

CITY OF WELLS

CITY OF WELLS ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2019

Minutes of Wells Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 13th March 2019 at 6.00pm in the Council Chamber, Wells Town Hall.

Present:

City & District Councillors: Cllrs: J North, J Osman (Deputy Mayor), H Siggs

City Councillors: Cllrs: C Price, P Welch, C Wride (The Mayor)

RFO, S Luck

County Cllr T Munt

14 members of the public

Refreshments were served at the start of the evening.

1. Apologies Cllrs; R Ayres, M Brandon, C Cox, R Greenwell, N Kennedy, R Mackenzie, C Mckinnell, T Robbins, D Swain, G Wilson,
Town Clerk: Mrs F White

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 14th March 2018

Minutes of the previous meeting were proposed, seconded, approved, and signed by the Mayor.

3. The Mayor's Annual Report

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen and welcome to the annual parish meeting. The Wells City Council has 16 Councillors covering the three wards of the City. St. Thomas', St. Cuthbert's and Central Ward. As Mayor, I am the Chairman of the Full Council at our monthly meetings. The Town Hall staff support the activities of the Council and the use of the Town Hall and carry out the duties in respect of open spaces and the Cemetery. I would like to thank the Town Clerk Felicity White and the Responsible Finance Officer Steve Luck and the Town Hall Manager Kevin Westwood for all of their support, together with all the members of staff for their help during this busy year.

This year there are local authority elections on 2nd May and the new Mayor will not be chosen until the 16th May.

So far in my year as Mayor I have attended over 217 events, both large and small. The Deputy Mayor has attended 5 events on my behalf and unfortunately, I have had to decline 49 events. I have attended upwards of 33 meetings, whether that be Council meetings or meetings with other bodies and outside organisations. Several of these events were Civic Ceremonial Events and I have been on those occasions, very well supported by my fellow Councillors. I have maintained very close contact with the Town Clerk, the Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee and the Responsible Finance Officer, holding regular meetings. I have during my term tried to attend as many committee meetings as I possibly can.

I would just like to remind the audience that Wells City Councillors are all volunteers – they are not paid and do not receive expenses. Unlike the other council tiers where Councillors receive allowances and expenses – City Councillors do not!

CITY OF WELLS

Much of the Council's work is based on working with the Community. The 'Meet and Greet' Group came out of the City and Tourism Forum and is proving very successful. The Council has helped with making the Coach/Bus Station more attractive, the Ticket Office has been renovated, the toilets are being refurbished, a shelter is planned for the excellent volunteers who 'meet and greet' our visitors and I have personally approached Thatcher's Cider Company to see if they will sponsor it in the near future. Watch this space. Wells, together with Leicester, is now the top destination of choice of coach drivers and Wells is in the top ten of most popular places to visit. All this has been achieved by volunteers but also the dropping of coach parking fees by Mendip District Council has helped tremendously.

Wake up Wells was fully supported by Wells City Council and the former Mayor John North started that involvement. Several Councillors were involved with the steering group and the Town Hall was provided free of charge for the Community Day in September and all the staff fully supported the event which eventually led to the Wake Up Wells Event at the Cathedral in January. Again Wells City Council involved fully with the community.

Somerset County Council are no longer doing speed checks on the highway so Wells City Council purchased a Speed Indicator Device (SID) which the staff operate and is proving a great success in the struggle against speeding in areas of the City. The machine cost £4,000 but is an investment for the future safety of our streets.

Our Outside Spaces Team continues to work in partnership with Somerset County Council Highways Department to keep the verges, hedges and open spaces tidy. I myself organise regular litter picks and have over 60 volunteers who now have the opportunity to use our own in-house equipment, purchased recently and available by those registered with the Council – to use when and where they like. In part too we were helped by a very kind donation from a member of the public. I think people are very proud to wear their bespoke 'Wells City Council Litter Pick Volunteer' hi-viz tabard! Instead of being asked what their crime was - they no longer need to explain! Again, as I have found during this year, Wells is full to the brim with volunteers.

In partnership with Somerset County Council, the signage has been changed for all motorists entering the City to show where long and short stay parking is and directing all coaches to the Coach/Bus Station which should help the on-going problems with traffic. The City still struggles with the parking and traffic situation but there is to be a Somerset County Council Review shortly which will hopefully highlight the problems, as if we weren't fully aware, and ways of solving them. We are apparently the first on the list!

The change to LED lights at the Town Hall has now been completed which is showing tremendous savings on energy costs. This initiative started by the late Chris Briton, former Mayor and Councillor, has seen thermostats being fitted to radiators, the heat saving vestibule and other cost saving measures. Wells is now a Plastic Free City and we have introduced our own guidelines to users of the Town Hall in respect of single use plastic.

The Changing Places facility was opened during my Mayoral Year and is a wonderful facility for those who want to visit our beautiful City but due to severe disabilities have been unable until now. The funding was provided in the main by the City Council assisted by the Mendip District Council.

CITY OF WELLS

The Planning Committee has heard many varied applications from a Mobile Telephone Mast to a 230 unit housing development, from a single storey house extension to the removal of a Walnut tree. Every application that is received is inspected by the Committee members and an opinion given and every encouragement is given for the public to attend meetings and address the Committee.

The Finance and General Purposes Committee has granted over £63,000 to more than 25 local charities and community projects.

Wells is a popular backdrop for film companies and event groups and the Town Hall staff try to assist with the 'paperwork' where it can. The Archives is a valuable source of local history which is now being digitised thanks to funding from the Wells City Council. The Remembrance Poppy Trail was so very well received that Michael Johns, Eric Preston, Clare Blackmore, Julia Wood, David Walker and I are now planning a History Trail for the summer. Watch this space!

There was a sadness in the Council family when Danny Unwin suddenly passed away. His funeral was a full Ceremonial Service and was our way of paying our deepest respects to such a popular man. Caroline McKinnell took his Ward seat in a by-election and Philip Welch was co-opted onto the Council following the resignation of Councillor Alison Luck.

So far this year Sarah and I have managed to accrue about £6,300 for my chosen charities, the St. John Ambulance and the Lawrence Centre. I have two events to go and a few other smaller events planned before the end of my year. I have bored you each week with my diary in the Wells Journal and cajoled many of you to buy raffle tickets, quiz tickets or provide raffle prizes. I apologise but there is still a coffee morning at the Parlour on the 19th March which is donation only and a Murder Mystery Afternoon Tea at the Town Hall on the 13th April. Tickets are on sale at the Town Hall and the same ladies who catered the Mayor-making event, will be once again providing the comestibles.

Sarah and I visited Bad Durkheim in September last year and welcomed a delegation from Paray le Monial, consisting of the Deputy Mayor, the Chair of their Twinning Association and both their spouses on a visit to Wells for the Carnival evening in November. It was a very successful visit.

This has been a busy year and the forthcoming elections promise to be interesting. We are losing some of our senior Councillors, Colin Price, Maureen Brandon, Gordon Wilson and Roy Mackenzie and I wish them all luck in their retirements. Wells is a beautiful City steeped in history but it also has a wonderful community that takes a great pride in it's past and very keen interest in its future. Long may that continue.

Once again may I thank my fellow Councillors for their continued support and I now open the meeting to questions from the floor. May I remind the audience that only those who reside in Wells and are registered to vote in the May elections may ask questions.

CITY OF WELLS

4. Open Forum: an opportunity to discuss matters of interest to the community

- i. A member of the public raised a question on next years Wells City Council budget headings. The RFO explained the new Audit guidelines.
- ii. The Mayor was congratulated on increasing the public attendance at this meeting and it was suggested by Cllr Osman that more people could be encouraged to attend next year by using social media to promote the meeting.
- iii. The Mayor was asked if she had set herself any objectives for her year and had she managed to achieve them. She replied she was happy with her Charity events she organised and she had set up the volunteer litter picker group and worked with Plastic free Wells. She had attended many events and promoted the City and Council as much as possible.
- iv. Members of the public raised the ongoing problems of parking in the City and the need for more car parks. Various options were discussed and Cllrs North, Osman and Siggs explained the problems and costs of finding a new car park. Somerset County Council were planning a consultation of on street parking and The City Council had worked with the Chamber of Commerce and SCC Highways to improve signage to existing car parks. Cllr Siggs reported Mendip District Council were looking to install vehicle charging points into MDC car parks.
- v. Concerns were raised over the Bus provision in Wells and future cuts to services, questions regarding subsidies were answered by SCC Cllr Munt. Cllr Price explained the City Council along with other parish councils had funded and saved bus route 67.
It was suggested there was a need to promote more use of the buses and less use of the car and this would help solve parking problems.
- vi. Cllr Siggs answered questions on the Wells Recreation Ground Trust and explained problems obtaining grants for the Bishop's Barn. Future ideas for improving the use and appeal of the area were being considered by the trust moving forward.

The Mayor thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 6.55 pm.

.....