



Wincanton
Town Council



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Appendix 1

WINCANTON ANNUAL PARISH MEETING REPORTS

22nd May 2023

TOWN COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW

It has been my privilege to chair the Town Council over the last 12 months. This short review aims to summarise the Council's activities over that period and is not necessarily exhaustive!

Council Matters

Firstly, we have managed to recruit permanent staff to both vacancies that existed – the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk - and in both cases we managed to persuade the incumbent part-time locum staff to apply for the permanent positions (along with others, and via a conventional recruitment process, just to be clear) because they really would like to work with us on a firmer footing. Because of this, many of the tasks that the council previously struggled to complete adequately (or even at all in some cases) have now been completed more than satisfactorily. Furthermore, until very recently we had managed to keep the staff roll identical as was in place at the last Annual meeting. This is no longer the case as our Admin Assistant has chosen to leave for a different job.

Secondly, we have put some emphasis into repairing things that had become broken and worn out – notably the paths in the cemetery and Town Hall itself, the offices of which have now been refurbished internally and the exterior has been decluttered and re-painted. We have also provided new planters and seating around the town, partly to celebrate the jubilee and the coronation.

Thirdly, and in the same vein, we have revamped the Council's website and e-mail system. I would urge you all to look at the new internet presence and provide feedback if possible. In matters relating to finance, the officers submitted a successful AGAR and internal audit which has itself provided continuous improvement suggestions for the Council from our auditors. Importantly the auditor recently described the Council's performance as "the best he has seen in years". This is an outstanding change in a little over 12 months and is very welcome. In addition, officers have identified a flaw in previous year's financial processes and a significant rebate in VAT is being worked on currently. Hopefully such issues will not arise going forward.

During the Council's budget setting discussions, it became apparent that the Council were able to maintain the precept so that resident's Council Tax bills did not change because of the Town Council's spending plans. We were also able to continue to provide modest grants to local organisations that provide non-statutory services to the community.

External Matters

Turning to external matters, South Somerset District Council's "Wincanton Regeneration" project has now run its course, along with the District Council itself. Those residents, me included, that thought that this might have resulted in some significant redevelopment of a derelict property have been disappointed as no suitable candidate site was identified by the project team before the project was put into hibernation. However, the regeneration project did deliver wholesale redecoration of many of the fronts of many of the properties on the High Street and the Marketplace which is to be applauded. The project also funded some events that took place in the town centre.

When I reported to you last year, I told you about the emerging Local Community Network that was being trialled in south-east Somerset. This trial was deemed a success by the incoming Somerset Council and a formal LCN will commence shortly. I look forward to seeing how this evolves over the next few years.

Public Events

By way of public events, in respect of the Coronation, we held a picnic style event in the park on Sunday 7th May which was very well received by residents.

In February, soldiers from 1AAC exercised the Freedom of the Town that was granted to them in 2016 by parading through the middle of the town. Most residents appreciated this event and the value that it brings to the large military community that live here.

Last June we held a Summer tea party for older residents, partly to mark the jubilee, then in December we held the traditional over-70s Xmas party.

Finally, there was a ceremony to mark the switching on of the Christmas tree lights in the Marketplace, along with a lantern parade for the children. Sadly, on this occasion Santa was too busy with his preparations to attend. We hope he may be able to come next time.

Final Remarks

Personally, 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 support throughout the year.

The grounds staff 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 dealt with many challenges in putting the administration functions back into shape after many months of low levels of office staff and continued changes of locums. I applaud their abilities to deal with this so successfully.

Many of the Councillors have assisted with the various events that I have described and I am very grateful for this – many hands make light work – so thank you too!

In summary, over the last 12 months, much has happened and much has changed for the better. This has all been achieved with no additional call on the resident's finances. There has been no repeat of the lack of harmony in the Council chamber that some of you complained about in 2022.

At the last annual meeting I promised you that I would endeavour to ensure that the Council undertakes its statutory duties as well as required; and that I would also endeavour to make the Council listen and respond to residents and to ensure that all Councillors are treated equally in any decision-making forum. I believe that this has been achieved. However, I still remain available for you to contact about any matter at all times.

I look forward to continued improvement in 2023/4 which will hopefully include refurbishment of the Council chamber, chasing developers for planning contributions and promised works, further engagement with the LCN and finally engagement with residents. On that last point, I am always available to speak to residents face-to-face or by other means on any matter and I would also welcome you to contact me or meet me at the Town Hall at any (reasonable) time.

WINCANTON & DISTRICT GARDENERS ASSOCIATION REPORT

Our association has returned to normal activities after the Covid pandemic. We have held our regular monthly talks and committee meetings.

Visits to local gardens has been arranged and our annual outing will take place in June with a visit to RHS Rosemoor. In July we will be holding our members annual Rose and Sweet Pea show.

Recently we hosted the Somerset Federation AGM, followed by a talk. This was a very successful evening and the association was congratulated by the Federation, in every aspect, for the hospitality which was extended to them.

You may have noticed that the plant containers have been emptied ready for the summer plants. Planting will take place during this week, with the majority being planted on Saturday 27th May. Our association has undertaken the purchase of plants, their planting and watering for many years. This has been achieved through the financial support of the Town Council, which enables the purchase of plants and compost.

Our planting scheme coordinator, Inge, has the task of purchasing the plants at the best available price. This has not been easy, as prices have risen significantly during the year. Inge keeps all the receipts to ensure every penny is accounted for. These are then passed to the Town Council. Our association is fortunate to have Inge, who has taken this scheme under her wing for many years, even during her illness.

There are a few problems with the plant containers in Carrington Way and by the Central Café. The surrounding wood on the two containers in Carrington Way has become rotten and in the need of being replaced, as it could cause injury. The container by the café is gradually falling apart and needs replacing. A matching container like the two outside the town hall, would be an ideal replacement. Perhaps this could happen just before the Autumn planting.

Thanks are expressed to Wincanton Town Council for their continued support, without which, the planting scheme could easily end.

BLACKMORE VALE READ EASY - (Oral Report)

Mr Porter provided information on the Blackmore Vale Read Easy group explaining that they work with adults with reading difficulties from the age of 18-88 covering a wide range of literacy problems. Information was given on the statistics of reading problems within the UK and Wincanton. It was explained that a typical reading course takes two years and two successful readers have since written and published books.

SOUTH SOMERSET COMMUNITY ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT – (Oral Report)

Mr Broad provided information about a challenging year with overheads significantly increasing in fuel, labour and maintenance. It was noted that fares had remained the same as 2021 with a 30% increase in passengers. Mr Broad explained that the CAT bus was a service for the entire community and available to everyone. Information was given about hours of operation and number of buses with the need for a new bus noted. Thanks was given to Wincanton Town Council for their continued support. An appeal for more social drivers was made as demand had risen by 60% with up to 17 enquiries in a day.

WINCANTON MHA – (Oral Report)

Judith Chalmer spoke on behalf of MHA and thanked Wincanton Town Council for their support. Information was provided on the charity and how they support older people within the community including befriending, meals, games, outings, theatre and activities, all aiming to help stop loneliness. The motto for MHA was explained as “Let older people live well later in life”. Judith explained that MHA is based in the Methodist church, all are welcome and the group is supported by volunteers. Special thanks was given to Inge Nicholls.

ONE PLANET WINCANTON – (Oral Report)

Janice Blackwell spoke on behalf of the group explaining that it had been formed 4 years ago and its aim was to teach people how to live more sustainably and reduce carbon output. Information was provided on the group’s activities including its successful Repair Café, planting of wildflowers, replacement of bird boxes and Wilder Churches initiative.

THE GROWING SPACE – (Oral Report)

Nick Truman provided information on The Growing Space based in the gardens of The Balsam Centre. It was noted that the scheme was going from strength to strength. Thanks were passed to Wincanton Town Council and Wincanton Community Hospital for their continued support. Information was provided about current projects the group is involved in.

CATCH – (Oral Report)

Janice Blackwell provided a brief report on CATCH regarding river pollution and invertebrates monitoring stating that the River Cale was being monitored by the Environment Agency.

Wincanton Recreation Trust - (Oral Report)

Justin French spoke on behalf of Wincanton Recreation Trust/Sports Ground stating that there are issues surrounding vandalism, dog fouling and unauthorised use of the car park by both adults and teenagers. Justin explained that usage of the building was increasing and upgrades had been made to the lighting and audio-visual system. It was noted that money had been lost when the football pitch was out of use, but new football teams were starting up. Justin urged anyone who may wish to use the premises to visit.