

WOOLMER GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

Annual Report 2022/23



WHAT IS A PARISH COUNCIL?

Elected parish councils were first established in the Local Government Act 1894. Its effect was to transfer all non-religious functions from the church to the elected Parish Councils to reinvigorate local communities and give them a voice. Much later the 1972 Local Government Act was passed and this, along with other legislation, forms the structure under which all parish councils operate today.

A parish council is a corporate body, a legal entity, separate from that of its members. Its decisions are the responsibility of the whole body. Parish councils have been granted powers by Parliament, including the authority to raise money through taxation (the precept) and a range of powers to spend public money. They can play a vital part in representing the interests of the communities they serve and improving the quality of life and the local environment.

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

In May the Parish Council was delighted to appoint a new morning caretaker, Abdul. He has fitted in to the team running the hall really well and several hirers of the hall have commented on how friendly and helpful he is. Well done Abdul.

The hall has underfloor heating, and it became obvious during the winter that some rooms in the hall were very hot and other areas were not heating up at all. A heating engineer and an underfloor heating specialist have carried out a thorough investigation and submitted a proposal to correct this problem but also, in light of the increase to fuel bills this past year, recommended that a more efficient system to control the heating remotely would save on fuel costs. Coincidentally, just before Christmas, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council informed the Parish Council that they had successfully applied to the Government Shared Prosperity Fund which will cover most of the refurbishment costs.

The Parish Council likes to keep the hall hire rates competitive and has not increased them for several years but with bookings still not fully recovered to pre 2020 levels, and the higher cost of living having an impact, the Council agreed to increase rates from 1st April 2023. Woolmer Green residents will be given a discount of 15%.

WOOLMER GREEN HALL HIRE RATES FROM 1st APRIL 2023				
	SATURDAYS	SATURDAY EVENINGS FROM 6pm	SUNDAYS	WEEKDAYS
HALL	£30 per hour	£40 per hour	£28 per hour	£22 per hour
MEETING ROOM 1	£18 per hour	£18 per hour	£16 per hour	£14 per hour
MEETING ROOM 2	£11 per hour	£11 per hour	£9 per hour	£9 per hour
ALL ROOMS ALL DAY	£600		£450	

In recent times many residents had asked if something could be done to improve the tennis court facility as it was rather run down. The Parish Council had recognised this and made preliminary investigations into costs which were significant for a small parish council.

Following professional advice, it was agreed that the priority should be to resurface and remark the court and install an all-weather tennis net. The Parish Council was grateful for the £1,000 contribution towards the project by County Councillor Tony Kingsbury from his Locality Budget. Vegetation had to be cut back around the outside of the court and Chiltern Sports were engaged to carry out the refurbishment work. The project cost £14,424 plus a further £900 for the pruning carried out by Wayward Pines. Thanks also to Chris Tyler for replacing two broken fence supports. Residents will be able to enjoy this upgraded facility for many years to come.

A rotten timber beam outside the hall was replaced at a cost of £490.

It was disappointing that one weekend someone committed vandalism by spraying graffiti on the village hall & both playgrounds. The damage was reported to the police and cameras detected some individuals responsible but there was insufficient evidence to identify them. This created a lot of work for volunteers who cleaned as much as possible and a specialist company was enlisted to remove the graffiti from brickwork.

A new infant swing was fitted in the hall playground to replace the existing one which was showing signs of deterioration.

PLANNING

Local Plan

The Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan will shape future development in the borough up until 2032 and was submitted for examination on 15th May 2017. Melvyn Middleton BA(Econ) DipTP DipMgmt MRTPI has been appointed by the Secretary of State to carry out an independent examination of the Local Plan and the process continues. The examination Hearings by the government planning inspector have concluded and amendments have been made to the original plan.

The inspector has assessed that 15,200 dwellings will need to be built in Welwyn Hatfield over a thirty-year period. Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council have argued that working patterns have changed over the last couple of years and considered that population growth had been significantly overestimated. It proposed that 12,775 homes would be sufficient, but the inspector rejected this saying housing requirements cannot be reassessed part way through the examination process.

The final Main Modifications consultation took place from 4th January until 15th February 2023. In Woolmer Green the car dealership site was changed from employment land to a site suitable for housing and the former Entech employment site, now fully developed, is classed as windfall. The Parish Council responded to the modifications proposed for Woolmer Green which it generally agrees with. However, it still disputes that the development of the Green Belt should be found sound as Woolmer Green can accommodate 106 dwellings on brownfield land which it considers a fair contribution. A major concern with the Green Belt site is the future danger of severe flooding.

The Parish Council has discussed the impact on Woolmer Green with its MP, Grant Shapps, on several occasions, most recently in February, and he is fully supportive of the Parish Council's view.

Land adjacent to 52 London Road

An area of land that joins Knebworth but is within the boundary of Woolmer Green was promoted for inclusion in the Local Plan for housing development. This site was eventually rejected by the Borough Council as it narrows the fragile gap between Woolmer Green and Knebworth as well as joining the two villages together.

At the end of March last year, the site owner submitted an application for outline planning permission to build 24 dwellings on the site but eventually this was refused by Welwyn Hatfield Council due to the land being Green Belt and the development being in conflict with the Draft Local Plan. Both Woolmer Green and Knebworth Parish Councils submitted objections. We await the possibility the applicant appeals the decision.

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

TRANSPORT

Safer Routes to School



In December 2022 Hertfordshire County Council invited the Parish Council to a meeting to introduce us to the Safer Routes to School projects in Oaklands and Woolmer Green. The aim of the project is to help people walk, wheel and cycle more often by making these journeys safer and more convenient.

Reducing the reliance on private cars, particularly for shorter journeys, helps reduce congestion on the roads and improve air quality, but also deliver health and wellbeing benefits in our community.

In Woolmer Green the plan is to improve walking, wheeling and cycling on London Road between St Michael's School and Tesco Express. The aim is to introduce:

- A signalised crossing point directly outside St Michael's Woolmer Green school to replace the well-used refuge island crossing point.
- A lower speed limit along the B197 London Road throughout the village.
- Wider pavements to include new cycleways to make it easier to walk and cycle between St Michael's School, local amenities, and businesses.

The Parish Council and local schools have been campaigning for a 30mph speed limit and the introduction of traffic calming measures on London Road for many years, so this initiative is very welcome.

Hertfordshire Highways conducted a public survey in February and are using the comments it received to help develop the designs. There will be a public consultation later this year when everyone will have the opportunity to comment further.

ENVIRONMENT

Queen's Green Canopy – Plant a tree for the Jubilee



Parish Councillors were out in force on the Easter weekend to Plant a Tree for the Jubilee to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee.

Community groups and individuals were encouraged to play their part in a unique scheme to enhance our environment by planting trees as part of The Queen's Green Canopy tree planting initiative. This will create a sustainable legacy which will benefit future generations and Woolmer Green Parish Council was delighted to take part.

The Parish Council was awarded £350 from Queen's Green Canopy Fund to purchase three trees for planting in Woolmer Green. The trees have been chosen for their smaller size, wildlife benefits, attractive flowers and autumn colour; Sorbus "Embley" and Crataegus "Rosea Flore Pleno".

Planters



We receive so many compliments about our wonderful planters, they lift everyone's spirits and, as always, we are eternally grateful to volunteer, Jenny, who tends them. Every spring she adds fresh compost and fertiliser to the planters, chooses the plants from Clockhouse Nursery and spends the rest of the summer watering and dead heading. It was quite a challenge keeping up with the watering in the long hot summer of 2022 but the planters continued to look beautiful.

COMMUNITY

Chequers

Following extensive refurbishment, Friday 8th April saw the grand opening of the Chequers pub. The pub has been transformed and is a great asset to the village. We wish Dan and his team every success.



Wheels on Woolmer Green

After a two year break due to the pandemic, Wheels on Woolmer Green was back on May Bank Holiday Monday and it was bigger than ever. All sorts of interesting vehicles were on display from vintage to modern classic cars.



Thanks to Parish Councillor Grant Pinney for organising the event which raised a grand total of £650 for nominated mental health charity 'Just One Click Away' (JOCA).

Village Day

Another event making a return in 2022 was Village Day and this year it was followed by a Jubilee Picnic. The weather wasn't particularly kind to us but although it was overcast at least it remained dry. The weather did put off some stall holders and games which didn't show up and the teacup roundabout broke down en-route. Nevertheless, lots of people still came along.

We had some fantastic cake entries in the Jubilee Baking Competition and over 20 very well-behaved dogs entered the pet competition. Woolmer Green Band played admirably, and we had some wonderful live performers throughout the day. Thanks to AWD Scaffolding who offered to erect our stage free of charge.

The Grand Finale at the Jubilee Picnic was a rendition of the National Anthem performed by police officers who came along to the event. What great sports!



Warm Space

The Parish Council was delighted to welcome our new curate, Christie Gilfeather, to our September meeting. The new curate introduced herself and said the church is responding to concerns that some people may not be able to look after themselves during the winter due to the increasing costs of living. She proposed that the village hall be used one afternoon per week to offer a warm space for anyone that needed it.

The Parish Council agreed it should work with the church to support our residents and the Monday afternoon sessions, that continued until the end of March, proved very popular.

Christmas Market

There was so much going on at the Christmas Market; cookie decorating, reindeer making, Santa's Grotto, mulled wine available, Sugar Plum Fairies dance display, Welwyn Hatfield Ukelele Band as well as lots of stalls. Thank you to our market manager, Tracie, who works so hard at promoting the monthly market and making it so successful.



Carols round the Tree

We had a great turnout for Carols round the Tree at the village hall and, unlike last year, it didn't rain! Thank you to Woolmer Green Band for accompanying our magnificent resident village vocalists who so generously donated to our chosen charity, nominated by market manager, Tracie, Herts Charity for Deprived Children.



£179.06 was collected at the event and Woolmer Green Band had collected £260.08 from other events where they had performed; they are becoming so popular! A total of £439.14 was donated.

Noticeboard

The Parish Council noticeboard had a complete overhaul and now looks very smart. A fantastic job was done by local joiner Lee Castle and cost £690.



Grants

£50 was donated to the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal. St. Michael's Church was awarded £750.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund



In December Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council notified us that their successful bid to the government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund meant the Parish Council could be awarded £5,000 per year for three years. As the hall underfloor heating system needs refurbishing and updating the 2022/23 and 2023/24 tranches of funding will be allocated to this project. The Chairman was delighted to greet the Welwyn

Hatfield Mayor, Councillor Barbara Fitzsimon and Leader of Welwyn Hatfield Council, Councillor Tony Kingsbury to receive the award.

Litter Pick



The Council organised a litter pick around the village on Sunday 26th March as part of the Annual Keep Britain Tidy Great British Spring Clean campaign. There were plenty of volunteers to cover the whole village and lots of rubbish was cleared. As a thank you, volunteers were rewarded with a free cuppa at the monthly market.

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.

Special thanks too to all our wonderful volunteers; Chris for inspecting the playgrounds and doing odd jobs, Janet for taking the newsletter bundles round to the deliverers, the newsletter deliverers: Andrew, Stuart, Emma, Jean, Helen, Jan, Gordon & Anne and village planter care, as already mentioned above, Jenny. Thank you all so much!

Community Award



The 2022 Community Award was presented to volunteer Jenny in appreciation of the hard work she does brightening up the village with colourful floral displays.

Chairman Andy Gribble and Councillor Rob Horton presented the award by one of the planters.

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

2021/22	Receipts:	2022/23
34,508.42	Hall Lettings	41,959.59
6,925.40	Barleyfield's Family Centre	7,644.95
320.00	Security	160.00
2,102.18	Pitch Fees	3,017.50
0	Bar	210.00
1,606.00	Farmers' Market Income	1,584.00
4,370.00	Car Park	2,280.00
591.68	Allotments	637.22
292.46	Interest on Investments	325.18
	Entertainment Fund :	
0	Village Day	529.50
1,193.00	Advertising	1,008.00
0	Other	550.83
7,066.20	Other income	439.14
58,975.34	TOTAL RECEIPTS	60,345.91
	Payments:	
41,886.51	Payroll	49,684.38
	Hall Maintenance :	
3,239.17	Insurance	4,007.04
7,250.63	Water, Gas, Electricity, Waste	8,209.15
2,613.52	License, Safety, Supplies	6,018.78
	Grounds Maintenance :	
6,004.77	Grounds	6,696.56
2,074.50	Playgrounds	374.00
591.68	Allotments	637.22
1,388.94	Office Expenses	1,969.40
155.00	Publicity	185.00
375.00	Audit & legal fees	375.00
849.70	HAPTC, CDA, CPRE	877.82
1,200.00	Grants	1,260.88
979.20	Sundry Expenses	592.21
	Entertainment Fund :	
0	Village Day	1,019.02
503.00	Newsletter	769.00
0	Other	1,089.14
	Non Recurring Payments:	
7,973.55	Hall Maintenance	13,811.10
-	Ball skills court	14,424.00
0	Contingency	0
77,085.17	TOTAL PAYMENTS	111,999.70
-18,109.83	Income less Expenses	-51,653.79
27,463.00	Precept	27,463.00
9,353.17	Surplus/Deficit	-24,190.79
54,803.06	BALANCE BROUGHT FORWARD	64,156.23
64,156.23	TOTAL FUND	39,965.44