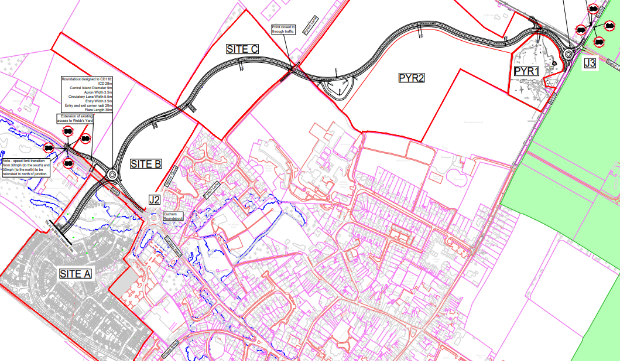
**Watlington Parish Council**

**Annual Report**

**Presented to the Annual Parish Meeting**

**Thursday 19th May 2022 7.30pm West Room**

****





**Contents**

**Minutes from 2021 AGM** – Pages 3-11

**Reports from Committees**

**Chairs Report**

**Finance and Staff**

**Pavilion and Sports Club**

**Strategy**

**Planning**

**Operations**

**Neighbourhood Plan Advisory Group**

**Allotments**

**Reports from Charities**

**Town Hall Trust Body**

**Reports from Local Groups and Councillors**

**Freddie Van Mierlo (Oxfordshire County Council)**

**Anna Badcock (South Oxfordshire District Council)**

**Gardening Club**

**Friends of Watlington Hill**

**Family Hubs**

**Watlington Bowls Club**

**Friends of Watlington Library (FOWL)**

**Royal British Legion**

**Watlington Age Concern**

MINUTES OF ANNUAL PARISH THE MEETING

HELD ON THURSDAY 29th April 2021 AT 7PM Via Zoom

**Present:**

**Councillors:** Matt Reid (Chairman), Ian Hill (Vice-Chairman), Terry Jackson, Tim Horton, Steve Bolingbroke, Nicky Smallbone, Margaret Noon, Keith Woolfson, Richard Dorney-Savage

**Co-opted Members:** Jenny Wilkinson (Operations), Gill Bindoff (Planning and NPAB), Keith Jackson (NPAB).

**Speakers:** Jeannette Wooster - WCAG

**Members of the Public:** 20

**Officer:**  Kristina Tynan

**District Councillor**: Anna Badcock

**Press:**  Anna Colivecchi

1. Welcome by the Chairman **– Matt Reid**

Matt Reid welcomed everyone to the meeting

1. Apologies

Roger Beattie, Rob Smith, Steve Harrod (County Councillor).

1. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 23rd May 2019 to be agreed and signed as a correct record.

**Resolved:** That these are a correct record of the meeting and to be signed by the Chair.

1. Presentation and Acceptance of the Annual Parish 2019 report.

The report was accepted. The Chairman’s report and Reports from Chairs of Committee are in the pack. There are also reports from organisations in the town. The report can be found on our website [www.watlington.org](http://www.watlington.org)

1. Chairman’s report

**Pandemic response**

This last year saw the ending of the first major lockdown in summer 2020 and the introduction of two further lockdowns in the Autumn of 2020 and the Winter of 2021. The period between the lockdowns allowed the District and County Councils time to put proper resources in place that eased the strain on the local volunteer network and parish office response that had been so effective in the first lockdown. As the surplus switch board capacity had been rented on a short-term basis, we were also able to close the Parish helpline once the initial need for general help had fallen away. Everyone appeared to settle into the same routine for the next two lockdowns although risk assessments for staff and parish buildings were reappraised each time to make sure the guidance was updated appropriately. Councillors had to adjust to having online meetings. I would like to record here my thanks for all the businesses, volunteers, staff and Councillors for carrying on throughout the pandemic and for keeping life as close to normal as the rules would allow.

**Edge Road** – MR said this will be a separate item later in the agenda.

Thanks as always is reserved for all of you who volunteer your time for some local activity or simply participate in your own way day to day in this incredible community.

1. Committee Chairman’s Reports

All reports are in the annual pack.

**Chair of Operations Report** – Ian Hill

The Operations Committee deal with operational matters concerned with the use, monitoring, replacement, maintenance and enhancement of Watlington assets, including those of the Sports Pavilion and Allotments as well as those for which the council has taken responsibility. This includes spending decisions within the agreed budget for the relevant items.

In April 2020 we started the year with 37 projects on our list of which 12 were high priority and we finished the year in March 2021 with 2 more projects of which 16 are high priority. However, of the initial 12 priority projects, 7 have been completed, 2 are in progress, 2 awaiting decisions from OCC and 1 has been adopted into OCC’s own programme (20 mph in the town)

Examples of the type of projects the committee undertake are:

Footpath 13 from The Goggs to the Willow Ponds which used to be unusable in wet weather. We installed new surfacing and drainage and it now good enough to survive the winter months with no more than minor puddling. [We were very lucky to get a grant from these works from TOE]

Graphical user interface

Description automatically generated with low confidence

Speed Indicator Devices (SID’s) – we have purchased 2 units which will be rotated around the parish. We are still waiting for 5 poles from OCC and as soon as they arrive the poles and SID’s will be put up. For a list of locations please contact the parish office.



The recreation ground is very well used all year round and you only need to visit on a sunny afternoon after school or a sunny weekend to see this. But it requires continual maintenance with our caretaker Bob carrying out much of the routine work. Some tasks are just too big for one person, and we get help for these. Sometimes it is volunteer teams such above, and sometimes paid contractors. We are currently looking at what can be done about the “i-play” which has not worked for months. Replacement with something needing less maintenance is being considered and ideas are welcome.



Watlington Parish Council are very proud of our facilities for skate boarders and BMX bikers but they are getting old. This year they have undergone refurbishment which will squeeze another few years life out of them, but we are starting to look at future options.

In the meantime we are very grateful for the brilliant job of refreshing the bowl and half-pipe done mainly by volunteers.

We take great pride in our town and were delighted when a couple, relatively new to the town, offered to restore the town gates to a good condition. We provided the paint, and they provided the labour. We thank them for this on-going task.

A picture containing diagram

Description automatically generated

By now I hope you are getting the message that one paid employee and this committee of six people depend on the willingness of volunteers to take on a range of tasks around the parish. I cannot thank these volunteers enough – Watlington has much to proud of, but much is dependent on volunteers and a range of organisations to keep it thriving.

The Operations committee in many ways are organisers rather than “doers” of this never-ending task.

Another permanent fixture on the operations agenda is Hill Road car park. With parking limited in the town we are very aware of the need to balance the demands of residents without off-road parking against the need for space for visitors to the town to leave their cars. We are very aware that Watlington as a community thrives because of its wide range of shops and businesses, but residents alone cannot keep these concerns afloat – we must pull in people from outside the town.

This year we have refreshed the car park and at the same time taken the opportunity to increase the number of short stay spaces While Westminster is pushing its “get active” policy, we have finally got round to installing a cycle rack in the car park.

7. Reports from Local Organisations

**Watlington Climate Action Group** (WCAG) – Jeannette Wooster (Slideshow is attached to

these minutes)

Watlington Climate Action Group is speaking here for the first time, thank you for asking us. I am Jeanette Wooster, Secretary of the group.

2 years ago, we existed as a 5-day old Facebook group, set up in response to climate related discussions on the Watlington Town Noticeboard.

At the annual Parish Council meeting around the same time, Amber Chainey, 19 year old councillor, and her friends spoke passionately on the need for Watlington to take action and ran a brainstorming session.

Our first activity as WCAG was to assimilate those ideas and hold two further public meetings to prioritise them based on impact and ease of implementation. By the Autumn we had created a strategy for our own group based on that activity and made recommendations to the Parish Council.

Update on our main projects:

1. **Education & Awareness**
   * Understanding and engagement is a pre-requisite for action. We aim to inform and support people about how they can choose to live more sustainably, as well as why and how they can get involved with and support larger community-based projects
   * We have done this through Watlington Times articles, social media, newsletter, our website, films, and many public events, collaborating often with other organisations in Watlington such as ArtWeeks and Icknield Community College. We’ve tackled subjects from food, to clothing, to green investing, electric vehicles, renewable energy and more.
2. **Plastic Free Watlington**
   * Single use plastic causes problems throughout our ecosystem – plastic microparticles are in the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat, and larger pieces cause huge problems for wildlife. Disposal is an issue, and both the production of, and disposal of single use plastic increases our carbon footprint.
   * This project aims to raise awareness and tackle the problem by encouraging individuals, businesses and community groups to reduce single use plastic.
3. **Green Plan**
   * The objective of the Green Plan is to sequester carbon and improve and enhance biodiversity through natural climate solutions.
   * This originally started as tree planting, but it quickly became apparent that we have very special habitats around Watlington, all of which sequester carbon. We now have initiatives addressing hedgerows, road verges, gardens and other habitats as part of this collaborative project working with Watlington Environment Group and others.
4. **Homes & Energy**
   * Housing is the biggest contributor to our carbon footprint in the Parish
   * We are looking to reduce the carbon footprint of both our existing housing stock, and campaign for high standards for new housing developments. We have delivered flyers with energy saving tips to homes in Watlington and undertaken a thermal imaging project for 50 homes. Come to our Homes. & Energy meeting on the 12th May to find out more about our plans in this area.

JW stated that Climate is ***the*** great challenge of our lives. The last year has been difficult with the pandemic, but it has shown what we can do when we pull together, and we will need to.

The last decade was the hottest decade on record and the causes and effects of climate change are now broadly accepted as scientifically beyond doubt. The target we are working towards in Watlington is net zero by 2030 - a target which is shared by South Oxfordshire District Council and many other councils across the country.

It’s a massively challenging target – and not something that can be outsourced to one organisation to deal with. We can tackle this most successfully when we work together as a community – WCAG, the Parish Council, the many organisations and businesses in Watlington, and as individuals.

Please contact us if you would like to help with any of our projects, find out what you can do as an individual or get advice on how your organisation can take action. You can contact us via our Facebook group, or website [www.watlingtonclimateaction.org.uk](http://www.watlingtonclimateaction.org.uk/)

MR said that phenomenal work has been done and it has shown what can be done when the impetus is there.

**Methodist Church –** Judy Crockett said that the Church has managed to put on a new roof despite Covid 19 and they are pleased to be hosting some local artists for Arts Week. Anna Badcock had arranged a grant for the Art Hub and thanked her for this.

8. Report from Town Hall Trust Body – Tim Horton

The written report is in the annual pack for people to read and for much of last year there were no meetings. However, an upgrade of the heating system has been done. In the coming year the body is hoping to attend to the brickwork issue. There also be a mini re-launch of the Town Hall as a key venue in the town. TH thanked the Parish Council and members of the Trust Body for their support.

9. Report from County Councillor – Cllr Steve Harrod

His report is in the annual pack. MR said that Steve Harrod had been very supportive to Watlington and our neighbouring parishes.

10. Report from District Councillor – Cllr Anna Badcock

AB reported that the officers at SODC responded amazingly to the Covid pandemic with some being taken off their normal roles to take on positions to support local communities as well as operating the Covid grants available and said she was so grateful to them for running various schemes to help individuals, communities and local businesses. They are now working on the restart business Covid grants. They also worked on Test and Trace. Central Government supported the leisure centres who are working with preventative social prescribing of activities to help with health problems.

The Local Plan was at a stage it could not be reversed as the current leadership had wanted and this cost £250,000 in legal bills. Bio- Abundance had put in a legal challenge on this but lost. The next Local Plan will be a joint one with the Vale. AB suggested that all Councillors pay attention to the meetings which will be held on this. CIL and Section 106 applications are now open again.

During last year the brown bins for garden waste had to be suspended for a while due to the pandemic with operators off sick etc. There were lots of queries about the waste collection during this time. AB said that if anyone has problems with bin collections to contact her direct as it is important that they are reported in.

The Ox-Cam Expressway will no longer go ahead.

AB stated that she is an advocate of putting support into local early years and has supported the Chalgrove/Watlington Family Hub centre. A grant was also given to WCAG to set up their website.

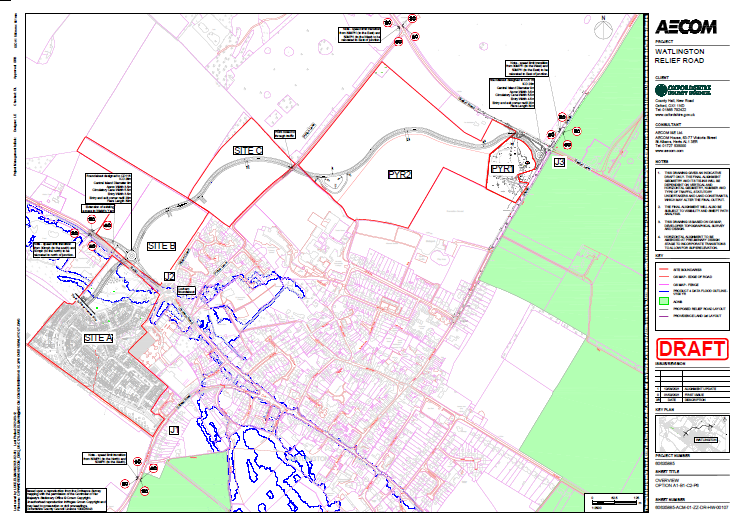
11. Update on the Edge Road and Slideshow Presentation – Matt Reid

Work finally commenced on Site A in the Autumn of 2020 and progress is reasonably rapid. Simultaneous to the build out of Site A has been the adoption of the safe guarded route in the Districts Local plan which came into force in December 2020. Talks with the OCC Highways consultants (AECOM) around the routing of the Edge Road were already in flight, but this adoption in local planning law accelerated the need to work together with our neighbours in Pyrton in order to find a series of compromises that both parties could live with. Coming out of this joint work has been the creation of a new working group that consists of 3 Watlington Parish Councillors and 3 Pyrton Parish Councillors. This group allows for discussions on the interface region between Watlington and Pyrton that will soon be filled with new developments.

With regards the Watlington sections of the Edge Road, we are still working to try and secure a solution to offset a hard T-Junction at the Britwell Road end of the scheme, but despite appearances this is a non-trivial problem. There is still a window of opportunity in which to solve this particular issue within the scope of the overall Edge Road scheme and we will be keeping local residents up to date with progress. Residents of Marlbrook will be pleased to hear that a new roundabout in the far side of Site B will be serviced by a re-alignment of the B480 Cuxham Road that will feed in from the existing roundabout. The Edge Road itself will then meet this new roundabout by way of a bridge like structure that will take it over the environmentally sensitive brook. Drawing the site further into Site B will also protect against additional ground water run-off from the new developments. Residents of Pyrton Lane will no doubt be pleased to hear that Pyrton Lane will be de-prioritised as a part of this plan and will only be open to walking, cycling and possibly horse riding upon final completion of the road. This will of course give much greater connectivity between Watlington and the large tracts of amenity land that will open up for walkers on the edge of Pyrton. Walking and cycling routes in line with these aims have already been included in the Neighbourhood Plan, but we will look to go further now that the details of the scheme are starting to solidify. We hope that the Icknield School will be with us for many more years, but we appreciate that the County Council will build a state of the art secondary and sixth form in Chalgrove should the planning application ever make it through.

The route of the Edge Road will pass close to the existing Sports Hall area of the current site, which will allow for school buses to use the new road rather than Love Lane, but in doing this the new playing fields that will be given over to the school will be on the other side of the road. Should the school leave then the new playing field will be given over to Pyrton Parish Council, but we have secured informal agreement that this will be retained for the use of community sports. The ICC sports field will of course be fenced off, but the land to the north will become something of a new ‘community green’ area for Pyrton that I’m sure many people in Watlington will also have the chance to enjoy. To put these plans in perspective, some 66% of the land on the Pyrton side of the Parish Boundary will be made over to amenity space of some description and the development on the Watlington side will be limited to somewhere around 100 new homes.

**See AECOM Plan overleaf**



11. Announcements

**Plastic Free Watlington –** Watlington has been given Plastic Free Approved Status by Surfers Against Sewerage. MR thanked TJ and WCAG for their work to obtain this. This process was started over a year ago and this is fantastic news. A lot of our businesses, community groups and Watlington Parish Council have signed a pledge to not use single use plastic.

**Art Weeks** – Will be held this year and will be held 15th to 23rd May.

**Community Awards** – These will be held in 2022

12. Residents Questions to Parish Councillors, District Councillor and Local Organisations

Q: **What impact would Chalgrove Have on land supply**?

It was noted that Chalgrove is the only major site on the SODC Local Plan that is not on the green belt but the least sensible to develop. Whilst Martin Baker remain on site there should not be any building on it. There is also not enough road infrastructure in place. When other sites were signed off in South Oxfordshire, Chalgrove was at the bottom of the list. WPC objected to the Chalgrove Development in August 2020. An SODC Officer is modelling what impact Chalgrove would have on Watlington.

There were no other questions and Matt Reid thanked everyone for attending and said that last year was not a year any of us would forget.

**THERE BEING NO OTHER BUSINESS THE MEETING CLOSED AT 8.20PM**

**Watlington Parish Council 2022 APM**

**Reports from Committees and Organisations 2021/2022**

**WPC CHAIRMAN’S REPORT**

**Current Members of Watlington Parish Council**

Matt Reid (Chairman), Steve Bolingbroke (Vice-Chairman), Ian Hill, Alex Basden, Roger Beattie, Tim Horton, Terry Jackson, Andrew McAuley, Margaret Noon, Rob Smith

**Staff to the Council**

Kristina Tynan (Clerk), Rachel Gill (Assistant to the Clerk), Bob Thomas (Watlington Caretaker), Christine Wiltshire (additional office support)

**Overview**

Progress on a number of fronts has been somewhat checked by a combination of events that range from the change of administration at Oxfordshire County Council in April 2021 to the slow and gradual emergence of normal life post pandemic. Council meetings have in the main continued to be held online with only the full council meetings returning to regular face to face meetings more recently. As can be expected in the circumstances, many Councillors have weighed the balance of their personal commitments and as a result we are now down to 10 sitting Councillors despite having 14 available positions. With an eye to the year ahead I’m pleased to report that Steve Bolingbroke has been elected Vice Chairman for 2022/23 and has already been instrumental this past year in starting many strategic initiatives that are already beginning to bear fruit.

**Edge Road**

With regards the change of leadership at OCC in April 2021, this did lead to something of an initial slowing in the momentum that we had built around the Edge Road project as we had originally hoped for a planning submission in Autumn 2021, but I’m pleased to report that activity has picked up again and we are now looking at a full planning submission sometime in the Autumn of 2022. This is not ideal as the permission for the Edge Road has now fallen behind the application for sites B and C, but as ever we have to roll with the punches. As a result of this, the Council have adopted the position in conjunction with Pyrton that Site C should not be open to Pyrton Lane until such time as the Edge Road is complete.

Regular meetings on the Edge Road with our local authorities and immediate neighbours have continued over the past year and I’m pleased to say that a broader sweep of the road at the Britwell Road end of the scheme has now been included as part of the overall project.

Our new County Councillor Freddie Van Mierlo has been incredibly supportive in making sure that this project has gotten back on track, so I extend the thanks of the Council to him for making some real headway on a range of issues including the Edge Road since his election.

The proposed route and quality of the proposed scheme has remained unchanged and is still projected to run from Site A on the Britwell Road all the way through to PYR1 on the Shirburn Road. This will result in marked changes to traffic flows in Watlington, so a strategic initiative is already in progress to look at bringing potential changes to traffic flow inside the Edge Road to public consultation.

**CIL Projects**

For each new development in Watlington there will be a payment made to the Parish Council known as a Community Infrastructure Levy or to phrase it more concisely ‘CIL money’, that can be directed into projects for the benefit of the wider community. There are a number of projects already earmarked for CIL funding most of which are in the area of the recreation ground, such as a new skate facility, a multi-use games area and a dedicated youth building, but under the new business processes put in place to manage these projects each one will have to be pushed forward by a group of proactive volunteers. Should volunteers not come forward to back the planning and administration of these projects then the funding will simply fall away and be directed into projects that have stronger community backing. One of the goals of the Council in this next year will be to re-gear itself in order to make sure that Council funds are more widely directed toward the many organisations that work independently of the Council and that give the Town its characteristic vibrancy. The Parish Council has done some excellent work to date in facilitating the strategic direction of where new development needs to occur, but we are now focused on recalibrating the way in which we recruit Councillors, run projects and spend your money.

The Operations Committee led by Ian Hill have been as busy as ever this year, but perhaps the biggest change in the past year is the introduction of the Speed Indicator Devices (SID’s) in both Watlington and Christmas Common. Plans for Electric Vehicle chargers in the Town’s Car Park are also now in full flight, so expect the first ones to arrive sometime soon.

**Charlotte Coxe Trust**

I’m glad to report that this year has finally seen some movement on the issue of the Charlotte Coxe Trust. Following an approach to the Council by Jeremy Irons over the Christmas period a lot of pressure has been to the OCC legal team in order to free up the use of the building for a year in order to house a refugee family. It should be pointed out that this activity started at the end of December, long before the Ukrainian crisis, so whilst the project is still subject to multiple legal hurdles and red tape it is finally moving forward, for which I extend the gratitude of both the Council and wider Community to Jeremy for his continued perseverance on this front.

With regards the administration of the trust, this has now been delegated to a group of Councillors at County Hall to make faster and more accountable decisions, but it is hoped that this state of affairs will be a temporary stepping stone towards passing control of the entire trust back to Watlington at some point in the future.

**Councillors and Staff**

Our staff continue to form the backbone on which we depend for both the day running of the Parish Office as well as supporting our Councillors in their duties and evening meetings. For those who may be newly arrived in Watlington, Kristina Tynan is our principal clerk and heads up a dedicated team that includes, Rachel Gill and Bob Thomas our community caretaker. I’d like to thank all Councillors who have served in the last year and will look forward to another year of progress on many of the fronts already mentioned above.

Our biggest thanks, as ever is reserved for all of you who volunteer your time for some local activity or simply participate in your own way day to day in keeping our community so vibrant and such a wonderful place to live.

**Matt Reid**

**Finance and Staff Committee (2021/22)**

**Members**: Councillors: Matt Read, Steve Bolingbroke, Ian Hill Roger Beattie and Tim Horton (Chair)

The Committee had been able to offer a budget that entailed no change to the precept upon Watlington residents between 2020/21 and 2021/22. and Council was able to stay within the parameters thereby set during the year.

With constraints as costs rose, the Council has been able to introduce a radical improvement to the equipment provided in the main children's area and also commence a new programme of management for trees on land it manages. It has also sustained the policy of aiding 'First Steps' – with Chalgrove – that does vital work for families and the youngest in the community.

The year has seen the Council set its priorities for capital spending both to utilise reserves that had developed over recent years and specially to take advantage of the Community Infrastructure Levy attributable to the parish. Work on plans for new skateboard facility and EV charging (in the car park) are well advanced. To these ends the Council requires to take professional and technical advice and where appropriate this has been sought. Legal advice has been sought regarding negotiations on the renewal of the rental agreement for sports land.

There was a major extension to the way annual budgeting is now presented. This is proving very useful with the anticipation of greater capital spending in the future and the requirement to make secure existing land and property through the use of 'sinking funds'. It was resolved at the end of the year to bring into our account’s monies held by SODC that were dedicated to infrastructure work.

The tax base has not altered very much in the parish, but with much new property coming into occupation this is likely to alter in the future. Further we have been able to secure excellent grants for work on the multi-games area and the EV projects. These grants will allow a greater range of ideas for capital investment from now on.

Our income is supplemented through annual grants for operating the public conveniences and the car park (from most local businesses, including the Co-op).

The Committee has met on extra occasions during the year, commonly to progress stages of tendering processes (such as for the projects above). Additional on staff, appraisals have been undertaken successfully. Watlington PC has opened accounts with the Unity bank to hopefully achieve lower costs in the future.

The Council was able to reduce its precept upon Watlington residents by a small amount as we entered the 2022/23 financial year – at 2.36% less that last year. Substantially the reason for this is that more spending can be attributes to CIL money that will enrich infrastructure work for some time into the future.  
The Committee has expressed special thanks for the work of Kristina Tynan and other staff who have ensured again good value for money in all the work on banking, accounts, tendering and the oversight of work in hand.

**Tim Horton**

**PSFC CHAIRMAN’S REPORT**

**Current Members of Watlington Parish Council PSFC Committee**

Matt Reid (Chairman), Steve Bolingbroke, Alex Basden, Tim Horton, Keith Wolfson (co-opted), Chris Allen (co-opted), Neil Boddington (co-opted), Pippa Tolfts (co-opted).

**Introduction**

The Pavilion was generously subsidised by government grants during the pandemic, but as things return to normal the Parish Council’s attention is now turning toward lessening the underlying Parish Council subsidies as well as the unseen administrative time spent by our office staff on running the pavilion.

I’m pleased to report that the PSFC committee has started down this path this past year has been working with the Football and Cricket clubs in order to start drawing up viable business plans for how the clubs could operate the building more autonomously and with less Council subsidy.

**Timescales**

At present the timescale for the handover of the pavilion to the Sports Club or some other suitable management entity is set for March 2023, but as always, these timescales are subject to a degree of flexibility dependant on the various challenges that present themselves as the business planning is taken down to a more granular level.

**Process**

The process for handover will require two main activities to be followed through. The first of course will be the establishment of a genuinely viable business plan, but most importantly for the new administrators, we will need to make sure that all necessary remedial work has been carried out so that they are not taking on a building in a state of disrepair. The establishment of ongoing sinking funds for maintenance will obviously be a large part of the business planning process.

**Continued success of the clubs**

Despite the Council focus being on divestment of responsibility for the running and funding of the pavilion it should be noted that both the Football and Cricket clubs have had a good year and membership numbers remain high. In particular, both clubs continue to attract younger players and have the potential to expand in the coming years, so our thanks go out to the respective Club committees for their continued hard work.



Matt Reid

**Strategy Committee**

**Chairman’s Report**

**Members**: Andrew McAuley (Chair), Matt Reid (Vice-Chair), Ian Hill, Terry Jackson, Margaret Noon, Tim Horton, Roger Beattie, Steve Bolingbroke

**Co-opted members**: Gill Bindoff

This year has seen a major shift in how the Strategy Committee performs its primary function of oversight of the delivery of the Parish Council Strategic Plan (PCSP). Last year I reported that the committee struggled to fully understand its role and how best to carry out its remit. This year, the adoption by the Parish Council of a project management system that introduced formalised business processes has improved oversight and decision making.

The PCSP remains at the core of what the council aims to deliver for the community and the objectives set out in the plan remain a priority for the council. The new project proposal process has introduced rigor to the planning and approval process for all council projects. Early in the period the Major Projects Working Group identified five projects that the council then approved to undergo the full project selection, approval and management process. These projects are the short to medium term (one-to-three-year timeframe) ambition of the council. All projects are eligible for a funding grant from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), monies paid by the developers of the major sites in Watlington and some minor developments within the Parish. However, each project must be supported by the community and must be value for money. The five projects are:

1. Multi Use Games Area (MUGA)
2. Community Performance Space
3. New Skate Park (Flow Park)
4. EV Charging Points in Hill Road Car Park
5. Youth Facility

All five project proposals are presently undergoing evaluation and are at different stages in the process.

The growth of the town is already increasing pressure on facilities, and it is, therefore, the priority of the Parish Council to provide facilities that meet the needs and aspirations of the community. The role of the Strategy Committee remains the setting of priorities and ensuring proper management structures are in place in order that the Parish Council can meet its obligations to the community.

As chairman I would like to extend my gratitude to all the members of the Strategy Committee. This has not been an easy year, but I feel that as a committee and as a council we are on the right road to deliver for the community.

**Planning Committee**

**Chairman’s Report**

**Members**: Andrew McAuley (Chair), Matt Reid (vice-chair), Rob Smith, Ian Hill, Terry Jackson, Margaret Noon, Alex Basden.

**Co-opted members**: Gill Bindoff, Tony Powell

This year, 2021-2022, has continued to be a difficult year for Parish Councils. The continuing threat from Covid-19 and the imposed regulations has meant that all meetings have continued to be conducted using virtual meeting software and all site visits have been limited in scope. Despite these administrative issues the committee met monthly and considered a wide range of planning applications. The objective of the committee is to deliver the community’s development priorities, as outlined in the Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan (WNDP), whilst ensuring that the character of the Watlington Parish is protected from inappropriate development. This does not mean that applications for modern, innovative and sustainable design are not welcome. Indeed, the Parish’s character is based on an evolution in design over the centuries. Modern design and the sympathetic use of modern materials will ensure that Watlington continues to thrive.

The trend, that was highlighted last year, for a higher than usual number of applications for household extensions, garden rooms and home offices has continued. The applications considered by the committee have spanned not only these types of minor development but also the major applications for the development sites between the Cuxham Road and Pyrton Lane. The successful delivery of these housing developments aligned to the edge road remains a priority for the committee. The Parish Council has also successfully opposed inappropriate development in the AONB at Pishill, on land off Hill Road and on garden land bordering the Paddock in the centre of town. However, this last application is now subject to appeal.

The virtual working environment to which we have all become accustomed has allowed committee members to continue to work closely with OCC, SODC and developers as well as being able to represent the Parish in front of the SODC Planning Committee. Planning decision times have returned to normal and the working relationship between the Parish Council and SODC Planning department has remained excellent throughout.

Work continues with OCC on the details of the routing of the Watlington edge road and a planning application for the full edge road is expected to be submitted by OCC in the Autumn of 2022. The proposed route meets the objectives set by the Parish Council and safeguards the centre of town and the residents of Marlbrook. It also, satisfies Pyrton Parish’s priority to ensure that there is a green gap between the two parishes.

The following key applications are of note. The details of WPC’s responses to these applications and all others can be found on the Parish website under Planning Committee Minutes.

**P19/S1928/O & P19/S1927/O** Land off Cuxham Road (Sites B & C).

These two applications were granted outline planning permission by the SODC Planning Committee in January 2021 pending a decision by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government regarding a call-in application. The outline planning permission was confirmed on 17th January 2022. They are a critical for the delivery of the edge road.

**P21/S0047/FUL** Grove Farm Patemore Lane Pishill RG9 6HH (Five Holiday Pods and Associated Facilities).

This application was refused planning permission by SODC on 22nd February 2022. The Parish Council as well as the communities of Stonor and Pishill strongly opposed and development on this site within the AONB. area.

**P20/S4280/FUL** Land to Rear of 56-58 Hill Road Watlington OX49 5AD

This application for two detached dwellings would have extended the built form along Hill Road to the rear of the existing properties and ii to the AONB. The application was refused by SODC on 1st February 2021 and was dismissed at appeal on 20th August 2021.

The Planning Committee continues to work closely with the planning department of SODC to ensure that the development of Watlington is carried out in a sympathetic way that meets the aspirations of the WNDP, both in the town and the wider parish. As chairman I would like to thank all members of the Planning Committee for their hard work over what has been another challenging period. I would also like to thank those members of the committee who have stood down over the past year. Their time and effort have been very much appreciated.

**Andrew McAuley (Chairman)**

**Operations Committee**

**Members in 2021-2022:**

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

Alex Basden, Tim Horton, Terry Jackson, Rob Smith, Keith Woolfson (till September)

**Co-opted members:** Bob West, Jenny Wilkinson

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

For the operations committee this has been a year in which many long-standing issues have reached a crucial stage where they appear to be on the verge of completion and are awaiting action from other organisations. Primary of these must be the changes to Pyrton Lane to make it a safer environment for residents, especially those having to walk along the lane to get anywhere. After negotiations with the County Council that started in 2018, we now have detailed plans drawn and approved, and a contractor appointed. We are told this work would be started soon after Easter, but I am not holding my breath.

Other tasks that have involved OCC Highways action are the trench along Brook Street which has been sinking since 2014 and had reached a maximum depth of 8cm and a length of 30 metres by the time it was filled a month or two back. A third task was getting the speed limit on our streets reduced to 20mph where we are told we will be in the first tranche of communities to get the limit implemented (Cuxham was one of the trial projects last year). For all these tasks I am grateful for strong support from our County Councillor who has very effectively oiled the wheels, or maybe leant on the officers, to get some action.

Another traffic measure that has come to fruition this year is the installation of SIDs (speed indicator devices) at the entrances to the town and to Christmas Common. We now have two of these devices and share a third with Cuxham and Cookley Green. Evidence of the effect they can have on speed is illustrated in the graph below which shows the average outward-bound speed on Shirburn Road both without and without the display switched on.

Moving on from traffic related issues, much of our effort has gone into support for our rest and recreational facilities. Top among these are the replacement of the i-Play unit on the Rec which has never worked effectively for any long period. After lengthy negotiations with the supplier, we have agreed a deal under which they will remove the unit and replace it with 10 new items of play equipment with a 33% discount. The new items were selected following a survey of users and will cost us £17,000 taken from our general reserves. Like the highway’s tasks, this is another project where all is agreed, and we are just waiting for installation in the near future.

Our green spaces have not been neglected with hedge replacement at Mansle Gardens, and repairs to footpaths and planting of a tree in the Paddock to replace the rowan that was poisoned a few years ago. That planting was part of a major programme of tree work on Parish Council owned land. The Allotments Committee, a subcommittee of Operations, have been very active over the year culminating in installation of a wider network of watering points. Other work on general environmental issues was a survey of our public waste (both general and dog waste) that has led to list of repairs and the need for additional bins in parts of the town.

No operations report would be complete without a report on the public toilets where we installed a CCTV system following a spate of vandalism. These have caught two instances of vandalism; however, most alarms are triggered by our 8 legged friends who clearly like the infra-red illumination and spend the night waving their legs at the camera thereby triggering the alarm. Again, I must thank our volunteers (Jenny Wilkinson and Chris Howse) who have done an excellent job of maintaining the high standard of cleanliness that attracts people to use of the facilities. They are taking a well-deserved retirement and we are struggling to find a replacement cleaner. If you know of somebody, please let Kristina know.

I thank the hard-working members of this committee, the parish council staff, our County Councillor 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 –** Operations Committee Chairman

**NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN ADVISORY BOARD**

Membership of the Advisory Board has changed during the year. David Robins resigned as he moved back to Scotland. There are a couple of vacancies for members of the community on the NPAB which have been advertised locally but, so far, the vacancies have not been filled. However, with equal numbers of parish councillors and members of the community, the NPAB has achieved a lot during the year.

**Advisory role on the delivery of the Neighbourhood Development Plan:**

* 1. Red Kite View: progress on the site has been monitored as more new homes are being occupied. There have been concerns about the delivery of the agreed provision for wildlife on the site and a meeting has been held with the Bloor Homes ecologist and a member of the site management team. Progress towards achieving the commitments in the Management Plans for the site is expected shortly and the NPAB will continue to monitor the approved provision for wildlife on the site.
  2. Sites B and C between Cuxham Road and Pyrton Lane: the NPAB has been represented at an initial meeting with the house builder Redrow and has looked in detail at the planning application for the development of the sites. Notes were provided for the WPC Planning Committee when it considered the applications. Engagement with the planning process will continue to ensure that the criteria in the Neighbourhood Plan for the development of the sites are fully met.
  3. Watlington Edge Road: the NPAB has been contributing to the meetings of the Interface Group between Watlington and Pyrton Parish Councils in order to support the Group’s work to make progress on the Edge Road. There is good communication with the County Council Highways officer who has the project brief for the road but communications with other officers has been poor in spite of the helpful efforts of Freddie Van Mierlo, the local county councillor. The County Council Cabinet approved the work to produce a planning application for the County Council sections of the road back in September 2021. The appointment of a consultant to do this work is still awaited but it is expected that the application will be submitted later this year with construction started in 2023.

**Progress on the review of the Neighbourhood Development Plan:**

2.1 Progress on the review of the aims/objectives of the Plan and the policies has been ongoing during the year. The NPAB has had support and advice from AECOM and has been given confirmation that the draft policies have a good evidence base.

2.2 The NPAB has been successful in getting grant funding for additional supporting evidence:

* An updated Conservation Area Appraisal has been done by Dr Kathryn Davies. This is in the process of being adopted by SODC
* Aecom is currently working with the NPAB on a revised Design Guide for the town
* Martin Gammie is working on a survey of trees. This survey will strengthen policies for protecting and enhancing the treescape in and around the town.
* A Housing Needs Assessment has been carried out by Aecom to support the local survey completed last year. This will inform the policies for housing in the revised Plan.

2.3 The NPAB has also carried out a number of surveys during the year:

* There was a good response to the Sports Survey which provided very useful information about current and future needs. The results have been fed into the Parish Council’s process for determining which major projects should benefit from the use of the parish share of the Community Infrastructure Levy
* The transport survey had a smaller response but did provide some useful information on local car use and options for the use of electric cars and public transport.
* Watlington and Christmas Common residents were surveyed on their views on the introduction of 20mph on residential streets. The outcome was strongly in favour with 80% supporting the idea in Watlington and 100% in Christmas Common.

2.4 Working groups have been looking at traffic management improvements and improvements to routes for cycling and walking.

2.5 The NPAB is also part of local environment groups, including the Watlington Green Plan group and the group working on an energy generation project.

**Watlington Allotment**

Co-Chairs: Kirsty and Josh Robinson-Ward

Vice Chair: Gerald Short

Committee: George Bruce, Gill Bindoff, Fergus Lapage, James Tappin, Johanna Tagada, Steven ‘Stedge’ Fanning

Parish Representatives: Roger Beattie, Ian Hill

This has been our first year as co-chairs at the allotments and we have enjoyed our role in this community. Thanks must go to George Bruce for his years of service to make the allotments what they are, and we have valued his input in handing over. He is still a voice on the committee, and we rely on his experience and the committee to ensure we are acting in the interests of everyone.

So far, in our short tenure, we have overseen the completion of the new water upgrade and we’d like to thank the Parish and Cllr Freddie Van Mierlo for their funding to get this project over the line. The system was installed by local plumber and plot holder James Tappin. We believe it will benefit many for years to come. We have organised plant sales, chutney sales and most recently a seed swap event. Not only do they bring people together and involve the wider Watlington community, but it is also a great opportunity for fundraising. We have also successfully applied for funding from Cllr Anna Badcock for a communal shed, which will be installed later this year.

We have a strong committee, are building up a workforce of volunteers who look after the site and we are keen to keep the allotment spirit thriving. We want to ensure the allotments run efficiently and as such are identifying long-term projects that will need time and financing such as road resurfacing, tree surgery and hedge laying.

All plots are currently rented and there is a waiting list. We are keen to ensure regular inspections are made and that plots are being well cultivated and maintained, the allotments are a community resource and as such should not be taken for granted.

**Josh and Kirsty Robinson-Ward - Allotment Co-Chairs**

**Town Hall Trust Body**

**Membership: Councillors Ian Hill, Matt Read, Tim Horton (Chairman), Terry Jackson, Alison Morgans (co-opted), Mike Young (co-opted)**

**Technical adviser: Bob West**

The Trust Body has been required to be extremely cautious concerning the use of the Main Hall for second year because of the emergency regarding Covid. This has restrained to an extent income from elsewhere than the Council's grant. However, we continue to enjoy good relations with our principal tenant in the Undercroft. The vegetable and fruit business has been vital to Watlington throughout the pandemic, and we have made every reasonable accommodation to the special needs of the business.

Following an upgrade of the boiler to electric, we continue to seek improvements for the electrical system (including lighting).

There has been attention to the need to further reduce heating costs and it is agreed in principle to utilise secondary glazing in the building. Such schemes require consent from the District Council and Heritage England.

The scheme to undertake a restoration of brickwork is also agreed and awaits Council approval.

Interest is also focused on the possibility of enclosing the Undercroft and a group of Trust members are testing ideas here. This would be a radical step and requires detailed investigation.



**Tim Horton**

**Reports from County and District Councillors and Local groups**

A person wearing glasses

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

**Annual Report 2022**

**Cllr Freddie van Mierlo, Chalgrove and Watlington Division**

*Liberal Democrat*

In May 2021, I was elected as your county councilor with 53% of the vote. It was part of a ‘yellow wave’ that saw Liberal Democrats become the equal largest party in the county, and also the equal largest party in the Henley constituency. A new administration was formed following the elections comprising of 21 Lib Dems, 3 Greens and 16 Labour Councillors – the first non-Conservative administration in Oxfordshire County Council.

In the first year of taking control, the new administration has not wasted any time. We have developed new strategies for transport and HGVs, libraries & SEND. Instituted a new policy to meet our promise of delivering 20mph communities and secured grants following ambitious bids to central government to improve bus services. Youth services will be brought back for the first time since they were scrapped by the Tories. We have engaged closely in the Oxfordshire 2050 process to express our concerns on the projected growth targets being set and were a key driver of getting the ox-cam arc and expressway scrapped.

In February this year, the new administration’s first budget was passed at Full Council. It is true that a rise in council tax comes at a time when the rising cost of living is hitting people hard. However, to continue to meet our obligations on social care – which makes up over half our budget – there was little choice. The Conservatives offered no amendments at the meeting. Having recently received my own council tax bill, I will pay it through gritted teeth, but knowing that the money is going to some of the most vulnerable residents in Oxfordshire.

As your local councilor, I serve one of the biggest divisions in the county – stretching from Nettlebed to Great Milton, and from Ewelme to Postcombe. Chalgrove village and Watlington town make up the largest settlements, but at my last count there are over 25 distinct villages and communities. I spend a lot of my time campaigning on issues important to Watlington and Chalgrove – as these also have a significant impact on the surrounding villages.

In Chalgrove, I continue to campaign against the airfield development. In August last year, I facilitated a meeting with the new Leader of the Council, Liz Leffman, and Martin-Baker, who currently use the site to test and develop ejector seats. In March 2022 I spoke against a reference to the airfield development at cabinet in papers prepared for HIF1 – a housing infrastructure project around Didcot. In April, I brought a motion to Full Council to position the County as opposed to the development. It was voted down by a Con-Lab coalition, but I will continue to oppose in any way I can. In Watlington, two thorny issues have needed persistence to keep on track. The first is the new ‘edge road’ that will direct traffic away from the historic town center and the second is working to resolve a long-standing legal bind that has prevented a council-controlled property on the high street from being occupied for 12 years.

Across all villages and towns in the division I have championed local efforts to reduce traffic speeds and volumes. I’m pleased that many of the villages in this division have applied to have 20mph zones and have been successful in being part of the first tranche to implemented by OCC. I have used my priority fund to support the purchase of SID and VAS signs and helped villages in accessing OCC matched funding to village gates and other traffic calming features.

As I look to the next 3 years, and the administration does too, we want to move from a position of firefighting and dealing with legacy issues, to making progress on our priorities. The way that planning works means some projects agreed by the Tories are locked into complicated processes that are difficult to unbind, but I hope that you as residents will see a shift over the next 3 years towards tackling the climate emergency and protecting biodiversity; taking on the inequalities in our county; improving social care and special educational needs provision; and investing in active and sustainable transport.

Not everything will be as popular as 20mph zones – I have had to have difficult conversations with local farmers about the change to plant-based meals at county meetings. No doubt when the Zero Emissions Zone in Oxford is expanded, and residents drive into Oxford for a fee, I will face more difficult questions.

Perhaps it is a dangerous thing post-Brexit to quote a former European Commission President, but I’m going to do it anyway. On climate change, Jean-Claude Juncker, said

*“We all know what to do, but we don’t know how to get re-elected once we have done it.”*

On a personal note, I’ve very much enjoyed my first year as a Councillor. It hasn’t been easy, and there is a reason why most Councillors are not of working age. It is very hard to make being a Councillor compatible with full time or near full time work – but I live life by the motto, *if you want something doing well, give it to a busy person*.

The reason I ran was to be part of a thriving and welcoming community – and to serve them as best I could. On this metric, I couldn’t have asked for a better first year. Thank you.

**ANNUAL REPORT – SODC | CLLR ANNA BADCOCK MAY 2022**

The past 12 months have been eventful as always, but the hard work of the officers have helped get money to where it needed to be, and services delivered.

As always, it’s the officers who keep services operating and I was particularly grateful for help from the finance and grants team in getting loans, grants and funds to businesses during and post Covid. Plenty of people did call me for help and I was delighted I could assist in difficult times.

As always, the Waste Team, led by Ian Matten have been exemplary in swiftly and efficiently answering any email I sent through by following up with on site visits. I would continue to urge all Parish Councils to ask residents to report missed collections straight to Biffa so that an evidenced map of problems can be referred back to if needs be when reviewing services, and that if problems persist to contact me. I often pick up reports of missed collections via the Watlington Town Facebook Page, and I know that the admin for the page allows the outlying villages access too. Please do post in that page or email me directly to report persistent problems.

**Planning**

As always, Planning is and always will be a contentious issue, and all applications and discussions have people on both sides, even if one voice is louder than the other, the quieter ones often contacting me directly. The edge road around Watlington is one such.

Comparatively to our neighbours, the Watlington ward has – by the very nature of consisting of many conservation areas and AONB which limits development – has had less development than our near neighbours in Chinnor and Benson. However, I am always aware and mindful of the impact of all building and get involved with applications where I am asked, or which need a wider viewpoint. If anyone has questions, they are always welcome to contact me.

Officers at SODC have always been responsive and helpful, but pressure over the last few months have meant that this has reduced – I would urge that if help is needed to call an application in to committee that parish clerks call me directly (all have my number) to ensure I can act responsively and speedily.

Some areas of the ward have long term planning and sustained development, other areas suffer from repeated applications in unspoilt countryside, so to try and sum up the issues here would be futile. However, I am in regular contact with the excellent officer for the Watlington, Pyrton and edge road developments who has been fantastic at listening to concerns and fighting to get the best outcomes for all parishes. I’m also astutely aware of the applications in the AONB villages and am grateful to residents and Parish Clerks who keep me abreast of all aspects to these applications.

**Enforcement**

This is always a difficult topic, given the very limited powers of enforcement that the Government allows Councils, the last twelve months has seen a significant rise in the number of cases that the Team has opened. These range from minor breaches by individuals who often fall foul of the regulations due to unfamiliarity, to major breaches by developers who know the system and have the legal advisors to help them ‘play they system.’

To try and get on top of the building mountain of cases, the Enforcement Team introduced a new protocol for categorising and prioritising cases, which was originally intended to run for twelve months with a review at the end of that period. During review at Scrutiny, it became clear that this was considered by most councillors to be too long and so the review was agreed to be carried out after 6 months to determine whether this protocol was proving effective. This review is scheduled to be carried out in the very near future. I am on Scrutiny and would encourage all residents interested in enforcement to watch the live feed.

**5 Year Land Supply**

Always a concern, the Chair of Scrutiny, has requested a full and thorough review into the Council’s preparation for Appeals and the approach taken to review the 5 Year Land Supply. This work remains on plan and the report should come to Scrutiny in July. The findings of the report will help bolster the Council’s case at Appeal. Whilst the Council is confident that our figures are correct, there can be no doubt that CoVID19 delayed progress for many developers and this can, and in some areas has, impacted some authorities’ land supply. We have written to the Secretary of State pointing out that this situation can result in an unfair, and ‘manufactured’ bias in favour of developers, but the responses have not been promising. Again, any questions on this, please let me know and I shall bring them up at scrutiny, and please do watch the live feed if you are interested.

**Community Hub supports residents with calls and supermarket vouchers**

Over the year, we’ve seen an increase in requests for support from our Community Hub team. Our officers have handled a significant number of enquires resulting in food parcels being provided and onward referrals for further support.

**Housing**

Due to the financial pressures of Covid, I was contacted by a few people about Housing and Council Tax issues and was delighted to be able to bring about the help and support they needed, resulting in positive outcomes.

**Office accommodation update**

You may already be aware that SODC has taken advantage of an opportunity to vacate the offices at Milton Park a little earlier than we had once planned.

The lease will end this autumn and a project is already underway to identify suitable, cost-effective interim accommodation that will meet our current needs now we’ve adapted to flexible and remote working and will bridge the gap between leaving Milton Park and moving into permanent offices.   

High level plans have been drawn up for a new Headquarters building on the ‘Didcot Gateway Site’ which should provide sufficient workspace for the Council’s officers given that hybrid working is now fully established, and the Administration wants to include quality flexible office space to rent out to help towards the Council’s operating costs. Concern has been raised about the lack of parking for the offices and the loss of the existing public carpark space.

**Waste Collection**

This is a service that continued during the period in which CoVID19 had closed down most operational functions, and in spite of the challenges presented, Biffa was, for the most part able to continue with collections, even with reduced crews. Things did reach a head early last summer and it was decided that, in the interests of the safety of the crews, the Garden Waste Service should be suspended. This was a matter that was examined at both Scrutiny and Full Council and fortunately it was possible to reinstate the full service towards the start of Autumn.

**Parking Enforcement**

As Councillors will be aware, the County Council has now taken over traffic enforcement from the Police, effective from the 1st November 2021. We understand that this is now active, although for the first few months, people parking were given reminders that in future they would receive fines, but we believe that fines are now being issued where breaches are identified.

This will affect Watlington, and it will remain to be seen how active wardens are.

**Grants**

It has been a busy year for the Councillor Grant Scheme now more people are aware of its existence, although I do also consistently flag this via Facebook. I remain grateful to the Parish Clerks who ably assist many applicants.

This year I was able to support The Watlington Allotment Society with a community shed; Wild Oxfordshire for their various Hedgerow schemes in the ward; Footsteps Family Hub (previously the Children’s Centre) for equipment; Rainbow Nursery for outdoor play equipment.

**WATLINGTON GARDENING CLUB**

After an 18 month hiatus, when like most other groups in Watlington, the Gardening Club had to cancel all our monthly speaker meetings, we re-started them in September 2021.

However, once lockdown restrictions had eased in autumn 2020, we were able to arrange several visits to local private gardens for our members in 2020-21. We were also able to hold our Summer Social in the garden of one of our committee members as we decided outdoor activities were less risky.

For ever the Club has met in the Town Hall, but in September 2021 we move our meetings to the Sports Pavilion as it is larger and were able to space out the chairs better. Members have really liked this move, it’s got ample parking outside, there are no stairs and venue is a very agreeable space. After the inoperable lock on the door was disconnected and I was able to open and close the entrance doors without a panic and setting off the alarm, I am also happy with the venue. I would like to thank the Parish Council for lending us their screen for us to use in the venue.

We have also arranged a full programme of garden visits for this summer and autumn too.

Caelia Pereira

Chairman

**Friends of Watlington Hill Report for Watlington Parish Council 10/05/2022**

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, and a certain amount of birch sapling elimination using a tool known as a tree popper. 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.

Opportunities for Countryside Volunteering have resumed cautiously since April 2021 including weekdays at selected sites including Watlington Hill. We now have a number of new locally based members.

For more information, please contact Keith Jackson [keithc.jackson@btinternet.com](mailto:keithc.jackson@btinternet.com) or Terry Jackson [tjacks@waitrose.com](mailto:tjacks@waitrose.com) .

Diagram

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

**Chalgrove and Watlington First Steps Family Hub Report**

April 2022

A picture containing grass, colorful

Description automatically generated

Since June 2021, the Family Hubs have continued to grow in popularity. Parents and children have been so grateful for the service we are able to provide.

*"I have been bringing my children to the hub since early July, they are both very young (18 months and 5 months) and taking them anywhere can be quite daunting on my own, but I have always been made to feel at ease and welcomed at the hub. There are plenty of toys and space for my toddler to run around to (which he does a lot of) and places for me to place the baby down safely, Maria often offers a helping hand. It’s great to be able to go somewhere with adult conversation whilst the children are safe to roam and play to their hearts content. We would be lost without the hub and very much appreciate Maria and the rest of the team who welcome us caregivers in every week in the masses. They do a great job. Thank you for having us :)"*

After the effects of Covid 19 the need for early year’s provision is extremely important and we are very proud to be able to offer the children and families the support and play opportunities they very much need. It has been wonderful to see ‘lock down’ babies interacting with others, listening to groups of first-time mums sharing their experiences and watching the children play alongside each other. We are able to support children’s development in a safe and secure environment while parents and family members have the opportunity to socialise and realise their needs to support their mental health.

We continue to have a full and varied timetable across both sites and have sustained our level of communication with families through regular emails with a range of information and our WhatsApp group where parents support each other and exchange ideas and knowledge.

“*The First Steps Family Hub has been a lifeline for me and my son over the last year. I was made redundant at the end of my maternity leave so my son hasn’t been to Nursery. I was worried about my son not having really mixed with other children. Maria and Anna were both so welcoming when I joined and gave me lots of reassurance about my son learning to share and being around others. I have recommended the group to so many people and really can’t rate it enough. Thanks for letting us be part of it.”*

The music session with Mr Chamberlain on Thursdays has hit a record number of 68 families; it has been lovely to see everyone enjoying the session. The families always make positive comments about the sessions

A picture containing grass, outdoor, tree

Description automatically generatedA group of people sitting in a room

Description automatically generated with low confidence

Messy Mondays and Fridays stay and play continues to be popular. The children have enjoyed getting messy with shaving foam, gloop, jelly and much more. We have been cooking every Friday; the children have made things such as pizza faces, vegetable soup, sausage rolls and biscuits. They absolutely love eating the end results!

A child eating carrots

Description automatically generated with low confidenceA picture containing text, table, indoor, room

Description automatically generatedA picture containing person

Description automatically generated

Over in Watlington we have our Tea and Tinies session for the under 1’s, this is a great opportunity for experienced mum to offer support and advice to first time mums. The health visitor is also part of this session offering the chance to weigh your baby and seek professional help if needed.

We provided adhoc sessions in the summer holidays which were open to everyone including older siblings.

At the start of the school year, we welcomed back lots of old faces and some new!

In December 2021 we had many festive activities including a visit from Father Christmas

Due to Covid 19 restriction we were unable to invite outside providers into the setting but from January 2022 we opened our doors to them including the Health Visiting Team

We ran a 6 week exercise class with Sarah Fountain at the start of the year followed by Mrs Bun’s cookery classes which the children loved especially the ham and cheese pie!

We have also been able to run a few one-off sessions which include Real Play, Slingsbee, Head massage and Meditation.

In March the Health Visiting Team ran the Early Days course for new mums from the Watlington Family Hub.

There are due to be a few changes at the Hub in the next coming months. Anna, one of the Hub co-ordinators is leaving, she will not be involved with the Thursday and Friday sessions in Chalgrove however she remains on the Committee and will be running sessions during the school holidays and will support the Hub with some admin duties. Two of our fantastic long-standing volunteers will be stepping up to fill the gap. We are very much looking forward to welcoming them to the staff team.

During the last financial year, we have continued to apply for grants as they have become available. We are so grateful for the regular support of Chalgrove Parish Council, Watlington Parish Council and Stadhampton Parish Council without whom we could not continue to run the service. We have also received a lot of support from Freddie Van de Mierlo, County Councillor who has visited and provided funding for two years from his County Councillor grant as well as spreading the word to other Parish Councils in the area as we have families attending from surrounding villages. David Turner and Anna Badcock South Oxfordshire District Councillors have also provided support for capital items and extra peripatetic professional services to enhance the sessions. This has enabled us to run the music, cookery and yoga sessions alongside our regular paid staff who are needed for the regular demands of running the Hubs. In addition, we were allocated £6500 by Oxfordshire Council for Voluntary Action who were allocating money from government down to Oxfordshire County Council to support organisations providing services to Early Years during Covid 19. This will help greatly this year to compensate for the ending of the £10,000 grant from Oxfordshire County Council which we need each year to maintain our current services in addition to the Parish Council grants.

Most families have been able to make a small donation for their attendance and as numbers have increased this has made a real difference too although we are always open to everyone regardless of their financial circumstances. Running costs have been kept to a minimum and there is a lot of goodwill and help from our volunteers. Regular sessions as well as special topic sessions have been well attended. In addition, we have been revamping the outside area to encourage parents outdoors during the pandemic. We have a new sandpit area and new outside toys.

We feel confident that we will be able to continue welcoming new families as they move into the villages, and we hope that our work continues to be recognised and valued so that regular and new sources of funding help us to continue.

If anyone feels able to help with financing or fundraising ideas or would be able to join our lively group of committed volunteers, we would be really pleased to hear from you. You can contact the Hub directly at [info@firststepshub.org.uk](mailto:info@firststepshub.org.uk) or speak with Heather Topping, Chair of Trustees on 01865 890650/07502416784

Kids eating donuts at a table

Description automatically generated with low confidence

Thank you for all the continued support

**WATLINGTON BOWLS CLUB**

Watlington Bowls Club has been around for 85 years, and we are part of The Watlington Club. You can find us in the centre of town, behind the main club in the High Street and next to the tennis courts.

Since our inception in 1937, we grew from a small country club into one of the strongest in Oxfordshire. For a few years we competed at the highest level in the top division of the Oxfordshire Men’s League, and we had some outstanding individual successes. Two of our younger players won County Men’s Singles Championships and one of them went on to win the English National title, a first ever for Watlington. And they were both under 25 - whoever said bowls is a game for old people?

But competitive bowls is just a small part of what we are about. We have separate Ladies matches and run a full programme of social mixed games and club social events, catering for all levels of ability. Our membership is made up of men and women of all shapes and sizes, with ages ranging from 20s through to 80s. Even lack of mobility is not a problem as we have a specially adapted wheelchair for use on our green.

Along with so many organisations, the Covid pandemic has had a devastating effect on the club, both in terms of a dramatic reduction in membership and from a financial viewpoint. After a couple of barren years, the good news is that there are many positive signs this year and we can look forward to the summer season with high hopes. Membership figures are on the increase and, largely due to a pro-active publicity campaign, interest has never been higher.

We always welcome new members and it couldn’t be easier to start. All you need is a pair of flat shoes and free coaching, and equipment are provided to get you under way. We have a social club roll-up every Tuesday afternoon and Thursday evening and you can just turn up and have a go.

For any further information, please call John Lewis on 01491 612894.

**REPORT FROM FOWL** [**F**riends **O**f **W**atlington **Li**brary]

As with all organisations in Watlington, the Covid pandemic continued to have an impact on the library and on all FOWL’s activities to support and promote it, during most of last year. Thankfully the library remained open throughout this time, reverting back to normal opening hours in September 2021 albeit with some minimal restrictions still in place such as mask wearing and social distancing.

Reduction of the library services was acknowledged within our commitments to OCC, and we have not had to make a financial contribution for 2021 and the beginning of 2022. Our financial commitments restarted in March of this year. We are extremely grateful that we continue to be able to cover all our financial commitments through our membership subscriptions coupled with fundraising (in whatever ways possible during Covid restrictions).

After maintaining a constant Storytime presence on Facebook throughout the first year of the pandemic, the FOWL Family Activities group were able to move to the Paddock for Storytime sessions over the summer period last year and then finally had the first session back in the library in October 2021, in the first instance with restricted numbers. This has continued to be a very popular and hugely valued community resource and has recently been added to by a new fortnightly Rhymetime session during the week, for babies and younger children.

We were delighted to be able to participate in ArtWeeks last year, hosting illustrator Steph Hicks under strict Covid restrictions - and we look forward to doing so again this year under more relaxed conditions. We have made a consistent effort to host exhibitions throughout the year as an important use of the community space that the library provides.

In September we were able to open the library for the Chiltern Heritage Festival (under Covid guidelines) and provide a very informative talk on the Watlington Hoard, plus opportunities for handling and viewing our Hoard replica. We now also have a screen in place to allow viewing of the Hoard animation film made by local children during an earlier film workshop.

We were able to successfully run our photography competition in 2021 to create another Calendar for Watlington showcasing our town - and will be launching this year’s competition at the beginning of June. This was an important source of funds last year, as well as being an important community endeavour that also creates something of value that showcases our town. We are thankful that the ease in restrictions will now also allow us to utilise additional fundraising avenues such as our author talks.

On that point, we have very recently resumed our adult talks, with our first talk with Mette Gauguin in St Leonard’s Church earlier this month – but we have yet to hold a talk in the library itself following restrictions. Our first talk in the library in 28 months is scheduled for next month.

Other activities are now also returning to the library, for example the resumption of Family History sessions and the return of jigsaws and local papers.

Our volunteers have continued to offer their time and commitment when needed. As always, we remain extremely grateful for their dedication to our community library. We would also like to acknowledge and thank our library manager, Libby Willis and the very welcome new addition to our team Lyn Smurthwaite, for all their hard work on behalf of our library. In addition, on a personal note, may I take this opportunity to thank our wonderful Board of Trustees for all their efforts this year.

The COVID pandemic has demonstrated to us all how valuable the library is to the people of Watlington. This year we have recently had a major membership drive which has resulted in a significant increase in membership, an indication perhaps of this fact. We are very grateful to all those members of the community who choose to help us protect, support and promote the precious Watlington resource that is our community library.

Dr Anna Tilley

Chair, FOWL

**WATLINGTON BRANCH OF THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION**

The pandemic has again changed ways of fundraising for the branch this year with several events having to be cancelled. However, it was possible to hold the Remembrance Day parade service and wreath laying and it was attended by several hundred people.

The Poppy Appeal was well organised with poppies being sold in shops, pubs and other central places. RBL Head Office advised that there should be no house-to-house or street collections for elderly or vulnerable people, so poppies were sold outside on several occasions at the Under Croft in the weeks leading up to 14th November, Remembrance Day in 2021. The additional use of a card machine produced welcome funds from those who now rarely carry cash. The Committee are grateful to all those who bought or sold poppies and helped raise £5,500 in this area for the Poppy Appeal. Although this is lower than in past years it was still a considerable sum in these difficult times.

The Committee are also grateful to the WI for producing their knitted and crocheted poppies again on large boards outside the Town Hall and the Methodist Church as well as in the trees surrounding the Cross.

Walks and historic talks took place before Remembrance Day. Boards giving the names of those on the war memorial were erected in the streets where they lived in Watlington.

Committee meetings have been held on Zoom. Our mission in the Watlington Branch continues to be to raise funds for the Poppy Appeal.

Quarterly Newsletters are sent to members giving information about the year ahead.

Tessa Mogg Secretary, Watlington Branch of the Royal British Legion.

**WADAC** - **WATLINGTON AND DISTRICT AGE CONCERN 2022**

WADAC’S Drop in at 26b The High Street was closed for part of the year due to Covid, however chiropody continued to take place on many Wednesday mornings throughout the year.

The Trustees and Clerk met on 16th September to prepare for the opening of WADAC’s café, under its new name **The** **Watlington Café.** Colourful notices in Age Concern colours were designed by Margaret Peach and advertise the whereabouts of this valued organisation. Small repairs and some updating were carried out to the premises ready for the opening which took place on the morning of 14th October 2021 and over 30 people visited throughout the morning.

Since then, The Watlington Café has been opened three mornings a week, on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9am to 12.30pm and is run by volunteers. Numbers have been steady and are increasing gradually as the fear of Covid diminishes.

Chiropody continues on Wednesday mornings and appointments can be made with Sue Yeowards on 01844 278606.

**Tessa Mogg - Vice Chairman of WADAC**