

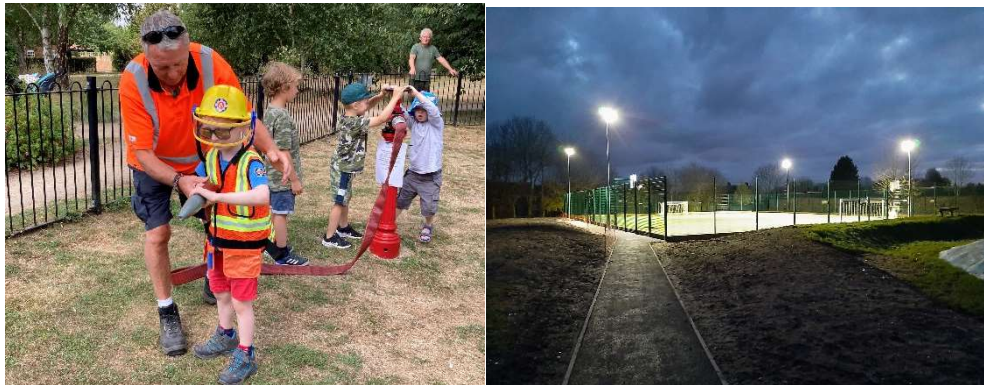
Watlington Parish Council

Annual Report

Presented to the Annual Parish Meeting

Friday 21st April 2023

7.00pm at Watlington Town Hall



Watlington Parish Council

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Freddie Van Mierlo (Oxfordshire County Council)

Gardening Club

Friends of Watlington Hill

Family Hubs

Watlington Bowls Club

Friends of Watlington Library (FOWL)

Royal British Legion

Watlington Age Concern

Rainbow Corner Day Nursery

Ridgeway U3A

Watlington Volunteer Drivers

Watlington Climate Action Group

MINUTES OF ANNUAL PARISH THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 19th May 2022 AT 7.30PM IN THE WEST ROOM

Present:

Councillors: Matt Reid (Chairman), Steve Bolingbroke (Vice-Chair), Ian Hill, Tim Horton, Andrew McAuley

Members of the Public: 5

Officer: Kristina Tynan

County Councillor: Freddie Van Mierlo

1. Welcome by the Chairman

Matt Reid welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked all for coming.

2. Apologies

Margaret Noon, Roger Beattie, Rob Smith, Tom Calnan, Gill Bindoff, Anna Badcock, Caelia Periera.

3. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 29th April 2021 to be agreed and signed as a correct record.

It was noted that this meeting was held on Zoom due to Covid.

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

4. 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

5. Chairman's report

MR reported on the following issues:

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. 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.

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. MR thanked SB for establishing this process. 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

Charlotte Coxe Trust

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, and we 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 steppingstone towards passing control of the entire trust back to Watlington at some point in the future.

MR thanked Councillors, staff and all those who volunteer in our community who make our town such a vibrant place.

6. Committee Chairman's Reports

The full reports are in the annual pack.

Finance – Tim Horton

The committee made a major change to the way budgeting is now presented and was able to reduce the precept for this year by 2.36%. As we are now receiving CIL payments the Council is able to improve its ability to finance Capital projects again as previously, we had to save hard to be able to deliver projects. This will take the pressure of our reserves.

Strategy – Andrew McAuley

This committee is to oversee implementation of the Watlington Strategic Plan which came out of the WNDP. There are core objectives, and the business process has been reorganised and is now very robust. There is now a business approach to the spending of money we hold and the nomination of projects. At present there are 5 main projects: MUGA, Performance Space, Flow Park, EV charging points and a Youth Facility.

Three of the projects would be developed at the Recreation Ground which is one of the major pieces of land that WPC own. Over the last year these projects have moved on substantially.

Planning – Andrew McAuley

AM reported on the following three applications:

Land off Cuxham Road, Sites A and B – The Parish Council spent a long time on these quite controversial applications and there were many iterations. However, the outline permission was granted by SODC. These sites are critical for the edge road.

Grove Farm Pishill – 5 Holiday Pods, - Watlington Parish Council strongly objected to this application and the SODC Committee did not grant permission for these.

Land to Rear of 56-58 Hill Road – The Parish Council and SODC objected to this application which went to appeal, and the Planning Inspector dismissed the appeal.

AM reported that this committee met 13 times this year and it was a fairly successful year in ensuring that development of Watlington is carried out in a way that meets the aspiration of the WNDP in the parish.

Operations – Ian Hill

IH stated that 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.

This year a lot of on-going issues have reached a crucial stage where they are nearly completed. First Pyrton Lane traffic calming works should be starting in August, the Brook Street trench which has been sinking and was filled in a month ago. Another task was to get 20mph for Watlington and we have been told by OCC that we will be in the first tranche of communities to get this implemented.

This year we have also been able to install SID devices, we have two and share another one with Cuxham and Swyncombe. IH reported that they do make a difference with speeds.

We had ambitions to remove the I-play and after negotiation with supplier we agreed a deal in which they will remove the I-Play at no cost and install ten new pieces of equipment with a 33% discount. A hedge has been replaced in Mansle Gardens. A tree survey was commissioned and the works to WPC trees has been done. CCTV was installed in the public conveniences as there had been some vandalism.

All routine work such as grass cutting has been done. IH said that the committee had a very reasonable year in achieving some of its aims.

Pavilion and Sports Field Committee (PSFC) – Matt Reid

MR reported that the sports clubs have been pushing for us to get more space for sports from planning gain. When the Edge Road is completed there will be space for extra sports facilities from PYR 2. The sports clubs had been subsidised by a Covid Grant from Government during the pandemic and are also subsidised by WPC. They have a well-established social scene with darts, pool etc taking place in the Pavilion. WPC are working with the Football and Cricket Clubs to start to draw up viable plans for how the clubs could operate the building more autonomously and with less of a WPC subsidy.

Neighbourhood Plan Advisory Board (NPAB) – Steve Bolingbroke

SB said that it is a requirement to review the NP and realign it to the District Local Plan. Climate and Environmental issues will be strengthened. There will be a consultation with our residents in September.

Allotment Committee – Roger Beattie

A new water upgrade system has been installed. The pumpkin grown on the Allotment was the second biggest grown in the UK. A grant for a compostable toilet and a community shed has been received from the Lottery Fund and SODC. RB reported that Kirsty and Josh are doing a remarkable job as co-chairs of the committee.

7. Reports from Local Organisations

First Steps – Heather Topping gave a huge thanks to WPC for supporting them with a grant again. She said that it has been a difficult two years, but everything is running normally now. They did well financially with various grants due to Covid. There are sessions in Watlington on Tuesday and Wednesdays and in Chalgrove on Monday, Thursday, and Fridays. They are helping 68 families at present with a breakdown of parishes. Chalgrove 34, Watlington 32 and the remainder from other neighbouring parishes. With the new housing being built the demand will increase. She said that they are very fortunate with their staff and volunteers and there is a good trustee body.

Bowls Club – They are recruiting at present to attract new members.

Royal British Legion – Nigel Mogg said that the RBL has two main focuses, to support the National Poppy Appeal and the second to assist WPC in the organisation of the Remembrance Day service at the Cross. Nationally the RBL is under considerable pressure and a number of branches have closed. Watlington still has a committee, but the membership is down to 80. Fifteen years ago, there were 200 members.

WADAC – Tessa Mogg stated that this is progressing quite well. The lunch club at the West Room had to be closed but they now have a new Watlington Café.

Watlington Concert Band – They were unable to rehearse during Covid last year but now have new members flooding in. They play at fetes; Remembrance Day and they have just had another successful concert in St Leonards.

U3A - Suzie Berry thanks WPC for allowing U3A to plant the war memorial beds this year and there will be a yellow and blue theme for the 40th anniversary of U3A which is a worldwide organisation which include Ukraine. They are struggling for committee members at the moment, but the membership is up 20% which is very good news. This followed a recruitment event in St Leonards. Committee meetings are held in the West Room. The pandemic led to members improving their IT skills and learning how to use zoom.

8. Report from Town Hall Trust Body – Tim Horton

TH said that there are discussions about the possibility of glazing the Undercroft and this idea is being examined by a small group, the gates have no historic relevance as the area used to be open. and it could be an interesting social space.

9. Report from County Councillor – Freddie van Mierlo

FvM stated that he was elected in May 2021 with 53% of the vote. He said that highlights from the year included new strategies from transport and for HGV's. This should reduce emissions by a quarter in 2030 and a third by 2040. OCC have had successful bids to Government especially for buses and for electrifying them. OCC will bring back youth services that were previously scrapped. Regarding Oxfordshire 2050 he is campaigning for the least amount of housing possible. Council tax was increased by 4.9%. with 4% going to Adult Social Care and will be used to look after the most vulnerable residents in Oxfordshire. FvM has 3 key objectives.

1. To fight the Chalgrove Airfield Development – Liz Leffman the new Leader has asked to visit site and she has had a meeting with Homes England.

2. Edge Road for Watlington – He said he knows how important this is to the town and to get it delivered on time. A consultant will be appointed very soon. All the OCC officers know the importance of this in Watlington.

3. Charlotte Coxe Trust – FvM has made this a real priority and there is now a new committee in place to speed up the decision making.

FvM has £15K available every two years for priority projects and has given grant to help fund projects in his division. He has championed local efforts to reduce traffic speeds and volumes and many of the towns and villages in his division have been successful in being part of the first tranche, Watlington being one of them.

He said he is looking forward to the next 3 years and working on tackling climate emergency, improving social care and sustainable transport. He said it is hard being a Councillor but if you want something doing well, give it to a busy person.

MR thanked FvM for his report.

10. Report from District Councillor

This is in the Annual Report 2022

11. Q&A

TH asked FvM if OCC will go back to supporting Early Years as WPC's largest grant is to the Watlington and Chalgrove Family Hub. FvM said he gave a grant from his personal priority fund. He said that there should be investment in youth facilities and children's services as these have been vulnerable to cuts and this needs to be reversed. He said that there should be more support for these next year. Heather Topping (First Steps) stated that David Turner will be bringing up this issue at OCC.

Planning – The Queen's speech spoke about Land Supply, and this could lead to a shake up over land supply.

12. Any Other Business

Matt Reid reminded all present that there is an event in the Paddock for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee on Sunday 5th June, and this is being organised by WPC and the PTA.

THERE BEING NO OTHER BUSINESS THE MEETING CLOSED AT 8.43PM

Watlington Parish Council 2023 APM

Reports from Committees and Organisations 2022/2023

WPC CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Current Members of Watlington Parish Council

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

Staff to the Council

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

Overview

Council meetings have in the main continued to be held online, but Full Council sessions are now held in person as the pandemic is officially declared to be over. We have struggled somewhat this last year with attendance due to a combination of issues with Councillor's health and work commitments, but on the whole business has continued as usual. I'm pleased to report that our efforts to recruit new blood to the council have been successful and that the new Council that will take its seats in May 2023 has a full membership of 14 Councillors.

Edge Road

Work has continued slowly, but diligently this last year and there have been no major changes to the proposed parameters to the project. Watlington and Pyrton Parish Councils have now walked the route in its entirety with OCC Highways officials and scenarios have been discussed as to the phasing of how the road may be delivered, which includes a potential option to build out the PYR2 section first as part of an Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) front funded scheme. We have of course recently had the two OCC consultation evenings in both Pyrton and Watlington and these were found on balance to be positive, with OCC looking to consolidate the outcome of those events imminently. If the project progresses to a full planning application this summer or autumn as expected then it is hoped that the project will finally commence sometime within the next two years. As part of the activity around the Edge Road consultation the Neighbourhood Plan group held an additional break out session with local businesses and as a result there will be closer cooperation in the next council term in order to proactively look at ways to keep footfall at current levels or above once the Edge Road is in place.

CIL Projects

Three major CIL have been in flight this last Council year, which include the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA), the Electric Vehicle Charging Points in the Hill Road car park and the Flow Track around the existing skate bowl at the recreation ground.

The MUGA has now been delivered and usage numbers look to be promising, so despite a range of additional ongoing costs being attributed to the project it looks like the budgeting for the long term maintenance plan looks to be on track. I'd like to thank the project team and contractors for all the work they've put in to deliver this over the last year.

The Electric Vehicle charging project continues to be hampered by delivery issues, but this now looks to be delivered within an autumn timescale depending on whether the supplier can overcome their current capacity issues.

The flow track project that will surround the existing skate bowl at the recreation ground has been assigned CIL funds to the tune of £130k with 30K of that assigned specifically for the removal and alternate placement of the Pavilion's current septic tank. The project board, formally known as 'Watlington Wheels' have recently launched their online funding campaign and will look to attract additional funding and match grants from other local authorities in the coming year.

Charlotte Coxe Trust

There has been a major change in how the trust is administered at OCC this last year, which has seen the formation of a committee of elected County Councillors take over decision making responsibility from the rather overworked legal staff at County Hall. As a result, there is now a concrete proposal to transfer the Trust in its entirety over to Watlington Parish Council, but investigations are ongoing with regard due diligence as to whether there are any unseen costs that are currently being accounted for via OCC's property services division. It is hoped that once these issues are better understood that the transfer of the trust will happen relatively quickly, but even if it doesn't the general responsiveness of OCC on dealing with trust matters is now greatly improved, so I'd like to extend our thanks to our County Councillor Freddie van Mierlo for all the hard work he has put into making this happen this last year.

Councillors and Staff

Our staff continue to form the back-bone on which we depend for the day to the day running of the Parish Office as well as supporting our Councillors in their duties and evening meetings. Kristina is now supported with additional hours from the new assistant clerk Jo Pugh and Rachel Gill. Bob Thomas recently retired this year from his position of Town Caretaker and we're thankful for his many years of service. Bob is replaced by Dan Hendy who is already becoming a well known face around town.

Thank you

It's been a honour to serve as your Council Chairman these last five years and I'd like to thank all the Council Staff, Councillors and co-opted members for their support and hard work over the previous four year term.

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 REPORT

Chairman's Report

Current Members of Watlington Parish Council PSFC Committee

Matt Reid (Chairman), Margaret Noon, Ian Hill

Introduction

Much of the work of the finance committee this past Council year has been around the change of back office processes in regards to how the budgets are set each year and how our multiple accounts are managed. I'd like to thank Steve Bolingbroke who returns in the new council line up this May for his work in putting these new systems in place with the Clerk. This work follows on from the strong foundations that Steve had been already able to lay in the previous Council year, but

I'm pleased to report that the Parish Council is now in both a strong and extremely well managed financial position.

CIL Expenditure

CIL money that is payable from the developers of the new housing projects has to be spent within five years of receipt. As a council we can choose when to draw down these monies, but at the point it is drawn down the clock starts ticking and plans must be drawn up for a sensible and sustainable spend of the money.

There are three big CIL projects currently in flight, which are the MUGA project, The EV Charger project and the Flow Track for the recreation ground.

The MUGA project is now pretty much complete subject to a few ongoing snags, but more remains to be done on the other two projects. The EV Charger project is the most advanced and looks likely to be delivered in the autumn. These MUGA projects itself has thrown into focus the need for well understood project outcomes and well thought out budget plans for ongoing maintenance. Without critical thinking in these matters the spend of CIL money would in fact create headaches for the Parish Councillors of the future who would be expected to pick up the financing of any maintenance work. This has happened to some degree in the case of the Pavilion, so we have been forced to practice some tough love and push back the majority of financial responsibility for its upkeep in the coming years back to the Sports Clubs themselves. A fuller treatment of that situation can be found in the separate PSFC report.

Due Diligence

With the proposed addition of the Charlotte Coxe Trust to the existing responsibilities of the Parish Council, it will be necessary for the incoming finance committee to appraise what extra costs may be associated with managing the administration as well as the extra estate that comes with the transfer as this is likely to be considerable. An initial appraisal of documentation around the trust has already been made in the current council year and there appears to be a range of additional documents that will need to be provided by OCC's property services division in order to get a better idea of the true running costs for the existing estate. There may well be some additional sensitivities in respect of the Oxfordshire Library Service who are not currently charged a meaningful rent by the trust, so there's certainly plenty of research left to do on this matter and we should not set any expectation that it will be trivial.

Outlook

We have a strong pipeline of new housing proposed for the remaining sites in the neighbourhood plan and this will obviously feed into the parish precept in future years as more of the new houses become occupied. It is projected that by next year our tax base will be sufficient to cover the deficit budget that was forecast for this current financial year.

Matt Reid

Financial Report on next page

Financial Information 2022/2023

SUMMARY BUDGET	Budget 22/23	Actual Year End to 31/3/2023
NET EXPENDITURE		
ADMINISTRATION & OFFICE	71,477	66,055
EXTERNAL GRANTS	19,650	16,734
WEST ROOM	881	-76
ALLOTMENTS	0	726
PAVILION & SPORTS FIELD (SEE DETAIL SHEET)	8,746	13,230
CAR PARK	2,418	-7,613
PUBLIC CONVENIENCES	0	-4,961
OPERATIONS	36,368	47,852
COMET BUS (S137)	625	1,213
MISC. COMMUNITY GROUP PROJECTS (SELF-FU	0	0
MUGA	0	400
TOTAL NET EXPENDITURE	140,165	133,160
PRECEPT	134,865	134,865
SURPLUS / SHORTFALL from Gen Reserves	5,300	1,705

PROJECT ACCOUNTS	Budget 22/23	Actual 31/3/23
EV Project		
Expenses	150,000	87,061
Other Grants (not CIL/S106)	79,000	48,750
Balance from CIL / S106 / Reserves	71,000	38,311
MUGA Project		
Expenses	257,823	265,303
Other Grants (not CIL/S106)	75,000	37,500
Balance from CIL / S106 / Reserves	182,823	227,803
Rec Master Plan		
Expenses	5,000	4,100
Other Grants (not CIL/S106)	0	0
Balance from CIL / S106 / Reserves	5,000	4,100
Flow Track		
Expenses	534,000	0
Other Grants (not CIL/S106)	404,000	0
Balance from CIL / S106 / Reserves	130,000	0
SIL		
Expenses	5,010	3,266
Other Grants (not CIL/S106)	0	0
Balance from CIL / S106 / Reserves	5,010	3,266
Total Balance from CIL / S106 / Reserves	393,833	273,481

Balance on Parish Accounts at 31/3/23

Barclays Premium A/C	£	33,444.90
Barclays Current A/C	£	4,688.32
Barclays High Interest Bus A/C	£	80,193.18
Barclays Pavilion a/C	£	1,980.24
Unity Trust	£	125,612.44
Totals	£	245,919.08
Held by WPC for Young People Fund	£	26,599.49

PAVILION AND SPORTS FIELD COMMITTEE (PSFC)

Chairman's Report

Current Members of Watlington Parish Council PSFC Committee

Matt Reid (Chairman), Alex Basden, Margaret Noon, Keith Wolfson (co-opted), Chris Allen (co-opted), Neil Boddington (co-opted), Pippa Tolfts (co-opted).

Introduction

This has been something of a transition year as we've moved towards implementing a new financial relationship between the sports clubs and Parish Council's day to day running of the Pavilion. The provision of general maintenance, cleaning and making full use of the pavilion is recognised as having never been truly delivered or fully realised by the Council. The Parish Council was originally a project partner that helped secure funding for the Pavilion from the Football Foundation, but in all other respects was poorly qualified to provide the necessary ongoing support at the level of service required by the respective clubs. As a result of this it was decided that we should move towards a new model in which the Sports Club themselves take over the running costs of the facility in return for complete autonomy over the building.

The negotiations necessary to achieve this handover of responsibility were often hampered by emotional conflicts due to the passions that will always run high in the world of competitive sport and as a result have left the Sports Club in limbo as agreements were not concluded within the more than generous 1.5 year timescale given by the Full Council in which to achieve the agreement. As a result the subsidies that have previously been given to the Sports Clubs have now been cut by £5000 in the 2023/24 budget. This will obviously be something of a shock to the system as that means the Pavilion is now effectively in a period of managed decline, but I'm encouraged to see that new management of the Sports Club already seems to be making some great in-roads towards generating additional funds that will no doubt be useful in addressing this shortfall.

Likely Outcomes

Given that the 2023/24 Council budget has already been set and is in flight, there is little leeway for the Parish Council to make any changes to the back stop agreement that has resulted in the de-funding of Sports Club for the current financial year. As a result, the incoming council may wish to decide on whether they want to re-convene the PSFC committee or simply deal with any ongoing issues with the Pavilion through the finance committee instead. The Sports Club have some good plans for the future, so it is now up to them to build the business model around those proposals and approach the Parish Council with some fresh initiatives for how they might take these forward. It will no doubt be a tough year of adjustment for the Sports Clubs and I have already given my commitment to helping them raise funds once I leave the Council this May, but it is hoped that this tougher regime will finally bring the much needed turnaround in relations between the Council and Sports Clubs that is long overdue.

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. Both clubs continue to attract new players, so our thanks go out to the respective Club committees for their continued hard work. In particular, we would like to thank the new Sports Club committee for being so proactive in making the best use of the newly refurbished bar. BT Sport is now viewable at the pavilion, and it is hoped that this will in turn drive increased proceeds at the bar.

Matt Reid

STRATEGY COMMITTEE

Chairman's Report

Members: Andrew McAuley (Chair), Matt Reid (Vice-Chair), Terry Jackson, Margaret Noon, Steve Bolingbroke

Co-opted members: Gill Bindoff

The Strategy Committee met twice this year in May and June. It had become evident that with reduced numbers of Parish councillors (9 or 10 out of a cohort of 14) there was a need to review and streamline the committee structure of the council. In short, there were too many committees for the number of councillors. This was leading to the stagnation of decision making and therefore, the structure was untenable. It was proposed that the work of the Strategy Committee should be transferred to other committees as well as Full Council. Full Council would be responsible for the Strategic Plan. The Plan would be administered by a working group comprising the Parish Chairman, Vice-Chair and chairs of the committees and NPAB. The oversight of Major Projects would become the responsibility of the Finance Committee and the PSFC and Allotments committee would report directly to Full Council. It was hoped that by having one less committee meeting per month, and a clearer reporting chain, the Council would be more appealing to new councillors and that a streamlined decision-making process would lead to more timely action. It was proposed that the Council should tap into and involve community organisations such as the Watlington Club, WBA, FOWL, WCAG as part of the drive to broaden community involvement in the decision-making process and administration of community affairs. Thus, creating a stronger connection between the Parish Council and community.

It was resolved by the Strategy Committee to recommend Full Council that:

The strategy committee is dissolved and that its responsibilities are reassigned to Full Council, the Finance Committee and NPAB as follows:

Full Council

- Parish Council Strategic Plan (PCSP).
- At the start of a new council period produce a PCSP, including priorities for the next four years, in line with the objectives of the Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan (WNDP).
- Set up a working group (Parish Chairman, Vice-Chair and chairs of the committees and NPAB) to monitor and review the progress PCSP twice per year (May and October).
- Update the PCSP as required.
- Assign work to committees as required by PCSP and as ad hoc tasks/projects arise.
- Coordination and submission of consultation responses where appropriate.

Finance Committee

- Scrutinise all proposals for major projects in accordance with the approved Parish procedure to ensure they meet due diligence requirements.

- Recommend to Full council those projects that are deemed suitable to be considered for Parish funding from CIL or other sources.
- Monitor progress of all approved projects.
- Maintain register of reserve projects.
- Periodically, refresh the list of active major projects by selecting from the reserve list and/or calling for new projects and running a prioritisation process with recommended changes going to Full Council for approval
- Keep under review the project approval and management process and make recommendations on changes to Full Council.
- Maintain the Major Project dashboard.

Due to various circumstances the motion was not taken by Full Council until September however, the motion was carried. The Strategy Committee was formally dissolved in September 2022.

As chairman I would like to extend my gratitude to all the members of the Strategy Committee. The decision to dissolve the Strategy Committee was the right one and I strongly feel that the Council is now properly constituted to deliver for the community.

Andrew McAuley

PLANNING COMMITTEE

Chairman's Report

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

Co-opted members: Gill Bindoff, Tony Powell, Nick Thomas

Planning year 2022-2023, has seen the continued growth in planning applications experienced in the previous two years. Once again, the work of the Planning Committee was conducted via virtual means with Parish committee meetings and meetings with SODC officers and developers conducted on-line. This method of working has become the new norm. The range of planning applications considered by the committee varied from the minor works on listed buildings through to the consideration of the detailed reserved matters applications submitted by Redrow Homes for Sites B & C off the Cuxham Road. It is evident that the trend for planning applications for home extensions and ancillary garden buildings seen in the previous two years is set to continue. There is strong evidence that there is a lack of larger three- and four-bedroom family properties within the parish and that many householders are electing to extend their properties rather than move locally.

The committee's focus remains the delivery of the development priorities set out in the Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan (WNDP) however, whilst it is important to ensure that the character of the town and wider parish is protected from inappropriate development, the increase in modern, innovative and sustainable design has been very welcome. This has been seen in both applications for property extensions and individual new builds. The use of modern materials and design ensures that new buildings meet the council's objective for sustainable development and minimises the impact on the environment. It also ensures that the Parish will continue to thrive by reflecting 21st Century building design and standards.

The delivery of the edge road remains a Parish Council priority and as such is at the forefront of the Planning Committee's work. A close working relationship with Oxfordshire County Council, SODC Planning Department and developers has ensured that the Parish's priorities and objectives for the

community have been built into the plans for the edge road. We continue to work with the major developers to ensure that their plans will deliver housing, green spaces and suitable connectivity (walking and cycling) for both new and existing residents.

The Parish Council has once again successfully opposed inappropriate development in the AONB at Pishill, the application for the development of holiday pods at Grove Farm has been refused at appeal by HM Inspector. A follow-on application for the development of a single property on the site has also been refused by SODC. The application for a three-bedroom property on garden land bordering the Paddock in the centre of town has been dismissed at appeal.

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.

P23/S0431/RM & P23/S0433/RM Land off Cuxham Road (Sites B & C).

These two applications were granted outline planning permission by the SODC Planning Committee in January 2021. The reserved matters (detailed plans) application was considered by the Planning Committee in March 23. The applications will be before the SODC Planning Committee in April 23. The plans include detail of the portion of the edge road that the developer is providing.

P22/S3363/FUL Grove Farm Patemore Lane Pishill RG9 6HH (Conversion of existing barn into single 4-bedroom dwelling).

This application was refused planning permission by SODC on 6th February 2023. The Parish Council as well as the communities of Stonor and Pishill strongly opposed any development on this site within the AONB.

As chairman I would like to extend my gratitude to all the members of the Planning Committee for their hard work and conscientious, balanced and meticulous approach to the decision-making process. At the forefront of our decisions has been the community's desire to retain the historic nature of Watlington whilst accepting that change is upon us and must be handled sympathetically.

Andrew McAuley

OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

Chairmans Report

Members in 2022-2023:

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

Alex Basden, Tim Horton, Terry Jackson, Rob Smith

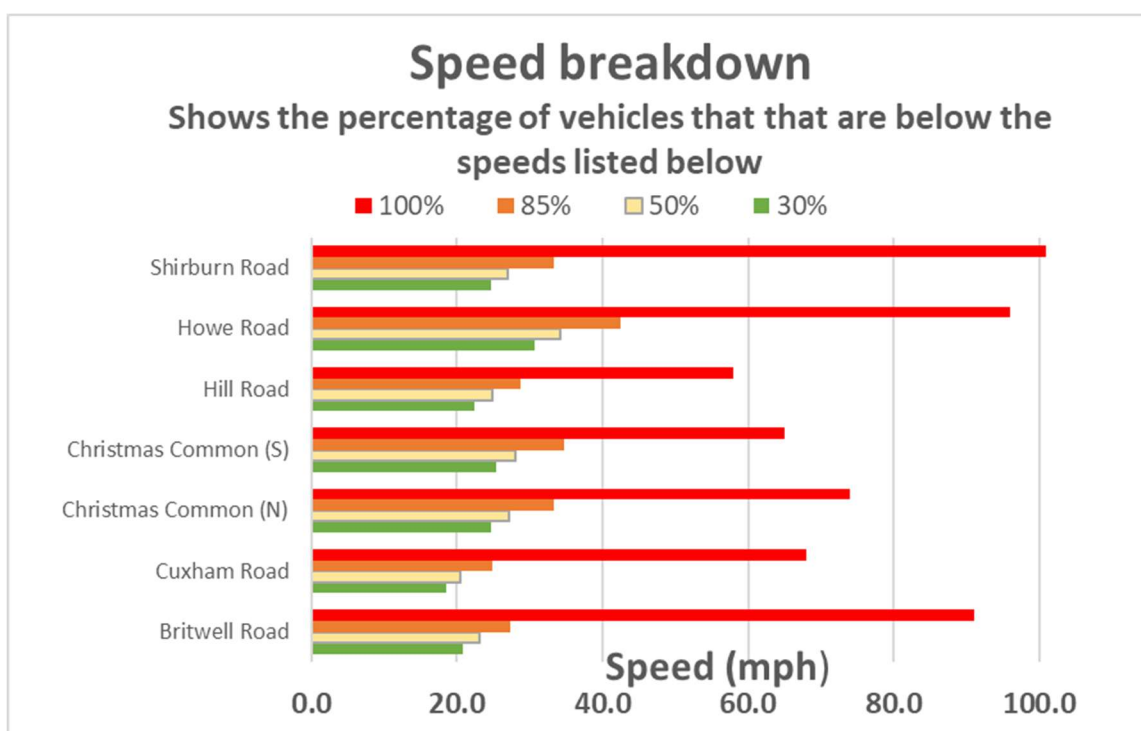
Co-opted members: Bob West, Jenny Wilkinson

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's role in this is identifying improvements or repairs that are needed

and preparing specifications for them. Where possible the work is carried out by council staff or councillors, but where the task is too large or requires special tools or materials, we employ contractors or suppliers.

The committee maintains a list of tasks to be done and this year managed to remove some of the long-standing items from the list. Top of the list must be the completion of work on making Pyrton Lane safer for pedestrians, a task we have been trying to get the County Council to do for at least five years. The speed reduction measures of a 20mph limit, humps & bumps and road narrowing posts might not have discouraged motorists from using the lane as a way to avoid the town centre, but appear to have made the lane a safer more attractive route for walkers.

Our first Speed Indicator Device (SID) was installed in the previous year, but an additional SID was bought this year together with further poles and solar panels. We are now able, with a third SID that we share with Swyncombe, to monitor traffic speed and numbers on all the roads into and out of the town and Christmas Common. Our aim is to move the SIDs at least quarterly so that all these roads should be monitored each year. With the 20mph limit coming later this year, it will be interesting to see how effective this limit will be. The figures for the past year are illustrated below.



The play area at the recreation ground has benefitted from replacement of the i-Play, an expensive piece of equipment which had been unreliable since we installed it. After lengthy negotiations with the supplier, we agreed a deal under which they removed the unit and replaced it with 10 new items of play equipment we bought with a 33% discount. The new items were selected following a survey of users of the Rec and were installed in this year. We went for simpler items which are now well used, with a wooden train being one of the most popular among the younger children.

We hope that you will have noticed the improvements in the garden areas of the Paddock and Mansle Garden. This is the result of employing a part time gardener who has worked wonders on getting these gardens to look well-loved. The new hedge we planted at Mansle Garden was put under considerable stress by the long dry summer last year, but much of it seems to have survived and any gaps will be patched up this year.

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

Ian Hill

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN ADVISORY BOARD

1. The membership of the NPAB, which includes parish councillors and representatives of the community, has changed during the year. Parish Council members, Tim Horton and Steve Bolingbroke both resigned from the Board. Terry Jackson has had leave as a councillor as a result of health issues but was welcomed back in January. Keith Jackson, a community member of the NPAB, was also welcomed back at the January meeting after a period of ill health. Membership of the NPAB will be reviewed after the local council elections in May.
2. The review of the Neighbourhood Development Plan is ongoing. The Parish Council supported the NPAB recommendation that the review would not be a full re-write, which would require a new referendum, but would be based on material modifications. No new sites for development will be included. The main focus will be on strengthening NDP objectives and policies to ensure that they reflect the need to mitigate climate change and contribute to nature recovery.
3. Local consultations on proposed changes will take place during 2023.
4. Work in support of the NDP review funded by Locality:
 - (i) Progress has been made on the new Watlington Conservation Area Appraisal. The initial appraisal was funded by Locality, the Government Agency which supports neighbourhood planning. The Appraisal will eventually be adopted by SODC and it is hoped that a local consultation on it will take place this year. The Parish Council supported the NPAB recommendation to make a small extension to the Conservation Area boundary by including a small parcel of land adjoining Britwell Road and extending behind The Goggs.
 - (ii) A new Design Code has been produced with detailed input from the NPAB. The Design Code has been produced by the consultant, Aecom, and is now publicly available. It will be used by the Parish Council Planning Committee as well as providing supporting evidence for the NDP objectives and policies.
 - (iii) Martin Gammie has produced a very detailed appraisal of the Watlington Treescape. He ran a very successful workshop on the Appraisal in February 2023. This will also be useful to the Planning Committee and will form the basis for ongoing work to protect and enhance the local treescape for its landscape, environmental and biodiversity benefit.
 - (iv) Finally, a successful grant application was made for a scheme to enhance the High Street and contribute to social infrastructure. This grant has been used to compliment the scheme to repair and re-decorate the cottage next to the Library for emergency housing for a refugee family. It has provided a full building condition report and has paid for the preparation of drawings to apply for planning permission for the long term repair and restoration of the cottage so that it can generate income for the Charlotte Coxe Trust. The cottage and the adjoining Library were left by Charlotte Coxe for the benefit of the people of Watlington. If planning permission is granted, the Trustees of the charity will be able to decide if the scheme is one which will benefit the Trust in the long term.
5. Options for enhancement schemes and traffic calming measures for the town centre have been considered during the year. The aim is to improve the town centre for both residents and visitors and reduce the impact of traffic. Consultation on proposals will take place during 2023.

6. A meeting with the Watlington Business Association was held in March 2023. The link with the WBA will continue and will contribute to the review of policies for the local economy, employment and infrastructure.

Gill Bindoff – Chairman Neighbourhood Plan Advisory Board

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

We had a very hot and dry summer at the allotments and many of us struggled with lower yields and failed pollination, we hope this is not a continuing trend this year, but we are starting to think about how our growing practices will evolve in the future and what changes the allotments might have to make to remain productive.

The previous year has been otherwise very successful. Every plot is occupied, and we have a waiting list of 7. Bi-annual inspections take place and multiple warnings were issued with two plot holders eventually removed. We have a committee approved method of giving first and then final warnings for plots that are not in keeping with the terms set out on the tenancy agreement.

We had the exciting addition of our new communal area, with a shared shed, kindly paid for by Cllr Anna Badcock Councillor Fund and a compostable toilet, funded by the National Lottery Community Grant. They are a great addition to the site, it means many tools can be shared and new plot holders do not need to 'fork' out large sums to get digging. The compostable toilet was not without its critics, but we feel those who opposed do now see the benefit and the associated concerns have so far not been an issue. We have a voluntarily cleaning rota and will continue to monitor it over the year.

We held two very successful fundraising events last year. Our annual Plant Sale at the end of May and then our Chutney Sale at the Town Hall in October. We raised a total of £598.40 and got a lovely new lawn mower for the communal shed and are now looking to fund our next project which is to repair the main track running through the site by spreading 45 tons of aggregate to fill potholes and reinforce the road. We have received a £500 grant from the Doris fund towards this and we estimate with a total cost of £2160, done in stages as and when we can raise money.

We also had our annual hedge cutting and site clean-up, followed by the coppicing of the Hazels. These were very well attended and show the strong community spirit that we have on the Allotment site. Our quarterly newsletter is well received, we have guest articles from our ploholders in each edition and we now publish excerpts in the Watlington Times.

Josh and Kirsty Robinson-Ward

TOWN HALL TRUST BODY

Membership: Cllr. Ian Hill, Cllr. Matt Reid, Cllr. Tim Horton, Cllr Terry Jackson, and by co-option Mike Staples and Mike Young. During the year Alison Morgan left the Trust Body.

Technical adviser: Bob West

The Trust Body has the responsibility to promote the use of the Town Hall as an active and useful space for the use of Watlington area bodies and to ensure its good restoration as a celebrated Grade 2* listed building.

Both aspects of this work were seriously affected by the Covid pandemic when no meetings could take place and specialist regulators (like planning officers and building control staff) were prevented from attending at the building. Nevertheless 2022/23 has been a better year in both areas of action. Most vitally, the fruit and vegetable operation provided a vital source for provisions and we helped strengthen this business after discussion, providing additional modern storage. We have seen a steady increase in regular and single bookings and remain alive to possibilities for new income streams from charges. The Trustees have taken a generous view of some kinds of celebratory work that has added considerably to the image of the Town as an artists' centre and a place with a special history. Trustees gave free lets to the Watlington Arts Week for which the Hall is a key, central display area. Additionally, it was the place of the exhibition of 'Watlington in the Fifties' that helped mark the 70th year of the late Queen's reign- 280 attended.

Summertime saw a massive re-evaluation of stored material and old furniture in the 'Clock Room' area, and much was recycled, allowing better use of this area. On the second floor the Trust continues to allow measurement of air quality and to maintain the valuable clock mechanism.

During the year, we added a cleaning regime to support the caretaking function and the new caretaker has settled into his new duties with confidence.

Trustees took the lead on treatment to the flagstones of the 'plinth' of the Hall, commissioning over the winter work to eliminate trip points and prevent the growth of weeds around the building. New rails for the entrance area also add to safety.

It has also been possible to return to some of the ambitions, somewhat lost during the pandemic. Examination continues with the SODC conservation team and Historic England into improvements in electrical arrangements, a stairlift for the building and additional schemes to conserve heat effectively. Shortly we will commence the largest scheme in the recent period replacing, where necessary, new brickwork and absent mortar to joints in the elevations to this fine building. This work is necessary every few years to act against the effects of weather, pollution and trafficking around the building.

Trustees are grateful for the care shown by users of the building, the staff who clean, improve and safeguard the Hall, and our clerical support that makes administration successful.

TOWN HALL ACCOUNTS 2022/23

	Budget 2022/3	
Expenditure		
Caretaker services	£	4,330.00
Water Supply	£	250.00
Electricity	£	5,800.00
Gas	£	-
Running Costs	£	600.00
Maintenance of Town Hall	£	22,500.00
Planned maintenance sink fund	£	-
Insurance	£	2,511.46
Planning Application Fees	£	400.00
Improvements	£	100.00
Audit	£	60.00
Misc	£	500.00
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£	37,051.46
Income		
Rental for Town Hall	£	7,500.00
Misc income	£	500.00
WPC Grant	£	8,200.00
Sinking Fund Income	£	-
TOTAL INCOME	£	16,200.00
	£	-
INCOME MINUS EXP	-£	20,851.46

Total Bank Balance 31/03/23

Accounted by :

General Reserves	£30,902.88
Sinking Fund	£15,800.00
Total	£46,702.88

Tim Horton – Chairman Town Hall Trust Body

REPORTS FROM COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLORS AND LOCAL GROUPS

Cllr Freddie van Mierlo, Chalgrove and Watlington Division

Now 2-years into its first 4-year term, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the progress made by the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance administration since taking control from the Conservatives. Its vision is laid out in the [9 priorities](#) adopted, that includes ‘putting climate at the heart of everything we do’. The IPCC’s ‘final warning’ to humanity in March this year, puts back into focus the importance of following through on this commitment – even in the face of rising opposition from conspiracy theorists, climate change deniers, and those who would wish to see a much-diminished role for the county council.

The County Council is responsible for delivering a range of services to residents of Oxfordshire, including adult social care, children's services – including for children with special educational needs and disabilities, and of course, maintaining Oxfordshire's highways and transport infrastructure, and a range of other services, including libraries, fire and rescue, and coroners' services.

Adult social care is largest responsibility of OCC in terms of spend. Demand is growing due to our ageing population and an increase in complexity of needs. In Oxfordshire, we are seeking to manage this demand with a pioneering 'Oxfordshire Way', that aims to keep people active and independent for as long as possible in their homes and communities. As part of this, OCC has been promoting a scheme to empower small scale care businesses in the community to thrive. Support is provided to 'micro-enterprises' to navigate the paperwork and start out as a commercial enterprise. An all-age unpaid carers strategy review is also ongoing to better support this vital group in our communities.

Children's services remain a challenge, particularly in the area of SEND. The service receives this year an inflation busting boost to its budget of 12.3% (£18.8m), which will provide much needed funds to improve the assessment of EHCPs in particular. The county was also successful in bidding for £5.2m to fund new residential homes for children with autism and children with adverse childhood experiences.

In transport and highways, the county is leading the way, alongside the Welsh government, by moving to 20mph as the speed limit for villages and towns. The newly adopted Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP5) is a radical change from the previous plan, and places an emphasis on active travel, public transport and reducing car journeys. Its ambitious targets to reduce car journey's by 25% by 2030 and 33% by 2040 will shape infrastructure decisions going forward, and be a powerful tool when developers seek massive car-centric developments (e.g., Chalgrove Airfield, Harrington). The freight strategy (which sits as part of LTCP5) is being developed further with inputs sought from communities on area weight restrictions and problem areas for HGVs. The strategy seeks to move non-local freight onto the strategic road network (M40, etc.), rather than use inappropriate local roads. Additional investment is being made in taking on stubborn highways flooding issues that will see more projects brought forward in 2023 and 2024 to take on problem areas.

As ever, I continue to advocate for projects and issues important to local communities and individual residents. Issues have ranged from road agreements, active travel, trees, road markings, flooding, children's services, and much more! In Watlington, key areas of focus have

been representing the views of the community to the County on the Watlington Relief Road. I've also been delighted to see the progress made to bring the unoccupied property at 33 High Street back to life. The work done by Watlington Welcome and the parish council is testament to the power of local communities and unlocking their potential. Work continues in the background to cement the handover of the Charlotte Coxe Trust (owner of 33 High Street) to the parish council.

I have also been delighted to support a wide range of projects through the Councillor Priority Fund. The fund was renewed in February's budget on the same basis as previously (£15,000 over 2 years), with new applications opening in April 2023. Given the impact of inflation, and a last-minute rush that is delaying approval of applications, I again will favour projects that can be delivered early and start providing benefit to the community this year.

Housing developments also remain a concern for residents. While strictly speaking a district matter, the major road developments associated with Chalgrove airfield development, and the potential Harrington development bring in County level concerns. I continue to oppose both of

these schemes, which would have a deleterious impact on the local environment and climate due to their remote and rural locations.

Finally, with Oxfordshire's growing population, the electoral commission has determined a review of current county council division boundaries is required. The election commission has agreed with a recommendation from council that the number of councillors be increased from 63 to 69, which would keep the number of electors per councillors roughly the same as they are now up to 2029. The increase in councillors will likely see the Watlington and Chalgrove division broken up into two separate divisions – with Chalgrove and Watlington being the major population centers in each of the new divisions. For me, this will be bitter-sweet, since I very much enjoy serving all the communities of the current county division, but it's wide geographic spread does make it extremely challenging, which will be somewhat alleviated by new boundaries.

Watlington Gardening Club

The Club's move to the Sports Pavilion in September 2021 for our monthly meetings has been a success with members; they like the space, the no steps and the spacious parking (about half our members come from out of town), so for the time being the Club will continue to meet there, although for me the locks, alarm and the not very bright lights with switches all over the place are all a bit of a faff. Also, unfortunately the new TV screen installed above the Fire Exits, is of no use to us, it is far too small and far away, any images projected on it by our speakers to illustrate their talks would not be clearly visible.

Our year of activities starts in September and we have had a full programme of nine meetings with a speaker to talk about a gardening related topic. Some have 'slides', some do demonstrations and some bring a range of plants 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 truly spectacular large private gardens, none of which were normally open to the public including St Timothee and Folly Farm, the latter professionally designed and owned by a millionaire so money no object and the most scrumptious tea imaginable, served by a bevy of gardeners, included in the price.

Our membership numbers has increased a little, we have just under fifty members, but it is still a struggle to cover the costs chiefly of the speakers due to rising costs and travel expenses.

Caelia Pereira, Chairman

Friends of Watlington Hill

Friends of Watlington Hill is a volunteer group affiliated to the National Trust and meets on the Hill or neighbouring properties on average about once a month. Some 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. Another increasingly common task especially in summer is the removal of non-native Himalayan Balsam - a simple process known as 'pulling'. This invasive plant can be found in the local National Trust Woodlands bordering Watlington Park.

Volunteering activities were paused from late summer 2022 but it is planned to resume these from May 2023.

For more information please contact Keith Jackson keithc.jackson@btinternet.com or Terry Jackson tjacks@waitrose.com .



Chalgrove and Watlington First Steps Family Hub Report

April 2023



With the increase in local new housing in both Chalgrove and Watlington, the Family Hubs have continued to grow, welcoming new families.

The need for early year's provision continues to be extremely important and we are very proud to be able to offer the children and families the support and play opportunities needed. We continue to support childrens' 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 and well-being.

We have a full timetable across both sites and send regular emails with information in relation to Early Years and local events. Our WhatsApp group has now reached 115 participants and parents are able to support each other, exchanging ideas and knowledge:

“The Hub is a wonderful friendly place that I am lucky to have on my doorstep. Maria and the team are amazing and do an incredible job. Teddy and I have made some lovely friends and although we have sadly graduated from Tuesday's Tea & Tinies there are plenty of other sessions that we can go to!”

“The hub sessions have been invaluable in helping me through the learning curve of being a parent for the first time. The shared experience, advice and wonderful company at the sessions have been amazing, and as my baby gets older he is really enjoying everything the hub has to offer. I'll definitely be coming along for as long as we can!”



The music session with Mr Chamberlain continues to be well-attended and everyone enjoys singing and dancing along to the music! His session has now become the most popular!



Messy Mondays and Fridays Room to Zoom is also very popular. The children have enjoyed getting messy with jelly, shaving foam, spaghetti, ice and sawdust for example. We have been cooking each Friday. The children have made banana muffins, apple pinwheels, rainbow salad pots, baked spring rolls and much more! It is a great opportunity to offer healthy recipes to families and encourage the children to participate and try new tastes!



Watlington Bowls Club

Bowls Club members keenly enjoy playing the game. The reason they join the club. We know, however, that the facilities we offer do not manage themselves. Organisationally we depend on volunteers both to oversee the clubhouse and green as well as to administer people and finances. We have been blessed in having an excellent Treasurer, Peter Clayton, who keeps us in order, as well as a willing and enthusiastic Committee. You know that our club is a wing of the Watlington Club per se. If you were present at last year's annual parish council meeting you will remember that we have both a highly successful history of past glories but that, during the pandemic, our club has suffered

downturns in both membership and revenue. However, despite earlier successes, we now firmly focus on the future. We have new blood keen to increase our membership. How? Through successful Open Days, as well as our outreach efforts with the local school and college, Scouts and Brownies, we have raised our profile. Additionally, as you will all know, being regular readers, that we contribute a regular monthly column to the *Watlington Times*. Perhaps we should also make our piece available to the *Henley Standard*.

Upcoming Open Days are scheduled for 30th April and 28th May. Please enjoy them.

Keeping a Bowls Club and its bowling green in good order is always a very expensive business. Over the past year 2022-2023 we have incurred costs of approx £12k for:

- ** Ditch Repair (surrounding the green)
- ** Ladies Toilet Floor Repair (following a leak of water)
- ** Machinery Replacement and Servicing
- ** Gardening shed roof repair
- ** New Club Shirts

Our membership is not called upon to fund these costs. We undertake fundraising via grants (thank you again) from any available source and from our own social activities. These have brought in funds that have kept us afloat, alongside our membership fees.

Finally, we would love to invite you to convene one of your regular Council meetings in our clubhouse. This would give each of you the opportunity to get to know us better. During the Summer obviously. Try your hand at our game. Shall we have a show of hands now? Thank you all or your attention.

For any further information please call David Shufflebotham on 07836 220204

Friends of Watlington Library (FOWL)

Our first author talk in the library in 28 months took place in June 2022 - and since then we have had a busy and varied programme of talks ranging from bestselling crime novelists to award winning natural historians to celebrated local authors. These author talks provide a crucial opportunity for fund raising but also serve to showcase the library and all it has to offer our community.

We have maintained a steady offering of Storytime and Rhymetime, both very popular and hugely valued community resources. In the autumn of 2022, we were also able to resume additional Family Activities within the library with the visits of ZooLab and also the Rhubarb Theatre company. These events are offered free to the community and sponsored by FOWL as a way to encourage young families into the library. In the same spirit, we have also welcomed a children's author for a visit in 2023.

We were delighted to be able to participate in ArtWeeks last year, hosting illustrator Steph Hicks - and we look forward to doing so again this year. We have made a consistent effort to host exhibitions throughout the year as an important use of the community space that the library provides. These have ranged from quilts, to lino prints to paintings. In addition, we continue to display artwork from James Kelso in an arrangement that has been ongoing since September 2021.

Once again, we ran our photography competition in 2022 to create our fourth Calendar for Watlington showcasing our town; this time focusing on Watlington Architecture. We will be launching this year's competition at the beginning of June with the theme of Seasons. The calendar

remains an important source of funds, as well as being a significant community endeavour that also creates something of value that showcases our town.

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, for all her hard work on behalf of our library. We were very sorry to say goodbye to our customer services advisor Lyn Smurthwaite, as she moved on to pastures new - but are also delighted to be welcoming Jo Aherne as she begins her training this month. In addition, on a personal note, may I take this opportunity to thank our wonderful 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 protect, support and promote the precious Watlington resource that is our community library. 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 part of our community.

Dr Anna Tilley - Chair, FOWL

Watlington Branch of the Royal British Legion

The RBL Branch committee met on several occasions through the year to discuss fund raising events and a Newsletter is sent to members each quarter.

A Grand Draw held in August was organised by Mr Tim Horton and raised over £800 profit. The Branch are grateful to all who bought or sold tickets and to the local shops and trading organisations who gave generous prizes which people were delighted to win. The draw took place in the Watlington Café in September where Dr Jenny Stillwell was presented with a County Certificate Award by the President, Brigadier Mogg, for her outstanding work for this branch of the RBL.

In October Mrs Tessa Mogg organised a Quiz Night in the Granary where we were welcomed by Liz and Andrew Winton who provided excellent nibbles. There was a sell out and space was at a premium. Quizzers were generous and over £300 was raised. Mrs Debbie Hemmins was presented with a County Certificate Award for her excellent and varied work for this branch over many years. Profits raised at these two events are given to the Poppy Appeal and added to the amount raised during Remembrance time.

The Poppy Appeal was well organised by Mr Ben Shaw with poppies being sold in shops, pubs and in other villages including the centre of Watlington on several days leading up to Remembrance Day. The use of a card machine is proving very successful as some people rarely carry cash now. The Committee are grateful to all those who bought, or sold poppies and other items, during the fortnight before Remembrance Day which raised £8500 for the Poppy Appeal. A very good result.

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 march past and parade were accompanied by the Watlington Concert Band. The sun shone and helicopters flew past, and Mrs Sarah Pullen played the last Post and Reveille.

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.

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.

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

Watlington and District Age Concern (WADAC)

Watlington and District Age Concern, WADAC, is run by 7 Trustees a secretary/treasurer and several volunteers without whom we could not manage. The purpose of Age concern is to promote the welfare of elderly people in Watlington, and surrounding villages, by enabling social contact and to provide somewhere to go outside the home. Hence The Watlington Café at 26b the High Street which opens three 3 mornings a week on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9.15am to 12.30pm for people to come for refreshments where they can and enjoy the company of others. Customer numbers continue to increase and there are books and other small items for sale to help meet running costs.

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

We were sad to lose two Trustees during 2022. Mrs Val Proctor who died very suddenly and Mrs Audrey Witney who started Age Concern in Watlington in the 1980s. She was the Chairman for several years and after that always gave huge support as a Vice President.

Tessa Mogg - Chairman of WADAC Trustees

Rainbow Corner Day Nursery

With Covid survived and well out of the way Rainbow Corner is coming up to its 39th year and is as busy as ever with all the new houses being built in Watlington. Due to this we have had to start pulling our catchment area much closer to home, which we feel is only fair as we are after all a community nursery and we need to offer as many places as possible to the Watlington community. We are still just keeping our heads above water to stay sustainable but this is getting increasingly difficult with the general cost of living, energy and wage increases. However, we still pride ourselves on being able to provide Watlington with high quality childcare and education, having received an OUTSTANDING Ofsted in our last inspection.

We continue to work very closely with Watlington Primary School Foundation Unit and have regular meetings with them, the children's family hub and local health visitors 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 community run nursery we are able to provide a much wider range of times and additional equipment. We keep a close eye on our budgets and as a charity we hold our AGM in March each year. We fundraise for all the extra equipment and fun activities our children need to give them the best start in life. Last year we had a wonderfully successful Barn dance thanks to Jeremy and Sinead and this year we have already held a Quiz night thanks to Liz at the Granary and Rae Young, an Easter raffle in Nursery and we have a Summer Story trail, and a "Rainbow showcases Watlington" Fashion show organised in the church on September 23rd. We thank all the community for their support in our fundraising events because without them we would not be able to provide such an engaging provision.

We provide the children with 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, water wall, 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 the very young.

We have a full working kitchen with two nursery cooks who provide the children with home cooked, healthy meals and continually keep up to date with new guidelines on children's nutrition, we also have the 5 score on the doors award.

We continue to offer the government's free 30 hour funding to parents, but we are only able to offer this in a reduced way to be able to stay sustainable. We do try whenever possible to offer short term places and reduced rates for people who find themselves in difficulties. It will be very interesting to see how the additional government funding to parents works out as unfortunately they are still not supporting nurseries financially and so there will be no additional places and many nurseries are close to closing due to not being sustainable anymore.

We now employ 25+ staff with a real mix of ages, we encourage all staff with us to further their development and we help and support students that 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 at Rainbow then please feel free to come and have a no obligation chat, we have lots to offer with flexible working 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.

Ridgeway u3a



Ridgeway u3a is thriving. We just managed to keep going in various ways during the periods of lockdown but since then we have been going from strength to strength.

We had an Open Day which attracted quite a few new members and our membership has continued to increase steadily ever since. We are now approximately twenty-five percent up on our pre-Covid numbers and are developing into a really vibrant u3a.

We have also been able to establish some new Interest Groups, which include Bridge, History, Knitting & Crochet and Classical Music is in the pipeline. Our members come up with new ideas all the time and nothing is considered too outlandish, providing a few people are keen to take part. Many groups meet in members houses and are cost free, The rest share costs between members and these are usually only a pound or two. Some organised visits benefit from group discounts.

Our monthly Speaker Meetings are held in St Leonard's Church at 2.30 pm on the third Tuesday of each month. Recent speakers have covered a wide range of subjects including Art and Design in the Chilterns, the music of Gilbert and Sullivan, the Galapagos Islands, the History of Christmas and the Wartime History of Hughenden Manor as well as the life of Swifts and the Elephant in the Garden. The meetings are always followed by tea and the chance to chatter with friends. We welcome guests to these meetings but if they come more than twice we encourage them to join as our membership is a bargain at twenty pounds a year. That is less than £1.70 per month for a lecture and tea, a copy of our Newsletter and, most importantly, the chance to meet with other like-minded people. Membership also enables members to join any of the Interest Groups or join

trips as well as giving them access to a huge range of regional and national activities across the u3a movement.

Membership of u3a is open to anyone who has time to spare during the daytime, therefore more usually but not exclusively those who are no longer in full-time work. The ethos of the movement is lifelong learning in a self-help structure. Members learn from and teach each other, using life experience and skills. Shared interests enable groups to make visits, embark on research, or learn together on-line about their chosen subject. Membership is strongly recommended for anyone who may be feeling lonely and, although we cannot actually offer care, we are happy for carers to accompany those who need them. We engage with social prescribing for suitable candidates.

Ridgeway u3a is one of some one thousand and forty across the United Kingdom. There are nearly two hundred in the south-east region alone. Ridgeway u3a covers Watlington, Chalgrove and all the surrounding villages. There are others in Chinnor, Thame, Wallingford and Henley-on-Thames. We all belong to the Thames Valley Network of forty-eight u3as, the representatives of which meet quarterly in Benson to discuss items of mutual interest and discuss best practice as well as organising Study Days and Events both live and on-line.

Why not come and join us if you have the time to spare? Our strapline says it all...

Learn, laugh, live

www.u3a.org.uk

<http://u3asites.org.uk/ridgeway>

Watlington Volunteer Drivers

Watlington Volunteer Drivers (WVD) is now in its thirteenth year of operation. The need for the service has steadily grown in line with the decline of public transport and the increase in the aging population in Watlington. We have been fortunate to attract new drivers, but we could always do with more as many of us are busy people who can only spare just a few hours in a month.

All our requests are for medical appointments to the hospital, doctor, dentist and therapy. We try not to let anyone down, indeed we received 533 requests last year and only 23 of those were not fulfilled as there was no driver available.

I applied for and received three amounts of grant funding during the year. One was from the SODC Transport Grant Scheme another was from OCC Contain Outbreak Management Scheme. Both of these grants enabled us to offer free rides to our clients. The third grant was from the Watlington Business Association Christmas Fayre fund. As our overheads are low, a mobile telephone and group cover insurance, this small grant will enable us to continue our services for at least another year. I thank all the funders for the generous donations.

The WVD continues to operate as a voluntary service not a taxi service. We do try to accommodate last minute requests, but a reasonable amount of notice always helps.

I would like to thank the committee and all our drivers and clients for making my job so enjoyable. If you are interested in becoming one of our drivers please call 07765 154120 and leave a message.

Nicky Smallbone, Chairman WVD

Watlington Climate Action Group

We continued with our programme of events and awareness raising activities throughout the year, covering a number of different subject areas relating to the climate and protecting our local natural habitats. These included: “Share A Car?”, “Discover Verges”, “Sustainable Living”, contributing to the Methodist Church’s “Environment Sunday” event, and running a “Climate Teddy Tombola” stall at the Christmas Fair as well as regular blogs and magazine articles. We are also supporting “The Commitment”, a non-party political campaign which asks people to sign a pledge to vote only for politicians who commit to making action on the climate and nature a priority.

Plastic Free Watlington – We ran Plastic Blitz, a joint event with WEG and in association with the Environment Agency and River Thame Conservation Trust, and gained a new Plastic Free Champion, Stilla Hem. Our Plastic Free Watlington lead has had to step back for personal reasons, so we are looking for someone who might be interested in giving an hour a week to keep this project moving forward.

Homes & Energy – We ran two free Energy Advice sessions and have been working with consultants Scene on a feasibility study for Community Energy, the results of which are due soon and will inform our next steps in this area. We need a joint project lead and additional volunteer support this to take this project further.

Green Plan – our website is now updated with information on the projects that the Green Plan (a collaboration with the Watlington Environment Group and others) is running and how to get involved. We had a live demonstration of making natural pigments at Oxford Natural History Museum, raising the profile of the importance of hedges. There were several further screenings of the Chalgrove Brook film around the county. Green Plan Art Trail art works Toby Trout and Helena Hedgehog were displayed at various events, helping engage people with nature and our projects. Our Hedgerow Project was the focus of the Wild Oxfordshire Local Groups Conference where groups from around the county came to visit and learn about our project to survey, restore, and plant hedgerows in the Parish. Additional hedge planting was carried out to replace hedgerow plants that died in last Summer’s drought.

Transport – following the talk we had on car sharing (a scheme where you can hire out your car to neighbours when you’re not using it) we have been looking for a volunteer to “drive” this forward for Watlington. Unfortunately no one has come forward. This scheme has great potential as a relatively easy win for Watlington which can reduce our carbon footprint and reduce the cost of owning a car for both hirers and car owners. We are currently applying for grant funding for a project officer to set up the scheme. If anyone is interested in this paid position (or voluntary position if we don’t get the funds) please let us know.

Offsetting – we have recently partnered with Ecologi as our offsetting partner. We all have a carbon footprint that we can’t eliminate through living more sustainably, or through contributing to our community based projects. To fill this gap, we have looked into different offsetting schemes and have chosen Ecologi as a trusted partner. If you sign up, you can also ask for your profile to be linked to the Watlington profile (www.ecologi.com/watlington), and we can see how we are doing as a community.

END OF REPORT