



Chairman's Report – Annual Parish Meeting 1st May 2012

Introduction

This is the first Annual Parish Meeting of the present Council. The elections were held on 5th May and those Councillors that stood for election were elected unopposed. There was one vacancy as a consequence of Cllr Chris Ambrose not standing for election. Chris had held the position of Chair for the previous five years and believed that it was time for a change.

I was elected Chair at our Annual General Meeting in May.

Chris Ambrose and Dr Mike Amos stood as candidates for the vacancy and were interviewed in June. Chris was co-opted and subsequently elected as Vice-Chair. So we now have a full complement of eleven Councillors.

The current financial climate and recent legislation have impacted on our deliberations. The Localism Bill and planning reform are being introduced and will also have an impact.

Website

On the recommendations of the Working Group in February 2011, the Parish Council decided to opt for construction of a new website. This was predicated on least cost and based on the experience of one of our Councillors, who has had websites built successfully. The main elements of the website were constructed by mid May 2011 and hosted under the www.waf.cc domain name, with the previous web addresses pointing to the new site. Unfortunately, the risks associated with hacking were severely underestimated. The new website was hacked on several occasions in January and February 2012 and it was decided to remove the content and close down the website.

The original options initially considered were then re-visited by the Working Group, now led by Ian Malpas, a local resident with some experience in website design. It was decided to proceed afresh with In Touch With Communities, a subsidiary of a Customer Relationship Management software company based in Weston-Super-Mare. The Parish Council agreed to proceed with this recommendation in March 2012 and this website is in preparation.

Planning

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

Planning Applications. The Parish Council considered 41 Planning Applications in the past year. It recommended approval on 28 and refusal on 13; NSC agreed with over 80% of recommendations. Only one application was taken to appeal. There were 7 applications regarding trees which had preservation orders upon them and 3 Listed Building Applications. One application was withdrawn prior to determination and there were 2 amendments to the original applications, which had to be reconsidered.

NSC is encouraging Parish and Town Councils to receive and disseminate planning information digitally. However, we believe that it is important to review detailed plans on A2 or A3 drawings so that dimensions can be easily scaled. Furthermore, it is more practical to use paper drawings when making a site visit.

Localism. The Localism Act received Royal Assent on 15 November 2011. A plain English guide is at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localismplainenglishupdate>.

Key items affecting this parish include:

- abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies
- a new right for communities to draw up a Neighbourhood Plan – see below
- clarification of the rules on predetermination - this frees Councillors to express their opinions on issues of local importance without the fear of legal challenge

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF, the most radical shake-up of the planning system in 60 years, was published on 27 March 2012. It condenses over 1,000 pages of previous legislation into just 50. Issues arising during the consultation have included:

- making it clear that the Local Plan is the basis for decisions in the planning system, and that the presumption in favour of sustainable development works through, and not against, the Local Plan
- emphasising that the definition of sustainable development embraces social, environmental and economic objectives, and that none can be pursued in isolation of the others
- clarifying that the relevant policies – such as those protecting the Green Belt, National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Sites of Special Scientific Interest – cannot be overridden by the presumption in favour of sustainable development

Both the National Trust and Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), to which this Council subscribes, have been lobbying for the NPPF to provide protection for the countryside and green spaces.

CPRE believe areas where there is likely to be improvement include intrinsic value, local plans, light pollution and tranquillity; areas for concern include housing pressure and the question of 'green' vs growth. It contends that the new NPPF does not go as far as previous policies in making sure that brownfield sites are always prioritised over greenfield. CPRE's analysis is at:

http://www.cpre.org.uk/magazine/opinion/item/2791-planning-for-the-future?dm_i=6A4,RFA8,4TOUD5,27VK8,1

Core Strategy. The Core Strategy was adopted by NSC on 10 April 2012. This and its supporting documentation is the main legal consideration for planning and development. Its relevance is increased by the above legislation. The main changes in this document from the previous version are:

- the villages of Wraxall and Failand will be designated as Countryside villages, so that they now will have no settlement boundary but are part of the Green Belt. This offers powerful protection against development. Development for agricultural or recreational purposes will be permitted. The Elms on the south of the parish retains a settlement boundary, adjoining that of Nailsea.
- Affordable Housing will be provided by our neighbours, Nailsea and Long Ashton.
- no development in gardens (known as garden grabbing)
- substantial agricultural building can be converted into holiday lets.

Neighbourhood Plans. Mindful of reservations with the National Planning Policy Framework, we hope that the Core Strategy will be sufficiently robust to protect Wraxall & Failand from unwanted development. However, a Neighbourhood Plan for this parish may offer further protection, building on information gathered for the Parish Plan. Councillors have:

- formed Working Groups for both villages.
- started the consultation process by approaching businesses and seeking their views.
- attended briefings given by NSC and CPRE.
- liaised with Long Ashton and Backwell Parish Councils, both of which are in the pilot schemes to produce Neighbourhood Plans.

Other Issues.

Councillors have worked with those from Nailsea Town Council to discuss the potential for burial grounds on the edge of the Elms. It was concluded that the land identified by Nailsea Town Council is not suitable for use as a burial ground.

Nailsea Town Council wish to encourage greater employment within Nailsea and, in support of this, they are keen to allow improved road access to the Southfield industrial estate despite it encroaching on the Green Belt. Previous attempts by Nailsea Town Council to review the Green Belt in this area have been strongly resisted by this Council and NSC. Recently, the Planning Inspector rejected Nailsea Town Council's request for a review of the Green Belt when considering NSC's Core Strategy.

GE Oil & Gas wish to expand into the Green Belt to the north of the existing site for car parking, rather than considering alternatives. Their proposal is supported by Nailsea Town Council but opposed by this Parish Council and the Trustees of the charity that owns the land.

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, advocating undergrounding and High Voltage Direct Current Gas Insulated Line technology. They have lobbied the Infrastructure Planning Commission challenging the adequacy of National Grid's consultation.

The Ambrose Pratt Report produced in January 2010, supplemented by the Consultation Report for the Department of Energy & Climate Change has caused National Grid to revisit their analysis of undergrounding and conclude that is less costly than they first claimed.

Recent developments include the Pylons debate in the House of Commons on 22 March 2012 introduced by our MP, Dr Liam Fox. He praised our Parish Council, and in particular Chris and Hugh, in recognition of the campaigning – the link to Hansard:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201212/cmhansrd/cm120322/debtext/120322-0004.htm#12032283000002>

It is considered likely that the campaign with National Grid and Ofgen will need to continue for some considerable time.

Footpaths & Public Right of Ways

Objectives. Over the years, the Parish Council has sought to improve the network of footpaths across the parish. This aim is supported by the Parish Plan, which recognises that they are a major recreational facility. Objectives established by the Footpath Working Group are to create/improve footpath access to:

- Tyntesfield from Nailsea, the Elms and Wraxall village
- the North Somerset Show Ground
- Wraxall Primary School from the Elms and the Grove
- the new Sustrans cycle route
- Flax Bourton with a river walk

Applications for Diversions. There were 5 applications for diversions to PRoW. NSC has approved one; the others have yet to be determined. One of these (LA/20/42 to LA/20/52) is subject to an informal hearing by the Planning Inspector.

The Bridleway through Tyntesfield is now in operation after a protracted period.

Olympic Torch Relay

Lynda Nutting, from Cheltenham, will be carrying the Flame through Failand along the Clevedon Road on 23 May 2012 between 7.33 am and 7.44 am. Lynda has links with Children's Hospice South West. Before and after this the Torch will be in what is called 'convoy mode', which means it is not visible (the Flame will be in a lantern in a vehicle). Details from

<http://www.london2012.com/olympic-torch-relay-map>.

Queen's Diamond Jubilee

Councillors wish to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee with lasting memorials. An oak tree will be planted in Lower Failand with an engraved stone marker and there will be a contribution to the water feature planned to be installed in Wraxall churchyard. It is hoped that if the Riverside walk comes to fruition then this can be named as the Jubilee Walk and signed with suitable markers.

Road Safety & Highway Maintenance

Parts of the B3128 and B3120 have been re-surfaced, along with Tower House Lane and Wraxall Hill. Many pot holes were filled a while after the bad winter of 2011 but there are still many about. Councillors report them to the Clerk as they do with items of road furniture which get damaged or dislodged. All are reported to NSC. Some repairs are outstanding due to lack of funding. The time taken to replace damaged signage is poor. Drains throughout the parish are often blocked and are reported to NSC. Drains on B3130 have been worked on and some gully clearance has been undertaken but the contractors left the debris on the side of the gully so it will get washed back in; this has been reported.

Road markings have been improved – there is more paint on the road to denote hazards! There are now improved road markings at the GE Oil & Gas roundabout, which has been a long standing concern. However, no action has been taken on the problem of vehicles turning right out of Budgens. The response from NSC to the submission for a lower speed limit on the B3128 has been very disappointing.

Transfer of Assets & Services from North Somerset Council

With relentless pressure on budgets, NSC is reviewing the quality of services that it is obliged to provide and is currently discussing local issues with Parish and Town Councils. To date Councillors have attended one seminar and one meeting. The overriding principle for any transfer of services or assets is that it has to cost less than at present. Issues raised include resurrecting the forum for Parish Councils that share a boundary with Nailsea, as a hub of mutual interest.

Finance

Councillors were mindful of the current financial climate but also of making provision for potential costs associated with Neighbourhood Plans. Hence an increase of 5% to the Precept was reluctantly approved. The reserves to respond to National Grid's proposed route for Pylons remain largely intact.

The Clerk has agreed that her salary should continue to be capped, despite additional hours worked voluntarily; residents continue to benefit from this element of the Precept being significantly less than it could be.

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, in their support to the community.
- our District Councillors, Bob Cook and Charles Cave – in representing our interests , particularly for planning and PRow, lobbying and liaising with NSC officers.
- our NSC Liaison Officer, now Richard Blows, and previously Sally Varley.
- our Neighbourhood Beat Officer, PC Adam Clarke, and Police Community Support Officers, Charlotte Thompson and Gary Lewis
- the Open Spaces Society Local representative, John Ives
- those residents who attend and contribute to the work of our Parish Council, particularly Ian Malpas and John Chapman.

David Robinson
Chairman