

SEEND PARISH COUNCIL
Annual Parish Meeting
Tuesday 7th May 2024

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 14 Parishioners

Apologies: Seend Tennis Club, Seend & District Ramblers, Seend Theatre Club, Seend Fund, Seend Lye Recreation Field, Melksham Police, Mr & Mrs Heatley, Mr & Mrs J Gorman, Fiona Johnson, Marion Whitehead

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 John Williams proposed the minutes be accepted as a true record. This was seconded by Mrs Bridget Johnstone. 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

Annual Parish Council Meeting

The Chairman advised the meeting that the Parish Council had held its Annual Parish Council meeting just before this one and was pleased to announce that he had been re-elected as Chairman along with Bridget Johnstone as Vice-Chair.

He noted the last year seemed to have raced by partly fuelled by many changes at home and abroad and, not least within our own Parish Council

We have a new face on the Parish Council.

- Debbie Savage – who joined us in November

The chairman thanked the Parish Councillors for their work during the year and for their unstinting commitments to our parish and its community.

Chairman's Review of the Year

The year 2023 saw the decline in severity of the Covid1-9 pandemic with the World Health Organisation ending it global health emergency in May and to celebrate the event, the country watched the Coronation of Charles & Camilla held on 6th May at Westminster Abbey.

Whilst 2023 was officially the hottest year on record, other world events such as the wars in Ukraine and Middle East conspired to overshadow this. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has continued despite a potential uprising by the Wagner group lead by Yevgeny Prigozhin. An escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict occurred in October when Hamas, who governed the Gaza Strip, led an attack on Israel, leading the latter to declare war on Hamas. This has led to wider consequences for international trade with attacks on shipping in the Red Sea causing shipping to take extended voyages around South Africa instead of the Suez Canal. The consequences of this have further fuelled inflation.

July was also the world's hottest month on record and in August with the world's oceans reaching a new record high temperature of 20.96 °C exceeding the previous record in 2016. In November, I was fortunate to travel to Antarctica.

Antarctica is a remarkable continent – remote, hostile uninhabited and beautiful. Here I witnessed first-hand the changes being caused to Wildlife in this most guarded place on earth.

Community Projects

Parish Cycle Racks

The Sandridge Solar Farm Community Benefit payment has been spent on deployment of new cycle racks within the Parish with additional cycle racks in Sells Green.

Our thank go to John Williams for installing these racks and for all the other little jobs John doe around the parish that so often go unnoticed.

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 more than £7,000 to local organisations. This year due to the increase in costs being experienced by these groups, the Parish Council agreed to increase further increase its annual donations to village organisations. The Parish Council has now moved the annual donations payments from December to May. So, this year's payments will be made in a couple of weeks and has we have finally moved to online banking, these payments will be direct into their accounts.

With careful fiscal management we were able to fund a contribution of £5,500 towards the purchase of a new mower for the Lye Field and this year we have been able to fund £3,000 to help with the refurbishment of the Tennis Courts. Although the Tennis Club is essentially a private members club, the Parish Council has gained agreement there will be public access availability at certain times. It is hoped this will lead to residents having a go without making a commitment before deciding to join the club.

Planning

During the last fiscal year, the Parish Council has discussed and voted on **36** planning applications. The vast majority were discussed and reviewed against the Neighbourhood Plan before voted on at a Parish Council meeting. In addition, 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 placed 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.

Bollands Hill

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 7 years the Parish Council has recorded 28 recorded accidents at this location. The Parish Council has been working with Highways to prioritise this location for direct intervention. This location along with ~ 70 other 'accident blackspots' across Wiltshire are currently being analysed to identify a 'Top Priority' list. We are hopeful the Bell will be included.

Resurfacing of Rusty & Bradley Lanes

As many of you will know, Rusty Lane was resurfaced in November 2022 and despite 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.

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 and provide real benefit for residents living at the western end of the village giving them a viable alternative route to the 'Narrows' on the High Street to reach the Lye Field and village halls.

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, later this month and early June. A village alert will be posted on Facebook.

We are looking forward to welcoming the new residents at Hook Hollow who are expecting to move in from June. We hope they will become active and supportive members of the community.

There will be Open Gardens in Seend Cleeve on 8th June and we look forward to the 75th Seend Fete and Flower show which is taking place on 10th 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 all our Parish Councillors for their hard work and commitment they have given to the parish council.

Neighbourhood Plan Report

This is included as a separate report on the Parish Council Website. However as there have been no changes during the past year, a new report has not been presented.

Councillor Reay's Report

Secure Finances – Investing in Key Services: Despite the ongoing budget pressures arising from increasing demand for services and inflationary costs, the Council has been able to effectively manage these challenges to ensure a firm financial footing. Key to this sustainable approach to delivering for Wiltshire, is to invest in services, especially those which tackle issues in a proactive way. The Council receives nearly 83% of its funding from local taxes, Business Rates and Council Tax, so we take delivering on our promises to local people very seriously.

Children's Services – Outstanding Ofsted: We want to give Wiltshire's children the best start in life as it is fundamental in improving their long-term life chances and gives them the best opportunity to live full and healthy lives. We have worked relentlessly to improve our services and now deliver consistently Outstanding services that ensure the needs of families and children are met at the right time by the right people. This is reflected in the Ofsted inspection report from November 2023 that rated us Outstanding across the board.

Additional Funding for Highways & Flood Prevention: Heat, flooding and severe winter weather has caused significant damage to some of Wiltshire's roads in 2023. Whilst the overall condition of Wiltshire's classified road network is better than the national average this continues to be a priority. We are investing an additional £10m in Highways maintenance, which together with increased Department for Transport (DfT) funding, will enable an extensive programme of road surfacing and treatment in 2024/25. We are also investing an additional £1m to support preventative drainage programmes and have confirmed additional £1.5m funding from 25/26 onwards to help with gully cleaning and potholes.

£179m for Adult Services, which includes over £9m of efficiency savings: Adult Social Care accounts for the highest percentage spend of Wiltshire Council's budget and continues to see significant demographic and cost pressures. The Transforming Adult Social Care programme ensures that the Council is proactive in ensuring services meet need. Continued investment is being made in preventative, enablement and reablement services that support people to stay in their own homes and take full part in their communities. The Shared Lives Scheme, which offers a fostering style model of care and support continues to grow, and the use of Technology Enabled Care (TEC) is a key priority. Moving from children to adult services is one of the most critical times for anyone's life, this is even more important for young adults who have Special Education Needs and Disabilities.

Locally, I have continued to support Parish Councils and residents with specific local matters, and it is a pleasure to attend Parish Council meetings across the area. I was very pleased to assist with fixing the prolonged mobile phone outage in Potterne and Worton, and I will continue to press for road safety improvements across the area, especially at Black Dog and Bell Crossroads. I have helped many Parishes with flooding issues access Wiltshire Council resources, and I am pressing the Environment Agency to find a long-term solution for the issues with the Mill Leat and Semington Brook in Worton and Marston. Looking forward, I will continue to support efforts to ensure that the planning applications for the large solar installations in Potterne are refused and to galvanise support from Danny Kruger and Michelle Donelan, where national policy needs reviewing. My huge apologies if I haven't mentioned your local issue this time – you can be assured that it is on my "to do" list – please do get in touch if I can help.

Statement of the Parish Council's accounts to 31st March 2024

The Precept for 2023-24 was set at £21,086 an increase of £680 on the previous year.

Income

Income for the year totaled £26,280 up £2,868 than previous due to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments of £2,428 from new housing within the parish and higher interest rates that provided an extra £383.

In addition, the Parish Council received a Sandridge Solar Farm Community payment of £1,399. The allotment rents remained the same as the previous year providing an income of £518 plus the VAT refund for the previous year's expenditure £338.

Expenditure

Expenditure totaled 20,058 down £1,267 on previous due to delayed payments towards local Highways improvements at Bell Hill and The Stocks.

The biggest outlay for the Parish Council is the staff costs of £8,424.

The parish Council's contribution towards the new Lye Field mower was the biggest single donation at £5,500.

Donations to other village organisations amounted to £1,905

At the end of this fiscal year, we have an overall balance of £38,352 up £5,992 on last year. We earmarked approximately £28,000 of this money for projects to be carried over into the new year such as:

- Neighbourhood Plan - £5,500

- Highways - Further road safety improvements at Bell Crossroads - £5,000
- Highways - Bradley Lane - Surface upgrade - £5,000
- Highways – New Speed Indicator Devices and sockets - £5,000
- Highways - Road Infrastructure improvement at 'The Stocks' - £2,000
- Tennis Club – New Court Surface - £3,000
- Defibrillator Support and eventual Replacement - £1,500
- Parish Council Election Costs & IT services - £1,000

This leaves the Parish Council with general reserves of £10,617 which is 50% of its Precept and exactly the recommended level of reserves a parish council such as Seend should hold.

This year the Parish Council's internal Auditor fully approved the accounts with no recommendations or actions having concluded that in all significant respects the financial controls and processes deployed by the Council have been achieved throughout the fiscal year.

Reports from village organisations

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

Any other business

Potential Tree that could fall across part of the eastbound A361 carriageway adjacent to Blossom Hill Travellers Site has been reported to Wiltshire Council.

Close of Meeting

The meeting closed at 8.59pm

.....
(Chairman)

Date: TBC May 2025