



Chairman's Report – Annual Parish Meeting 3rd May 2016

Introduction

The year began with the co-opting of Councillors Paul Amos from Failand and Mrs Lucy Vowles from Wraxall to fill two vacancies we had on the Parish Council.

The main focus of the Parish Council this year has been provision of allotments off Lodge Lane, and road safety around Failand and along Tower House Lane.

The government's austerity measures have had a significant impact on North Somerset Council (NSC) and the Avon & Somerset Police force.

NSC intentionally sets a low Council Tax but this should not be at the expense of transferring cost to the Parish Precept, or cuts to services that residents value.

One consequence is that NSC has decided not to fund the School Crossing Patrol for Wraxall Primary School after August this year. We believe that the transfer of cost from NSC to the Parish Precept or the school budget is against the spirit of government policy. Furthermore, in our case many of the children attending the school are from outside the parish, as is much of the traffic passing the school, so it is very much a North Somerset issue. I'll show you an extract of a parliamentary debate in Westminster Hall on March 2011. In our view, where there is clearly a need, especially when it relates to safety of children, NSC should not abdicate its responsibility. The Council has made its views known very clearly and is continuing to lobby for this to be re-considered. I've written to our MP, Dr Fox, and I understand that he'll be writing to NSC in support.

There is less to spend on road safety measures: the budget for this has halved since 2009. Consequently, if there are measures to be taken to deal with speed of traffic through our lanes and around our villages, then the Parish Council is expected to contribute to funding them. I'll be addressing this in more detail later.

For the police, there are now fewer officers to tackle a larger beat. The force has had to prioritise and infrequent attendance at Parish Council meetings has been a consequence. Notwithstanding this the crime figures remain comparatively low in our parish.

Planning

Planning & Development is the core work of the Parish Council; we seek to influence the decisions of the NSC Planning & Regulatory Committee with our comments and recommendations.

The Parish Council commented on 69 Planning Applications in the past year – there were 71 last year. Amongst these were 9 Trees Preservation Orders and 4 Listed Building Applications. 50 Planning Applications have been Approved and 6 Refused by NSC; 2 have been withdrawn.

We have yet to be advised of the remaining 11. NSC did not agree with the Parish Council's recommendations on 11 of the Planning Applications, but in the cases that were approved, they usually placed Conditions reflecting our views. Two Planning Applications that were refused by NSC this year were appealed successfully.

In considering Planning Applications, our Councillors have continued to be diligent, seeking residents' views and conducting site visits. Our District Councillors work with the Planning Officers to reinforce any concerns that we may have.

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 in March 2013 on the scale of new housing - being insufficient and not justified. The revised Housing Policy was referred to the Secretary of State in March 2015 and the revised housing numbers have been accepted. The underlying policies will be re-examined by a Planning Inspector at a hearing to be held on 21, 22 and 23 June 2016. Until all policies have been accepted, this opens NSC to challenges from developers. Those that pertain to our parish, include the 'Green Belt' and 'Smaller Settlements & Countryside'.

Nailsea Town Council is seeking a review of the Green Belt for it to be relaxed to the north-east of Nailsea to support the development of industrial and commercial sites. Wraxall & Failand Parish Council are opposed to this.

Parking for GE Oil & Gas remains an issue. We did not support the development of Wraxall Charities land to become an extension car park for GE Oil & Gas but it went ahead. 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. We do not support GE's latest applications for a renewal of the application for the extension car park or the new Test Facility on their site. The latter would mean the loss of about 50 car parking spaces and it was considered that GE's Travel Plan, which advocated car sharing, was overly optimistic.

Possible infringements or disregard of planning law are often reported to the Parish Council. The NSC Enforcement team is responsible for dealing with them. Unfortunately, the team is under resourced and progress is painfully slow. The Parish Council is very grateful to our District Councillor, Charles Cave, to help them prioritise their work in our parish.

Allotments

Following a representation at a Parish Council meeting over 2 years ago requesting land for allotments, a small Working Group was formed and various options were investigated.

The field off Lodge Lane, behind Budgens, which has been identified as suitable for allotments, is designated as an 'existing outdoor playing space'. It falls within the Elm Farm public open space and is one of the key green lungs on the edge of Nailsea that is owned and maintained by NSC. Our survey shows that 70% of our residents who responded were supportive.

NSC considers that it is a feasible site and is keen that it is used by residents from both our parish and Nailsea. The Wraxall Allotments Association (WAA) has been established, by Simon Beck, a resident on the Elms, as their Chairman.

The WAA has produced a detailed proposal and the Parish Council has put a set of questions to NSC seeking advice. However, progress is complicated by a covenant on the land which was raised by the developers of the Elms estate. Before the holders of the Covenant are approached, the Parish Council wishes to ensure that all elements of NSC (legal, planning and the Open Spaces team) are content with the WAA proposal, and that the costs are reasonable. Both our Parish Council and Nailsea Town Council have allocated funds in their budgets for this, and hope that the WAA will be successful in applying for other grants.

Road Safety

Residents have expressed concern about the volume and speed of traffic using Tower House Lane (THL), the lanes around Lower Failand and Failand village (the triangle) that affects other road users including pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. The growth of Bristol Airport and its popularity with those who can easily reach it via junction 19 of the M5 (Gordano Services), has increased the volume of traffic around Failand.

In past years Speedwatch in Failand has worked with the police to try and deter motorists that speed with limited success. However, the number of active members has declined and, following Parish Council initiatives discussed below, a new group, Failand Residents Against Speeding (FRAS), has formed.

Working Groups have met residents from all the above areas and put forward their ideas to the engineer in the NSC Highways team responsible for road safety, who was the principal speaker at special meeting held at Failand, which was well attended.

Significantly, the engineer acknowledged that Failand met the criteria for a village, which implies a 30 mph speed limit should be applicable. Studies show that reducing that the speed limit without additional traffic calming measures will have only a small effect. Any solution has to be approved by the NSC Highways team and, given the NSC budget, contributions to funding implementation of effective solution(s) will need to be found. The mechanism for changing a speed limit is to use a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). Measures that change the perception of motorists are likely to be most effective solution for Failand. The Highways team has been requested to advise costs for a number of options before the Parish Council decides how to proceed.

A new portable Vehicle Activated Sign has been lent by the Highways team for 6 weeks and is being managed and maintained by members of FRAS on our behalf. It is currently sited at Flax Bourton Road. If this proves to be successful in moderating driver behaviour, then the Parish Council may decide to purchase a similar sign, which has the potential to be sited around the Parish.

Further housing development around Nailsea is likely to create more passing traffic at Stone Edge Batch on the junction of the B3128 with the B3130. It appears that the ideal solution for the issues on THL is traffic management at this junction; however, this is far from simple and likely to be costly. We will continue to monitor this.

For the lanes around Lower Failand, informal signage on private land near the highway could be a solution reducing speed.

Footpaths & Public Rights of Ways

The Parish Plan recognises that the network of footpaths, bridleways and cycle paths across the parish is a major recreational facility. The Parish Council Footpath Working Group has been re-established. Led by Cllr Bob Sheppard, it has sought to improve them and the current focus has been routes through Tyntesfield.

Pylons

Former 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 (NG) for routing 400kV Transmission lines, by advocating undergrounding and alternative technology. Our MP, Dr Liam Fox was also active in this matter.

This year the Planning Inspectorate decided in favour of NG's proposal. Nailsea Town Council decided to ascertain the merits of a judicial review and this Council made a contribution to this. The result was very disappointing, it appears that much of the consultation process and the consideration of fully underground and undersea options was unnecessary because NG only had to acknowledge alternative options rather than give them equal weight in order to find an "acceptable" (rather than a better) solution to the need for more transmission capacity. The planning system is very much weighted in favour of the applicant (NG).

To an extent the campaigning has been successful, in so far as, NG's approved route avoids all but the NW corner of our parish.

Broadband

Councillor Ian Malpas, having gained the support of Dr Fox MP to enable him to liaise with Connecting Devon & Somerset and BT Openreach, has been successful in persuading them to address the complaints of Failand residents about poor quality broadband services. There is now a fibre-optic cable connecting Failand to an exchange in Bedminster, which links into the local network via a new communications cabinet at the junction of Beggar Bush Lane. It will take some time to map the connections from each home from the existing cabinet to the new one and this should be complete by July. Customers will then be able to request to buy a new service from their Internet Service Providers and should expect speeds in excess of 10 Mb/s. Further details are on our website.

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 would welcome more people to be involved with this. If you are interested in supporting this network, or know of someone who might be, then please talk to Martin. Details are on our website.

Finance

As already highlighted, Councillors have been concerned about the budget pressures on NSC and the potential requirement for our Parish Council to supplement or take on responsibility for services that NSC may choose to reduce or relinquish. We continue to hold reserves which were ring-fenced to respond to NG's proposed route for Pylons and any unwelcome large development around Failand and the Parish Council needs to review this.

The Precept requested for this year was £34,200 – the same as last year.

The Clerk has again worked many additional hours voluntarily; she also works at home. Residents continue to benefit from this element of the Precept being significantly less than it could be.

Buses

In November 2013 when there was a reduction in bus services through Wraxall village, the Parish Council sought to influence the situation and improve matters. In August last year, changes have been made and more buses now stop in the village. North Somerset has provided kick-start funding to enhance the bus links between Nailsea and Bristol with the intention that the service becomes commercially viable. It's really important that residents make good use of this new service to try and ensure that it continues beyond 2016.

Notice Boards

We are grateful to Cllr Tom Sage for refurbishing the Noticeboard in Lower Failand; the one by Failand Post Office is beyond economic repair and will be replaced.

Amenities

The Nailsea Community Trust and Wraxall Parochial Charities were generous in providing grants to match our funding to enable a picnic table and a springer (which is a seat on a large spring designed for toddlers) to be installed in the Millennium Green play area in Wraxall village. We are grateful to Martin & Cllr Richard Delmas for conducting weekly Health & Safety inspections on the play area.

Through contributions from residents in Lower Failand and the good work of Cllrs Paul Amos, Tom Sage and his son Ed, the red telephone box opposite the church has now been repaired, making good the damage that was inflicted in November last year. It is intended to fit boards inside with local information and footpath maps.

Recycling & Litter

NSC is striving to improve recycling rates, seeking community and our participation through the Parish Recycling Scheme. As a small Parish Council we do not have the resources to provide the level of support that NSC envisage.

We often have reports about litter; some of this is caused when strong wind blows the recycling out of bins. It's possible to avoid this by fitting covers and these can be purchased from retailers shown on this link: <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/services/?nearest=true&cat-services=green-waste-bag-retailers&location=>

Appreciation

I wish to recognise the dedication and support during the last year of:

- our Clerk, Freda Shattock, supported by her husband, David, who delivers working papers to Councillors and notice-boards at his own expense. Freda has decided to retire at the end of August and we would like to acknowledge the many years of dedicated support she has given to our Parish Council.
- Cathryn Butler, our Webmaster; Cathryn also produces our PowerPoint presentations for the planning element of our meetings.
- all our Councillors, who are not paid, in their support to the community and their contribution for investigating Planning Applications. In particular, I would like to thank
 - those supporting Working Groups. Cllr Bob Sheppard leads both the footpath and Road Safety groups. Cllr Alison Lock's legal background and Cllr Richard King's knowledge of grounds maintenance have been particularly helpful in considering the allotments proposal.
 - Cllr Ian Malpas for his contribution to broadband and governance issues
- our District Councillors, Charles Cave and Kate Stowey – in representing our interests, particularly for planning, lobbying and liaising with NSC officers.
- our Neighbourhood Beat Officer, PC Martin Faithful, and Police Community Support Officers, Charlotte Thompson and Eleanor Hicks, all reporting to Sergeant Mark Raby.
- those residents who attend meetings and contribute to the work of our Parish Council. We are grateful to Chris Ambrose, the previous Chairman of the Council, for his continued support.

David Robinson
Chairman