



Chairman's Report – Annual Parish Meeting 6th May 2014

Introduction

This year we've said farewell to Councillor Mrs Pat Shaw, who has resigned on health grounds, having served on the Council for many years looking after the interests of residents in Failand. I would like to thank Pat for her support over the years. We welcome Ian Malpas, who was co-opted to the Council in February to fill the vacancy. We also thank Alison Locke, who also stood but unfortunately was not successful this time, despite being an excellent candidate. I must thank her for continuing to take an active part in the work of the Council after her disappointment. It is most commendable.

Challenging the Boundary Commission's latest proposals which threaten to divide our parish has been a significant recent activity. Two public meetings were held in mid-March to explain the situation and encourage residents to write to the Commission to support Plan A, which retains our link with Long Ashton in the ward boundary for the District Council. We are awaiting the outcome of the considerations.

The current financial climate and recent legislation have a strong influence the work of the Parish Council. Planning reforms continue to be introduced, which threaten to weaken the Green Belt, and will undoubtedly affect us. Pressures on North Somerset Council (NSC) to reduce their budget may well have a knock-on effect on Wraxall & Failand.

Planning

The core work of the Parish Council continues to revolve around Planning & Development as we seek to influence the decisions of the NSC North Area Planning Committee with our comments and recommendations.

The Parish Council commented on 48 Planning Applications in the past year - about the same as last year. Amongst these were 7 Trees Preservation Orders and 6 Listed Building Applications. 36 Planning Applications have been Approved and 5 Refused by NSC; we have yet to be advised of the remaining 7. NSC agreed with over 82% of the Parish Council's recommendations.

Where Planning Applications have been contentious, and there have been several this year, our Councillors and District Councillors have invested much time listening to residents and conducting multiple site visits.

In response to severe budget pressures, NSC has introduced Paperless Planning from April 2014. This means that all documentation is provided in digital format on the NSC website and paper copies are now only provided for complex applications. Previously, paper copies were used extensively by Investigating Councillors for site visits and will be missed, as tablet devices do not easily allow different parts of a plan to be viewed simultaneously. The Parish council needed to adopt an alternative approach and now the lead Investigating Councillor determines

which drawings are essential in A3 paper format and our Clerk then arranges for a local firm to print them. This obviously incurs additional costs. Also, to enable effective discussion at meetings, a digital presentation is prepared for each planning application including plans, maps and images downloaded from the web. This is projected on a large screen for all those present (Councillors and residents) to view and make their comments. This is a significant improvement from trying to view paper copies around the table and makes it easier to assimilate the issues. Currently, this time-consuming but important activity is prepared by Councillors.

NSC's Core Strategy is the main planning document for North Somerset and guides decisions on development proposals until 2026. It was challenged in the High Court last March on the scale of new housing - being insufficient and not justified. This has affected 9 supporting policies; those which most affect Wraxall & Failand, include CS6: Green Belt and CS33: Smaller settlements and countryside.

Nailsea Town Council continues to have aspirations for the Green Belt to be relaxed to the north-east of the town to support the development of industrial and commercial sites. This runs counter to Wraxall & Failand Parish Council's position. We did not support the development of Wraxall Charities land to become an extension car park for GE Oil & Gas. Car parking along Lodge Lane continues (the car park extension was cited as being able to alleviate this). There is little that we can do about this.

Pylons

Councillors Chris Ambrose and Dr Hugh Pratt have continued to represent this Parish, and other groups which include Nailsea Action Against Pylons & Save Our Valley, in challenging the options proposed by National Grid for routing 400kV Transmission lines. Our Parish Councillors are advocating undergrounding and alternative technology. To support the challenge to National Grid the Parish Council commissioned Dr Claus Newmann, an authority on High Voltage Direct Current Gas Insulated Line (GIL) technology, to produce a report outlining the feasibility and costs of GIL, which was published in July 2013. It is considered likely that the campaign with National Grid and Ofgen will need to continue for some considerable time.

For further information and our reports please see our website.

Footpaths & Public Rights of Ways

The Parish Plan recognises that the network of footpaths across the parish is a major recreational facility and the Parish Council has sought to improve them. This year has seen:

- adoption of the 'Diamond Jubilee Riverside' Walk
- footpath diversion around the Paddock, Lower Failand
- the creation of a Bridleway by the National Trust at Tyntesfield
- the creation of 'Wheel 'n Walk' by the Rotary around the Elms and Nailsea

- work continuing on the 'Wraxall Village' walk - a path through the fields from the Grove to the west of the village avoiding the road which has no footway. A recent public meeting showed continuing support for this.

Road Safety & Highway Maintenance

The stretch of the B3130 between Budgens and Wraxall School has been re-surfaced recently. This is a huge improvement, addressing potholes and flooding issues. The Highways team have also taken the opportunity to remove a long-standing hazard, that of cars turning right out of Budgens, and improve the safety of pedestrians crossing at that point. The Parish Council has been lobbying for this for some time and is pleased to see it being implemented.

Potholes have been repaired at 60 Acres Close, however the surface is already crazing and cracking. We have been pressing the Highways Team for another repair and hopefully, re-surfacing.

Future work that is planned includes:

- resurfacing the footway on Weston Road, from 12 May to 30 May.
- carriageway resurfacing on Weston Road and Belmont Hill, starting on Belmont Hill on 2 June and finishing on Weston Road on 13 June. It will be necessary to close the road to through traffic, because of the narrow road width. An alternative diversion route will be signed.

I would encourage you to report highways issues directly to NSC via the link on our website. Councillors take an active interest with the state of roads in our parish; important issues are reported to NSC Area Officers by the Clerk.

Quiet Lanes

Following incidents involving cyclists and horses in the lanes around Lower Failand, including one tragic accident, Councillor Bob Sheppard has been leading a small group, which includes residents, to see what measures can be introduced to improve safety. The introduction of Quiet Lanes is one option, not just for Lower Failand but also Tower House Lane and, potentially, Lodge Lane in Wraxall. For roads designated as Quiet Lanes a speed limit of 20 mph helps to change the culture of road users aimed at prioritising use for cyclists, horse riders and pedestrians. Work is at an early stage.

Buses

In November 2013 there was a reduction in bus services through Wraxall village, as result of First Bus reducing their services and North Somerset Coaches withdrawing services 55 and X5. Abus has stepped in, replacing some of the services run by North Somerset Coaches. Nevertheless, this was of great concern to many residents, who made representations at the Parish Council meeting in December and latterly submitted a petition.

The Parish Council sought to influence the situation and improve matters, lobbying NSC and the Regional Manager for First Bus. NSC considered that it was not possible to provide a supported service for the area as, even if they had the finances available, this would undermine the commercial bus service. A few years ago NSC had supported a Sunday/Bank Holiday service but had to withdraw support, as it was poorly used and represented poor value for money. First Bus continued to have further discussions with NSC and from mid April 2014 First Bus introduced a new service X10 (Bristol to Nailsea, via Long Ashton and Wraxall). This improves the situation but does not restore the frequency to levels before November 2013.

Allotments

Historically, there have been allotments in the parish on land owned by the Tyntesfield estate. Subsequently, the Wraxall Village Club was built on this land. Following a representation at a Parish Council meeting requesting land for allotments, various options have been investigated, including:

- the National Trust at Tyntesfield. When the NT purchased the estate it was thought that an area could be allocated but this land has now been used for other purposes. If another area were identified, then access would be restricted, which is obviously a disadvantage.
- the field off Lodge Lane, Wraxall. It is designated as an 'existing outdoor playing space', falls within the Elm Farm public open space and is one of the key green lungs on the edge of Nailsea that is maintained by NSC. The Parish Council sought and has received detailed advice from NSC, which our councillors have considered carefully and decided that it is not a feasible site for allotments.
- use of residents' under-utilised gardens – it is understood that some of those seeking land for allotments have followed up this suggestion.

The Parish Council will continue to consider alternative sites.

Notice Boards

Although the Parish Council website is being used to post notices on the home page and communicate with residents, we recognise that not all residents use computers. The Parish Council has decided to replace 2 of the Noticeboards that are deteriorating with ones which are low maintenance and easier to insert notices. Councillor Tom Sage investigated options which were best value. The Noticeboards to be replaced are at the bottom of Wraxall Hill and the Yeo Valley Way play area in Wraxall. It is intended to replace the perspex front of the one in Failand Churchyard.

Community Resilience

Councillor Martin Law has been our focal point on NSC's Community Resilience network which aims to build strong, resilient communities, prepared to deal with any emergency using local resources and trained volunteers. We've recently updated our Emergency Plan and accepted a Community Pack which includes Foil Blankets, Torch/Radios, a Loudhailer, 5 Hi Vis jackets and 2

First Aid Kits. If you are interested in helping in an emergency, then there are further details on our website.

Finance

Councillors, mindful of the current financial climate, have been concerned about the budget pressures on NSC and the potential requirement for Wraxall & Failand Parish Council to supplement or take responsibility for services that NSC may choose to reduce or relinquish. As such, Councillors agreed to increase the Precept (the parish share of the Council Tax) by 3%. Fewer discretionary grants were awarded this year. However, the Parish Council agreed to a grant for the refurbishment of the Wraxall Club, a well-used community facility which has not had any help from the Parish Council for many years. We continue to hold reserves to respond to National Grid's proposed route for Pylons.

The Clerk has again made an offer that her salary should continue to be capped, despite additional hours worked voluntarily; she also works at home. Residents continue to benefit from this element of the Precept being significantly less than it could be.

Expenditure for the year ending 31 March 2014 comprises:

- Staff, office and administrative costs £17,100 (66% of expenditure) - this includes salary, allowances, office administration, audit, training, insurance.
- Open spaces £2,500 (10%) - this includes cutting of grass verges, maintenance of bus shelters and the Grove play area.
- Grants and Subscriptions £4,900 (19%)
- Diamond Jubilee commemoration £1,500 (5%) - planting of tree and memorial stone at Failand Village Hall and contribution to memorial in Wraxall Churchyard.

Appreciation

I wish to recognise the dedication and support of:

- our Clerk, Freda Shattock, supported by her husband, David, who delivers working papers to Councillors and notice-boards at his own expense.
- our Councillors, who are not paid, in their support to the community.
- our District Councillors, Bob Cook and Charles Cave – in representing our interests, particularly for planning and footpaths, lobbying and liaising with NSC officers.
- our NSC Liaison Officer, Richard Blows, who has now been replaced by Mike Rees.
- our Neighbourhood Beat Officers, PC Adam Clarke, now been replaced by PC Matt Christie, and Police Community Support Officers, Charlotte Thompson and Justin Robbie
- the Open Spaces Society Local Representative, John Ives
- those residents who attend meetings and contribute to the work of our Parish Council

David Robinson
Chairman