

Wembdon Annual Parish Assembly

Held at Wembdon Village Hall on the 22nd April 2024 at 7.30pm

Present at the meeting were eight members of the Parish Council and sixteen parishioners.

1. Chairman's opening remarks.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Annual Parish Assembly.

2. Minutes of the last Annual Parish Assembly held on 3rd April 2023.

The minutes were approved without amendment. They are available to view on the Parish Council website.

3. Report of the Chairman of the Parish Council Councillor A Reed for the period April 2023 to March 2024.

The Chairman gave the following report:

Good evening, ladies & gentlemen and Councillors. Welcome to Wembdon Parish Council's Annual Assembly.

My name is Anne Reed, and I am the Chairman of Wembdon Parish Council. As I come to the end of this year, having taken over the chair last May from Mike Solomon, I am more than ever aware that his was a hard act to follow. However, I have had the able support of all the council, and also of course from our excellent clerk Tony Jay.

We are certainly heading towards "interesting times"! However, before I come to that I should like to reflect on some of the achievements and events of the past year.

May saw Wembdon celebrating the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III, in true village style, with several events including the planting of two new oak trees by Mike Solomon. Four large tubs were planted with colourful shrubs and bedding plants, to mark the entrances to the village, as part of the Big Help Out. A considerable volume of litter was also collected.

Another cause for celebration was the announcement that Wembdon Playing Fields were runners up in the 2023 Somerset Playing Fields Association large fields competition. Congratulations are due to Dan Bingham of Wembdon Cricket Club, and Steve Bull of Avalonian, the maintenance contractor last year, for their working so hard to reach this high standard.

During the course of the year, we have been fortunate enough to be joined by two new Councillors, Jenny Hayden-Briffett and Paul King, who have definitely both proved their worth already.

Planning is a very important part of what we do, and almost every month we hold a meeting of the planning committee, ably led by the Chairman, Peter Major. There are usually two or three applications, and we make comments

based on Planning Regulations, which Somerset Council has to take into consideration when it makes its decisions.

Related to planning is the Wembdon Neighbourhood Plan, which was made 5 years ago. This is due for a review, and a Review Group of some Councillors and others has been set up, which will report back to the Council any recommendations it has.

One of the perennial issues the council has to deal with is the issue of dog mess. Councillor Chris Chalk led an initiative involving the pupils of St George's School designing some posters to display around the village, in the hope of reminding everyone of the importance of clearing up after their pets and disposing of the bags in the appropriate way. Some very arresting designs were submitted, and three winners were chosen.

The Parklands area is continuing to develop and flourish, under the supervision of Councillors Lorna Edwards and Chris Chalk. The stumpery, and sensory borders, are getting well and truly established, and the whole area is used and admired by very many people, including those who have limited mobility.

Councillor Paul King has been actively involved in problems affecting Perry Green, particularly, this year, flooding. His tireless efforts have resulted in some ditches and drains being maintained to a better standard. Sadly, with current weather conditions, we will have to remain vigilant, and the Council is in the process of developing a flood action plan.

The allotments are much in demand, and Councillor Dianne Claydon does a great job overseeing them and ensuring they remain well maintained.

The 20mph speed limit, introduced last year, continues to pay dividends. It has not only resulted in a significant reduction in overall speeds, but also in the number of vehicles passing through the village. Councillor Dave Gliddon provides the monitoring of the speed indicator devices, and collates the figures, and together with Councillor Peter Major keeps an eye on maintenance. We are also indebted to the speed watch team, who have been active in the last few months.

Councillor Jenny Hayden-Briffett has taken on the role of keeping an eye on the Play Area, ensuring that it is well looked after.

Councillors Mark Phillips and Dave Gliddon keep a close eye on footpaths and highways and report any problems to our maintenance contractor or Somerset Highways as appropriate.

Councillor Mark Phillips is the Vice Chairman, and in addition to chairing meetings when required, is deeply involved in all areas, and getting down to practical tasks as needed. He is often joined in these tasks by other councillors, demonstrating what an active council we have. He is the Parish Council representative on the Wembdon Village Hall and Playing Fields Trust. and many of you will have sampled the new coffee shop at the hall which is

proving to be a great success. He also represents the council at the various forums involving Hinckley.

The changes in local government, with the unitary council in Somerset, have brought some new challenges. Wembdon has joined with a number of local parishes to form Dowsborough Local Community Network. This meets monthly to discuss issues such as how to continue providing services which Somerset Council may devolve to the parishes. Councillor Bridget Hedaux has been acting as our representative at these meetings, fulfilling a vital role for us. Councillor Paul King represents the council at the highway forum meetings.

I am proud to report that our finances are in good shape, positioning us well for the potential devolution of financial responsibility mentioned previously. The Clerk will be speaking about these issues in more detail in his report.

Lastly, I want to thank on behalf of the whole community, our clerk Tony Jay, who as Responsible Financial Officer ensures that we keep a tight control over the budget and keeps us on the straight and narrow. I should also like to thank all the Councillors who voluntarily give up their time week by week and serve our wonderful community of Wembdon.

The Parish Clerk will now give his report, followed by our speaker for the evening, who is Alys Laver of The Wildlife and Wetlands Trust at Steart Marshes, and then we invite you to join us for a drink and nibbles in the bar.

4. Financial report for the period April 2023 to March 2024.

The Parish Clerk gave the following report in his role as Responsible Financial Officer:

At the start of the financial year the Parish Council's bank balance stood at £59,279. At the end the balance was £90,450, so the Parish Council's finances are in a much healthier position than a year ago. The auditors recommend that Parish Councils hold between 50% and 100% of their annual income in reserve. Wembdon Parish Council is now within that band. This increase in reserves has been made possible by the frugal attitude that Councillors have adopted in the last year, with no major projects taking place.

A year ago I reported that there was great uncertainty about the forthcoming financial requirements of all Town and Parish Councils due to the newly formed Somerset Council. Well, nothing has changed! We still do not know how many of the services that were previously provided by Sedgemoor District Council and Somerset County Council will continue under the new Somerset Council. It is possible that the Parish Council may have to pay for services that were previously provided free of charge. We simply do not know at the present time.

Because of this uncertainty the Parish Councillors took the very difficult, but sensible decision to increase the precept demand by £20,000 to £130,992 for 2024-25. This is an increase of 18% and means that a Band D household in Wembdon will be paying an extra £14.85 a year to the Parish Council – £1.24

a month. This extra income will provide a contingency to pay for any services that are cut back or removed by Somerset Council.

The Parish Council has one public sector loan which funded the entrance to the Village Hall. The outstanding balance currently stands at approximately £141,000.

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

5. Alys Laver of Steart Marshes will give a 30-minute talk about the importance of the wetlands and the developments that have been made at Steart over recent years.

The Chairman thanked Alys Laver for the very interesting and informative talk which was very well received by everyone in attendance.

Refreshments were served to all in attendance following the Assembly, which closed at 8.20 pm.