

Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held in the Community Hall on Tuesday 27 September 2022

Present:	Cllr. John Meischke (Vice-Chair)	Cllr. Stephen Block
	Cllr. Christine Dinnin	Cllr. Helen McCash
	Cllr. Kay Jancey	Cllr. Ian Knight
	Cllr. David Stock	Cllr. Emma Waltham
	Clerk: Jane Allsop	
Public:	Michael Smith, Nicola White, Annabel Kirk and Jane Dodson	

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies: Cllr. Catherine Hammon.

2. Public participation

Cllr. Meischke welcomed Nicola White, Annabel Kirk and Jane Dodson to the meeting. He introduced himself as Vice-Chairman of the Watton-at-Stone Parish Council and acting Chair for this meeting.

Cllr. Meischke thanked Michael Smith for all the years he has helped the village progress. He resigned from the Parish Council on Monday 12th September, after over 19 years as a Watton-at-Stone Parish Councillor. He was elected in May 2003 and has been our Chairman since May 2011.

Cllr. Meischke said he would not be putting his name forward as Chairman of the Parish Council. Cllr. Waltham volunteered to be Chairperson and it was agreed that she will be formally elected at our Parish Council meeting on 11th October.

EHDC notices of vacancy have been published on the Parish Council website and its notice boards. If by 5 October 2022 a request for an election to fill the vacancy is made in writing to the Returning Officer EHDC by ten local government electors for the area, an election will be held to fill the vacancy. If an election is not requested by ten local government electors, the vacancy will be filled by co-option as soon as practicable after 5 October 2022. If this is the case, co-option will take place during the Parish Council meeting scheduled for 11th October.

Michael Smith will report on various items during the meeting and read out his report under Specific items.

3. Chair's/Clerk's report

None.

4. Declaration of interests

Cllr. Knight declared a personal interest in item 6 a i, planning applications - 11a Beane Road (Cllr. Knight lives at 11a Beane Road and his son is the applicant).

5. Minutes of the last meeting.

a) Acceptance

- **Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Tuesday 12 July 2022**
Parish Councillors agreed that the minutes be approved and signed.

b) Review of actions

1. Review Roger and Jean Tomlinson Allotment plots

Refer to item 8 a, Environment Sub-Committee.

2. Investigate dog fouling signage for the village

This item to be deferred to the October Parish Council meeting

Agenda: 10.22

3. Contact District Cllr. Bell re traffic warden visits

Michael Smith said that District Cllr. Bell had not responded to any of his e-mails. He said that he had spoken to District Councillor Ken Crofton who had also been experiencing problems contacting her.

It was agreed to write to EHDC stating that we have tried to get in contact with our District Councillor Sophie Bell, on numerous occasions but have failed to make contact.

Action: J. Allsop

4. Arrange a meeting with the Woodhall Estate to discuss NP benefits

Refer to item 7 a, Specific items – Neighbourhood Plan

5. Progress producing NP Heads of Terms document – later

Refer to item 7 a, Specific items – Neighbourhood Plan

6. Attend site meeting to discuss Footpath link from the Bull car park to Rivershill

Michael Smith e-mailed all Parish Councillors on 13th July re a site meeting he had with County Cllr. Crofton and Tony Bradford.

"I met with Ken and Rights of Way officer, Tony Bradford at 2pm today.

The issue is, as far as Highways are concerned, that the Path does not connect with an existing Public Highway, i.e., it finishes in the bull car park, privately owned. As it stands and because of this, Rights of Way (ROW) can't take it on and Ken can't spend his budget on it. Rights of Way, even if it was an adopted path, would not have the budget. He is allowed 4p per metre of path across the county. (some 3500 km.) Furthermore, the condition of the path falls within the accepted safety limits which allows for a 1 inch (25mm) deviation in levels. Tony went on to say that it is unlikely that the development company would exist today as it is common practice to set up a company solely for an individual development and dissolve it on completion.

Ken suggested that the PC could precept for the cost of refurbishment if it was so minded but the path would never be adopted by HCC unless possibly, it was extended to the public footpath network.

As it stands people use the footpath at their own risk and that any signage should say little more than "Beware of uneven surface."

7. Arrange working group meeting to discuss increasing problems in the High Street

Refer to item 7 a, Specific items – High Street traffic issues.

8. Look at the caretaker job description

This item to be deferred to a future date.

9. Make changes to Charity documentation

Refer to item 8 a, Community Hall Trustees

10. Arrange a meeting of the Environment Sub-Committee to discuss way forward re uncultivated plots

This item to be deferred until a future date.

11. Investigate having a shield made to go over the bench at the Great Innings/High Street roundabout

This item is outstanding.

Action: J. Meischke

c) Action points resolved

1. Write to planning department re 38 Rivershill (3/22/1322/HH)
2. Write to planning department re Blue Hill Villa, Walkern Road (3/22/1409/HH)
3. Invoice Mr. & Mrs Sell for us of Parish Council land in Walkern Road
4. Renew CPRE annual subscription
5. **Obtain EPC for the Community Hall**

Cllr. Meischke said that the EPC rating for the Community Hall has come in at 29 B which is much better than average halls which are around 71 C. The only improvement suggested was the installation of an air source heat pump, which the Parish Council has previously rejected as not being financially viable.

6. Order 6 folding tables for the Community Hall

The new tables, which have storm grey tops, have arrived and look very good.

The old tables that were in a serviceable condition have been donated to the Parish Church. On behalf of the Watton-at-Stone PCC, Cllr. McCash thanked the Parish Council for these tables.

7. E-mail Cllr. Jancey's monthly village report to all Parish Councillors

6. Planning

a) Applications

- i) 11a Beane Road (3/22/1625/PNHH)** - Demolition of conservatory. Construction of single storey extension with flat roof: Depth 4.98 metres, Maximum Height 2.70 metres, Eaves height 2.39 metres.
This permitted development application was turned down by EHDC because the proposed construction was higher than the existing roof. The applicants will need to submit a planning application will therefore need to be submitted.
 - ii) 14 High Street (3/22/1741/ASDPN)**
Additional storey on a dwelling house (to increase the height of the dwelling from 5.35 metres to 7.94 metres) and the demolition of the side rear extensions. New drop kerb to serve the existing driveway.
Parish Councillors agreed a no comment response. **Action: J. Allsop**
 - iii) 53 Great Innings (3/22/1827/HH)**
Rear single storey extension
Parish Councillors agreed a no comment response. **Action: J. Allsop**
- The following planning application was received after the agenda was published.
- **63 Rivershill (3/22/1963/HH)**
Loft conversion with the addition of two new roof light windows on the front and rear elevations
Parish Councillors agreed a no comment response. **Action: J. Allsop**

b) Decisions

i) Lane Croft (3/22/0973/ASDPN)

Construction of an additional storey to increase the height of the dwelling from 5.295 metres to 7.887 metres
- EHDC approval required, and permission granted

ii) 62 Hazeldell (3/22/1194/HH)

Erection of single storey front extension, replacement roof for existing single storey element and alterations to fenestration - EHDC permission refused

iii) 20 High Street (3/22/1147/HH)

Raising of roof ridge with hip to gable roof. Insertion of two dormers to front and dormer to rear. Single storey infill extension to front. Demolition of rear extension. Erection of single storey rear extension. Alterations to fenestration. - EHDC permission granted

iv) 78 Hazeldell (3/22/1184/HH)

Single storey rear extension, new pitched roof to existing single storey rear projection, garage conversion and replace garage door with new front window. - EHDC permission granted

v) Highfields, Whempstead

Demolition of existing dwelling and erection of replacement dwelling - EHDC permission granted

vi) Blue Hill Villa, Walkern Road (3/22/1409/HH)

Erection of summer house (2018) and garden store (1932) (retrospective) - EHDC permission refused

Additional Planning decision**• 51 Rivershill (3/22/1493/HH)**

Double storey and single storey rear extension - EHDC permission granted

7. Specific items

Cllr. Meischke invited Michael Smith to give his report

• Reasoning - Why am I standing down

I just felt the time was right for me, I felt more duty bound than volunteer and the issue of Chairmanship did not sit easily with me, and I thank Emma for standing in at least for now.

I can't speak for Jane, but she has kept us on the straight and narrow and a good relationship between the Chair and Clerk is vital in choppy waters! I like to think we had that and so Thank you Jane and as you so often say, best wishes.

By standing down now it does give the council an opportunity to Co-opt which has worked well in the past. However, it seems likely that there will be an election next May and perhaps its time.

However, I have an interest in some projects that I have been moving forward for some time:

• Football - We are now in a position to go out to tender. I think we should wait until the NP delivers more certainty concerning the lease of the land. I have asked Jane to keep the Tender documents from Agripower filed ready for formal tendering.

I am willing to oversee this process at least until a new council is elected next May

On the Meadow I think that football can recommence playing as and when they wish. Rose and I continually watered the reseeded area and luckily were able to water morning and night for the first 10 days. The pitch has largely recovered, and I have moved the 5 a side goal away from the touch like ready for white lining. The tennis club have complained that footballs damage the fencing, but Sports Courts said that far more damage is caused by tennis players bouncing off the fences and stretching the support wires, something not noticed when there was a boarded surround.

• Pedestrian bridge in Mill Lane - This involves the EA, need I say more. I am waiting for an 'Informal appraisal' of the request, and I want to keep the Mill developers on side. My view is that irrespective of the Football issue, it will still be worthwhile. Once I get a response, I will hand it over to the PC or take instruction.**• The Stanleys -** I will supervise this work to make sure it's as expected.

They are due to cut the grass on the Lammas, Watton Green and the allotments next month. I have agreed that the week beginning the 17th Oct. will be the start date.

Therefore, the Cricketers will need to remove their boundary fence.

The Allotment holders need to be informed that they will need to move everything that they have adjacent to the hedge at least 1.5 metres away from the hedge to facilitate major reshaping of the hedge. It needs to be made clear that neither the PC or the contractor will accept any liability for damage to property obstructing this work.

(It will undoubtedly require some hand work inside the hedge which will be itemized separately at an hourly rate).

• The Beane - John Macpherson had permission to renovate his side of the riverbank and we allowed him access via the Lammas. I encouraged him to spread surplus soil in an area on the northerly edge of the field and this area I have re-seeded with water meadow grass and wildflower seed. Also, I have seeded the reinstated riverbank in the hope that we may get better plant diversity. Mr Macpherson donated £350 to the Parish Council.

- **Neighbourhood Plan** - This evening I am sure Emma will be asking you to approve the NP for submission to EHDC.

It may not be perfect and I'm sure there will be challenges but one thing is for sure, the steering group have toiled unstintingly for too long and they deserve our thanks and appreciation.

I reserve my sincerest appreciation for Catherine and Emma who have guided this process above and beyond what could reasonably be expected. They deserve closure and release from this mammoth task.

It has not been an easy decision for me. Many of you were here when I joined and is a testament to your staying power and I applaud you for it. Then of course the loss of Nigel Poulton was tragic and a blow to this village in his role as District and Parish Councillor. A great loss to me was Michael Freeman who steadied the ship when development in the Village was a toxic issue. And of course, Dennis Filer who we knew as a fastidious Chairman of Budget and Finance but whose modesty belied a great man in business, civil and military service.

I leave it to the Chair's discretion if you have any questions but, In summary,

Thank you for having me.

a) **Neighbourhood plan and benefits**

The Parish Council voted unanimously to submit the finalised Neighbourhood Plan to East Herts District Council. Cllr Waltham recommended that the Council budget for a further £1000 expenditure on the Neighbourhood Plan as we are not eligible for any more funding from Locality UK and there will be several more stages to progress through before the referendum stage.

Cllr Waltham has recently met with EHDC to discuss the Great Innings site and will be meeting with the Environment Agency and Fairview over the coming weeks. The Woodhall Estate has sent a letter of intent which is being reviewed.

b) **High Street traffic issues**

This items to be deferred to the November Parish Council meeting.

Agenda: 11.2022

8. Reports

a) **Sub-Committees**

Budget & Finance

Cllr. Block reported on the following items.

- **Monthly accounts**

Cllr. Block said that the accounts below cover a 2.5-month period.

Watton-at-Stone Parish Council		
Petty Cash – Receipts		Petty cash - Payments
None		None
Payments		
Miss S Sen (Mimi)	Return of Allotment deposit	50.00
Wages and Salaries	July and August 2022	2846.70
Adam Welch	cut back hedge to the left of allotment entrance and strim	80.00
CPRE	Annual subscription	36.00
Michael Smith	5-a-side goal: Cable ties & white spray paint, Securing Pegs, small pegs	95.15
M. J. Smith	Rat bait for the allotments	16.49
Frank Cooper & Son Ltd	work to goal mouths including top-soil and grass seeding	288.00
M. J. Smith	Post Crete for allotment ramp near car park	67.15
Grassroots	War Memorial maintenance – July 2022	50.40
Ace Driveways &	Ramp quote £4,850 plus £750 retaining wall - £70 for postcrete	6,650.00
M. J. Smith	Boston Seeds - grass seed to reinstate Lammas bank	62.50
Frank Cooper & Son Ltd	grass cutting on 7th & 29th July	156.00
British Telecom	BT phone bill - 28th July 2022	24.41
Fred Burnell	wasp nest on allotments on 03.08.22	52.80
British Telecom	BT phone bill - 28th August 2022	23.11
castle water		277.28
Grassroots	War Memorial maintenance – August 2022	50.40
J. Allsop	Google workspace	4.75
Rosemary Brown	32 hours litterpick @ £10.50 per hour	336.00
		11,167.14
Receipts		
Nationwide	Interest for period July 22	60.01
Santander	Interest on deposit account	1.74
John McPherson	Donation re access from the Lammas to property over the river	350.00
Nationwide	Interest for period August 22	79.62
Santander	Interest on deposit account	1.37
HMRC	VAT rebate 02.22 to 08.22	3,092.08
Jamie Whitehouse	Allotment deposit	50.00
Victor Sell	use of PC land on Walkern Rd	400.00
		4,034.82

Watton-at-Stone Community Hall		
Petty Cash – Receipts		Petty Cash -Payments
Tony Silverstri – Pavilion	150.00	
Art Club – Meeting room	96.00	
Archery – Main Hall	144.00	
Table tennis	224.00	
	614.00	
Payments		
East Herts Council	Rates - payment 4 of 10	73.00
British gas	Gas	21.32
Herts Fire Inspection	Annual fire equipment inspection and replacements	191.40
HCC	Cleaning materials	74.32
Wages	July, August & September - 12 weeks	877.25
Michael Smith	B&O - £25.50 Yale mortice, £16.50 Yale brass 3-lever mortice	42.00
Church Buying Group	Advanced Moulds - 6 pro tables	1,213.92
Michael Smith	Water hose for sportsfield	7.49
British gas	Electricity	104.86
HMRC	VAT return - June 2022	122.02
East Herts Council	Rates - payment 4 of 10	73.00
British gas	Gas	20.83
HCC	cleaning materials	111.46
Withers Thomas	Valuation of Community Hall	420.00
British gas	Electricity	121.16
Easy EPC	EPC for community Hall	258.00
East Herts Council	Rates - payment 4 of 10	73.00
Sports Courts	Tennis court resurfacing (minus £2,000 - deposit (see 7)	16,793.70
British gas	Gas	21.81
		20,620.54
Receipts		
HCC	Meeting room on 20.07.22	42.00
Pam Grandison	2nd payment for hire - 19th July cancelled	33.00
Lisa Hayes	1st 50% deposit for hire - 13th August	18.00
Claire Messina	2nd payment for hire - 23rd July	38.00
Ben Talbott Fitness		80.00
Santander	bank interest	0.86
Emily Fordham	1st 50% deposit for hire - 21st August	77.00
Paula Sutton	Main Hall hire - July - September 2022	209.00
Lisa Hayes	2nd payment for hire - 13th Aug	18.00
Louise Davis		57.20
Peter Khera	Main Hall	269.80
Emily Fordham	2nd 50% deposit for hire - 21st August	77.00
Charlotte Locke	Pavilion on 19th August	22.50
Eleni Stylianou	1st 50% deposit for hire - 24th September	33.25
Gemma Scholes	1st 50% deposit for hire - 20th November	18.00
Ashley Bevan	1st 50% deposit for hire - 26th November	77.00
Caroline Paton	1st 50% deposit for hire - 19th November	58.00
Santander	bank interest	0.86
HMRC	VAT rebate - July 2022	35.91
Begoña Garcia	Meeting room - Sept - Nov 2022	76.00
Santhi George	1st 50% deposit for hire - 5th November	77.00
Imagination Dance	Pavilion hire - September to December 2022	180.00
Eleni Stylianou	2nd 50% deposit for hire - 24th September	42.75
Bounce Watton	part payment of June-September invoice	290.00
		1831.13

Parish Councillors approved the payments.

Cllr. Block said that the Community Hall should be eligible for a government grant towards gas and electricity costs this winter.

- **VAT**

Cllr. McCash said that the Government is making tax digital which means that all businesses must submit their VAT via a third party.

There are two options. One is for the Parish Council to purchase software that works with Excel spreadsheets and the Clerk would complete the returns via this software. An option available from 123 sheets costs £19.75 for one year. The other option would be for McCash and Hay to submit the returns using software they have already purchased. The Clerk would put together the monthly VAT returns as normal on Excel and then e-mail this information to McCash and Hay for submission to HMRC.

Cllr. McCash agreed to e-mail Cllr. Meischke the monthly cost.

Action: H. McCash

- **Insurance cover**

BHIB e-mailed all policy holders in August asking them to ensure that they had sufficient insurance cover on their policies. The sharp rise in the cost of living means that index linked increases on current policies might not cover actual replacement values on buildings etc.

Cllr. Meischke said that he instructed Withers Thomas, who valued the Community Hall and surrounding brick wall in January 2008 to revalue them. The new valuations come in at 1,000,000 for the hall and £38,000 for the brick wall. These figures exceed the current cover on the Parish Council policy and BHIB have quoted £126.57 for this additional cover

Parish Councillors agreed to instruct BHIB to increase the insurance cover immediately. **Action: J. Allsop**

Community Hall Trustees

Cllr. Meischke reported on the following items.

- **Make the changes to the Trustee Charity documentation**

Cllr. McCash said that she e-mailed the Charity Commission about changes required to the Community Hall's charity status to allow one non-Parish Councillor to become a Trustee. To date, she has not received a response and therefore rang the Charity Commission this morning, who advised her that a Deed of Variation will almost certainly be required.

She then spoke to Longmore solicitors, who carried out a Deed of Variation to the original charity status back in 1997. They are willing to do this work and submit it to the Charity Commission but would not give an estimated costs involved until they had a clearer idea of the work involved.

- **Outside toilet door**

The magnetic lock on the outside toilet has broken again. D. P. Electrics have estimated £150 to supply and fit a replacement lock. Parish Councillors agreed that the lock should be replaced as soon as possible. Cllr. Meischke to instruct D. P Electrics accordingly.

Action: J. Meischke

Recreation and Amenities Sub-Committee

Cllr. Knight reported on the following items.

- **Tennis Court resurfacing**

Cllr. Knight said that the tennis court resurfacing has been completed and the court surface colouring and permanent tennis lines are due to be installed in the next couple of weeks.

They have tensioned the wire fencing around both courts. The tensioning wires had come loose mainly because of tennis players bouncing off the fence. When there were kicker boards at the bottom of the old fencing, this problem did not occur.

- **Women's football team**

Women's football are struggling to put together a team and therefore there will be a potential loss of income to the Parish Council and Community Hall of £670 for the season 2022/23. Cllr. Meischke suggested that if they do have any games, or practise sessions, they are charged on a pro rata usage. This was agreed in principle.

Cllr Meischke said that the goal mouths need mowing a few times before the pitch is marked out and he would speak to Scott Reynolds about this.

Action: J. Meischke

Environment Sub-Committee

Cllr. Dinnin reported on the following items.

- **Allotments**

Cllr. Dinnin said that the allotment rent and water invoices are due to go out at the beginning of October.

It was agreed at the December 2021 Parish Council meeting that the rent for 2022-2023, would be increased from £30 to £32 for a large plot and £15 to £16 for a small one.

The current water charges are £8.80 for a large plot and £4.40 for a small. She proposed that, due to the very hot summer, these water charges be increased to £12 for a full plot and £6 for a half plot. This was agreed by all Parish Councillors.

The Allotment invoices to be sent accordingly.

Action: J. Allsop

Cllr. Dinnin said that all new allotment tenants will be sent an e-mail to include two paragraphs stating that if you have problems tending to their plot, they should contact the Parish Council directly.

She said that Mike Smith has drawn up a new allotment plan for the notice board. It was agreed to ask

1st Call Signs to make the new sign.

Action: M. Smith

b) Routine Reports

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

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

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

Cllr. Meischke continues to give 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. Stock completed the report on 9th September 2022 and the Clerk e-mailed all Parish Councillors a copy the results.

Cllr. Stock reported that the issue involving the War Memorial garden has been resolved by Grassroots.

He then said that, personally, he remained uneasy about the positioning of seats under the large oak and explained why.

Cllrs. Stock, Meischke and Dinnin to make a site visit to review the situation and report back to the Parish Council accordingly. **Action: J. Meischke/D. Stock/C. Dinnin**

vi) Weekly sportsfield-report

Nothing to report.

viii) Weekly defibrillator inspection

Cllr. Meischke reported that the defibrillator was reported to have been removed from the cabinet during an emergency. However, on inspection it does not appear to have been removed and remains in full working order. The Clerk has updated the status of our defibrillator as working on the national defibrillator network website.

ix) Website/Facebook

None.

x) Highway issues**• Footpath resurfacing behind the George and Dragon**

County Cllr. Ken Crofton forwarded an e-mail, dated 22nd September, from Andrew Burton (Senior Projects Officer, Countryside and Rights of Way, HCC) re footpath resurfacing behind the George and Dragon pub. It reads. "The Highways team are happy to undertake works, plans and information have been exchanged. I have an onsite meeting with them, due shortly, to confirm RoW requirements, potential closure etc. I hope to be able to get an estimate of a start date at that meeting."

xi) Dog fouling reports

Michael Smith said he was happy to continue to take the dog waste bags to Mr. Morey so he can keep the dispenser filled.

xii) Police reports

The Clerk to ask PCSO Sally Brooks to provide a police report for our October meeting. **Action: J. Allsop**

9. Correspondence received**a) Letter from Michael Smith**

Refer to item 2 Public participation

b) EHDC – Parish Council vacancy and co-option

Refer to item 2 Public participation

10. Village organisations**• War Memorial Hall Management Committee**

Cllr. Stock attended the recent meeting of the Committee on 20 September and reported that although there were no routine issues of concern, the Board of Trustees is yet to identify a replacement for the late Denis Filer.

• River Beane Restoration Association

Cllr. Block said that at the end of July around 140 water voles were reintroduced into the River Beane at the Woodhall estate in a bid to stop them becoming extinct.

Water voles have become the UK's fastest declining mammal in the past 50 years and face extinction.

Reintroducing them to the river means the future was "looking brighter". Water voles have not been seen in the river since 2000.

• Parish Church

Cllr. McCash said that although the Queen's book of condolence is no longer available for parishioners to write in at the Parish Church, she can make it available to anyone who wishes to contact her. She said she is not required to take the book to the Lord Chancellors office until March 2023.

11. Items for Parish News**• Neighbourhood Plan**

Cllr. Waltham to write an article re the submission of the NP for inclusion in the November issue of the Parish News. **Action: E, Waltham**

Meeting closed: 2030.

The date for the next Parish Council meeting is Tuesday 11 October 2022.