



WOOLMER GREEN
PARISH COUNCIL
Annual Report 2023/24



PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Councils are a statutory local authority in their own right. They were established under the Local Government Act 1894 which removed all non-ecclesiastical functions from church parish councils and passed them to newly established local elected bodies called Parish Councils. They are not connected to the church which is a common misconception.

In the 1972 Local Government Act was passed and this, along with other legislation, forms the structure under which all parish councils operate today.

Parish Councils are the lowest tier of government and have the power to raise taxes through the Council Tax and can undertake projects that benefit their community.

Councillors are elected to serve a four-year term and the current term began in May 2023.

WOOLMER GREEN PARISH COUNCILLORS

Andy Gribble, Chairman

Transport, Staffing Committee, Young Person Liaison.

Phil Corke, Vice Chairman

Village Hall, Community, Staffing Committee.

Tim Dix

Planning, Hall Grounds.

Sarah Hall

Finance, Staffing Committee, Allotment Liaison. Treasurer of the Allotment Committee.

Rob Horton

Planning, Environment.

Grant Pinney

Village Hall, Community.

CLERK TO THE COUNCIL

Janet Pearce

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

BOROUGH COUNCILLORS

Councillors Julie Cragg, Terry Mitchinson and Roger Trigg.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR

Councillor Tony Kingsbury.

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

Grant Shapps MP

HALL AND GROUNDS

We are lucky to have such a modern hall with ample parking that is very popular as a venue for private functions such as children's and adult parties, wedding receptions, luncheons, community group events, work events, seminars, training, meetings, counselling as well as all the regular activities that the community can participate in like karate, dancing, pilates, carpet bowls and family history.

As the hall is in such demand, and the Parish Council's main source of income, it needs to be well maintained. It is now over thirty years old so there is always something that needs updating.

It was becoming obvious the hall underfloor heating had become unreliable due to the manifolds corroding so it was very timely that Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council had successfully applied to the Government Shared Prosperity Fund, which meant the Parish Council would benefit from a £15,000 grant over a three-year period. The first two instalments of £10,000 have covered the cost of upgrading the heating system which will also improve efficiency.

Another issue needing urgent attention was the hall guttering. The soffits were very rotten and not supporting the guttering causing them to overflow. They have been replaced with UPVC which should last for many years to come. It was also discovered that the guttering at the front of the hall had been incorrectly joined to the extension built in 2008, when the children's centre was built, so that during heavy downpours water overflowed and caused damp to the wall. This has now been corrected and the total cost of all the work was £4,390.

The two fire doors at the south end of the hall have been replaced with aluminium as the original wooden doors were rotting and this cost £6,800.

The Parish Council had a three-year agreement to fix energy prices so avoided the volatility with fuel costs over the winter of 2022/23, but this agreement is due to end in July 2024. Quotes were obtained from an energy broker when prices were lower and it was decided, in order to guarantee certainty, to fix a new price from July 2024 to September 2026.

During the year the Council purchased 7 new trestle tables and a small storage trolley to store in the larger meeting room. These will be of benefit to the market and Village Day organisers and also save hirers and caretakers having to carry tables from room to room. These items cost £947.41.

The Council purchased a new updated projector that can be hired by hall users.

Two outside electrical sockets in a secure metal box were installed.

The Council reviewed hall hire rates for 2024/25

VILLAGE HALL HIRE RATES FROM 1st APRIL 2024			
	SATURDAYS & SUNDAYS	SATURDAY EVENINGS FROM 6pm	WEEKDAYS
HALL	£35 per hour	£45 per hour	£26 per hour
MEETING ROOM 1	£21 per hour	£21 per hour	£16 per hour
MEETING ROOM 2	£13 per hour	£13 per hour	£11 per hour
ALL ROOMS ALL DAY	SATURDAY £700 SUNDAY £500		

The annual playground inspection identified that one of the swing posts was rotting and this was replaced by Wickstead under guarantee.

The small bench in the Garden Road playground was replaced.

The Parish Council was approached by a recycling company called ASTCO asking to site a clothes recycling bin on Council property. ASTCO works with charities and non-profit organisations, such as Parish Councils, and donates 30p per kilo of collected items.

The Council agreed to the proposal and the clothes recycling container was placed in a discrete location in the village hall grounds. Everything deposited is re-used, recycled or repurposed and none of it goes to landfill which is great for the environment.

The money raised will go towards maintaining and improving our community facilities.

Recently the Parish Council received a letter from a commercial agent representing Hertfordshire County Council to say that it is closing Barleyfields Family Centre and asked the Parish Council if it would consider surrendering the lease on the Family Centre rooms. The Parish Council is currently investigating its options.

PLANNING

Local Plan

The Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan was submitted for inspection by a government appointed planning inspector in 2017. Since then, it has been subject to numerous Hearing Sessions to discuss the plan in detail with anyone who wished to take part and express their views.

A local landowner had submitted land to the rear of the car dealership and extending to the chocolate factory for consideration for inclusion in the Local Plan, and Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council assessed that it was suitable for development and could accommodate 150 dwellings.

From the outset, and taking into account feedback from residents, the Parish Council objected to the site being developed. Apart from the loss of Green Belt, the Parish Council argued that there is insufficient infrastructure, in particular road capacity, and a high risk of flooding. It supported the development of two brownfield sites, which had been earmarked for employment, and warned that it was inevitable that all three sites would be developed for housing and increase the size of the village by over 40%.

The Parish Council robustly put forward its case by supporting the Save Woolmer Green Group which handed in a petition against Green Belt development to Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, it raised its concerns by writing to the Borough Council and discussed the Local Plan with our Borough Councillors. It encouraged villagers to respond to consultations, met with and gained the support of our MP. It engaged the expertise of a planning consultant to represent the Parish Council at the relevant Hearing Sessions and wrote to the Secretary of State for Housing and Local Government on two occasions.

All our efforts to state our case did not convince the planning inspector who submitted his Inspector's Report on the Examination of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan and concluded that the Plan is sound and capable of adoption.

The Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan was finally adopted on 12th October 2023, and this will now be used in determining planning applications and development decisions within the Borough.



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An outline planning application has been submitted for the development of the former Green Belt site for 150 dwellings to include affordable housing, public open space, landscaping, sustainable drainage system (SuDS) and vehicular access points. The Parish Council has objected to this citing the significant flooding risk and concerns regarding road access.

An outline planning application has been submitted to North Herts Council for two hundred dwellings in Knebworth. It is proposed that Swanley's Lane, past Knebworth school, should be closed. Woolmer Green Parish Council has objected to the application as closing Swangley's Lane will divert more traffic into New Road, Mardleybury Road and London Road and adversely affect the quality of life of residents in both villages.

The Parish Council responded to 13 planning applications throughout the year.

TRANSPORT

At the Parish Council's Annual Meeting in April 2023 the issue was raised that, now the south access at the Chequers is fenced off, drivers use the dropped kerb area as a lay by forcing pedestrians, including children walking to school, to walk into the road.

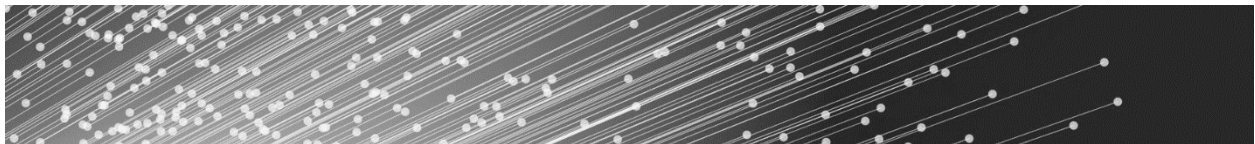
Our County Councillor, Tony Kingsbury, allocated some of his Highways Locality Budget to have the kerb reinstated which has made the area much safer. The Parish Council is very grateful to Councillor Kingsbury and thanks him for resolving this issue.



It is now two and a half years since plans for a puffin crossing at the north of Woolmer Green, that would make crossing the road to access the shops safer, were approved by Welwyn Hatfield planning. All the legal matters have been dealt with by Herts Highways and in December 2023 the owners of Kellard House informed the Parish Council that they were in the process of obtaining tenders for competitive quotes. The matter is being dealt with by Welwyn Hatfield enforcement, which recently informed us that they have suggested the owners submit a variation of condition for a revised puffin crossing. The Parish Council will continue to pursue the issue to ensure the work is carried out.

BROADBAND

Broadband company, Gigaclear, asked to meet with the Parish Council to discuss the rollout of full fibre broadband in Woolmer Green and Oaklands. The company was in the process of obtaining permission via an Access Agreement, to carry out work to existing infrastructure on private land and plan to begin installation during 2024. They assured that disruption will be minimal and wish to keep the community fully informed to reassure residents.



COMMUNITY

Wheels on Woolmer Green

The popular Wheels on Woolmer Green car show took place again on the first Monday Bank Holiday in May. There were lots of interesting cars on display from vintage models, classic and custom cars. Thanks to Councillor Grant Pinney for organising the event, to Woolmer Green Band for entertaining us and to the volunteers that helped on the day. A total of £943 was collected for mental health charity Just One Click Away.



WoolyFest

Following the successful Jubilee Picnic last year, it was decided to hold a music event in the hall as a warmup to Village Day the following day. A number of popular local bands featured, and it was an enjoyable musical evening.

Village Day

Another successful Village Day was held on the first Sunday of June and, unlike last year when the weather was grey and drizzly, the sun shone which encouraged a great turnout of stallholders and the public.

Splitz Dance students showed off their talent by doing a presentation in the hall, residents were keen to enter their pet in the popular pet show competition; lots of dogs came along. Thanks to Councillors Phil Corke and Grant Pinney for putting on such a great event for the community to come together and have a great time.



Warhammer Club

Warhammer 40,000 is a miniature wargame produced by Games Workshop and has become a very popular club activity. When Councillor Pinney heard there was interest in the village he proposed setting up a free Warhammer Club in Woolmer Green for anyone, children and adults, interested in getting involved helped by volunteer Rob Wood.

Games Workshop supplied a starter pack of materials to help plan sessions and it was up and running on Wednesday evenings by the end of September and has proved immensely popular.

Carols round the Tree

Thanks to Woolmer Green Band and Reverend Christie Gilfeather for livening up proceedings at the annual Carols round the Tree carol singing event. Everyone enjoyed the singalong and the mulled wine too.

The weather was a bit windy and at one point the tree was blown over, but it was soon recovered and at least it did not rain like last year.

Residents had been asked to nominate a charity for the collection and Nicola and Beverley came forward to nominate Mind in Mid Herts, a very worthy cause. Thanks to all of you that came along and donated so generously. £168.84 was raised on the evening.



Over the Christmas period Woolmer Green Band played at events in Datchworth and Burnham Green, as well as in our local pubs the Chequers and the Red Lion, where they collected donations and raised a further £386.94.

In January the Parish Council was able to present Emma, from Mind in Mid Herts, with a cheque for a grand total of £555.78.

Community Award

The Community Award for 2023 was presented to Chris Tyler who volunteers to regularly inspect the playgrounds to check their condition and ensure they are safe. Often Chris carries out small playground and fence repairs free of charge and the Parish Council is immensely grateful for all that he does for the village.



The Welwyn Hatfield Community Lottery

The Parish Council has been contemplating planting a real and permanent Christmas tree in the hall grounds that could be lit up for the Carols round the Tree event, so when the Council heard about the Welwyn Hatfield Lottery it decided to take part to see if the money could be raised. The PC could recruit supporters and would receive 50p per supporter each week. Publicity materials and a dedicated website page are provided by the Community Lottery.

Red Lion Light Switch On

Chairman Andy Gribble was delighted to be invited to switch on the Christmas lights at the Red Lion accompanied by Councillors Phil Corke and Sarah Hall. The Red Lion lit up the high street with their great festive decorations. Thank you Red Lion.

Grants

£50 was donated to the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal.

£450 was donated to Woolmer Green Band for playing at Parish events which would help pay for hire of the village hall for rehearsals.

Training

Resident first aid trainer, Sarah McGuinness of Critical Response Training, kindly offered to hold a free training session for residents to familiarise themselves with the two AEDs in the village on Friday 22nd March.

Litter Pick

The litter pick has been arranged for Sunday 28th April at 10.30am.

Staff and Volunteers

Last, but by no means least, the Parish Council wishes to thank its staff that keep the hall clean, tidy and running smoothly, Julie, Peter and Abdul. Thanks too to all our wonderful volunteers whom we couldn't do without and a special mention to Jenny for all her hard work planting and tending our village planters.

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

2022/23	Receipts:	2023/24
41,959.59	Hall Lettings	50,642.25
7,644.95	Barleyfield's Family Centre	8,016.87
160.00	Security	320.00
3,017.50	Pitch Fees	2,390.65
210.00	Bar	255.00
1,584.00	Farmers' Market Income	1,525.10
2,280.00	Car Park	510.00
-	Clothes Bank	164.10
637.22	Allotments	723.31
325.18	Interest on Investments	702.32
	Entertainment Fund :	
529.50	Village Day	1,404.50
-	Woolyfest	1,607.99
1,008.00	Advertising	940.60
550.83	Other	1,570.42
439.14	Other income	13,345.00
60,345.91	TOTAL RECEIPTS	84,118.11
	Payments:	
49,684.38	Payroll	53,322.16
	Hall Maintenance :	
4,007.04	Insurance	4,300.60
8,209.15	Water, Gas, Electricity, Waste	7,166.56
6,018.78	License, Safety, Supplies	7,111.98
	Grounds Maintenance :	
6,696.56	Grounds	8,514.39
374.00	Playgrounds	317.50
637.22	Allotments	723.31
1,969.40	Office Expenses	1,375.58
185.00	Publicity	165.00
375.00	Audit & legal fees	495.00
877.82	HAPTC, CDA, CPRE	910.57
1,260.88	Grants	1,119.99
592.21	Sundry Expenses	548.04
	Entertainment Fund :	
1,019.02	Village Day	665.36
-	Woolyfest	1,117.17
769.00	Newsletter	700.00
1,089.14	Other	1,570.78
	Non Recurring Payments:	
13,811.10	Hall Maintenance	22,071.02
-	Dropped Kerb & Sockets	1,520.00
14,424.00	Ball skills court	-
0	Planning Consultant	250.00
-	Election	556.62
0	Contingency	0
111,999.70	TOTAL PAYMENTS	114,521.63
-51,653.79	Income less Expenses	-30,403.52
27,463.00	Precept	28,836.00
-24,190.79	Surplus/Deficit	-1,567.52
64,156.23	BALANCE BROUGHT FORWARD	39,965.44
39,965.44	TOTAL FUND	38,397.92