SEEND PARISH COUNCIL
Annual Parish Meeting
Tuesday 16th May 2023

Present: Mr Terry James (Chairman), Mrs Bridget Johnstone (Vice Chair), Mrs Pam Akerman, Mr Jamie Halliday, Mrs Jackie Hamblin, Mr William Lack, Mr Springate and Mr John Williams, Mr Martin Wiltshire

Also Present: Chris Stirland (Clerk) Cllr Tamara Reay, and 21 Parishioners

Apologies: Seend Link, Seend Play Group, Melksham Police, Mr & Mrs J Gorman

To confirm and sign the minutes of the previous Annual Meeting

The minutes had been circulated to all Councillor and were available for all those attending on the Parish Council website. Mr William Lack proposed the minutes be accepted as a true record. This was seconded by Mrs Pamela Akerman. The minutes were approved unanimously by those present. The Chairman signed the minutes as a true record.

Annual Report of the Parish Council presented by the Chairman

Welcome to this year's Annual Parish Meeting. It is good to see so many familiar faces and some new.
This last year seems to have raced by partly fuelled by many changes at home and abroad and, not least within our own Parish Council
We have a few new faces on the Parish Council.

- Bridget Johnstone – joined us in June
- Jamie Halliday – who joined us in March

However, we unfortunately lost Carol Dickinson who died in February.
Last and by no means least we are sad to lose the services of

- Georgina A'Bear
- Anita Heatley

Georgina was the lead for Seend's Neighbour Hood Plan and without her drive and tenacity we may not have been able to achieve it without her.

Anita has been our Vice Chairman for more than 5 years and has helped steer the council through some of the more challenging Planning situations we have had to manage.
I would like to thank them for the work and support they have given to the Parish Council over the years. They will be severely missed.

I would also like to thank all our Parish Councillors for their work during the year and for their unstinting commitments to our parish and its community.

So, we are still one councillor short and if there is any of you out there interested in becoming a Councillor, please contact the Clerk – Chris Stirland

Annual Parish Council Meeting

We have held our Annual Parish Council meeting just before this one, and I am pleased to announce that I have been re-elected as chairman and we have a new Vice Chairman Bridget Johnstone.

Review of the Year

If 2021 could have been described as a bit 'rollercoaster ride', 2022 started with hope and optimism as the Covid pandemic receded and life was returning to normal. However, by the end of February, Putin's war on Ukraine whilst at first seemed far away would have a dramatic impact on the economy and stability of the world. There was a sense of unreality as we enjoyed one of the longest and hottest summers for many years.
September was marked by huge sadness at the passing of Her Majesty the Queen which was felt so profoundly worldwide and brought a tremendous sense of loss. As many of you will recall in late 2021, we were fortunate to have the then Queen Consort visit Seend and lay a wreath at our village war memorial. I am sure I speak for all our parishioners in wishing our new King and Queen well in their new roles.

As some of you know, Seend has been part of a project known as the Queens Green Canopy. This was a nationwide initiative designed to mark the Platinum Jubilee. It has created a living legacy with over a million trees planted in Her Majesty's name across the nation as a lasting tribute to her extraordinary service to her country and her people. Over 300 trees have been planted within the Parish with particular thanks going to Georgina A'Bear for acting as the local collection point for the young saplings.

As summer turned slowly to autumn, the impact in Ukraine and political turmoil at home brought the stark reality that our country was not immune as the cost of living rapidly escalated into a crisis and a sudden cold snap two weeks into December brought a sobering Christmas to many.

Wiltshire Council helped where it could, with additional cost of living grants, and an extension to the concessionary bus scheme. Here at Seend, Holy Cross Church working with the Irene Usher Memorial Pavilion created Warm Space events.

Community Projects

Parish Cycle Racks

The Sandridge Solar Farm Community Benefit payment for 2022 has been spent on deployment of new cycle racks within the Parish. We will be shortly deploying additional cycle racks in Sells Green and potentially at the new community housing development in Seend Cleeve.

Village Defibrillators

The Parish Council with assistance from local volunteers has completed an upgrade and refurbishment of our three village defibrillators. These defibrillators form part of the Community Heartbeat Trust network of over 8,000 Defibrillators deployed across the UK. We are grateful for the ongoing support from local parishioners who carry out weekly checks of these devices so helping to ensure they are immediately available should they be needed.

Donations to local Organisations

Last year we donated £1,800 to local organisations. This year due to the increase in costs being experienced by these groups, the Parish Council agreed to increase donations to £2,600 which included a donation to the Community Centre toward the costs of the Kings Coronation. The Parish Council also decided to move the annual donations payments from December to June. So, this year's payments will be made in a couple of weeks meaning our local organisations will not have to wait until the end of the year for their next payment.
We have also made a commitment to contribute £5,500 towards the purchase of a new mower for the Lye Field. The money will be kept earmarked for when it is needed by the Lye Trustees.

Planning

During the last financial year, the Parish Council has discussed and voted on 38 planning applications. The vast majority were discussed and voted on at a Parish Council meeting, but there is a delegated planning sub-committee of the Parish Council, and this committee occasionally agrees a response if it is between Parish Council meetings. This is as long as the application is straight forward, otherwise an extension is requested so that it can be discussed at a full council meeting.

Highways

We maintain a regular dialogue with Wiltshire Council about our highway's issues. Our Councillor, Tamara Reay has been incredibly supportive of us, initiating meetings with highway representatives and helping where she can.

The Stocks

After much lobbying by the Parish Council, Highways have carried out an assessment and agreed to place additional signage on the eastern approach to The Stocks aimed at calming traffic and increasing driver awareness of the right-hand junction into Seend Cleeve. This is expected to be deployed shortly.

Bollands Hill

The Parish Council with assistance from residents carried out a traffic survey of heavy vehicles using Bollands Hill in October. The results were sent to Highways, and we are continuing to work with them on this issue. Many of the large vehicles that use this route are the same traffic travelling through Worton. Highways are looking to take a wider view of the large vehicle / freight movement along this route to see what can be done. It is complicated but we will do everything we can to try and improve the current situation.

Bell Crossroads

During the past 6 years the Parish Council has recorded 18 accidents at this location. The Parish Council has been working with Highways to improve junction visibility with the aim of reducing vehicle overshoots at this junction. Work is being scheduled to deliver several improvements that we hope will make a difference.

Resurfacing of Rusty Lane

As many of you will know, Rusty Lane was resurfaced in November and despite very heavy rainfall at times, the new surface has remained stable. There is the last 130m or so to be completed to the Canal swing bridge and we are hopeful this will be undertaken later in the year.

Inmarsh High Friction Surface

Finally, and by no means least, we have a new High Friction Surface installed providing a crossing point near the top of Inmarsh Lane.
Looking ahead, the Parish Council has initiated discussions with Highways on the possibility of upgrading the surface of Bradley Lane which will bring further benefits to local walkers and cyclists. This combined with the improvements at the bottom of Rusty Lane will complete a welcome link to the Canal and Route 4 National Cycle Network.

Highways Major Incidents

During the last year, the Parish Council has taken immediate action to alert our local Highways team of two major road incidents within the Parish. The first was the broken sewage main on Bollands Hill, where we alerted Wessex Water of the break and following its repair, we helped facilitate the clean up after the verges along Pelch Lane had become damaged resulting in a significant amount of mud on the road.

During a particular cold spell in January, we alerted Highways, Wessex Water and the Police to the issue of icing across both Carriageways of the A361 below the Bell Crossroads. Although the initial response was slower than we had hoped, our connection with the local police facilitated police warning signs being placed either side of the icing.

Looking ahead

Seend has again entered the CPRE Best Kept Village Competition. John Williams is co-ordinating taking the lead on this. It is important that we ensure our Parish is kept tidy, litter is collected, and flyers taken off lamps and trees. Judging will take place, in late May and June and an alert will be posted on Facebook.

There will be Open Gardens in Seend on 11th June and we look forward to the 74th Seend Fete and Flower show which is taking place on 12th August.

The Parish Council will continue to work on behalf of the Parish, and thanks the Parish for their continued support. The first port of call should be our Clerk, Chris Stirland who can be contacted by email at clerk@seendparishcouncil.co.uk or by telephone 07706 850859.

In closing I would like to take this opportunity to thank Chris Stirland our Parish Clerk for all his hard work for the benefit of the parish and Anita Heatley and Georgina A'Bear for all their hard work and commitment they have given to the parish council over a number of years.

Report from Councillor Reay

Some of the highlights from Wiltshire Council, and my own work over the last year to support residents in Devizes Rural West are below.

Wiltshire Council's budget for 2023/24, which is underpinned by the council's 10-year Business Plan, is £466m – this includes an additional £69m to cover inflation and increased demand for services and is broken down as follows:

- Whole life pathway (mental health, autism spectrum conditions and learning disabilities support services) - £96m, an increase of £11m
- Living and aging well (adult care) - £83m, an increase of £15m
- Families and children - £63m, an increase of £2m
- Environment (which includes waste and recycling services)- £48m, an increase of £4m
- Highways and transport - £41m, an increase of £3m
- Education and skills - £29m, an increase of £6m

Last November, Wiltshire Council invited the Local Government Association to carry out a Corporate Peer Challenge – the review found that the council's Business Plan provides a clear set of objectives and that focus on improving outcomes for some of the most vulnerable in the community is none more evident than in children's services. It was also noted that the council is excelling in work to address climate change.

In addition to funding of £22.9m from the Government's Highways Maintenance Fund, £3.6m was received from the Department for Transport's Pothole Fund which will be used to target pothole hotspots around the county. Anyone who spots a highways issue must report it using the MyWilts app or via the website – and if it doesn't get fixed, please email me at tamara.reay@wiltshire.gov.uk

Wiltshire has welcomed 1,374 guests so far and is one of the top authorities in England for taking in Ukraine nationals - 165 families have now moved into private rented accommodation and every Ukrainian household has a named Case Worker assigned to support the guests to help them integrate into the community. More information is at Wiltshire stands with Ukraine - Wiltshire Council.

Over the last three years I have led the project for a new rail station to serve Devizes and secured almost £500,000 from the Department for Transport for business case assessment. The Interim Feasibility Study undertaken over the

last few months has now reported and shows that whilst there isn't a current rail service which could stop at Devizes Gateway without affecting the rest of the rail network. Network Rail has concluded that there may be opportunities for a new train service and station following a broader Wiltshire Wide Rail Review. This is really good news - Devizes is very much at the heart of future rail developments in Wiltshire and along with Danny Kruger MP, and other local organisations such as the Devizes Development Partnership, I will continue to push the case for Devizes Gateway. The detailed Interim Feasibility Study is online at Findings of Devizes station feasibility study released - Wiltshire Council

It has been a pleasure to support Parish Councils, community groups and residents with a whole host of local issues over the last year including flooding, road safety, footpaths and planning matters. If there is a local issue that you are concerned about, please do get in touch and I will do my very best to help.

Finally, I would like to say a huge thank you to all the Parish Councils across Devizes Rural West – they and the many other local organisations help ensure our villages are such fabulous communities and brilliant places to live.

Neighbourhood Plan Report

This is included as a separate report on the Parish Council Website

Statement of the Parish Council's accounts to 31st March 2023

The Precept for 2022-23 was £20,406 and increase of £25 on the previous year

Income for the year was a total of: £23,312 down £815 than previous. In addition to the Precept, the Parish Council received a Sandridge Solar Farm Community payment of £1,285. The allotment rent remained the same as the previous year and brought in the same income of: £518 plus the VAT refund for the previous year's expenditure £1,026. Interest was £78, and with the sharp increase in rates was £72 more than last year.

Expenditure

Expenditure totalled £21,555 up £2,460 on previous mainly due to our contribution towards local Highways and Byways improvements such as Inmarsh High Friction surface and Rusty Lane upgrade.

The biggest outlay for the parish council is the staff costs. This year it covered the salary of two clerks for the month of April. Overall, this amounted to £8,655.

The upgrade of Rusty Lane was the biggest single outlay at £4,000

Our donations to village organisations increased by £100 to £1875

At the end of this financial year, we have an overall balance of £32,360 up £1,660 on last year. The Parish Council earmarked approximately £21,000 of this money for projects to be carried over into the new year:

- Highways - Further road safety improvements at Bell Crossroads - £5,000
- Highways - Road Infrastructure improvement at 'The Stocks' £3,500
- Highways - Bradley Lane - Surface upgrade £1,500
- Seend Lye Field Trustees - Mower contribution £5,500
- Neighbourhood Plan Reserves - £5,500

This leaves the Council with general reserves of £11,327 plus a VAT refund of £337 which overall is over 50% of the Precept value. Although this is slightly above (£1,460) the recommended level of reserves a council such as Seend should hold, the Internal Auditor acknowledged that we lowered our Precept increase by using some of the existing reserves.

The Auditor was pleased to note the Council had dispensed with the services of our former accountants and produced the accounts 'in-house' using an automated system on a cash basis that removed the need for calculating debtors and creditors. The new system makes reconciliation between the Council's prime records and the annual AGAR report simple and straight forward. As a result, the Auditor fully approved our accounts with no recommendations or actions.

Reports from village organisations

All reports have been collated on a separate document as an appendix to these minutes and are displayed on the Parish Council's website.

Any other business

The issue of a lack of volunteers to support individual village organisations was discussed along with a summary of the village survey. Unless parishioners are willing to give time to supporting these organisations, they will be unable to continue. A possible way forward may be for some organisations to come together and operate with a single management team adopting a joint operating model similar to that deployed in Saltford known as the Saltford Community Association.

The state of the county's roads was discussed. Councillor Reay requested the use of the MyWilts app to report potholes and other defective road / pavement infrastructure direct to Wiltshire Highways.

The ongoing problem with vehicle overshoots at the Bell Crossroads was raised and it was noted that a report back in 2015 had highlighted this issue. Although there has been repeated request for a 'Stop' sign at the junction with Bollands Hill, Wiltshire Highways have stated on several occasions that the junction does not meet the criteria for such a sign. Wiltshire Council are about to deploy additional signage / infrastructure on the approach to this junction within the next three months.

Close of Meeting

The meeting closed at 9.13pm

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Terry James (Chairman)
Date: 7th May 2024