

Wembdon Annual Parish Assembly

Held at St. Georges School, Wembdon on the 24th April 2017 at 8pm

Present at the meeting were 7 members of the Parish Council, District Cllr Ian Dyer and 14 other residents.

Opening Remarks by the Chairman:

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the assembly. The minutes from the last assembly on 18th April 2017 were proposed and accepted by the meeting as being a true and accurate reflection of the previous meeting.

Chairman's Report

Good evening and welcome to this evening's Annual Meeting of the Parish, my name is Mike Solomon and I am Chairman of Wembdon Parish Council.

This is my opportunity to review with everyone in the village the work of the Parish Council and what has been achieved. As always, I start by thanking each of your Parish Councillors for the amount of work that they freely give to our community to make Wembdon a better place to live. None of what has been achieved could have been done without their time and effort.

I usually just run through the achievements of the past year but just a few days ago we were asked by SDC to report on what we had done to support the Health and Wellbeing agenda. This gave me an opportunity to look back a little further, to the time that many of your Councillors were first elected.

Improving the Playing Fields equipment was one of the first tasks that we took on, and just about 10 years ago, after fundraising £50,000, we replaced almost all of the swings and slide and added a new climbing frames for the toddlers to enjoy in their area as well as a new larger climbing frame. As well as maintaining a monthly inspection on all of the playing field we have also just revamped that area with new steel railings around the toddlers area.

Our next task was to raise funding to construct a drainage system for the playing field and this was completed about 8 years ago, as prior to this, half of the field was unusable for 4 months of the year and the footpath was regularly flooded – now a thing of the past.

The bridge into the playing field was our next target and we replaced the narrow concrete planks with a new wide bridge, capable now of carrying a pram or wheelchair.

Some six years ago, we risked losing our allotments as the land owner had died and the land was being sold. The Parish Council arranged a loan and bought the land to ensure that the benefits of allotment owning, and the magnificent views out over the Bristol Channel would continue to be available to the residents of our Parish. We also re-surfaced the access track and added benches to try to make this an amenity area for a wider group of residents to enjoy.

Four years ago we started the negotiations with the builders Persimmon to acquire the land adjacent to the Great Oaks Estate, the area that remained after their housing development. We finally agreed a free of cost transfer to the Council and a team of willing volunteers from our community cut back the bramble and cleared the copse areas to bring the land into community use, retaining a significant section of wild hedge to provide a nesting area for our wildbirds. This area connected directly with land on long-term lease so that we now have an 11 acre area of rough parkland for all to enjoy.

Finally of course, as a village we have taken on the project of organising land and building a new Village Green and an iconic new Village Hall. 11 acres of tended grass, marked out for cricket in the summer and football in the winter, encircled by 20 English Oaks, with over 200

native trees and bushes planted, your Council hopes that this will be a legacy for generations of Wembdon residents to enjoy. A Village Hall, with facilities for nursery age children, a large Village Hall, a Community Lounge, plus kitchens, changing rooms and a bar, we hope that this will be a building that our whole community will take pride in and may become the heart of our expanding village.

So again I note my massive thanks to all of the Councillors, for volunteering many hundreds of hours in improving this village and carrying on, often as unsung heroes, tackling these major projects whilst ensuring that the day to day business of the Council: the planning applications, the clearing of the drains and rhynes, the production and distribution of the Parish Paper, the cutting back of the footpaths, continues. I really enjoy living in Wembdon and I hope you all do as well.

Mike Solomon

Financial report for the period April 2015 to March 2016

The Clerk presented the following financial report.

2016/17 has been a very unusual year financially, as the Parish Council has faced a number of unexpected challenges. Despite this, the Parish Council's finances remain healthy due to the sound financial management of the Council.

At the start of the year the bank balance stood at £63,975. At the end this had increased to £66,385. Therefore the Council has a reported operating surplus of £2,410. However the works on the road access for the NDR to the Village Hall are as yet uncompleted and additional charges are anticipated in the next financial period.

The Council has two public sector loans which have funded the purchase of the allotments and the new entrance to the Village Hall. I will be recommending that any operating surpluses in future years be used to reduce these loans.

The Council Tax support grant is being phased out, and will disappear in the next few years. In 2016/17 this figure was £2,372.

The precept demand has risen from £65,097 to £71,373. This decision was taken for four reasons:

- To compensate for the reduced Council Tax support grant.
- The grass cutting and general maintenance contract has been renewed, with a substantial rise in costs due to additional work being required in the Parish.
- To allow for inflation
- To recognise that Parish Councils are being expected to take an increasing amount of local support services and yet may be capped in the future, in the way that District Councils have been capped. All advice received is that Parish Council's should increase their precepts now, in recognition of the increasing responsibilities. Capping would mean that future projects such as improving the children's play area and repairing footpaths would not be possible without public referenda being held, which would be a considerable expense to the Parish.

I am very confident that all financial decisions taken by the Parish Council have been the correct ones.

No questions were asked.

Presentations from Village Organisations

District Cllr Ian Dyer addressed the meeting. He said that had been a pleasure for both Cllr Ann Bown and him to be District Councillors here. He wished to play particular tribute to all the groups in Wembdon, who actually make things happen in the Parish,

As Chairman of Sedgemoor District Council he has introduced the Sedgemoor Community Awards. There were eighteen awards for the whole of Sedgemoor, and two went to Wembdon, a very impressive achievement. There are many others who also do a great deal of community work. Cllr Dyer thanked them all

Presentations were given by local individuals and organisations.

The meeting closed at 9.05 pm