

SEMINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

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Notice is hereby given that a Virtual/Remote meeting of the Semington Parish Council will be held on Wednesday 23 September 2020 at 8.00 pm. and you are invited to attend.

This meeting is being held using Zoom technology

AGENDA.

Prior to the commencement of the Parish Council meeting, members of the public will be given the opportunity to make any representations that they wish the Parish Council to note.

Public Participation.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING.

1. Apologies.

To receive and to accept apologies for non-attendance.

2. Declaration of Interests.

Councillors to declare any interests.

3. Co-option of a New Member.

- a. To decide whether to co-opt a new member as a parish councillor.
- b. To co-opt a new member (subject to the decision at 3a above).

4. Minutes of the Ordinary Parish Council Meeting held on 19 August 2020 and Decisions taken remotely (post – Lockdown).

- a. To agree and sign the minutes of the meeting as an accurate record.
- b. To endorse the decisions taken remotely (post – COVID-19 Lockdown).

5. Wiltshire Council Report.

To receive a report from Wiltshire Council, Cllr. J Seed.

6. Chairman's Report.

The Chairman to update the Council on developments since the last meeting. – Refer to attached Chairman's Report.

7. Highways and Environment.

To note any current issues and to decide the action necessary.

8. Planning.

- a. To note the status of extant planning applications:

20/01306/OUT	Land North of St Georges Road, Semington	Residential development of up to 26no entry-level affordable dwellings with associated car parking etc	Appeal Pending – APP/Y3940/W/20/3253180 (21 October 2020)
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20/05482/FUL	Former Poultry Building, Paxcroft Farm, Devizes Road, Trowbridge	Conversion of agricultural building to General B Uses (B1, B2 and B8) and extension of car parking and associated works.	Pending (16/9/20)
20/05710/FUL	17 Pound Close Semington BA14 6JP	4m single storey rear extension	Pending (23/9/20)
20/06902/TPO	The Old Coach House Church Street Semington	TG1 – 2 x Lime trees (previously pollarded as part of their ongoing management. Repollarded at approx.. 3" above the previous pollard points.	Pending (16/9/20)

b. To agree the comments to be sent to Wiltshire Council in respect of the following planning applications:

20/07304/FUL	Entrance Hall, St Georges Court BA14 6GA	Proposed Conversion of Entrance Lobby into New Dwelling	New
20/07850/LBC	Entrance Hall, St Georges Court BA14 6GA	Proposed Conversion of Entrance Lobby into New Dwelling	New

c. To decide the comments to be sent to Wiltshire Council in respect of any planning applications received after 16 September 2020.

d. 'Planning for the Future' Government White Paper Consultation – To agree the response from Semington Parish Council. (This document is attached to this Agenda).

e. To note any other planning related matter, including the recommendations of the Electoral Review Committee for new Area Board boundaries.

9. Finance.

a. To receive a report from the Clerk on the current financial position.

b. To adopt the recently agreed NALC Pay Scale 2020-2021 for Clerks and Local Government Employees.

c. To agree the payments to be made.

10. Village Initiatives.

To consider proposals arising from the Village Initiative set out in a draft strategic Framework to guide Parish Council activities and to agree how to proceed. (This document is attached to this Agenda).

11. Semington Website.

To decide whether to invest in the creation of a new Parish Council and/or Semington website.

12. Village Celebration, the 'Litter Pick' and Gutter/Pavement Clearance and Village Planters.

To note the success of these community activities – Brief details of these activities are given in the attached Chairman's Report.

13. Date of the next meeting.

To agree a date for the next Parish Council meeting – Wednesday 21 October 2020 proposed – and whether to hold it remotely/virtually or in the Village Hall.

Decisions taken remotely by Semington Parish Council – Subsequent to Contingency Plan 17 March 2020 and Post Parish Council Meeting held on 19 August 2020.

Village Planters/Planting - £150 allocated.

R P Coleman
16 September 2020

Vice Chairman's Report, 23rd September 2020

Guttering and Pavement Clearance – a total of 15 parishioners worked hard through the morning of 12th September to clear weeds and soil build-up along several streets in the village. At the time of writing, the clean pavements and edgings are a treat to behold.

Planning Changes – Vicky and Bill wrote a very clear and comprehensive response to the Government's consultation document on proposed planning changes. We have all seen the draft and some of us have written in to approve it. As well as using it to reply to government, it is proposed to share this with our local MP, neighbouring parishes and others.

Wessex Close anti-social behaviour – on 11th September, damage to play equipment and extensive littering at the play area was reported by a parishioner. This was cleared away the following morning by volunteers from the pavement clearance group. It's clear that people with homes in the area have heard noisy gatherings recently, and are keeping an eye on the play area.

Village Celebration – this will have happened by the time we meet, with the theme being "Harvest Festival". A special newsletter was delivered to homes around the parish and, hopefully, the weather will have been kind on 19th September.

Village Litter Pick – parishioners have volunteered to help pick litter on 18th September in preparation for the village celebration. I can report on this at our meeting.

Reviving our village planters – a working budget of £150 was approved by the council under the Covid 19 email approval system. Robert also has the daffodil bulbs for autumn planting. A date will soon be set for work on the 9 concrete planters. Replacement of the two wooden barrels, possibly with raised beds, is under consideration. We also need to set a date for bulb planting.

A Framework for prioritising village initiatives – at our August meeting, we considered how best to respond to the many village initiatives coming forward from the July village questionnaire. It was suggested that we might try to give a parish wide structure to those initiatives and to the ongoing work and responsibilities of the council. This could then be used to guide priorities for working groups to take forward. A document setting this framework is circulated as a separate item.

Cllr. P Smith (Vice-Chairman)

(Acting Chairman – Semington Parish Council)

‘Planning for the Future’ Government White Paper Consultation – Possible Response

These comments on the *Planning for the Future* white paper come from Semington Parish Council which represents around one thousand people in the West Wiltshire village of Semington, and the nearby small settlements of Little Marsh and Littleton. Wiltshire is a county of old villages like ours, each of which is connected to other villages by ancient tracks, by-ways, green lanes and drove roads, most of which are now rights-of-way. Typically, they are also now connected to larger settlements by the road network as well as by these routes.

Semington is linked in these ways to the towns of Melksham to the north, and Trowbridge to the south. They are between three and four miles away. These towns are important to Semington as centres of employment, commerce, transport, secondary schooling, further education, health and leisure. We are well connected to these towns but we are separate, and culturally distinct, from them. Significantly for us, there is another distinct village settlement between Semington and each of the towns.

Semington Parish Council and the community we represent understand the need for additional housing, including affordable housing, and our policy is to promote appropriate housing development within the community. Looking back over the period since the Second World War, there are numerous examples of such development in the village. All have been relatively small additions to the village housing stock and this has allowed the village to grow whilst retaining its integrity as a settlement and as a community. We have been assisted in this by the policies of the various planning authorities within Wiltshire over the years. Currently, the Wiltshire Council policy is to promote sustainable housing development. This means favouring the building of housing in urban settings where there are employment, commerce, transport, education, health and leisure facilities, and restricting development in villages like Semington where there are not.

Over the last twenty years there have been a number of examples of Semington Parish Council and the Wiltshire planning authority co-operating so that new housing is developed in the village. Currently, for example, we are waiting for the building of 24 new homes (including affordable homes). This project was a collaboration between a small local developer and the village, where there was extensive collaboration and discussions with the Parish Council and local people. This development met with village approval because it was seen to meet our housing needs and was appropriate in scale and design. We have been told by our local Wiltshire councillor that this collaboration was exemplary. Our good record of working with Wiltshire Council is one of the reasons that the Parish Council decided against developing its own neighbourhood plan.

Over the same period (2015 to the present), however, there have been two attempts by national property developers to obtain planning permission for large housing developments outside the Semington village settlement boundary. Had these been approved, they would, together, have increased the village housing stock by over 25%. Each was aggressive in approach, and characterised by a disdain for discussions with local people. It was something being done to us, not with us. In fact, the Parish Council was told by each developer that there was no point in opposing their plans as they were bound to succeed. That they did not, was due to the combined efforts of villagers, who protested in huge numbers to Wiltshire Council planners (and subsequently to the Planning Inspectorate), our local councillor, and Wiltshire Council, which was robust in defending its policies and communities, including at appeal.

We have provided this background to Semington and its record on housing development because it is necessary for an understanding of our disquiet at what the government is proposing in the White Paper. To put it bluntly, we are very concerned about the position that villages such as Semington will find themselves in should these plans go forward into legislation. Our fears are grounded in the fact that the only substantive mention of villages in the White Paper is this:

Renewal areas “suitable for development” – this would cover existing built areas where smaller scale development is appropriate. It could include the gentle densification and infill of residential areas, development in town centres, and development in rural areas that is not annotated as *Growth* or *Protected* areas, such as small sites within or on the edge of villages. There would be a statutory presumption in favour of development being granted for the uses specified as being suitable in each area. Local authorities could continue to consider the case for resisting inappropriate development of residential gardens.

It seems clear from this that the intention is that villages that are not specifically protected on the narrow ground available will not be protected at all from the sort of approaches that we have experienced over the past five years. This will remove the ability of communities like Semington to protect themselves from the whims of builders and housing developers. Indeed, it will remove our ability to have our say about the future of our community. This seems profoundly anti-democratic.

It also seems significant that neither of the consultation documents mention settlement boundaries or rural exception sites. Because of this we can only conclude that these are to disappear thereby removing the protection from uncontrolled extensions of housing into the countryside. The only realistic outcome of this can be the filling in of the green space between villages so that they become absorbed into each other and then into nearby towns. We cannot really believe that this is what is intended, but it would seem to be an inevitable consequence of the current proposals.

To summarise, Semington village has a history of pro-actively supporting appropriate sustainable housing development in its community. Is it really too much to ask that we will be able to continue to do this?

Peter Smith

Acting Chair

Semington Parish Council

A draft Strategic Framework Guiding Semington Parish Council Activities (16 September 2020)

Background

At the August Parish Council meeting, we thought about how to respond to the many ideas arising from the Village Questionnaire, and one suggestion was that we might try to set out what we do as a Parish Council within a strategic framework. Shortly after the meeting, there was an exchange of emails about managing our meetings during the rest of the year, and the difficulty of working by Zoom. During this exchange, small working groups were suggested as means of thinking about issues between meetings. The acting-Chair then proposed that such a group should cast a strategic eye over the questionnaire suggestions and related aspects of council work, reporting back to the full Parish Council in time for the September meeting. Two councillors joined the acting-Chair in this.

This document, A draft strategic framework guiding Semington Parish Council activities, is the result. It has 4 sections, beginning with a characterisation of the Semington community. This is followed by a description of the Parish Council, its vision and goals. Then comes the framework itself which sets out 5 themes and the specific activities the Council undertakes in relation to each of these, either directly or by supporting the work of community and other groups. Finally, there is a proposal to use this framework as a means of prioritising and communicating the work of the Council on a rolling 12-month programme.

If the Parish Council accepts the principle of adopting a strategic framework document, with appropriate edits following Council discussion, it can then be circulated to the village for consultation and feedback prior to reconsideration and formal adoption by the Council.

The Village

Around one thousand people live, work and go to school in the Parish of Semington, which includes the neighbouring rural settlements of Little Marsh and Littleton. Semington is linked by road and other rights of way to the nearby towns of Melksham to the north, and Trowbridge to the southwest. These towns are important to Semington as centres of employment, commerce, transport, secondary schooling, further education, health and leisure. We are well connected to these towns, but we are separate, and culturally distinct, from them.

The character of Semington is actively rural. In and around the parish, we have at least five working farms and several other agricultural small holdings, with much of the land being used for non-intensive pasture. The village, which lies to the south of the Kennet & Avon canal, was once dominated by the A350 running through its heart, but the opening of the bypass in 2004 provided a welcome respite, and since then the village has been actively rebuilding its rural character. The High Street is increasingly the heart and hub of the village; the place where people gather at the village hall, the pub or around the Christmas tree. The architecture of the High Street, with its attractive blend of old farmworkers' cottages, grander houses and the C18th pub, is a key element of the rural character of the village. There are 33 listed buildings in Semington.

Semington is well connected, with the A361 and A350 providing road and rural bus network links to neighbouring towns and further afield, where many of the residents work or go to school. But like many Wiltshire villages, we also have multiple rural rights of way. The byway to the west and the old road to the north provide cycle, equestrian and pedestrian access to Trowbridge (via Hilperton) and Melksham respectively. The canal and its towpath also offer pedestrian and cycle access to Trowbridge, Devizes and beyond, as well as to multiple footpaths and minor roads for circular walks and cycle rides.

The community of Semington is active, with over 20 clubs and other groups covering a wide range of interests. There are also multiple small businesses, from farms to garages and narrow boat maintenance to the small businesses at the Turnpike. A wide range of community institutions including the primary school, the Independent Living Centre, the church, village hall and the Somerset Arms and the crematorium actively support the community and bring in visitors.

We are fortunate to have several buildings and structures of significant historical interest, including the 16th century church, the Brunel aqueduct on the canal, multiple pill boxes and other WW2 relics, Georgian and earlier stone houses, many of which are in the village, but others are in the surrounding countryside including the early 18th century packhorse bridge at Whaddon.

The relatively light agricultural use of the farmland around Semington, with much of it set to grazing and grass cropping, together with the water courses of the canal and brook, provide attractive habitats for wildlife, both flora and fauna. Deer, foxes, badgers, hares and rabbits are complemented by herons, kingfishers, kites, kestrels, ravens and buzzards. Water voles and even otters have been seen in the brook, as well as less welcome mink. The canal is well stocked and draws people from afar to fish, while the brook hosts a wide range of smaller fish and the occasional trout. Wildflowers are abundant throughout the area and ancient hedgerows are evidenced by the huge variety of species they host.

The Parish Council

The Parish Council has nine elected councillors who are guided by an experienced and qualified Clerk. The Council has discretionary and legislative powers and rights laid down by Parliament to represent and provide services for the community. It looks after a number of assets that are held on behalf of the public and supports community groups that use these and other facilities. The council acts as a sounding board for local opinion and is formally consulted by Wiltshire Council on a number of matters affecting the parish, most notably on housing development and other planning issues. It holds all its meetings in public and anyone living or working in the village is able to attend, and raise issues.

Parish Council Vision

Over the next ten years, we want to help the village to further benefit from the reduction in traffic made possible by the A350 bypass. We will build on the actively rural character that residents and visitors know and love. The Parish Council will enable and encourage this vision, using this character as the compass to help guide the decisions we make and the activities we support.

Parish Council Goal

The overall goal of the Parish Council is to promote the best interests of the entire community, consistent with its statutory and financial obligations and within the guidelines of the Vision. To achieve this, the Parish Council sets out to support, safeguard and strengthen the community, to enable social and economic developments that meet the existing and emerging needs of the people who live, work and go to school in the village, to encourage and enable a sense of belonging and inclusion, and to enable individuals, families and organisations in Semington to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from living in this actively rural community.

A Strategic Framework Guiding Parish Council Activities

The work of the Parish Council can usefully be set out under five themes. In what follows we identify how each theme aligns with the vision and goals and then list the specific activities the Council undertakes in relation to each of these themes, either directly or by supporting the work of community and other groups. Our idea is that individual councillors will identify with each of the Themes and to lead on their development.

1 Planning and Development

We will seek to influence planning decisions to maintain the character of the village. We do not want to stop all development, but rather ensure that it is proportionate and compatible with our vision and goals and specifically that change happens at a pace that allows the community to adapt. We shall achieve this through

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- Scrutinising routine planning applications and commenting to Wiltshire Council

- Informing parishioners of significant new proposals; consulting, capturing views and commenting as appropriate
- Encouraging villagers to respond to significant planning proposals
- Responding to statutory consultations
- Conducting village-wide surveys on needs and development priorities
- Representing the village at Wiltshire Council planning committees, community area boards and public inquiries, and liaising with other parish councils
- Monitoring proposed legislative changes and submitting views

2 Transport and Traffic

We will encourage the management of roads and other transport networks in a way that maintains the actively rural character of the village, seeking to reduce the A-road feel of the high street and adjoining roads within the village. We shall achieve this through ...

- Liaising with the Highways Authority and the police (as appropriate) on village traffic issues: speeding, parking, road safety, street furniture, bus gate, speed limits and other traffic management issues including the promotion of road safety improvements.
- Promoting transport links that benefit the village: bus services, cycle routes, bridleways, footpaths
- Identifying changes wanted, and finding ways and means for these to happen
- Representing the village at Community Area Highways meetings
- Consulting with villagers about possible transport developments and supporting appropriate actions that align with our vision and goals

3 Environment and Street Scene

We will actively nurture and enhance the rural character of the village within its wider rural landscape. We shall achieve this through ...

- Encouraging and helping community efforts to keep the built areas clean and attractive by supporting volunteer groups to: pick litter; control weed growth on pavements and in gutters; prepare, plant and maintain displays in village planters; clean and repaint village assets such as telephone kiosk, litter bins, railings at the canal bridge
- Monitoring, maintaining and encouraging the use of rights of way (public footpaths, canal towpath and bridges, bridleways and by-ways) and ensuring they remain open and safe for all users
- Encouraging and helping community efforts to improve and maintain the green environment and natural rural feel of the village by: nurturing, improving and increasing wooded areas (such as Jubilee Wood and the Memorial Oaks); encouraging and maintaining wildlife areas within the built up areas of the village
- Supporting landowners in the maintenance of the rural landscape around the village
- Liaising with home and landowners regarding maintenance of rights of way and of the wider village environment, encouraging them to consider providing permissive rights of access such as those at Giles Wood. Liaising with the Parish Steward, Wiltshire Council, neighbouring parish councils and other organisations (e.g. Ramblers Association) to provide knowhow and support to village groups

4 Community and Communication

We will ensure that members of the community have input to this framework and the themes. We will also ensure that residents know who the Parish Councillors are and can contact them to seek their support and involvement. We shall achieve this through ...

- Encouraging and supporting the work of village groups, clubs and societies financially and in other ways
- Working in support of the Semington, Little Marsh and Littleton Support Group to help meet the needs of parishioners throughout the Covid-19 pandemic
- Communicating with parishioners through all Semington media: magazine, newsletter, village website, and Support Group Facebook page

- Helping promoters of new community initiatives (e.g. village shop) access advice from Wiltshire Council and Community Area experts
- Communicating with local businesses to encourage their engagement with the village and to help them to thrive in the village
- Supporting village social events such as fetes and street parties
- Encouraging members of the village to actively participate in village life. In particular seeking wider support for the activities listed under each of these Themes.
- Maintaining relationships with neighbouring parish councils, villages and towns.

5 Recreation and Wellbeing

We will encourage the village community to be active, enhancing the formal recreational facilities around the village, as well as the wider rural landscape. We shall achieve this through ...

- Encouraging and supporting community groups to develop and maintain parish recreational facilities: St. George’s Tennis Court; the Wessex Close Play Area (decision on adoption pending)
- Working with other organisations to promote village use of recreational space: Recreation Ground and football pitch in Little Marsh; St. George’s Allotments (once established)
- Supporting efforts to improve public safety within the parish: Neighbourhood Watch; liaising with police to tackle anti-social behaviour
- Encouraging visitors to come to Semington to enjoy its facilities and landscape, walk their dogs, ride their horses and bikes, as well as visiting the pub and other businesses and participating in Semington’s organisations to help them thrive

Reviewing and budgeting

This framework will be reviewed by the Parish Council each Autumn with a view to identifying development priorities for the coming year. These priorities will be used in setting the budget in order to ensure [i] that sufficient funds are available for what is planned and [ii] that any resulting increase in the annual precept is proportional and justified.

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Draft prepared by Peter Smith, Bill Scott & Richard Bruges

September 16th 2020