

WESTFIELD ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Parish meeting on 29th March 2023 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, Pat Williams, Paul Millard
9 Members of the public.
Cllr Robin Moss, B&NES Councillor for Westfield
PC 3356 George Simpson

Attending: Tracey Stephens Deputy Parish Clerk and Caitlin Brown, Admin Assistant

Apologies: Cllr Eleanor Jackson, B&NES Councillor for Westfield
Lesley Close, Parish Clerk

Absent: Cllrs Bryan Wallbridge, Lesley Mansell, James Honess

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 30th March 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 30th March 2022 were agreed as a true record and were signed by the Chair.

3. To present the 6th Westfield Inspirational Citizen award

Cllr Fuller announced the winner of Westfield's Inspirational Citizen 2023 – Mrs Marion Harrington.

Mrs Harrington has tirelessly campaigned to keep the buses which serve Westfield running.

Mrs Harrington shared some words;

I am honoured, I am very passionate about the buses. The bus is my lifeline, I use it for shopping, post office, pharmacy, dentist, without it I would be stuck at home. I value my independence and I'm fighting to keep my independence.

I spoke with the manager at Tesco who has informed me he will pass this on to higher management. If they don't have the bus, they will lose income. Many people need the bus to get there.

A group of eight of us gathered to speak with Jacob Rees-Mogg about the 82 bus service. He was very understanding and said he would send us a petition form. It has been sent to (Cllr) Eleanor Jackson who has forwarded to (Cllr) Liz Hardman (Paulton Ward) who will re-write, jargon free.

We have a lovely bus driver.

Please get behind us and support our bus service.

4. The work of the Parish Council

Cllr Fuller gave a report on the work of the Parish Council in 2022 and what was coming up in 2023:

In a year with the cost of living increasing and soaring inflation the Parish Council has wanted to ease the tax burden, without jeopardizing the recreational facilities in the Parish. We have managed to keep the precept, which is the amount you pay within your Council Tax for the Parish Council, to an increase of only 5p per week on last year.

What's been happening?

Waterside Valley has been a key focus this last year, with several summer consultations and the ongoing purchase of a plot of land adjacent to the one the Parish Council already owns.

A management plan has been put in place and funding of £10,000 sourced from WECA, thanks to Somer Valley Rediscovered and B&NES. The main aspects needing work and funding are accessibility and bio diversity. Plans are in place encompassing paths, entrances, signage and grass cutting and ongoing work will be discussed with the lots of volunteers that have offered to help.

We continue to support local organisations and charities with grant donations.

Youth Connect are working hard with the young people of our Parish with meetings regularly in this church hall and at the recreation grounds. Some of the things that the young people have been tackling are Health, Nutrition and cooking, information, advice and guidance and sports and physical health. Numbers of young people in the groups are increasing, so this shows that word is getting out there about what a great group it is.

Each year we endeavour to recognise those within the community whose actions have had a positive impact on the lives of people in Westfield. Last year we were very grateful to Rachael and Eddie Liddiard for their care and consideration for their neighbours. This year we thank Marion Harrington for her tireless efforts to keep the buses running in Westfield.

What's next?

In May you will be asked to vote for your B&NES Councillors and, if there are more than 11 applications, your Parish Councillors. Please remember you will need photo identity in future to vote.

This coming year sees the coronation of our King, Charles III. Westfield are in the process of organising a 'Big Lunch' at Westhill Recreation Ground and information is being sent out on our website, Facebook, the Westfield Warbler and noticeboards.

There's a lot more to talk about under the banner of Environment and Development committee, so I will let the Vice Chair of that committee, Diana Cooper, give the updates on what's been happening in the environment. Then Cllr Phil Wilkinson, Chairman of the Finance and Personnel committee will give an outline of where we are financially.

To finish I would just like to thank all our Councillors for their work throughout the year.

Environment and Development Committee, Cllr Diana Cooper –

2022-2023

New play equipment at Norton Hill Recreation Ground has been installed to replace the old wooden swing frames. Thanks to Awards for All and the Sperring charity for their funding for that.

A new brick planter at Wesley Avenue is under construction. It is almost finished – just some final touches. The old planter was wooden and rotting, so some local stone has been sourced to keep it looking attractive through the years ahead.

Events through the year

First competition of the year is the Front Garden competition. This is for those whose gardens are visible to passersby and lift the environment of Westfield. Last year we had three categories to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The main front garden category was won by Mr and Mrs Holcombe of Waterside Road for their beautiful garden. The best

Jubilee display was judged to have been from Mrs Helen Moon of Birch Road. The best container was a hanging basket in Highfields.

The annual Christmas lights switch on was back last year and as popular as ever. We had 3 more lampposts fitted with lights on the stretch through Westfield, making it extend virtually from start to finish of Westfield along the A367.

Along with the Christmas lights we had Santa judging the best home decorations. Last Christmas the award went to Mr and Mrs Holcombe in Waterside Road for their amazing display.

Then there is the Inspirational Citizen, which we have already awarded this evening. Thanks to Marion Harrington for her tireless work with the bus services.

Winter maintenance of pavements in Westfield is important and we would encourage anyone to help out with gritting pavements in their location. We have all the equipment – just get in touch if you would be able to help with this.

The flower displays through Westfield are updated each year with hanging baskets and coal truck planters. Thanks to our contractor, Rob Wicke, for his work on these, brightening up the journey through the centre of Westfield.

Planning

The Council have been fighting a planning application, The White Post, since 2015 and will continue to fight this. The development is actually situated in Mendip, however the impact on Westfield and its services will be huge.

Finance and Personnel, Cllr Phil Wilkinson

Cllr Wilkinson gave a brief overview of finance and personnel for the last year and invited questions. There were no questions from members of the public.

5. Bath and North East Somerset Councillors' reports

Cllr Jackson's report:

As I have said on previous occasions, it is an immense privilege to represent Westfield on Bath & North East Somerset Council, and I feel this the more strongly as an election fast approaches. I can only thank you for all the support you have given me in my efforts on behalf of the community over the past year, and indeed since I was first elected in 2015. I hope you will continue to do so. I hope also that the loss of physical vision I have had to contend with over the

past year has been compensated by a better insight into residents' aspirations and ambitions as well as by a greater understanding of their sufferings with the cost of living crisis, housing shortages and high rentals, and the decline of adult social services and the NHS. I can only apologise that I am not present tonight because of a nasty bout of covid-19 which has rendered me almost speechless. All I can say is, take care. According to the B&NES website, there were 90 cases reported in the area in the last week, but I would say that is massive under-reporting. Stay safe!

Going back to my Annual Report in 2019, just before the last election, is a humbling experience as there are still many on-going issues. I wrote: 'Trying to create a sense of community as well as an awareness of Westfield's tangible achievements, and combatting the attitude of those who think that the edge of the known world is Maple Drive, remains a challenge. I send endless emails about parking perils in Longfellow Road, the issues Mardon's Club has, and the problems at Elm Tree Avenue, and drag officers and cabinet members out here. Endless patience (and re-election) is needed for this. Think how many years it has taken to get the double yellow lines you wanted, or the K6 telephone kiosk removed! If I started on the saga of the broken gate beside this church, B&NES' responsibility, or the broken bollard at COSTCO, this would be a very long report indeed.'

The same is true now, though I would like to think that Westfield has a higher profile, even if there is a difficulty with the Welton Road 'Welcome to Westfield' sign. There is a string of unresolved enforcement cases up and down the A367, that I need to chase up with the new planning officers. We have lost the head of the enforcement team to another BANES department, and senior planners have departed in shoals as well.

Where we have made progress, thanks in no small part to the tenacity of our Clerk and Deputy Clerk and an alliance with certain MSN B&NES councillors, is with planning policy Mendip District Council (RIP) This is because of the plans for 505 houses at various sites around the White Post and Norton St Philip. There is no magical 'five year housing supply' established yet in their Local Plan because the process of consultation was flawed, as the residents of Norton St Philip proved in the high court. I have attended hearings on planning policy and planning applications to establish your view that the A367 and the B3355 will not take a greater volume of traffic, and the GP facilities and school places are lacking.

I have pressed for greater economic investment, though I am concerned that if the Old Mills development goes ahead some of the Westfield businesses may re-locate. Some do need larger facilities.

Going back to the 2019 report, I am glad that the youth work is now established in Youth Connect South West, and flourishes in Westfield. 'Holding the Health Commissioners to account is very hard work... Fighting to retain the 'community equipment' service free of charge for residents post-surgery has been another battle hopefully won, and I have worked, and am working to get better provision locally for those with mental health issues' I

wrote, but mental health provision remains woeful. Cllr Moss can say more about Adult Social Care.

With the closure of the Radstock Methodist Church for Methodist worship, I struck back with an exhibition at Radstock Museum on 'The History of Methodism in the Radstock Area'. This included a considerable amount of material on this church, first built in 1862 as a Primitive Methodist Church by miners using stone from the Waterside quarry, and then extended, and on the United Church which stood in front of Providence Bungalow on the Wells Hill. It demonstrated the truth of my earlier exhibition on the History of Westfield, that Westfield residents are 'ordinary people achieving extraordinary things.' We have also now organised proper Remembrance tide ceremonies, with a past chair of BANES laying a wreath at the memorial stone in 2022, and a service here, and the 11th hour of the 11th day observed.

Finally, I am proud that in the first year of Westfield in Bloom, we won 'Silver Gilt' while the 5 It's Your Neighbourhood entries were outstanding except for Fosseway School a grade lower, which is outstanding. This year we think we should concentrate on the concept of Neighbourhood. And entitle our entry 'It's Our Neighbourhood'.

Eleanor Jackson, 29/03/2023

Cllr Moss reported:

Locally, the issues that have been raised contacts from residents are largely similar to previous years. Many thanks to Parish councillors & officers for the work they do, as we are able to do a great deal more working together.

Issues have included:

Anti-social behaviour. We do seem to have spates of vandalism particularly when the nights are long & the weather is good. Damage to play equipment & benches sadly still occur. Unfortunately speeding in residential streets by a small inconsiderate minority continues, as does the insistence by some that the school run can only happen in a car.

More general traffic problems. Housing is being built without the necessary transport infrastructure increases, so the pressure on the existing roads & streets mounts. As B&NES councillors Eleanor & I are always pressuring for planned housing, as do Parish councillors. B&NES are looking to introduce 'Liveable Neighbourhoods' mainly in Bath, which restricts & calms traffic, but with mixed views from residents. These are schemes that are worth watching (there are 15 at the moment) to see what might work in Westfield.

The lack of affordable housing for young families remains a problem, in both the rental & 'to buy' sectors, sadly not the first or last time it will appear as an

issue in a parish report. Housing developers always seem to be able to offer a percentage of affordable housing during the planning process, only to find they cannot deliver when it comes to actually building. There needs to be a more robust regime by B&NES planners to make sure developers do as they say (rather than be seen as an easy touch), but there is still the problem that 'affordable' is calculated in relation to average prices rather than average wages & income, which is a national problem.

I have made contact with some of the new Somerset Councillors to ensure we keep communicating regarding planning on borders.

My work with Big Local (the 10-year Lottery funding programme) continues. We are coming into the last few years of scheme & we are planning for the future beyond Lottery funding. Organisations in Westfield continue to benefit from support, whether from small grants to Dragons Den, as well as bigger improvements at local schools as well as the fitness track around Westhill Rec, which continue to be well used.

Case work, particularly people needing support with social care, continues to rise. Without a national policy on funding, payments & support this will continue, especially as recruitment & retention of care staff is such a problem.

As B&NES councillors we continue to make sure that Westfield is not forgotten & continually remind 'the powers that be' that Westfield is a distinct community in its own right, that residents pay for services & facilities & expect those to be forthcoming. I know how annoying it is to see reports & references that talk about 'Radstock' & 'MSN' when they should be saying 'Westfield'.

There is an ongoing campaign for local buses. The funding has been extended until July and we need to ensure this continues. I have been in contact with Metro Mayor, Dan Norris, to gain support and will be speaking with him again in the next few days.

In conclusion, another year with many challenges. Again, many thanks to councillors & officers of Westfield Parish for all their work.

Robin Moss, March 2023

6. PC 3356 George Simpson

Our local beat officer, PC George Simpson, attended the meeting. He reported that statistically Westfield is a safe place to live. There are some incidents of antisocial behaviour but this is being tackled.

Speeding in Westfield was raised, including Waterford Park and the A367. PC Simpson advised that creating a Community Speed Watch Group would help by recording data of speeding hotspots which can then be reported to the Speed Enforcement Officers who can target these areas. The Highway Agency will assess the data collected and determine the best deterrents to use. If anyone is interested in starting a Community Speed Watch Group, police can support this to happen.

7. Questions from the public

When will the seats be replaced on the bus stops?

Resolved: Cllr Moss will pass this on to appropriate department at B&NES.

When will those who signed up to volunteer at Waterside Valley be contacted? There have been reports of contractors completing works at Waterside Valley but no volunteers. Is this something the Parish Council still want local people to help with?

Tracey Stephens, Deputy Clerk, explained that the Management Plan for Waterside Valley had only recently been signed off and as a result the redevelopment of the site has only recently started. Contractors were required to complete specialist work however the Parish Council are very keen for members of the local community to be involved in the ongoing maintenance of the area. It was noted that volunteers could have been updated on progress and plans sooner.

Cllr Hopkins advised that there are plans to create a 'Friends of Waterside Valley' group in the future.

Resolved: The Parish Council will contact all those who signed up to volunteer with an update shortly.

8. SUMMING UP AND CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

Cllr Fuller closed the meeting, thanking those who attended.

The meeting closed at 19:45