

Minutes of the Zoom Parish Council meeting held on Tuesday 16th March 2021

Present:	Cllr. Michael Smith (Chairman)	Cllr. John Meischke (Vice-Chairman)
	Cllr. Stephen Block	Cllr. Christine Dinnin
	Cllr. Catherine Hammon	Cllr. Ian Knight (until 2011)
	Cllr. Kay Jancey	Cllr. Helen McCash (until 2011)
	Cllr. David Stock	Cllr. Emma Waltham
	District Cllr. Sophie Bell	Clerk: Jane Allsop

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies: None

2. Public participation

None.

3. Chairman's/ Clerk's report

None

4. Declaration of interests

Cllrs. McCash declared a pecuniary interest in item 8 a, Budget and Finance Sub-Committee - Internal and external auditors for the Parish Council and Community Hall accounts for the year 2020/21 (Immediate Family).

Cllrs. Knight and McCash declared an interest in item 9 a, Correspondence received - E-mail from Janet Carpenter re Belfry at Parish Church (both are Church Wardens at the Parish Church).

5. Minutes of the last meeting

a) Acceptance

- **Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Tuesday 16th February 2021**
Parish Councillors agreed that the minutes be approved.

b) Review of actions

1. Write to the owner of the fence that is falling into School Lane

A letter was sent to the owner of 3 Rectory Lane re their fence and the following e-mail reply received on 4th March

‘Thank you for your letter regarding a section of our fence bordering School Lane footpath.

As parents we appreciate the concern and are fully aware. I have made a temporary fix to ensure it won't fall over. I'm currently sourcing materials for replacing (not easy during covid).

As I'm sure you are aware, the footpath itself is poorly maintained and overgrown on the other side by approximately 1 meter, creating a narrow entrance and making it impossible to 'socially distance'. I will ensure when I replace this section it will be done outside school time.’

Cllr. Smith said that he noted yesterday that the fence had been taken down and preparations were ready for its repair/replacement.

2. Obtain bin collection dates for 2021 from EHDC

Cllr. Sophie Bell said that the bin collection dates are on the back of the garden waste leaflets distributed throughout the village.

The Clerk said she had not received one of these leaflets. Cllr. Bell agreed to send her a copy.

Action: S. Bell

3. Report broken branch hanging over the carriage way in the High Street to Highways faults

This was reported to Highways on 17th February and to the occupiers of the Chestnuts and the Woodhall Estate on 8th March.

Lorna Middlewood (Estate Office Administrator, Woodhall Estate) e-mailed on 10th March as follows.

“Thank you for notifying us of this tree branch and the potential safety concerns it may pose.

I have informed our Head of Forestry who will inspect the area as soon as possible – I do believe we have some tree works authorised for this location also, so this may possibly be dealt with at the same time. However, I shall await confirmation from my colleague as to the exact plan of action, if required.”

4. Ask EHDC to clarify situation of putting dog waste in litterbins

Cllr. Bell said that EHDC propose to remove all existing dog bins and so there is one general waste bin for litter and dog waste. In low usage areas they will just remove the dog waste bins, however in high usage areas they will replace the litterbins with larger general waste bins to deal with the combined waste. This will make the emptying of bins easier. Cllr. Bell said that these implementations are unlikely to happen before 2022.

5. Inspect dip in the grass at one end of Fun box and take action if required

Cllr. Meischke said that he and Cllr. Smith inspected the dip and decided to revisit the site when the ground has dried out. No action required at the present time.

c) Action points resolved

1. Read and comment on Neighbourhood Plan – draft regulation 14 booklet
2. E-mail copy of draft regulation 14 booklet to Cllr. Bell
3. Inspect work to drop kerbs in the High Street
4. Upload revised Financial Regulations & Risk Assessment documents to the website
5. E-mail members of Budget and Finance Sub-committee revised Long term capital expenditure document
6. Arrange a meeting of the Budget and Finance Sub-Committee prior to the March Parish Council meeting
7. Ask cleaners what drug paraphernalia was found in the outside toilets whilst it was left unlocked at night
8. Produce comparison of pricing document re tennis court surfaces
9. E-mail quotations for repair to Allotment entrance to all Parish Councillors
10. Update Allotment tenancy agreement and forward to Parish Councillors for discussion
11. Discuss repair work to War Memorial with Grassroots
12. Ask Adam Welch to clear branch on Watton Green and leave it in the wooded area
13. Report broken branch hanging over the carriage way in the High Street to Highways faults
14. Give the Clerk photos of the hanging tree branch for uploading to Highways faults
15. Give Councillor Smith phone number of Woodhall tenant re hanging tree branch
16. Inspect dip in the grass at one end of Fun box and take action if required
17. Put up temporary litterbins if required
18. Find out from EHDC if the Walkern Road dog waste bin can be relocated and exchanged for a larger one
19. Take photos of the blocked Church Lane drain and report to Highways

6. Planning**a) Applications**

The following planning applications were dealt with via e-mail and letters put through the doors of residents as and when required.

i) 2 Aylott Close (3/21/0370/HH)

Proposed conservatory

Parish Councillors agreed a no comment response and the Clerk advised the planning department accordingly.

ii) Gregorys Barn, Gregorys Farm, Dane End (3/21/0211/FUL)

Change of use of 2 attached barns to 1 residential dwelling. Single storey frameless glass extension. New ground floor, first floor and roof window openings and blocking up of existing openings. External alterations with stained black softwood feathergate boarding and white render finish to brickwork. New patio and fence

Parish Councillors agreed a no comment response other than that all the constraints be satisfied, and the Clerk advised the planning department accordingly.

iii) Gregorys Barn, Gregorys Farm, Dane End (3/21/0212/LBC)

Change of use of 2 attached barns to 1 residential dwelling. Single storey frameless glass extension. New ground floor, first floor and roof window openings and blocking up of existing openings. External alterations with stained black softwood feathergate boarding and white render finish to brickwork. New patio and fence. Internal alterations to install stairs and create first floor accommodation, remove internal walls, create new openings, and install new internal walls.

Parish Councillors agreed a no comment response other than that all the constraints be satisfied, and the Clerk advised the planning department accordingly.

The following application was submitted after the March agenda was posted.

• 16 High Street (3/21/0610/HH)

Single storey rear extension

Parish Councillors agreed a no comment response. The planning department to be advised accordingly.

Action: J. Allsop

b) Decisions

The following application was submitted after the March agenda was posted.

1 Watton House (3/21/0120/HH)

Demolition of detached garage and side entrance way; erection of two storey side and rear extension; loft conversion with roof lights to rear; alterations to fenestration and creation of front entrance way with porch.

--EHDC permission refused

Cllr. Smith said that when advising the Parish Council on a no comment response to this application, he had not realised that the property lies outside the village envelope and is therefore in Green Belt

7. Reports

a) Neighbourhood plan and Benefits Committee – progress reports

Cllr. Waltham reported as follows.

The NP Steering Group is in the final stages of preparing for the Watton-at-Stone Neighbourhood Plan Regulation 14 consultation, which is expected to start in May. It will last for 8 weeks and all parishioners will receive a summary of the Neighbourhood Plan and questionnaire for comments during this time. The Steering Group will also hold an online Q&A session to give people the opportunity to ask questions. Other stakeholders who have an interest in Watton-at-Stone, such as landholders and Network Rail, will also be invited to review and comment. The Steering Group is now finalising the consultation materials and the list of stakeholders. Once the Parish Council has approved the draft plan the Steering Group will confirm the date of the consultation. The NP Steering Group has also submitted a SEA Screening Opinion to EHDC. A 6-week consultation on this will begin on Monday (organised by EHDC) and it will invite the three statutory consultees to advise on whether an environmental assessment is required as part of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Cllr. Waltham said that there will be an underspend of approximately £3,000 on the Groundwork UK grant of £7,347 awarded in August 2020. This will have to be paid back at the end of March 2021 and another grant applied for in April. However, during this one-month period, the NP may require approximately £200 for printing costs toward the regulation 14 consultation. The Parish Council may be asked if they would pay the printing costs to avoid delaying the regulation 14 consultation further, as retrospective payments cannot be made on grant applications.

Cllr. Waltham said that the NP may also be able to apply for additional funding from the affordable housing funding pot.

Cllr. Waltham said that the Clerk has produced a spreadsheet showing all the costs incurred by the Neighbourhood plan, together with all grants received. She said that this needs some updating to show recent spending. If Parish Councillors are interested in seeing the spreadsheet the Clerk will e-mail them a copy.

b) Footpaths

- **Hazeldell Footpaths** - report provided by Cllr. Stock

Cllr. Stock reported that no further work had been done so, if nothing has happened before our meeting in April, he will contact HCC for an update. **Action: D. Stock**

- **High Street footpaths** – report provided by Cllr. Block

Cllr. Block and Cllr. Stock inspected the footpath improvements and repairs recently carried out by Ringway on the High Street and Great Innings.

It is pleasing to report that the works of the highest priority had been carried out satisfactorily. However, it was noted there were a number of sites where works have not been carried out as detailed in the HCC Draft Report. Cllr. Block has e-mailed County Councillor Ken Crofton to seek clarification.

Cllr. Block said that he is in communication with Ken Crofton re the outstanding works. However, no further works will take place in the High Street whilst the A602 roadworks are in place.

Cllr. McCash said that Alan Rattue has made an official complaint about damage to the road/pavement surface outside 93-95 High Street and the junction with White House Close.

8. Reports

a) Sub-Committees

Budget & Finance

Cllr. Block reported on the following items.

- **Monthly accounts**

Watton-at-Stone Parish Council		
Petty Cash – Receipts		Petty cash - Payments
None		None
Payments		
Defib Store	Defibrillator battery	270.00
JRB Enterprise	Dog waste bags	259.20
Fasthost	Domain name - watton-pc.org.uk	12.59
Michael Smith	1 month Zoom	14.39
Wages and salaries	February salary, mobile phone allowance	1330.63
Dr Emma Waltham	Neighbourhood Plan domain name	14.39
BT Phone calls	To 28.01.21- £23.33, 28.02.21 - £23.16	46.49
Allotment & Garden	Public Liability insurance for allotment holders from 31.12.20	157.29
East Herts Council	Playground inspection 2019 (counted as 2 inspections)	107.26
Grassroots	Repair work to War Memorial site	853.50
		3065.74

Receipts		
Aviva	Insurance claim re War Memorial	586.25
Nationwide	Interest	15.66
Santander	Interest	0.20
Stuart Coulson	Allotment rent and deposit	69.40
		671.51

Watton-at-Stone Community Hall

Petty Cash – Receipts			Petty Cash -Payments		
Active East Herts –	64.00		None		
Steve Smith – Main	24.00				
	88.00				
Payments					
British Gas	Gas				76.37
H. D. Cleaning	Daily cleaning of outside toilet cleaning - January				155.00
Wages	February 2021				36.20
T. G. Shultar	Repair to guttering				384.00
HMRC	VAT return				74.15
British Gas	Electricity				39.55
					765.27
Receipts					
Santander	Bank interest				0.08
					0.08

Parish Councillors approved the payments.

- **Report on Budget and Finance meeting held on 10th March 2021**

A Zoom meeting of the Budget & Finance Sub-Committee was held on 10th March.

Items on the agenda were Long Term Capital Expenditure and The Asset Register.

- **Long term capital expenditures**

Cllr. Block explained that the Long-Term Capital Expenditure had always been split into over 5, 10 and 15 years ahead. It was felt that this was too long term.

A new document was put together with Cllr. Meischke focusing on a 2-, 5- and 10-year timeframe. The new schedule also includes a priority column.

Parish Councillors approved the changes to the Long-Term Capital Expenditures document.

- **Review Asset registers**

The Asset Register was updated by adding the two new acoustic panels and removing the old panel as well as the leaflet racks.

Parish Councillors approved the updated Asset Register.

- **Council Finance**

Under Any Other Business Cllr. Smith explained that a more sustainable approach is required regarding Reserves, Projected Expenditure and The New Homes Bonus (refer to the minutes of the Budget and Finance Sub-Committee meeting held on 10th March 2021).

After discussion, Parish Councillors approved the creation of a 'Community Improvement Fund'.

The Community Improvement Fund will take over from NHB when funds currently held under that title are expended. It is difficult to obtain grant funding while NHB funds are held, and we suggest the following expenditure be agreed:

Projects to funded from existing NHB funds are:

- Scouts £25,000 (Agreed)
- Tennis Courts £25,000 (Costed)
- Play Area upgrade £40,000 (under review)
- CH Car Park £15,000 (+ £10,000 from CH Reserves) (Planned)

The Community Improvement Fund will ease the decision as to whether expenditure is maintenance or capital. It will be a vehicle in which to hold grant funding and regular precept funds and be more transparent.

Cllr. Bell said that some local Town and Parish Councils are sitting on their NHB money and not using them. She said that because of this, EHDC have made the decision that in future councils will

need to apply for NHB funds for specific projects instead. This will be a fairer scheme and stop councils' hoarding additional funds.

Cllr. Hammon asked if the rule not to use NHB funds for maintenance was ours or that of the District Council. The District Council has never put any restrictions on what this money could be used for. The Parish Council however made this rule when NHB funding was made available to local organisations. One of the funding criteria was that the funds could not be used for maintenance projects.

Cllr. Bell said that the government has not yet decided if there will be giving District Councils any future NHB funds. When the funds EHDC currently hold dries up, this may be the end of the NHB funding pot as we know it.

- **Approval of Budget and Finance minutes dated 10th March 2021**

It was agreed to remove the section starting 'Possibilities from new NHB funding in conjunction with Benefits from Neighbourhood Plan' from the Budget and Finance minutes. Members of the Budget and Finance Sub-Committee approved the amended minutes.

The Clerk to e-mail the amended Budget and Finance minutes to all Parish Councillors.

Action: J. Allsop

- **Appoint auditor for the Internal audit of the Parish Council accounts for the year ended 31st March 2021**

Stuart McCash was appointed as the internal auditor of the Parish Council accounts.

The Clerk to arrange for the Parish Council accounts, for the year ending 31st March 2021, to be submitted to Stuart McCash for auditing.

Action: J. Allsop

- **Appoint auditor for the External audit of the Community Hall accounts for the year ended 31st March 2021**

McCash and Hay was appointed as the external auditor of the Community Hall accounts.

The Clerk will arrange for the Community Hall accounts, for the year ending 31st March 2021, to be submitted to McCash and Hay for auditing.

Action: J. Allsop

Community Hall Trustees

Cllr. Meischke reported on the following items.

- **Gutters**

Cllr. Meischke said that work to the gutters is now complete and appears to be fine. However, he and Cllr. Smith will need to inspect the guttering system during heavy rain.

They also believe there may be a leak between the new roof and old roof on one side of the building and should be able to identify the problem during heavy rain.

Action: J. Meischke/M. Smith

- **Reopening of Hall**

Cllr. Meischke said that, subject to the government regulations, the hall will be fully open from 12th April onwards.

However, the footballers will have access to the Community Hall from 30th March to allow them to use their floodlights for evening football practise. They will also be able to use the internal toilets with only one person being allowed in the building at any one time and they must comply to the Community Hall's Covid-19 safety regulations.

- **Windows repair and repaint**

Cllr. Meischke said he had hoped to update Parish Councillors on the start date for the window repair and repainting work. Unfortunately, Mark Blacktin cancelled their scheduled meeting today and Cllr. Meischke therefore does not know when this work will begin.

Recreation and Amenities Sub-Committee

Cllr. Knight reported on the following item.

- **Tennis courts surfaces**

A meeting was held at the tennis courts with Chris Rolf (Sports Courts) to discuss the strategy of maintenance for the old double tennis court.

It was decided there was no point in repainting the court – it needs resurfacing. It was last resurfaced in Nov 2000 and was deemed when done to have a life of 15 to 20 years. It had a binder coat applied in 2013.

It was decided that the court should be resurfaced within two-years and a target of spring /summer 2022 seems sensible. Subject to finance considerations this will be proposed to the Parish Council for agreement at an estimated cost around £21,000.

Environment Sub-Committee

Cllr. Dinnin reported on the following items.

- **Allotments**

Cllr. Dinnin reported that she has updated the Allotment Tenancy Agreement and these amendments have been approved by the Environment Committee.

The amendments have now been sent to all Councillors for their approval. Once this has been approved by the Parish Council, the Clerk will send out new Agreements to all allotment holders.

2 allotments have been re-let, with 2 remaining, these plots need some tidying up before any new tenant takes them on. At present there is no one suitable on the waiting list.

Cllr. Hammon said that she had looked at the tenancy agreement tonight and had a few small changes to suggest. She agreed to e-mail these to Cllr. Dinnin for her approval. **Action: C. Hammon**

Cllr. Dinnin to e-mail a copy of the revised document to all Parish Councillors for their e-mail approval. **Action: C. Dinnin**

The Clerk to send out new tenancy agreements to all allotment holders, following approval from Parish Councillors. **Action: J. Allsop**

- **Planting of Oak trees on the Meadow (sportsfield)**

This was done on the 5th March 2021, with some children and staff from year 6 attending.

- **War Memorial** – Cllr. Stock provided the following report.

Cllr. Stock was pleased to report that the repairs and replacement planting are now complete and the site has been returned to a good standard. We have received the invoice from Grassroots, which is as per their quotation, and Cllr. Stock had approved its payment.

Although he is happy with the work done, it appears that the new stones do not match those already laid. He has been told that these are of the same type and from the same company as before. However, when being laid, it had been noted that they were covered in a degree of sand. So, if after weathering there is still a difference in colour, Cllr. Stock has asked Grassroots to mix the two together to give a uniform appearance throughout the site and that this could be done as part of the scheduled maintenance activities. Finally, having missed saying so during our meeting last month, Cllr. Stock thanked Cllr. Meischke for his discussions with our insurance company re the damage sustained.

- **Watton Green**

Cllr. Dinnin reported that Adam Welch has cut down the branches on the Green for £60.

Cllr. Smith said that the tree with the bench around it has grown so big that it has pushed the seat out of place. Cllr. Smith said that he had adjusted the seat to fit the tree and will monitor the situation from time to time.

- **The Lammas**

Cllr. McCash said that damage is occurring to the steps on the Lammas. Trail bikers are using the steps to bounce their bikes down and damaging the wooden treads. There are approximately six bikers who are coming from the Walkern area.

It was agreed to produce a laminated notice telling the trail bikers not to use the steps and position the notice at the top of the steps. **Action: J. Allsop/C. Dinnin**

b) Routine Reports

- i) **Emergency escape lighting tests and manual alarm call tests**

Cllr. Meischke carries out the emergency escape lighting and manual alarm call tests on a regular basis. He continues to inspect the hall regularly including running the water every 2-3 days to prevent the risk of legionnaires disease.

- ii) **Gas and electricity meter readings**

Cllr. Meischke gives the Clerk gas and electricity meter readings at the end of each month and she uploads these readings to the providers websites.

- iii) **Weekly reports - Fire Inspection and shower tests**

Done.

- iv) **Monthly village-report**

Cllr. McCash completed the report on 14th March 2021.

A copy of the report has been e-mailed to all Parish Councillors; therefore, the following is a summary.

- **Sportsfield:** When is the first cut due, grass is long and looks tatty. Also, very worn, and muddy around the goal mouth.

Apart from the grass the area looks very good

Clerk to contact Frank Cooper to cut grass as soon as dry enough. **Action: J. Allsop**

- **Toddler area** - top still missing
- **Community Hall** - Toilet doors and window frames look very unkempt.
- **Tennis courts** - All locked but fine as far as I could see. But the path to the courts needs the grass cutting back as they are very overgrown
- **Allotment** - All looks good and tidy, many underway for this season
- **Culverts** – No rubbish, all looking good.
- **Dog bins** – All ok except for the one on Walkern Road, which is at a strange angle
- **War Memorial** - Looking beautiful since it's repair work. The new gravel has also made a huge difference.

Cllr. Waltham reported the following problems

- **Mill lane** – the wall to the right-hand side of the entrance into Willowdene, in Mill Lane, looks as though it is about to fall onto the path. Cllrs. Smith and Meischke agreed to inspect the wall and decide what action is needed. **Action: M. Smith/J. Meischke**
- **Bench by the Ornate village sign** – this wooden seat is in a poor state of repair and one of the wooden slats at the back of the seat is decomposing. Cllrs. Smith and Meischke agreed to inspect the seat and decide what action is needed. **Action: M. Smith/J. Meischke**

Cllr. Meischke reported the following problems

- **Milestone outside 138 High Street**

Over the past week, work has been done to the Milestone outside 138 High Street.

The Milestone is owned by Highways, who contract Ringway's to maintain it. Any work done has to comply with the Milestone Society's maintenance guidance. The Society recommend cleaning and painting with lime wash and then painting in the letters with black, so although some of you might not like it, it is an approved approach.

Cllr. Meischke suggested that the Parish Council contact Highways because the Society recommends that a maintenance plan is agreed with the landowner, which is in this case is them. However, it would have been good to have been informed before they carried out the work and been allowed some input. He also suggested we complain that the work has not been done correctly. They have missed the word 'FROM' out. He said he had looked at the stone and could see the unpainted word, although not clearly. Both he and Roger Green can remember that the word was readable approximately 20 years ago.

Cllr. Smith agreed to write to Highways.

Action: M. Smith

v) **Weekly sportsfield-reports**

Nothing to report.

vi) **Weekly defibrillator inspection**

Cllr. McCash inspected the defibrillator whilst carrying out the monthly village-report on 14th March, and all was in good order.

Cllr. Hammon continues to do regular checks.

vii) **Website/Facebook**

None.

viii) **Highway issues**

- **High Street**

A group of Heath Mount parents have taken to parking their vehicles on the yellow lines outside the Crumbs bakery at prohibited times (i.e., between 0800 and 0900). It would also appear that they are not adhering to social distancing, nor do they wear facemasks, putting others at risk.

It was agreed to write to the Headmaster at Heath Mount school informing him of the situation and asking if he would have a word with the parents, stating that the parking restrictions are in place for safety reasons but cannot be regularly enforced by East Herts at this time. **Action: M. Smith**

ix) **Dog fouling reports**

Nothing to report.

x) **Police reports**

PCSO Sally Brooks e-mailed her policing report to the Clerk today, this covers reported crimes over the past six weeks. A copy of this e-mail has been forwarded to all Parish Councillors.

The Clerk has been given Police ECHO posters for the village, which she then laminated. These have gone up in various locations in the village.

The Clerk to give Cllr. Smith a copy of the ECHO poster, so he can put it up in Whempstead.

Action: J. Allsop/M. Smith

9. Correspondence received

a) E-mail from Janet Carpenter re Belfry at Parish Church

This item was discussed after item 11, when Cllrs. Knight and McCash had left the meeting.

b) EHDC- Notice of confirmation of tree preservation order - Land to the rear of 119 & 121 High Street

All PCs have been e-mailed the confirmation for the tree preservation order.

10. Village organisations

None.

11. Items for Parish News

No items were identified for inclusion in the next issue of the Parish News.

Milestone

- **Noticeboards**

The Clerk said that what was thought to be a Velcro felt backing to the notice boards outside Londis and the board on the car park side of the Community Hall is something different. With age and sunlight, the surface has become smooth, and Velcro tabbed notices will not adhere to the notice board backing.

She asked if she could purchase some felt and apply it to the inside of the notice boards. This was agreed by Parish Councillors.

Action: J. Allsop

Cllrs. Knight and McCash left the meeting.

- **E-mail from Janet Carpenter re Belfry at Parish Church**

Cllr. Smith drew councillors' attention to an e-mail received earlier requesting funds for the urgent maintenance of the Belfry of St Andrew and St. Marys. This was in response to a request that the bells be readied should the sad event of the Duke of Edinburgh's death be announced following a prolonged stay in hospital.

The minute will note that the request was agreed and £750 is to be given to the Church to help offset the expense.

The meeting closed 2020.

The date for the next Parish Council meeting is Tuesday 20th April 2021.