

PARISH REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2016/17

The Watton-at-Stone Parish Council comprised of 10 members in the year 2016/17, namely:

Mr. Mike Smith(Chairman)	Mr. John Meischke(Vice-Chairman)
Dr. Emma Waltham	Mrs. Christine Dinnin
Mr. Denis Filer	Mrs. Catherine Hammon
Mr. Ian Knight	Mrs. Helen McCash
Mrs. Margaret Stanley	Mr. David Stock

This Annual Report will be my sixth, more than I intended or expected. There is no doubt that the work load for all Parish Councillors in Watton is increasing and with it the responsibility. No sooner is one item resolved and two take its place or so it seems. Much is expected of a group of volunteers and our decisions both financial and physical have to be carefully considered not only to make best use of public money but also to work within statutory requirements.

At long last the end is in sight concerning Station Road and The High Street with only some 'snagging' remaining. The Parish Council has no regulatory powers and suffice it to say other councils involved should and could have done better.

We have weathered the storm of recent years financially finding ourselves with unprecedented reserves. However, much of this can be attributed to our New Homes Bonus account, which currently has a balance in excess of £77,000. This income stream is winding down and in order to extract maximum benefit from it the emphasis will be on co-funding village projects. Should there be development in the future one of the main drivers will be community benefit which may be in cash or kind but it will not be as fluid as New Homes Bonus. \$106 money arising from the Gatekeeper development has benefitted the Parish to the tune of £70,000 having been spent on the Lammis, new play equipment and a new tennis court (plus £10,000 raised by the Tennis Club). It is emerging that some of the funds arising from Gatekeeper have been used in other projects outside of Watton. We should have a clear vision of what we want to achieve and be sure that any developments move us nearer to that goal. Awards this year have been made to The Scouts and Guides, The Methodist Church Meditation Garden, Ladies and Men's Football and the Cricket Club to the tune of £10,695.00.

Which brings us quite nicely on to the District Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan. The District plan has been deposited with the government inspectorate and there will be an examination in public sometime in September with final decision by the end of the year. The Neighbourhood Plan group inches its way forward not helped by a proposal from EHC to allow Watton to decide whether or not the release of green belt land for development is necessary or desirable. The NP group have engaged independent advisors to study the impact of options thrown up by this untested turn of events.

The Parish Councils main asset is the Nigel Poulton Community Hall. Much effort has been made by the trustees to improve not only its use but also its financial standing and in conjunction with the East Herts 'Forever Active' initiative much has been achieved. In the Meeting Room Cllr. Mike Freeman with much enthusiasm has overseen the opening of a library to replace the Mobile Library service recently cut by the County Council. (There will be a separate report by the Community Hall Trustees)

We have commented on numerous planning applications in the village and sometimes find ourselves at odds with our statutory planners particularly where parking places are concerned as a result of garage conversions. We begin to think that this is a battle lost. Also, we are not immune from our share of the country wide problem of Fly Tipping with incidents reported most months.

Probably the most shocking incident this year occurred on the night of the 25th February 2017. An act of mindless vandalism saw the deliberate destruction of play equipment on the meadow. The fire was reported at 11pm and a fire engine attended. There was much consternation at Glebe Court residential facility immediately adjacent. Despite £1000 being offered by the Council for information, no one has yet been charged. Fortuitously our insurance covered the event and I thank Denis and Jane who have been deliberating over our insurance cover recently. By the May bank holiday all was restored.

None of the above would make sense without the diligence of Councillors and our Clerk, Jane.

I would like to thank you all for supporting me over the last year.

Mike Smith (Chairman)