

Outside Spaces & Estates Committee Report for Annual Parish Meeting: March 5th 2025

Report from Chair of Outside Spaces and Estates Committee summarising activity from April 2024 to March 2025.

The Outside Spaces team is ably led by WCC Officer Matt Johnson who has a team of 5 Rangers and a part time admin assistant. They are greatly appreciated by the Councillors and public alike for maintaining very high standards around the city's open spaces and green areas and frequently go above and beyond their remit.

The Outside Spaces committee sits once a month and members of the public frequently attend to ask questions and make comments. Climate Emergency is also covered at these meetings.

Until January 2025 the agenda for OS meetings was alternated to allow the focus to be on the Recreation Ground and the Bishop's Barn every other month, which are the areas most needy of lengthy input.

Currently however each meeting covers all features of our open spaces.

Outside Spaces.

The decision was reached in early February, for the final package of services from Somerset Council, associated with Devolution. Whilst WCC remains aware of the likely impact that these services will take onto its operational team, we are preparing for these services and locations which will take effect from 1st June 2025. It is anticipated that loans will be taken out to fund the new equipment required to take on a greater level of grass cutting.

Works undertaken over the past year.

Lovers Walk has been well maintained with hedges being taken lower to support safety measures for St Teresa and St Joseph's pupils and parents crossing to the school gate.

The team has been removing unsafe equipment from the skatepark. The new skate park will remain in the same location (although will be enlarged) and funds will be raised by the Skateboard Park Community Group for equipment and layout. They hope to raise £500,000 with approximately £105,00 raised to date. WCC will release £15,000 (capped) when works are commenced and will then manage the space on a day to day basis as part of the Council's estate.

Measures have been taken to support the campaign to improve access in the City's streets for wheelchair users, prams and the like. Somerset Council has granted permission to WCC to repair trip hazards with the appropriate training undertaken and regular checks now in place.

Three times a year voluntary litter picks have been organised by Cllr Deborah Orrett and her team of 65 volunteers clearing all areas in the city centre, the residential areas and approach roads to Wells. The Open spaces team are regularly seen litter picking around the city and Rec.

Recreation Ground

The OS team are responsible for mowing the grass in the Recreation ground and this has made a substantial difference to how well cared for it appears.

"No Mow May" was respected as well as the "Leave it longer" campaign in the Recreation Ground and elsewhere.

Waste bins in the Recreation ground are emptied by the OS team in addition to the contractors Idverde. The entire contract with Idverde will cease at the end of May this year, following which litter bins will be managed within the Rec, solely by the open spaces team.

New benches have been installed as has the new Monarch's Way notice board.

Railings have been painted.

Numerous items of Playground equipment have been taken away, repaired and returned. Budget allowing, new pieces of playground equipment will be purchased. The public have expressed their desire for this enhancement and discussions have taken place regarding the provision of more accessible equipment for those less able bodied, which it is expected will be encapsulated within future strategies of the Council.

A table tennis table will be installed in the play area in the spring, weather permitting

Valentines vending van has proved highly successful and a new contract has been issued to them with WCC taking an income each month, supporting the Council's income strategy. A new hardcore area has been laid for the van following concerns about the ground suitability and in line with the license arrangements in place with the provider.

The area for a sensory plants bed has been laid although the tree roots there have proved a limitation.

A memorial tree has been offered and the location of this will be considered along with the overall view for the Recreation Ground.

The Band Stand will be repainted (using next year's budget)

The Bowling Club, who lease their land and facilities, have been allowed to extend their boundary to accommodate wheelchair access and ensure DDA compliance of the facility.

The trees surrounding the Recreation ground have proved complicated; all have TPOs. A tree condition assessment report was submitted to the Outside Spaces committee. Re-submissions have been required for applications of tree works and a second tree survey was conducted. Work on the dead and "high priority trees", where they were dangerously encroaching on roofs, was completed by November 2024 by MTL and signed off by Bo Walshe, Somerset Council's tree officer. Sadly, and most frustratingly for the owner, the trees adjacent to Park Cottage did not meet the criteria for removal or lopping. Wells City Council is only able to deliver works as agreed by the Tree officer, owing to the TPOs, thus, at present, all agreed works have been completed.

Bishop's Barn

Numerous successful events have been held here over the past year including a Stonemasons workshop and display, Wells Theatre Festival, Wells Pride and Tanys's Transformation Catwalk. Feedback has been most positive despite major works needed to the toilets and kitchen area. Cllr Philip Welch recently requested the forming of a working group in order to determine a future strategy and development of the Bishops Barn which is progressing and will look to provide further updates to the Council in due course.

Cllr Georgie Robbins organised the first Wells Gay Pride event with numerous activities taking place in the Barn as well as in the streets and other locations within Wells. Congratulations go to her for initiating this.

Wells in Bloom

Led by Cllr Denise Denis, a successful schools and a separate gardens and allotments competition took place last year with award ceremonies in July and October respectively.

This year a decision has been made to proceed only with the schools competition with children designing and filling wheel barrows which the OS team will collect, taking them to the Bishop's Palace for judging. Cllr Denis has decided to step down from organising the WIB competitions and we thank her for all the time and effort she has put into the scheme and the joy it has brought.

Climate Emergency.

Cllr Denis reports monthly to the OS committee on WCC's commitment to the Climate Emergency. Along with Councillors Orrett and Powell and numerous outside bodies such as Sustainable Wells, Somerset Wildlife Trust and Active Travel, a very successful Environment Week was held in October 2024, kicking off with a panel and audience participation event at Cedars Hall, where the facility was generously donated by Wells Cathedral School, and the theme of Farming, Food and Flooding was explored. Presentations and workshops were on offer for an entire Saturday at the Town Hall and numerous other events were held in the community during the following week. A similar event is planned for October 2025.

An Act To Adapt plan is also being developed for residents in and around Wells to focus on alleviating floods and drought.

Again, thanks must go to Cllr Denis for her huge commitment.

The OS team and OS committee continue to work together to enhance our lovely City and its environs for all to enjoy.

Cllr Deborah Orrett
Chair of Outside Spaces & Estates Committee

February 2025