

# Hatley Parish Council

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The year from the last AGM in May 2022 saw the departure of two Councillors, Margot Eagle and Nicola Jenkins, whose services to the community we are all grateful for.

They have been replaced by Councillors Carol Cooper and Councillor Paul Kraus, and we welcome them both on board.

With such a small and rural community as ours it is important that the Parish Council is regularly invigorated with new people, and I urge anyone who has any community spirit to consider putting themselves forward to join the Council. There is training available, which both of the new Councillors have received. Carol has refreshed the Hatley Village Hall Association (HVA), initiated a Neighbourhood watch scheme and applied her considerable energy to help organising the cleaning of the Village Hall. Paul, as an engineer, has also applied his talents to various repairs, getting the notice board functioning and getting the bar plumbing to work again; all of this in addition to dealing with the usual Council business. Thank you both.

Councillor Nickerson has reintroduced a Speed watch program as part of our efforts to get a 30-mph zone put into the village. As the weather warms and the days grow longer, keep an eye out for their high viz jackets and speed measuring signs. Councillor Pinney keeps an eye on the speed warning machines and played an important part in helping us acquire a set of goal posts for the Recreation Ground.

Martin Ward and his team keep the Hall defibrillator in good order; the time-expired consumables were replaced this year. Thanks again to them all. Many of you came to the two CPR training courses which were given by Magpas recently, the charity which keeps the air ambulance in operation.

Peter Mann continues to keep our very informative and clear website up to date, for which we are all grateful: thank you Peter. And it is clearly read all over the world as we have a trickle of people called 'Hatley' or 'St George' who pass through, exploring their roots.

East Hatley phone box is now available for free calls to UK landlines and mobiles, thanks the Nicola Jenkins efforts. The one in Hatley St George might follow this year.

As most people will have noticed, this year saw a change to the Luton and Stansted inbound flight paths. There have been various local meetings on the topic, and our local MP has become involved. We have publicised how comments can be made to the relevant authority. The period of so-called consultancy is due to end this year.

It has been a relatively quiet year on the Planning front with one modest extension in East Hatley approved by us.

We have as a Council, declared a Climate Emergency, but are finding it difficult to find more things to try and do to play our part in trying to help. Any suggestions are welcome.

Once again, we are grateful to the various inhabitants who braved the vagaries of the March weather and collected many bags of litter from along the main roads with our litter pick.

The final touches to the new Village Hall entrance and bathrooms were completed last year, with thanks again to Peter Mann and Mervin Lack and the team they organised to accomplish this. We are still trying to sort out some condensation problems, but the facilities are certainly up to a high standard now. Along with improvement to the lighting, the number of electrical sockets and repairs to the rather rough and potentially dangerous floorboards, the Village Hall is open for hiring and is beginning to fill again. We have re-organised the booking form and increased the rates.

This year also saw the resignation of our previous Clerk, Nicola Pearce. Luckily our ex-Clerk, Kim Wilde, was able to step in as a locum and then become our regular Clerk again. There proved to have been much paperwork which hadn't been properly completed and Kim's experience, eye for detail and considerable long hours of Clerk work has got us now back on track again, for which we are all most appreciative. Just about all the points our outside audit raised have already been addressed.

Following on from a review of Council business, we have changed the format of meetings, putting all the financial business at the start, when people are fresh, getting Councillors to each take on a piece of business to review, so that the load is spread, and the process is speeded up. We have also tightened up procedures to try and reduce the chance that Council meetings become talking shops. It is all too easy to exploit our District and County Councillors' usual attendance at our meetings and get distracted by, in many cases, venting our views on County matters.

Our finances are in adequate order. We started our accounting year on the 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2022 with £24,719 in the bank, and ended it on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2023 with £12,767. The reduction in funds were attributed to the Village Hall bathroom and entrance hall improvements, an increase in energy costs, the purchase of the new goal posts and the considerable overtime incurred by our new Clerk in correcting our affairs. We agreed to increase the Precept, by which we are funded, by a relatively modest 5%, given the current rate of inflation, which is still higher than that, and take the balance required to keep us afloat out of savings, rather than inflict greater pain on the community through higher local taxes, which finances the Precept. Although our play equipment passed its recent ROSPA test for safety, the time when we shall have to raise considerable funds to replace the slowly decaying wooden climbing frame is fast approaching.

I shall leave it to others to report on the various commemorations we have made over this year, but I believe that given the modest size of our community, we continue to be a proactive Council, for which I thank my fellow Councillors and their continuing dedication and effort.

Michael Astor  
Chair.

16-May-2023