

WRAXALL & FAILAND PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO ANNUAL PARISH MEETING AT 7.30 P.M. ON 3RD MAY AT THE CROSS TREE CENTRE, WRAXALL

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our Annual Parish Meeting (APM).

This is the last APM of the present Council, so a little reflection is in order.

The year started with a full complement of Councillors and Chris Ambrose was re-elected as Chairman.

Which reminds me, we have an election in two days time, and it is appropriate to recall that Parish Councillors are unpaid volunteers; so please continue to remember that when you have reason to raise an issue with them and since the clarification of the *pre-determination rules* you may now request the PC or individual Councillors to act as advocates for a particular issue or plead the cause for your particular difficulty, but please provide the necessary evidence. The PC will then enlist the support of the District Councillors to pursue the matter further.

This also means that it will now be OK for Councillors to campaign on issues in order to better represent their communities.

However, it is the years ahead that we may be able to influence not the past, and that was why we set out to produce the Parish Plan in 2007 and issued it in 2009. It has served us well so far and it continues to be "material consideration" in developing policy for NSC.

We established the Road Safety Committee, under the chairmanship of David Robinson. The Committee comprises Councillors and concerned residents. It meets regularly and is well attended. It has, to its credit, raised the profile of Wraxall & Failand highway issues with NSC and has had a modicum of success with safety measures and resurfacing through Wraxall village. It has also produced a Safety Report on the B3128 which was recently issued to NSC. They constantly press for pot holes to be repaired.

We re-established the PROW Committee under the chairmanship of Hugh Pratt and again this comprises Councillors, concerned residents, landowners and footpath groups. It too has raised our profile with NSC. The issues surrounding PROW are constrained by legal and regulatory requirements which make progress slow.

Both of these items will be reported on later by Hugh and David.

We also established a small team to revisit our web site and to seek to improve it and make it more useable for speedy communication.

David Robinson will update us on that shortly.

The two big items over the last couple of years were the Failand Public Enquiry which found in our favour and the proposed 400 KV Transmission Lines which still has to be decided.

Our defence at the Public Enquiry was crucial in supporting NSC's objection and was only made possible by the raising of funds through the Precept. Thank you for that.

The funds were also raised to challenge the NG proposals, and these have yet to be expended. Fortunately, we have been able to challenge NG from inhouse, with the help of Hugh Pratt and Chris Ambrose who produced a comprehensive report with input from other local and specialist sources. These are all acknowledged in the report.

The report was issued in Jan 2010, followed by later addendums, to NG, Liam Fox MP, other local MPs, DECC, OFGEM, IPC, CPRE and subsequently other Councils, Councillors and Campaign Groups around the country.

We have met with NG at public meetings and privately, and meet regularly with Liam Fox who is totally supportive. We have met with each of the regulatory authorities more than once, and contributed to the

KEMA/IET review of undergrounding and subsea transmission. Hugh Pratt attended the KEMA/IET review meeting in London. I recently attended the London Symposium on the whole issue of Power Transmission nationally.

We responded to the consultation on the National Policy Statements (NPS) in conjunction with other groups and PCs in the South West.

We met recently with NG at their review of undergrounding workshop on the 26th April 2011.

This meeting turned out to be more encouraging than I expected.

It was the first time in my dealings with NG that they had shown any sign of understanding the issues and of listening to us. There were indications of a change in their thinking, a moving towards our position.

NG acknowledged the valuable work done by us and others in influencing their policy.

However, we must not become complacent; we must continue our efforts, for although progress has been made there is a long way to go.

A particular point is "**willingness to pay**" for the extra transmission cost of going subsea or underground. This cost according to NG is £1.00 per year on our domestic electricity bill for every extra £1.0B of capital cost. This cost may be passed to the consumer directly or to the power generator, either way there is an extra cost to be paid for the benefits we gain, and no matter how presented it will eventually only be paid for by us.

Note that this extra cost pales into insignificance compared to the recent increase announced by the SOS for DECC of 30% for renewables (to cover subsidies and feed in tariffs) and a likely additional 50 % for the carbon tax (imposed on the Generators).

We continue to respond to publications and statements made by the various bodies and to attempt to explain and influence the Government on the impact and outcomes required of the interacting parts.

To give you a snapshot of the complexity of this issue:

The overarching control mechanism is the 2008 Planning Act.

There are 6 interacting bodies or legislative controls.

- The IPC, who consider only Major Infrastructure Projects above ground, i.e. overhead transmission lines.
- This therefore excludes underground transmission which is deemed to be permitted development or subsea which comes under marine legislation.
- DECC who issue the NPS and direct OFGEM.
- OFGEM in turn controls the funding. First cost only.
- The 1989 Electricity Act which regulates how and what NG install.
- There are technical challenges, they are considerable, but do-able.
- Cost basis for comparisons i.e. first cost or whole life cost?
- Add to that the Holford Rules.

Conclusion: it's like baking a cake; the ingredients need careful selection, weighing and mixing, temperature and time to bake a successful cake. Presently, this cake is likely to end up visually intrusive, damaging to our health and property values, damaging to our environment and our tourist industry. The cake would only be hard, soggy, sunken, or burnt!

Hugh & I and SOV have a meeting with Liam Fox on Friday 6th May to discuss the situation.

With the change of Government last May we can now feel a little easier over the proposed housing developments in the green belt although until the Government's Bill abolishes the RSS and replaces it with an alternative, based on the locally emerging core strategy we can't relax.

Nailsea TC is still keen to acquire the green belt land down to the Land Yeo. The purpose is to create an access to the Southfield Estate industrial units and to develop the area for more employment.

The Parish Council strongly resisted their recent attempt at acquisition and won the support of NSC, who rejected the proposal. This situation needs monitoring carefully as any reduction in the green belt separation

would see Wraxall become part of Nailsea.

The PC contributed to the consultation on the Draft Core Strategy and we await the final issue. The desire for affordable housing in the parish is on hold until the Core Strategy is issued. It looks presently as if policy will not support it.

We set the Precept at the 09 level for this coming year with the extra funds raised last year placed in reserve.

The PC discovered, following an application for a considerable extension to a Pub's Entertainment Licence, that the PC is not considered as a Statutory Consultee.

This is very concerning. This statute was drafted by the last Government to prevent local objections to 24hr drinking and entertainment. The PC would urge you, therefore, to be alert to any suspicious notices near public houses and work to get the Law changed.

Enforcement of planning conditions continues to be an issue and will probably get more difficult with the implementation of the cost savings.

The Millennium Field in The Grove now has a new play area for children aged 8- 14 years. This was provided via NSC using Government monies under the Play Builder - Play England scheme, at a cost of £30,810. We look forward to the local children enjoying the new facilities

The minutes of our monthly meetings are available on the web site for those of you who require more detail together with more useful information, as David will explain later .

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2011 /12 AND BEYOND

Introduction

We all recognize that global events impact on our small world here in Wraxall & Failand.

What we cannot predict, although we can well imagine, is the unintended consequences of such a diverse and interconnected range of events; from the tragedy in Japan, through the debt-ridden countries of Portugal, Ireland, Greece, & Spain, and the impact this will have on the Euro, to the UK's own debt, which is considerable.

The huge US debt, is likely to affect their credit rating and the value of the \$.

Equally, what affect will the emerging economic power of China and India, and the upward pressure on raw material costs and inflation have in this complex equation?

And, who can predict where the demand for democracy in the Middle East and North Africa will lead.

Whatever the outcome to us individually and collectively, "the Times they are a changing" - The Coalition Government is awash with policy changes which will affect us all in some way or other.

Concentrating on W&F PC - The **Localism Bill** is as important as is the **Planning Reform Bill**.

We are expecting the **Localism Bill** to be issued shortly; from leaked information it has the ability to change a PC's duties and responsibilities and how we operate.

Suggestions include more planning powers, decisions being made locally, placing more demand on public engagement if local communities are to be properly represented.

It means that those who do participate will make the decisions. If you don't, you risk being disappointed or worse.

Planning Reform is a big issue. It will abolish the RSS and the Government Office for the South West.

To add to the confusion of a **Planning Reform Bill**, since the last budget, economic development and inducements are now to be closely linked with planning. Vested interests come to mind?

Localism

There is to be a shift in power away from central government to the local unitary authorities and parish councils. We will be expected to do more for ourselves. Whatever we are asked to do must be lawful and we must be competent to carry it out. It means we will work more closely with other local councils and bodies. Government doesn't make W&F a great place to live, people do; **you do**.

Those of you, who look after your neighbours, take pride in your homes, pick up litter from our roads and lanes, identify pot holes, in other words get involved.

You will have the right to challenge local council proposals and express ideas.

You can call for a vote on local issues that are important. Local authorities and other public bodies will be required to take the outcome into account as they make their decision. You may approve or veto Council Tax

increases above a ceiling level. The planning system is to be clearer, more democratic, and more effective. You will be able to influence decisions and matters that affect our lives.

Local communities will be able to draw up neighbourhood development plans. Neighbourhoods need defining? Is it The Grove, The Elms, 60 Acres, or the greater neighbourhood of related and interconnected parishes and towns?

Enforcement to tackle planning abuses will be strengthened.

The Standards Board will be abandoned which means the local Standards Committee will be abandoned; this could be replaced, should NSC decide they want a standards committee.

The money to carry out these new responsibilities must follow them and not be duplicated.

We have still to see the detail before we get too enthusiastic, but it is a move in the right direction.

Core Strategy

We have contributed to the development of NSC's Core Strategy by attending workshops, private meetings with the Planning Manager and responding to draft issues of the Core Strategy.

We are awaiting the final publication this year.

Generally, the provision of housing in North Somerset will be at W-S-M, with some in Clevedon, Nailsea & Portishead.

This housing development will be employment-led.

Villages in rural areas have been defined as service villages and infill villages where there will be limited development, and countryside villages where no development is expected.

For us in W&F the changes proposed will have the following effects:

We will be known as a Countryside Village.

The settlement boundary at 60 Acres will be removed.

The whole parish will now be washed over with Greenbelt which means no development.

What will be allowed has to be for agricultural or recreational purposes.

As presently proposed, we as a parish will not be allowed to build affordable housing as this will be deemed to be provided by our neighbours in Long Ashton and Nailsea.

However, existing properties can be extended, if appropriate, by more than under existing limits.

There will be no development in gardens, i.e. no garden-grabbing.

Substantial agricultural buildings can be converted into holiday lets.

Pylons

I have covered this point earlier and Hugh will provide more detail later.

This issue will be with us until at least 2018.

Solar Farms and Wind Farms

We thought they could become an issue last year. Thankfully they didn't.

However, a potential conflict has arisen between the Planning Reform Bill and the Budget announcement, to the extent that, the Budget suggested that development should take precedence over other planning constraints, implying that a developer wishing to build a solar or wind farm on green belt land could do so, as it would benefit the economy and the renewables requirements.

Yet the core strategy states there will be no development in the green belt.

It should be noted that both solar and wind are inefficient energy generators, (in the last very cold spell wind generated only 5% maximum of the energy the country needed because there was no wind) in addition neither of these energy generators is cost effective without significant subsidies and feed in tariffs which benefit the developer for 25 years. The developer finds the financing highly attractive but it is totally unattractive to us the residents who find the possibility of such eyesores appalling and to add insult to injury you and I pay for these subsidies and FITs in our electricity bills.

So please remain alert to these possibilities to cause us more grief.

Major Developments

The major developments which are in reasonable proximity to our Parish are now reduced to two - *BIA expansion*, and *The Stadium*. The impacts and unintended consequences they will inevitably have on our rural life are still to be assessed.

The stadium may still be averted, for the reasons outlined by the no campaign group. Note however, that the PC is not against a new stadium, quite simply, we believe, it is in the wrong place, both for the team and the supporters.

The Airport has had its application approved and must now have well constructed conditions attached by the 106 agreement if its consequences are to be mitigated.

Waste and recycling

We have had the introduction of the new waste/recycling arrangements and although there were some teething problems it seems to be working well.

Finance

The Precept was returned this year to the level at 2009. The fund to respond to the National Grid's proposals is still intact and will only be used for that purpose.

Once again, I must record that the Clerk has agreed to cap her salary and not to charge for other items. This means the Precept is saved the costs of office provision, mileage, and of course the extra hours worked. This saving suggests that the provision of a Clerk should really cost double what we actually pay and the Precept increased accordingly.

THANK YOU

As this is my last year as Chairman, five years is more than sufficient. I must begin with a thank you to my wife Sally, who has been, over the last five years, very encouraging, supportive, and offered practical assistance, despite the disruptive telephone calls over dinner, and the amount of paper I leave strewn over the floor!

A big thank you must go to our Clerk, Freda Shattock and to the Councillors for their hard work and dedication over the year.

Each year, I have drawn particular attention to the amount of work our Clerk, Freda Shattock, does, and in particular the increased work generated by the big issues. However, this year she had a very serious accident which left her in great pain for a considerable period of time. Yet throughout this she never missed a day in the office. The powerful pain killers she was taking led to the odd mistake - at least that was what she told me!! This was very much over and above the call of duty. We all benefit from this stoicism and largesse and yet Freda accepts no additional reward. Many thanks Freda.

David Shattock has again supported Freda, by his deliveries of Council papers etc. always on time, to each Councillor. He also undertakes any number of ad hoc activities that come up throughout the year. Again he does all this at his own cost. Many thanks David.

The Councillors, as I mentioned earlier, give their time freely and carry out their duties with enthusiasm and always to the best of their ability. They have always supported me in my role as Chairman, for which I thank them.

I personally and the PC generally wish to thank our District Councillors, Bob Cook and Howard Roberts. Howard has not been well enough to attend our meetings this year and is not standing in the election this time. May we take this opportunity to thank him for his many years of service to our community and wish him well for the future? We also thank our Liaison Officer Sally Varley. We appreciate their support and guidance and, when necessary, they intercede for us with NSC.

We also thank Constable Adam Clarke, our Beat Officer, who provides monthly updates on crime figures and matters of interest to the PC, and in his absence Charlotte or Gary our PCSOs. Adam is also a member of the Road Safety committee.

We thank Hugh Pratt and Chris Ambrose for their continuing involvement in challenging the Proposed Transmission Lines. We recognize that this will continue to be an issue for a few more years. Thank you.

Thank you to Hugh Pratt and David Robinson for so ably chairing the two committees, PROW and Road Safety.

Thank you to all the residents who contribute to the various issues that arise, and to those who attend the committee meetings. It is appreciated.

To round off the meeting please partake of a glass of wine with your Councillors and socialise.

Chris Ambrose Chairman Wraxall & Failand Parish Council
3rd May 2011 vbg