

Outside Spaces and Estates Committee

Annual Parish Report 2023-2024

Meeting Schedule

The meeting schedule was amended on 6th July 2023 to assist progression of plans for the Bishop's Barn and Recreation Ground. It was agreed that the Outside Spaces and Estates Committee would continue to meet monthly but that every other month the emphasis would be placed on matters pertaining exclusively to the Recreation Ground and Bishop's Barn. All discussions regarding the Recreation Ground and Bishop's Barn were agreed to be held exclusively at these meetings to improve cohesion between the public, Councillors and Council Officers and to avoid duplication. This is subject to review.

Outside Spaces

The Outside Spaces Team continues to be led by Matt Johnson. There has been significant positive praise and feedback from the public for the Outside Spaces Team. Some of the work carried out has been over and above the normal responsibilities of the Open Spaces Team such as clearing blocked drains to reduce flooding. This has been key to preventing flooding in the City and Wells Residents have benefitted as a result. The work of the Outdoor Spaces Team is extremely appreciated by the Open Spaces and Estates Committee.

The new storage unit at Underwood Business Park has continued to provide vital space for the Outdoor Spaces Team.

New mowers have been acquired this year which are more suitable for areas where grass needs to be cut shorter such as in the Recreation Ground.

Bulbs have been planted in the Bus Station to enhance the overall environment.

'No Mow May' took place in May 2023 and is scheduled again for May 2024.

The Bowling Club lease was extended for 11 years in May 2023.

Cllr. Orrett was thanked for organising the successful litter picks in 2023-24 which have made a considerable contribution to improving the outside spaces in the city, in particular the roadsides.

The Town Clerk reported that Somerset Council has now granted permission to start repairing pavement defects and trip hazards and the Outdoor Spaces Team have been given the necessary training. Dropped kerbs were acknowledged to be lacking in Wells and discussions are ongoing at Wells City Council to improve pavements in the city.

Portway Annexe

Repairs and maintenance that have taken place in 2023-2024 include:

Replacement of cracked windows

Installation of new boiler

LED light replacement

Repair to leaks caused by heavy rainfall

Soundproofing has been installed in the music rehearsal room.

An i-pad has been installed to ease the signing-in process.

The car park continues to provide revenue for Wells City Council through the lease of secure designated parking spaces.

Discussions to provide a community fridge at the Portway Annexe are still underway.

Friday Community coffee mornings managed by Liz Webber have been reported as a success.

A new twilight member of staff has been appointed.

Discussions have taken place around suitability of the placement of a mosaic with a Tree of Life design on the outside of the Portway Annexe and are still underway.

Recreation Ground

Cllr Powell presented a report on the Bishop's Barn Open Day which took place on Saturday 20th May 2023 in which members of the public were invited to give their views on the Recreation Ground and Bishops Barn. Cllr. Powell was thanked for her report.

A short-term plan for the Recreation Ground was prepared and submitted to the Open Spaces Committee by the Chair, Cllr J. Browne. Committee members voted to accept the plan on 2nd November 2023. The plan included addressing anti-social behaviour, ordering new equipment and benches, commencing work on trees and trialling a refreshment kiosk.

The Bishops Barn public hire prices remain on the WCC website and the space is available to be booked as is seen by contacting the Outdoor Spaces Officer. Some private events have taken place there including a wedding in the Summer of 2023.

The trial of a pop-up vendor in the Recreation Ground to improve the area for families and to create a more amenable environment around the former playground took place over the summer period. Although unsuccessful on this occasion, a new tender has since been prepared by the Assistant Town Clerk and has been published in local media and place on the WCC website. It is hoped that the summer season will attract further interest.

Members of the public have repeatedly expressed concern at Open Spaces meetings about the condition of trees on the Recreation Ground. Issues have arisen with the trees on the Recreation Ground on account of complications arising from Tree Protection Orders. A survey was carried out and all identifiable dead wood was subsequently removed by Mendip Trees and Landscapes in December 2023. In order to carry out further work, a planning application has been submitted to Somerset County Council to allow for a two-metre 'exclusion zone' between existing trees and residential properties.

English Heritage were approached by Wells City Councillors to establish whether the organisation would be interested in taking over the Bishops Barn. This was unsuccessful but further discussions with other organisations have not been ruled out.

In response to reports of anti-social behaviour at the Recreation Ground, a new CCTV camera has been installed and police have assured WCC that they regularly patrol the area. Toilets are cleaned twice a day by WCC staff and any problems immediately reported.

A request to move benches from the area surrounding the public toilets at the Recreation Ground was turned down as this particular seating was considered necessary for parents whose children are using the toilets. However, to improve the overall area, four additional picnic benches were ordered to give people alternative seating areas and to make the location more inviting to families and visitors.

Additional equipment for the children's play area is being investigated and costed and are planned for the future subject to available funds.

Additional rubbish bins were installed in the children's playground and more have been ordered for the Recreation Ground.

Cllr Denis has been working with members of the public to look at options for creating a sensory garden in a designated corner of the Recreation Ground with appropriate plants and shrubs.

The Outdoor Spaces Officer has requested a survey of existing tarmac in the Recreation Ground with a view to carrying out repairs or removing the current tarmac to replace it with grass.

The following minor repairs were agreed by the Outdoor Spaces committee and have been carried out on the Bishops Barn in the Committee Year 2023-24:

Sanding of internal floor

Cleaning of flaking paint

Removal of graffiti

The insurance company carried out an inspection and renewal of policy has been agreed for a further 12 months. Two oak doors need to be repaired and wood in the barn requires fire retardant treatment. The lighting also needs improvement.

However, following intervention from Historic England, it was agreed that from now onwards, only specialist contractors would carry out work on the Bishops Barn in keeping with its status as a Grade1 Listed Building.

Wells in Bloom

Public feedback had been overwhelmingly positive on the hanging baskets and planters across the City of Wells.

Andy Allen has handed over the Wells in Bloom role to Nathaniel Bell in the Outside Spaces Team. The Committee are grateful to Andy Allen for his brilliant work and commitment during his tenure.

Questions have been raised over increasing income for the Wells in Bloom Scheme by increasing Corporate sponsorship and splitting larger areas. Discussions are ongoing.

The Wells in Bloom School Awards are scheduled for 4th July 2024 for schools (to be held at the Bishops Palace) and 4th October for other categories (to be held at the Town Hall)

The Committee extend their thanks to Cllr Denis for her work with Wells in Bloom.