

WESTFIELD ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Parish meeting on 30th March 2022 at Trinity Methodist Church, Westfield, starting at 7pm.

Present: Cllr Geoff Fuller, Chair of Westfield Parish Council
Parish Councillors: Cllrs Diana Cooper, Ron Hopkins, Phil Wilkinson and Pat Williams
6 Members of the public.
Cllrs Eleanor Jackson and Robin Moss, B&NES Councillors for Westfield

Attending: Lesley Close, Parish Clerk and Tracey Stephens, Admin Assistant

Apologies: -

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 Zoom on 4th May 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 4th May were agreed as a true record and were signed by the Chair.

3. To present the 5th Westfield Inspirational Citizen award

Cllr Fuller announced the winners of the 2022 Inspirational Citizen Award – Eddie and Rachael Liddiard.

“This year there was overwhelming support for one couple that had done a lot for their friends and neighbours, not just during lockdown, but before that when the world wasn’t looking for ‘heroes’.

Some of the nominations read:

- Honestly couldn’t wish to meet a nicer couple of neighbours that regularly cut grass, go shopping, cook meals, arranged a fund raising event for Cancer Research to name but a few of the wonderful things they continue to do for older neighbours and us all!

We have all got to know each other really well during the last two years (covid) and they have also helped myself (Deb) organising street parties and evenings which I have been so grateful for. They are both very kind and thoughtful neighbours that St Peter’s Road are very lucky to have

- I can't say enough about this great couple! They have helped me get shopping, Rachael has baked cakes and dinners for me during this last two years. They have checked in on me most days and have definitely made the last 2 years less lonely as my daughter lives in Weston-Super-Mare and wasn't always able to get up to me.

Unfortunately due to my health I am now moving from St Peter's to live with my daughter but I am going to miss Rachael and Eddie so much. Huge thanks to them both

- Despite having very busy working and family commitments Rachael and her husband Eddie (Tank) Liddiard have tirelessly contributed to our community as St Peter's Road since lockdown March 2020 (and most probably beforehand). They have gone out of their way to make themselves known to us, check on us and offer us their help. This unassuming, caring and selfless help comes in many forms – shopping, gardening, providing dooced meals, visiting elderly residents, listening, maintaining the commemorative planter – to name just a few.

They have helped with and organized the following events: An outside Fish and ~Chip evening, and outside VE celebration, a barbeque, a Macmillan coffee fundraising morning, a birthday party, a ladies Christmas lunch at the Old Down Inn, not forgetting a Secret Santa for our elderly residents!

Rachael and Tank have truly kept us all going by their encouragement and fun. Being a household of pensioners we have very much appreciated their thoughtfulness and kindness by keeping us safe.

We would like to nominate them both for the Westfield Inspirational Award 2022. They have enhanced our lives tremendously.

So, the award must go to Eddie and Rachael Liddiard – thank you for being truly Inspirational!

The award was made to Rachael as Eddie was unable to attend the meeting.

4. The work of the Parish Council

A special welcome to our inspirational citizens Rachael and Eddie Liddiard and to Andy King from New Leaf Studios who will talk to us shortly about Waterside Valley. Thank you to all in the Waterside Valley Focus Group who have turned out tonight and everyone who has come out to support Rachael and Eddie.

Please take time after the meeting if you have not already done so to have some refreshments and to write some comments on the proposed Dog Exercise Enclosure at Westhill Recreation Ground.

Waterside Valley

The big item to mention first is the purchase of land at the Waterside Valley. We surveyed residents of Westfield before the purchase to see if it was something they would like to see happen and the response was a resounding YES. We are delighted that the purchase has gone ahead and are in full consultation mode for a management plan which is being put together by Andy King of New Leaf Studios, who will tell you more in a moment.

New Play Equipment at both Norton Hill and Westhill

The safety of the equipment at both recreation grounds is constantly under review and some of the wooden play items were coming to the end of their life, so have been replaced with more robust items.

Trees at Norton Hill Recreation Ground

As you may have noticed we have, unfortunately, lost some of the Ash trees that line the road along Norton Hill Rec. This was due to Ash Dieback. They have been replaced by some Silver Birch trees, but more may have to go.

Christmas lights switch on

It was great to see this event back in full swing and it proved very popular once again. Thanks to a lot of people that put this together and especially Father Christmas and his helper for coming along!!

Youth Connect

Youth services are still going on in Westfield and we are pleased that they are able to come into this hall once again for their sessions. There is good engagement with the service and we are happy to support it financially.

Westfield Warbler

Covid had a big effect on the income of a lot of local small businesses. One thing the Parish Council could do to help was free advertising in our quarterly newsletter, The Westfield Warbler. We hope it was beneficial.

This church

Mindful of the importance of this church to the community the Council had it registered as an asset of community value. That means that if it had to be sold the Parish Council would have a specified window of time to see if purchasing it would be an option.

Grants

We continue to support local organisations with grant donations. Some recipients this year were Westfield Voices, St Peter's church, the allotments,

Mardons Carnival Club, Prattens and Swallow. If anyone knows of a project that is being set up for the benefit of people of Westfield then have a look at the next round of grant donation. The process starts in July and is publicised on Facebook and our website as well as on the noticeboards in Westfield.

Community competitions

The Inspirational Citizen Award continues to reward those whose kindness and selfless work in the community has an impact on residents of Westfield.

Unfortunately last year we couldn't have a presentation ceremony due to covid, but we would like to thank Debbie Maggs, Mike Chivers and Nigel Swift for their care and consideration to the community. As you will have seen, this year's award was for Eddie and Rachael Liddiard who were nominated by a lot of people that appreciated their attention.

The Front Garden Competition goes from strength to strength and this year we are looking at a new category for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. So any keen gardeners out there take note.

A new competition last year was for the brightest, most dazzling display of outside Christmas decorations. We hope this may continue.

Other things happening

Climate emergency is always a hot topic in today's world and the Parish Council would welcome anyone that feels they could add something to the Working Group. You don't have to be on the Parish Council to be part of this working group. Last year the group liaised with the Shell Garage to install an electric charging point for cars and started investigating low carbon heat sources of the community. Contact the office if you are interested.

5. Waterside Valley

Andy King of New Leaf Studios presented work to date on the developing Management Plan for the Waterside Valley.

6. Bath and North East Somerset Councillors' reports

Cllr Jackson reported:

It is really quite a depressing thought to consider how much has changed since I last reported, for 2020/2, and how little has changed since then, for 2021/22. Some things have changed irreversibly, for example most of us have our full quota of covid jabs, something I spent a lot of time encouraging residents to do, other things have not, such as the difficulty of getting effective enforcement action in the case of certain notorious developers who are not meeting the terms and conditions of their planning consents on the large estates, and individuals who seem to feel they can ignore the rules, creating 'loss of amenity' for their

neighbours. The connection, of course, is covid, which has meant planning officers unable to work, or having to work from home, and a significant backlog of cases building up. On top of that, a number of senior officers, who knew Westfield very well, considered their options during lockdown, and either moved to better jobs elsewhere, or moved into other departments within our council. Recently six young officers have been taken on, so be nice to them if you see one wandering round – in Cobbler's Way, for example. They are on a steep learning curve, but what they lack in experience, they often compensate for with enthusiasm and a fresh eye on our deep-rooted problems.

To return to the nitty gritty. I persuaded B&NES public health officers to bring the covid wagon to the car park here in order to make testing kits and information more accessible, especially for the elderly. I keep reminding officers and the rest of the world that not everyone organises their lives on the internet, and not everyone given a vaccination appointment in Exeter or Heathrow thinks there is something wrong with the computer programme, not with them. I spent quite a lot of time explaining to people how to get their vaccinations, arguing with a bus driver who is anti-vax, and several other residents, and asking people to keep their (social) distance. We have still not gone back to actual B&NES full council meetings but for most of the year planning committee meetings with very strict and distancing disinfection rules have been in the Guildhall. The acoustics are awful, and I have to sit as close to the screen for presentations as possible, but it works. These measures came into their own when a councillor had, quite rightly turned off his mobile for the meeting (which can last four-five hours) and then found he had been 'pinged' and needed to self-isolate because of a contact. No-one else on the committee succumbed.

Planning committee does take up an awful lot of my time, with on average 200 pages of application details to absorb before meetings, site visits, queries from residents and training. As I said last year, we have not had as much training as previously, and because of covid also, we have not done the annual outing to look at the consequences of our decisions. The only problem with that last is that there has been a big turn over of membership of the committee with about two thirds elected in 2019. So when we came out that year to look at Mardons/Nightingale Way, virtually no-one present had voted on the consent. Site visits can be great learning experiences. On Monday this week a very experienced councillor gave us a lecture on farmyard drainage, and what must be done to stop the proposed barn development causing flooding. People, quite rightly, feel passionately about developments, so I feel it is time well spent. I made representations on behalf of Westfield Parish Council about the proposed 550 or so houses Mendip Council want to park on our ward doorstep in their Local Plan Part II. Sadly, I could not do an encore because the Planning Inspector held the enquiry in Shepton Mallet, not 'virtually'. Fortunately the well-organised residents won that one. I have also endeavoured to get the Writhlington development brought to committee as Mendip have successfully applied for B&NES to determine the cross-border application. The reason for this is that there will be a backwash into Westfield. There are not enough school places in our primary schools for the incoming children in Fosseyway South and so on, and the A367 is overloaded already. The most recent application for the White Post means children may well have to go to Wells to school, and Shepton

Mallet or Taunton if they have learning difficulties. In the B&NES Budget statement we noticed £4million for accommodation for SEND pupils on our Bath College campus. The idea is to reduce commuting for disabled students. It does seem wrong to me that specialist unit provision is so meagre that our most vulnerable children are having long journeys to school.

On planning policy, I have been involved in the Local Planning Policy Update, which is grinding its way through the system. The principal issue here is that new housing in Westfield, Radstock and Midsomer Norton will be bought by people working in Bath or Bristol and we have a 'climate emergency' and should not be encouraging commuting. The Council has adopted several SPDs or Special Planning Documents, the most important of which is for retro-fitting measures. For Bath there are new policies agreed on houses in multiple occupation which may become relevant to us, firstly as students move out this way to find affordable accommodation (student halls of residence are too expensive for many!) There are already quite a few in Peasedown St John. Secondly, with the approaching worsening of the housing crisis, we may see many family homes out here split up to be rented room by room again.

Housing and homelessness remain my brief. I recently had a meeting with Graham Saborne, the Director for Housing. It seems that compared with pre-covid times, there has been about a 40% increase in homelessness, but the difference between us and other authorities is that accommodation and counselling is available for all rough sleepers. It is more difficult to help 'sofa surfers' but much can be done. The real issue is going to be the number of families who will face eviction because they cannot pay their heating bills and rent when the prices go up after 1 April. B&NES do have various schemes for assistance but people don't know about them, or are ashamed to ask for help. I am very worried about proposals to move council services from the Hollies to Bath, in order to plug the black hole in the council's finances. This will also hit our planners who 'hot desk' there because the CEO has already sold or let most of the offices in Manvers Street.

To say that the Labour Group think B&NES Council accounts are full of holes like Swiss cheese is putting it mildly. Obviously they lost heavily during the pandemic because of the collapse of tourism and their inability to let shops in Bath. But if I go into detail this report will become too long.

I continue to work on the RE Committee, both on the new Agreed Syllabus, for which I am writing a module for 14 year olds, and on persuading schools to improve their websites. It may seem a small thing, but we persuaded BANES to include us on the council website. We are after all a statutory body the council has to have.

I also continue to work with the British Legion to improve conditions for veterans and military families. You may have noticed that the Remembrance Day commemorations at the memorial stone in Elm Tree Avenue have become a regular thing now.

Finally, with the relaxation in the covid regulations it is possible for me to hold regular face to face 'surgeries' again. On the first and third Saturdays I am here,

in future from 11-12 (note the change in time) and on the second Saturday in Radstock Library 10-11.

But I can always be emailed eleanor.jackson@bathnes.gov.uk or telephoned 01761-438968 or 07979968416 , or simply stopped in the street. It took me about three years to get the litter bin outside this hall, but I will always keep on trying on your behalf.

Dr Eleanor Jackson.

28 March 2022.

Cllr Moss reported:

It's good to be able to have a Parish meeting again, for the first time after a very unusual couple of years !

(1) **Covid:** still remains the biggest issue for B&NES to face, for a number of reasons. The numbers of people with the infection remain high, with those numbers expected to seasonally fluctuate. That does mean that there are higher than usual rates of sickness absence with B&NES employees, particularly in face to face services such as refuse & recycling collection, which has meant that providing some services at times is a struggle.

Also B&NES has traditionally relied on tourism income, which has collapsed over the last few years & is only recovering slowly, which is creating a budget 'gap'.

(2) **Housing:** The pressure from central government to build houses continues, with local councils being given target numbers, B&NES are currently under discussion with central govt & the Metro Mayor about 'our' numbers. The problem we have in Westfield, being on the border with Mendip Council, is that they seem intent on building housing close to the 'border', so they collect the council tax & it is our communities that take the pressure on schools, roads, GP surgeries etc. I have discussed this with Mayor Dan Norris on a number of occasions, stressing particularly the need for a proper transport plan, as well as the need for good quality, well paid local jobs (in places such as the Paulton enterprise zone) so that we don't just build houses for commuters with all the associated traffic issues. The need for affordable housing for rent as well as for sale is also a continuing issue.

(3) **Cars & traffic:** continues to be a problem, particularly around the time of the school run. The majority of parents either walk their children to school or are considerate drivers, but there is a small minority who are inconsiderate, to put it mildly. There is a particular 'hot spot' near Fosseyway school (which has a very wide catchment area) where these problems have been very acute & difficult for local residents. Cllr Fuller & myself have met with local residents, with the local head teachers & are in communication with B&NES & the Police, to come up with a solution. However this has not been simple & straightforward, particularly as many drivers (particularly those with disabled children) have Blue Badges & an entitlement to park largely irrespective of the usual parking restrictions. The Police have been asked to attend on a number of occasions & B&NES have been asked to provide regular civil enforcement officers (traffic wardens). We continue to press these authorities.

(4) **NHS & local social care services:** our local health services, such as GP surgeries, dentists & other 'ancillary' services continue to struggle with the amount of work they have to cover. In part this has to do with the after effects of

Covid, the increased numbers of people struggling with poor mental health, the doubling of reported incidents of domestic violence, none of us being able to keep up with dental check-ups, being examples. But there are also grave concerns about the quality of care being provided, because the professionals providing the services are being expected to use unworkable & inappropriate systems. I'm sure you have all seen that Virgin Care sold their business to a private equity company Twenty20 Capital, who renamed the business HRCG Care Group. B&NES are now looking if they are the right company to keep that contract, with a decision due to be taken by the end of June.

Finally, many thanks to the Parish council, particularly the staff team, for all the hard work they do on behalf of local residents.

Robin Moss

30 March 2022

7. Questions from the public

Mrs Liddiard spoke on behalf of the residents' association of St Peter's Road. She highlighted the problems residents have with parking on St Peter's Road by people who are using the schools on Longfellow Road. She said that the level of inconsiderate parking and abuse from some people was unacceptable and asked the Parish Councillors to help with their campaign to get action from B&NES. Double yellow lines were discussed, but the problem with that was that there is no enforcement available. It was asked if the pathway between St Peter's Road and Longfellow Road could be closed, but advice was that this wouldn't be possible as it is a public right of way.

It was pointed out that the Chief Executive of B&NES visited Westfield recently and this was one of the issues that was highlighted to him.

Resolved: (1) Cllr Moss to contact Highways.

(2) The office to write to Will Godfrey, further reinforcing the depth of feeling by residents.

8. SUMMING UP AND CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

Cllr Fuller closed the meeting, thanking Andy King for his time and asking Rachael Liddiard to pass on thanks to Eddie Liddiard for his part in the Inspirational Citizen award.

The meeting closed at 8:33pm