

Wembdon Annual Parish Assembly

Held Wembdon Village Hall on the 9th April 2018 at 8pm

Present at the meeting were ten members of the Parish Council, District Cllr's Bown, Duddridge and Dyer and 9 parishioners.

Opening Remarks by the Chairman:

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the assembly. The minutes from the last assembly on 24th 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 to you all and thank you for coming out and joining us at this the Wembdon Annual Parish meeting. My name is Mike Solomon and I am Chairman of Wembdon Parish Council.

This is my annual opportunity to review with everyone the work of the Parish Council and what has been achieved this past 12 months.

Firstly let me take this opportunity to give sincere thanks to our Clerk, Tony and all of the Councillors on behalf of everybody in the village. All of your Councillors are volunteers who give their time freely to make Wembdon a better place to live.

So what has been achieved?

In July last year we opened this splendid Village Hall and Lyn, as Hall Manager will tell us a little more about its success later this evening. I truly believe that this is an amazing achievement for a village such as ours and the number of users is already astonishing everybody – especially the funders and the District Council. The Parish Council played a key supporting role in this project, providing some land as well as funding the NDR access and I know that we are all pleased to see the success of the project so far.

A Village Hall was one of the key needs identified in the Parish Plan - our Vision for Wembdon - and over the past eight years this Parish Council has taken the results from the household surveys that were carried out as a part of the Plan to guide its own priorities. Traffic speed through the village was identified as a high priority and so we are now operating our own speed indicating device, our SID, and using this to monitor traffic volumes and speed. This required not only the purchasing of the SID but also training a team of volunteers to operate the unit and move it from place to place. I am so pleased to say that the team now comprises 3 volunteers from the village as well as one Councillor but the team are always looking for more volunteers! The data that this team has generated has been both invaluable and quite horrifying. After years of pressure on SCC Highways, in August last year they installed a Zebra Crossing on Wembdon Rise but it appears to have had little effect and we still see speeds in excess of 50mph on that stretch of road. Fortunately with the SID we now have the data to prove our claims and we have asked Highways to again review what further action can be taken to reduce vehicle speeds through Wembdon.

Another major achievement of your Parish Council this year has been the installation of a new path into the playing field and the tarmac surfacing of almost a mile of existing footpath. This has required liaison with Highways, the Rights of Way team at County Hall and the landowners as well as managing a significant contract. I can honestly say that in 15 years on the Council this is the only job that we have ever done that has only received positive comments. There is still some backfilling and seeding to be done to the footpath edges once the land has dried out a bit but the overwhelming view from our community is that this has been a great success.

The final major project that has absorbed many hundreds of Councillor and volunteer hours this year has been the groundwork for the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan. I am delighted that we have been able to involve eight volunteers from our Community, along with three Councillors in what will be the most important task that this Council can undertake for the future of our Parish. This team will produce a document that will guide the development of Wembdon for the next 20 years. We have hired in professional help and started with a survey of every household in our neighbourhood. Peter Reed will speak much more about this project later in the evening and the future steps that we need to take but let me just note that this Parish Council is grateful for all of the hours being freely given by this team and we of course offer our 100% support.

The other work that absorbs the time of this Council we just consider to be our day to day activity.

We respond to each and every planning application and do our level best to guide the decisions of the Planning Officers and the Development Committee with our local knowledge. We have organized the lowering of some kerbs in the village to make life easier for our parishioners with reduced mobility.

We maintain our communication channels with the Parish Paper as well as our digital presence with a website and Facebook page.

We keep our green areas maintained with a combination of contract gardening and our great Give a Day team, who each month, tackle the more challenging outdoor jobs.

We carry out monthly inspections of the playing fields and the play equipment, repairing any items that are needing maintenance, which included this year: replacing the binoculars, replacing the swing seats and also swiftly repairing the damage done by the occasional bout of vandalism. We do suffer from vandalism in the village and your Parish Council takes a very strong view that the culprits must be caught and made to pay. The youths that spray painted the play area this summer were all identified and with their parents in attendance, scrubbed the area clean and did a litter pick all along the NDR.

Whilst we have achieved a great deal, this Council has not run out of ideas. We are now working on a series of projects under an overarching scheme of Access for All. We have started this with the construction of the new footpaths through Wembdon Parkland and the playing fields. We are working with PACT, a volunteer group of parishioners in developing and implementing a scheme to make our Wembdon Parklands more accessible and more eco friendly with new sensory gardens, replanting the wildflower meadow and introducing additional insect friendly plants. We are developing a plan for installing new and fully inclusive play equipment in the park and working closely with the Village Hall Trust to modify their existing disabled facilities to provide toilet equipment for the severely disabled in our community.

My sincere thanks go to Tony Jay, our excellent Clerk and all of our Councillors, old and new, for their many hours of unpaid work and their willingness to put up with the sometimes negative comments from people within our community who appear to know no better. And let me add an aside here briefly, the advent of social networks has made it far too easy for anyone with an opinion to just sit at a keyboard and comment. There are plenty of people out there who like to make a comment, sometimes positive but usually a negative one but when invited to actually participate, get off their sofa and do something, go amazingly quiet. I applaud and encourage the recent comments from our Clerk, inviting the complainers to get involved. We welcome more involvement from our community and strongly encourage the formation of joint teams of Councillors and parishioners.

So again, my thanks to our Councillors and all of the volunteers in this great parish of Wembdon. We all strive to make this village a wonderful place to live and I really do think we succeed.

Mike Solomon

Financial report for the period April 2016 to March 2017

The Clerk presented the following financial report.

The Parish Council's finances remain healthy due to the sound financial management of the Council.

At the start of the financial year the Council's bank balance stood at £67,117. At the end of March the balance was £67,293. There are outstanding bills totalling £19,392, but a VAT refund of £4,064 for 2017-18 has been submitted. Therefore the Council's cash assets effectively total £51,965.

The major expenditure item during 2017-18 was the £25,000 for the improvement of the footpaths (of which £15,800 plus VAT is still outstanding and forms the majority of the above outstanding figure of £19,392).

The Council has two public sector loans which have funded the purchase of the allotments and the new entrance to the Village Hall. The outstanding debts total £15,000 (allotment loan) and £181,733 (new entrance loan).

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. In 2017/18 it was £1,680.

The precept demand has risen from £71,373 to £74,080. This decision was taken for three reasons:

- To compensate for the reduced Council Tax support grant.
- 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 these increasing responsibilities, as they may not be able to do so in the future if capping takes place.

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

Presentations were given by local individuals and organisations, all of which were very well received.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm