

WESTFIELD ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON ZOOM ON TUESDAY 4TH MAY 2021 STARTING AT 7PM

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

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF COUNCILLORS

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

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 12TH MARCH 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th March 2019 were agreed as a true record and would be signed by the Chair.

3. WESTFIELD INSPIRATIONAL CITIZEN AWARD

Cllr Fuller announced the three winners of the Inspirational Citizen Award – Debbie Maggs, Mike Chivers and Nigel Swift. Due to the meeting being online as a result of covid the presentations had taken place previously. These were their nominations:

“Debbie lives in St Peter’s Road and has done a lot of work bringing a sense of community to the street. She and her husband are responsible for the flower tub at the entrance to the street, lifting people’s spirits as they walk or drive by. She gets contributions for the plants from the residents of St Peter’s, so everyone is involved. During the pandemic she has brought residents together by organising barbecues, coffee mornings and fish and chip evenings when they were allowed back in the summer. She is truly someone who tries her best to develop a sense of community.”

“Mike is a regular sight around Westfield and neighbouring areas with his litter picker and rubbish bags. He has been out and about in all weathers keeping the streets tidy. It makes such a difference for everyone living in or passing through Westfield to see the place free from rubbish. His nominators said “We

would love to see him recognised for his quiet, unassuming and dedicated work to keep Westfield tidy”

“Nigel has spent several years maintaining the footpaths through the Waterside Valley and generally working on the upkeep of the area making it safe for people to use and children to play. This is especially pertinent at the moment with the Parish Council purchasing some land at Waterside Valley. We hope he will continue to do so for some time to come!! “

The members of the public left the meeting.

4. THE WORK OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

As there were no members of the public present the reports were not given. Cllr Fuller invited any questions and there were none.

5. BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCILLORS' REPORTS

Cllr Jackson had forwarded the following report by email:

If I could have a hot meal for every time that someone has said, 'It's been a very strange year', I would never have to cook again! I make no apologies for repeating this cliché, and adding, that very strange things have happened. The first was that I got myself labelled, 'Extremely Clinically Vulnerable' and the recipient of numerous caring letters from Matt Hancock and Bath and North East Somerset Council. This was useful in showing me what other residents were receiving from government and council, but as far as I was concerned, 'reports of my ill health and disability are greatly exaggerated'. Anyway, I had covid in February 2020, I think. I did decide that I should try to keep out of trouble – who would feed my cats if I were ill again? - and kept visits to Westfield to a minimum, stopped doing surgeries and site visits, and spent much time on my computer putting people in need of help with the agencies set up by the council, and ringing the housebound. I developed IT skills I never thought I had.

I always tell people enquiring about what a councillor does, that it is about planning, parking and potholes. The last pothole I reported was filled remarkably quickly, but I am not getting very far with ruptures in the pavement caused by tree roots for example in Holly Terrace and the Waterside, and a general need for re-surfacing of pavements. Remember, the Transport Strategy for our end of the Somer Valley is that people should walk or cycle! Just too bad if you trip on the awful paving in places, or your bicycle wheel gets caught in a 'furrow'. This policy has been in place since 2014's Placemaking Plan, but of course is being reinforced by our 'green administration' who are doing their best to keep cars out of Bath.

Meanwhile I have been supporting the parish council in an attempt to get the pollution along the A367 monitored and measures put in place to reduce the

fumes which give me asthma attacks every time I stand at a bus stop for any length of time.

There have been not a few hiccups in planning, and a few changes were necessary to the Constitution at the March 2021 Full Council meeting. Training has been limited. We did have most useful sessions on enforcement, and on the implications of the greenbelt system. Training usually consists of practical problem solving around a table, as well as talks, and doing all this virtually was not the same. However, the administration has held regular planning policy webinars for the public, which are always informative for learning what the aspirations of the administration are, for example on the Clean Air Zone.

There has been some clarification of protocols, but there is still a difficulty when parish councils feel their views, as statutory consultees, are being ignored, or when they do not express their objections sufficiently clearly within the planning framework, the chair does not pick up on the principle at stake in a particular application, and the officer goes ahead anyway. The Gasex installation in Welton is a classic example of this. What I find difficult is the need for a ward councillor to jump in early if they want to get an application referred to the chair or committee. I have missed one or two when I thought the decision was so obvious on planning policy, that I did not need to intervene, and then the officer took the opposite view. Applications which do come to committee are usually horrendously complicated ones, ones which have been the subject of public uproar, or now, if the council's interests are involved, as in the case of the old school in Bath Old Road, Radstock, where an intelligent officer discovered that the council had not actually sold the land, but a would-be purchaser had made the planning application. A site with a valid permission is much more valuable than one without.

I think there is a great need to advertise procedures in clear, straightforward, grammatical language. We have had no actual site visits, and the quality of officers' presentations has varied widely, though the responses to referrals from the committee have generally been very good with videos made by officers.

The Local Development Forum. This is an arcane group of senior planners, group leaders, and group representatives from planning.

It is supposed to 'give a steer' on policy documents going out for public consultation and building up to the Local Plan Update, the process whereby B&NES planning policies will be made consistent with the administration's adopted policies on Climate Emergency, HMOs and student accommodation, parking zones and greenbelt. Underlying all this is the need to identify sites to satisfy our alleged housing needs and to improve infrastructure.

My inside knowledge proved useful when the possibility of Westfield Council buying the fields along the Waterside came up.

There have been many and various consultations about Planning Policy, usually of very brief span, and at unseasonal or rather during festive periods. These have been over the internet, instead of BANES hiring local halls and putting on exhibitions. The same applies for developers, who would normally put on displays in public places when attempting a major project.

In November I went to see Jacob Rees-Mogg about the proposals in government white papers to change planning procedure. His line was that I should not worry because the government had no time for primary legislation. However, there is no question that the secretary of state is slipping things through while we are distracted with covid. The three white papers the government produced last autumn, if enacted, constitute major changes, removing all democracy, since parish councils will no longer have any say in determining applications, and the planning committee will be pretty well redundant, too. Social housing will disappear because under the changed conditions none of the housing associations will be able to continue building, only developments of more than 50 houses will be required to have 'social housing' and only first-time buyers looking at new properties will benefit. This is a gross over-simplification but is the basis on which national organisations and councils have objected. Only two things seem sacred, (apart from developers' profits) greenbelt and the parish neighbourhood plans.

Meanwhile the applications to go on the Homeseach register have nearly doubled, and are likely to further increase when 'furlough' ends and unemployment soars. I could write another paper on that, the effect of increased domestic violence under 'lockdown' on the provision of safe accommodation, especially for children etc.

I have to say, getting two homeless families into shared equity properties two weeks ago after a yearlong struggle was one of the most satisfying things I have done. But that is only the tip of the iceberg.

Finally, the problem of parking, especially anti-social residents who park on green verges, block people into their drives or park on double yellow lines takes up quite a bit of my time. I am very pleased that after four years' argument, I got a new litter bin to replace the old one removed from Westfield chapel.

Cllr Eleanor Jackson

Cllr Moss had emailed the following report:

This year's report to the Parish meeting, the first for 2 years, is less about what has happened in the last 15 months & more about what will happen in the next couple of years.

As we start to come out of lockdown (fingers crossed there will be no return) the main focus for B&NES should be to repair its finances, to support those families & communities that are struggling, to help small & local businesses to recover, all in a way that doesn't make the climate emergency any worse. How this will unfold is not clear in these exceptional times.

B&NES finances are rocky, to put it mildly. Income is not just from Council Tax, but also from tourism income (particularly the Roman Baths & parking), from the commercial estate of offices & shops as well as from business rates. All these elements have been hard hit & we won't just be returning to 'as you were'. Usually budgets are set annually, but I wouldn't be surprised if they have to be revisited every 4-6 months.

But not everything is doom & gloom. The support given to those struggling under lockdown has been wonderful to see. From shopping to 'baby bundles', fetching prescriptions to delivering hot food, extra support for carers, our community has a lot to be proud of, let's hope it continues.

Many thanks to the (remote) office staff at Westfield Parish, & all my fellow parish councillors who kept the good work going. The purchase of Waterside valley means a valuable local asset has been protected, the grants to the community groups as well as recognising great work with the Citizens Awards has helped in difficult times. Let's hope that the next 12 months will be less challenging while keeping all the positive bits!

Robin Moss – May 2021

6. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from the public

7. SUMMING UP AND CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

Cllr Fuller closed the meeting, thanking Councillors and staff for keeping going through a very difficult year.

The meeting closed at 7:10pm