



Watlington Parish Council

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Watlington Parish Council

Annual Report

Presented to the Annual Parish Meeting

**Annual Parish
Meeting 2026
Wednesday 29th
April
7pm in the West
Room
(Old School Place)**

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Minutes from 2025 Annual Parish Meeting

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MINUTES OF ANNUAL PARISH THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 22nd MAY 2025 AT 7PM IN THE WEST ROOM

Present:

Councillors: Nicky Smallbone, Andy Aherne, Tim Horton, Sylvia Glover, Denise Mallon

In Attendance: Gill Bindoff – Planning and NPAB Chair

District and County Councillor: Ben Higgins

Members of the Public: 13

Officers: Kristina Tynan, Rachel Gill

1. Welcome by the Chairman
Nicky Smallbone welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.
2. Apologies
Karyn Buck, Steve Bolingbroke, Leo Pesci, Keith Jackson, Mat Hunter (ICC), Angie Paterson (Watlington Club), Josh Robinson Ward, Ian Hill.
3. Presentation of options for Rural Housing – Kay Sentence (KS) from Community First Oxfordshire
NS welcomed Kay Sentence to the meeting and thanked her for coming to the meeting.

KS stated that she is Rural Housing Enabler for Community First which is charity set up 100 years ago to look after villages and it is supported by DEFRA and there is funding in place for at least another year. Community First will work with parish councils and residents to see what the rural housing needs are. The first step is to do a rural housing needs survey to see what the actual needs are, and the parish can have a say rather than a developer coming in. 'Rural' is defined as towns and villages with up to a 3000 population. Community First lobbies politically for rural housing and each community has different needs and requirements. There are rural housing exception sites sometimes on agricultural land which can be used for affordable homes in perpetuity which otherwise would not get planning permission. These are also exempt from a right to buy. Some affordable homes are done by Housing Associations, and they are already working on some with SOHA.

If the Parish decided to do a Housing Needs Survey, Community First could do this at no charge and will collaborate with the Council. GB said that Community First have previously done two for Watlington KS said that they have found that the best results are doing it with a hard copy, but it could be done on-line.

It was noted that Community First support the Volunteer Drivers group and hold the data base.

4. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 28th May 2024 to be agreed and signed as a correct record.

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

5. Presentation and Acceptance of the Annual Parish 2024 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. **Link:** [Meetings & Minutes - WATLINGTON PARISH COUNCIL](#)

6. Chair's Report – Nicky Smallbone

We started the year with a full council membership of fourteen, but currently only have ten. After serving over twenty years as a council member Ian Hill decided to retire. He will be greatly missed, his knowledge of Watlington and his contribution to the various committees and chairmanship was invaluable. Isla Woodcock stepped back from the council as she now has two very young children so unfortunately did not have the time to dedicate to the council she would have liked to. However, she remains in touch with us. Brenda Bradford has moved to be nearer family. Roger Beattie also resigned after 20 years and his contribution to the Pavilion and Sports Club, the Youth Club and the general help around the town will be missed. James Herridge-Lang has a very demanding job so was unable to give the time to the Council he would have liked. Thanks to Ian, Isla, Brenda, Roger and James for their contributions to our council. We have recruited one new member, Melissa Cupis and we hope she will enjoy her time on the council. So currently we have four vacancies, if anyone is interested in joining, then please contact the office.

Being a Councillor, helping to make a difference in the community, can sometimes be frustrating and thankless but ultimately it can also be extremely rewarding and a great deal of fun.

Relief Road

I would love to be able to tell you that planning permission for the Relief Road had been granted, but it has been delayed yet again. The good news is that the funding has been secured again but the bad news is that the submission and subsequent decision could be delayed at least another month or two. I can assure you that this Council together with a tremendous amount of help from Gill Bindoff, has done everything in its power to help the team from OCC to get the application in each time, but they have been continuously confronted with last minute objections.

Work on the Red Kite View is all but finished and work on the new Redrow development is continuing at pace, so we really would like to see some development with the connection of the Relief Road sooner rather than later.

WPC Small Grants Initiative

During this year, the council gave grants to the successful applications from FOWL, Watlington Town Football Club, St Leonard's Church, Watlington Concert Band and the Summer Community Event which we hope will be a great success. There will be a similar initiative this year and we welcome new applications.

Charlotte Coxe Trust

OCC have finally given permission for the formation of a CIO to administer the Charlotte Cox Trust. New trustees, including some councillors and members of our community have been interviewed and are now waiting for the final paperwork to begin the important work of running the Trust.

mywatlington.co.uk

Last year I reported on a meeting of all the Voluntary Community Groups. Since then, a website has been created with pages for Special Events, What's On, Volunteering and Groups and Clubs. This is proving to be a popular addition to the town, and I would like to thank Karyn Buck for all her work on this project.

Councillors and Staff

A big thanks to all the staff and councillors for their hard work throughout this year. I have enjoyed my second year as Chairman; there is always something new to learn and new things to be confronted with. I have been elected to continue for another year and am looking forward to more of the same.

7. Committee Chair's Reports

The full reports are in the annual pack.

Planning – Gill Bindoff -Chair

GB reported that there have been ongoing consultations on the discharge of planning conditions at Red Kite View and a revised plan for biodiversity enhancement has been produced. This plan has been approved by SODC, but the Committee raised concerns about the effectiveness of the plan as it is implemented on the ground

The Committee had serious concerns about SODC processes for enforcing planning conditions at Watlington Service Station and the parish council made a complaint to SODC about the way that the concerns of the parish had been handled. SODC did not uphold the complaint, but a meeting was held with senior members of the SODC management team to explain why the parish council was not satisfied with the outcome. A commitment was made to review SODC procedures to ensure that the partnership with local parishes is more effective.

The Committee responded to the consultation on the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan. Objections were made to the proposed change in the status of Watlington which would have implications for its growth in the future. The parish council will make representations at the Inquiry into the Joint Plan.

Operations Committee – Andy Aherne – Chair

AA stated that the Operations Committee is responsible for managing the programme of maintenance and improvement of the Parish Council's assets, as well as identifying issues for action by the County and District Councils. The committee identifies improvements or repairs that are required and prepares specifications for them. Needless to say, the biggest change this year has been the loss of Ian Hill who resigned both as a Councillor as well as from the Operations Committee.

Firstly, following subsidence and the collapse of the sewage plant which supports the Pavilion building at the Rec, we embarked on a lengthy competitive tendering exercise. We looked at a number of options before agreeing that the best value for money solution which would serve the longer-term needs of the community was to connect the sewage to the mains drains in Love Lane – a not inconsiderable distance. Coincidentally this also turned out to be the cheapest option.

This new connection will also help with the installation of external toilets which will replace the seasonal Portaloo which has been used in previous summers.

The second significant project which has been 2 years in delivery has been the electric chargers in Hill Road Car Park. We are pleased that all the operational work has been complete, and we are now waiting for EZ Charge to facilitate the actual payment functionality. We appreciate that the closure of Spring Lane not once but twice was a major inconvenience to many residents and local businesses, however it was something over which we had little control over.

We have also been pleased to have responded to safety issues raised by some parents and residents regarding the poor lighting from Spring Lane to the MUGA. With financial support from the Watlington Support Fund we have installed 24 solar powered units to ensure all children feel safe when walking to and from the MUGA in the evenings.

The Parish Council working with other key stakeholders within the town have also been looking at ways to ensure that we continue to be able to respond to the occasional spate of anti-social behaviour including vandalism and graffiti. On the whole we continue to have a relatively low level of anti-social behaviour and our partnership with the Icknield Community College and with Thames Valley Police and other agencies is a very positive one. We have installed 360° CCTV in the Hill Road Car Park and will be upgrading the CCTV at the Public Conveniences at the bottom of the High Street. We are also looking at covering the centre of town and the MUGA in 2025.

Traffic and driver behaviour remains an issue in the town and surrounding villages, and we have been disappointed that Watlington's Relief Road has not yet been formally approved let alone for work to begin. However, given the persistent issues relating to traffic (HGV's, parking and driving on pavements and speeding) we are pleased to have installed new bollards in both Couching Street and Brook Street and importantly now established a Watlington and Christmas Common SpeedWatch initiative led by local

residents. We hope that letters from Thames Valley Police dropping on people's doormats may help dissuade drivers from repeating their offences. We have also engaged with the Chapel Street Residents who have rightly raised concerns about the danger that traffic using Chapel Street, New Road and Church Street presents to students walking to school, and who have assembled a very detailed report summarising the issues and importantly coming up with recommendations and potential solutions which we are glad to support.

We have also worked closely with the careers coach at Icknield Community College this year to develop a program of work for one of their and we hope that this proved to be a useful exercise for that student. Lastly and most importantly it would be remiss not to thank our clerks - Kristina, Jo and Rachael along with our maintenance lead Dan for all of the support, knowledge and enthusiasm they bring to the table - week in, week out - and who gently steer the operations team as much as our contractors to get things done.

8. County and District Councillor Reports- Ben Higgins (BH)

BH said that he is the new County and District Councillor and Freddie van Meirlo, who is now our Local MP is a hard act to follow. He thanked the Parish Council for conducting the Hustings prior to the elections and said it was a really good exercise and experience. He said that he has been to Watlington every week meeting with representatives from the Parish Council. He will be booking some joint sessions for a drop-in Surgery for residents to come and ask questions in the coming months

He gave an update on issues relating to Watlington.

1. **Watlington Relief Road (WRR)** – This is obviously very needed and said he was 100% committed to making this happen and he is doing all he can help on the OCC side to progress this.

2. **Reducing Congestion** – He has been looking into options to making Watlington roads more efficient. He is aware of the resident's proposals for Chapel Street options. It was noted that the whole town needs be looked at.

3. **HGVs in the town** –He has picked this issue up with the Trading Standards department.

4. **Roads** - He stated that more budget has been allocated to roads. Howe Hill has recently been resurfaced and Hill Road to the Car Park and Spring Lane are due to be resurfaced later in the year.

TH said that 40 years ago there was no footpath by the chip shop and now there is a narrow path, he said that it would be good if this could be widened as part of the Arts Spine would be welcomed by the community. BH said he would be happy to raise this with Highways.

5. **Gully Clearance** - This was previously reduced to happening every 4 years but from this year it will be done annually between June and August.

6. **Charlotte Coxe Trust** –BH said he is aware of the amount of work done on this locally and it is in process of now being run locally and thereby OCC will transfer it over. He has been elected as the Chair of the OCC committee to help shepherd this process.

9. Reports from Local Organisations

All reports submitted are in the Annual Pack.

10. Report from the Town Hall Trust Body – Tim Horton – Chair

TH reported that the last year has been very busy and successful. In the past year the Trust have added secondary glazing to all the windows of the Hall. The cost was less than £9,000 but should 'repay' our commitment to climate change objectives through the reduction to heating costs.

The Trust has sought to reduce damp problems that have been evident in the walling of the 'old' stairwell, through the removal of plaster. This so far appears is a successful measure and now allows for a returned attention to upgrading electricity and introducing a stairlift.

Another successful initiative was the restoration of the small ground floor room (near to the old entrance) to a uni-sex toilet. The scheme used local contractors and has produced an airy space that should be easy

to maintain. It will be of considerable advantage to those using the Undercroft. It allows the stairlift ambition to extend to connection just between ground and first floor (i.e. not through the whole building)

Welcomed especially by the main users of the Undercroft has been to the largely 'plastic' see-through curtaining of two of the arches of the Hall. This has significantly reduced draughts through this space and encouraging a higher temperature (without impact on the goods). We have also added other energy saving measures to doors. The addition of new cutlery, crockery and other equipment available to hirers has also been welcomed.

The income from hire was higher than budgeted which has been very welcome. TH thanked all the trustees especially Ian Hill who has now resigned from the Trust Body for all their hard work and expertise on specific issues. He also thanked the office staff for their help and hard work.

11. Q&A

There were no questions asked.

12. Any Other Business

Jaine McCormack thanked Council for all their help with Art Weeks and said that the artists were very appreciative.

First Steps – Helen Topping

We are very grateful to Watlington Parish Council for their ongoing support for our work at the Hub providing facilities for Watlington residents. It is difficult to identify numbers attending from Watlington specifically as families do come and go. However, 43 families (53 children) from Watlington are currently using both the hubs at Watlington and Chalgrove and the sessions are available to anyone wishing to attend from all of the surrounding areas.

Watlington Business Association – Robin Holmes Smith gave thanks to the Council for all their work they do for the community.

Nicky Smallbone thanked everyone present for attending the meeting.

THERE BEING NO OTHER BUSINESS THE MEETING CLOSED AT 8PM

Reports from WPC Committees

Chairs Report

WPC CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Current Members of Watlington Parish Council

Nicky Smallbone (Chairman), Karyn Buck (Vice-Chairman), Tim Horton, Steve Bolingbroke, Keith Jackson, Denise Mallan, Leo Pesci, Sylvia Glover, Luci Papworth, Mike Deighton, Jules McIntyre, Clare Wenley

Staff to the Council

Kristina Tynan (Clerk), Jo Pugh (Assistant Clerk), Rachel Gill (Assistant to the Clerk), Dan Hendy (Watlington Caretaker)

Overview

There has been some movement in the Council membership during the year, Andy Aherne stepped down to spend more time 'being retired' and to take up a further education course, we wish him well. Mike Deighton has replaced him as Chair of Operations, a mammoth task, and for his willingness to learn and take this on, we are extremely grateful. Melissa Cupis also left the Council and two new people; Luci Papworth and Clare Wenley have joined in 2026. We are lucky to have filled the vacancies, but we could still recruit two more to make the numbers up to fourteen. So, if you think you would like to join and are interested in working to make a difference in the town please contact me, the Clerk or any member of the Council.

Councillors are represented on six committees, Planning, Finance, Operations, Pavilion and Sports Field

Liaison Group, Allotments and Neighbourhood Plan Advisory Board.

Councillors are also present on the Watlington Education Foundation, Friends of Watlington Library, Youth Club, Icknield Community College, Town Hall Charity Trustee Body, Watlington Business Association and the Charlotte Cox Trust.

The Parish Council submitted an EOI to the Town of Culture initiative in March. We await the result with anticipation. Thanks to Steve Bolingbroke and Fiona Mclean for their extensive work on the preparation of the proposal.

The first meeting of the Youth Council was held at the Icknield School this year. This was an initiative bought forward by Karyn Buck, and working with James Barringer, the deputy head and a group of enthusiastic young people is continuing to progress. A new Youth Shelter and Smart bench have been installed; The Youth Shelter was funded by money left from a Young Peoples Fund which could only be spent on a youth structure and the Smart bench was CIL funded. We hope these will be appreciated by the many young people who use the facilities at the recreation ground.

The Parish Office, both inside and out is undergoing a long overdue complete refurbishment. This also includes new IT equipment and software. The costs for this have been taken from reserves for a Special Project. Some of the planters in the town have also been included and have been replaced.

Ian Hill received the first award for the Honorary Freeman of the Town of Watlington. This was in recognition for his service to the community over more than twenty years as a Parish Councillor. Further awards will be made in the future.

Meet Your Councillor was started this year and has proved very successful. Thanks go to Karyn Buck for organising and Ben Higgins and Freddie van Mierlo for their attendance.

We applied and successfully received a grant from the Police Crime Commissioner to fund an upgrade and new installations of CCTV cameras in and around the town. Thanks to Leo Pesci for his technical help and the office staff for the grant application. We hope that this will deter the petty vandalism that continues to frustrate the Parish Council. If you have any information you would like to give us that may lead to this sort of behaviour becoming a thing of the past, then please contact the office.

The lease for the Pavillion was signed by Watlington Sports Club. This enables the Club to run the day-to-day business and maintenance of the Pavillion. We wish them all the success in the future. The Parish Council continues to fund the sports field.

Road Works

The road works that blighted the town last summer have left an unfortunate lasting legacy. Some of our shops and businesses feel that they still haven't recovered, and the resulting damage to the already broken streets and lanes is still obvious. Ben Higgins has been active in following this up and some of the damage has been addressed. We are hoping that we now have better lines of communication with OCC so that the office is consulted well in advance before any road closure proposals are put forward. Thanks go to Steve Bolingbroke and Andy Aherne for their hands on work at the time and all the follow up meetings.

Local Elections

These took place last May. For the first time the Parish Council held hustings in the Town Hall. We feel this was a successful initiative and thank all the candidates for attending. Ben Higgins was elected and we are very lucky to have such an active District and County Councillor working on our behalf.

Flooding

A grant from the Environment Agency and SODC has been awarded to help with the potential flooding around the Goggs, West Meadow and Britwell Road. This has been an ongoing risk for some time. Thanks go to SODC for work on the design and proposal and also to Paul Sayers for his invaluable technical support.

Thanks to Steve Bolingbroke and his persistence, the flooding in Pyrton Lane and around the church has finally been resolved. The walk to school for many should now not need wellies!

Relief Road

Looking back on my previous reports regarding the above, I would be excused for thinking Ground Hog Day. I have written the same thing for the past two years – 'there is hope that work should have started by next year's report'. Well, here I go again, but this time I really do hope that work will start in Spring next year. There has been a change in personnel, and we and OCC are more confident that work will indeed begin next year. I would like to thank Gill Bindoff and Steve Bolingbroke who have put a tremendous amount of time and effort into working with OCC to finally get the scheme nearer the line. I

do hope that when I come to write my report this time next year, if work hasn't started, we will have a definite date for the commencement.

CIL Projects

The MUGA continues to be used regularly by many groups and has proved to be a much-needed facility. We have funding in place thanks to the work of councillors and Josh Robinson-Ward, to have three sides extended to prevent wayward balls travelling into the allotments and the skatebowl.

The EV Charging Points have been installed, connected and are in full use. We do sometimes have an issue with non-EV vehicles parking in the spaces, so we would ask you to be aware that EV vehicles do have priority.

Watlington Wheels together with the Council have successfully upgraded the skatebowl and halfpipe. The contractors and many members of Watlington Wheels have done an amazing job to complete the works during some challenging weather conditions. The surrounds will be landscaped over the next few months. There are several proposals for the allocation of any remaining CIL funding, all will be required to have a business case put forward to be considered by the Parish Council for the allocation of funds.

My Watlington

The mywatlington website was created last year for all the local voluntary groups to have a platform to advertise details of their group and any forthcoming events. It is proving a useful tool and now also has an up to date What's On page. Please take a look if you haven't already done so. Thanks to Karyn and Bill Buck for putting this together and continuing to host.

Charlotte Cox Trust

The transfer of the property, 33 High Street, from OCC to Watlington Parish Council is still ongoing. Trustees for the new body have been selected and approved, and negotiations are continuing to potentially enable the transfer to go ahead.

WPC Small Grants Initiative

During this year, the council gave grants to the successful applications from FOWL, St Leonard's Church, Watlington Concert Band, Party in the Park, Watlington Beavers, Watlington Primary School and Watlington Bowls Club. There will be a similar initiative this year and we welcome new applications. The Parish Council also awards annual grants to First Steps, the Town Hall and the Churchyard grass cutting.

Councillors and Staff

This Council has been very busy during the year which in turn has created a lot more work for the office. Thanks go to the Councillors for their hours of hard work and to the office for dealing with the numerous requests and challenges with patience and care. I have enjoyed working with everyone and look forward to next year.

Nicky Smallbone

Planning Committee

Chair: Gill Bindoff

Committee: Nicky Smallbone, Keith Jackson, Denise Mallon, Luci Papworth

Co-opted: Tony Powell, Bob Nock

There have been several changes in membership this year and some meetings have not been quorate with insufficient numbers of councillors present. The committee continues to co-opt non-voting members with planning knowledge and experience to support councillors.

The majority of applications have not been controversial with agreement between the parish council and the local planning authority. Almost all applications have been approved. In particular, the planning committee has given strong support to the works needed to create the ArtSpine and to the plans by the tennis club to extend and improve facilities at its clubhouse.

The planning committee and SODC were also in agreement to oppose the application to develop a small site opposite the Fox and Hounds at Christmas Common. It was opposed primarily because of its sensitive

location within the village and the Chilterns National Landscape. The applicant appealed the decision, but the appeal was turned down by a planning inspector. The Inspector agreed with detailed objections that the parish council had made.

Ongoing items have included the development of the Redrow site at Hampden Meadows and the Watlington Relief Road (WRR). Final planning permission has recently been given by SODC for the remaining part of the Redrow development and the county council is working towards finalising the planning application for the WRR later this year.

There have been an increasing number of applications for permitted development which do not need to go through the full planning process. This is in line with changes to the planning system by Government. These applications are not automatically approved by SODC and can be refused. It is not always easy for parish councils to understand how the applications are assessed.

The parish council has an ongoing problem with support from the SODC enforcement team. Unfortunately, enforcement procedures do not result in effective management of breaches of planning requirements and bring the planning system into disrepute. The parish council has had concerns about unauthorised development at Forget me not Farm at Christmas Common and at the House of Spice in Couching Street.

The issue of the unauthorised illuminated sign at the House of Spice has, finally, been resolved but there are ongoing problems at Forget me not Farm.

Good news this year is that the Conservation Area Appraisal for the centre of Watlington has, finally, been formally adopted by SODC. It is available on the SODC website.

Not such good news is that the Air Quality Management Area which was designated by SODC several years ago has been revoked. While it is correct that measurements of nitrogen dioxide in the air in the town centre have fallen below national guidelines, levels of pollution are not safe and are twice as high as levels determined by the World Health Organisation.

The local and national context for planning is uncertain at the moment. The Watlington neighbourhood plan is under review and the SODC Local Plan is still being considered by inspectors. Hopefully, they will both be adopted later this year. The National Planning Policy Framework is also being reviewed and is likely to be published shortly.

Gill Bindoff

Operations Committee

Members in 2025-2026:

Chair: Mike Deighton **Vice-Chair:** Jules McIntyre

Committee Members: Nicky Smallbone, Leo Pesci, Tim Horton, Sylvia Glover, Keith Jackson

Co-opted member: Jenny Wilkinson

The Operations Committee is responsible for managing the programme of maintenance and improvement of Parish assets, as well as identifying issues for action by the District and County Councils. The committee also takes comments from residents on-board and seeks to address all matters in a timely and cost-effective manner, using our own staff and local contractors wherever possible. We have had to adapt to the departure of Andy Aherne who led the Committee until November 2025 and was in-post at the start of many of the projects that have been completed this year. Andy deserves an enormous vote of thanks for all his work during his time on the committee and as Chair.

The Operation Committee achievements this year include.

- Connecting the electric chargers in the Hill Road Car Park to the supply, enabling them to go “live”.
- Renovation of the Public Conveniences in the High Street. Many thanks to Jenny Wilkinson who keeps a close watch on these important facilities and also leads the monthly litter-picking work in the town.

- Monitoring and responding to traffic issues within the town - Councillors including Operations Committee members were involved in trying to mitigate the impact of the Shirburn Road gas works road closure. The committee has also supported Chapel Street residents in their attempts to reduce the dangers presented by traffic to pedestrians, particularly those walking to and from the schools at peak times. We are also continuing to work with the resident-led Community Speed Watch group in Watlington and Christmas Common, investigating new equipment and collaboration with nearby groups - new members welcome!
- Installing CCTV around the Town Hall and near the MUGA and upgrading the system at the Public Conveniences in an attempt to reduce the levels of anti-social behaviour in those areas. Many thanks to Leo for his work on this.
- Supporting (mainly Council Chair Nicky Smallbone) the Watlington Wheels project to resurface the skatebowl, ensuring it can be used for many years.
- Working with students at Icknield Community College, Nicky Smallbone and Karyn Buck (Council Chair and Vice-chair respectively) scoped possible solutions and preferences for a new Youth Shelter and solar-powered Smart bench at the Recreation Ground. Karyn then worked with Andy on the installation. The Smart Bench has 4G and Bluetooth connectivity and can be used to charge phones.
- Improving the appearance of the Parish Office area by removing over-grown plants and unsightly storage, installing a caretaker's shed and fenced storage area, and restoring the window and door frames, much of which was project managed by our dedicated Ops clerk Jo Pugh. The interior has also been redecorated to give it a more modern, welcoming feel.
- Replacing the barrels and plants near the War Memorial and around the Town Hall with robust, wood-like, recycled plastic containers, as well as new plants (kindly donated by Watlington in Bloom).

I would also like to record my thanks to all the members of the Committee for their support and help in the brief time that I have been a member of the Council and the Committee. Particular thanks go to Jules McIntyre who joined the Council at the same time and who has been a great support throughout, particularly with ideas for the developments at the Parish Office and with the financial management and budget setting process.

The Committee would like to thank once again the Clerks, Kristina, Jo and Rachel, and caretaker Dan for all their hard work and support during the year. Their extensive knowledge and expertise benefits the whole community by enabling the Operations team and the contractors to "get more things done".

Mike Deighton

Finance and Staff Committee

WPC 2025/26 Year End Finance Review

Performance vs. Budget 2025/26

SUMMARY BUDGET	<i>Budget 25/26</i>	<i>Actual Year End</i>	<i>Variance</i>
NET EXPENDITURE			
ADMINISTRATION & OFFICE	103,145	98,604	-4,541
EXTERNAL GRANTS	17,030	19,266	2,236
WEST ROOM	350	-535	-885
ALLOTMENTS	0	-1,353	-1,353
PAVILION & SPORTS FIELD	5,000	5,000	-0
CAR PARK	0	2,844	2,844
PUBLIC CONVENIENCES	0	-5,225	-5,225
OPERATIONS	87,593	62,746	-24,846
MUGA	0	-6,773	-6,773
TOWN HALL	6,500	6,500	0

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN	0	0	0
MISC. COMMUNITY PROJECTS (SELF-FUNDING)	0	-10,384	-10,384
TOTAL NET EXPENDITURE	219,617	170,691	-48,927
PRECEPT	199,618	199,618	0
SURPLUS / SHORTFALL from General Reserves	-19,999	28,927	48,927

Notes: Figures shown are net costs so **RED** negative figures are surpluses / underspends.

The budget included a planned £20k draw down from reserves for capital projects

Administration & Office: Staff costs were on budget. A number of unbudgeted items (IT, Town Freeman, Traffic Management and costs related to the Pavilion hand over) were offset by underspends elsewhere

External Grants: An unbudgeted grant of £2k was made to Visit Watlington.

West Room: Made a small surplus due to increased bookings

Allotments: Fundraising by allotment holders has resulted in a surplus of £1.3k in the year.

Pavilion: On budget. The lease to the Sports Club was signed by 31st March and all supplier contracts are being transferred to the clubs from 1st April.

Car Park: The car park is operating at a budgeted loss due the Coop's refusal to pay an increased charge and non-payments by other traders. It was agreed at the time of budgeting for 2026/27 that a strategic review of funding options would be carried out to address this.

Public Conveniences: Despite drawing on reserves to fund the refurbishment of the toilets and the cost of the additional toilets at the Recreation Ground, we made a surplus of £5k this year.

Operations: Programme of improvement works budgeted during the year were carried out with remaining works to be completed in 2026/27.

MUGA: Higher than budgeted revenues generate a surplus of £6.7k. It is anticipated that some of this will be invested in the improved catch fencing in 2026/27.

Major Projects (CIL)

EV Project: Completed during the year with an overspend of £54k due to the costs of additional power supply to the site.

Skate Bowl: Completed on budget.

Pavilion: £21k of agreed grant spent to provide improved hot water systems.

Footpaths & Hill Road Car Park Refurbishment: £4k of consultancy to enable resurfacing and landscaping works. To be completed in 26/27.

ArtSpine: Stage payments totalling £105k during the year. Sculptures to be installed in 26/27.

Reserves (Before Year End Adjustments)

BANK ACCOUNTS	31/03/2026	At month end
Bank - Current A/C		3,801
Bank - High Interest Account		83,363
Bank - Business Premium Account		153,603
Pavilion and Sport Field Account		0
Unity Trust Bank Account		125,522
Total Bank Accounts		366,290

Notes:

- Unspent CIL receipts stand at £295k. £112k of this is already committed.
- The Contingency Fund remains at £35k
- There are small sinking funds for the allotments (£2,210), MUGA (£7,200), Car Park (£4,601) and Public Conveniences (£5,321)

Steve Bolingbroke

Watlington Allotment Co-Chair Annual Report

Co-Chairs: Kirsty and Josh Robinson-Ward

Vice Chair: Sandra Griffiths

Committee: Gill Bindoff, Fergus Lapage, Johanna Tagada, Steven Fanning, Mark Ramsbottom

Parish Representative: Nicky Smallbone

Our biannual 2026 plot inspections this year were the best of our 5-year tenure. The standard of plots is extremely high, with most well prepared for the growing season ahead. We have only 4 out of 126 plots showing signs of neglect. These plots receive warnings and will be re-let if not turned around.

We have had a large site clearance, with all unwanted metals collected first then a large skip filled and it has made a big difference across the site, which is looking lovely at this time of year.

We had a hugely successful seed swap event in April outside the town hall, run by committee member Johanna Tagada with her partner Jatinder. The event is open to the wider Watlington community to come and swap their own saved seeds or surplus packets and to try new varieties. The seed swap now continues in the Library. We will have a plant sale in May from extras grown across the site and this has also been a good fundraising opportunity for the site too.

Financially the allotments are again in a strong position, generating sufficient rent to cover the running cost of the site with money put aside in a sinking fund for future investment/repairs in the site. We have also been successful applying for grants for ongoing site improvement. Rental is held at £20 for <100m² plots and 10p per m² thereafter. This makes the allotment extremely affordable for the local community but with no extra burden on the Parish finances.

We are looking at replacing the ageing fencing at the school end to match the rabbit proof fencing installed last year. We have received a grant from Cllr Ben Higgins to support this project and the rest will be funded from previous years fundraising and unspent rental saved in the sinking fund. Track repairs are also on-going with the majority of the site now resurfaced.

Josh and Kirsty Robinson-Ward

Neighbourhood Plan Advisory Board

The NPAB is a joint group of parish councillors and members of the community and has been working on the review of the Neighbourhood Plan for some time. It is very pleased that the parish council is funding some consultant support. Community First Oxfordshire is now working with the NPAB with a view to completing a full draft of the NP this year. Most meetings have been working groups rather than formal meetings and it is good that progress is being made.

The Neighbourhood Plan has to comply with the SODC Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework. There is a lot of uncertainty at the moment as both these documents are currently under review but will have an impact on the final version of the NP.

The NPAB has been represented at meetings with Redrow about the development of Sites B and C and at regular meetings with the county council about the Watlington Relief Road. The road and the housing development are key to the delivery of the NP which was adopted in 2018.

Gill Bindoff

Town Hall Trust Body

Membership (to April 2026) Cllr Denise Mallan (Chair) Sylvia Glover (Vice Chair) Cllr Tim Horton, Cllr Nicky Smallborn, Cllr Karyn Buck, (Coopted) Mike Young.

The trust body is responsible for the maintenance of the and good order of the town hall a grade two listed building.

The Building

In the past year, the trust has carried out several maintenance works to the building:

The Undercroft: the ceiling has been painted and the wood beams treated; this has resulted in a brightness to the popular venue of the undercroft market.

New Locks: the trust commissioned B Hatt Locksmiths to change the main locks to the building, this has been required for some time, this has improved the security of the building and improved accessibility for hirers.

Electrics: There have been some major electrical repairs required to the building, these should be completed by the beginning of May 2026.

Lighting: We have commissioned Ben Quarman electrical Ltd to replace a number of the lighting fixtures and work should all be completed by June 2026.

Paving; The brickwork renovation in the undercroft has commenced this April, this will continue in three stages as this would not interfere with the operational days of the undercroft market.

Facilities

Hiring of the hall and undercroft has continued to increase. The undercroft is now open four days a week. There are now a number of increased wellbeing activities available during the week.

Events

The trust held a successful fund-raising race night event in February, the funds raised will contribute to the improve the decoration of the building. The accounts for the year are shown below.

Town Hall Trust Body Accounts 25-26		
INCOME	Budget 2025/26	Actual to 31/3/2026
RECEIPTS		
Town Hall Rental	£ 12,500.00	£ 8,848.93
Town Hall Events	£ 500.00	£ 589.29
Other Fundraising	£ 400.00	£ 500.00
WPC Grant to Town Hall	£ 6,500.00	£ 4,164.26
Misc receipts	£ 900.00	£ 1,400.00
Grants (other)	£ -	£ -
TOTAL RECEIPTS	£ 20,800.00	£ 15,502.48
EXPENDITURE		
	Budget 2025/26	Actual 2025/26
Utilities		
Water - Castle Water	£ 275.00	£ 260.34
Electric - Tomato Energy / Yu Energy	£ 5,000.00	£ 4,757.99
	£ 5,275.00	£ 5,018.33
Running Costs		
Barclays Commission Charges	£ 100.00	£ 94.50
Caretaker	£ 3,354.66	£ -
Cleaner	£ 900.00	£ 685.00
Insurance	£ 3,100.00	£ 3,284.09
Planned Maintenance	£ 1,000.00	£ 1,427.73
Audit	£ 60.00	£ 200.00
Events expenses	£ -	£ 217.93
Supplies	£ 700.00	£ 172.40
Governance	£ -	£ 600.00
Misc	£ 300.00	£ 5.02
Maintenance / Improvements	£ -	£ 1,645.92
Website	£ -	£ 78.00
	£ 9,514.66	£ 8,410.59
Town Hall Projects		
• Electrics and lighting	£ 5,000.00	£ -
• Stairlift	£ -	£ -
• Inside Brickwork	£ 2,500.00	£ -
	£ 10,250.00	£ -
TOTAL PAYMENTS	31539.66	15269.26
Income - Expenditure	-£ 10,739.66	£ 233.22
Total Grant from WPC is 6,500 but is split between income and running costs		

Reports from Local Groups and Organisations

Report from Friends of Watlington Library

We have had a busy and varied programme of talks this year, with subjects including Alyce Chaucer, tennis, the Ridgeway, Oscar Nemon – and culminating in a major talk on Lady Pamela Hicks earlier this

month. These author talks provide a crucial opportunity for fund raising and also serve to elegantly advertise our library.

Our Family Activities arm has maintained a steady offering of Storytime and Rhymetime; both very popular and hugely valued community resources. Our monthly Lego Club has now been running for two years and remains popular. Once again, this year we have hosted a children's author in the library and invited along classes from our primary school. We have also hosted Lego and Watlington Hoard sessions for our scouting groups. All important ways to encourage young families into our library and increase our community connections.

We are delighted to continue to participate in ArtWeeks, last year hosting Jen Skene and this year both Jen and also Steph Hicks. We have also made a consistent effort to host exhibitions throughout the year as an important use of the community space and a way to champion our local artists. It is with great sadness that we report the loss of our 'artist-in-residence' Jim Kelso this year after a wonderful collaboration.

Once again, we ran our photography competition in 2025 to create our seventh Calendar for Watlington; this time focusing on Watlington Walks. We were fortunate to win an award from 'The Library Campaign' charity for our calendar fundraising idea. We will be launching this year's competition at the beginning of June with the theme of 'Colours of Watlington'. The calendar remains a crucial source of funds, as well as being a significant community endeavour that showcases our town.

For the fourth year FOWL has created a book fund to allow our library manager to purchase books chosen specifically for our community. We are grateful to WPC for extending a grant that contributed to the purchase of our Lego cupboard. We are also grateful to the Co-op, the Beacon festival and the WBA for their support this year.

Our volunteers have continued to offer their time and commitment when needed. As always, we remain extremely grateful for their dedication. We would also like to acknowledge and thank our library manager, Libby Willis. She and our Customer Services Advisor Jo Aherne, make a formidable team. On a personal note, may I take this opportunity to thank our Board of Trustees for all their efforts this year.

We are very grateful to all those members of the community who choose to help us support our community library by joining FOWL, attending talks and/or buying our calendar and notecards. We continue to be able to cover all our financial commitments to OCC through our membership subscriptions coupled with our fundraising endeavours. As a consequence of all our efforts, we once again do not require additional funds from the WPC to continue to support this vital community resource.

Dr Anna Tilley: Chair

Watlington Gardening Club

Our year of activities started in September 2025 and goes to July 2026. We have had a full programme of nine meetings with a speaker coming to talk about a gardening related topic. Some have 'slides', some do demonstrations and some bring a range of plants to sell which is very popular with our members. We are particularly grateful to Jo Dudley for finding such interesting speakers.

We managed to arrange several visits over the past year to some lovely, large private gardens, none of which were normally open to the public including, Petiffers near Banbury, and St Timothee, which was a return visit, and Chivel Farm which was also a return, at a different time of the year. These visits are popular and attract visitors.

Financially we have had a good year, with various income streams including a raffle and a plant table at meetings, a Tombola at our summer social, where also members' spouses are generous with buying extra glasses of wine. As a result, we've managed to hold our subscriptions for another year and increase our spend on speakers.

Last year we started a campaign to increase awareness of the club with a view to recruiting new members. After a slow start with little noticeable difference, we have seen an increase in membership

and more visitors to our meetings.

We are still meeting at Sports Pavilion which is popular with members as it has parking and no steps.

There is no projection screen, but we are grateful we can borrow one from the Parish Council.

Caelia Pereira - Chair – The Watlington Gardening Club

Rainbow Corner Day Nursery Report

Rainbow Corner is as busy as ever the second large estate of the new houses being well on its way in Watlington and even with our new catchment area being smaller than before we still have a strong waiting list of local families.

My first year as Manager has flown by and I have learnt more every day with the help of our well-established staff team, Admin staff, trustees and committee members.

Financially with the increased Government funding and our restructure of additional fees around the funding we are in a better place than we have been for many years but with the increase of the minimum wage, the NI contributions, increased cost of food and other items and trying to continue to build on our reserves it is still a matter for our Finance team to keep a very close eye on all finances.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive and we still pride ourselves on being able to provide what is required for our little people to thrive, having received a good Ofsted inspection in July 2024.

We continue to work very closely with Watlington Primary School Foundation Unit and have regular meetings with them and the children's family hub as well as meetings with other local Nurseries to make sure we are all meeting the needs of as many under five children and their families as we can.

As a charity and committee run nursery, we fundraise to help provide a much wider range of additional equipment and activities our children need to give them the best start in life. We hold an open evening AGM which this year will be in June as we have moved our year end to 31st March instead of 31st December.

For fundraising this year, we have held an Easter Hamper Raffle and are due to hold a bottle Tombola at the Summer Street fair, a story Trail and picnic in April, an 80'S Disco in September and a cake & raffle stall at the Christmas Street fair. We thank all our parents, staff and the local community for their support in our fundraising events because without them we would not be able to provide such an engaging provision.

Our children experience a wonderful array of activities including walks around Watlington, visits to the library, fire station, church, shops, parks etc. In nursery we are just as busy with art and craft activities, lots of outside play and learning with two wonderful mud kitchens, digging tubs, music wall and additional extra-large building blocks. Indoors we have a dressing up station, home corners, sensory activities and lots of small world play. We welcome visitors from the local community as well as parents to come in and help teach the children about their job roles/hobbies or bring in items and activities for the children to experience hands on. Susie Grove our qualified teacher works with the children as well as supporting staff in the teaching methods for our young children.

Our full working kitchen provides the children with home cooked, healthy meals and continually keeps up to date with new guidelines on children's nutrition, we also have the 5 score on the doors award.

We now employ 30 staff with a real mix of ages; we encourage all staff with us to further their development and training and have four members of staff training for their level 3 early years qualifications. We also help and support students to come to us to fulfil their training needs and often employ them when the next staff vacancy becomes available. If anyone is interested in working or volunteering at Rainbow then please feel free to come and have a no obligation chat, we have lots to offer with flexible working as an option.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who support and help us throughout the year, from both schools, local businesses, past parents as well as our current committee, trustees and staff. Without such support Rainbow would not be the place it is today.

Becky Spicer -Nursery Manager

Royal British Legion

The RBL Branch committee met on several occasions through the year to discuss fund raising events and the Newsletter which is circulated to members every few months.

The mission of the Watlington Branch continues to be to raise funds for the Poppy Appeal and to give advice to service families and their dependents when asked for. If you would like to join this committee, please contact the Secretary.

Mr Tim Horton, together with Brigadier and Mrs Mogg, organised an event to celebrate the 80th Anniversary of VE Day on 5th May 2025. With Mrs Carol Horton, they described various aspects of the war and how it affected Watlington and its people. We were delighted to have Eve Diett with us, a local resident of almost 100, who had been in the Land Army, the only person there who had been an adult during the War. The Bells Ringers of St Leonards took part, as did the Watlington Concert Band, The Watlington Community Choir, both directed by Mrs Susie Ingram, the Reverend Daniel Thompson, Mr John Sennett, Mr John Riddell, volunteers from the Spire and Spoke and the Branch committee all helped to make it an appropriate celebration. Thanks to them all and the large audience. Proceeds from this event have gone towards Watlington's contribution to the Poppy Appeal.

On 16th August 2025 Watlington observed a time of remembrance of VJ Day at the Cross. The terrible battles and loss of life and the appalling conditions prisoners of war endured were described. A post card from one of these prisoners was read out. The end of WWII was then celebrated by all those present.

The Poppy Appeal was well organised by Mr Ben Shaw and his assistant Mr Peter Marshall. Poppies were sold in shops, pubs, in other villages and the centre of Watlington by several volunteers on the days leading up to Remembrance Day. The Committee are grateful to all those who bought, or sold poppies and other items, during the fortnight before Remembrance Day which raised nearly £10,000 for the Poppy Appeal. This included a donation from the Watlington Branch resulting from the August Grand Draw held in 2024.

The Remembrance Day parade, service and wreath laying was attended by several hundred people. There were also many young people present on parade and in the crowd. The salute was taken by the branch President, Brigadier Nigel Mogg, and the Chairman of the Parish Council Mrs Nicky Smallbone. The March Past and Parade were accompanied by the Watlington Concert Band. Mrs Sarah Pullen played the last Post and Reveille. The Reverend Angie Paterson led the service.

The Committee are also grateful to the WI producing the knitted and crocheted poppies again and Mr and Mrs Mike Young for displaying them outside the Town Hall and the Methodist Church as well as in the trees surrounding the Cross.

Two cut out Tommys, World War I Soldiers, are now owned by the Parish Council and were erected at entrances to the Town by Mr Tim Horton and Mr Neil Foreman.

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

Watlington and District Age Concern

Watlington and District Age Concern, WADAC, is run by 5 Trustees and a secretary/treasurer. The purpose of Age concern is to "Promote the welfare of elderly people in Watlington, and surrounding villages". For over 30 years WADAC ran a café in the centre of the Town in three different locations. Over 120 people visited these cafes each week for many years run by a large team of volunteers. Despite moving ultimately into the front room of the Watlington Memorial Club, with just a few wonderful volunteers who opened the cafe on just two mornings per week, numbers continued to dwindle to about 10 regulars each week. The Trustees felt that it was irresponsible to continue to run something which was losing the money in their care, so The Meeting Place Café was closed at the end of October 2025, but WADAC is still very much a going concern.

Trustees are working on ideas where WADAC can contribute and so continue to enhance the lives of the older members of the Community. They have a short list, the results of which will be announced in 2026.

Since closing two volunteers have opened the Café on the 3rd Thursday in the month and if this is well supported, they will continue.

Tessa Mogg
Chairman of WADAC Trustees

Watlington WI

Watlington WI meets every second Thursday of the month in the West Room.

We have 30 members, who are mainly elderly and because of this we had to move from the Town Hall, which was ideal, except for the stairs being a problem. The West Room is the right size for us, although parking can sometimes be difficult.

We have a range of different speakers and events during the year. For instance, we had the history of sushi and a demonstration at our last meeting, then we have planned talks on fundraising for Stoke Manderville hospice, Medical detection dogs, workshop making Christmas table decorations, wine tasting and chair yoga. Every year we have a Garden Party at Watlington Bowls Club, so we can use the outside space and the kitchen.

The WI has very successful stalls at the Christmas and Summer Fairs in Watlington. They are renowned for their marmalade, preserves, soup, cakes and crafts. The money raised helps us pay for speakers and subsidize events.

Every year we decorate a tree at the Christmas Tree Festival at St Leonard's. Our New Year meal was held at the Fat Fox, and we were able to help members out with the cost. It would be lovely to attract some younger members, but being an afternoon meeting it is difficult for those that work. The afternoon works better for the elderly, not having to come out on the dark evenings.

Rosemary Lewis

Ridgeway u3a

Connect with others through the things you love!

Joining your local u3a is a great way to find and develop new interests and make friends in a relaxed environment. **Ridgeway u3a**, which covers Watlington, Chalgrove and surrounding villages, presently offers monthly speaker meetings on a wide range of topics and a summary of each talk, together with information on future speakers, is included in the Watlington Times each month.

The speaker meetings are presently held in St Leonard's Church at 2.30pm on the 3rd Tuesday of each month and the talks are followed by refreshments and the opportunity to meet and converse with fellow members. Our speaker talks during the past year have covered a variety of interests and topics from the apocalyptic events at Pompeii and Herculaneum in 79AD to A Day in the Life of a Crime Scene Investigator in the 2020s - we have another exciting range of speakers to look forward to this year ranging from the life and times of Charles Dickens to Fossils and how to become one!

There are also a variety of established groups within Ridgeway u3a which are co-ordinated by members and include art, book clubs, local history, creative writing, bridge, and knitting as well as the ever-popular luncheon group and coffee mornings. Other groups based on members' interests are always welcome and outings to theatres and places of interest are just one such group which has recently launched.

It's local, social, friendly, low-cost and open to all. Make the most of life by exploring new interests and ideas with **Ridgeway u3a**. The **Ridgeway u3a** newsletter, which is published monthly, updates members on group activities as well as dates for future meetings. The newsletter is available to all members and is distributed at the monthly speaker meetings and by email/post to those unable to attend. There is also a wealth of information about **Ridgeway u3a** and its activities on our website, <http://ridgeway.u3asite.uk>.

As part of the national u3a network, members also have access to events organized both by the Thames Valley Network, which covers u3a in the Southeast, and by the national u3a itself. Members can opt to receive **u3aMatters**, the magazine of the national u3a, which is published five times a year and is packed full of stories, advice, travel, recipes and features with regular contributions from guest writers and members.

Our members connect with others through the interests and activities they love, make friends, have fun and perhaps even learn something along the way! Learn, laugh, live – **Ridgeway u3a** and its members will be delighted to meet you.

Ellen Froggatt – Chair

Watlington Volunteer Drivers

Chair: Nicky Smallbone

Treasurer: Jane Slemeck

Watlington Volunteer Drivers is an informal group of Watlington and District residents who, using their own cars, take local people to mainly medical appointments. The main exception to the medical aspect is that we also take up to 6 people per week to the Chalgrove Lunch Club.

In 2024, we logged 946 jobs, or approximately 80 per month. Inevitably, our records miss a few jobs – mainly those that have been arranged directly with the client and fail to get reported to the coordinator. Approximately 60% of these jobs were short range to local surgeries etc. plus the lunch club. 33% went to longer-range destinations, mainly hospitals in Oxford but also as far as Banbury, Bicester, Witney, Bracknell, and others. The rest were to places like Thame and Wallingford. About 9% were cancelled – more than half of which after a driver had been assigned and they had blocked out the time required – frequently because of last-minute changes by hospitals. For 2% of requests, we were unable to find a driver – usually because of very short notice.

We currently have 33 active drivers; the bulk of the jobs are done by about 10 of these. Some drivers only do a few jobs a year because of other commitments; this is fine if we have a large pool to draw on. We need to recruit continually as, inevitably drivers' circumstances change through ill-health, job requirements or moving away, so we are always keen to sign new people up; another 10 drivers would be a great help although we do not put a cap on the total as we could probably never entirely eliminate our unfilled jobs.

Drivers are reimbursed 45p per mile for running costs but give their time for free. They find the work rewarding, as they meet interesting, grateful people. There are a few challenges, but generally it goes smoothly. With very few exceptions, insurance companies make no conditions for this activity as it is not paid work.

We have 6 coordinators who take monthly turns to receive telephone messages from clients and send out email requests to all the drivers. Two of our coordinators are unable to drive but nevertheless give their time to keep the system going.

We have been going since 18th May 2010 and, given the expansion of the town and an ageing population, we shall be required for a long time to come.

Mike Staples – Secretary Watlington Volunteer Drivers - 07920 030917 mikstaples@hotmail.com

Watlington Youth Club

In March 2025 we held a small meeting with four young people in the Watlington Club, although the number was small however they were all communicating with around six friends on WhatsApp video calls.

They made several requests including, Wi Fi, charging points for their phones, Actives including table tennis, darts, basic cooking facilities, and music to name just a few.

Their main request was that the start time was 3.15 at the end of the school day allowing them to attend with their friends.

They commented that they just wanted somewhere to hang out with their friends.

In May, this year we were fortunate that Alice Gilby came forward to take on the role of youth club facilitator with a plan for me to support her during the first two months, until we had several volunteers

in place. In May we booked two rooms in the Watlington club. Numbers attending during the first month were between eight to ten per session. The numbers then increased to double figures with twenty being the highest at one session.

We have advertised for volunteers in the Watlington Times and on Facebook, but the interest generated was zero.

At the start of the autumn term Christina Clifton joined Alice in facilitating the weekly session. Both are receiving a small sum in recompense for their input and demanding work in the weekly sessions.

We offer the youngsters a hot or cold drink with hot buttered toast or crumpets free of charge during the sessions. On arrival for the first time, all must complete a joining form with their details and a signature from parents or guardians. The age range attending is typically between 11 to 13 years old, with most of the youngsters resident in Watlington with the occasional visitor from Chalgrove.

Alice and Christina have recently held a consultation meeting with the young people to ask for their ideas for future actives, one idea we have taken forward is a monthly film session with the venue being the town hall, with the first one being held on the 12th December 2025.

Three of the young people agreed to lay a wreath on remembrance Sunday which they carried out with due respect. A number of the group also decorated a tree on behalf of the youth club at St Leonards Church's Christmas tree festival.

Denise Mallan

Watlington Environment Group

Watlington Environment Group has had another successful year, with excellent speakers drawing in near-capacity audiences for some of our talks, part of our diverse programme of indoor and outside events. We are increasingly working alongside other like-minded organisations such as the Watlington Climate Action Group and the artistic community, magnifying the value of what can be achieved in both raising awareness of environmental issues, and taking action on the ground.

In our own right, we also remain busy delivering a range of practical conservation work across the parish:

1. At the Watlington Chalk Pit Local Nature Reserve on Hill Road, which we manage on behalf of the Parish Council, we continue with the implementation of the approved Management Plan, seeking to further protect and enhance this important area of mixed scrub and grassland that forms part of the wider Watlington and Pyrton Hills Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). We have also been able to do a small amount of work on an additional parcel of land leased by the PC from Watlington Park, protecting some small pockets of chalk grassland from encroaching scrub.

We were also glad to play a small but important part in recent work to address the problem of vegetation encroaching Hill Road, which was becoming a hazard to larger and higher vehicles in particular. Rather than just hacking it back in the sadly common modern style, the skills and imagination of a local contractor, and the flexibility of the Council, led to the task being done in a way which delivered positive biodiversity benefits, as well as being more cost-effective.

2. We have now completed our first year helping with the management of the churchyard at St Leonard's Church, with the aim of safeguarding it as an equally special place for heritage, wildlife and people. We are pleased with the early progress that has been made, bringing under control species such as brambles and ivy whose growth had got a little out of hand, whilst seeking to retain a semi-wild meadow-like character.

3. Our long-term Watercourses Project continues to safeguard and improve the Chalgrove Brook, the rare spring-fed chalk stream with its source in Watlington. Ongoing work includes removing litter and larger junk from the stream and its banks, planting and other vegetation management to improve the stream habitat for invertebrates and fish, and general maintenance.

We are always happy to share our knowledge and hydrological data gained during our thirteen-year study, to help inform optimum solutions to local water-related issues.

4. In association with Watlington Park and the National Trust, our successful effort to combat invasive Himalayan Balsam, which can pose a threat to our bluebell woods, continues; plus, miscellaneous other work.

We are extremely grateful to the Parish Council for paying for the insurance necessary to carry out our work at the Chalkpits, and to St Leonard's Church PCC for contributing towards the cost of some additional tools to aid our work at the church and at other sites.

Membership of WEG, which gives free admission to indoor and outdoor events, and a monthly full-colour newsletter packed with photos of local wildlife, costs only £10 a year. (But non-members are very welcome to help with our practical conservation work!) To find out how to join and for more information about the Group, go to <https://www.watlington-environment-group.org.uk>.

Climate Action Group report

What have we done over the last year?

- We held “**Green Drinks**” meetups most months, with a combination of structured and unstructured presentations and discussions around a range of climate and environmental issues
- We wrote articles for the **Watlington Times** and delivered an email newsletter keeping people in touch with the activities of the group and promoting individual and community action.
- We have been supporting the Parish Council on the revision of their **Climate Action Plan**. (<https://www.watlington.org/climate-action-plan.html>)
- We ran an ambitious **ArtWeeks** programme (in collaboration with the Watlington Environment Group) where St Leonards was allocated as a “**Wildlife and Nature Stop**” with artists and filmmakers inspired by nature. Showing Nicola Schafer's new film “Where Red Kites Soar”, shot entirely at Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve with the aim of encouraging people to connect with nature. Our stall showed how the nature in the churchyard is managed and had artists run additional workshops inspired by nature. We also helped establish a **tree trail** around the churchyard (with Pauline Verbe) that many residents used to explore the Churchyard and the amazing variety of trees within it.
- We co-hosted a stand at the **Summer Fair** (with the Watlington Environment Group) at which we invited people to do some stone-painting and provide information about the activities of the two groups.
- We took part in **Plastic Blitz**, a citizen science litter pick, which helped clean up the areas around the Chalgrove Brook and provide data into a nationwide survey on the types of litter that were collected.
- We were a distribution point for the **Garden Tree Giveaway** and gave away around 80 native trees to local residents to plant in their gardens.
- We started the **Watlington Gardens Nature Reserve Facebook** page, which is about encouraging residents to take an interest and celebrate the nature in their gardens.
- We took part in community events such as the **Christmas Tree Festival**, with a tree promoting the importance of trees and the work of the Tree Group, and the **Remembrance Day parade** with an upcycled wreath.
- We continued to promote the very popular **Waste Not Want Not** group as an alternative to buying new stuff, both for acquiring unwanted from others or short-term loans, reducing our carbon footprint as a community and diverting items from landfill

- We promoted “**Green Reads**” (recommended reading on the climate and environment) and choosing bank accounts that have a responsible investment approach with regard to the climate, and home upgrade grants.
- Ongoing project by artist Jules Bishop who is making inks from hedgerow plants and trees, and creating sustainable paints, for which she received funding from STORC via WCAG, helping to promote the importance of hedgerows and trees.

What have we got planned for the next year?

- On the evening of **Monday 15th June**, in **St. Leonard’s Church**, we will be showing a film about the **People’s Emergency Briefing**. This is a national public information initiative to ensure the UK is fully briefed on the climate and nature crisis. This event is open to all, and we will be shortly publicising the event and sending invitations directly to local organisations and businesses in the hope of ensuring a strong turn out for this important national initiative. **Our local MP, Freddie Van Mierlo**, will be joining us to watch the film and participate in a post-film discussion about how we should be responding to the threats of climate change. Please do join us if you can!
- We’ll continue running “**Green Drinks**” most months at which anyone can turn up and join in a couple of hours of climate and environmental discussion. If you are interested in this, we have a WhatsApp channel you can join that will keep you informed of the dates and venues.
- We will continue to contribute regular **Watlington Times Articles** bringing news about current events, encouraging residents to take action that address climate change and the local environment, and inviting people to get involved in the group.
- At the **Summer Fair** we will be hosting a stand at which people can build and take home “**bee hotels**” using repurposed plastic drinks bottles and old garden canes. Please join us to make a hotel and find out more about how to support wildlife in your gardens.
- We will be holding a “**Wildlife Open Gardens**” event in the summer when a selection of local private gardens with wildlife-friendly features will be opened for the day. Look out for publicity about this event, where you will be able to find out more about how to create and manage a garden that’s great for wildlife.
- Our “**Ponds Together**” group will be building their first wildlife-friendly ponds in private gardens around Watlington. This group brings together residents who want to build a pond in their garden and would prefer to work with others as a group to make it a more social and enjoyable experience as well as share the load on researching how to best plan and manage the ponds for wildlife. It’s not too late to join this group: if you are interested get in touch.
- We hope to be one of the distribution points for the **2026 Garden Tree Giveaway**. This brilliant initiative, run by the International Tree Foundation, gives away free native trees for local residents to plant in their gardens. Look out for publicity about how to claim your free trees in October.
- We will start planning another “gardening for wildlife” project for 2027.
- We will be continuing our campaign to help local residents reduce their **electronic carbon footprint**.
- We have a visit to the **Broad Arboretum** at the Earth Trust.
- The **Parish Council** recently published a revised **Climate Change Action Plan**. The Climate Action Group will be working with the Parish Council during 2026 on the implementation of many of the actions in this plan, some of which are described below.
- In collaboration with the Parish Council, we will be providing information and running an event to promote **home insulation** and uptake of **heat pumps**. We aim to help residents understand how

the technology works and what types of properties can benefit from it, and what grants are available to help with installation costs.

- With the help of Oxfordshire County Council, we'll be investigating options for setting up a **Watlington car-sharing scheme**. This will start with a survey (open until a little after the Summer Fair), followed by a workshop at which viability of various options will be investigated. Please look out for and participate in the survey.

What is the Watlington Climate Action Group?

The WCAG is network of Watlington residents who take an interest in the environment and climate change. We have a core team of around 20 people who are actively involved in setting up, promoting and running local climate and environment related activities. We maintain a mailing list of interested Watlington residents and a WhatsApp group that is used to coordinate the activities of the group.

How to get in contact with the group?

Please visit our web-site (<https://www.watlingtonclimateaction.org.uk/>) for more information about the group and use our email address (watlingtonclimateaction@gmail.com) to get in contact.