

Annual Parish Meeting

Minutes of the Semington Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 6 May 2009 at 8 pm in the Village Hall

PRESENT:

Robert Oglesby, Chairman, Semington Parish Council and Chairman for the meeting.

Roger Coleman, Clerk.

The following Parish Councillors were present: Paul Bowyer, Kevin Lockwood, Brian Smyth, Steve Rimmer and Pete Vooght.

County Councillor E Clark attended the meeting.

There were twenty-six parishioners present.

1. Introduction and Apologies.

The Clerk, Roger Coleman opened the meeting by explaining the purpose of, and procedure for, a Parish Meeting.

The Chairman, Robert Oglesby, welcomed everyone to the meeting and he expressed his pleasure at seeing such a well-attended meeting.

Apologies for non-attendance were received from (ex) District Councillor V Fortescue.

2. Minutes of the Parish Meeting held on 21 May 2008.

The Minutes were signed as a true and accurate record.

3. Annual Report of the Parish Council.

The Chairman commenced his report by stating that the Parish Council was greatly saddened last year at the death of Doug Firmager. He added that the Council and the village had lost a valuable and hard-working member of the community.

The Chairman reported that Francis Dobbyn had been co-opted on to the Parish Council as a new Parish Councillor and that it was now a full Council of nine members.

The Chairman presented his Annual Report of the Parish Council in which he described the activities of the Parish Council during the year.

A summary of his report and the topics addressed is attached at Annex A to these minutes.

5. Statement on the Parish Council accounts for Year ending 31 March 2009.

The Clerk presented his report on the Parish Council accounts for the year ending 31 March 2009.

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He stated that he had balanced the accounts and had completed the Annual Return and all associated paperwork. He stated that the balance brought forward from FY2007/08 had been £29044.85 and, allowing for the payments and receipts during the year, the balance carried forward at the end of FY2008/09, was £30,536.94. He added that the total receipts for the year were £8339.92, payments for the year totalled £6847.83 and the value of the fixed assets owned by the Council was £19152.64

He commented that of the balance of £30, 536.94 carried forward some £27,148.68 represented the legacy donation of the St George's Development Fund, that is:

St George's Developer Grant - £21,858.
Tennis Court Fund - £5291

leaving just £3388.26 in the General Reserve Bank account.

He added that a VAT Refund of £1271.26 has yet to be credited to the St George's fund and a recent donation to St George's School of £500 has to be debited from the St George's Fund. When these transactions have taken place, the General Reserve (at FY2008/09 year-end) will be £2617 – just enough for a Parish Council election.

Main Receipts in the year were:

Precept:	£7500
HMRC VAT Refund:	£131.07
Bank/BS Interest:	£708.85

Main Payments in the year were:

Staff Costs:	£3184.76
Office Expenses:	£371.76
Donations:	£1790 (St George's School - £500, PCC - £650, Newsletter - £300).
Insurance/Subscriptions/Audit Fees:	£ 856.31
Hall Hire:	£400

The Clerk reported that the Annual Return had been completed and that the Internal Auditor had completed her audit and had signed off the Annual Return. He added that the Annual Return will be submitted to the Parish Council at the next meeting for approval and thereafter it will be sent to Mazars, the External Auditor.

A parishioner observed that the precept had been raised to £7500 a couple of years previously on the understanding that additional funds would be necessary for a Parish Council election. He added that an election was never held and he understood that this money would be ring-fenced. He commented that, more recently, the precept had remained at £7500 and queried what had happened to the original £2500 and why the precept had remained at the higher level.

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The Clerk explained that the precept had been kept artificially low for a period of time and that the Parish Council financial reserves had become very low. The need to increase these reserves, the possibility of an election that could arise at any time and the increased expenditure by the Council dictated the need for an increased precept at that time and for it to be maintained at that level for the time being.

6. Observations from Parish County and District Councillors.

County Councillor Clark gave the following report (shown in italics):

The single biggest council event in the past year must have been the abolition of the district and county councils to form the new unitary Wiltshire Council. Despite being promised that the merger would save us money, we were still faced with an above inflation council tax increase earlier this year.

Whether or not one agreed with the move to a unitary authority, and I must admit that I was against it, the time has now passed to fight that battle and we must look to the future to ensure that the residents of Semington get the service they deserve. One interesting point about the new council is that they have refused to pay parish councils their precept in full as the district council used to. Instead, VVC will pay 50% in April/May and the balance about six months later.

In case you don't know, there will be an election for the new council on 4th June and I would urge everybody to take the trouble to vote. If it helps, or hinders, the European Election is on the same day.

On a parochial level the temporary planning permission for the caravan site must have been the most contentious issue of the year followed, I guess, by the seemingly high-handed action of the WC Implementation Executive in transferring Semington from the Trowbridge Area Board to the Melksham one.

Your council should have been invited to a meeting to discuss this issue, but the invitation has not been extended to any WC councillors.

The new 'care village' proposed by the Order of St. John Trust will be making its way through the planning system shortly and it will be interesting to see the details in it.

With regard to 'day-to-day' business for me as your councillor, the year has had its usual mix of problems ranging from the swing bridge closure (or not, as it turned out) to housing society tenants receiving unfair treatment.

Neighbourhood Policing.

The Chairman thanked PC Emily Thomas for attending the meeting as a representative of the Neighbourhood Policing Team (NPT) for the village. PC Emily Thomas introduced herself and explained her role. PC Thomas explained that her recent tasks included addressing the anti-social behaviour reported at St George's Court and the failure of motorists to observe the 'No Through Road' sign on the (old)

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A350, just north of the village. She added that Rose Baldock had recently replaced Ciera McVeigh as the Police Constable Support Officer (PCSO) in the NPT.

In answer to a question from a parishioner, Parish Councillor Bowyer stated that new Neighbourhood Signs were being obtained and would be installed shortly.

Parish Councillor Vooght reminded parishioners that the NPT Letter Box outside the Village Hall was there to allow them to post written notes to the NPT regarding local concerns.

PC Thomas advised parishioners that the Bobby Van Trust provided a home security service for elderly or vulnerable residents and that this service included installing new, or better, door and window locks and offering home security advice and support, especially following a break-in.

7. To consider resolutions of which written notice has been given.

No resolutions were submitted.

8. To consider other matters raised by those present.

The following matters were raised by the public present:

Parishioners voiced the view that there was a need for allotment gardens in the Parish and asked the Parish Council to consider providing them.

The Clerk explained that a resolution by a well attended Parish Meeting that the Parish Council ought to provide allotments, legally obliges the Council to provide them. He explained that the Smallholdings and Allotment Act 1908 defines this duty on a Local Council and that such land may be purchased, rented or compulsorily acquired. He added that there are other ancillary matters that would need to be considered by the Parish Council when providing allotment gardens, such as location, security, car-parking, availability of water, drainage, waste removal. The Clerk stated that he had written to WWDC for guidance about providing allotments and was awaiting a reply.

Mr Steve James, a local elector, proposed that allotment gardens be provided. Mr Jamie Aldred, also a local elector, seconded the proposal. A vote was taken and nineteen of the electors present supported the proposal. There were no votes against nor abstentions. The Clerk observed that the majority of those electors present had passed a resolution for allotment gardens to be provided and that this Annual Parish meeting was a well-attended meeting. He stated that the Parish Council now has a legal obligation to pursue this matter and would do so.

The following matters were raised by a parishioner:

Village or Parish Council Website – the need for a Semington Website to allow matters of local interest, such as Parish Council Meeting minutes, forthcoming events, to be displayed. The Chairman stated that this was something that the Parish Council would address at its next meeting.

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Bus Service at Semington – to request that the two services be re-timed to provide a half-hourly service. The Chairman stated that representations had been made to Wiltshire County Council (WCC), as the Traffic Regulator, but it was unable to act in the matter. WCC had argued that it was a purely commercial decision that had to be made by the Bus Service operators.

Wessex Close Play Equipment – the need to replace missing equipment and to install newer equipment. The Clerk stated that this was in hand with correspondence currently being exchanged between the Parish Council and Wiltshire Council. He added that the Parish Council was keen to see improvements in this Play Area and that it may be a project to be funded from the St George's Fund if Wiltshire Council refused to provide financial assistance.

Proposed Sports' Field – the need for a proper A361 pedestrian crossing point to facilitate access from the village to the Sports' Field. The Chairman noted this request.

The Chairman asked those present to consider ways in which the St George's Fund could be spent for the benefit of the parishioners of Semington and to communicate those ideas to a Parish Councillor or the Clerk.

The Chairman also asked those present to note that the Parish Steward makes monthly visits to Semington to undertake a variety of tasks and if anyone had tasks suitable for the Steward to contact a Parish Councillor or the Clerk.

Parish Councillor Brian Smyth explained that the Village Litter Pick planned for 9 May would have to take place without the mechanical 'Litter Pickers' because Wiltshire Council had an insufficient number to meet the increased demand for them. He understood that some two to three week's notice was now required by Wiltshire Council. He also added that Wiltshire Council would now not supply protective gloves because of Health and Safety reasons. The parishioners involved in this Litter Pick decided that the Litter Pick would continue on that day despite the difficulties.

9. Any Other Business.

There was no other business.

10. Close.

The meeting closed at 9.20pm.

Chairman

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Annex A

Annual Report From the Parish Council - Year 2008 – 2009

The following is a summary of some of the activities of the Parish Council on behalf of the parishioners of Semington:

Consideration of Planning Applications – Around 20 (nearly 30 last year).

- Orders of St John Care Trust – ‘Care’ Village Development. (Special Planning Meeting – 18 December 2008)
- Planning Application 07/03870 – Travellers/Crematorium (Fol Request, Process Complaint, Standards Committee, Temporary Permission and Conditions etc).
- Littleton Stables Planning Application (09/00407).
- Change to procedure for handling objections from a Parish Council.

St George’s Developer Grant - £21,858 (at 31/3/09).

Tennis Court Fund - £5291 (at 31/3/09).

Introduction of Direct Bus Service – Semington to Bath.
(Request to PC from a parishioner).

Investigations into viability of re-opening Village Shop/Post Office.

Village Sports Field – Preliminary investigations.

Travellers:

- Littlemarsh.
- Land next to the Crematorium.

Neighbourhood Policing Team Activities (Tasking Meeting etc) – PC Emily Thomas and PCSO Ciera McVeigh.

Expenditure:

- Simply Gardens – Landscaping Village/Handyman Duties(£225)
- Flower Tubs Planting (£50).
- St George’s PCC (£200) – Churchyard & Grass Cutting.
- St George’s PCC (£300) – Village Newsletter.
- St George’s PCC – Lawn Mower (£450).
- St George’s Primary School – Computer (£500).

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Donations/Subscriptions:

- Cloth Arts Trail (£40).
- Community First (£34).
- Wiltshire Wildlife Trust (£36).
- Wiltshire Bobby Van Trust (£100).
- Parish Councils' Liaison Group (£100).
- SPLASH (£100).

Village Clean-Up – Litter Pick (17 May).

Parish Steward - Footpath Clearance/Brambles/Grass Cutting/Overgrown Hedges.

Highways issues:

- Bus Clearway.
- Dog Fouling Signs obtained.

Other Matters:

- Boundary Commission and changes to Electoral Divisions.
- Transfer of Summerham & Seend from Trowbridge Community Area to Melksham Community Area – without consultation!.
- Formation of Wiltshire Council – scrapping of WWDC/WCC and formation of Area Boards and Community Areas.
- Parish Forum/Parish Liaison Group.
- Parish Steward Scheme.
- Trowbridge Community Area Future.

Consideration/Consultation on numerous WCC, WWDC (and latterly) WC Documents