

CITY OF WELLS

CITY OF WELLS ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2026

Minutes of Wells Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 11th March 2026 at 7.00pm in the Council Chamber, Wells Town Hall.

PRESENT: WCC Cllrs: L Agabani (Mayor), T Butt Philip, D Denis (Deputy Mayor), S Eden, G Folkard, D Orrett, S Powell, P Welch

WCC: H Wilkins (Town Clerk)
C Hobbs (Note taker),
J Nogan (WCC Staff)
4 x Members of the public:

Apologies

WCC Cllrs: J Browne, S Cursley, T Kolizeras, T Munt (MP for Wells and Mendip Hills/Somerset Cllr for Wells)

Minutes of the Bi - Annual Parish meeting held on 5th March 2025

Cllr L Agabani paid a tribute to Wells Cllr T Robbins who passed away in February. He will be hugely missed by all at Wells City Council

The Minutes of the previous meeting were presented and signed - No comments received

Actions from the Bi-Annual Parish meeting held on 25th September 2025

The Town Clerk updated the meeting that

- i. Work to offering online meetings is very much work in progress and hopes are that this will be delivered at some point in 2026.
- ii. Conversations are taking place with the Editor of the Wells voice to help provide a weekly newsletter at some point in 2026.
- iii. The WCC website improvements have not yet taken place, but slight improvements have taken place and this is scheduled work for the first half of 2026.
- iv. Review of toilet cleaning provision. Cllrs will be aware that a forthcoming paper with a forward plan will be published in two months with options for future toilet cleaning.

The Mayor's Annual Report

I would like to start with acknowledging the sad loss of Cllr Tony Robbins recently. He was always very kind to me. He will be greatly missed by all at Wells City Council.

As Mayor it has been the year I have got to see and meet people in Wells and Somerset that I would not have otherwise. Spending time with carnival clubs and visiting an 18th Century synagogue have been two of the many highlights.

It has been a year of restructure and building resilience for WCC. The new Town Clerk has been in the post for 1 year.

New Estates Committee was formed in May, as well as revision of several other committees to aid the Council moving forward.

Wells Act to Adapt Plan was adopted by the council in June 2025.

Key themes are: Improving and increasing green spaces, Financial Sustainability, Good Governance, Climate Change and Asset Stewardship, Securing the Future of Council

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Services, Economic Growth and Tourism in a Heritage Context, Adapting to flooding, Encouraging community driven climate action, Co-ordinating emergency plans

The City Council has agreed and published its Corporate Priorities. Focusing on:– Wells has been living through devolution from Somerset and learning what it really means to the City.

The Old Post Office, which had been empty for three years, has opened as a restaurant and trading well.

My thanks to my fellow councillors, the Town Clerk, and all the council staff for all their hard work and support. A special thank you to the Town Crier who will be retiring in May this year, after 25 years of service to Wells.

Cllr Louis Agabani, Mayor of Wells, 11th March 2026

Vice-Chair of Finance Committee report

Cllr G Folkard (Vice Chair of Finance Committee) presented the 2026 Report to Wells City Council Annual Parish Meeting

On behalf of the Committee I would like to pay tribute to Councillor Tony Robbins who was Chair of the Committee until his untimely death in February. His assured guidance will be sorely missed.

The Finance and Council Matters Committee is one of the standing committees of the Council. It meets once a month. It normally has a membership of 8 councillors, including a chair and vice chair.

Its functions include:

To exercise the powers of the City Council regarding:

- i. Consideration and determination of all financial matters of the Council unless otherwise delegated, except those reserved by statute, Management of the Council's expenditure and budgetary controls.
- ii. Awarding grants (budgets assigned to other committees shall not be used to award grants).
- iii. Use of assets and routine management of property, i.e. buildings including public toilets (except where assigned to Estates or City Centre & Open Spaces committees).
- iv. To make recommendations to the City Council regarding:
 - v. Procedures and policies
 - vi. To consider cost implication of any major Council civic/ceremonial events
 - vii. The annual budget and precept
 - viii. Financial Performance

Wells City Council expenditure has grown significantly from £1,561,338 in the year to 31 March 2025 to a forecast £1,874,312 for the year to 31 March 2026.

Whilst subject to the same inflationary pressures as other organisations, the main reason for the increased expenditure is the devolution of certain services from Somerset following the amalgamation of previous District Councils. A full list of services and locations which are managed by the City Council can be found on the website www.wells.gov.uk

Other notable expenditure includes the purchase of Wells Cinema which was funded by a loan from central government and the acquisition of new Gazebos for the market which is one of the services transferred from Somerset. Neither of these required precept funding from the Council Tax.

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Cost have been proactively managed, remaining within budget, and it is expected that a surplus of £150k will be available to strengthen reserves at 31 March 2026. Reserves to cover unexpected events are a requirement for all organisations and this transfer is an important step towards holding a recommended and appropriate sum.

Chair of Outside Spaces Committee report

Cllr D Orrett (Chair of Outside Spaces Committee) presented the Outside Space report for the Annual Parish Meeting, March 10th 2026

The Outside Spaces team is ably led by WCC Officer Matt Johnson who has a team of 4.5 rangers and a part time admin assistant.

The prime responsibilities of the team are:

- The management and upkeep of Wells Cemetery
- Support for the 3 Council run allotments
- Overseeing the annual Wells in Bloom planting and maintaining the colourful displays throughout the seasons
- The Christmas Lights
- Supplying Dog waste bins
- Maintaining Grit bins

The OS team, under delegated authority from Somerset Council and the Highways Department, clear gullies, maintain pathways through weed clearance and hedge cutting and carry out litter picking within the boundary of the City.

The Outside Spaces committee comprises a Chair, a Deputy and 6 Councillors. The Town Clerk and a member of WCC Clerical staff attend. The Outside Spaces Officer is present or sends a report. We meet on a monthly basis (omitting May and August).

Members of the public frequently attend to ask questions and make comments. Climate emergency is also covered at these meetings and we now have the standing agenda items of Traffic, Parking & Highways and a Police & Crime update.

A Forward plan is also agreed.

Work Undertaken over the past year.

- i. Lovers Walk hedges have been reduced in height to support safety measures for St Teresa and St Joseph's pupils and parents crossing to the school gate.
- ii. Grass cutting has continued in areas of the Cutting Plan post Devolution with a visual map for the public showing the areas of responsibility between Wells City Council and Somerset Council.
- iii. On and around Tor Woods, grass cutting has been carried out using swathing techniques.
- iv. The OS team have worked with volunteers at Mendip Hospital cemetery to cut back the undergrowth so that it can be more easily maintained.
- v. There have been proposals to plant pollinator friendly plants in planters in some areas.
- vi. Wells cemetery has a new caretaker and has been described as a "spectacular asset" and indeed WCC are looking at Green Flag awards for cemetery services.
- vii. A review is being carried out of the allotments which belong to WCC. There are 60 plots currently but a waiting list of 85 individuals. [Unfortunately, there is no land available within the boundary of Wells to buy more]

Recreation Ground

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Wells Recreation Ground is an ongoing source of pleasure, and measures are in place to produce a long-term vision for this space as well as implementing short term changes.

- i. Benches and waste bins have been taken away and repaired as have goal posts.
- ii. A dog bin has been moved to discourage users from entering the park by the wall in South Street car park which can be a hazard as narrow and slippery.
- iii. When the weather improves a table tennis table and suitable base will be installed and the Band Stand will be painted.
- iv. Play equipment is frequently checked for safety and ongoing repairs are carried out.
- v.

There is also ongoing maintenance and repair at the other play areas in the residential areas of the city – these have now been devolved from Somerset Council to WCC. WCC are developing a Leisure and Play strategy for all green and open spaces which will determine the best locations for all activities for the benefit of all. Valentines vending van continues to be a success.

Other updates.

- i. The Wells Litter Pickers have managed to keep the city centre, residential roads and some of the approach roads to Wells free of litter with the three times a year organised picks. Many individuals also go out on their own accord. Insurance is now in place due to a new Volunteer Policy produced by the Town Clerk. WCC provides the kit and Somerset Council collect the rubbish.
- ii. A second, highly successful Eco Week took place in October with numerous voluntary bodies involved. This involved cross parish working with St Cuthbert's Out.
- iii. Three Councillors sit on the Wells Environment Network who create the momentum.
- iv. Act to Adapt was launched with £1000 received to go towards drought planting beds in the Recreation ground. Act to Adapt is being developed for residents in an around Wells to focus on alleviating floods and droughts.
- v. £500 was also received from the Community Wilder scheme towards the drought beds.
- vi. 10 local schools were involved in the Wells in Bloom competition with support provided by the Outside Spaces team

Parking continues to be a discussed topic. New signage is due to be installed in place in the Market Place for disabled parking.

Several residential streets have become "Residents Only" parking so this has made other residential streets become more congested.

Concern has been expressed by residents re; crossing for school children across the Bristol Hill from Ash Lane to College Road. A petition is being mounted and any form of collision or near miss recorded as evidence of this unacceptable health and safety risk.

WCC has scoped out the work and cost in implementing a 20mph zone around local schools Bids for SID (Speed Indicator Device) will be submitted in the new financial year with a view to encouraging Speed Watch using volunteers.

More dropped kerbs were installed across the city and residential areas in January 2026 to accommodate wheelchair users and prams and push chairs. Thanks here go to Accessible Wells.

The OS officer has made a log of all cobbled areas which are "outside tolerance" and in fact a trip hazard. This has been sent to Somerset Council Highways.

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The market was taken on by WCC on April 2nd 2025. Staff employed in putting up and taking down are employed on a casual basis. OS staff offer backfill if required. A Market Manager is in post and new gazebos purchased and an overhaul of the market trailers has been completed. Regular updates on local crimes come from the Neighbourhood Policing team.

The Police and Crime Commissioner presented at a Full Council meeting and improved communication has been an outcome.

Enormous thanks must go to the Outside Spaces team, the Town Clerk and WCC staff plus Councillors on the OS committee for maintaining high standards within existing resources whilst enhancing the overall presentation of our city for residents and visitors alike.

Cllr D Denis thanks Cllr D Orrett for her hard work on this committee.

Chair of Planning Advisory Committee report

Cllr S Powell (Chair of Planning and Advisory Committee) presented the Planning Advisory report for the Annual Parish Meeting on 11th March 2026.

Cllr S Powell thanked the previous Chair Cllr D Denis for her hard work as Chair on the committee

The Planning Advisory Committee has met twice monthly between June and January in response to the significant backlog of applications awaiting determination by Somerset Council. Since January, the Committee has returned to its usual schedule of meeting once a month. Over this period, we have considered an average of nine planning applications per month.

Applications of note

- 2025/0547/FUL – Wells Rugby Club, Charter Way, Wells

Proposal for the demolition of the existing clubhouse and floodlighting, and the erection of 106 dwellings.

The Committee has worked closely with the Strawberry Line Group and St Cuthbert's Out to ensure that the impact on the Strawberry Line is fully considered. We continue to make detailed representations to the Local Planning Authority on this matter.

- 2025/1762/FUL – 66 Bath Road (The Britannia Inn)

Proposal for the change of use and partial demolition of the existing building to create a single dwelling, alongside the erection of four new dwellings.

Details of these and all other planning applications are available on the Somerset Council's Planning Portal, where members of the public can also view and comment on applications.

View and comment on a planning application

We welcome comments, concerns, and observations from residents on any planning application under consideration. Meeting dates for the Planning Advisory Committee are published on the Wells City Council website in the Calendar of Meetings and Engagements, where members of the public are welcome to speak.

Calendar of Meetings and Engagements

I would like to express my sincere thanks to our council officers for their invaluable guidance and professional advice throughout the year. My thanks also go to the Councillors who serve on this Committee for their thoughtful contributions, diligence, and continued support.

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Chair of Estates Committee Report for the Annual Parish Meeting March 2026

This is a new committee and the first task was to aim to define our role.

- First understand how we were using the council assets
- Develop a clear picture of real cost
- Undertake a longer time view as to maintain and improve those assets
- Consider the community benefit of how we use those assets.

IT was requested by the public to have a greater level of understanding of the actions of this committee, its purpose and outcomes.

Chair of Civic & Archives Committee report

Presented by Cllr D Denis (Chair of Civic & Archives Committee) for the Annual Parish Meeting 2026

The newly formed committee of 6 Councillors is scheduled to meet quarterly and 2 have been held since May 2025. It has had one meeting cancelled due to insufficient numbers to be quorate.

The Terms of Reference are as attached. In Summary, the committee's remit is:

- to have an overview and provide guidance on the civic processes of the Council
- to review and oversee the storage, catalogue work and maintenance of the City Archives which are housed at the Wells and Mendip Museum.

Actions to date are:

- Approval of Annual Civic Procedures and Terms of Reference.
- Review of the Regalia for the Town Crier by a small working group and a paper to Full Council in January 2026. There will be no changes as voted at Full Council.
- Town Hall Civic Promotion- a small guide leaflet has been produced and the Archivist set up a very informative display in the Town Hall on Heritage Day.
- There is still an outstanding action to set up a display for Charter Day and involve more councillors in A Town Hall Guided Tour.
- Twinning Association – Due to poor attendance, Wells City Council postponed the meeting at which the Chair of the Twinning Association was due to present a view on future working between the Twinning Association and Council for the Civic duties to be met.

Open Forum

C Simons had submitted questions to the Town Clerk ahead of the meeting. The questions and responses were read out by the Town Clerk and are as follows:

1. Is there a complete budget for the Portway Annexe following the partial budget produced at the 2025 Meeting?

The budget references in the monthly cash book, under budget cost centre 203 offers the complete budget for Portway Annexe. As previously advised, the budget has been developed since the last Annual Meeting to include staffing costs, all maintenance and expenditure in order to offer Committee a complete view of the entity.

2. Is £64 still the annual budget for the Market Provision?

The annual budget for markets appears in the month Cash book under cost centre 207. The Forecast for Q4 2025-26 references Income of £183,928, Expenditure of £56,877 and therefore a profit of £127,051. This is income in excess of the originally reference budget of £64,000.

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3. Have the Council adopted a Tender Book?

No, there is not a formal tender book in place, however, best practice has been applied with the development of invitation to tenders, specifications for works and bid processes where spend exceed local limits and is supported by the governance of the council.

4. Why were the reserves allowed to fall to such a low level that the Annual Accounts were qualified?

As previously referenced, a large area of income was being incorrectly accounted for within WCC accounts. On rectification, this saw the councils reserves fall to an untenable level. The audit on review agreed with the actions deployed to rectify the issue and have completed further intermediate audit within year to support the actions of officers. The decision to qualify the audit is the opinion of the external auditor, and whilst a level of reserves is prudent, there is no statutory legal limit and thus, no reason for the audit not to be qualified.

5. Does this committee ensure, through a skills audit of Members, that it has sufficiently effective financial management to ensure robust monitoring of all aspects of the budget?

There is no legal requirement for any member of council (elected member) to hold specific skills in order to stand or operate within a committee. A skills audit and additional training for all councils and staff has been commenced and is being built upon in 2026-27.

6. Have reliable arrangements for identifying, recording and analysing the physical condition of their properties (for example through Stock Condition Surveys), which are adequate for preparing costed plans for future maintenance, and has identified a workable programme for maintenance, and is making adequate financial provision to undertake the works when they are required?

Yes, whilst work continues in this area, audits have been completed in a number of areas, and in turn have informed the Planned Preventative Maintenance scheme now in place and budgeted for. This process is overseen by the Estates Committee.

C Simons suggested that the next 50 years repairs require adequate reserves so as not to burden a future council with unexpected expenses

The Town Clerk agreed and reassured that the Estates Committee will be addressing this issue.

C Simons also spoke of the correct skills mix of committee members.

The Mayor reassured C Simons that training does take place and members sit on the committees where their skills are best suited.

E Hobbs commented that in his opinion the skills mix at WCC is of a good quality. He spoke of recent occasions locally and nationally where councils have elected candidates, who have then stood down after a very short time after taking up their seat.

The Mayor closed the Meeting – Date of next Annual Parish Meeting - TBC