



Wedmore Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly

Held at: The Sports Pavilion, Wedmore Playing Fields, Wedmore on Wednesday 22nd May 2023 at 7:00 pm

Present: *Councillor Farley, Councillor Beacom, Councillor Tinney, Councillor Loughrey, Councillor Banwell, Councillor Thorogood, Councillor Weale, Councillor Blackshaw, and Councillor Smart.

In Attendance: 34 Members of the Public

1. Apologies for Absence.

Councillor Smith, Councillor Munt (Somerset Councillor) and Mrs. Lindsey Baker (clerk).

2. Minutes of the Previous Annual Meeting held on Wednesday 24th May 2023

Councillor Farley addressed the room and confirmed everyone had read the minutes from the previous assembly.

It was accepted as an accurate record and the minutes were signed.

3. Wedmore Parish Council Activities – Councillor Jacky Farley Chair of Wedmore Parish Council.

Below is the speech prepared and read by Councillor Farley.

ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY 2024

Welcome to our Annual Parish Assembly, lovely to see so many people here.

My intention tonight is to give you some insight into what the Council has been doing in the last year, including some of the challenges we have faced but also the opportunities we have exploited.

Firstly, there are assets we own and maintain. We all know that running costs are an issue so I will talk about our program of maintenance and how we manage these assets.

On the positive, we have given a total of more than £73,000 in grants for various requirements, so I'll provide a bit of detail on that.

We have worked closely with Somerset Council and Somerset Highways on planning matters, local flooding, local maintenance, and road speed, amongst many others.

Finally, I will comment on the members of the Parish Council and the challenges presented by having a reduced number of Councillors.

We have been able to achieve a great deal this year, with much credit for those achievements going to our lovely Clerk Lindsey Baker who unfortunately is unwell and will not be attending this evening, Isobel our vice-chair has volunteered to take the Minutes.

As a Council we are responsible for a wide range of assets across the Parish, ranging from the Cemetery to woods, Car Park to Play areas, and Allotments to public toilets, all of which require regular assessment and maintenance to ensure we are providing a safe and enjoyable environment for our Parishioners.

For example, the Car park lighting has now been updated and replaced, the old lighting had reached a point where the lights were not working. The CCTV which had not been working for many years has also been replaced, the hedges have also been cut back and trees maintained.

In the play areas, during the last year we have replaced the zip wire at Wedmore at a cost of nearly £6,000. We will need to replace the slide at Blackford within the next 12 months at a cost of over £8,000.

The Cemetery committee reviewed and amended the prices which had not been amended for a number of years. The Clerk has recently undergone tople test training in relation to headstones to ensure that we avoid injury for people using the cemetery; the most common of injury in graveyards are caused by people using a headstone to help them stand up after tending a grave. The Council will be undertaking tople tests on all headstones in the months ahead.

With the Public Toilets, the Council is proposing refurbishment of the toilets in The Borough, the roof is leaking, and the facilities need updating and decorating. The specification has been sent out to 4 local companies for tender, we are waiting for these to be submitted for consideration. You may have heard, Somerset Council are no longer funding public toilets in other towns and villages including Cheddar and Wells, leading to their closure. We are lucky that the toilets in Wedmore

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are already the responsibility of the Parish, so they will be staying open. But of course, that needs management and funding. We are striving as a Council to bring in a proper maintenance program to ensure that these assets are around for many years to come. We are being assisted by Wedmore Men's Shed with the maintenance of the many benches and notice boards in the Parish, for which we are very grateful.

We own and manage 28 full allotments, which are fully let to 34 villagers. The Council has produced a Handbook for new allotments holders as well as reviewing and amending the Allotment policy.

Moving onto the matter of grants, during the last 12 months we have given around £14,000.

The larger grants included £2,500 for the Men's Shed to provide funds for a new building and for Wedmore Tennis Club £2,500 to update their flood lighting. Wedmore Scouts received a £1,745 contribution for a battery storage unit following their installation of solar panels.

To assist with local events the Council has supported Young Farmers by donating £1,250 to assist with their 90th anniversary show, which was a great success and well attended. Donations of £1,250 were made to Lamplight and £1,000 to Harvest Home, two local favourites which were well attended.

Wedmore in Bloom received £1,000 to assist with their costs, I am sure you will agree the work they do greatly enhances the village. Wedmore Health and Wellbeing event received £250 to assist with costs and Green Wedmore £542.60

Grants were made to the Village halls of Blackford, Wedmore and Theale of £500 each. All this totals £13,615.60

After much deliberation, debate and discussion Theale Village Hall was awarded £60,000 for improvements including repairs to the leaking roof, rotten flooring, kitchen, and insulation. This is a highly significant grant which came from funds derived through Somerset CC.

The Council are currently reviewing our grants policy, and whilst grants will be available, applications will need to be submitted in a grant window, enabling the Council to better enable the Council to manage the budget. There is going to be very little extra coming from Somerset CC, so we will need to manage this budget very carefully.

For anyone who is interested in the general finances of the Parish Council, the Clerk will upload the Annual Accounting Statement on the Council's website for the period from Friday 3 June to Friday 12 July.

Onto planning issues and our dealings with Somerset County Council. Let's start with our highways.

In the Neighbourhood Plan of 2019, most parishioners who commented wanted the lack of pavement on Pilcorn Street to be addressed. Councillor Smith and our Clerk, Lindsey Baker, have both been working tirelessly with Somerset Highways to progress this matter. We are currently awaiting the result of a feasibility study including a topographical survey before hopefully seeing this project progress. Whilst there is an alternative route through the estate at St Medards there are many residents who walk along the road. It is hoped that if a safe route is in place, it will encourage many more people to walk into the village centre from the Strongvox estate and for parents and children to access the First School by foot rather than driving.

There have been a worrying number of accidents at Heath House crossroads, we are working with Somerset Highways to try and improve the junction. I would ask, if anyone knows of any accidents, to please pass this information on to the Clerk to strengthen our case for an improved junction.

Since Somerset Council came into being in its current form, they have grouped Parishes in Local Community Networks in the hope that parishes will be able to work together concerning aspirations and more importantly how Parishes will cope with a reduction in services provided by County. The Highways Department has already produced a program showing reduced reactivity relating to matters such as grass cutting, gully emptying, hedge trimming and treating noxious weeds.

We are currently awaiting financial information as to the cost of extra work from the Highways department for these services. Highways will only be carrying out the statutory minimum concerning many services which will continue to reduce over the next 2 years. This means, for instance, that in the future the Parish will be funding the cost of unblocking drains and gullies which if we get further winters like the last one the cost could be considerable.

The Council already own 3 Speed Indicator Devices, which you will have seen working around the Parish. These have proved to be very effective at slowing down cars entering the village. It is hoped to purchase 2 more in the coming year to save rotating the ones we already have. There is some SID information available on the tables at the back if anyone would like to look at it.

Planning, during the last 12 months the Council have considered nearly 70 planning applications in their capacity as consultees. There are still over 30 applications outstanding from last year due to the County planning department being short-staffed.

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As well as the regular planning applications the Council has been actively fighting against the proposed development at Coombe Batch. I have attended and spoken at 2 Development Committee meetings in connection with the original application which was eventually refused by the Committee in February of this year by a vote of 7 to 2. However, as I am sure you are aware the developers have submitted a new application to which we are also strenuously objecting. If you have not already lodged an objection and wish to do so we will be able to give you the application number at the end of the meeting. The closing date for comments is this Friday 24th May.

Finally, many of our parishioners have suffered in several ways with flooding this winter.

Flooding has been an issue for many residents over the winter. I am pleased to say that Councillor Phillip Wheale is in touch with Dr Bel Deering, Community Engagement Officer of the Rivers Authority with a view to improving our flood resilience and how flooding in the village can be managed.

Councillor Bill Smart is liaising with other Parishes along the length of the river Brue to improve management of the Brue and request that dredging take place, which it is hoped will reduce the length of time that flood water is sitting on the levels. I am sure you will agree that the amount of flood water in certain areas was unprecedented as was the length of time that it was an issue, Bill having to row to his front door will certainly agree it affected many households.

That completes my report for the year. I hope I have been able to communicate the amount of effort which has gone into maintaining and improving services to our community, to ensure Wedmore remains a village which remains happy and proud to live in.

I would just take this opportunity to thank all the members of the Wedmore Parish Council, who will introduce themselves to you shortly. I should remind you that we are all volunteers and as a Parish, we should have a total of 16 Councillors, 3 from Theale Ward, 3 from Blackford and 10 from Wedmore. At this point in time, we have only 10 Councillors, which means the workload of each Councillor is significantly increased as they all play their part in everything I've talked about today. We will soon be losing a Councillor due to a house move which means everyone will have to contribute even more. Wedmore was the biggest Parish by area in the former Sedgemoor District Council and the 4th biggest by population, so it is no small feat that this smaller group has achieved all it has.

By becoming a parish councillor, you can help your community change for the better, because of decisions you have helped make, is something that can give you a sense of achievement and pride. I hope that more people will join the Council to help the community.

I will now ask the Councillors to introduce themselves and say which committees they sit on.

Councillor Farley, Councillor Beacom, Councillor Tinney, Councillor Loughrey, Councillor Banwell, Councillor Thorogood, Councillor Weale, Councillor Blackshaw and Councillor Smart all gave an account of themselves.

4. A talk by parishioner Jim O'Conner 'How to read adverts'.

An interesting, funny, and relevant presentation. We are aware that the audience and parish councillors enjoyed listening to the insights on how advertising is not just about the product but also subliminally about the consumer.

5. Parish Matters Generally – Subjects/issues raised by the electorate of the parish.

Councillor Farley asked the Members of the Public present if there were any questions or concerns, they would like to raise.

Several members of the Public asked to address the Parish Council.

The questions were on planning the process and if the Parish Council can stop planning applications or even how many times a developer can make an application. There were a few questions on the Combe Batch application 50/24/21. Firstly, on the ridgeline of the new houses and was this an actual material consideration? There was also a question on the Highways. There were safety concerns about the proposed development's entrance/exit.

These questions were answered satisfactorily by Councillors Farley and Beacom.

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A vote of thanks from a member of the public was asked to be passed onto Councillor Smith for all his hard work involving the Pilcorn Street Safe Route to School project.

6. Presentation of the HENRY BUTT Trophy 2024

The following nominations were considered for the Henry Butt Award this year.

VANESSA BECKER-HUGHES - Vanessa is a key member of Green Wedmore. Vanessa was involved in the Wilder Wedmore, festival. Her skills include creating graphics for promotion, obtaining sponsorships, and liaising with speakers. Whilst organising Wilder Wedmore, Vanessa contacted Sustainable Eel Group – a European-wide science-led organization. She started a £10K fundraising campaign to move struggling eels into the waterways. This became a project to collect eDNA and get some real data about how the eels are doing; as well as getting elvers into schools to help educate children. This has grown becoming the Somerset Eel Recovery Project. This year will see more elvers in more schools, other events, and initiatives to help this locally important species. She is passionate, driven, warm, friendly, and approachable. In Theale she helped setting up a butterfly corridor and turned some of the graveyard into wildflower areas.

BLUEBIRD CAFÉ – In under a year the café has become a great success, everyone put in such hard work before it was opened to get it ready. It's a not-for-profit organisation, that provides live music and delicious food. A great meeting place for everyone to socialise and is used by many local groups including Men Shed and Wedmore in Bloom. They have recently been inviting grant applications for community projects and good causes that will benefit Wedmore and its residents, I look forward to seeing who has been successful in due course.

STEVE GEORGE – Steve is a longstanding volunteer driver and treasurer for the Wedmore Community Bus. He is also a volunteer for the Isle of Wedmore Good Neighbours Scheme. He is Chairman and captain of the St Mary's Bell ringers. A member and Treasurer of both the Wedmore Opera and Theatre Clubs. He was on the Parish Council where he was the chairman of the highways committee. He was also responsible for writing the highways element of the Wedmore Neighbourhood Plan.

DAVID HOPKINS – David initiated and runs the Friends of St Marys for church users rather than just the congregation. He considers the church a place for family events and social gatherings and as part of that role, he runs the tower tour days, co-runs the Clash of the Choirs event and the 'Adopt a Grave' group which maintains the graves in the graveyard at St Marys. He also organises the occasional fundraising Christmas Card printing and sales. He is a volunteer on the team of Warm in Wedmore. He has been co-secretary of Green Wedmore and has been involved in organising and running the Big Tidy Up, the Freecycle events and the repair café. He was involved in the creation of the village farm project but has recently stepped aside. He is on the board of the Wedmore Power Co-op and co-runs the Wedmore 40/30 fundraising bicycle ride. Finally, David is also a volunteer driver for the Wedmore Community Bus. David is very approachable and contactable within the community.

OLGA PIPPETT – Is someone who represents a team of helpers at Harvest Homes. Throughout the years her face has been a regular, someone that often goes unnoticed in working to benefit others at village events. Just the fact that when you become nostalgic about these times, her face has always been there. Although she may have given up for now, she was part of a huge team of unsung heroes who have worked thanklessly on behalf of the local community.

JANET SMITH - Is involved in many different groups and is one of those people who help make Wedmore the thriving community that it is. She is approachable, friendly, and loves to connect with people. She is always serving, helping, and looking after others. Janet is a key member of *Bagley Baptist Church*. She sometimes plays the piano or sings as part of a worship band, and she often serves tea & coffee after the service, she also helps manage all the gardening, particularly the flowers and flower beds we have around the site. Janet also helps with various activities at St. Mary's church, including Messy Church, this is a great community event, often drawing in many of the young children in the area. Janet is also an active member of *Wedmore in Bloom helping to make the village look wonderful*.

PETE TINNEY – Pete is someone who has been involved in many local organisations over the years he remains a Trustee
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of Blackford Village Hall and was involved with the redevelopment of the hall from its former site. Pete has also been an active member of the Wedmore Theatre Group and Allerton Players. He is a great storyteller and has given many talks to groups such as the WI and history groups as well as being a hugely entertaining after-dinner speaker talking about his farming life in and around Wedmore. Pete was an active member of Young Farmers for many years and remains involved holding the title of Honorary Lifetime Vice President. Farming has played a huge part in Pete's life; he has Chaired an NFU group and was a tenant representative with the Bruton Estate.

Pete has shown a long-standing commitment to the Isle of Wedmore News, he has been there since the early days of compiling the individually typed pages and stapling them together for delivery, to more recent decisions related to restructuring. He offers a sense of continuity to considered decisions and remains committed to ensuring the Parish Council is present and relevant in the publication. His sense of humour, stories of days gone by and sensitivities to village life have been invaluable over the years. After many years he has decided to stand down from the committee and he will be greatly missed.

The Henry Butt Trophy for 2024 was awarded to Pete Tinney.

He gave a gracious acceptance speech.

All business conducted the meeting was closed at closed 8.05 pm.