

The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of Wembdon 2011

Draft

The Annual Parish Meeting was held on Monday 14 March 2011, at Wembdon St. George's School, commencing at 7.00pm.

Present were 14 members of the public, PC Tony Freeman, PCSO Nick Mizon and the following Parish Councillors - Cllr B Webb (Chairman), Cllr K Perry, Cllr J Riddle, Cllr D Lumber, Cllr R Western, Cllr M Solomon, Cllr P Reed, Cllr S Bagg and Cllr Ann Bown

Chairman's Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for Absence

These were received in respect of Cllr R Harris and County Cllr John Edney.

Minutes

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 8 March 2010 were read agreed and signed.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

The Chairman's Annual Report

The Chairman read the following statement

I am beginning my report this year with a simple equation: Hinkley Point construction + new Haygrove School + possible future development of Cokerhurst Farm + possible development on the Green Wedge + general increase in vehicles = potential traffic chaos in the coming years. I believe that Wembdon and the surrounding area will face the possibility of regular gridlock in the near future, and the Parish Council will face a daunting task in attempting to mitigate the impact on the village of an enormous increase in vehicle movements. The level of threats to Wembdon from various developments is unprecedented.

The planning application that has recently generated the greatest interest among parishioners has been the outline application for the construction of some 450 houses at Cokerhurst Farm. Following a lively public meeting, the Parish Council submitted a robust objection to this application, and there were also many individual objections. In the last few days we have been advised that the Cokerhurst Farm application has been refused. We have won the first battle, but on past form developers do not give up easily, and we must have our troops ready for possible counter-attack.

After the May elections, a new Parish Council will be formed, and it will undoubtedly be spending a great deal of time in discussing the Green Wedge. At the instigation of the Parish Council, two Councillors were asked to pinpoint possible areas for recreational development in Wembdon. They were asked to consult a cross-section of Wembdon residents and report back their findings. With no further reference to the Parish Council, a group established itself as the Wembdon Recreational Development Group (WRDG), with its own officers. This group is a separate legal entity and operates quite separately from the Parish Council. The group decided that the Green Wedge was the only suitable opportunity for recreational development in Wembdon and held detailed discussions with the principal Green Wedge landowner and Sedgemoor District Council officials. The Parish Council was effectively side-lined for a long period and had no worthwhile feedback on WRDG's activities. As most of you will be aware, the WRDG prepared detailed plans for development in the Green Wedge and presented these to Wembdon residents before any briefing was given to the Parish Council.

The key to any development in the Green Wedge is ownership of the land. The Council would have no problem in accepting any unconditional gifting of the land. However, the main owner has indicated that he would gift the land subject to the Council supporting the building of 14 houses at the far end of the Green Wedge in the area presently designated as a playing area. The advice we have received is that such a conditional offer could be challenged on legal grounds. We shall be establishing full clarification on this question. An unconditional offer would of course be gratefully received by the Parish Council on behalf of Wembdon residents.

The Parish Council already has a stake in the Green Wedge with its playing field. This field is beloved by many residents and their children, and its merit has again been recognised. In the Somerset Playing Fields 2010 competition it won second prize-a step up from last year when it was third.

On the financial side, the Parish Council has asked for a precept of £25,000 for the coming year. This represents a high percentage increase from the £16,000 this year, but reflects the passing on of certain costs by S.D.C. and the fact that the Council has not built up any reserves in previous years when it had almost the lowest precept among Sedgemoor Parish Councils.

One extra cost this coming year is for dog bins. Dog-fouling is a national problem, and the dog-walkers cannot win. If they allow their dogs to foul areas they incur the wrath of the public who have to pick a careful path. If they carefully place their dog's mess in the dog bins, they are costing council tax payers money. Next year, Sedgemoor is passing on the total cost of dog bins to the Parish Council.

As most of you, particularly allotment holders, will know, the Council is having an anxious time in trying to retain allotments in the village. The beneficiaries of the late owner have not been prepared to continue the old arrangement and bids have been sought for the allotments. The Council has made a bid and, if successful, will need to raise a loan. If unsuccessful, we must hope that the new owner would be prepared to offer a deal to the Council which would ensure that allotments remain available to villagers.

It has been a difficult year for Councillors with some disharmony created in the Green Wedge discussions. Individually, many Councillors have performed well. I would like to single out Ray Harris, who has made a valuable contribution to the Council over a lengthy period. I understand he will not be seeking re-election in May, so we wish him well. It has also been a difficult year for our Clerk, Kevin Thorpe, who has had to steer a tricky course at times. He has handled all the situations in his usual adroit way, and I congratulate him for this. I am pleased Kevin has withdrawn his recent resignation. His continued presence will offer

much needed continuity for the Council. Congratulations once again also to PC Tony Freeman and PCSO Nick Mizon for another years splendid work.

Finally I must end this report on a personal note. This will be my last annual report as Chairman. I have outlined the many challenges which the Council faces in the period ahead. I believe that after an unbroken 32 years on the Council, including the last 8 as Chairman, a younger person, with abundant energy, is needed to lead the Council through what could be troublesome times. I shall be applying for re-election as a Councillor, but if elected I shall become a foot soldier following a new leader who, hopefully, will be dedicating himself, as I have done, over a long period, to maintaining the character and independence of the Wembdon in which you love to live.

Questions from Parishioners

One parishioner asked a question relating to the WRDG. The Chairman responded by stating he could not reply on behalf of the WRDG and therefore the question was inappropriate.

The Chairman was then asked whether the Parish Council had supported the Vision for Wembdon and had they had a chance to see it before publication. The response to both questions was yes.

One parishioner then stated his belief that villagers had been conned by the interpretations recorded within the Vision following the completion of the questionnaires. Another parishioner objected to this and asked for the remark to be withdrawn. This was refused.

The Chairman was asked if the Council had met with the main landowner of the Green Wedge. The meeting was informed that, to date, there had been correspondence but no meeting.

Cllr Ann Bown stated that she was saddened by the fact that the Chairman was standing down and she wished to thank him, in her capacity as a District Councillor, for the work that he had undertaken.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 7.30pm