



WOOLMER GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

Annual Report



2014/2015

Woolmer Green Parish Council

Parish Councils were established under the Local Government Act of 1894 when ecclesiastical Vestry Committees run by the church were abolished and elected Parish Councils were formed in rural areas to administer civic duties. A Parish Council is the lowest form of government under the Borough and County Councils and Woolmer Green Parish Council was formed in 2000 following a split from Welwyn Parish.

Woolmer Green Parish Council has six Councillors who are unpaid and serve a four year term of office. The current four year term will end at the beginning of May.

Parish Councillors

On 1st May 2014 Councillor Alex Tobin resigned from office due to him relocating to the Netherlands. We thank Alex for the contributions he made to the Council. We welcomed new Councillor Laura Brooks-Payne who was co-opted onto the Council on 10th June 2014. Each Councillor is allocated a specific area of responsibility and they sometimes represent the Parish Council on external bodies.

Phil Corke, Chairman, Village Hall, Staffing Committee.
A member of the School Friends Association.

Andy Gribble, Vice Chairman, Transport, Staffing Committee, Young Person Liaison.
Represents the Council on St Michael's School's Travel Forum & Barleyfields Advisory Group. Administers Badminton Smash Up.

Laura Brooks-Payne, Communications, Staffing Committee
A member of the School Friends Association.

Sarah Hall, Finance, Staffing Committee & Allotment Liaison.
Treasurer of the Allotment Committee.

Gareth Lloyd, Village Hall, Planning.

Tony White, Environment. A director of Twin Foxes Management Ltd.

Parish Clerk

Janet Pearce, Proper officer of the Council and Responsible Financial Officer. An employee who is responsible for carrying out the decisions of the Council, managing its facilities and ensuring it complies with the law.

Councillors & the Clerk attend meetings with Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, Highways Liaison Meetings and Welwyn Hatfield Association of Local Councils Meetings. The Clerk has occasional meetings with Welwyn Hatfield Head of Planning.

Borough Councillors: Councillors Julie Cragg, Steve Markiewicz and Carl Storer. Your Borough Councillors hold regular Surgeries in Woolmer Green Village Hall where anyone is welcome to attend if they have an issue they want to discuss. In 2015 the Surgeries will be held on 6th June, 1st August, 3rd October and 5th December 10.00am-10.45am. A Parish Councillor will also be in attendance.

County Councillor: Richard Smith.

Hall & Grounds

Phase II of the Queen Elizabeth II Field in Trust was finally completed. Following the demolition of the old equipment a new playground was erected to complement the natural surroundings of the orchard and wild flower meadow. It was installed by Wicksteed Playgrounds and was paid for with a £25,000 grant from SITA Trust, a £3,500 grant from Fields in Trust, £2,000 donated by our County Councillor, Richard Smith, from his Locality Budget and £2,000 from the Parish Council.

The new playground was officially opened on Friday 11th July by County Councillor Richard Smith and the Mayor of Welwyn Hatfield, Les Page. Two representatives from St. Michael's School Council, Niamah Phillips and George Craig, cut the ribbon.

The existing picnic benches were relocated and refurbished at a cost of £672.

Volunteer Jenny Hawkins has continued to work hard to ensure the wild flower meadow looks spectacular throughout the year and encourage wildlife by planting hundreds of bluebells, primroses and a multitude of other wild flowers which she raises from seed herself. She has also organised a successful wild flower planting day and regularly updates residents on the orchards progress via the village newsletter. We all really appreciate Jenny's hard work.

The Orchard and Playground site was nominated in a shortlist of three finalists for the Fields in Trust "most improved field" award. The Chairman, Phil Corke, and volunteer Jenny Hawkins attended a presentation dinner at Lords Cricket Ground on Wednesday 3rd December 2014. The award went to Belfast City Council for a multi-million pound scheme in Orangefield Park but it was a great achievement for Woolmer Green Parish Council to be nominated.

The stop net at the Hall Lane end was damaged in strong winds and will be replaced soon.

The hall continues to be very popular and an unprecedented number of wedding receptions were held there during the summer as well as two wedding ceremonies. Regretfully the Council has made the decision that it will no longer accept bookings for 16th to 25th birthday parties due to issues regarding behaviour of attendees.

The shower valves have been replaced in the gents changing rooms at a cost of £1,350.

The hall was fitted with a pressurised water cylinder to enable the two main gas boilers in the loft to heat the water as well as the underfloor heating system. Three wall mounted boilers that just heated water for the kitchen, toilets and cleaners facility were able to be removed which will save on servicing and maintenance costs for the future. The work cost £3,449.

At the annual service one of the loft boilers was found to be faulty and the parts have become obsolete. Both loft boilers have been removed and replaced by one condensing boiler at a cost of £3,542. Finally our heating system is much more economical to run and maintain as we started the year with six boilers and are now down to two.

Following a fire inspection it was identified that some of the doors in the village hall were below the current fire safety standards. The glass in the double doors to the main hall was replaced with wired glass and intumescent strips were fitted to the edges of the doors that did not comply. Total cost of the work was £1,048.

The Parish Council would like to express its thanks to all of its staff that continue to keep the hall running smoothly and to Debbie Johnson & Lisa Wintle for managing the Market each month.

Transport

During preparations for a Parish Plan in 2007 the Parish Council conducted a village survey to ascertain what issues were important to Woolmer Green residents. Overwhelmingly the speed of the traffic on the B197 was the primary concern with a call for a 30mph speed limit as is appropriate for a residential area. At the Annual Parish Meeting in April 2008 the school presented a petition from parents to County Councillor Richard Smith requesting a 30mph speed limit and this was subsequently submitted to the Highways Joint Members Panel. In 2009 dialogue with Highways began and it soon became clear that only by narrowing the road could a 30mph speed limit be considered. Therefore the Woolmer Green London Road Action Group was set up to produce a Parish Plan document detailing how the B197 could be improved by narrowing the B197 and installing traffic calming measures. The Parish Plan proposals received overwhelming support from residents following a referendum and this evidence and the document was then presented to Highways. In October 2012 we finally received the long awaited news that funding for the scheme to narrow the road was available which would, hopefully, pave the way for a reduction of the speed limit. This year the work to narrow the road has been completed and we await the results of a safety audit due to be conducted in April/May 2015. It has been a long process and thanks must go to the members of the Action Group; former Parish Councillors Judith Watson & Nick Collingridge, parent & volunteer Paula Deane & Councillor Andy Gribble for all their hard work and commitment. Also grateful thanks to our County Councillor, Richard Smith who has been so supportive throughout the process.

We still have more work to do however, as the 30mph speed limit has still to be achieved.

Environment

As part of the Parish Paths Partnership the Parish Council can apply for a £1,000 grant each year. Again our application was successful and, with a further contribution of £620 from the Rights of Way Officer's budget, we were able to pay for improvements to the entrance, surface & drainage of footpath 24.

The Parish Council was successful in its request to the Borough Council for two new dog bins to be installed; one at the entrance to the bridle path in New Road and another in Heath Road.

The Head of Herts Countryside Management visited to advise on the "crassula helmsii" that is a non-native invasive weed present in the pond. The Parish Council also sought advice from the Environment Agency which did not advise on any control measures but provided a number of case studies from other sites in the UK where control had been attempted. These studies highlighted how control of the weed is extremely difficult and that the weed has not been eliminated from any

natural site where it has taken hold as it rapidly re-establishes. The growth of the weed will be monitored and the situation reviewed when necessary.

Woolmer Green supported the Centenary Poppy Campaign as part of the anniversary of the outbreak of World War I and Jenny grew and planted numerous poppies around the village planters and under the sign for Mardleybury Road which gave a brilliant show.

The village planters were particularly colourful this year and following completion of the road scheme the planter nearest the railway cottages was moved to the opposite end of the village to make an attractive gateway feature. This was considerably hard work and thanks must go to Jenny, Tracey, Martin and Jason for tackling the job.

Planning

The Parish Council submitted comments on thirteen planning applications.

Sadly the Fox pub which has been in existence since at least 1871 was closed by McMullens Brewery and was sold to a developer. It is expected that the pub building will be demolished and replaced with four semi-detached houses.

In June the Parish Council received an invitation from Solstice Renewables to view a proposal for a solar farm at Swangle's Lane, Knebworth; the site being visible from Woolmer Green and on our border. Councillors attended a presentation by the company and visited the site. Once a full planning application had been submitted the Parish Council unanimously voted to oppose the plans due to the detrimental impact it would have to the Green Belt. Parish Councillors considered that the application did not demonstrate the "very special circumstances" required for Green Belt development and that erecting solar panels on roofs is a more suitable alternative rather than taking agricultural land out of production. However following the submission of revised plans to North Herts District Council its Planning Committee granted the application.

Stephen McPartland MP, in whose constituency the solar farm is proposed, lent his full support and requested that the Secretary of State call the application in for determination. Woolmer Green, Knebworth & Datchworth Parish Councils also sent a joint letter to the Secretary of State to ask that he call in the application. It is rare for the Secretary of State to call in planning applications but he has now agreed and an enquiry conducted by a Government planning inspector will be carried out; possibly in November; their report will be submitted to the Secretary of State who will then make the final decision.

The Parish Council submitted a response to North Herts District Councils Local Plan consultation raising concern over lack of infrastructure, the impact of further development in Knebworth on Woolmer Green and the release of the Green Belt.

The Parish Council held a public meeting to gauge the opinion of villagers to the proposals in Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council's Local Plan which proposes 160 new houses for Woolmer Green up to 2031 and 12,500 houses in the Borough as a whole. The Council submitted a thorough & detailed response to the Local Plan consultation.

Consultations

The Parish Council submitted comments to the following consultations:

Hertfordshire's Household Waste Recycling Centres Consultation.

HCC Parish & Town Council Charter Consultation.

The Big Lottery consultation.

Community Engagement

Village Day- The Welwyn Hatfield Sport & Physical Activity Alliance (WHSPAA) were successful in a grant application to Sport England to enable sport to be brought to the villages. For the second year running we were able to bring the Sports Stadia to Village Day where young people were able to enjoy a variety of sports.

In commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of WWI and following considerable research, information was displayed inside the hall about each of the casualties from Woolmer Green who are commemorated on the war memorial . This was also on display in the Church on Remembrance Day.

Village Day was a great success again in 2014 and attracted a large number of residents.

Badminton Smash Up- Also as a result of the WHSPAA grant funding Badminton Smash Up was set up and is now a popular regular Wednesday evening activity aimed at over 11 year olds.

Carols round the Pond- Once again lots of residents gathered round the village pond to sing carols in celebration of the season and hold a collection for a good cause. This year £140 was collected to help towards church roof repairs.

Volunteers- A big thank you to Jenny, Ken, Gordon, Paula, Mia, Linda, Simon, Tracey, Scarlett, Martin, the two Jasons, Helen, Janet & Michelle, who all volunteered their time to help our community by planting, delivering, fetching & carrying, editing, printing & accounting. The Parish Council is always happy to hear from volunteers offering to help out.

Alan Edmonds

The Parish Council would like to commemorate the previous Parish Clerk, Alan Edmonds, who passed away in December. He was Clerk from 2003 to 2008 and was instrumental in setting up the procedures for the function of the Parish Council which had only been in existence for just over two years. Alan put the fledgling Parish Council on a firm footing and it is only fitting that we remember Alan and express our gratitude and appreciation for all the work he did for Woolmer Green.

In Memory of Founder Councillors

We must also pay tribute to two founding Parish Councillors who passed away this year; Terry Singer and Sheila Rogers. Both became Councillors at the very beginning of Woolmer Green Parish Council and we are grateful for the service they each gave to the village.

Statement of Accounts

| 2013/14 | <u>Total Receipts</u> | 2014/15 |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 40,991.53 | Hall Lettings | 40,807.96 |
| 4,881.75 | Children' Centre | 6,895.10 |
| 530.00 | Security | 930.00 |
| 1,600.00 | Pitch Fees | 1,290.00 |
| 485.00 | Bar | 675.00 |
| 848.50 | Farmers' Market Income | 636.40 |
| | Car Park | 1,666.69 |
| 493.70 | Allotments | 507.30 |
| 111.14 | Interest on Investments | 15.86 |
| 1,564.27 | Council Tax Support Grant | 1,356.22 |
| | Entertainment Fund | |
| | Village Day | 595.00 |
| | Advertising | 620.00 |
| 7,153.24 | Other | 4,853.00 |
| 58,659.13 | | 60,848.53 |
| | <u>Total Payments</u> | |
| 34,117.59 | Payroll | 34,548.44 |
| | Hall Maintenance: | |
| 3,932.30 | Rates | 4,008.91 |
| 4,527.61 | Insurance | 4,430.27 |
| 5,323.27 | Water, Gas, Electricity | 5,337.05 |
| 3,600.82 | License, Safety, Supplies | 3,707.74 |
| | Grounds Maintenance: | |
| 6,615.79 | Grounds | 5,626.17 |
| 2,945.00 | Playgrounds | 8,512.00 |
| 493.70 | Allotments | 507.30 |
| 1,035.19 | Office Expenses | 974.58 |
| 141.00 | Publicity | 150.00 |
| 405.00 | Audit & legal fees | 375.00 |
| 821.26 | HAPTC, CDA, CPRE, FIT | 788.40 |
| 730.00 | Grants | 1,040.00 |
| 461.77 | Sundry Expenses | 527.23 |
| | Entertainment Fund | |
| | Village Day | 604.80 |
| | Newsletter | 522.00 |
| 65,150.30 | TOTAL RECURRING EXPENSE | 71,659.89 |
| | | |
| 3,082.23 | Hall Maintenance: | 9,347.84 |
| 0.00 | Hall Heating | 3,449.60 |
| 1,283.33 | PPP | 1,000.00 |
| 1,300.00 | Wedding License | 0.00 |
| 0.00 | Contingency | 0.00 |
| 5,665.56 | TOTAL NON-RECURRING EXPENSE | 13,797.44 |
| 70,815.86 | | 85,457.33 |
| | <u>Income less Expenses</u> | |
| -12,156.73 | Precept | -24,608.80 |
| 21,500.00 | | 23,435.00 |
| 9,343.27 | Balance B/Fwd | -1,173.80 |
| 31,040.04 | FUND | 40,383.31 |
| 40,383.31 | | 39,209.51 |

NB The community Entertainment Fund which funds Village Day & the newsletter was taken over by the Parish Council at the end of 2013/14