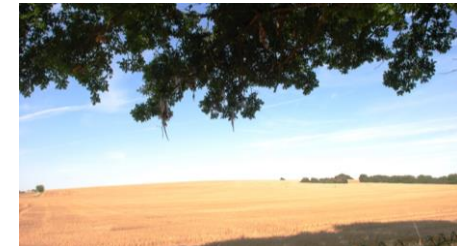


Woolmer Green Parish Council Annual Report 2016/17



Woolmer Green Parish Council

A Parish Council is a statutory civil local authority established under the Local Government Act of 1972. It is the first level of local government and provides communities with a democratic voice. Woolmer Green Parish Council was established in the year 2000.

Woolmer Green has six Parish Councillors who are all unpaid volunteers who live in the village and are dedicated to serving their community. The current Councillors were elected in May 2015 and will serve for four years.

In April 2016 Councillor Dale Wilson resigned creating a casual vacancy on the Council. At least ten letters from electors were received by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council within fourteen days of the notice of the vacancy requesting that a by election be held. Only one nomination paper was submitted by Grant Pinney therefore he was elected unopposed. Grant joined the Parish Council in July and attended a Councillor Training Course. We welcome the enthusiasm and new ideas that he brings to the Council.

Your Parish Councillors are:

Andy Gribble, Chairman, Transport, Staffing Committee, Young Person Liaison.
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.

Grant Pinney.

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

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.

The Parish Council holds its meetings on the second Tuesday of the month except for April and August. The meetings are open to the public.

Borough Councillors: Councillors Julie Cragg, Steve Markiewicz and Roger Trigg.

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 2017 the Surgeries will be held on 3rd June, 5th August, 7th October and 2nd December 10.00am-10.45am. A Parish Councillor will also be in attendance.

County Councillor: Councillor Richard Smith.

Member of Parliament: Grant Shapps MP

Hall & Grounds

At the beginning of the year new curtains were fitted throughout the hall smartening up all the rooms. Thank you to our County Councillor Richard Smith for a donation from his Locality Budget which paid for the new industrial tracks.

Also at the start of the year the hall kitchen was repainted.

Low energy electronic hand driers were fitted in the toilets.

A new up-to-date sound system and disco lighting was installed in the hall that can be rented out to hirers. This equipment is much simpler for the public to operate and encompasses the latest wireless technology.

At the end of the financial year the Parish Council had sufficient funds to pay for the meeting rooms, toilets and corridor to be repainted.

A defibrillator is now in place at the entrance to the village hall housed in a coded heated cabinet. This equipment is available for anyone to use to administer life-saving treatment to a casualty suffering from a cardiac-arrest. The Parish Council was advised by resident Sarah McGuinness of Critical Response Training who supplied the equipment and provided a free training session for residents. Thank you Sarah. The defibrillator was partly funded by the Wheels on Woolmer Green Event.

We applied to the Fields in Trust for a grant to help pay for the path through the orchard to be resurfaced as it had become very uneven. We were delighted when the Trust kindly donated the full cost of the project which was £1,650. Grateful thanks to Fields in Trust.

In July much disruption was caused when a small group of travellers, who had to leave their permanent travellers site, encamped in the hall car park. Following some amicable negotiations with the travellers a legal notice was served asking them to leave. This they duly did and left the car park clean and tidy. In order to deter this happening again in the future the Parish Council commissioned an openable height barrier to be fixed to the existing front gate.

Several residents asked for something to be done about the basketball net which was located in the hall car park making it inaccessible on occasions as well as being a safety issue. The Parish Council had discussed resolving the problem but other priorities continually took precedence. Therefore it was decided to seek funding from the Stevenage Community Trust. The Parish Council's bid was successful and we are grateful to the Trustees for their donation of £395. Now the basketball net is safely installed in the ball skills court.

The Parish Council purchased three benches for the hall grounds and is grateful to our County Councillor Richard Smith who donated £600 from his Locality Budget which covered the cost.

Planning

Following the uncertain future of the Red Lion at the start on 2016 the Parish Council decided to apply to the Borough Council to have the pub registered as an Asset of Community Value under the Localism Act 2011. The Council's application was successful and the pub is registered. This means that the owner cannot dispose of the Red Lion without letting the local authority know, change its use or demolish it without planning permission. If the asset is offered for sale the community would then be given six weeks to decide whether they want to make a bid.

Some Parish Councillors attended Planning Training that was organised by the Borough Council's senior planning officers.

The Parish Council responded to the concerns of residents to the proposals in the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council's Local Plan which allocates Green Belt land for development in Woolmer Green despite the previously developed Entech site being promoted for housing by its owners. The Council expressed residents' views to our Borough Councillors and senior planning officers and met with the owners of both Entech and the Green Belt sites. The Parish Council also supported the resurrected Save Woolmer Green group which organised a petition opposing green belt development. The Parish Council Chairman attended a Local Plan public event and spoke to senior officers and Borough Councillors responsible for planning to further promote Woolmer Green residents views. The Parish Council also organised a well-attended Public Meeting so that residents had the opportunity to voice their opinions to Borough Councillors. This all culminated in the submission of a detailed response to the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan consultation. A further letter to Borough Councillors setting out why the Local Plan should be changed was sent prior to the Boroughs planning committee meeting where possible changes to the submission document were discussed. Despite all our efforts Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council made no changes to the Local Plan. The Parish Council hope to attend the Planning Enquiry to put its case to the Government Planning Inspector once the Local Plan has been submitted for inspection.

The Parish Council attended the Knebworth Local Plan public meeting and submitted a response opposing the proposals of six hundred houses allocated for Knebworth to the North Herts Local Plan consultation.

The Parish Council submitted responses to nineteen planning applications during 2016/17.

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 2016 the application was again successful and a third of footpath 10, Bridger's Path, was resurfaced. The remaining two thirds of Bridger's Path will be resurfaced over the next two years.

The Parish Council attended the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) Rural Living Awards as the Woolmer Green wild flower meadow had been nominated. It was a successful evening as the wild flower meadow won the Mercury Award and Parish Councillor Jenny Hawkins won the Peterkin Award for her individual outstanding contribution to rural life. Congratulations to Jenny who is also responsible for ensuring the village planters provide a beautiful display of colour throughout the year.

An important part of rural life is being surrounded by beautiful mature trees which not only provide amenity value but cool the air, help counteract flooding and remove (sequester) CO² pollution from the atmosphere. Very few trees in Woolmer Green are protected and many have been lost over the years so the Parish Council has identified significant trees that warrant protection. So far Tree Protection Orders have been granted on the trees around the church, the four willows each side of the pond and the trees at Entech. As the Entech site is due to be developed the tree officer and the developer have identified which trees are important to preserve and which trees can be removed but there is also the opportunity to plant more trees here for future generations.

Following a request at last year's Annual Parish Meeting the Parish Council consulted the Welwyn Natural History Society and Defra regarding the control of *Crassula helmsii* in the

pond. After carefully evaluating all the information provided the Parish Council concluded that the current approach of leaving the pond undisturbed for the time being is the only prudent option available at present. Defra are funding trials to find a biological control for *Crassula helmsii* and the Parish Council is in direct contact with the Project Manager of the trials who has reported that an insect control has been found and the results look promising. It is hoped that the control can be tested in the wild later in the year.

Transport

A small sink hole appeared outside the Chequers pub in the spring and Highways were asked to investigate. They concluded it was not a risk to the public and is therefore a low priority for repair.

The issues of cars parked on pavements, verges and yellow lines has been discussed during the year and is a common problem in the County to which Herts Highways do not have an effective strategy for preventing at present. The Parish Council continue to encourage parents to park in the hall car park and use the walking bus to alleviate traffic congestion. The layby outside the school is often used for advertising cars for sale which reduces parking for parents. This has been reported but still continues.

Following the road improvements in 2014 a further speed survey was undertaken by Herts Highways. The results showed little change from the data collected in 2015.

Woolmer Green Parish Council along with Welwyn Parish Council, Oaklands School and St. Michael's Woolmer Green School, supported the petition raised by an Oaklands resident asking for traffic calming measures to be introduced on the B197. The speed of traffic on the B197 has long been a concern to residents in the village.

County Councillor Richard Smith has submitted a bid to the Police and Crime Commissioner's Road Safety Fund which, if successful, would pay for a feasibility study of the B197.

Consultations

The Parish Council submitted comments to the following consultations:

Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan Consultation.

Herts County Council Hertfordshire Transport Vision 2050.

2017/18 Local Government Finance Settlement Consultation.

North Herts Local Plan Consultation.

Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) 2018 Timetable Consultation.

Community

Village Day

Once again Councillor Phil Corke organised a great Village Day in June with lots of activities and trade stalls. This event is always so well attended and really brings the community together. This year Grant Pinney was keen to be involved and provided music and commentary.

Wheels on Woolmer Green

The Wheels on Woolmer Green event was the idea of resident, now Parish Councillor, Grant Pinney, who along with fellow resident Rob McGuinness, organised the event. It was a fascinating spectacle seeing over a hundred classic and vintage cars all lined up on the hall field. Prizes were awarded to various categories of vehicle and £667.86 was raised towards the purchase of a defibrillator for the village. As it was such a success Wheels on Woolmer Green will be back in 2017.

Badminton Smash Up

The Parish Council was keen to re-establish Badminton Smash Up which had proved popular in the past. Following information published in the newsletter it was clear there were several young people in the village interested in participating. When the Welwyn Hatfield Sports & Physical Activity Alliance had difficulty finding an activator to take the sessions a call for a volunteer was again published in the newsletter. This resulted in resident Paul Woodley coming forward. Paul already had experience as a badminton coach from his university days and wanted to get involved again. Since the re-launch in September Paul has become an official Badminton England Smash Up Activator and is also taking a further badminton course. Thank you Paul, for passing on your skills and enthusiasm to the young people of Woolmer Green.

Knebworth Football Club

At the beginning of last year the Parish Council was approached by Knebworth Football Club which was expanding its younger teams and needed additional pitches. Following consultations with them it was agreed that they could use the Woolmer Green recreation ground from the start of the 2016/17 season. Knebworth FC already attracted children from Woolmer Green so the Parish Council is delighted it is able to support the club.

Parish Council Christmas Card Competition

It was decided to hold a photography competition to select a Christmassy image of Woolmer Green taken by a resident for the Parish Council's Christmas card. Several entries were received but the Parish Council chose a picture of a tree in Carvers Croft illuminated by a street light which was submitted by resident Margaret Elliott. Well done Margaret.

Carols round the Pond

The Church organised the Carols round the Pond event on Christmas Eve and raised £174.12 for the Children's Society. This year the singing was accompanied by the new Woolmer Green Band which really enhanced the event.

Volunteers

Thank you to all the volunteers that came forward during the year offering to help the community. Thanks to Paul for taking on Badminton Smash Up, to Jo-Ann and Anne for delivering the newsletter and to Chris, Liane & Clare for offering to take on the weekly Garden Road playground inspection. The Parish Council really appreciates your help.

Grants Awarded

This year the Parish Council were able to help three village groups that applied for funding. £150 was awarded to the Wickfield Close Community so they could purchase some activity equipment, Woolmer Green Band was awarded the equivalent of 6 months free hire of the hall for rehearsals and £750 was awarded to the Church for maintenance of the churchyard. £50 was also donated to the Royal British Legion.

Finance

Due mainly to the hall bookings performing better than expected the Parish Council has made an £8,091.43 surplus this year. This together with the small surplus made in the previous year will greatly contribute to the cost of replacing the two large hall windows. The Parish Council was successful in raising £3,645 in grant funding to pay for various projects.

The deal made with Knebworth FC guarantees a regular income from hiring out the football pitches which had declined over the last couple of years.

Statement of Accounts

2015/16	Receipts:	2016/17
44,675.84	Hall Lettings	49,509.95
6,287.54	Children' Centre	6,397.97
360.00	Security	360.00
935.00	Pitch Fees	1,969.27
340.00	Bar	515.00
637.50	Farmers' Market Income	585.00
2,023.34	Car Park	1,875.60
507.30	Allotments	525.45
152.08	Interest on Investments	153.36
1,150.07	Council Tax Support Grant	693.66
	Entertainment Fund :	
1,093.50	Village Day	853.70
681.80	Advertising	429.00
375.00	Other	667.86
3,894.00	Other income	3,948.00
63,112.97	TOTAL RECEIPTS	68,483.82
	Payments:	
35,164.66	Payroll	36,328.70
	Hall Maintenance :	
4,085.51	Rates	4119.56
4,250.84	Insurance	3936.75
4,235.36	Water, Gas, Electricity, Waste	4,781.14
4,376.53	License, Safety, Supplies	4,857.80
	Grounds Maintenance :	
7,657.05	Grounds	7,357.80
1,414.00	Playgrounds	1,620.88
512.98	Allotments	519.77
1,087.68	Office Expenses	1,192.50
150.00	Publicity	150.00
375.00	Audit & legal fees	375.00
788.85	HAPTC, CDA, CPRE	734.73
540	Grants	1479.00
1227.96	Sundry Expenses	799.50
	Entertainment Fund :	
764.34	Village Day	1,056.23
522.00	Newsletter	438.00
260.00	Other	200.00
	Non Recurring Payments:	
7,092.68	Hall Maintenance	9,541.00
-	Curtains	2,200.91
-	Hand Driers	691.38
-	Benches	759.11
4,973.55	Hall Floor & Cleaner	-
703.00	Worktops	-
337.71	Election	575.17
1,350.00	PPP	998.00
0	Contingency	0
81,869.70	TOTAL PAYMENTS	84,652.39
-18,756.73	Income less Expenses	-16,168.57
23,785.00	Precept	24,260.00
5,028.27	Surplus	8,091.43
39,209.51	BALANCE BROUGHT FORWARD	44,237.78
44,237.78	TOTAL FUND	52,329.21

