

Wembdon Annual Parish Assembly

Held Wembdon Village Hall on the 11th March 2019 at 8pm

Present at the meeting were nine members of the Parish Council, District Cllr's Bown, and Dyer and 14 parishioners.

Opening Remarks by the Chairman:

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the assembly. The minutes from the last assembly on 9th April 2018 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. Thank you for coming and joining us at this annual meeting of Wembdon Parish. My name is Mike Solomon and I am Chairman of the Parish Council.

This is my annual opportunity to review with everyone in the Parish, the work of the Council and what has been achieved over the past 12 months, but as we are at the end of a 4 year term of office, and here I am grateful to Cllr Bown for enlightening me to the term quadrennium, I thought it appropriate that I should, in fact, review the activities of this Council over the past quadrennium.

I think your Parish Council has achieved a great deal over the 4 years but it is important to point out that our objectives have been very much directed by your Vision for Wembdon, which was written into our Parish Plan and based upon extensive household surveys carried out some years ago.

The key point that shone through everybody's responses to the survey was that we all wanted Wembdon to retain that unique character that made Wembdon the village that it is and it is interesting that this same sentiment is echoed 100% in the responses from the survey carried out for the new Neighbourhood Plan – but more of that later.

The Plan established a few key priorities and this Council has focused on achieving these. Some of these included:

Traffic and Transport – which has really grown into our Access for All programme, to ensure that every member of our community has safe access routes to all of the main facilities of the Parish and all can enjoy those facilities regardless of capability.

Initially we built a bridge, this was a little more than 4 years ago but it really was the initiation of Access for All. Prior to this bridge, we all carried our pushchairs, prams and tricycles as we tried to access the playing field.

We then built footpaths, to ensure that mobility scooters and powered wheelchairs could access the facilities, as well as the prams and the pushchairs.

We built lots of footpaths to ensure that our children didn't need to wear wellies to school as we had to and they could walk or use their scooters rather than add to the queues of traffic on our narrow roads.

We also cut back long overgrown hedges to improve accessibility along our existing footpaths.

To start to understand and try to manage our traffic speeds, as a Parish we bought our own Speed Indicating Device (SID) and that gave us information - some very concerning information that whilst our average speeds are generally within the limits, we really need to tackle the issue of vehicles travelling at dangerous speeds, especially when they fly across our zebra crossing.

The zebra crossing was installed after much campaigning but there is still some work to be done to make it safe.

Land Drainage was raised as an issue in the Plan and over the past 4 years we have worked closely with the Land Drainage Board in deep dredging all of our rhynes to reduce flooding in our areas of risk.

Keeping the streets and green areas free of litter and dog fouling was a high priority in the plan so with the District Council we have established Public Space Protection Orders (or PSPOs) in key areas. We have installed the signage, we have four times the number of bins than the average in Sedgemoor and we encourage the dog warden to visit as frequently as possible. We have achieved a lot but it is a never ending task.

It is in the provision of Facilities and Amenities that this Council has made some major steps.

The Village Green has grown from 1½ to 11 acres and we have added another 11 acres of Wembdon Parkland.

We have built this village hall, despite some major challenges, and the Council took perhaps its bravest decision in resolving to provide another bridge, the access from the NDR, when funding from Viridor had time expired.

I mention the Parkland, this was an area negotiated from Persimmon which they failed to maintain over many years.

Our 'Give a Day' team felled the brambles, trimmed the edges, cut back trees to provide us with a beautiful parkland setting that, with the PACT team, we will now make Accessible to All.

This Council has also led the way in public planting, we have planted 20 large oak trees, over 200 hedge plants and many thousands of daffodils.

Our latest achievements under the Access for All programme have been directed towards ensuring that those challenged by some severely disabling impairment can enjoy basic facilities and play equipment.

We have led the way with a specially designed trampoline and roundabout and changing places toilet facilities, with solar lighting and CCTV coverage, all provided in close cooperation with the Wembdon Village Hall and Playing Fields Trust to maximize the benefits to everybody in our community.

These are of course the very visible achievements of your Council but the other major absorber of volunteer time this past year has been the preparation of our Neighbourhood Plan. The Council, supported by a team of 8 volunteers from the village have devoted hundreds of hours to produce a Neighbourhood Plan for Wembdon Parish. Currently in final draft form and undergoing independent examination, we hope that the inspector will endorse our work and that the whole community will vote in favour in a public poll, which will then ensure that the vision that has been established for Wembdon will be enshrined into planning law from now on and that any new developments continue to maintain and enhance the essential character that makes Wembdon the village that it is.

And what else have we done? All of the day to day activities of every Parish Council. We have had to fix vandalism damage, we respond to every planning application, we manage the allotments and of course we regularly publish our news in the Parish Paper, our Facebook page and our website – and hopefully continue to make Wembdon a better place to live.

And what is all this costing? Well Tony will speak about the finances next but my overview of the position is that the opening balance in our bank account 4 years ago was £36,880. At the end of February this year our account stands at £57,000. So we have achieved a great deal of our programme through grant funding whilst strengthening our balance sheet.

So let me end by thanking on behalf of the whole Parish, our Parish Clerk, Tony, responsible for keeping us all on the right side of the law and balancing our books. My sincere thanks also go to the whole team of Parish Councillors, who together give many thousands of hours to make Wembdon this great place to live.

We look forward over the next 4 years to continuing our Access for All programme, with more play equipment, more solar lighting, better accessibility into the parklands and building an ever stronger financial position as we start to receive the Community Impact Levy (CIL) payments from the developers of the Cokerhurst Farm site.

Thank you.

Financial report for the period April 2016 to March 2017

The Clerk presented the following financial report.

This year's report will be slightly different from normal, as this meeting is usually held in April, so I can present an accurate financial position at the end of the previous financial year. That is not the case today as the meeting is being held earlier this year due to the purdah period leading up to the election procedures starting shortly.

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 £67,293. At the end of February the balance was £56,396. Things are happening so quickly, with grants being obtained, RLT2 money being received from Sedgemoor District Council, and major expenditure continuing so I cannot accurately predict what the figure will be at the end of March. However, I am very confident that the Council will be in a strong financial position. There is uncertainty over the cost of repairing the recently fallen wall at the allotments, so that will reduce the Council's assets, perhaps considerably, but this is a situation out of our control and the work will have to be done.

Major expenditures during 2018-19 were the preparation of the neighbourhood plan and the access for all measures highlighted by the Chairman in his report.

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 £13,333 (allotment loan) and £178,600 (new entrance loan).

The Council Tax support grant we receive from SDC is being phased out, and is due to halve every year until it disappears. In 2017/18 this figure was £1,680. In 2018/19 it was £833.

The precept demand has risen from £74,080 to £76,700, an increase of 3.5%. This decision was taken for two reasons:

- To compensate for the reduced Council Tax support grant.
- To allow for inflation.

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 EDF, the Environment Agency, the Village Hall and the Village Centre, all of which were very well received.

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm

