

WELLS CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE WELLS CITY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 27TH JANUARY 2022 AT 7.00PM

**COUNCILLORS
PRESENT:**

Cllrs: L Agabani, A Bayley, J Browne, S Cursley, D Denis, R Humphreys,
A l'Anson, S Johns, S Powell, T Pullin, T Robbins, J Rust, T Leach,
J Browne, P Welch (Mayor)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Town Clerk/RFO: S Luck
Town Clerk Assistant, C Woodland
WCC Staff: C Hobbs
Mace Bearer M Goody
Cllr T Munt (Somerset County Council)
5 members of the Public

22/01/C APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE FROM MEMBERS

Cllr N Kennedy, No apology Cllr J Osman

22/02/C DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive Councillors' Declarations of Interest, made under the Council's Code of Conduct adopted 27th July 2012.

None received.

22/03/C MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL HELD ON 9TH DECEMBER 2021

Minutes of the previous meeting were proposed, seconded, confirmed as a true record and were signed by the Mayor after the following queries.

- i. Cllr Rust regarding recording of absent Councillors at meetings. The Town Clerk confirmed the process for recording absences and apologies.
- ii. 21/93/C Cllr Rust challenged wording regarding the availability of the Bus Back Scheme report. Cllr Rust informed the meeting that the report was already available on the website at the time of the meeting.
- iii. 21/204/C Cllr Denis requested whether there had been an update from the Environment Agency regarding the pollution. The Town Clerk confirmed he had not had a formal response.
- iv. Cllr Rust requested confirmation of Cllr Welch's (Mayor) vote on 21/196/C as it was a recorded vote. Confirmation was given by Cllr Welch (Mayor) that he cast his vote 'for' the proposal.

22/04/C MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

No members of the public requested to speak.

22/05/C MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- a) Update on plans for the Platinum Jubilee celebrations in Wells
 - i. Cllr Welch (Mayor) commended Mark Culliford and the Outside Spaces team for the installation work of the bollards in the Market Place.
 - ii. Cllr Welch (Mayor) gave an update of the activities planned for the Queen's Jubilee, as he is chairing the steering group. There is involvement with Cathedral, Bishop's Palace, Chamber of Commerce, Lions, Rotary, Cllrs Cursley and Robbins. Some of the activities will include a "God Bless the Queen" Service in the Cathedral, tea party in the Nave, abseiling down the West front, a tightrope walk. Performances such as music, comedy, children's dance classes are being organised. There will be food stalls and charity stalls. A big screen will relay the festivities from London. Activities are planned across several locations such as Cathedral Green, Bishop's Palace, the Recreation Ground and a parade which will proceed along the High Street with a marching band. Wells City Band will perform in the Town Hall and there will be a mass Town Crier event and much more.

- b) Mayor's Diary
 - i 28th Jan The Somerset & Bath Lunatic Asylum Photo Exhibition, The Bishop's Palace
 - ii 2nd Feb Launch of Jean Imray's book 'Wells Old Almshouse', Almshouses
 - iii 6th Feb Evensong to celebrate 70 years since the Accession of Her Majesty the Queen, Wells Cathedral
 - iv 7th Feb Wells Cathedral School Jubilee Thanksgiving Service, Wells Cathedral
 - v 13th Feb Karen Deverell celebration of MBE received for services to Children and Young People in Somerset, The Swan Hotel
 - vi 16th Feb Reception for relaunch of the Wells Ambassadors, Wells Town Hall
 - vii 25th Feb Wells Lions Charter Dinner, The Swan Hotel

22/06/C MINUTES OF THE FINANCE & COUNCIL MATTERS COMMITTEE

To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 13th January 2022

Cllr Rust questioned phrasing in 22/05/FCM and the usage of Mayor's allowance to thank volunteers and requested the phrase was removed. Cllr Welch (Mayor) confirmed that volunteers had not received monies from the allowance but that he had personally paid for tickets to show gratitude for help received with Mayor's Charity events. The Town Clerk will alter the minutes and agree them at the next Finance meeting.

22/07/C MINUTES OF THE PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

To receive the minutes of the meetings:

- i 16th December 2021 (held under delegated authority)
- ii 20th January 2022

No comments received.

22/08/C UNITARY & ACQUISITIONS

The Town Clerk updated members that the Programme Director for One Somerset bid, Carlton Brand, has retired and has been replaced with A Jones and work will progress. Several meetings have taken place. The process is in very early stages and it is understood that it will be April 2023 before any decisions are made regarding our bid for assets or ownerships of monetary value. We have been assured that services provided by Mendip District Council will not cease after Mendip is abolished on March 31st 2023 and that negotiations will continue with the new Somerset Unitary Council. A report from Cllr Rogers (MDC) has been received (attached), regarding assets, some points of the report are being challenged. We have approached Mendip District Council regarding transfers of assets that have no revenue or are unwanted by the Unitary Authority. Assets with financial value cannot be transferred at this stage.

The city council's proposed bid for asset transfers to Wells will be made available to the public in due course via the website and Town Hall reception. The Unitary team will be invited to a public meeting.

Cllr Denis requested clarification regarding the extension of the temporary licences of the Market Place as mentioned in Cllr Rogers' report. The Town Clerk confirmed he was questioning this point with Mendip District Council and requested clarification from Cllr Munt (SCC).

Cllr Munt clarified that Cllr Rogers is committed to the Wells City Council's bid for assets from Mendip District Council. Cllr Munt advised that in order to retain the Market Place post Unitary, any costs incurred in the short term for road closures should be accepted by Wells City Council as this may be beneficial in the long term.

Cllr Agabani reported that although the Market Place has had the bollards installed the parking meters are still being used.

22/09/C BID FOR REGENERATION OF WELLS HIGH STREET (attached)
Cllr l'Anson updated the meeting that the bid is to improve safety and wellbeing for people using the High Street and requested that a decision be made to proceed with one of three options:
a) Do nothing
b) Partial closure of the High Street (on Market Days)
c) Traffic calming measures put into place.
Cllr Rust reminded the meeting that the Planning meeting had voted against closing the High Street to buses.
A discussion took place about possible locations and various options for traffic calming measures, crossing points, etc.
Cllr Munt showed support for making Wells more pedestrian friendly.
Cllr Robbins proposed that we proceed with Option c) Traffic calming measures.
Cllr l'Anson clarified that these measures would be discussed with Somerset County Council Highways and a group of Councillors.
The Town Clerk advised that Councillors with businesses in the city may vote and do not require to declare an interest as the proposal is for a consultation process to begin.
Proposal seconded by Cllr Browne, carried unanimously.

22/10/C UPDATE ON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN (attached)
To receive an update from Cllr l'Anson
Cllr l'Anson requested that two Councillors put themselves forward to replace Cllrs Rust and Humphreys. Cllrs Denis and Pullin put themselves forward.
A discussion took place about the Neighbourhood Plan proceeding during when City Council goes into the pre-election period. The Town Clerk suggested there may be a delay on public consultation during this time and will seek advice.

22/11/C TO RECEIVE ANY WRITTEN REPORTS FROM COUNCILLORS ON OUTSIDE BODIES
Cllr Denis reported that Sustainable Wells will meet with Mendip District Council to map out locations that can become wildflower verges. (Report attached.)
Cllr Robbins reported that a Carnival meeting will take place in February regarding funding required for future carnivals.

22/12/C TO RECEIVE ANY WRITTEN REPORTS FROM DISTRICT OR COUNTY COUNCILLORS
Cllr Munt reported that she's received the Economic and Community Infrastructure report. However, it was reported that work on Unitary matters is currently taking precedence at Somerset County Council.

22/13/C ANY OTHER URGENT MATTERS OF REPORT
i Cllrs thanked A Westwood for work on the new Wells City Council website.
ii Cllr Denis suggested the inclusion of a policy for volunteers.
iii The Town Clerk informed the meeting that nominations and a vote will be required for Mayor and Deputy Mayor at the February Full Council meeting.

22/14/C DATE OF NEXT MEETING
The next meeting of Wells City Council will be Thursday 24th February 2022, 7pm.

EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Note: If it is necessary for matters to be considered in confidence, it will be proposed by the Mayor that a resolution be passed under the provisions of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 as amended.

Minutes signed by The Mayor: **Date:**

MDC Report from Cllr L Rogers (22/08/C above)

Bishops Barn:

A report is being presented to the February MDC cabinet meeting making clear that all the issues and details between Mendip and Wells' solicitors have been resolved. We are now waiting for the final green light from the Charity Commission confirming that the transfer can go ahead. [see also land transfer below]

Skatepark

Tracy Aarons, MDC deputy chief executive, is planning a meeting between the interested parties to see if it's possible to persuade SCC simply to take back the land and operate the skatepark. The funding would still have to be raised but it would mean the donors would know there was no question mark over the tenure. If this could be agreed with SCC it would be by far the quickest way to get the project going - and would avoid the risk of the time-limited MDC funds being withdrawn because of lack of progress. Grants totalling £55,000 have been offered by MDC, a further £15,000 has been offered by Wells City Council, and the bulk of the estimated additional £300,000 required will be raised from grants, lottery funding, fundraising etc. It has been explained to SCC that it is not possible to secure this money to benefit land which currently has such a short lease.

Market Square

As you know MDC supported the installation of the market square bollards with a grant of £17,000 to WCC from the government's post pandemic high street revitalisation scheme. We all think they look great! There was a mix up over approval for the siting of these posts but apparently an MDC surveyor has been to check, and a map of where they are in relation to utilities, etc, has now been drawn up. We the Wells MDC councillors, are due to receive a briefing on what is happening longer term because temporary permission for the pedestrianisation of the square expires in September and the bollards theoretically have to be removed. Mendip is also currently working to identify other (temporary) locations for the disabled parking spaces previously in the square.

Strawberry Line

The Strawberry Line cycle track from Dulcote to the Charlie Bigham factory was surfaced two weeks ago and looks great. We are delighted that this project which has been in gestation for about 30 years, is finally going ahead thanks to £50,000 in MDC funding and a £15,000 donation from Charlie Bigham. It currently looks very bare but the amazing group of volunteers are forging ahead with their plans and it is much cheaper for MDC to work directly with them to implement the planting scheme than it is to use commercial contractors. We also hope there will be some money left over from the Queen's Green Canopy initiative (see below), to allow more trees to be planted alongside the track.

New Lidl store

Lois Rogers was completely misquoted in a recent report in the increasingly inaccurate Wells Journal which said the Lidl expansion plan was being scrapped. The new store is going ahead but Lidl is appealing against an Environment Agency requirement to raise the level of the floor because of their prediction that climate change-related flood waters to a depth of 1.8 meters could affect the area. A terrifying thought for all of us...

Land transfer and securing allotments

We are aware that WCC is anxious to take back its historic ownership of the market square and administration of the market. However, as you know, there are legal constraints preventing MDC transferring assets with a significant revenue stream, which we understand have been further revised because of the advent of the unitary authority. Therefore, as things stand this cannot be done. We understand there is some dispute between MDC and WCC about who will pay valuation and legal fees for asset transfer. We have also been told WCC has declined the MDC offer to take back ownership of the Burcott Road allotments which WCC currently administers, because MDC has required an undertaking the land will be retained as allotments. It would be helpful if you could clarify this. We are keen for the use of this land as allotments to be secured going forwards.

If WCC does not take over the land, there is a risk it will simply be passed to the incoming unitary authority and sold off for yet more housing. We do not want to see this happen.

Climate Change Tree Update

Mendip is working with Reimagining The Levels, the AONB and Somerset Wildlife Trust, using the Queen's Green Canopy initiative to go towards planting at least 7000 trees, establishing a tree nursery and restoring hedgerows. We are working with the Tree Council who provide funding for tree planting, training for volunteers, monthly updates and regional networking opportunities. Our resilience and climate change officer Jacob Hall is working with interested district councillors to establish a tree warden network in Mendip in conjunction with parish councils, including Wells. Please also see current funding opportunities in the Mendip official monthly bulletin

<https://internationaltreefoundation.org/uk-community-tree-planting/>

Free swimming and gym passes:

Fusion Lifestyle, the charity that operates leisure facilities in the Mendip area, is encouraging all Wells residents to take advantage of the post lock down freedom to get fit, by claiming free swim or gym passes to try out the leisure centre facilities.. All people need to do is go to www.fusion-lifestyle.com select their preferred centre and fill out their details. Fusion will call ahead of the visit to confirm the appointment and answer any questions.

Carbon Literacy Training

This has been paid for by SCC to raise awareness of climate change and to help co-ordinate efforts. Free bespoke online training is being offered for Parish and Town Council's across Somerset as follows:

Full days online training 10am – 5pm. Run by ClimateGuide. <https://climateguide.co.uk/>

- Thursday 3rd February 2022 10am-5pm (City & Town Council Event)

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/somerset-county-council-carbon-literacy-for-town-city-councils-tickets-170363995296>

- Wednesday 9th February 2022 10am-5pm (Parish Council Event)

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/somerset-county-council-carbon-literacy-for-parish-councils-tickets-170363427598>

Paint recycling

Finally, we can all be proud of the activities of Somerset Waste Partnership - despite complaints from the public about delayed bin collections during the covid pandemic. SWP is one of the pioneers of paint recycling and our Dulcote recycling centre is among those accepting paint to be sent off for reuse. In 2020-2021, 269 tonnes of paint were sent to Paint 360 in the West Midlands - <https://www.paint360.co.uk/> - to be reused in new paint products. We know this because they track every tonne of Somerset's recycled materials, from garden waste and food to glass, metals and plastics, and have done each year since Mendip pioneered the annual Recycling Tracker report in 2008. The tracker measures the efforts of everyone in Somerset to make a difference and reduce the county's carbon footprint. The 2021-22 report will be available later this year, and is expected to show the initial impact of Somerset's Recycle More expanded weekly recycling. Full details: <https://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/recycling-tracker/>

Report on the bid for funds for regeneration of Wells High Street bid – 20.01.22.

1. The aim of the national high streets project for which a grant of a maximum of £15,000 is available is to:
 - animate empty shops, disused buildings and underused outdoor spaces
 - create more welcoming and attractive high streets where people want to spend time
 - ensure that the high street is inclusive and caters to all sectors of the community through good design and the provision of shops and services
 - promote good physical and mental health and wellbeing and encourage activity
 - improve the quality of the physical environment
 - increase the delivery of new housing and jobs
 - ensure high streets are places for a diverse range of businesses
 - forge/enhance a distinct identity and character
2. We are at the second stage of the bid process and this constitutes facilitation which is being provided by Annabel Osborne of Locality. All relevant information is required by the beginning of March 2022 with all quotes. The project must be capable of delivery by the end of March 2023. I have had two telephone conversations with AO and these will continue as the bid develops.
3. The bid will accord with the Objectives of the Wells Neighbourhood Plan demonstrating the importance of safe and convenient access to Wells High Street. Objectives of the "Moving Around" section of the draft Wells Neighbourhood Plan refer to improving "safe accessibility into and out of the City centre and to and from new development for pedestrians and cyclists" and maintaining and enhancing "access into and around the High Street which benefits pedestrians (shoppers) retailers and other businesses". It will be useful to provide evidence from the Market Manager as to how the market would benefit from the extra space at the top end of the High Street on market days.
4. The components of the bid are currently
 - a) traffic surveys to establish both current traffic flows and also the percentage of traffic flowing down the High Street which is through traffic as opposed to traffic which is using the City centre for access
 - b) a survey of the views of shoppers/walkers and retailers as regards partial closure of the High Street on market days
 - c) production of a scheme to close the High Street on market days save for access for shops, The Swan and disabled drivers.
5. AO has advised that discussion with SCC as the highway authority is crucial to elicit their views on
 - a) ways and means and benefit of temporary/permanent closure of the High Street
 - b) moving the bus route and stop from the High Street

- c) impact on disabled users and potentially more parking spaces in the High Street
- d) amended signage and
- e) discover what traffic flow information they have and
- f) ways and means of improving the percentage of active shops in the centre of Wells.

6. I have been in email contact with Matthew Prince, Transport Policy Officer with County Highways and have arranged a Zoom meeting with him and others on the 13th of this month. I have also had discussions with Kelly Knight of Mendip District Council and Ben Coleman of PJA Associates. The latter is producing a Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan for four Mendip towns – including Wells.

7. The Transport Data Team at Somerset County Council are at a cost of £175 carrying out a survey of vehicles passing through the High Street between the 14th and 23rd of February. The TDT have also explained that an ANPR survey, involving cameras at each end of the High Street, will provide information as to the split between through traffic and local traffic.

8. The quotations for ANPR surveys received to date are

Tracsis Cameras at 4 locations	12 hours - £3,400 24 hours - £4,250 36 hours - £5,500
Intelligent Data Collection Cameras at 4 locations	12 hours - £1040 24 hours - £1840 36 hours - £2460

9. I have obtained Air Quality reports for Wells which relate to Tucker Street and Glastonbury Road. As shown below, these indicate the improvement in air quality between 2019 and 2020 consequent on lockdown and the reduction in traffic.

Reductions of NO₂ concentrations of between 33% and 49% were experienced at roadside diffusion tube monitoring sites between April and June 2020 as can be seen from the spreadsheet below. Overall, from the average results across Mendip District Council there has been a 25% reduction in annual mean concentration relative to 2019.

10. Since writing the above, I have had the discussion with Matthew Prince referred to in paragraph 6 above. He made the following points:

- in the current climate which promotes use by buses, it is unlikely that the County Council or its successor would favour moving routes away from the High Street
- consultation on any kind of traffic scheme can be accomplished via an "Active Travel Scheme" and "Commonplace" a simple means of carrying out an on line survey based on a map of the relevant area and questions formulated by the proponent

- an Experimental Traffic Order would last some 12 to 18 months and would involve limited consultation prior to the Order being made but would be balanced by views being submitted during the life of the Order
- exemptions from a partial closure would not extend to disabled drivers as the Blue Badge Scheme applies to the individual and not the vehicle and
- he favoured a traffic calming approach based on a raised table between "Fudge Corner" and the edge of the Market Place. In his opinion, this would provide pedestrian priority at this significant point and provide pedestrians and shoppers with a safer and more convenient environment in the High Street.

11. In the light of this additional advice, the Planning Committee and then Council are asked to decide whether or not the bid should be proceeded with either in terms of closure of the High Street to vehicles on market days or the traffic calming approach referred to in paragraph 10. If the latter is the favoured approach, authority is sought to proceed with the bid based on funding for a plan for appropriate traffic calming.

Adrian I'Anson – 20.01.22.

Wells Neighbourhood Plan Update (22/10/C above)

1. Neighbourhood Plans are set in the context of Local Plans set by District Councils. The Mendip Local Plan covers all five towns in Mendip and was approved in December 2021. Neighbourhood Plans give an opportunity for individual parishes to set out their vision for the future based on planning policies and projects.
2. The Wells Neighbourhood Plan is nearing completion to a point where the Council will be asked at the February meeting to approve it so that it can go out to consultation.
3. It is anticipated that the community engagement will take place in March and April. Following any necessary re-drafting as a result of the consultation, the Plan will be submitted to Mendip and then be subject to a further consultation and examined by an independent Planning Inspector to ensure that it conforms with national and local planning policy. If it does, it will then be voted on at a referendum which needs a majority to vote for it to be made.
4. The draft WNP runs to some 70 pages with additional appendices and covers Heritage, Housing, Transport, the Environment, Retail and Tourism. The main appendices are documents which have been prepared by consultants, AECOM and comprise:
 - a Wells Design Guide
 - a Masterplan setting out options for development of the three housing sites allocated Wells by the Mendip Local Plan. These sites are land:
 - i) between the west side of the Keward estate and the sewage works
 - ii) at Tincknells bounded by Glastonbury Road and Strawberry Way and
 - iii) at the Rugby Club at Portway and
 - a Housing Needs Assessment for Wells.
5. The current draft of the Plan and the three documents referred to are all available on the web site.
6. The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group which has developed the draft Plan comprises representatives from St Cuthbert Out Parish Council, our County councillor, a District councillor, individuals with planning experience, Stuart Todd our planning consultant, myself and Wells City councillors Rachel Humphreys and Jenny Rust. Our Wells City councillors wish to stand down and I am looking for at least two councillors who will bring the draft Plan through its final stages before it is made and becomes a legal document.
7. The purpose of this paper is to
 - explain where the Council is with the Neighbourhood Plan
 - appoint at least two councillors to the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and
 - ensure that the Council is aware that at its next meeting, the Council will be asked to approve the Plan as a draft for consultation with or without amendments.

Adrian I'Anson
20.01.22

Report on Links with Sustainable Wells- January 2022 (22/11/C above)

I have attended a monthly meeting in November in person, and a zoom monthly meeting in December then followed up with a zoom meeting with the Communications Officer, Mathilda Janicot Bale on 20 December.

I was able to explain my role as a link to the Council, and gave Ms Bale a report on recent Council proposals and actions on Climate Emergency, Neighbourhood Plan, future council structure, assets and services with regard to Unitary Council changes.

I have also worked with Emma Jakins, Sustainability Officer, and Sustainable Wells to liaise with Tom Ronan, Mendip DC Strategic Policy and Climate Change portfolio holder, to propose a pilot project for Wildflower Verges in Wells. This has been agreed in principle, by Mendip DC, and the number and location of verges that will be managed by Sustainable Wells is being researched and hopefully will be agreed, in the next 2 weeks. Sustainable Wells will then consult with the local residents to seek agreements, and support from those people living in the area. The plan is to develop signage to explain what the project is about, and Wells City Council Finance Committee has a small grant available to support the project.

Cllr Denise Denis

25/01/2022