

**Long Ashton Annual Parish Meeting
Long Ashton Village Hall, 24th April 2017
Chairman - Councillor Andrew Wilkinson
The meeting was attended by 35 electors**

1. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting 2016

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 25th April, copies having been circulated to those present, were signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

2. Chairman's Report

The Chairman, Cllr Andrew Wilkinson, welcomed everyone and gave his report: "In looking over my predecessor's comments over the last few years we seem to have a recurring theme in the threat of development around Long Ashton and this year is no different. With our close proximity to Bristol this probably shouldn't be a surprise and Taylor Wimpey is the latest with its proposals for the Vale. In approving the Neighbourhood Development Plan, the residents of Long Ashton clearly expressed their wishes to protect the green belt and remain separate from Bristol. As a council, we will be doing our utmost to ensure this happens.

The South Bristol Link Road (SBLR) is now open. The full effect is not yet fully understood, mainly due to the temporary effects of the Barrow Gurney closure and Hartcliffe Way in Bristol becoming one way. The vehicle activated speed signs in the village are recording data that will allow us to evaluate any changes.

Outside of traffic volumes, there are already some issues with increased noise levels for some residents and changes to the drainage arrangements in the valley. A concern is the new underpass has already flooded despite assurances it was designed for a one-in-one hundred year event. We will be continuing to monitor for any further effects the SBL has had.

This year we have also had the sad closure of the Royal British Legion building. The council registered it as an asset of community value, triggering a six-month moratorium for local groups to consider a bid and to raise money. This time is now up and the local fundraising did not prove to be successful, although we are aware that one community group is interested in the property and we also understand the RBL may have a different preferred bidder.

Our Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) states that: "*Development or change of use of assets registered as being of Community Value will only be permitted if the proposed development or change of use protects and enhances the community value of the asset*" and we will be monitoring any proposals for the site to ensure this intent is delivered.

On NDPs, Long Ashton PC was one of the early councils to adopt an NDP and this is becoming increasingly useful in helping to ensure the wishes of the residents are at the forefront when planning issues are considered.

On a final note from myself, the council directly employs a number of people. On behalf of myself and all the chairs of our committees I would like to thank our Clerk, Janet Turp, for keeping us on the straight and narrow procedurally. We also have an assistant, Vicky Lacey, who ably takes the minutes of the meetings. In addition, we have the village orderlies and a gardener. So, my thanks to all."

Planning Committee Report

The Chair of the Planning Committee, Cllr Miss Mary Uppington, gave her report: "The work of the Planning Committee continues to increase with around 130 applications being considered during the last year, along with 40 works on trees.

The requests for extensions to properties, which arrive with great frequency, are always looked at carefully and we particularly take into account how any alterations will affect neighbours and the character of the area before making our recommendations to North Somerset Council (NSC) - and it is only recommendations that we can make - NSC makes the decisions.

Although certain extensions are allowed under Permitted Development, if they meet the stated criteria, it is always sensible for residents to consult with NSC if they are thinking about making alterations to their property. It is interesting to note that many of the extensions or alterations which have been permitted have proven to be very successful and have improved the appearance of the dwellings. Our Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) is regularly being recognised by NSC Planning Officers and recently they have quoted its policies in refusing an application.

NSC has not earmarked Long Ashton for a large number of new houses to be erected. However, some new properties are either being built now or will be in future.

Development of eight properties on the former Auto Scuderia site, at the junction of Glebe Road and Long Ashton Road, is causing some concerns, especially over the eventual width of the road, the visibility at the junction, and the height of the walls at the front of the properties facing Long Ashton Road. Four of our councillors have met on site with an NSC representative and we hope these problems will be resolved.

An application for conversion and part demolition of agricultural buildings to create five new dwellings at Gatcombe Farm has been granted - with a number of conditions - but work has yet to be started there.

Another application for an 82 bed Care Home at Estune Business Park, Wild Country Lane, has been refused because the site is identified for business and employment uses and insufficient marketing had taken place to be able to demonstrate that it is no longer capable of offering accommodation for business. There were also inadequate plans for parking.

Last July, Taylor Wimpey staged an exhibition showing its plans for 'The Vale' - should this green belt area ever become available for development. Many residents were unhappy with its plans and disappointed at the quality of this consultation event. The Parish Council is strongly opposed to any development in the Green Belt. It would be contrary to our NDP and to NSC and national planning policy.

We know there is likely to be pressure brought for building to the south of Bristol and this would mean using green belt land. This is an area which ensures a clear distinction between urban Bristol and rural North Somerset. It makes an important contribution to the local character and distinctiveness and is highly valued and strongly supported. Green belt is intended to be a long-term designation and we shall do all we can to protect the current landscape between our village and the city.

During the year, we have considered and commented on various national and NSC documents. Bearing in mind that some of the plans provided by applicants are of a poor standard we were very pleased to see NSC is preparing a 'planning application requirements'

document which will indicate clearly what details must be shown. We have given our full support to this and it should help councils in making a more accurate response to applications.

NSC has undertaken a review of libraries and children's centres and we were delighted with its decision to maintain our library and children's centres at their present locations. Although it is likely that manned library hours will be reduced, there are plans for the library to be open for longer hours on a self-service basis for those who hold a library card.

Many trees and hedges have needed attention, with residents who have trees designated with a TPO or who are in a conservation area needing to apply to NSC if they wish to do work on trees. These requests are considered by the NSC tree officer and his advice and decisions are always very constructive. On the whole, residents are very thoughtful about keeping hedges cut back so that footpaths and pavements are not obstructed by any overhanging foliage.

Thanks must be given to certain people who continually help to keep our committee up and running. Firstly to the Planning Committee who has often endured long meetings and made valuable contributions to our discussions. Secondly, to Charles Cave, whose assistance and advice as a District Councillor is very much appreciated. He works hard for our parish and is always ready to follow up any planning issues with the appropriate officer or department at NSC."

Highways and Burial Ground Committee Report

The Chairman of the Highways and Burial Ground Committee, Cllr Mrs Mackwood, gave her report: "Firstly, the Burial Ground: we had a tree survey of the Burial Ground done, which is effective for five years. It has indicated that work on the trees in the burial ground will be required, and this will be ongoing. More land in the South East quadrant of the Burial Ground will be consecrated during the year and there will also be space for some unconsecrated plots. The Heaven Scent garden is as inspiring as ever and had a bumper crop of raspberries for everyone to enjoy who visited the garden during the summer. A tree which has been shadowing the Garden of Remembrance is to be trimmed or removed to make the space lighter and more appealing. The Royal British Legion Memorial has been moved to an area of the burial ground near the Polish Memorial.

And to footpaths: Dawson's Walk has ongoing maintenance problems of which we are aware and we are constantly contacting those responsible to take action on health and safety grounds. The route from Parsonage to Yanley Lane has been blocked and has now been fast tracked for a Definitive Map Modification Order. Although the fast-tracking has been approved by NSC, it may still take up to five years to be finalised. There is a new kissing gate between the churchyard to Festival Way, and the restructured path there was paid for by the South Bristol Link Road mitigation fund. Peel Park will have a permissive path across it and we are in discussions with Kingcott Farm at the moment to have a permissive path along its drive from just above Seven Streams to Ashton Hill Woods.

The village's Vehicle Activated Speed Signs have been helping to record and control the speed of traffic through the village. Leigh Woods has had huge parking problems as a result of the parking restrictions imposed in Clifton, and the Suspension Bridge's new visitor centre, which is a great new attraction. Traffic problems in North Road and near the woods have necessitated the printing of yellow lines there, and there are also new Traffic Enforcement Officers both there and in Long Ashton, so beware, you may be ticketed!

Metrowest had planned to put in a new road near the David Lloyd Leisure Centre because of the planned Bristol to Portishead railway. However, the cost of the railway is higher than initially thought and expected numbers of trains has fallen, thereby meaning that there may not be funding nor a need for the new road.

There has been a new A370/B3130 junction put in at Cambridge Batch, in our Parish. However, NSC omitted to consult Long Ashton, as it is required to do, and also failed to consult us about the new entrance for Bristol Water at Redwood Farm on the B3130. We are in discussion with NSC to try to have the junction put back to how it was before, as we feel it disadvantages those going from Long Ashton towards Weston-Super-Mare.

We have been hoping to have consultations with Bristol City Council to increase the use of the Park & Ride, especially during football and rugby matches. However, due to illness of key people, this has been postponed.

And lastly, there has been much discussion about the possible installation of a kissing gate behind Copford Lane to stop bicycles from using the footpath there. However, due to the need for access to this path in order to keep the brook clear, NSC has decided that a kissing gate there would not be appropriate."

Finance and General Purposes Committee Report

The Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, Cllr Hardingham, gave her report: "The precept is the part of council tax that NSC collects for the parish council and last year it was £147,400. For some of you, the most important question is: what does this pay for?"

The Community Association needed £27,508 from the council towards running this Community Centre, which continues to thrive and makes a real and valuable contribution to the vitality of the village. Based on a population of 6,000, this means the cost is less than £5 a head a year for which you get a playground, all sorts of sports and exercise facilities plus event and meeting rooms, as well as a café, which has been a great success. The CCTV system has been well worth having. The maintenance of Peel Park and the two playgrounds at Chancellors Park and Kings Croft are still covered by the Section 106 funds from the developer.

The youth club needed £16,000 last year and this enabled EPIC Youth to continue three sessions a week. The recent publicity about mental health issues highlights how important it is for young people to be able to talk to trained professionals and I am very pleased that the Parish Council has been able to keep up the youth club funding in Long Ashton. You will often see them at the village market so please do support their stall and their 500-Club as it is a constant challenge to raise funds.

Through the year, small grants were made to the Guides, the Scouts, Nailsea Community Transport, MS Therapy Centre, St Peters Hospice, CRUSE, the Multiple Births Group, Café Mamma and Leigh Woods Cinema Club. The council paid for one defibrillator and continued its support for the retinopathy clinic.

My report would not be complete without mentioning the public art to be provided in Kings Croft and Chancellors Park by Taylor Wimpey. The indications are that it will make a payment to the council so we will be able to arrange the installations. Some progress has therefore been made. It must be well over 10 years since the first homes were built on the site, so you do wonder about the regard the developers have for the residents who bought

their homes that it takes so long to sort out the Public Art.

For the community grant, we have changed the timing to fit in better with the regular council grant timetable. The deadline for applications is next Tuesday, 2nd May, with the decision meeting on Thursday, October 12th. Last year it was disappointing that only two projects applied so I hope that more proposals come forward this time. If you are involved in any group, please publicise that a grant of £1,500 and £500 each will be available. And please come to the decision meeting, as this is your chance to be involved in the grant decision.

The Parish Council is taking part in NSC's Parish Recycling Scheme. The aims are to waste less and recycle more, and try to encourage us all to do this by approaching it at grassroots level, by talking to residents. We all, I hope, agree there should be less plastic sent to landfill, but how can we translate that into practical action - making the effort to wash out one extra thing to recycle each week or buy products in less packaging? The parish council receives certain bonuses for reaching various thresholds of raising awareness. There are pledge forms on your chairs so please do sign one if you haven't already; these are part of challenging residents to think about what more each of us can do. There is always something more that you can do! If you have any ideas or any comments on recycling, do please complete the questionnaires around the hall.

Turning to the new financial year, the council has increased the precept to £154,600 for 2017/18; that is a rise for a Band D property to £58.13 for the year or about £1.12 a week; an increase of 1.98%. We know that the vast majority of residents oppose the idea of building thousands of homes on the green belt here. The fighting fund is now at £100,000, which has been our target.

Looking at the Council Tax demand that we have all received in the last month, this sets out the precept for all the parish councils in North Somerset. I believe Long Ashton compares favourably with other similar councils.

One resident made an objection to the parish council accounts for 2015/16 to the auditors, because he was unhappy with the way the grant for the Community Centre was made. The auditors have not agreed with him but as is the case for the statutory right to object, Long Ashton council tax payers will pay the auditor's additional fee of over £1,000 for investigating the complaint.

F&GP is responsible for the accounts, statutory compliance and council policies so includes staff matters, the asset register and insurance issues. Finally I must mention that as more responsibilities fall on parish councils, more work falls on the parish clerk and the pressure on her time is a cause for concern. So Janet, our clerk and finance officer, has had to call on all her reserves of patience.

The previous year's accounts are at the door of the hall."

3. Parochial Charity Accounts

The accounts of the trustees to the Parochial Charity for 2016 were displayed during the meeting.

4. Resolutions

The Clerk had not received written notice of any resolutions.

5. Question & Answer session

Question from Harry Williams: "Can you tell me about the fiasco underneath the bypass: why NSC did it and how much it cost?"

A: "We are under the impression that a resident in Barrow Gurney asked for it to be done; presumably to stop traffic going through Barrow Gurney. However, if traffic is going through at rush hour, it makes no difference. It makes a big difference though to traffic going to Weston-Super-Mare. Buses and articulated lorries are finding it difficult to negotiate and are driving over the verges. When traffic backs up on to the bypass, the traffic going to Weston also stops. Some drivers are doing U-turns on the bypass because of it. It's detrimental to road users and has no advantages. We've had a letter from NSC which explains that much of the confusion has been because the signs haven't been finished yet; considering the amount of notice the council has had about this road, that explanation is outrageous."

Harry Williams: "It's more proof that NSC doesn't think things through. I've completely lost faith in them."

Cllr Charles Cave: "NSC is aware that it's made a mistake. The same thing could have been accomplished more cheaply by using signs. The PC wants the junction put back to what it was before and is due to have a meeting with officers shortly."

Mrs S Clarke: "There seems to be a huge amount more traffic coming through the village. I had to drive to Nailsea and Backwell recently and had to stop while traffic poured into the village. Drivers don't seem to like the new road; it's quite frightening."

A: "Our vehicle activated signs are recording the data. Also, traffic flow through the village was why the Village Enhancement Scheme was set up. Unfortunately, although we've got a cash reserve to go towards it, we've ground to a halt because NSC doesn't have the resources to deal with it at the moment. NSC will have to work out how to deal with road safety, if it doesn't have the staff to manage the issue."

Harry Williams: "I would suggest that every Parish Councillor go up on the bridge and look down to the bypass and see the difference that would have been made had there been a bypass lane at the roundabout there."

A: "The designers didn't make any provision for a bypass lane. They said it wouldn't be necessary."

Question from Nigel Moorcroft: "The thing that's upset me has been the inordinate amount of money spent on Barrow Gurney. Could this be because a director of the West of England Partnership lives there?"

A: "Maybe it's time we think about using Freedom of Information, to find out why it's happened."

Question from Angela Neale: "We've been flooded with publicity about giving money to the group aiming to buy the former Royal British Legion building. Has the PC contributed to the publication of this literature?"

A: "We made a £300 contribution towards the printing of the leaflets and a banner. The PC was keen to support the community bid. We also paid for the valuation of the building - to provide a figure that interested groups could use."

Question from David Neale: "My query is about the South Bristol Link project. There's a parallel shared walking and cycling route. The original plan from 2012 showed the route coming from the vicinity of the Park & Ride beside the bus way, and up to the A38. Cycling England commented and asked for a link to the Festival Way in Long Ashton and to the Malago Green Way in Hengrove, neither of which has happened. More recent plans included a link along to the Park and Ride, and an additional link beside the road, with traffic coming over the farm access bridge by the Festival Way. This is a muddy farm track and this deters cyclists. I have suggested a couple of options to NSC which will overcome this gap in provision, and I wonder if the PC will support one of them, as nothing seems to be happening at the moment."

A: "I am sure the PC would consider supporting them. Please put them forward and we'll put them on the agenda for our next meeting."

Question from a R Durrant: "I would like to comment on overhanging branches in four mostly privately owned areas in the village. They are opposite Piccolos on the way up to Brocks Lane, at the bus stops by Bourton Mead and Theynes Croft, and by a house at the bottom of Northleaze. I'm always cutting the hedges back, as they hit me in the eye as I go past."

A: "We'll follow it up; we've made a note."

Question from Angela Neale: "With regard to cars parking on the pavement; who do we report it to, the police or to NSC?"

A: "At a PACT meeting last week, we talked to Martin Faithfull, the village's policeman, about parking. The police will still enforce parking violations, but regarding parking on the pavement, the law says that drivers can as long as there's room for a double buggy or wheelchair to go past. That, however, doesn't help our resident who has just spoken, who may walk into cars if they're parked on the pavement. Report parking violations to Martin Faithfull and it's NSC for double yellow lines."

Question from Grace Collins: "Should smoking be made illegal in the solid bus shelters in the village?"

A: "The PC has put up no smoking signs in all the shelters and they've been removed. Bus users could remind one another that smoking is not allowed."

Question from Grace Collins: "Is Long Ashton part of the safe place scheme run by NSC? If a vulnerable person feels at risk, they can go into a shop, show a card and the staff member knows how to ring their carers."

A: "No, Long Ashton isn't part of the scheme. We'll have a look at it though and put it on the agenda for our next meeting."

6. Presentation

The Chairman welcomed Trish Johnson, the Bridge Master of Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust, who gave a presentation entitled 'Clifton Suspension Bridge – Past and Present'.

"The bridge was a dream of William Wick. He was a wealthy wine merchant who lived in Bristol and died in 1754. In his will he left £1,000, nearly £250,000 in today's money, to the Society of Merchant Venturers. He said that the money should be invested until it reached £10,000 - a sum that he thought would be sufficient to build a toll-free bridge from Clifton to Leigh Down. In 1754, the technology was not there to make this a reality - stone and timber being the only construction materials available. The use of iron in construction was still in its infancy.

In 1793, the plans to build a bridge were revived and designs for a monumental stone bridge were published by William Bridges. This was to be a spectacular arched entrance to Bristol from the sea. It was to include factories, a school, libraries and a lift. The plan was for the industries in the abutments to pay for the structure. However, war broke out in France and the building boom collapsed. The shipping trade was badly affected and the bridge never took shape.

In 1829, the Society of Merchant Venturers obtained an Act of Parliament to change Vick's Will stating that the bridge had to be toll-free. The money had grown to £8,000 by now. A competition was launched, which asked entrants to design a suspension bridge in just seven weeks. There were around 22 entries, with four from the 22 year old Isambard Kingdom Brunel. The cost estimates ranged from £30,000 to £93,000. The committee rejected all but five designs and then asked the father of Civil Engineering, Thomas Telford, to advise. Having said that none of the designs were suitable, Thomas Telford himself was asked to produce a design. His design was a short-span suspension bridge supported by two hollow masonry Gothic style towers. The cost was estimated at £42,000 to £52,000 including approach roads. Although the committee tasked with managing the project were delighted, the public was not, and neither was Brunel. King George then died and election fever broke out.

After the election, the committee decided to hold another competition. They invited previous entrants, together with Brunel and Telford. The designs were judged on engineering qualities and the judge wanted to appoint Smith & Hawkes. However, having had dinner with Brunel that evening, he changed his mind and proposed Brunel's idea - of a bridge with Egyptian architectural style with sphinxes for the top of the towers - as the winner. Land clearance in Clifton started in June 1831. This stopped four months later, however, with the Bristol Riots, and work didn't resume again until five years later.

At this time, funds were tight and there was a shortfall in the budget. A spectacular foundation ceremony was held in 1836 to attract interest in the project. A time capsule was placed in the rock below the foundation stone and this has never been found. Bankruptcy and harsh weather took its toll on the project and in 1843, towers and abutments had been built, but money then ran out. The iron had been bought but then had to be sold for use on Brunel's Royal Albert Bridge in Saltash, to pay off the bridge's debts.

In 1859, Brunel died at 53. His colleague John Hawkshaw noticed when taking down the Hungerford Bridge that the chains could be used for the Clifton Bridge. Hawkshaw and another of Brunel's colleagues got together to seek investors to finish the bridge as a memorial to Brunel.

Work began again in 1862. The deck was constructed from both sides and the chains containing 4,200 links were completed in 1864. The bridge was officially opened on 8 December that year. Maintenance of the bridge is ongoing - for example, painting, lighting

and stonework. Roped access is now used to paint the chains and rods, which has to be done every 15-20 years. Initially, the bridge was only lit up on special occasions like the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953. Up to 3,000 lamps were installed. Now the bridge has LED lights, which last longer, but are only available in white. Recently, the stone work has been cleaned and some replaced and the towers can be seen in all their glory. The whole underside of the bridge is being painted at the moment, and new toll houses are being planned for the Clifton side of the bridge, with refurbishments of the toll houses taking place on the Leigh Woods side. The bridge vaults, which were discovered in 2002, are open for tours and are currently being surveyed. Visitors can get free entry to the visitor centre on the Leigh Woods side of the bridge, and a catering concession should soon be available just outside. Anyone interested in volunteering at the Bridge should contact Kat Tudor on 0117 974 4664 or getinvolved@cliftonbridge.org.uk.

Question from Angela Neale: "Are the vaults on the Bristol side or Long Ashton side?"

A: "They're on both sides, but the long abutment is on the Leigh Woods side."

Question from David Neale: "In the 1980s, engineers had to build a structure underneath the bridge. Why was this done?"

A: "This was a rock protection shelter to protect against rock fall. When rocks fall, they get embedded in the structure, rather than falling on to the road."

Ivor Scoones: "The bridge is always thought of as a Bristol bridge, but half of it is in North Somerset and it was also actually built in Gloucester, not in Bristol."

Question from David Johnson: "Are there any plans to change the tolls?"

A: "No, we're not planning an increase."

Question from David Johnson: "Do you have to draw on other funds, like the Lottery?"

A: "We're a privately run bridge, and we don't receive any money from Bristol City Council or North Somerset Council. We have to keep some reserves in order to pay for maintenance, and these are generated by people crossing the bridge."

Question from Peter Bramhall: "Will bridge users be able to make payments with smart cards soon?"

A: "We want to bring in this sort of technology, but it's not there yet - it can't be done with our sort of barrier, although it's obviously been brought in elsewhere. Users can buy crossing cards though, which are great value."

The Chairman thanked Ms Johnson for her presentation, which concluded the Annual Parish Meeting.