

# Walton Parish Council Annual Report 2023



Since 2020, we have been unable to hold a Meeting of the Parish due to COVID restrictions. This year we are no longer under the restrictions and can once again meet in the village hall as a community. As you may know, your council tax contributes not only to Mendip and Somerset Council budgets, but a small amount also goes to the Parish Council. It is important to me that you have a chance to know where that money goes and how you can influence future choices.

Some issues that affect Walton are not in our direct control, for example planning decisions, highways repair or refuse collection. Local government has many, many different

organisations but, in general, your parish council can act of the first port-of-call for any complaints or problems of this nature. Whilst we may not be the correct body to resolve the problem, we will know who is and can represent the community to those bodies.

## Councillors

Walton Parish Council kindly voted for me to chair the council meetings in 2020. Councillors are not paid but nor are we volunteers, in that we hold a statutory, elected Public Office. We are either elected by you to act on your behalf, or co-opted to positions between election years. In May of 2022 local elections were held and the councillors were duly elected. The council has seats for nine members. For much of the year, we have been operating with only six or seven, and have been actively recruiting new members. I am pleased to say that we are now near full strength having co-opted several new, younger members. Their joining has brought a great balance to the council.

Many of you will have known Bob Musgrave. Sadly, Bob passed away this year. He had served on the council for decades, bringing gentle wisdom as well as practical assistance to the community. He will be greatly missed by us all.

The Parish Council is involved in many parts of the community and I have listed below a few of the activities that the council undertakes. There are, of course, others, including liaising with Somerset Bus Partnership, commenting on county and national initiatives, communication, training and budgeting.

We meet at least monthly, occasionally more frequently if required, and have a number of sub-committees to plan and execute specific tasks (e.g. finance, Local Plan and Walton in Bloom). Each councillor also takes responsibility for an area that interests them or where they have expertise.

### Planning

The council sees and can comment on planning applications. There is a plethora of considerations, such as permitted development zones, the allocation of new houses made by central government, the visual impact, traffic, drainage and so on. The council uses their experience and judgement to represent the wishes of the community, but we appreciate your thoughts before the relevant meeting.

Two current planning concerns come to my mind that you may wish to follow. The first regards South Street. Following a large public meeting to discuss plan for development in 2021, we raised our voice against it. Recently, the application was rejected by Mendip, but the developer may appeal and we may again need your support to protest. Secondly, a public meeting was held regarding a solar park in Pedwell. No application has been made as yet, but your opinions would be welcome in case one is made.

Some years ago, a Parish Plan was developed. It is a statement of the current and desired status of the village land use. We have recently decided that the time has come to refresh the plan to give a clear statement of how the community wants the village to grow. A recent and agreed plan becomes influential in planning board decisions at county level. It is therefore important that, when a draft is developed, we get your opinions and, later, support.

### Environment

We need to protect our environment, not only the wider global issues, but also the local green spaces. The council acts in several ways to do this. It ensures that the play park is maintained and safe and that the grass and hedge is maintained in good order. It provides dog waste bins and arranges their emptying via the council waste services. It maintains some of the verges and beds around the village. Before lockdown, we arranged litter-picks and this will soon restart.

Walton in Bloom is an annual competition, with many categories, to encourage and reward beautiful or productive gardens. Having been run by Bob Musgrave for many years, the mantle will now fall to others, but we will maintain this activity.



The largest area we manage is the ‘walk to’ community area near the Allotments in East Mead. We have installed benches and planted trees there, as well as a hedgerow to separate the area from the nearby grass keep. Many thanks to the school and other volunteers for their help with this.

If you have any ideas for improving the village environment, please do let a councillor know or email the clerk. We have set aside some budget for this, and have also recently contracted a lengthsman – someone whose role is to carry out minor work on our behalf.

### Roads and Footpaths

Responsibility for roads, verges and footpaths is a confusing subject, as it is shared between local landowners, Highways Department and the Unitary Council. The parish council also undertakes some work to clear paths and to report on their state where needed. We also undertake some minor repairs to signs and access.

The major road-related bugbear for the residents is the speed and volume of traffic through the village. To help control this as much as we can, the council purchased and installed a Speed Indicator device at each end of the village, as well as an ‘Auto Speed Watch’ device which records speeds. These are operated and maintained by the council in partnership with the Speed Watch group.



### Support for Local Causes

The council also receives requests for support from organisations such as the Village Hall, Pre-school, Men’s Shed, Hospice, Air Ambulance, Church and other local groups. As representatives of the community, we try to support those causes which benefit Walton directly and discuss the amount and use of such support annually.

We feel that it is important that the community provides a welcome to new residents, as well as supporting the older and more vulnerable residents. The range of organisations supported reflects this, but all organisations operating within the village are encouraged to discuss any support they need with projects. Applying for help is easy, and forms are distributed in September for consideration in the late autumn.

### Conclusion

The three years I have been Chair of the council have been, to say the least, unusual. The pandemic has disrupted life in many ways, the sad passing of the Queen and the effects of both Brexit and the Unitary Council have been real shocks. Now, we seem to be emerging back into some normality. It is good to see people able to enjoy the opportunities that village life provides. To me, the Walton Fun Day expresses this community cohesion and I was delighted that it restarted in September and was so well attended. I look forward to manning the barbeque again this year and to seeing you all there.

I would like to close by thanking my fellow councillors for their work on behalf of the village these last years I would especially like to thank Helen Moore, our Clerk, for doing an excellent job keeping the council well informed and ensuring that the finances are controlled, transparent and audited.

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Walton parish council

Annual Financial Report for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023

#### INCOME

|                           |             |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| Balances brought forward. | £ 66,169.19 |
| Annual precept received.  | £ 34,247.00 |
| Total other receipts.     | £ 511.35    |

#### EXPENDITURE

|                    |             |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Staff costs.       | £ 12,576.47 |
| Other expenditure. | £ 22,619.30 |

|                                   |                    |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| <u>BALANCES carried forward *</u> | <u>£ 65,731.77</u> |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|

\*Includes the Harry Skinner fund and grants received for specific projects not yet complete.

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