



Annual Report 2015/16



Woolmer Green Parish Council

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Woolmer Green Parish Council was established in May 2000 following a separation from Welwyn Parish Council. Parish Councils are the third tier of local government after the County Council and Borough Council and have the power to raise taxes by adding a "precept" to Council Tax.

Woolmer Green Parish Council has six Councillors who are unpaid volunteers from the village dedicated to serving their community. The Council is responsible for maintaining and managing the village hall and grounds, maintaining the two playgrounds in the village, the "Jolly Garden" and protecting the unowned village pond.

In May 2015 all of the serving Councillors stepped down as their four year term of office came to an end and applications were encouraged via the newsletter for new candidates to come forward.

Councillors Gareth Lloyd and Laura Brooks-Payne decided not to re-stand and the Council is very grateful for the valuable contributions they made during their term of office.

Applications to fill the six Council vacancies were submitted by former Councillors Phil Corke, Andy Gribble, Sarah Hall and Tony White and two new residents also came forward; Jenny Hawkins and Dale Wilson. As this was the exact number of Councillors required they were all elected unopposed and an election was not necessary. The current Council will serve until May 2019.

Your Parish Councillors are:

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

Phil Corke, Vice Chairman, Village Hall & grounds, Planning, Staffing Committee.
Chairman of the School Friends Association.

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

Jenny Hawkins, Village Hall & grounds.

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

Dale Wilson, Transport. Staffing Committee.

Parish Clerk, Janet Pearce.

The Parish Clerk is a statutory office holder who is the Proper Officer of the Council and the Responsible Financial Officer. The Clerk is not an elected member but an employee who is responsible for carrying out the decisions of the Council, managing its facilities and ensuring it complies with the law.

Borough Councillors: Councillors Julie Cragg, Steve Markiewicz and Carl Storer.
Borough Councillor Carl Storer is stepping down in May 2016 and the Parish Council thank him for the support he has given to the Council over the years.

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 2016 the Surgeries will be held on 4th June, 6th August, 1st October and 3rd December 10.00am-10.45am. A Parish Councillor will also be in attendance.

County Councillor: Richard Smith.

Hall & Grounds

The Parish Council was approached by Splitz Dance, which regularly hires the hall, asking if the carpet in the committee room could be replaced with heavy duty vinyl as this would enable them to organise more classes. Splitz Dance offered to contribute half the cost of the floor. The Parish Council agreed to this proposal as it calculated that the increase in bookings would recover the Parish Council's contribution within a year as well as making the committee room look smarter. Total cost of the project was £2,200.

A grant from Welwyn Hatfield Sport and Physical Activity Alliance enabled the tennis court to be remarked and for some young people to receive tennis coaching.

A new waste bin was installed outside the village hall as the existing one was damaged.

New signs were erected in the orchard asking residents and visitors to respect the area which has become a haven for slow worms, bees, butterflies and birds, including a resident robin. The fruit trees are growing well and there was a particularly good crop of quince.

Volunteers came along to Wild Flower Planting day which took place in September and the resultant display of colour during the summer was magnificent.

Planning

The land at Entech was submitted by the owner to the Borough Council to be considered for inclusion in the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan. Following the publication by the Borough Council of the list of new sites that were put forward after the consultation in March, the Parish Council wrote to Welwyn Hatfield planning to say that the Council and residents would support development on the Entech site if the already submitted green belt site behind Marshall's was protected. The Parish Council opposes development on the green belt in the village, believes that an allocation of 160 new houses is excessive and that accepting 80 houses on the Entech site would be a reasonable outcome for Woolmer Green.

There had been much controversy over the proposed solar farm at Swangley's Lane in Knebworth on green belt land which borders Woolmer Green and Datchworth. The application had been called in to the Secretary of State for determination which would follow a public enquiry by a Government planning inspector. However in September Solstice Renewables withdrew the application saying that in light of Government announcements over the summer the costs of the public enquiry could not be justified.

Following an initial planning application that had been withdrawn the developers of the Fox site submitted a second planning application in April, again for two pairs of semi-detached houses following demolition of the Fox public house. The historic significance of the Fox building was brought to the attention of Welwyn Hatfield Planning by a conservation officer which prompted Planning to commission a conservation report in May. The subsequent report opposed the demolition of the building and considered that it could have been statutory listed if the developers had not gutted it. The Parish Council was surprised that the historical significance of the Fox pub had not been assessed during the confidential pre-planning advice stage and sent a letter of complaint to Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council. The Parish Council highlighted section 169 of the National Planning Policy Framework which states that a Local Planning Authority should predict the likelihood that currently unidentified heritage assets will be discovered.

In July Libby and Steve Rayner, the landlord and landlady of the Red Lion for fourteen years retired due to health issues. Sadly Steve Rayner passed away at the beginning of 2016. The Red Lion had opened very briefly since September but Punch Taverns informed the Parish Council that it has plans to refurbish the building during the spring/ summer and has confirmed that a new landlady has been appointed.

Following its closure villagers expressed their concern over the future of the Red Lion, particularly in light of the events that led to the demolition of the Fox pub. The Parish Council researched the history of the building, which dates back to at least 1723, at the Hertfordshire Archives and submitted an application to Historic England for it to be statutory listed. However Historic England informed the Parish Council it can only progress cases where the building is under threat due to a submitted planning application or that the land is included in a Local Plan. It advised that the building could be added to a "local list" of historic assets held by the Local Planning Authority.

The Parish Council have also submitted an application to Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council for the Red Lion to be designated an Asset of Community Value under the Localism Act 2011.

The Parish Council followed up the advice of Historic England with reference to including non-statutory listed historic assets on the "local list" and consulted Welwyn Hatfield Planning to discover that the Borough Council have not compiled a "local list" and had no plans to do so. Historic England have published a good practice guide for compiling a "local list" and cited examples where the local community had compiled their own and said there is funding available. The Parish Council is now embarking on producing a "local list" for Woolmer Green and will pursue the matter with the Borough Council in due course.

The Parish Council submitted responses to eighteen planning applications during 2015/16.

Environment

As a member of the Parish Paths Partnership the Council submits an application each year to Hertfordshire County Council for a £1,000 grant to be used to improve the public Rights of Way in the village. In 2015 the application was again successful and with a further contribution from the Rights of Way Officer's budget of £350, footpath 26 was resurfaced.

The flower planters at the north end of the village continue to provide a dazzling display of colour which brightens up the village and are enjoyed by residents and visitors passing through. The success of the planters is partly due to the quantity and wide variety of plants used for the display and this has been achieved by receiving generous donations from our sponsors to whom we are enormously grateful: Stagg Plumbing, J. Jackson Cars, Wallington Farms and Frank Cooper & Son. The Council was also able to purchase two new planters for the south end of the village with the help of our County Councillor, Richard Smith who donated funds from his Locality Budget.

Transport

Councillors attended the launch of the Hertfordshire Highways "Highways Together" Scheme. This scheme allows Parish Councils to undertake minor works like for example edging paths, cutting back vegetation or cleaning signs. The Parish Council is looking to repaint the listed mile post under this scheme.

The effects of the B197 road scheme were evaluated by Herts Highways and the Parish Council was disappointed that the road improvements did not achieve the target speed that is required to enable a 30mph speed limit to be implemented. This is largely due to:

- The retention of the turning lane at Bridge Road as requested by the police.
- Omitting narrowing the road outside Marshall's as the shop closed as works were due to start.
- Not being permitted a 6 meter wide road as the B197 is the overflow of the A1M.
- Mardleybury junction not being included in the scheme due to its complexity and large costs involved.

Table: Traffic Speed Data – Feb/March 2015 (7-day average)

Before figures (April 2013) shown in brackets for comparison purposes.

Location	Direction	Mean Speed (mph)	85th Percentile Speed (mph)
B197 London Road (lighting column no. 99 by Cawdor Stone Gallery)	Northbound	39.1 (40.0)	44.9 (45.3)
	Southbound	35.5 (36.9)	40.4 (41.3)
B197 London Road (lighting column no. 89 opposite Wolves Mere)	Northbound	32.5 (33.4)	38.6 (39.5)
	Southbound	30.0 (30.8)	35.4 (35.7)
B197 Mardley Hill (lighting column no. 79 north of Heath Road)	Northbound	34.5 (33.1)	39.8 (38.6)
	Southbound	36.2 (36.1)	41.6 (42.4)

Nevertheless the works have had positive benefits of improving accessibility and enhancing the village environment and the speed through the centre of the village has reduced.

Hertfordshire Highways initiated a gully cleaning programme and Woolmer Green Parish Council submitted photographs of a large number of gullies in the village that are in need of cleaning. Since then a number of gullies have been cleaned.

Consultations

The Parish Council submitted comments to the following consultations:

HMRC Landfill Communities Fund Consultation.

WHBC validation checklist consultation.

Hertfordshire Rail Strategy consultation.

The Hertfordshire Compact consultation.

Hertfordshire County Councils Passenger Assistant Consultation.

Community

Village Day

Village Day was held on Sunday 6th June and the weather was kind to us yet again with blue skies and bright sunshine contributing to the events success. The go-kart ride was a big attraction along with an inflatable joust, bouncy castles, roundabout, vintage cars and more stalls than ever before. The turnout was the biggest we've ever had; it was good to see so many local people gathered together and with the pre-school putting on the barbecue, the church organising the tea and cakes and the Chequers running the bar, Village Day was a very successful community event.

Parish Council Christmas Card Competition

Mardleybury Gallery owner, Sharon Struckman, organised the Parish Council Christmas card competition which was open to artists who exhibit at the gallery and local residents. Parish Councillors chose the winning image which was an illustration of a robin in a churchyard by Sara Denham.

Carols round the Pond

The Church organised the Carols round the Pond event on Christmas Eve and raised £82.32 for the United Nations Relief Fund for refugees.

School Admissions

The Parish Council supported a local resident in challenging the secondary school transfer rules with the Schools Adjudicator. As the admissions rules allocate a different "nearest school" depending on what road in Woolmer Green a child lives in the Parish Council consider that all the children in the village are not treated equally. The Schools Adjudicator did not uphold the complaint.

Volunteers

It was with great sadness that the Parish Council heard of the death of villager and keen volunteer, Ken Sisseman in October. Ken had regularly attended Parish Meetings in the past and for many years edited the village newsletter.

Thank you to volunteer Cathy who stepped down this year from opening up the hall for Sunday morning hirers.

Grateful thanks to two new volunteers who came forward following an appeal in the village newsletter. Grant has taken over the Sunday hall opening and is keen to be involved in village life and Jan has offered to deliver newsletters.

Statement of Accounts

2014/15	Receipts:	2015/16
40,807.96	Hall Lettings	44,675.84
6,895.10	Children' Centre	6,287.54
930.00	Security	360.00
1,290.00	Pitch Fees	935.00
675.00	Bar	340.00
636.40	Farmers' Market Income	637.50
1,666.69	Car Park	2,023.34
507.30	Allotments	507.30
15.86	Interest on Investments	152.08
1,356.22	Council Tax Support Grant	1,150.07
	Entertainment Fund :	
595.00	Village Day	1,093.50
620.00	Advertising	681.80
	Badminton Smash Up	375.00
4,853.00	Other	3,894.00
60,848.53	TOTAL RECEIPTS	63,112.97
	Payments:	
34,548.44	Payroll	35,164.66
	Hall Maintenance :	
4,008.91	Rates	4,085.51
4,430.27	Insurance	4,250.84
5,337.05	Water, Gas, Electricity, Waste	4,235.36
3,707.74	License, Safety, Supplies	4,376.53
	Grounds Maintenance :	
5,626.17	Grounds	7,657.05
8,512.00	Playgrounds	1,414.00
507.30	Allotments	512.98
974.58	Office Expenses	1,087.68
150.00	Publicity	150.00
375.00	Audit & legal fees	375.00
788.40	HAPTC, CDA, CPRE, FIT	788.85
1,040.00	Grants	540.00
527.23	Sundry Expenses	1,227.96
	Entertainment Fund :	
604.80	Village Day	764.34
522.00	Newsletter	522.00
	Badminton Smash Up	260.00
	Non Recurring Payments:	
9,347.84	Hall Maintenance	7,092.68
-	Hall Floor & Cleaner	4,973.55
-	Worktops	703.00
3449.60	Hall Heating	-
0	Election	337.71
1,000	PPP	1,350.00
0	Contingency	0
85,457.33	TOTAL PAYMENTS	81,869.70
-24,608.80	Income less Expenses	-18,756.73
23,435.00	Precept	23,785.00
-1,173.80	Surplus/Deficit	5,028.27
40,383.31	BALANCE BROUGHT FORWARD	39,209.51
39,209.51	TOTAL FUND	44,237.78

