

WESTFIELD ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD AT THE TRINITY METHODIST HALL ON MONDAY 23RD APRIL STARTING AT 7PM

- Present:** Cllr Geoff Fuller, Chair of Westfield Parish Council
Parish Councillors: Cllrs Andrew Butcher, Ron Hopkins, Lesley Mansell, Bryan Wallbridge, Pat Williams and Phil Wilkinson,
19 Members of the public.
Cllr Robin Moss, BANES Councillor for Westfield
- Attending:** Lesley Welch, Parish Clerk, Emily Merko, Finance Officer and Tracey Stephens, Admin Assistant
- Apologies:** Cllrs Diana Cooper, Kevin Docherty, Eleanor Jackson and James Honess

The Submission draft of the Westfield Neighbourhood Plan was projected on a screen on auto scroll at the start and end of the meeting, with a paper copy available to peruse.

The History of Westfield Exhibition posters were on display.

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF COUNCILLORS

Cllr Fuller welcomed all to the meeting and introduced the Councillors.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 24TH APRIL 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th April 2017 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

3. WESTFIELD INSPIRATIONAL CITIZEN AWARD

Cllr Fuller presented the first Westfield Inspirational Citizen Award to John Reynolds. John started the Westfield TT Running club 3 years ago with 6 runners. Now there are over 500 people that take part. The award was given to recognise John's commitment to the health and well-being of local people and the promotion of Westfield at events country wide.

John said in his thank you message that the success of the club is very much a team effort. The team philosophy is that no one is ever left behind, and in an event the last person in is always supported by other runners. The team colours are worn at events country wide and commentators will always pick them out. When John undertakes his challenges worldwide he will make sure he's wearing the Westfield TT colours. John talks regularly in local schools and many of the older students are now becoming part of the group.

4. THE WORK OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

a. Overview by Cllr Fuller, Chair of the Parish Council

Cllr Fuller gave an overview of the work of the Parish Council over the last year.

Heritage Walks - Last year, a project of particular interest to me was the creation of the Westfield Heritage Walks. There are three routes around the Parish of varying lengths and there are four boards at different points on the route giving information about the Parish's history. A downloadable flyer is available on the Parish Council website. The walks were launched at the Walking Festival in September, when I led a group around the longest of the three walks, taking in the Waterside Valley. We are continuing to be part of the Walking Festival again this year.

Fun Day - The Parish once again enjoyed a (rather wet) Fun Day at Westhill Recreation Ground and the return of the Fun Fair to Norton Hill Recreation Ground. Volunteers to join the organisers of the 8th annual Fun Day on 3rd June 2018 are very welcome.

Flowers - We welcomed a new flowers contractor this year and were delighted with the beautiful, long-lasting baskets and flower displays. The Parish Council decided to invest in new automatic watering systems to the various baskets and planted areas and this made the contract much more appealing.

Front Garden Competition - Meanwhile residents continued to present beautiful gardens for the annual Front Garden Competition in July which is kindly judged by horticulture specialists from Bath College and was won by two residents in Waterside Road. In addition a special award was given to the residents of Rowan Court collectively for a beautiful group of gardens.

Youth - The Parish Council continued to support youth provision in the Parish and has seen B&NES' Youth Connect service take the activities offered in Westfield to a whole new level with young people having enjoyed first aid courses, cookery lessons, DJ workshops, rugby training and above all, a safe space to meet with other people of their own age.

Defibrillators - The Parish Council takes the safety and well-being of its residents seriously so the decision was taken this year to purchase a further two defibrillators for the Parish. The new defibrillators at Mardons Club and the Fire Station join the defibrillator at Westfield Pharmacy which has been used on numerous occasions.

Christmas Lights - Finally, we rounded off 2017 with yet another enjoyable Christmas Lights switch-on event. A record number of residents joined Westfield Ladies Choir and the Silver Band singing carols, enjoying mulled wine and mince pies and seeing in the start of the festive season. Plans are underway to add to the festive lights so that the display of lights on lampposts stretch the length of the Parish for Christmas 2018.

Grass cutting - This year, the Parish Council is working closely with B&NES and Curo to enhance the maintenance of the grass areas. This is an issue that is often reported to the Parish Council and it is hoped that by working together the Parish will look tidier and even more appealing in 2018. Jubilee Green will be cut fortnightly, the area at the top of Elm Tree Avenue will be cut three weekly and across the road every four weeks, with the cuttings removed. Sadly BANES has told us that they are unable to continue cutting green space which they do not own and we have been in contact with residents about the future of such spaces.

Allotments - The Parish Council continues to work towards more allotments in the Parish. Two sites are being considered and pursued – Larch Court and Linden Close - and residents have been consulted.

Snow Wardens – I'd like to finish with special thanks to the Snow Wardens – Ross Thayer in particular who not only went out in the icy weather but also maintained the gritting machines. It is hoped that more volunteer snow wardens can be recruited to undertake gritting of public walkways in icy weather this year

Litter pick – Thanks must be given to Cllr Diana Cooper who organized the volunteer litter pick in March. Put off by the snow on the first occasion, the pick went ahead mid March and the volunteers collected 29 bags of rubbish.

b. Environment and Development committee

The Chairman introduced Cllr Bryan Wallbridge, Chair of the Environment and Development committee

Planning - Cllr Wallbridge reported that planning is a major part of the committee's work and he was able to report that planning permission had now been granted for the Shambles. The development is going to be sympathetic to the original style and consist of residential and commercial premises.

Community Centre - A community centre is something that a large percentage of Westfield residents say they would like to see. This is something that is going to take some time, due to the lack of funds available, but Council hasn't given up on the aspiration and will continue to work towards it.

Fun Fair - The fun fair took place at Norton Hill Recreation Ground again in 2017 and was a great success. It is enjoyed by residents and we work hard to make sure there is little disruption

Westfield going Global – We have been contacted by Westfield, Massachusetts with a view to having a recorded radio link between us on New Year's Eve as they are going into their 350th anniversary year. There will be a radio broadcast on Somer Valley FM, linking up to the radio station there. This is not a twinning exercise, but

shows that we are forging links with other countries and creating a stronger identity for Westfield.

Profile of Westfield - It is always on the agenda to create a strong identity for Westfield. We need the people of Westfield to get behind us and tell the entire world about Westfield

Future plans - There are plans to improve the play area at Shakespeare Road. At present the project is out to tender with playground manufacturers and when we get the quotes we will be consulting the children of Westfield for their preferences.

Westfield's 10th Anniversary - Although it is two years away we need to start thinking about how to celebrate our 10th anniversary. We welcome any ideas from residents. If anyone has any thoughts we would appreciate them contacting us. This also applies to the Fun Day – volunteers are needed.

c. Finance and Personnel committee

The Chairman introduced Cllr Phil Wilkinson, Chair of the Parish Council's Finance and Personnel committee.

Cllr Wilkinson advised that the Finance and Personnel committee is a small committee and gave his thanks to Emily Merko, the Finance Officer for her help in preparing the finances for the Council.

Grants - This year £16,000 was given in grants to community groups in Westfield.

Precept - Cllr Wilkinson offered apologies for the increase in the precept this year and explained that it was necessary due to the decreased funding received from BaNES. It is only the third time in the 8 years of the Council that it has been increased. He assured those present that the Council will attempt to keep any increases to a minimum.

5. A NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN FOR WESTFIELD

The Chairman introduced Cllr Ron Hopkins, Chair of the Neighbourhood Planning Working Group. Cllr Hopkins referred to the Submission Draft of the Neighbourhood Plan which was available to peruse and had been projected on a screen on auto scroll before the start of the meeting.

Westfield is a great place to live. A safe, prosperous, well-educated and neighbourly community with a unique heritage, strong family and neighbourhood ties and positive blend of homes and industrial development, but most importantly an optimistic and enthusiastic population enjoying a dynamic future.

Following the exciting proposals and guidelines laid out in the Localism Act 2011 the Parish Council realised immediately that preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for Westfield would present a unique opportunity to ensure the people of Westfield would have a say in all aspects of the future of their parish, and most importantly it provides an opportunity for local residents to decide where, for example, new housing should go, what schools should be incorporated and where commercial and retail locations were required. This process to guide and instruct planning officers, rather than leaving this decision entirely to the vagaries and inconsistencies of BaNES.

And so, on 5th February 2015 (it seems like a long time ago now) the Parish Council put out a call to local people to become part of the Westfield Neighbourhood Plan Working Group. A multi-faceted task requiring a broad range of experience and life skills that moved it way beyond the reach of the Parish Council alone.

And volunteered, enthusiasm, experience and life skills came in abundance, enabling the Westfield Neighbourhood Plan to set out a vision for the community that truly reflects the thoughts and feelings of local residents.

Having said that, the progress that has been made toward the Westfield Neighbourhood Plan has been a tremendously demanding process, not least for the full time staff of the Council and it would be remiss of me if I did not express at this opportunity my personal thanks to our Parish Clerk, Lesley Welch who has borne the enormous work load of the final processes and ensured that I understood the more complex legal requirements.

But something as important as this needs to have time spent on it to ensure it truly represents what we want for our children, our jobs, our houses and the spirit of community that Westfield has become known for.

Well, the time has been spent and the process has been followed to the letter, and the plan has been submitted to BANES in what is known as a Pre-Submission Draft which enables BaNES staff to examine it in detail, not to change the content or intent of the decisions the community have reached in preparing it, but to make sure it dovetails exactly into the other processes and plans that rule our local regional governance, such as the new Joint Spatial Plan and other regional and central government development proposals. The next step required by the Localism Act 2011 will be to submit the plan to an independent examiner for comment and observations before final submission for local referendum, at which time we can all read the content and vote to accept the plan for adoption as an important and mandatory part of the BaNES planning and communities process, ensuring our views and wishes are inexorably linked with those.

I know this seems bureaucratic, but be assured this long and complex process is a great investment in our community's future....

Real 'Joined UP thinking' possibly for the first time....

6. THE BIG LOCAL

Cllr Fuller introduced Rob Wicke of the Big Local Radstock and Westfield. Rob gave a presentation introducing the Big Local as a lottery fund of £1m to be given out among the community. Rob thanked Westfield Parish Council for being the LTO since 2015, and thanks were given for the help and support from the officers of the Council.

Dragon's Den - a process where community groups bid for £500 of funding and the bids are voted on by people present. This year was the biggest event yet and Westfield groups to benefit from it were the Westfield Ladies' Choir, Westfield Allotment Group and Swallow.

There is now a £5k fund for Young People and there is a committee of young people organising that fund who have their own panel for decision making.

The fruit project is a community orchard based in Radstock which is to be looked after by local people. This will benefit the residents of Westfield as well as Radstock.

Partner organisations now include Westfield Primary school, Westfield Parish Council and WAGS

Sugar Smart - they are working with BaNES and VirginCare to promote Sugar Smart and make Big Local a flagship for the enterprise.

Looking to the future they will be encouraging local residents to take part in the management team and are developing a community kitchen. They are also supporting the organisers of a mini market in Radstock to get local traders together and create a regular market.

Councillor Robin Moss arrived at 7:45pm

7. BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCILLORS' REPORTS

Cllr Robin Moss addressed the meeting.

This year's report from B&NES is not so much about what the council is doing, as what the council is stopping or has stopped providing. In common with all local authorities, the national austerity programme means that many services traditionally provided are no longer affordable, and are being 'picked up' in some cases by parish councils, like WPC. Youth services, libraries, funding for voluntary organisations, have all been cut back.

So where does the money go, as council tax has risen? In the main, back to central government, as the grant that B&NES receives from central government is being reduced & reduced. It will reach £0 in the next couple of years. But there is also the rising cost of providing social care for those most vulnerable. About 73p in every pound of B&NES spending now goes to social care, for severely disabled younger people as well as our increasingly ageing population. Not a situation that can continue, which is why one council has gone bankrupt, and why others will follow.

More locally our problems in Westfield are well known, and not particularly new.

Traffic and parking remains a matter for complaint & concern, particularly around the school run as well as at commuting times. Making sure that current parking restrictions are enforced as well as arguing for very limited funding for traffic calming.

Homelessness and housing are an issue for many families, especially those where young people are wanting to move out and start their own families. The definitions of 'affordable' are laughable, and it is a constant battle to make sure that promises made by developers at the planning stage are kept when building starts.

One success has been to highlight the plight of forces families, and to successfully argue that it is 'spend to save' to make sure that they get support when leaving the services. Preventing homelessness is a priority, and now B&NES have officers with specific training & responsibility.

Anti social behaviour still creates some complaint and casework, but at a relatively low level compared to other areas. However we are both chasing up the 'man Engine' event, which just shows that anti-social behaviour can come from different sources.

Thanks to WPC for all they work they do, and also for the initiative to start holding councillor surgeries. It would be good if these can get off the ground, as putting these on in the past has had mixed results.

Robin Moss

Cllr Jackson was unable to attend this evening, but sent a report to the meeting:

1. I am immensely proud of what we managed to achieve together to produce the Neighbourhood Plan. It will do so much to give Westfield residents a say in planning, so we can realise our aspirations and get our due share of community infrastructure levy money. The volunteer members of the working party were outstanding. It was just so sad that we lost Richard Wallace and his incomparable knowledge.

2. Part and parcel of that process and in order to create a public identity for Westfield was 'The Way we lived then', the History of Westfield exhibition at Radstock Museum. It ran from September – December last year. What was remarkable was how it was truly 'the people's exhibition' with people producing their family treasures and memories. Westfield has so many unsung heroes, and Joan Pack is certainly one.

3. Another link is the work I have done together with Geoff Fuller to help veterans, especially the homeless and traumatised and their families. Robin, Geoff and I were pleased to support a new charity shop in Midsomer Norton. I am working

now for a special community 1918 remembrance event on 11th November as I am also Chair of Christians Together in Radstock and Westfield.

4. I have backed the Parish Council up on a number of planning applications, but I could not save the Pill box. I have also tried to help individuals. Parking, planning and potholes are the daily bread of a Councillor!

5. I am a member of Radstock Youth Futures and support the youth work in Westfield.

6. Holding the Health Commissioners to account is very hard work, but I am confident that at least our pharmacy is safe.

7. Sometimes I feel I am standing on a sandcastle as the tide comes in, with all these council cuts, but I will keep battling for you.

Eleanor Jackson

8. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

8.1 Grass cutting. A question was asked about the BaNES decision to stop cutting some of the grass in areas of Westfield. It was explained that BaNES had been cutting grass in areas that it didn't own the land and now were looking to cut costs further, so are no longer able to do so. There are meetings to be held with affected residents and BaNES officers where the owner of the land is unknown to look at a way forward and where the owner of the land is known they have been contacted to ask them to maintain it.

8.2 Potholes. A large pothole was reported at the junction with Wells Road and Butcher's Close. This will be reported on Fix my Street. Cllr Mansell advised anyone that is affected by potholes to call Council Connect regularly until the work is done to repair them.

8.3 Traffic lights at junction of Wells Road and Elm Tree Avenue. A resident felt that the time lapse on the lights is too short. As soon as the button is pressed to cross the lights turn. This means that drivers approaching the crossing thinking they have time before the lights change are taken by surprise and stop sharply. It was felt that this is an accident waiting to happen. It was explained that this is a Toucan Crossing and that the priority is given entirely to the pedestrian, which maybe why the time lapse is so short.

8.4 Hedges. Councillors were asked what can people do about hedges that are growing over pavements and pathways. Advice was given to go to Fix my Street and report it there.

8.5 Double yellow lines at Elm Tree Avenue being too long. It was explained that when the lines were put down they were longer than they should have been. The process to remove them would be very long.

9. SUMMING UP AND CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

Cllr Fuller closed the meeting, thanking those that had spoken.

The meeting closed at 8:10pm.