

Annual Parish Meeting 2019/2020

Reports from Parish Council Committees

Watlington Parish Council – Chairman’s Report 2020

This has been an eventful year, but I will recap the major events in chronological order which I hope will paint something of a picture of the previous normality that we enjoyed oblivious to the changes that were just around the corner in 2020.

May 2019 represented the beginning of a new 4-year term for the council and due to the presence of 14 nominees for the 14 available places there was no requirement to hold an election. As a result, we saw some new faces joining us, including our youngest member, Amber Chainey who at 18 years old sent a very positive message that the Council is open to anyone who wants to help bring about positive change within the community. This shift in the Councils demographic was very much tied up with the emergence of the new Watlington Climate Action Group, whose ambitions for reducing waste and making Watlington a more sustainable place to live formed the focus of our 2019 annual meeting that was held at a well-attended event in the Watlington Club.

That same meeting also threw light on the fact that the South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) development plan was now under review due to the change of political leadership at district level in the May 2019 elections. Our own Neighbourhood plan had been proceeding very much in line with the strategy of the original draft as it gave provision for development of the edge road from central government growth funds, which were contingent on the previous administrations plan.

Against this background of additional uncertainty much of 2019 and 2020 has been spent fighting to make the planning permission given to Site A align with the vision put forward in the Neighbourhood plan. This was something of a battle on two fronts as it required the need to prove that one, an edge road was necessary and secondly that it should be routed round the edge of the new development sites rather than cutting through the roundabout of the existing industrial estate. To say that this has been an epic battle would be something of an understatement, but I would like to thank in particular Andrew McAuley our Chair of Planning and Gill Bindoff and her NPAB team for mounting such a robust defence of Watlington's Neighbourhood Plan this past year.

The planning committee and NPAB reports will obviously go into these matters in more detail, but at the time of writing this report Watlington looks to be in a much stronger and more certain position than this time last year. It is also worthy of note that we have grown much closer to our Neighbours in the surrounding parishes and in particular Pyrton where we now have a strengthened relationship in which we more fully understand and respect each other’s perspectives on future development. Any changes to the future flow of traffic through Watlington will obviously impact heavily on our surrounding parishes, so we have established an understanding that we need to work collectively in our future dealings with Oxfordshire County Council’s Highways department, so that we not only alleviate traffic through the town centre, but also keep traffic levels in the wider area manageable.

In terms of new infrastructure there have been plans approved for a new Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) at the recreation ground and a band stand for the Paddock. The band stand has proven to be controversial as many residents who border the Paddock feel that it could give rise to increased anti-social behaviour, so it falls to the Parish Council to prove that we can make this a positive addition to the Town that can enhance our cultural output and become in time a much loved amenity.

With the introduction of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments on new housing developments the Parish Council is starting to see the benefit of additional money reaching our coffers. These amounts will eventually find their way into local infrastructure projects but must be spent within 5 years of receipt. To facilitate this the Parish Council has reworked its existing strategic plan and will work with other internal sub-committees and external organisations to bring about a range new infrastructure projects that will put this money to good use.

The transfer of the Charlotte Coxe trust from Oxfordshire County Council to Watlington Parish Council has again moved at an agonisingly slow pace this last year, but we believe that all the legal loose ends have now been tied up to all parties satisfaction. The lockdown period has obviously limited activity levels at OCC's legal department, but it would appear that there is nothing now stopping the transfer once the OCC resources are available to facilitate the transaction.

In March 2020, Watlington, the UK as a whole and indeed the world was hit very hard by the outbreak of the newly emerging Covid 19 virus. Whilst the news coverage given to the virus continued to increase day on day it still came as something as a shock when we were eventually ordered into a national state of quarantine. The Parish Council had used the two weeks prior to lock down to create an addendum to its existing emergency plan although the speed at which events unfolded in March meant that the Council found itself having to act upon it within about an hour of its final drafting!

At the core of the plan was the need for the Parish Council to become a central point of focus in coordinating the network of volunteers and other community and local authority based organisations that all had a hand in keeping life as normal as possible under the circumstances. The Parish Office remained open (in a socially distanced form) throughout lock down and Kristina and Rachel our Clerk and Deputy Clerk did an amazing job of collating everyone's details that had signed up to help. They were also able to quickly facilitate connections between individuals, volunteers and other organisations that could give the necessary help where needed. It was incredible to see so many people rally to the cause so quickly, for which we can never thank all concerned enough. The speed at which local business adapted to this new reality and offered delivery services and takeaway options is also notable in very quickly leading to a situation in which Watlington was fully provisioned in terms of communication, volunteers and available supplies allowing people to observe lockdown to the best of their own individual circumstances. Throughout this period, we were of course critically dependant on our key workers in the NHS, emergency services, shop workers and care home workers to name but a few. Due to the nature of how the statistics are compiled it may take a while to accurately measure how Watlington fared in this global crisis, but I know the community undertook this task in a remarkable display of togetherness and with a steely resolve to not let anyone feel helpless in this new and bewildering situation.

The crisis is nowhere near over and many knock-on impacts are still to work their way through all levels of the economy, but we will continue to plan for how we best meet Watlington's needs at each remaining step of this particular journey.

The council at present continues to run in something of a reduced capacity, with all meetings being held virtually. We currently continue host the Full Council, Planning and Operations committees with others occurring only when needed, otherwise the day to day decision making of the Council remains in the hands of a smaller executive committee made up of the Clerk, Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Chair of Finance and the Chair of Planning. This year's annual meeting has been cancelled and the current chairs of the various committees will hold their current positions until May 2021.

Finance and Staff Committee

The Finance and Staff Committee meets quarterly or more often if required. The long-standing issue of the transfer of the Sole Trusteeship of the Charlotte Coxe Charity from Oxfordshire County Council to Watlington Parish Council has unfortunately still not been resolved. We have moved on a little further and we hope to progress to a satisfactory conclusion for all very soon.

There is a sum of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money available to the Parish. This money has accumulated from the construction of new property in the parish. It is not totally clear how we can spend this money, but we are looking into a Speed Device Indicator (SDI) to help control the speed of traffic entering the town and also a 20mph speed limit in the centre of town.

The precept this year was increased in line with inflation. Grants were made to the Watlington Youth Club, the Watlington and Chalgrove Children's Centre and local bus services. Grants were also given to the Town Hall, the CAB, grass cutting in the churchyard, Watlington Art Week and the Christmas trees in the town. The Parish Council has a comprehensive grant making policy available to review on our website.

The precept also covers the maintenance of the Pavilion, the sports field hedge, play areas in the recreation ground and paddock, the Parish Office and equipment, car parks, trees, allotments and bollards. Hire of the sports field, grass cutting, gardening, general office services, insurance and cleaning are all included. A new photocopier was installed in the office

SODC continue to fund the public conveniences and contributions from the Watlington traders help with the maintenance of the car park. Other income comes from the hire of the Pavilion, West Room, Parish Office, Town Hall and Allotment rents.

The staff costs were increased in line with NALC guidelines and inflation. Our current staff are an invaluable asset to the community, and we thank them for their continued loyalty. At the beginning of the Covid 19 pandemic and lockdown, their enthusiasm and knowledge was exceptional. Together with a database of volunteers and coordination with the Watlington Businesses, easy connection to the vulnerable was achieved in a very short time. In June, Bob was ably assisted by a young man from the ICC for work experience. It turned out to be an extremely worthwhile time for them both!

The Parish Council have received a sum of money from the Young Peoples Fund. This money is designated to secure a long-term dedicated building for the use of young people or if not used within five years from the transfer date, to only be spent on charitable purposes following advice from residents of the parish.

The Parish Office will be closed for a period in August for annual holidays.

Nicky Smallbone -Chair

Accounts for 2019/2020 are shown on the next page

Summary Income and Expenditure Account for the Year Ending 31st March 2020

Watlington Parish Council

2018/19	£	<u>Income</u>	2019/20	£
	128390.00	Precepts		132626.42
	276.92	Interest on Investments		375.69
	260.00	Community Office Lettings		575.00
	1330.00	Allotments Rents		1468.00
	116.00	Sale of Photocopying		366.82
	7809.74	Public Convenience Grant		8012.74
	1328.39	Grants		1028.39
	1313.00	Miscellaneous		1810.83
	590.00	West Room Lettings		1820.00
	9623.54	Pav Lettings+ Club Rent and Misc		11152.00
	5795.00	Car Park Contributions		11780.00
	5179.00	Charges for Caretaking		5179.00
	4141.80	CIL Receipts		14883.87
	166153.39	TOTAL INCOME		191078.76
		<u>Expenditure</u>		
	77639.19	General Administration		81511.47
	12141.72	S137 Payments		10195.38
	8000.00	Town Hall Grant		8178.00
		Other Grants		
	97780.91			99884.85
		<u>Running Costs</u>		
	0.00	Allotments		102.76
	11480.91	Community Office		12531.08
	33450.57	Recreation Ground and Environment		32904.38
	12050.96	Pavilion		11109.40
	4.47	West Room		7.09
	1625.66	Neighbourhood Plan		753.00
	0.00	Planning		2106.96
	58612.57			57407.71
	156393.48	TOTAL EXPENDITURE		157292.56
	9759.91	Excess		33786.20

Strategy Committee

During the year the committee has progressed the following topics:

Completed:

Community Resilience Plan – completed and published

Standing Orders review – completed and published

Community Awards 2018/9 – completed and individuals awarded

Clean Air Month – this activity was defined and has been completed

Strategic Plan. A forum was held in January 2020 to consolidate and prioritise the NP actions and the Strategic Plan produced two years ago. The level of activity required of councillors and the intervening Covid situation has resulted in some items being progressed but many being on hold pending assignment of individual responsibility.

A public outreach meeting with local communities was held on 3 June, other meetings between councillors of Pyrton, Shirburn, Britwell Salome and Watlington have taken place as necessitated by the development of housing and road proposals in the Parish.

On-going:

Masons' Wood – possible acquisition by the Parish was discussed but seems unlikely unless the masons change their stance

Charlotte Coxe Trust: transfer to Watlington. The terms of the transfer have been agreed and the matter is with solicitors to bring to a conclusion.

OxCam Expressway – communications detailing objections to this have been issued.

Fibre to the Premises – surveys have been undertaken but at present it looks as though there is insufficient interest in Watlington as residents often have on-going contracts which they find satisfactory.

Community Transport Group aims for the public transport servicing Watlington have been established, progress has stalled largely due to Covid.

Communications Action Plan: a draft was produced but has since been dropped.

Review of council committee structure and terms of reference: this has since been dropped

The future: the major activities going forward in addition to those referred to above include the review of the Neighbourhood Plan plus:

- Monitoring the development of the new housing and associated edge road including submitting response to plans, making representations to developers and planning authorities and attending hearings as necessary.
- Watlington Conservation Area review: terms with an appropriate body have yet to be agreed but it is recognised funding will be required.
- Participating in and developing Watlington's Climate Action agenda
- Development of better facilities and access, eg a cycleway, to the Lewknor/M40 hub have been discussed but it seems likely this should be passed to a non-council group such as Climate Action.

Nick Hancock – Chair of Strategy

[NB Nick Hancock has since resigned from the Council]

Pavilion and Sports Field Committee

Council Representatives: Nicky Smallbone, Roger Beattie, Matt Reid, Alex Basden

Sports Club Representatives: Keith Woolfson, Owen Lewis, Neil Boddington

The PSFC committee is responsible for the management of the pavilion building and the playing fields. It is a joint committee formed from Parish Councillors and members of the Sports Clubs. It meets quarterly or as needed.

The Football Club have installed another portacabin in the car park, we hope this will help with their storage problems.

I would like to thank the Dog Group who all pulled together to help with the problem of dog poo on the playing field. They made people aware of the issues and carried out regular patrols to keep the fields and paths clear. I hope their good work continues and the field remains clean.

The Pavilion was used regularly by the Football Club, Cricket Club, Aunt Sally, Pool, Darts, Scouts, Youth Club, Circle Dancing and Smurf-Fit. Sadly, at this present moment the Pavilion and children's play area and outdoor fitness equipment are closed due to the Covid 19 pandemic, however the playing field is open for recreation.

The planning application for the MUGA has been successful and we will be looking for funding from various sources.

Nicky Smallbone -Chair

Planning Committee

Members: Andrew McAuley (Chair), Rob Smith (Vice-Chair), Matt Reid, Ian Hill, Terry Jackson, Nicky Smallbone, Alex Basden, Keith Woolfson and Diana Ludlow.

Co-opted members: Gill Bindoff, Tony Powell

This past year has probably been the most demanding and busiest year the Watlington Parish Council Planning Committee has ever experienced. The local council elections in May 2019 witnessed a dramatic political shift in the South Oxfordshire district. The change in political direction had dramatic ramifications for local planning policy when the incumbent council withdrew SODC's draft Local Plan 2034 before it could go to examination. This meant that Parish and Town councils were operating in a local planning vacuum. The intervention of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government has forced the District Council to resubmit the plan to examination. It is hoped that the Local Plan will be approved and published by the end of the year.

There have been a large number of planning applications across the full spectrum of application types. These have included applications both within the core of Watlington town and our satellite settlements. Many of the applications have been complex and controversial, demanding a level of scrutiny not previously required at Parish level. Alongside the normal applications covering works to listed buildings and other properties, as well as individual new builds, the applications on the WNP sites along the proposed route of

the edge road continue to dominate the planning agenda. Following the late notice withdrawal by SODC of its objections on the grounds of the detrimental impact on AQMA and congestion/damage caused by the increase in traffic from the proposed development on Site A, WPC was forced to defend its own objections at a public appeal in October 2019. The appeal was upheld by the inspector and the development was given permission to proceed. This is the first time WPC has participated in a Planning Appeal as a Rule 6 participant.

Throughout the year the Planning Committee met 13 times, including one meeting (April 2020) held under 'virtual' meeting conditions due to the Covid-19 restrictions imposed on local government activities. Members have also participated in a large number of meetings with representatives from OCC, SODC and developers as well as representing the Parish in front of the SODC Planning Committee. Members of the Planning Committee, alongside members of the NPAB, have continued to represent the policies in the WNDP at the highest level of local government. We have had some victories as well as some losses. However, we have been able to gain assurances that the edge road remains a priority and that funding has been secured. We continue to work with developers to ensure that, as Watlington expands, the interests of the community and the environment are at the forefront of the planning process.

The enlargement of the planning committee by co-opting two non-councillor members of the Neighbourhood Plan Advisory Board (NPAB) has continued to work very well. Their role, as non-voting members of the committee, advising on policies within the WNDP, district and national planning policy, has enhanced the decision-making process and strengthened the comments submitted to SODC on all planning applications.

The following key applications are of particular note:

P18/S1822/FUL 40 Brook Street, Watlington. Erection of 2 x 2 bed cottages and 2 x 4/5 bed detached houses. WPC objected to this application on three grounds: that it did not comply with the policies in the WNDP; highway safety; and the negative impact on the Watlington Conservation Area. Although the objection was confirmed by SODC, the applicant went to appeal. The appeal was upheld by the inspector.

P19/S2380/RM This reserved matters application for the provision of a care home, 37 retirement units and staff accommodation was approved in outline in April 2019. This application is on the site of the old MOD Depot on Shirburn Road. The application continues through the planning process with final approval expected later in 2020. WPC supports this application.

P17/S3231/O Land at Britwell Road, Watlington. This involves the full planning application for demolition of the existing pig farm and the erection of 183 dwellings, the outline

application for 650sqm of commercial premises and all associated infrastructure and landscaping. The application also includes provision of a section of the edge road. Although the application was approved by WPC at a special public meeting of the planning committee on 18th September 2018, the approval was conditional on the delivery of the edge road ahead of the commencement of building work. The applicant appealed to the Planning Inspectorate on the grounds of lack of determination by SODC. WPC participated in the appeal in October 2019 as a rule 6 participant defending its position that the development would have a severe detrimental impact on the AQMA prior to the delivery of the edge road. The appeal was upheld by the inspector and development on the site will commence in mid-2020.

As chairman I would like to extend my thanks to all the members of the Planning Committee for their continued dedication. The Planning Committee continues to strive to ensure that the development of Watlington is carried out in a sympathetic way that meets the aspirations of the WNDP, the local community in Watlington itself as well as our settlements.

I would also like to thank the two members of the committee who have stood down over the past year. Their time and effort has been very much appreciated.

Andrew McAuley - Chairman

Operations Committee

Members in 2019-2020:

Chairman: Ian Hill **Vice-chairman:** Roger Beattie

Alex Basden, Tim Horton, Terry Jackson, Fergus Lapage (January to February 2020), Diana Ludlow (December 2019 till January 2020), Bonnie Williams (until July 2019), Keith Woolfson

Co-opted members: Bob West, Jenny Wilkinson

The Operations Committee is responsible for managing the maintenance programme of the Parish Council's assets, as well as identifying issues for action by the County and District Councils.

The Committee has had a very busy year progressing many different projects, many of which are ongoing and are reported below.

Dog fouling on the Sports Fields has long been a problem. In June, this committee recommended to Full Council that a policy of dogs being kept on leads be introduced as it was unacceptable for the sports pitches to have be cleared by sports users before each event. There were strong objections from dog walking residents who set up a group to clear the fields each weekend and to encourage dog users to pick up. It was agreed that a trial until October be conducted before the dogs-on-leads policy would be implemented. This proved very successful and a significant improvement in the situation was reported. In October it was agreed to continue the suspension unless the instances of dog fouling increased again. The "dog patrol" did an excellent job of keeping the field clear but took it further by dealing with the recreation area and making a number of suggestions for further

improvements. Chief among these was the addition of extra dog bins both at the field and around town. SODC agreed to install these bins and other litter bins around town but reported that they no longer provided dog bins as they tended to be misused. Unfortunately, they scheduled this work for the new financial year, but have been prevented from any action by the Covid-19 precautions.

Continuing with sport related projects we have now been given for a larger hard all-weather playing surface in the recreation ground and are seeking grants to help cover the costs of this major project. The surface will be provided with lighting and will be available for use by any sports group, formal or informal, by arrangement with the parish council.

Another long-standing problem was however completed before the shutdown with footpath 13 from the end of the Goggs to the track leading to the Willow Pond cleared out and resurfaced with aggregate. The wet weather in early April provided a test for the work and, although there was some puddling, the path stood up and has now hardened into good surface. Further work is planned for later this year to install a weed prevention fabric over the new surface and add a further layer of aggregate to increase the life of the path.

Also, on the recreation side protective canopies were installed in the children's play area at the recreation. Unfortunately, Covid-19 has kept the play area closed this spring, so the canopies have not yet been replaced after the winter break. We hope that they will eventually see some use later in the year. The "dog patrol" group was not the only local volunteer group to work hard to keep the town attractive – the battle against litter and weeds in the town has been tackled quietly but efficiently by Jenny Wilkinson's monthly town clean up group and the Watlington in Bloom group.

Examples of ongoing projects are reworking the parking area at the recreation ground, where a second storage container has been added by the football club, but work to square up the car park and remark it is uncompleted. We have acquired the old BT phone booth in the Hill Road Car park and are discussing plans for how it might be used as an information board. On the roads we have reworking of the Pyrton Lane layout to slow traffic and discourage its use as a rat run which has been led by residents of the area. The parish council is working on introducing a 20mph zone in the town and installing (in conjunction with neighbouring villages) Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs) that will warn motorists when they are exceeding the speed limits. Residents of Christmas Common are working on a plan for reducing speed through the village and providing user friendly footpaths. All of these road related projects have been stalled by Covid-19.

Another project delayed by the virus is Art Week, which is organised independently of the parish council, but for which the council has been collecting plastic waste. Imaginative uses for this waste are proposed and following the event it will be melted down to provide benches in Lady Moggs garden, the small triangle of land on Cuxham road that we imaginatively transformed into a dry riverbed.

A major ongoing project is the creation of a performance space in the Paddock. This will be available for events no more than 14 times a year, and the events staged there will be limited to those which will not cause excessive noise and disruption to local residents. We have had

a plan approved but the contractors have suggested an alternative design which will be more robust. Our first goal is to raise sufficient funds for this project that we expect will be an asset to the town.

I thank the hard working members of this committee, the parish council staff and many local residents for the hours they have devoted to these projects that will provide real benefits to the community, as well as for the work they have put in to just keep the parish ticking over as a place that is attractive to visit and attractive to live in.

Ian Hill –Chairman

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN ADVISORY BOARD

Membership of the NPAB: Gill Bindoff (Chair), Tim Horton, Keith Jackson, Terry Jackson, Andrew McAuley, Tony Powell, Matt Reid, Peter Richardson

The main task of the NPAB during the year has been to advise the Parish Council on the delivery of the Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan (WNDP) which was adopted by SODC in August 2018. This has involved work on development proposals for the sites allocated for new housing in the WNDP and on the delivery of new highways infrastructure – the Edge Road. Discussions have been held with developers and with the County Council (OCC) through the year but progress towards the construction of the Edge Road has been painfully slow. OCC was expecting to be able to appoint a consultant last autumn to carry out initial surveys for the road and to prepare for the planning application but there have been many delays to the process and the Parish Council is still waiting for confirmation that the consultant has finally been appointed. The planning application is not expected to be submitted to SODC before next year. In the meantime, the NPAB continues to be involved with discussions on the Edge Road and other highways issues.

The Board led the Parish Council's defence of the WNDP at a Public Inquiry in October. The parish faced major problems of the withdrawal of objections to the development by SODC and OCC with no prior discussions with WPC. The Parish Council argued that the proposed development at Britwell Road (Site A) should not be able to go ahead in its entirety until the Edge Road was fully constructed and in use. The Parish Council proposed a limit of one third of the new homes until the road was in place. The limit was proposed in order to protect Watlington from increased traffic and harm to air quality. Unfortunately, the Inspector did not agree with the Parish Council's case and allowed the development to go ahead in full. The NPAB also prepared a case for a second Inquiry into development at Site A which included two alternative routes for the Edge Road. This Inquiry, scheduled for January, did not go ahead.

The NPAB has initiated communications with SODC Councillors about developments in Watlington, the Edge Road and air quality. A meeting was arranged with Anna Badcock and the Cabinet members for Planning and Housing/Environment to present concerns about air quality and the SODC approach to assessing the impact of development on the Watlington Air Quality Management Area. These discussions will be ongoing.

The NPAB arranged a joint workshop with members of the WPC Strategy Committee to discuss strategic planning and the most effective way of delivering the priorities in the WNDP. This work is

ongoing. Members of NPAB support the work of the WPC Planning Committee with advice on the WNDP, NPPF, the SODC Local Plan and other issues.

The NPAB has supported the Planning Committee in making representations to SODC regarding the use of the WNDP in determining planning applications. It has also been involved in encouraging SODC to link more closely with parishes with made NDPs. WPC is a member of the Oxfordshire Neighbourhood Plans Alliance which aims to promote closer working relationships between NP groups, District and County Councils.

The Examiner of the WNDP decided that the Plan should be reviewed after two years. Discussions have been held with SODC about the value of reviewing the Plan before the Inspection of the SODC Local Plan is completed. The review will be started this year with a view to completing it after the Local Plan is adopted.

Allotments

We now have the highest number of Tenants on Pyrton Field since it started. Several large plots have been divided and there is a good case for doing more as large plots become vacant.

It is still difficult to contact all the Tenants as a number do not have computer access.

Thanks to a number of tenants who keep running costs down by extra use of their saws and strimmer's. More water butts are in evidence but too much water is wasted by overuse of hoses.

With increasing traffic, the tracks have needed extra attention. I was able to persuade road contractors to tip heaps of old road surface removed from Love Lane along the track. This has gradually been recycled to great effect. Washed flints raked off gardens are also being used to fill potholes.

Some plots have never looked so good because of the virus lockdown. We have been very good at distancing and work has proceeded.

We have confronted a number of "visitors" who having seen the notices saying no right of way chose to ignore them in spite of the increased risk to us all.

On a more cheerful note the Hazel Copse planted on a regularly flooded area is now doing its job and is organised on a seven-year rotation.

George Bruce – Chairman

Reports from Organisations and Trusts

Town Hall Trust Body

Membership: Tim Horton (Chairman), Terry Jackson (Vice Chairman), Matt Reid, Ian Hill, Nick Hancock (retired during the year)
Alison Morgans (Co-opted), Mike Young (Co-opted)
Bob West (Technical Consultant)

Maintenance and development of the building

Replacement of plaster to wall

This year the Trust Body commissioned the work of replacing much of the plaster to an inner wall (that between the vestibule area and the lower part of the old staircase). This wall had been monitored for some eight years and after much advice was finished with lime plaster. The work was carried out by Colin King most expertly.

Replacement of boiler

The gas boiler that was placed in a small maintenance space under the old staircase in the 1990s become unreliable. It was resolved after much exploration that the unit would be replaced using electric power. Though heating units may currently be a little higher than gas, savings are to be made in terms of costs of maintenance and better control. There will be less 'exhaust' from the Hall into a difficult area of Town and it make possible this year the full repair of a small window through which the gas boiler vented.

External works

Following a close and detailed visual inspection of the outside of the Hall last year the Trust Body is arranging for some re-mortaring of brickwork in 2020. In addition, in collaboration with the Parish Council and OCC, there will be some work to paviers to limit weed growth around the prestigious building.

New Noticeboard

A smart new noticeboard has been placed on the gates. This serves to publicise the Hall, its activities and some relevant news from the Parish Council.

Further works

The Trust Body has made financial provision for improvements to electrical wiring inside the Hall and the Undercroft. It continues to seek consent for a stair lift from the District Council and hopes that the provision of a small WC on the ground floor will also aid effort to attract groups with members who find stairs difficult.

Bookings

The Trust has increased some sessional charges in order to improve income. We have lost some groups for a variety of reasons. However, we have been able to welcome back drama to the Hall with the Phoenix Players and have developed close relations to the Art Weeks Committee.

The Trust Body is anxious to use new methods of advertising the availability of sessions.

Covid-19

Covid -19 lanced many planned activities after March 2020 and some plans for improvements to the building have been affected. The immense value of the Hall as a marketing centre for fruit and vegetables has been shown through this period and sustained some liveliness in difficult trading times for the High Street. Cleanliness has recently become a keynote for public buildings and the Trust Body wishes to supplement the caretaking carried out by Bob Thomas.

Finances

The Trust Body continues to be mindful of many long term needs of the building and continues to sustain a 'sinking' fund. We are alive to opportunities for grant aid. These sources are diminished – but vital to the future.

TOWN HALL ACCOUNTS 2019 / 2020					
Budget 2019/2020	Budget 19/20	Actual to 31/3/2020	Variance	Variance %	
Expenditure					
Caretaker services	£ 4,330.00	£ 4,330.00	£ -	0%	
Town Hall Open/Close	£ 849.00	£ 849.00	£ -	0%	
Water Supply	£ 240.00	£ 195.23	-£ 44.77	-19%	
Electricity	£ -	£ 127.82	£ 127.82		
Gas + Boiler Service	£ 1,700.00	£ 1,118.11	-£ 581.89	-34%	
Running Costs	£ 600.00	£ 416.69	-£ 183.31	-31%	
Maintenance of Town Hall	£ 1,000.00	£ 4,775.86	£ 3,775.86	378%	
Planned maintenance sink fund	£ 2,000.00		-£ 2,000.00	-100%	
Insurance	£ 2,025.00	£ 2,087.91	£ 62.91	3%	
Legal Fees & Land Registry	£ 200.00		-£ 200.00	-100%	
Planning Application Fees	£ 190.00		-£ 190.00	-100%	
Website	£ 100.00		-£ 100.00	-100%	
Audit			£ -		
Misc	£ 146.38	£ 358.34	£ 211.96	145%	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£ 13,353.64	£ 14,258.96	£ 905.32	7%	
Income					
Rental for Town Hall	£ 6,822.00	£ 5,597.50	-£ 1,224.50	-18%	
Misc income	£ 229.00	£ 667.58	£ 438.58	192%	
WPC Grant	£ 8,000.00	£ 6,343.76	-£ 1,656.24	-21%	
Grant from Doris Field	£ 500.00		-£ 500.00	-100%	
Sinking Fund Income	£ -		£ -		
TOTAL INCOME	£ 15,551.00	£ 12,608.84	-£ 2,942.16	-19%	
	£ -				
INCOME MINUS EXP	£ 2,321.39	-£ 1,650.12	-£ 3,847.48	-166%	
Total Bank Balance 27/12/19					
Accounted by :					
General Reserves	£15,931.09				
Sinking Fund	£15,800.00				
Total	£31,731.09				

Thanks

The Trust Body owe special appreciation to the Parish Council that meets to a good proportion of our needs. Also, we should want to thank the office staff – Kristina, Rachel and Bob - for guidance and the organisation of meetings. This year has seen the appointment of Bob West as a technical adviser. Formerly a Trust member, Bob is giving freely excellent

practical help.

Tim Horton -Chairman

Report from: Friends of Watlington Library (FOWL) to WPC

FOWL has had a busy and active year. We enjoyed a varied programme of author talks ranging from Celia Brayfield to Richard Fortey, before our major event in March with Lord Jay of Ewelme (and all subsequent talks) were postponed due to the current pandemic. The **Family Activities** arm of our group has continued to thrive and grow - and during lockdown has provided an enterprising and vital live service, with **Storytime** and **Creative Club** sessions on Facebook to a very appreciative and ever-expanding local audience.

New initiatives this year have included the creation of the watlingtonlibrary.wordpress.com website and the launch of a photography competition to create the **Images of Watlington 2020 Calendar**. This last venture also led to two photography exhibitions and the creation of a series of notecards and postcards. We have also hosted an exhibition to profile participating artists in **ArtWeeks** and will be a venue and an information hub for this event when it can go ahead. In addition, some generous donations have enabled us to welcome a children's theatre group and provide story sacks for the children's area.

These efforts have enabled **FOWL** to meet our financial commitments to **OCC** towards the running of the library this year, whilst also promoting and supporting Watlington library as a key community resource. Our volunteers and home library deliverers continue to devote their time and effort to our library, and we are extremely grateful to them all for their commitment.

Dr Anna Tilley -Chair **FOWL**

ANNUAL REPORT from the WATLINGTON BRANCH OF THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION 2019 - 2020

Members of the Committee of the Watlington Branch of the RBL organised several events during the year to raise funds for the Poppy Appeal. The first was a Quiz night held at the end of June at The Chequers which was well supported. The Grand Draw was held throughout August with tickets being sold outside the Town Hall on three consecutive Saturday mornings. It did well.

The library held a talk in November entitled "Letters from Emma" and generously gave a donation to the Poppy Appeal.

The Poppy Appeal organiser and sellers worked hard selling hundreds of poppies. The RBL, Watlington Branch, sent over £9000 to the Poppy Appeal which is impressive for a small town. Steph Anders, The Poppy Appeal Organiser, has retired after four years of splendid work, and Ben Shaw has taken over.

Committee members visited the Primary and Icknield Schools in November and talked to them about the significance of the Poppy, War Time Rationing and how other countries celebrate remembrance.

The 75th Anniversary of D Day was celebrated across the country by members of the Royal British Legion and many others.

In November in Watlington the RBL displayed large Poppies on boards on many roads where people had lived whose names are on The Cross. Their names were listed under each Poppy. There were two walks giving the history of many of these people. Two War horses visited and walked around the town and the BBC came to the Primary School and were impressed by the children's knowledge about the Harman Family, who lost 5 sons during the War.

Armistice Day fell on 10th November and the RBL, Parish Council and many other organisations here in Watlington took part in a parade and service of remembrance for all those who lost their lives in conflict. The Two Minute silence was observed at the Cross at 11am where many people of all ages gathered.

As I write, lockdown is upon us and sadly the Party in the Paddock to commemorate VE Day had to be cancelled. The RBL were unable to organize anything officially but the day, 8th May, did not go unmarked. There were Union Flags, bunting and many people came out of their houses to clap and sing and have street parties, all the time self-distancing.

Please keep looking at Notices around the town, in the Watlington Times and Face Book about local British Legion events which may be possible later in the year.

If you would like to support your local RBL Branch in some way please get in touch with the Secretary, Mrs Tessa Mogg 01491 612429.1



The U3A motto is 'learn, laugh and live'. U3A is specifically for people no longer in full time work.

Ridgeway U3A has become a vibrant, friendly and interesting U3A here in Watlington, with the help of our friends from Chalgrove and surrounding villages. We normally meet every month on the third Tuesday afternoon at 2.30pm, in the Sports Pavilion, to listen to a varied and interesting program of speakers. Obviously, we now find ourselves in lockdown, haven't had a meeting since February and still don't know when we might reconvene. These are certainly difficult circumstances.

Usually we have a number of interest groups which members can join, or if they have an interest not represented already, then they are encouraged to start another. The groups are led by members and include two Reading Groups, a Heritage and Local Studies Group, a Creative Writing Group, a Walking Group which joins the Chinnor U3A for their walks, a Dabbling in Art Group and a German Language Group. These are all included in the subscription of only £20. There is also a New Horizons Group which has either Speakers or Trips for which there is a charge. The Luncheon Group meets every other month and a

Theatre Group as and when local productions are of interest to members. These obviously have to be paid for separately. We are sure you will agree that the activities available are indeed varied and interesting – there is something for everyone.

It might surprise you to know that a few of our groups are still operating in the lockdown online or by telephone. We are able to keep members in touch via Newsletters from Ridgeway, online from National Office and from the South East Region which we deliver to those not on the internet, plus our articles in local magazines. Thames Valley Network is part of the South East Region, which brings together many U3As from the South East including Ridgeway. Their size allows them to organize workshops and events covering a large number of subjects.

Importantly our National Office is still very active indeed. It has organised a Facebook ‘Keeping in touch’ page which many members countrywide have joined. There are amusing anecdotes and videos, articles of interest and very challenging daily mathematical puzzles. It is quite reassuring to see how members elsewhere are coping in these strange times. Also, they have introduced an online membership at only £7.50. This has many activities covering a range of subjects from History to Languages. Those members will eventually, when lockdown is over, be reabsorbed into normal U3As in their appropriate areas.

We all look forward to the end of lockdown, but realistically realise that we might have to make permanent adjustments to future events. We live in hope that a vaccine will soon be available, allowing us all to go back to normal.

More can be found out about us on our website: <https://u3asites.org.uk/ridgeway>

Thames Valley Network at: www.u3atvnetwork.org.uk

Also information can be found on the National Website at: www.u3a.org.uk

Annette Thompson – Chairman



First Steps Family Hub Summary Report March 2020

This report covers:

What we provide for the local community

Ways in which we communicate

Attendance levels and donations.

Funding and fundraising

Our future plans



What we provide for the local community:

We continue to run services for preschool children and families in our rural area. We are a universal service with free access for early years.

Our daily sessions support many young families very successfully by providing a base for new families moving here with professional advice and support for maternal mental health, school readiness, breast feeding, health and parenting.

All our sessions are planned according to the EYFS and we evaluate each session to inform our next steps. We ensure there are suitable activities for all ages.

Our current service has a regular programme of activities for 0-5 years and their families; please see the attached timetable for more information.

We have invited outside providers to run fun activities on behalf of the Family Hub such as: Mrs Bun the Baker, Lady Bird First Aid, Musical Mayhem, Pottering About, Baby Lunch Box, Pilates and Go Active Postnatal Fitness. These activities encourage a range of experiences for families that they may not otherwise access due to cost or travel implications.

The wider community benefits from the hubs in many ways; we are linked to primary schools therefore making transition into school easier for both the children and parents. Many health and education professionals benefit from using the hub as a base for advice sessions and making links to families. Our staff and visiting professionals support families by signposting to other specialist services.

We are bringing people together across several rural communities by offering daily sessions for children cared for by all age groups. At this early stage in family life links are made and relationships are forged to create strong communities.



Quote: “The family hub at Chalgrove and Watlington has been vital to me in that it allows me to socialise with others mums, keep fit and gives my child a safe place to learn and play. The staff at the centre are fantastic, welcoming and always here to provide assistance and support. I recommend the family hub wherever I go because it is truly the heart of the community”

Ways in which we communicate to the local areas and families:

We work hard to ensure our communication is always at its best. Ways in which we sustain communication is by attending local meetings, delivering leaflets, putting adverts in local magazines but our best communication tools have been word of mouth and social media. We also provide play areas at festivals and fetes which helps to get our service out into a wider area. The Beacon Festival has also generously donated to the Family Hubs for the last two years – choosing us as one of 6 charities for their event. Open mornings are held a few times a year to try and attract new families to join us.

We always like to get feedback from our families so recently we had a committee member come in specifically to talk to people to find out their views and wishes for the hubs. The feedback allowed us to look at what we are providing now and make slight adjustments or additions to suit the users; such as changing the structure to the school readiness plan, adding in a Saturdays session and making sure we purchase equipment to enhance our activities. Of course, we love all the positive feedback as well!

Attendance levels and donations:

Since our last report in April 2019, our sessions have become more popular. We have worked hard to make sure there is a suitable balance of activities between both the sites.

The attached spreadsheet shows the attendance figures since September 2019.

We decided to introduce a ‘sum up’ card machine in order to make donations more convenient for families. This seems to have worked well.

Donations from attendees at the hubs have contributed to the overall income of the hub however does not have a big impact on the budget as the takings go directly towards the activities put on for the families.



Funding and fundraising:

We were very fortunate to have been granted another £10,000 from the OCC as part of the 'left over' transition grant money. A lot of hard work went into the application by the committee and we were one of the only family centres to receive it in the local area.

We still need to plan for the long-term future of the hubs and therefore have recently applied for a grant from the National Lottery. We are awaiting the decision – fingers crossed!

SOHA housing have been very supportive over the last year allowing us to pay for the additional activities which attract new families to the hubs.

Private donations are very welcome, this year we were able to invite Zoo Lab to come along to show the children a variety of mini beasts – we had a huge turnout of families which was inspiring to see.

Bovis Homes at Stadhampton supported us by creating and printing all our flyers over 5000 copies! These have been taken to local events and delivered by hand to new families into the villages.

We have obtained funding for one of our volunteers to attend training and to run the Baby Massage sessions free of charge to local families.

Of course, we very much value the contributions made by the local parish councils and these make up a large part of the funding we need in order to keep the service that we are providing up and running.



Quote: “The hub has a welcoming relaxed feel to it. The best thing about it is how it caters for all. I can go to the calm ‘baby’ sessions for my daughter, then let my 2 boys get thoroughly involved with whatever is going on at the session for the older ones, where they enjoy a variety of activities and I get a chance for a hot drink!”

Our future plans:

We want to continue to provide a safe learning environment for families within the local area. In order to achieve this we need to secure more funding.

We want to continue to build new links with the local community and businesses. We are just in the process of linking with families we have with the local Age Concern group and Watlington Hospital through music and singing with the help from Mr Chamberlain, the music teacher based at Chalgrove School.

After the success of Let’s Talk Coffee morning we would like to attend Mental Health training in order to be able to support families who are having difficulties in this area.

We are planning to set up a Saturdays sessions to encourage fathers to feel they can be part of the Family Hub, have the opportunity to spend time with their children, socialise and meet other dads.

We plan to revamp our school readiness session in the summer term and work closely with the Nurseries and Schools during this time.

We are hoping to attend the Real Play training later on in the year and then to facilitate these sessions within the Family Hubs.



WADAC - WATLINGTON AND DISTRICT AGE CONCERN

We are part of Age UK and provide places where people from Watlington, and the surrounding villages, can meet. One of these areas is the Drop In which is at 26B The High Street. It is usually open every weekday from 9.15am to 12.30pm. Drinks are provided by a wonderful group of volunteers. A chiropodist comes every Wednesday and there is a secondhand sales table. People find it a welcoming place where they can meet friends, sit down after shopping and there is a nucleus of regular customers.

The other place is the Thursday Club in the West Room where people come once a week from 9.30am until 2.30pm. Several people have lifts from the Volunteer Drivers. Newspapers are provided and there is bingo and chair exercises which are led by the manager. These are followed by a delicious lunch provided by two volunteer cooks and others who wash up. There have been several interesting talks this year. One about the Methodist Movement in Watlington another about South Africa and SODC talk on recycling in the area, these have been much enjoyed by regular people as well as other guests. We thank the speakers for giving their time.

Three paid staff lead these events. There are seven Trustees who meet to make plans for the general running and the finances of WADAC. County Council cuts to grants have affected WADAC and it is currently running at a small loss, but we have had some generous donations through the year for which we are very grateful. The Watlington Times gave us £1000 and others have given donations in memory of family members who have enjoyed the things that WADAC has to offer and these have all helped us to continue. Without the team of volunteers WADAC would not be able to function so the Trustees are particularly grateful to them all.

The above were all running smoothly until February when there was a problem with the roof at 26B, so we had to close until we were assured that all was safe. The County Surveyor came to inspect the building and said it was safe and we were just about to open again in early March when the Corvid 19 virus hit so have remained closed since then. The paid staff have been furloughed and work to repair the building is starting in June. We look forward to being able to open both venues again before long but will have to wait for further guideline.

Rainbow Corner Day Nursery Parish report 2020.

2019 was a successful year all round for Rainbow, we had a full register and the fundraising team staff and parents worked extremely hard to raise £14,000 from events donations and a few small grants.

These funds were put to good use to replace our very old Children's tables and Chairs and revamp the preschool garden to replace the broken climbing frame and worn out lawn with a new Playdale climbing frame and artificial grass for all year use. We have been very lucky this has been able to be completed in the last week, ready for the gentle return of children on June 1st, 2020.

Like for the rest of the world March 2020 changed Rainbow from its normal busy routine however, with a huge amount of work and reorganisation we managed to work out a way to protect the

nursery and to offer our key worker families continued provision, this has continued throughout lockdown with 5 staff working to look after these children in a new and safe way, the rest of our staff have been on furlough using the government job retention scheme .

From June 1st after another huge effort from staff to totally rearranged nursery into 5 zones we have reopened for more of our children, we have one zone to continue to care for our keyworker families from 8-5 and 4 other zones for children attending 9-3 to offer the parents who want their children to return at his time a start back to nursery life, this is to protect both children and staff with small zones of 1 adult with the required ratio of adult to child. This situation is not financially viable for nursery and will therefore need to be reviewed again in July.

Friends of Watlington Hill Report for Watlington Parish Council 07/06/2020

Friends of Watlington Hill is a volunteer group affiliated to the National Trust and meets on the Hill on average about once a month. The bulk of our work parties involve cutting back and collecting cut material. This is to maintain the bio-diverse chalk grasslands which would very quickly become covered in wood and scrub if left whilst maintaining a percentage of scrub and tree cover for they too are important for a balance. As part of this we carried out a short programme of tree popping using a set of special tools which enable the safe removal of very small saplings from areas of chalk grassland where tree cover is not helpful to the goal of retaining it.

This work has continued throughout 2019-2020 with short pauses in the summer to allow birds to nest undisturbed. During the pauses we carried out the annual cleaning of the White Mark monument.

We have diversified into other nearby properties within the Ranger's portfolio – such as Lower Deans Wood and Greenfield Copse principally to assist both the National Trust and the Watlington Park Estate in controlling outbreaks of Himalayan Balsam. This is a pernicious non-native species which can quickly spread and crowd out our native wildflowers and other plants. Fortunately, it is quite easy to remove by pulling the stalks – however there is a lot of it!

Like most other organisations we have taken an enforced break since March 2020 as a result of the restrictions put in place to slow the spread of the Coronavirus.

When conditions allow a resumption of volunteer work, we will meet at 10 am on either a Saturday or a Sunday in the National Trust Car Park and work until about 3pm but volunteers need only work as long as they wish and can leave earlier or join in later. There is always a good atmosphere with friendly conversation. It is a great way to meet new people and learn about and enjoy the local environment. If you would like to be added to our mailing list please contact Keith Jackson keithc.jackson@btinternet.com or Terry Jackson tjacks@waitrose.com .

Annual Report of Watlington In Bloom 2019-2020

On 8th July Watlington was visited by the Thames and Chilterns RHS In Bloom judges. We felt quietly confident as we showed the judges around our lovely town (classed as a large village for the RHS campaign based on population). Some decisive changes had taken place here since their last visit which we hoped they would approve of.

Because of watering difficulties in the car park we moved two of the planters from the car park to the junction of Couching Street and Brook Street where there were two roundels in which the trees had died but the roots remained making it difficult for anything but weeds (mainly thistles!) to grow. With the help of Tom Bindoff and his trusty Landrover the tubs were emptied at the car park; the stumps were cut to ground level, the weeds and plants removed and the roundels were covered with a weed membrane and grey and white gravel and the tubs were placed on top and replanted. The third Car Park planter will be moved in due course.



We also planted some new planters outside K is for Kitchen and Harriet Holgate's Interior Design Shop. We always try to use organic peat free compost and drought resistant plants that are also attractive to pollinating insects.

The triangle at the junction of Brook Street, Cuxham Road and Britwell Road has had the grass dug out and been planted with pollinators – we are also allowing wildflower to self-seed for the pollinators.



When the RHS Judges visited they did not witness the self-sown red poppies which were very popular locally when they were at their peak! We have laid weed membrane and pebbles and cobbles where the lorries regularly drive over so there shouldn't be a problem of them running over the 'pretty bits'.



The Thames and Chilterns RHS 'In Bloom' awards ceremony took place in Woodley in September 2019. Watlington received an overall Silver award and an award for 'Best Large Village', as well as an award, for which we are particularly proud, for Conservation and Wildlife.



The day before lockdown we purchased 3 new planters, plants and compost and these have been placed on Brook Street where a large Sedge had previously been

removed and where we attempt to control bramble coming from under the fence!(although it too is popular with pollinators).

We had planned to hold the ever popular Open Gardens Day event during June but that has been scuppered by the Coronavirus situation so please



watch out for the virtual version of this event soon.

If you are interested in volunteering with WIB please contact Terry tjacks@waitrose.com