

WESTFIELD ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Parish meeting on 27th March 2024 at Trinity Methodist Church, Westfield, starting at 7pm.

Present: Cllr Phil Wilkinson, Chair of Westfield Parish Council
Parish Councillors: Cllrs Diana Cooper, James Cradock, Geoff Fuller, Ron Hopkins, Paul Millard, Pat Williams
9 Members of the public.
Cllrs Robin Moss and Eleanor Jackson, B&NES Councillors for Westfield
PC Paul Sheppard, PCSO Lana Washbourne

Attending: Lesley Close, Parish Clerk and Caitlin Brown, Admin Assistant

Apologies: Tracey Stephens, Deputy Parish Clerk

Absent: James Honess

1. Welcome and introduction of Councillors

Cllr Wilkinson, Chair of the Parish Council welcomed all to the meeting.

2. Minutes of the last meeting held on 29th March 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 29th March 2023 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

3. To present the 7th Westfield Inspirational Citizen award

Cllr Wilkinson announced the winner of this year's Inspiration Citizen – Mrs Sally Hicks.

Sally was nominated in recognition of her fundraising efforts for Swallow, the local charity that supports teenagers and adults with learning disabilities.

Cllr Wilkinson thanked Sally on behalf of the Parish Council for her continued support of the local charity.

4. Somer Valley Rediscovered – an update of their work at Waterside Valley

Miriam Woolnough, Project Manager for Somer Valley Rediscovered gave an overview of the work of Somer Valley Rediscovered and an update on developments taking place at Waterside Valley.

Somer Valley Rediscovered work on five key spaces within Bath and North East Somerset, covering 34 hectares. Their work includes habitat management, access improvements, volunteer opportunities and working alongside health professionals for social prescribing.

Work at Waterside Valley continues, in January this year scrub was cleared to redress the balance between scrub and grassland, both of which are important to the habitat.

There is further work planned, such as grass topping and hay making – contractors are on standby to complete this once the weather improves.

There are many events taking place at Waterside Valley, such as wellbeing walks, bird wanderers, bat walks and foraging workshops. These events are free to join.

Positive relationships with other local organisations such as Youth Connect South West have been developed and workshops in bushcraft and film making have taken place.

Details of all events can be found on the Somer Valley Rediscovered website.

5. Review of the Westfield Neighbourhood Plan

Westfield's Neighbourhood Plan was completed in November 2018 following years of consultations and surveys. It documents Westfield's needs and desires in the categories of housing, green spaces, heritage, economy and jobs, as well as amenities, infrastructure and highways.

Over the past five years it has been used to advise the parish council and lend weight to our responses to planning applications (large and small).

The Neighbourhood Plan also provided the evidence the parish council needed to support our grant and CIL applications for funds to purchase the Waterside Valley and for the creation of the much-loved outdoor running and gym facilities at Westhill Recreation Ground.

We are very proud that our original plan, which was one of the first produced nationwide, received a very positive response after it was issued and indeed was used as the format basis for many other councils Neighbourhood plans nationwide.

There is no formal requirement, nor time restrictions, about monitoring or reviewing neighbourhood plans, but it is good practice and helps to ensure that the neighbourhood plan remains relevant and effective, so, in line with Westfield's progressive and forward-thinking approach to local governance, five years after its completion, in November 2023, Westfield Parish Council decided to begin the long process of reviewing its Neighbourhood Plan.

Early in the process we started to gather much anecdotal evidence that young people leaving home for the first time and older people wishing to downsize did not necessarily have the choice of housing types and locations in Westfield that they needed.

This led the parish council to believe that there was a significant drift and potentially damaging breakdown in, sometimes, historical family location in the parish and this required deeper investigation. To that end we secured a grant from Localities which has funded the recent Housing Needs Survey that you will all have seen, to see if the anecdotal evidence could be confirmed.

Of course, the housing needs survey will also clarify many other issues about housing requirements and facility and infrastructure management within Westfield, so many thanks to everyone who completed the survey and congratulations to the winners of £100 who were randomly selected after completing the survey. The data gathered will inform the type and location of housing that we will request if housing developments are agreed in our area.

The results of the housing needs survey will be available to us in the next few days, and we will be calling on residents to join us to discuss the revision of the Neighbourhood Plan in order to bring it to a rapid conclusion.

Be assured that the finished, revised, neighbourhood plan will be available for everyone to read, and it will be used to ensure that wherever possible the new BANES Local Plan will be guided to Westfield's best advantage.

6. Overview of the work of the Parish Council

Chairman's report

What's going on in Westfield?

Between Councillor Cooper, Chair of the Environment and Development committee, and I we will try to explain what's been happening in Westfield this last year and outline some of the projects going forward. Councillor Moss will give an outline of the finances.

The Neighbourhood Plan that was created in 2018 is due for updating. Cllr Ron Hopkins chairs the Neighbourhood Plan Review group and will give more information about this.

Youth Services continue to thrive and the Parish Council is pleased to continue to support the provision financially. Groups are regularly held here in the church hall and at the Recreation Grounds.

Grants were given to several local organisations and we had a presentation evening at Westhill Club to celebrate the work of the recipients in our community. Most of the

same organisations apply each year, but last year we were happy to give a grant to some not so regular applicants and one new one.

Recipients were: Citizens Advice Bureau, Dial-a-Ride, HeartTalks, Jesters Carnival Club, MSNRSB, Prattens Bowls Club, Radstock Baptist Church, Small Stuff Baby Bank, SWAN, Trinity Girls Brigade, Westhill Club, Westfield Primary School and Westfield Voices.

The Parish Council welcomed the installation of a silhouette of a miner next to the coal truck planter at the top of Elm Tree Avenue. Funded and installed by the Somerset District Miners' Trust, this is an imaginative way of preserving this important aspect of our heritage. There is a further silhouette to be situated by the Memorial stone at Elm Tree Avenue to commemorate D Day 80th anniversary on June 6th.

Dogs on Leads was a key message to all visiting our recreation grounds this year and the message remains important as ever. Over the summer holidays we invested in a Park Attendant who spoke with those exercising their dogs and encouraged them to use Waterside Valley for off lead exercise and keep dogs on leads in the recreation grounds.

The two allotments sites are kept up to date beautifully. There is constant work going on at both sites – Waterford Park and Larch Court – and the Parish Council is very grateful to the allotmenters for their work.

What is new for 2024/25?

Speeding on the A367 continues to be an issue and we are pleased to say that we have received funding for two speed indicator devices, like the one outside St Peter's church, which will be positioned on Wells Road around Westhill Road/Highfields, Northbound and Southbound. We had a report on speeds on the main road done for us a few months back and it was clear that people took note of how fast they are travelling, so hopefully the new ones will help to standardise the speeds through Westfield.

The Parish Council is working to create changing rooms at Westhill Recreation Ground in order that the football pitch can be used by teams who need changing facilities.

We are working towards the renovation of the brick footbridge at the Radstock end of Waterside Valley and a new footbridge at the opposite end of join Waterside Valley and Haydon Batch. The process is long but we are addressing each step of the process.

The 80th anniversary of D Day is on 6th June this year. The Parish Council has been working with the Royal British Legion for a small commemorative service at the memorial stone at the top of Elm Tree Avenue. This will begin at 2pm and all are welcome.

The Parish Council is made up of 11 Councillors elected by the people of Westfield every four years. We have one vacancy on the council. If anyone is interested in joining us, please speak to any one of the Councillors and staff here this evening.

Cllr Cooper, Chair of the Environment and Development Committee gave an update:

The ever-popular Christmas Lights Switch On event goes from strength to strength. We have been holding this event now for 11 years and it is a very popular event. It is always a pleasure to see local children switching on the lights and listening to the Silver Band getting us in the Christmas mood.

The annual Front Garden competition is now in its ninth year and was won by Mr and Mrs Morgan of Waterford Park last year for their front garden bursting with colour with many plants grown themselves from seed. The winning container was a stunning display by Kay Pera of Magnolia Road. As an extra this year we awarded a cup for the garden at Fosse Way School, managed beautifully by a former student of the school, Darren Hickling.

For the last few years, we have been doing a competition to find the best of the Christmas home/garden decorations in Westfield, judged by Santa himself with the aid of Cllr Wilkinson and myself. In 2023 the winner was Mr Rabbitts of Ruskin Road. His display was very bright and had a wow factor!

Last year we planted out over 900 daffodil and camassia bulbs on the green at Glebelands with the aid of a few volunteers. Flowers are showing now and it looks lovely.

There is lots going on in the Waterside Valley in conjunction with Somer Valley Rediscovered, who are holding events some of which support Green Social Prescribing, such as Bird Wanders – learning about the birds that are present in our everyday lives, Spring Nature group – helping to make connections with nature and an introduction to early Spring foraging. Bath College is making use of the space to carry out volunteering as well. We are also doing lots of work on the habitat there –and Miriam will have given details of this earlier in the meeting. Dog waste bins were installed at two entrances so hopefully they will be well used. We have also recently received news that we have been awarded grant funding to rebuild two bridges.

We manage the Miners' Trust recreation grounds at Norton Hill and Westhill. At Norton Hill, unfortunately, we have had to have the Ash trees removed as they are all showing signs of Ash Die Back. Discussion on a way forward to keep this area looking good is ongoing. The main problem with putting trees there is that they need an enormous amount of care as saplings and the cost of watering them is out of the reach of the Parish Council budget. We tried with some Silver Birch trees a few years ago, but unfortunately, they failed. If anyone has any ideas, they are welcome to put them to Council for discussion.

Cllr Moss, Chair of the Finance and Personnel Committee gave an update:

The committee oversees the Parish Council's finance and staffing and all is running as it should be. Thanks go to the office staff for maintaining accurate records and keeping the accounts in order.

This year, we were tasked with finding new office space after being given notice on our current property. I am pleased to say we have found new premises and will be moving just along the road from where we are currently situated. A moving date is to be confirmed.

7. Bath and North East Somerset Councillors' Reports

Cllr Robin Moss gave their report:

Housing

Recent & hopefully positive news is that Somerset Council (previously Mendip District) have taken the Fossefield site (opposite the White Post) off their list of preferred housing locations. This is not inside the parish boundary, but would still have a major impact on traffic as well as local services if built, especially on top of the building already taking place. It's not the end of the story, as a developer has put in an application to build 220 houses, but in a 'non designated' site this hopefully will be easier to resist.

The problem is that we do need housing, affordable housing with the infrastructure & services to go with it. Unfortunately, too often development proposals are for very expensive 'executive' housing. Some 'affordable' housing will be included in the initial plans but often abandoned part way through by builders (as they say they can't afford to build them, ironically). Infrastructure & services will follow, we are told, but as anyone who has tried to get an NHS dentist, for example, will tell you, they don't seem to follow at all.

Council Tax

The BaNES council tax went up by 4.99%, mainly because of the continuing increase in social care, for both adults and children. You will have probably seen reports that many councils are in severe financial difficulty & on the point of bankruptcy (such as Somerset Council) but fortunately BaNES is not among them, mainly because of income from tourist assets such as the Roman Baths. However the continuing crisis in local government finance cannot rule out a collapse in services, as is happening elsewhere.

Congratulations to Westfield Parish in keeping their rise down. Many parishes are having to put their precepts up to keep up with costs of providing services, especially as the BaNES is doing less, but prudent housekeeping has made the PCs decision an easier one on local residents.

Traffic & Transport

Continues to be a problem through the parish. Recently there were 2 major road works scheduled in MSN & Radstock at the same time, which was going to be difficult on their own. However gas leak in Radstock meant an emergency closure that caused gridlock throughout the district, including the A367 at a standstill. I contacted BaNES about emergency diversions, as I'm sure did many other residents. I also brought it up at a BaNES cabinet meeting, suggesting that when more than one road repair planned in the same area at the same time then a risk assessment should be done, to look at 'what if'. Hopefully that idea sunk in!

Buses, or the lack of them, continues to be a real problem for some residents. Discussions with both BaNES & the Metro Mayor's office continue & the recent announcement of a service being run by Paulton Parish Council is good, positive, news.

Cllr Eleanor Jackson gave her report:

Context: local and regional

Looking at the piles of paper on my office desk, all positioned to remind me to do something fairly important in the Council for Westfield residents, on subjects as diverse as the Knife Crime Task and Finish Group reporting to a scrutiny panel, the research into Growing Food (allotment provision etc) for both health and climate and environment panels, WECA and the campaign to restore the rural bus services, and of course the Religious Education provision as required by law (SACRE), I am reminded what a privilege it is to have been re-elected to represent Westfield residents again on both B&NES Council and the parish council. My father used to say that I had a butterfly mind, flitting from one subject to another, but I like to think of myself as a pollinator, essential for creating seeds for future growth. I'm absolutely delighted with the parish council's successful application for funding for the bridges across the stream in the Waterside Project. Well done! Apart from all the direct benefits, it reminds me that a councillor should be a bridgebuilder between organisations, action groups and individual residents. I also see myself as a champion for Westfield, generally, as well as for the homeless, the young people, especially those with disabilities, and the 'battling grannies and grampies' who are losing their sight but not their marbles. I always say that being a councillor is about potholes, planning and parking. This year we have had furrows on grass verges, gas main renewal and issues with ash trees, planning problems by the shedload and the continued problems of parking, as residents acquire ever larger vehicles which won't fit their garages, and new sets of double yellow lines which are then totally ignored.

The first 12 months after an election are always a strange time. We (Labour) settled comfortably into the Official Opposition desks and proposed some radical changes to the Budget even though councillors were starved of in-depth information. The Greens became a proper party with three members as opposed to the one woman show before. The Conservatives shrank to three, with no Bath councillors at all. Meanwhile, re-structuring continued apace, and the officer force shrank considerably, as some posts were frozen. With 41 councillors, the Lib Dems did some re-structuring of their

own, splitting portfolios and handing out titles, and taking over chairs where there ought to be an opposition scrutiny. Whatever the political reasons for this, the fact of the matter is that we have a far higher proportion of young councillors, some with small children and all with 'day jobs', so they are not available to do the donkey work, even on the Planning Committee.

Regionally we have big changes as the Mayor of Bristol becomes extinct, the WECA mayor looks for a new job (BBC1 announcement) as he does not have the powers of other mayors, and he runs into problems over the bus services, and Westfield is thrown into the new Frome and East Somerset parliamentary constituency.

Community identity

Creating an identity for Westfield is an important part of the parish council's agenda, as well as mine. Rather than going on about how council officers and Bath councillors do not know where Westfield is, and fail to respond to problems, I would like to focus on the positive. We not only have the excellent stewardship of community facilities by parish council officers, and the way they act as a helpline, and refer residents to the right agencies, we also have groups of residents in certain roads campaigning to improve their neighbourhoods. We have Westfield Primary School and the Fosseyway School engaging with the community through the parents' activities such as gardening projects, and we have Youth Connect South West, as well as Swallows, as well as football teams. I was pleased to be able to give a new resident, a mother, a string of possible activities for her teenager, which would not cost much money. The vandals are not going to be beaten without constructive alternatives being available.

The Remembrance tide ceremonies at the memorial stone in Elm Tree Avenue are now an established event, though we could do to improve, and get more musicians involved. The D-Day commemoration on 6 June will be a quieter event for us, but we should remember the Westfield navy veterans who only five-six years ago gave me vivid accounts of their experiences. I remain involved with Radstock Museum.

Secondly, Westfield in Bloom was very successful in July 2023, the first time we entered the Ayre Cup section. The theme, 'It's Our Neighbourhood' linked the 'outstanding' entries in the 'It's Your Neighbourhood' section of the competition and put Westfield on the Royal Horticultural Society map via South West in Bloom. The gardening club at Westfield Primary School won a cup for having the best compost heap in the South West. They surely had the best pumpkin, too. Swallows' office garden (Old Pit Lane) won the prize for 'inclusivity'.

This year our theme is, 'gardening is good for you', focussing on the health benefits of community gardening. We need more volunteers, and more funding. However, the project dovetails well with the parish council's 'flowers in public places'. The joint bulb planting in Bryant's Avenue went very well

The way forward

More volunteers, of course. At all levels and in all places, whether it is the odd litter pick, helping out the parish council with its response to the Neighbourhood Plan update, emailing 'Fix my Street', campaigning or writing to the Journal.

The Local Plan consultation is about to close. There will be further rounds, no doubt. I continue to represent what I hear to Mendip Local Plan officers, and there is also the question of having a Westfield Conservation area, and the relationship to Radstock and its energetic town council. parish councillors are always needed...

Most importantly, thank you for coming.

8. PC Paul Sheppard

PC Sheppard gave an update on local crime statistics and stated the figures are stable.

9. Questions from the public

There were no questions from members of the public.

10. Summing up and closure of the meeting

Cllr Wilkinson closed the meeting and thanked everyone who attended, stating, 'Westfield belongs to the people who live here, Councillors are just the guardians.'

The meeting closed at 20:15