

PARISH REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2019/20

The Watton-at-Stone Parish Council comprised of 10 members in the year 2018/19, namely:

Cllr. Mike Smith (Chairman)	Cllr John Meischke (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr. Stephen Block	Cllr. Christine Dinnin
Cllr . Catherine Hammon	Cllr. Kay Jancey
Cllr. Ian Knight	Cllr.. Helen McCash
Cllr. David Stock	Cllr. Emma Waltham

One would expect the Chairman's report to be a summary of events that the Parish Council has considered and progressed throughout the year, starting in May and ending in April. However, the year did not end as we expected due to the Covid 19 pandemic and lockdown.

As a result, we decided that it was inappropriate to hold our March meeting because for the most part we are vulnerable or have young families to consider.

We continued essential business by email for March, April and May but there came a point where I for one had had enough of strings of emails clogging up the inbox.

Despite some concessions from central government there came a point where we had to produce and agree our annual return which requires a recorded vote, and so that's how we ZOOMED into the digital age.

There has been much speculation concerning the fate of the George and Dragon public house and the Parish Council has kept up the pressure on Greene King to bring back to life this iconic building and public asset. The brewery informed us that a new tenant had been appointed but the pandemic struck and everything came to a standstill. Greene King assures us that normal service will resume when allowed.

The streetlights were finally removed from our asset register and are now fully maintained by the County Council. The older style lights in the village are also due for a sympathetic upgrade.

We have finished our planned upgrade of litter bins in the village, but they have buckled under pressure during the pandemic but hopefully things will return to normal post lockdown.

This year Kay Jancey was co-opted onto the Parish Council. Her nursing background made Kay the perfect candidate for organising a First Aid training course with particular reference to the Defibrillator in the High Street. Twelve people attended a course onsite on the 12th October.

Not so good is the continuing nuisance of dog fouling and the complete disregard that a few dog owners have for the wellbeing of their neighbours. It's an impossible task for any authority to police but any refuse collector can now be used for waste in bags. Our thanks go to Mr. Moray in Glebe Close who keeps the dog bag dispenser topped up near the school.

The Lammas has been a godsend during the pandemic providing a pleasant walk away from the High Street particularly in the fine spell of weather we've had. New information boards are being readied and will soon be displayed. Lammas meadows were a traditional source of a hay crop and the grass will be removed in July sadly, not as hay due to its poor quality.

You may have noticed that the War Memorial has received more attention than usual this year with a makeover to celebrate the 75th anniversary of VE day. A rather fine seat was donated by Debra Freeman in remembrance of her late husband Michael. It has been suggested that the painted stones decorating the village of late and celebrating VE day and the NHS be brought to the War Memorial on Remembrance Sunday.

We have considered some 28 planning applications. It is debateable what influence we have, but we certainly have opinions. We encourage people to engage as individuals as that seems to carry some more weight.

The Neighbourhood plan continues in the background not helped by government dithering. It is now in its fifth year of development, is now answerable to its third Prime Minister and seen us leave the EU. However, due to the diligence and commitment of the steering committee, The Parish Council will soon be submitting it to East Herts Council and soon after that, referendum.

The upgrading of the A602 road is entering its final stage and probably have a short-term negative effect in the village particularly when the Ware road is closed from Watton House to the roundabout. This will undoubtedly affect passing trade for our businesses and the Parish Council has been proactive in its efforts to see this minimised during the construction. The County Council has agreed to provide new gateway signs for the village!

Finally, and after many years of dedicated service to the Village, Sergeant Duncan Wallace retired on the 19th December. He regularly attended our meeting giving good humoured insight into village policing. His replacement will be acting sergeant Nicola Blunt. Our thanks go to PCSO Sally Brooks whose 'quiet words' often resolves situations.

The Nigel Poulton Community Hall is part of the Parish Councils public assets but is managed by Trustees as a charity on our behalf. It's annual report can be seen separately.

The Parish Council oversees a raft of mundane activity which is largely taken for granted and keeping up with legislation is onerous, but we are kept on track by our long-suffering Clerk, Jane Alsop, thank you Jane.

Mike Smith (Chairman)