



Wincanton
Town Council



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Appendix 1

WINCANTON ANNUAL PARISH MEETING REPORTS

12th MAY 2025

TOWN COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW

At the Annual Town Council meeting in May 2024, I was re-elected as Mayor, and it has been my privilege to Chair the Town Council over the past year supported by my fellow Councillors and Deputy Mayor. Following a few Cllr resignations throughout the year the Council is currently seeking to co-opt 2 new Cllrs. I am confident that 2 new Cllrs will be co-opted soon.

Wincanton Town Council are lucky to have a great team of staff led by the Town Clerk. The team works tirelessly to carry out the requirements of the Town Council for the community. The Council is currently fully staffed and has been since January 2024.

The Works and Maintenance team did a fantastic job throughout the year in maintaining our open spaces in an excellent condition, in addition, they continued to undertake tasks above and beyond their statutory remit in a successful effort to keep the town looking as good as possible. The office-based staff continuously strive to improve administration functions and improve the governance and transparency of the Council. The RFO/Deputy Clerk ensured the Council again had a successful audit and Annual Governance and Accountability review. I applaud their abilities to deal with work pressures so successfully in a small team with limited funds.

The Council has achieved many accomplishments this year while under financial and local government pressures. Somerset Council continue to seek to devolve some services to the Town Council – without any financial assistance - which will put increasing pressure on Wincanton Town Council's budgets and workloads. Inevitably there will be a sense in the community that they are being asked to pay twice over for these devolved services. Sadly, as Somerset Council will be unable to perform them, it is probably the only way in which these services will be undertaken. In this regard, Somerset Council recently closed the Memorial Hall car park toilets, despite the Town Council having paid to clean and maintain those toilets in the last financial year.

During the Town Council's 2025/2026 budget setting discussions it became apparent that an increase in precept was required to meet its agreed budget of £491,888. The result is a precept request of £458,896, an increase in the Band D equivalent (the average householder) of £5.19 for the year, an additional monthly cost of just £0.43. A Budget and Precept Report has been prepared by our Deputy Clerk/RFO with further information available on the Council's website or by emailing the office. The Clerk is in the process of preparing an Annual Report.

Events and Projects during the past year

During the past year, the Town Council has effectively completed the following projects, and events – list not exhaustive:

- Started the process of registering all Town Council land with the Land Registry
- Commenced the process of valuing Town Council assets.
- Paid for the cleaning of the Memorial Hall toilets to keep them open an extra year.
- Had the War Memorial professionally cleaned.
- Completed the tender process to use CIL funds to have the two Town Council toilets refurbished.
- Started a monthly e-newsletter.
- Agreed preventative measures to stop vehicle access to Cale Park
- Cale Park Events including Family Fun Days and Inflatable sessions.

- Continued review of and implementation of new regulations, procedures and policies
- Finalisation of the Community Plan Report and Executive Summary
- Completed the transfer of Cales Reach at Cale Park
- Community Awards
- CCTV installation in Cale Park
- Successful deployment of a Speed Indicator Device
- Initiation of the 20mph speed limit on the town centre
- Christmas Light Switch On and Over 70's Christmas Lunch events
- Continuation of Easter event for children
- Continuation of Youth Contract
- Successful Internal and External Audits and Annual Governance and Accountability Return
- Extended hedge cutting
- Continued homing the Community Fridge at the Town Hall

In addition, the Town Council awarded grants to the following organisations:

- MHA
- The Growing Space
- Octagon Theatre & Westlands Entertainment Venue
- Wincanton District History Society
- Wincanton Cares

Looking into 2025/26 and Beyond

The Council along with all other tiers of local government within Somerset is entering uncharted territory. It is difficult to envisage how the next few years will pan out, but highly likely that some services and assets will be devolved to Wincanton Town Council.

Following the completion of the Community Plan Report and Executive Summary work has commenced on an Action Plan which it is hoped will assist in the production of a Strategic Plan.

Final Remarks

I would like to thank all the Council's staff for their hard work and determination during the year and my Councillor colleagues for their voluntary support. Without all of these individuals, the work of the Town Council would be impossible to complete.

WINCANTON NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING

Two representatives from Avon and Somerset Police introduced themselves and asked questions of those present. A representative from Wincanton Cares thanked the police for their support. Questions were raised regarding speeding in the town and antisocial behaviour.

SOUTH SOMERSET COMMUNITY ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT

The representative explained that the CAT bus was facing increased costs in the coming year of £15,000 and more money would need to be raised. It was noted that the coming year would be very challenging. Statistics such as number of journeys was supplied and it was noted the first quarter of 2025 was the busiest ever. It was sadly reported that the founder of the CAT Bus, Andy Chiltern, had passed away on 1st April 2025.

THE GROWING SPACE

The Growing Space is a Social & Therapeutic Gardening charity working with The Balsam Centre in Wincanton. We offer services to a wide range of people and organisations within a 10-mile radius of Wincanton. We provide mood-boosting gardening activities that help lift depression, reduce anxiety, overcome learning disability, and enable people to learn new skills while benefitting from working collaboratively on projects that improve public outdoor spaces. Activities also enable participants to gain a sense of pride through achievement and articulate what they perceive to be barriers to employment and community participation.

We have large greenhouses, lots of space for fruit, flowers and vegetables, and wildlife gardens with a large pond. We engage about 50 people a year of all ages in gardening activities (from toddlers through to the more mature). We have 7 dedicated volunteers helping us to deliver therapeutic services and maintain the gardens.

Working in partnership with The Balsam Centre enables us to:

- Get support from a wide range of professionals and practitioners.
- maintain good relations with local grass-roots groups including horticultural societies, self-help groups and environmental groups. Particularly the One Planet Groups.
- work closely with local authorities and statutory bodies.
- assist and advise many local gardeners new and old on gardening methods, growing vegetables, herbs and ornamental

Current and Continuing Activities.

Young People, Nature and Food Growing

We offer activities to young adults aged 18 – 25 who are experiencing mental health problems and missed out at school and college. We provide them with meaningful activities based on horticulture and garden wildlife that help them get more motivated for work and training.

Greenhouse and Propagation Group

This group suits people recovering from mental ill-health. We meet in a quiet, calm space on Wednesday afternoons in our cosy but roomy greenhouse. Participants can clearly identify goals, build confidence, add structure and stability to their week, and take advantage of the mood-boosting power of propagating and caring for plants. We focus on sowing seeds, taking cuttings and propagating vegetables and flowers. We propagate all the plants needed in our gardens and always have plenty to spare for giving away in return for donations.

The Compost Crew

Participants in this group help us make the compost and leafmould that feed all our wildlife, flower and vegetable gardens around the Balsam Centre. We also do other weeding, pruning, and landscaping tasks. This coming summer we'll be making our own peat-free multi-purpose compost and experimenting with its nutritional qualities. This has been funded by Wessex Water.

Supported Gardening

If people's confidence is lacking, they need extra help, or they're feeling a bit isolated, they can attend one of our Tuesday or Wednesday workshops. They get lots of support from our horticulture workers and are invited to set goals that help them learn and progress. The gardening choices are many and the range of activities captures their interest and boosts their confidence and motivation as they begin to see the results of their work.

Volunteering

We need people who have a background in horticulture, care or education to help deliver our services and maintain the gardens. If someone has no experience but is still interested, our qualified and experienced staff can provide training and guidance.

Working With Other Groups and Organisations

Other groups visit us to get involved in lots of different activities, or to pick up plants. We always try to be prepared for whoever walks through the gate. Some groups come regularly from the Balsam Centre and some from further afield. We propagate lots of plants for the One Planet groups to use in both Bruton and Wincanton.

New Activities in the Pipeline

Town Centre Planters

Due to the sad news that Wincanton Gardeners Association has folded, we'll be planting up the large planters throughout the town centre with some nice summer and winter displays. We want to involve all our existing groups and attract more people from the town, including the schools. Through this summer and autumn, we'll propagate all the plants we need ready for some lovely displays in 2026. We're hoping that this activity also raises the profile of the charity and the support we get from the town, as well as the numbers of people benefitting from our services.

Arts & Crafts with Natural Materials

We already run workshops that enable people of all ages to share good times while growing and arranging flowers and bouquets (flowers are cut straight from the gardens). But we'd like to extend these workshops into evenings and weekends so that more people can benefit. We reached out to people living in the area with a short questionnaire (both online and paper) last autumn, and the results showed a definite need for more creative workshops. We're seeking funds to employ an arts and crafts practitioner to work alongside our horticulture practitioners. Creative workshops could include willow weaving, sculpture from natural materials, painting, drawing and even photography.

We will continue our close links with people and the organisations supporting them within our catchment and hope to develop new links as new groups emerge and needs change, so that more people have access to our services.