

# Widford Parish Council



## Minutes of the Widford Ordinary Parish Council Meeting Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2022 at 7.30pm in Widford Village Hall

Note: this replaced the September 13<sup>th</sup> meeting postponed upon the death of QEll

**PRESENT:** Cllr Mike Allen (MA); Cllr Ian Collins; Cllr Michael Ripsher (MPR); Cllr Mark Rome(MR)

Five members of the public

Clerk: Colin Marks, Clerk to the Parish Council

The Chairman welcomed everyone and opened the meeting at 7.30pm

**ACTION**

### 22.076 To receive and approve apologies for absence

1. Councillors: Cllr Babs Edwards (away) **Approved**
2. Others: PCSO Leon De Bruyn, Gilda Deterding

### 22.077 Declarations of Interest and requests for dispensations

#### 1. Interests

As noted on the agenda: Cllr Babs Edwards: an interest and a dispensation in respect of Playing Field matters, her husband being Treasurer of the PFMC. Cllr Mike Allen has an interest and a dispensation in re Playing Field matters, being a trustee. Cllr Ian Collins has a dispensation for the remainder of the electoral term in respect of his wife having the Closed Churchyard maintenance contract.

### 22.078 Approval of Minutes

**RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2022 were a true and accurate record.** The Chairman signed the Minutes.

**Clerk/MA**

Draft Minutes of the 5<sup>th</sup> April 2022 Annual Meeting of the Parish Electorate were not available to be received.

**Clerk**

### 22.079 Police report

1. Crime report: No crimes reported in Widford.
2. Benningfield Road junction parking update: Ongoing concerns were raised about unaddressed dangerous parking at this location and elsewhere in the village.
3. Drivesafe update:

The following had been received from Vicky Mortley, People & Workforce Development, Hertfordshire Constabulary:

*Following receipt of the Drivesafe Petition for Widford Village I have now completed checks and the onsite assessment for the location requested for monitoring to take place. Junction to Daintrees, location assessed 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2022, locations considered on both sides of the road however neither provides a clear line of sight to enable time for volunteers and equipment to effectively read the necessary information needed from offending vehicles. Other locations were considered outside of Bell Lane, however whilst this location provides good space to house equipment this location is too close to a bus stop and therefore cannot be used. I'm sorry that on this occasion I will not be able to process the application further.*

### 22.080 Chairman's announcements

The Chairman expressed admiration for the late Queen Elizabeth's longevity and devotion to duty throughout her long and outstanding reign.

The Ashview verges are beginning to look in need of some attention again. The cost of arranging this to be considered.

A letter from a parishioner has raised a number of issues that will be addressed this evening in various agenda items.

**22.081 Reports by County and District Councillor Eric Buckmaster**

Cllr Buckmaster gave a brief resumé of his latest report, the full written version of which appears as an appendix to the Minutes of this meeting.

The dissatisfaction with East Herts Planning in general was raised, but with particular reference to The Doe Shed application and decision. Cllr Buckmaster agreed to pursue this further with EH Planning, following up the Clerk’s email to him dated 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022.

The Chairman noted that a parishioner had asked the Parish Council for – and had been given - information regarding the number of new houses built in the village in the last five years, the answer being 43.

**22.082 Planning**

**1. New Applications:**

**3/22/1686/FUL Land to rear of the Green Man: Build two new dwellings.**

**RESOLVED: To object to the application on the following grounds:**

**With reference to the East Herts Council District Plan 2018, the proposal does not meet the criteria for a Group 2 Village:**

- 1. Policy VILL2, V. (a) The proposed development DOES NOT relate well to the village in terms of location, layout and connectivity. It is an opportunistic attempt to use a small open space for inappropriate development.**
- 2. Policy VILL2, V. (b) The proposed development IS NOT of a scale appropriate to the size of the village having regard to the potential cumulative impact of development in the locality. The village has already been significantly impacted by development with 43 new houses having been built over the last five years, representing a 21% increase in properties without any corresponding increase in amenities (indeed, amenities have been lost, including that of the Green Man which has left the community with no pub). Development and the decrease in public services has left parishioners with no alternative to the motor car which has resulted in increasing safety issues with cars being parked in the road. This development would further exacerbate the problem on the main road at a difficult location.**
- 3. Policy VILL2, V. (g) The proposed development IS significantly detrimental to the amenity of neighbouring occupiers – particularly those overlooking the site.**
- 4. The Parish Council is very concerned that this application might be considered by East Herts District Council as representing part of its windfall allowance under 10.3.10 of the District Plan. The basis of such a decision would advantage East Herts Council at the expense of, and to the detriment of, Widford parishioners whose best interests must be protected.**

Clerk

**2. Decision Notices.** For information only, the following were noted:

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| <b>3/22/1331/FUL Land at Priory Farm:</b> Partial re-surfacing of track   | <b>REFUSED</b> |
| <b>3/21/1720/HH 4 Nether Street:</b> Outbuilding to rear.   | <b>GRANTED</b> |
| <b>3/21/1180/HH &amp; 1181/LBC Chestnut Tree Cottage:</b> Erection of garden room   | <b>GRANTED</b> |
| <b>3/22/1501/HH 28 Benningfield Rd:</b> Remove garage; build side extension.  | <i>Awaited</i> |
| <b>3/19/1045/OUT Land North of the Stort Valley &amp; A414, Gilston:</b> Outline planning   | <i>Awaited</i> |
| <b>3/22/1196/HH Gilston, 42 Bell Lane:</b> Installation of solar panels   | <i>Awaited</i> |
| <b>3/22/0888/HH &amp; 3/22/1001/LBC The Old Rectory:</b> Demolish attached outbuildings & conservatory; build single storey side extension and other works. | <i>Awaited</i> |
| <b>3/21/2668/FUL: Ash View Stables:</b> Additional capacity on existing site.   | <i>Awaited</i> |
| <b>E/21/0288/ENF 30 Benningfield Road:</b> Enforcement investigation.   | <i>Awaited</i> |

**3. Other planning matters, including items received too late for the agenda**

**1. Other planning matters**

**1. Late planning applications**

**3/22/1852/HH Phoenix Farm:** Side extension

**RESOLVED: No objections**

Clerk

2. Concerns about delays in planning applications being determined: This was covered above with Cllr Eric Buckmaster's report (22.081).

MA

22.083 Finance

1. Report of the Council's accounts

Finance Summary to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022

	£
Opening cashbook balance 1 <sup>st</sup> July	40,661.18
Plus: income to 31 <sup>st</sup> August	578.26
Minus: expenditure to 31 <sup>st</sup> August	<u>2,998.35</u>
<b>Balance available to Council at 31<sup>st</sup> August (cashbook balance)</b>	<b>38,241.09</b>
Plus unrepresented cheques/payments	<u>0.00</u>
<b>Bank balance: reconciled with bank statement at 31<sup>st</sup> August</b>	<b><u>38,241.09</u></b>

**RESOLVED: that the Accounts Statement to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022 be approved.**

2. Bank reconciliations

Copies of the bank statement were presented. **RESOLVED: to agree the bank reconciliation as presented.**

3. Performance vs budget at 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022

The Clerk's detailed report on the financial performance vs budget to 31<sup>st</sup> August was received. There were no untoward transactions to note. Income for the year to date totalled £9,937 against a budget of £17,155. Expenditure for the year to date totalled £8,015 against a budget of £25,243.

It was noted that £7,500 is held in reserves for the Playing Field play area equipment grant, to be paid when the play area funding is resolved.

**RESOLVED: that the financial performance report to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022 be accepted as presented.**

4. List of payments.

4.1. **RESOLVED: to approve the list of payments as presented by the Clerk**

Clerk

*All expenditure made under the General Power of Competence.*

		Gross	VAT incl
TP Jones LLP	Payroll July-September	58.50	9.75
Clerk	Expenses August-September	17.75	
Jo English	Litterpicking: September 6 of 12	125.00	
Clerk	Salary September	407.25	
HMRC	PAYE September	101.80	
Buckland Parish Council	MS365 annual licence share 1/4th	20.00	
Unity Trust Bank	Quarterly service	18.00	
<b>Recoverable VAT included</b>			<b>£9.75</b>

5. Audit: Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) 2021/22

External auditor PKF Littlejohn accepted the Parish Council's exempt status and therefore there will not be an external audit or fee. The Parish Council will not hear from the auditor again unless there was a request from a parishioner during the period of Public Rights that closed on 22<sup>nd</sup> July.

Clerk

22.084 **Correspondence:** The list of correspondence was noted as it appeared on the Agenda:

- Parishioner (16/7): complaint about dog owners not clearing up their dog's mess (22.086.3.2)
- Parishioner: Vehicular Damage to Nether Street railings (22.086.2.4)
- Parishioner: Concerns at long delays etc in EHC Planning determining applications (22.082.3.3)
- Parishioner: Road safety concerns on Ware Road by Greenacres (22.071.2.3)
- Parishioner: Safety concerns re Lilly Bridge (22.086.2.5)
- EHC: Proposed change to Litterpicking grant policy (22.083.8)
- Parishioner: Broken kissing gate FP18/Bridleway16 (22.086.1.2)
- Parishioner: Dog walkers on BOAT22/Permissive Path (22.086.2.6)

- Parishioner: Unclear wording on defibrillator signs; crab apples on Benningfield footway; bus stop bench (22.086.3)
- Parishioner: Ware Road flooding after rain (22.086.2.7)

**22.085 Village Reports**

**1. Village Hall**

Report sent by Cllr Michael Ripsher following 12<sup>th</sup> September Committee meeting:

Remain solvent with good cash balances  
 Bookings remain below pre pandemic levels but they are booking fundraising events in. Harvest supper, Quiz night and pub night...Race night to be held in New year.  
 They are also looking at having a clothes bank installed, it would be placed next to the village hall, is a good cause and they earn some money from it.  
 Pavilion vote: Greg needs to put flyer together for village and liaise with Ian regarding electoral roll.  
 Bingo afternoon and additional soup/roll afternoon to offer people a warm space over winter being considered.  
 Now on instagram !

Cllr Ian Collins said he met the VH Chairman after the last PC meeting and was ready to help and liaise, but as yet had not heard anything further.

IC

**2. Playing Field**

Cllr Mike Allen gave the following report on proposals and the Biffa grant:

In 2019 the WPFC put a recruitment drive together and gathered a small group of willing participants to begin a drive towards improvement of both the income and facilities. Ideas flowed and many suggestions put forward in an effort to start the ball rolling. A masterplan was discussed to try and encapsulate some of the ideas being put forward for improvements to the playing field, including but not limited to, replacement of current play equipment, community garden, additional seating (both covered and uncovered), new goal posts and nets, adult training equipment, walking/ running path and carparking.

Several funding options were considered such as Sport England, Lotto, East Herts and Biffa. A few grants were sought via East Herts for the upgrade of benches and repairs to existing equipment, however these were small amounts and insufficient to make a real difference. Biffa landfill sites are required to support local charities and facilities to ensure that a proportion of profit is returned to the local area in the form of a grant up to £75k with local support at 10% (Thanks to the PC). This was by far and away the best option for upgrading the play equipment.

Events such as Halloween, summer picnic, car boot sales and walking trails were all undertaken as part of a drive to secure some additional income. Amazon Smile, Give As You Live and East Herts Lottery were all engaged to add to the regular income for the playing field's maintenance and upkeep as well as trying to add to a play equipment upgrade fund. As you will be aware the PC has generously agreed to support the playing field with £1,000 per annum to assist with maintenance activities and it is much appreciated.

The Biffa application was the option agreed to pursue however the support information is extensive, and many pieces of information were required prior to the application being submitted. This process was long and required many days of input, a big mention here, to the current chair Alison Woodley whose efforts must not go unnoticed. Along with several other people in the committee, the masterplan, play equipment quotations, village consultation, local group consultations and various letters of support were gathered as evidence.

When the final pieces of evidence and support were being put together a line in the application requested the applicant needs to either have ownership of or a long lease over the land for the funds to be released if successful. At this time the nation was in lockdown and obtaining information was difficult and protracted, suffice to say, the net result is due to the nature of the charitable status in which the playing field is held prevents the ownership or lease situation to be clear and distinct according to Biffa's requirements therefore the application is void. A very disappointing end to what is a

now, well-documented and supported proposal.

The WPFC would like to ask the PC, based on the agreement to fund the 10% requirement for the Biffa application, the following questions:

1. Is it possible for the PC to endorse and fund the upgrading of equipment and facilities on the playing field?
2. If there is an appetite for this action to what extent are the PC prepared to consider when knowing the Biffa grant application was for the full £75k?
3. What information would the PC require to consider all the options?

A plan of the layout proposal was also presented to the meeting.

It was noted that Jackie Bruce of East Herts had sent an email reminding of the Section 106 funding that has been agreed specifically for:

- Car parking facilities contribution of £14,430.68 to be used 'towards the upgrading car parking facilities serving the playing fields and village hall'.
- Open space facilities contribution of £2,726.10 to be used 'towards open space facilities for children and young people in the local area'.

It was further noted that the Village Hall MC plans and the Playing Field MC plans are mutually exclusive and only one of them could be taken forward. Therefore, there will have to be agreement and a decision on which one to proceed with.

MA

### 3. Allotments

Cllr Babs Edwards sent the following report:

Allotments are doing ok and water is holding up. There are now new rules about what must not be taken to allotments as we want them to be plastic free where possible. All asbestos water butts have been removed.

BE

### 4. Closed Churchyard.

Nothing to report

Clerk

## 22.086 Highways, Public Rights of Way, and other Parish matters

### 1. Footpaths and PRoW.

1. FP1: No update on PRoW replacing the stile with a suitable bollard. This is under consideration in Nicholas Maddex's programme of works. Hedge trimming has been done.
2. FP18/Bridleway16 broken kissing gate. This is believed to be the landowner's responsibility. The Clerk to make an approach to get it repaired.

MA

Clerk

### 2. Highways and footways

1. Clean-up of verges and overgrown footways: Agreed work has been completed.
2. Road safety concerns by Greenacres, Ware Road: This is ongoing and being investigated by EHC Planning Enforcement and Herts Highways, with the assistance of Cllr Eric Buckmaster.
3. Highways Fault Reports ref 401002754363 Hunsdon Road and 401002754085 Hunsdon Road were noted. No response received. The Fault Map to be checked to see if the current status is recorded.
4. Nether Street railings damage: This is a Highways matter, reported on the Highways Fault system, ref 401002819071. It was questioned whether the repairs had been done.
5. Lilly Bridge safety: Nicholas Maddex sent a report saying he has requested that the bridge be scheduled for replacement in the next year or so as it is unlikely to last much longer.
6. Report of dogs running loose on BOAT22 and the Permissive Path off BOAT 22: Having consulted with Nicholas Maddex, the Clerk confirmed that permissive paths are entirely at the discretion of the land owner, who's estate is out of contact. There appear to be no rules covering this and Cllr Ian Collins agreed to contact the

MA

concerned parishioner to give some reassurance since he walks that particular path twice a day.

- 7. A parishioner had concerns about Ware Road below the church towards the old coal yard flooding after heavy rain. It was agreed this is a well known occasional problem and that no further action is required.

**3. Other parish matters and concerns**

- 1. Alternative location for the QEII Platinum Jubilee Memorial bench  
Having suggested the Playing Field, there has been a request to locate it where there had once been a bench by the bus stop outside the former Green Man. The Clerk to follow up with Cllr Eric Buckmaster to see what Highways regulations would apply to a bench being located there on the footway. **Clerk**
- 2. A Parishioner had asked that dog owners be asked to clear up their own dog's mess. It was acknowledged that this is an ongoing problem widely caused by a small number of thoughtless individuals. It was suggested that signs could be put up saying the area is monitored. The Chairman agreed to put a piece in the village magazine and to post it on facebook. **MA**
- 3. Ongoing fly tipping in the layby: Incidents should always be reported asap on the HCC incident site. The Chairman suggested there are ways of monitoring the location. **MA**
- 4. Worn AED sign by the Playing Field: This had been resolved.
- 5. Crab apples reported as a slip hazard on Benningfield Road footway: It was acknowledged that this can be a problem anywhere at this time of year and the best remedy is for anyone identifying the problem to clear the crab apples away.
- 6. Bus stop bench: Considered at 22.086.3.1 above

**22.087 Benningfield Green**

- 1. Annual Licence renewal: The Clerk reported that this has been paid and renewed. **Clerk**
- 2. Ongoing parking issues: No further action required at this time. **Clerk**

**22.088 Urgent matters** received too late for inclusion on this agenda:

Cllr Mark Rome raised a concern about access rights at Wilmoor. It was agreed this is something for the individual property owners to resolve.

***Suspension of Meeting for Public Comments at 9.18pm***

It was reiterated that the plans being proposed by the Village Hall MC and the Playing Field MC are mutually exclusive and that only one of them can be taken forward. That must be resolved before any money is spent or allocated.

***The meeting was restored to order at 9.21pm***

**22.089 Items for future agendas**

- Village Archive: November agenda
- Draft budget for 2023/24: November agenda

**22.090 Date of next Parish Council Meeting**

Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> November: Ordinary Parish Council Meeting, 7.30pm in the Village Hall. **Clerk/MA**

There being no further business, the Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 9.25pm.

Signed.....Dated.....

## APPENDIX

### District and County Councillor Report, August/September 2022

#### Minerals and Waste Plan Regulation 18 Consultation

Currently formally under consultation until end Sept. However the Council has agreed to stakeholders that responses may be made late owing the time taken during the period of national mourning. The plan allocates 3 sites for minerals extraction, Briggens, Hatfield Aerodrome, the land adjoining Coopers Lane. Coopers Lane has been through Dev Control but Decision notice is yet to be issued. 2.7 yrs and 3.5m tonnes. Hatfield Aerodrome has had a new planning application submitted but yet to be determined.

#### Heatwave

In truly testing circumstances, in one weekend crews responded to multiple, and at times, an unrelenting stream of large-scale incidents including road traffic collisions, fires close to the M25 and crop and field fires. Due to the quick response and actions of our teams, thankfully no-one was injured, and larger incidents did not escalate into disasters, despite some fires rapidly approaching residential properties. The incidents below are only a fraction of what was managed, but demonstrate the scale and pressure of what teams experienced and responded to across the county:

- Combine harvester fire in Buntingford: six appliances in attendance
- RTC on the M1: five appliances in attendance
- Field fire in Rushden: six appliances in attendance
- Field fire in Hemel Hempstead: six appliances in attendance
- Field fire in Codicote: 12 appliances in attendance

These were in addition to the multiple cross-border incidents we supported in London, Buckinghamshire and Cambridgeshire

**Sunset Studios decision is “superb” for Hertfordshire residents.** The prospect of Hertfordshire adding another world-class film, tv and digital production facility to its portfolio moved a step closer last week when Broxbourne Borough Council’s Planning and Regulatory Committee granted outline planning permission for Sunset Waltham Cross Studios.

The proposed development, which will be located on a 91-acre site close to junction 25 of the M25, would be the first expansion of the Sunset Studios platform outside of the US.

#### Free holiday fun keeps kids in Hertfordshire HAPpy this summer

Hertfordshire County Council-funded free summer holiday camps are proving so popular that they are almost fully booked. More than 3,600 children who, on average, were booked to enjoy 10 days of free activities.

The HAF programme free holiday activity clubs, known locally as HAPpy Camps, started running across Hertfordshire at the start of the holidays. There were over 180 camps funded by Hertfordshire County Council, coordinated by Herts Sports Partnership and the Hertfordshire Community Foundation, and run by over 80 different providers.

HAPpy Camps, which are delivering healthy food and fun activities during the school holidays, are free for children who are eligible for benefits related free school meals. There were more than 42,000 sessions running across Hertfordshire between 25 July and 31 August.

#### Life-saving defibrillators installed at all Hertfordshire Recycling Centres

Hertfordshire County Council has installed life-saving defibrillators in all 16 of its operational recycling centres. Defibrillators are medical devices that help and support a patient by giving a high energy electric shock to the heart of someone who is in cardiac arrest.

With an annual footfall of 1.6 million visitors, the centres are set up to save lives should they ever be needed. The equipment will benefit local communities and all residents and staff on sites right across the county.

No specialist training is required to use defibrillators as they give audible instructions to the operator step by step throughout the process. Staff also receive enhanced first aid training to assist with their understanding and use of the equipment as well as improving the health and safety provision on the centres. As a fail-safe, the devices detect a patient’s condition once the pads are attached and will not administer a shock to anyone who doesn’t require it.

All equipment has been provided by Public Health with the support of London Hearts, the UK’s

leading defibrillator charity.

Eric Buckmaster, Executive Member for Environment, Hertfordshire County Council, said: “The introduction of defibrillators to all centres is a wonderful initiative that will not only benefit our site users, but also the local communities who will have access to the emergency equipment in the event it is required during a centre’s operational hours.”

**The Intalink Enhanced Partnership**

The Intalink Enhanced Partnership has launched its first Bus Passenger Charter! A bus passenger charter made with and for bus users. As part of the Department for Transport’s guidelines for any authority publishing a Bus Service Improvement Plan’s (BSIP) a Bus Passenger Charter was required to be created. The intention of the Charter is to communicate what passengers can hope to expect from bus operators delivering local bus services in their area.

The Intalink Bus Passenger Charter (IBPC) sets out the commitment made between Hertfordshire County Council / bus operators and the passengers they serve to try and ensure certain standards are met for each journey. It translates the key elements of the BSIP into standards that the passenger should expect to see when taking a bus journey.

In January a 6-week consultation was launched. The purpose of this consultation was to understand bus users’ priorities and to gain insight into what a bus user wants The IEP to value. The consultation interacted with over 5000 constituents. The IBPC was drafted in collaboration with bus operators combined with the results of the consultation. The consultation helped the understanding of bus users’ priorities and what they value and want to see improved.

**Over £55,000 raised for Fire Fighters Charity through Recycling: Hertfordshire residents have helped raise over £55,000 for the Fire Fighters Charity just by donating unwanted clothes, shoes and other textiles.**

Items can be donated at any one of twenty textile banks located at Hertfordshire Fire Stations. The scheme is supported by Hertfordshire Waste Partnership, made up of county, district and borough councils working together to reduce, reuse and recycle Hertfordshire waste.

The Fire Fighters Charity provides confidential, personalised support to the whole of the fire services community including mental health, physical health and social wellbeing services. The charity supports all fire service personnel, whatever their role in the service, as well as serving, retired, spouses and qualified dependents.

Donations have begun to increase again following the pandemic. For the year ending March 2022, over 44,000 kgs of items were generated, with the textile bank at Redbourn topping the list followed by Ware.

Eric Buckmaster, Executive Member for Environment, Hertfordshire County Council, said: “I’m delighted that Hertfordshire Fire Station textile banks are able to help with the fantastic work undertaken by the Fire Fighters Charity.

“The council has a vision to create a cleaner, greener and healthier Hertfordshire. It’s important that we support residents with what they throw away and increase recycling and re-use so we can minimise waste.”

**Young people from Hertfordshire make lifelong memories on National Citizen Service summer programme** Over 200 young people aged 16-17 gained vital life skills and lifelong

**Introducing Tala – a new** memories this summer by taking part in the National Citizen Service (NCS) programmes run by Hertfordshire County Council Services for Young People (SfYP). NCS provides young people with the opportunity to learn valuable life skills, take part in challenging activities and work with other young people to make a difference in their communities during the school holidays.

The two-week SfYP summer programme included a four-night residential stay at the University of Bedfordshire to give the young people a taste of student life while taking part in workshops, including first aid, CPR and how to use a defibrillator.

This was followed by two days of teambuilding at Box End Park, Bedford, including activities such as archery, orienteering, paddleboarding and aqua park challenges. The activities were all designed to develop communication and leadership skills, with the young people encouraging each other to push themselves out of their comfort zones.

The second week was based at one of SfYP’s young people’s centres, with each group of around 15 young people choosing a charity they feel passionate about and raising both money

and awareness for their good causes in creative ways.

**Character to inspire the newest generation of visitors to Hertfordshire’s libraries: Tala The Storyteller.**

Designed by newly graduated local artists, Tala will replace Bookstart Bear. The new character will be used to inspire families with babies and young children to visit Hertfordshire’s 46 libraries. Libraries are also launching ‘My Firsts’, a way of celebrating key milestones in the lives of little ones.

From September, there will be a new addition to the Hertfordshire library family, as ‘Tala the Storyteller’ is unveiled. A bright, vibrant creature, Tala is set to capture the imagination of babies and young people making their first foray into the wonderful world of reading.

The new character was created by local, newly graduated artists Emma Phillips and Eva Povey using funds from an Arts Council National Lottery Project Grant. Through creative workshops with families they were able to find out what appeals to young children in Hertfordshire and used these ideas in their designs.

Tala will be the star of Hertfordshire libraries’ new promotion ‘My Firsts’ to inspire families with babies and young children to visit the library regularly, to borrow books and to join in with the variety of early years family activities, such as Rhyme Time.

**Hertfordshire secondary school applications for September 2023 now open**

The new school year may just be about to start but it’s already time for parents and carers in Hertfordshire to start planning for next year as the application process for transfer to secondary schools opens today (Thursday 1 September).

If your child starts secondary, upper or university technical college next year, make sure you apply for a place in good time. The easiest way to apply for a school place for September 2023 is to visit [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/admissions](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/admissions) and complete the online application form. Online applications can be amended at any time before the closing date, and you can access your school offer before allocation letters are received and accept your school allocation online.

Last year over 99% of parents applied in this way and found the system quick, easy and secure.

**Hertfordshire County Council – A Financial Update**

Like all organisations across the country, the ongoing impact of increasing inflation has added significantly to the pressures on Hertfordshire County Council’s budget. The latest forecast of council finances estimates a shortfall of £23.5 million for 2022/23 and ongoing pressures for future years – despite having set a balanced budget for the next two years as recently as February.

It’s costing a lot more to simply provide our services at current levels. For example, the bill to keep streetlights on has increased by 60%, that’s an extra £2.3 million a year just to keep the lights on after dark.

The Council’s Resources and Performance Cabinet Panel will be asked to discuss the financial report, which notes options to make ‘in year’ efficiency savings and use some of the council’s contingency and reserves to bridge the gap this year.

The pressures being seen today have been caused by soaring inflation affecting the whole economy, resulting in greatly increased costs alongside high post covid demand for key services such as supporting children with special educational needs. The war in Ukraine and Russia restricting gas supplies means that global uncertainty is having a huge impact close to home. For months now the financial health of the County Council has been closely monitored and this will continue.

**Richard Roberts, Leader of Hertfordshire County Council says;**

"Financially, the council is a very well managed organisation, making a great start to the financial year with a balanced budget. Last year we came out of the pandemic able to offer a significant covid recovery package supporting many residents and businesses across the county and investing in services our residents value.

However the last six months have seen global events outside our control unfold, with everyone in the country now dealing with increases in the cost-of-living. This was why we set out our ‘Cost of Living’ support in July. Our residents are struggling with rising bills and we, like every council in the country, are facing a similar picture.

We will also be doing everything we can to offer support to our most vulnerable residents and offer much needed advice and guidance for everyone. I will be writing to the new Prime Minister congratulating her and asking that she considers the pressures we face as she

balances need across the country and also working with the Local Government Association (LGA) and County Councils Network (CCN) to make representations on behalf of the county. At a time when our residents and businesses are facing unprecedented challenges I want our services to continue to be efficient, helpful and above all tied in closely with our partner district councils, voluntary and faith organisations. Only together can we get through this."

The Resources panel will take place on 14 Sept and can be viewed at [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/watchmeetings](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/watchmeetings) and any resident wanting support with cost of living can find advice, resources and links of what is already available via this web page [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/costofliving](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/costofliving)

*District and County Councillor Eric Buckmaster  
September 2022*