



## WELLINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

### ANNUAL REPORT 2022/2023

#### JOINT REPORT OF THE TOWN MAYOR FOR 2022/23 COUNCILLOR MARK LITHGOW AND THE TOWN CLERK MR DAVE FARROW

#### 1. Introduction

This Annual Report of the Council will be available on the Council Website and at the Town Council Offices, when open. The Council will also publish an annual summary of funds report as part of the internal and external audit process. This is due to be presented to the June meeting of Full Council and will also be published online accordingly.

#### 2. Town Council

Wellington Town Council has 15 Councillors. The current Council was elected in May 2022 and will sit for five years rather than the usual four to bring it in to line with the Somerset Council election cycle. The political composition of the Council is Labour five, Liberal Democrat five, Conservative four and Independent one. Importantly however, Councillors work together to serve the town without political bias.

Councillors' names and contact details are listed by Ward at **Appendix A** to this report.

#### 3. Overview

This has been a busy year for the Council as it has taken on more responsibilities and raised its profile in the town and with partners.

During the year the Council has adopted a Work Plan which sets out the various workstreams and projects that the Council staff are working on. This is reported on at each Council meeting through the Town Clerk's Report and forms the basis of the work of each of the Council's committees (see below).

This year has also seen the implementation of a new structure of local government in Somerset when on 1 April 2023 the new unitary council, Somerset Council, came into being and the district councils ceased to exist. This presents opportunities for the Town Council to take on additional responsibilities in line with the business case supporting the unitary council proposal which it is keen to do.

#### 4. Council Priorities

In June 2022, following the election of new councillors in May, the Council revisited the Vision for the Town Council that had initially been agreed in March 2022 and resolved to restate its commitment to the Vision namely that the Council will work with and offer support to all members of the community as needed with the aim that Wellington is or becomes:

- An inclusive, safe and secure town where everybody is supportive of each other and offers particular care for the more vulnerable members of our community

- A town with a diverse, thriving, and resilient local economy
- A town with vibrant cultural, sporting, and social communities
- Proud and protective of our heritage, green spaces, and biodiversity
- Committed to becoming a net carbon neutral town
- A destination of choice for people to live and work and for businesses to be located.
- Connected with the Blackdown Hills AONB and surrounding communities

## **5. Council Staff**

In the summer of 2022, the Council commissioned a review of its staffing arrangements by the Local Council Consultancy Service. This was done on the basis that the Council's role had changed significantly since the last review in 2019 with further changes to come through local government reorganisation and the Council's own ambitions. The review was undertaken in September and October 2022 and resulted in recommendations for changes of roles and responsibilities and for an additional post.

The changes proposed were that Alice Kendall should take on the role of Deputy Clerk/Deputy Responsible Financial Officer and two new roles be created. The first being a post of Assets and Events Officer to be filled by Annette Kirk who had previously been Deputy Clerk and the second a Project Officer.

The Council accepted the findings of the review and agreed at its November meeting to implement the recommendations from the 1 December 2022.

The role of full time Project Officer was subsequently advertised, and Sarah Goodman was appointed and took up the post on the 1 March 2023.

The Council also agreed to appoint a Community Warden following the decision of ID Verde to no longer provide that service. At the time of writing, we have been unable to fill that post.

## **6. Council Offices**

Council Offices are open to the public from 9am – 2pm and phones are answered until 5pm (4.30pm on Fridays). Appointments can be made to meet with officers between 2pm and 5pm.

## **7. Budget and Precept**

In December 2022 the Council approved the budget for 2023/24. The budget was set to reflect the work that the Council was planning to undertake in 2023/24 and the need to plan work arising from the implementation of the new unitary council in Somerset. The Precept was set at the January 2023 meeting of the Full Council at £466,332 representing a 10% increase on the previous year (there was no increase in the Precept in 2020/21). Council balances remain healthy.

## **8. Committees and Working Parties**

The Council has a range of formal committees and working parties with responsibility for certain areas of the Council's business. The Council's method of working has continued to develop over the last year with as many recommendations to the Town Council being first considered by the relevant committee. This allows the committee to comment on proposals and shape them before they are presented. This is not intended to limit discussion at a Town Council meeting but rather to ensure that any proposal presented has had some scrutiny in advance of that meeting.

There are occasions when, because of the timing of meetings and the need for decision to be taken, it is not always possible for proposals to be taken through the committee process first, but these occurrences should be the exception rather than the rule.

In April 2023, the Council took the decision to revise the remit of the Environment and Open Spaces Committee to give it oversight of heritage issues in the town and renamed it The Environment and Heritage Committee.

The Council also instigated a Green Corridor Advisory Board consisting of representatives of community and other groups to advise on the use and management of the Green Corridor. The Board meets every other month and reports to the Environment and Heritage Committee.

Details of the committees that are currently operating showing membership, along with Council representation on Outside Bodies, is attached as **Appendix B to this report**.

The Council welcomes public participation at all its meetings as it provides a valuable opportunity for Councillors to keep in touch with local views. It also gives local people an opportunity to see what the Council does and to understand issues of interest and concern. This assists in developing mutual understanding and in managing expectations.

The Allotments Committee, Town Centre Committee and Environment and Heritage Committee meetings are particularly well attended by individuals or representatives of local groups. Planning meetings provide an opportunity for residents to express their views on specific planning applications, which helps inform the Council's decision or comment.

## **9. The Mayor**

The Mayor is the Chairman of the Council. A specific purpose for the Mayor, alongside other Councillors, is to promote the town, raising the Council's profile of the Town Council and represent the local community. Civic events such as the Two Minute Silence, Remembrance Sunday and Armed Forces Day are regular engagements in the Mayor's calendar. The Mayor reports the events that he has attended to the Council every month.

Councillor Marcus Barr has been elected as Mayor for 2023/24.

## **10. General Power of Competence.**

The Council resolved at its Annual Meeting in May 2022 to adopt the General Power of Competence (GPC) following the Clerk gaining the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) qualification and given that the Council had the requisite number of elected councillors. This legal power extended the Council's range of activities by enabling it to carry out any activity or operation that an individual might do, if it is lawful and not expressly prohibited through other strands of legislation. The GPC remains in place for the duration of this Council.

## **11. Financial Support to the Community**

The Town Council seeks to support the wellbeing and success of the town by giving financial support to many local clubs and organisations through its grant system. This enables a wide range of activities and events to take place which otherwise might not be possible. To be successful, applicants need to demonstrate that there is demand for the activity/event for which funding is requested, and that there will be a positive benefit to residents within the town. Councillors make decisions on applications at the monthly Finance meetings. Applications are determined against the Council's grants policy and funds are directed to organisations needing financial support, and whose proposals are in line with the Council's over-arching aims and aspirations. Organisations receiving grants are expected to give feedback at the end of the year as the success of their activity or event.

Grants awarded in 2022/23 were:

Life Education Wessex

£555.00

Avon & Somerset Police	£1,700.00
Wellington Basins Volunteer Group	£493.00
Wellington Rugby Club	£2,000.00
Best Before Food Store	£2,935.00
People's Plot T/A eat:Festivals	£750.00
Wellington Cricket Club	£696.42
Wellington Tennis Club	£880.00
Avtar Indian Dance CIC	£390.00
Avon & Somerset Police	£2,982.00
Wellington Methodist Church	£300.00
Wellington Carnival Committee	£3,536.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>£17,217.42</b>

The Council also has in place three Service Level Agreements, each with a three-year term. This enables a financial commitment for a longer support period for these charities as they work to help local people. The recipients are:-

- Reminiscence Learning £4,500 – Supporting local people with dementia
- Wellington Community Counselling £12,000 – providing free and affordable counselling services for the people of Wellington, taking referrals from GPs, PFSA's, and directly from individuals.
- Citizen's Advice Taunton £5,000 – delivering free, impartial and confidential welfare advice both in person and via digital outlets.

The Council also agreed that in future the Finance Committee would have delegated authority to agree grants for up to £3,000. In support of its Carbon Neutral Strategy it also agreed to instigate a Green Grants Policy for 2022/23 to support green initiatives in the town.

## **12. Working Together for the Good of the Community**

The Town Council is an important part of local democracy and the tier of government closest to local people. Councillors and staff continue to work hard to encourage social inclusion and engagement with the widest possible range of residents. Other key objectives remain to have a say in future development locally, to support and advocate for local business, and to promote the success and wellbeing of the town and its residents.

There is an ongoing commitment to ensuring that essential local facilities continue to be available in their fullest range. These include direct provision of discretionary services such as public conveniences, dog waste and litter bins. The Council also advocates on residents' behalf for community services or health facilities. Wherever possible Councillors and staff seek to work closely with other agencies so that a joined up, effective and value-for-money approach is taken to the problems and issues that arise in the area.

## **13. Climate Change**

In September 2021 the Council resolved that it and the town should take rapid steps to reduce carbon emissions going forward, so that becoming carbon neutral by 2030 in line with local, national and international government commitments is achievable. It tasked this Environment and Open Spaces Committee with developing a strategy that sets out how this could be achieved both in relation to the Council's own activities and across the town given the Council's role in place leadership.

A Climate Change Strategy was subsequently agreed by the Council at its March 2022 meeting and in November 2022 the Council adopted a tree planting strategy with the aim of increasing tree coverage in the town. Moving this work forward is the role of the Town Council's Project Officer.

In February 2022, the Council purchased a field at Westford to protect it from development and to enable the Council and local groups to use it to enhance biodiversity as part of the Climate Change Strategy. Over the last year Transition Town Wellington, working with local residents, has planted close to 200 trees at the top of the field and as a coppice in one corner at the bottom of the field.

In January 2023 the Town Council entered in to a 150 year lease on a peppercorn rent with Somerset West and Taunton Council (now Somerset Council) for 64 acres of land linking Tonedale Mill to The Basins and then over to Rockwell Green and Hilly Head. This will contribute significantly to the delivery of the Council's Climate Change Strategy.

One of the projects taking place on the land is the establishment of a Community Farm. Last year the Council funded a feasibility study for the farm and in April 2023 a pilot area was ploughed in advance of planting crops for this season.

The Council will continue to work in partnership with a range of community groups to deliver the strategy.

#### **14. Young People**

The Council aims to encourage interest in the community and civic affairs. The Civic Award Scheme has been run this year with Beech Grove Primary School

The Town Council is also sponsoring awards for Court Fields School and the Senior school at Wellington School where one pupil from each year group who has been deemed to have made a significant contribution to the community over the last year will receive an award and gift vouchers for Bookshop by the Blackdowns.

A key Council priority remains to continue actively working with relevant parties so a meaningful youth service can be maintained in the town. The Council has a three-year agreement in place which provides annual funding of around £26,000 to Wellington Community Support Service. Unfortunately, it has been unable to recruit youth workers this year, but funding has remained available to support projects when required.

The Council has entered in to a three-year Service Level Agreement with Mind to contribute to the delivery of a Peer Youth Support programme designed to support vulnerable young people in the community and has provided funding to the local Community Police Team to set up activities for young people at risk of committing anti-social behaviour.

We are keen to ensure that young people have an opportunity to make their views known on local issues that concern them.

#### **15. Local Groups and Charities**

The Council maintains a close connection with several local groups working for the benefit and wellbeing of residents. The Council established a Cost of Living Crisis fund in October 2022 which was used to provide support to some local schools and groups to support families who were experiencing difficulties.

#### **16. Wellington One**

This service, which co-ordinates a multi-agency 'one team' approach to statutory services and local charities, continues to meet monthly and is a significant example of working together. Following the Somerset West and Taunton merger this vital service was to be discontinued. However, a range of

local bodies, including the Town Council agreed to provide funding to save this extremely valuable service.

By retaining this multi-agency group the Council can realise many of its aspirations and focus on the areas it considers to be important, such as welfare and wellbeing, as well as support for vulnerable residents and reduction in crime.

### **17. Wellington Heritage**

The Council has increased its commitment to supporting the protection and development of heritage sites in the town and Heritage at Risk Team now employed by Somerset Council. It committed £50,000 of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to support work at Toneworks to enable access to parts of the site later in 2023. As mentioned earlier, it also amended the terms of reference of the Environment and Open Spaces Committee to give it an oversight of heritage matters in the town and renamed it The Environment and Heritage Committee. This committee receives regular reports from the Heritage at Risk Team on ongoing issues and work at Tonedale Mill, Toneworks, the Rockwell Green water towers and the conservation area in the town.

Alongside organisations already mentioned, the Council is indebted to the many groups and charities around the town who give much free time to provide or support activities and opportunities for the public, or who advocate for pleasant, safe and environmentally friendly surroundings.

### **18. The Local Policing Team**

Sergeant Dan Bishop who had led the team for the last few years left the town having gained promotion and was replaced by Sergeant Kat Forrest who continued to attend most Town Council meetings and provides a report on the team's activities and any emerging issues within the town. As a result of this, the relationship between the Town Council and the team is effective and ensures that matters of mutual interest are shared and acted on in a timely way. Unfortunately, we have now been told that Sergeant Forrest is leaving again because of promotion and she will be replaced by Sergeant Jon O'Connor.

### **19. Transport**

#### **The Railway**

Progress continues to be made on reinstating the station in the town. The site for the station near the Longforth Farm development has been identified and the Planning Application for the site including the station, is due to be submitted at any time. The Town Council will continue to be represented on the oversight body through Councillor Marcus Barr and the Town Clerk.

#### **Cycling**

As reported last year, the Town Council jointly, with Somerset West and Taunton Council, funded a professional feasibility study for a cycle route between Wellington and Taunton. This was commissioned by the local 'Wellington Wheelers' group and carried out by Sustrans. The Project Group has been meeting regularly through the year and will continue to do so in 2023/4. The group is reviewing route options and the Council is represented on the Group by Councillor Janet Lloyd and the Town Clerk.

Last year we reported that the Council had allocated £3,000 to a project working in partnership with Somerset County Council and SWT Council to develop a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan that will identify key routes in the town and will place the Council in a strong position to apply for funding to improve cycling and walking infrastructure in the town as and when opportunities arise. Work has been taking place on this across the year and is close to completion. The Council is grateful to the Wellington Footpath Volunteers and the Wellington Wheelers Cycle Club for their support in carrying out the audits.

## 20. Town Centre

The Town Centre Committee were awarded an additional £25,00, Emergency High Street Recovery Funding from Somerset West & Taunton District Council. Expenditure deadline being 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. Projects included:

- Christmas Street Entertainment and Creative Workshop
- Community Photography Project – promoting 24 small businesses
- Refurbishment of two town centre planters
- Installation of benches
- Living displays on town centre railings
- Street banners for events planned in 2023
- Three town centre notice boards

The Town Centre Committee delivered two town centre events:

Queen's Platinum Jubilee Street Fair – 4<sup>th</sup> June 2023

Christmas Market & Lights Switch On – 26<sup>th</sup> November 2022

### **Pop-Up-Shop**

The Pop-Up shop has continued to operate and over the year and was booked for 36 weeks in 2022/23, a booking rate of 69%. It is also fully booked for the remainder of 2023.

The shop is offered for free to organisations who are fund raising for themselves or other charities. The Town Council utilised the Pop-Up Shop when it was not booked in February 2022 to work with Transition Town Wellington and Wellington Community Food to promote climate action and the Council's "Vision for Wellington". The community groups that shared the space were grateful for the opportunity and are now considering renting the Pop-Up Shop for their future projects.

The shops was also used to host consultation events for the Green Corridor and by Somerset West and Taunton Council for consultation on the development of the Wellington Place Plan

### **Town Centre Promotional Space**

The promotional space provides an opportunity to enhance the vibrancy of the town centre through use by local groups for selling, promotion, fundraising or entertainment purposes. The Council does not charge for charitable use, but a small amount of income is gained through the weekly commercial letting of the space. Being in the heart of the town centre the promotional space is a great location for activities including those directly organised by the Town Council.

## 21 Local Government Reorganisation

On 1 April 2023 the new Somerset Council came in to being replacing the previous two tier structure in Somerset of district and county councils.

The Town Council welcomes the potential opportunities provided by this change to play a greater role in the delivery and management of services for the town's residents and to take more responsibility for the management of public assets in Wellington.

The Town Council is well placed to develop its role and will work with the local community and neighbouring Parish Councils to ensure that the residents of Wellington are properly represented in shaping the future delivery of services in the town.

## 22. Other Service considerations

Once again, provision has been made in the Council's budget to fund extra cuts of highway grass and weed spraying next year, should this prove necessary.

The Council also has a stock of grit for use in the main streets in the event of severe winter weather and made funding available for clearance of some local roads should heavy snow fall. Happily, neither was needed.

### **23. The Allotments**

The Town Council's allotments (102 plots) at The Basins, Corams Lane, continued to prove extremely popular and at year end the waiting list totalled around 23 applicants. Plots are allocated in strict order of application date, with a £2.00 annual rent increase in September. Tenancies are brought to end by hirers giving notice, or less frequently when plots are not maintained to a satisfactory standard despite requests to do so. All indications suggest growth in demand in the year ahead. The Town Council are now members of the National Allotment Society which offers support and legal advice. It also provides valuable growing advice which can be passed on to our tenants.

We are also working with Bloor Homes in relation to the area of land that has been set aside for allotments on the Longforth Farm development. There has been a hold up in this land being handed over as Bloor homes were required as part of the Section 106 Agreement to install a main water connection on the site. We have recently had confirmation from Somerset Council, that Wessex Water will complete this work in the next few weeks.

### **24. Longforth Road Public Toilets**

Unfortunately, just before Christmas a car drove into the front of the toilet block causing significant damage requiring their closure. Following a competitive process, the Council has appointed an external Project Manager to manage the insurance claim and to advise on subsequent remodelling of the block.

### **25. Community Warden**

During the year ID Vere informed the Council that it was no longer going to be able to provide a community warden service and after some consideration the Council decided to appoint its own Community Warden. Unfortunately to date we have not been able to recruit to the post and the Council will be considering how it wishes to proceed. In the meantime, Somerset Council are providing support to the Town Council when needed.

### **26. Community Safety**

The Council has two community defibrillators, one at the Longforth Road public toilets and the other at the Rockwell Green Christian Fellowship Centre. A defibrillator at the Reminiscence Learning Centre was funded through a Council grant.

The town is now very well-provided with defibrillators at many locations, good news considering that survival rates increase hugely where heart attack victims are given 'shock' treatment.

### **27. Sports provision**

Having committed funding last year to support the rugby and football clubs in their plans to expand or relocate their provision little progress has been made for a variety of reasons.

The project to deliver a 3G pitch at Court Fields School is progressing well and it is hoped will be in place during the course of the next Council year.

An area of land has also been identified in the Green Corridor where it may be possible to locate junior sports pitches and the Council has agreed to fund feasibility studies to enable that work to progress.



## **28. Footpaths**

Somerset Council has overall responsibility for footpaths and public rights of way. We receive a small grant from Somerset Council towards the cost of footpath maintenance and contribute extra sums as required. Walking remains popular and the maintenance of public rights of way is very important to the local community.

The Council and walkers continue to benefit greatly from the services of local volunteer Steve Saunders who replaced Tom Borg and his wife, Eunice, as Parish Path Liaison Officer. He is supported by two footpath volunteers who generously give their time to surveying, strimming and clearing footpaths.

All definitive footpaths within the town boundary are regularly inspected and a schedule drawn up to keep them clear and passable. There is also an interactive online map showing Wellington's public rights of way.

## **29. Conclusion**

This has been another positive year for the Council. As can be seen from this report, the Council has been proactive in running events, supporting local sports clubs and community groups and securing land for the benefit for the whole community. It has developed further its partnerships with Somerset Council and local community groups and will continue to do so to reflect its developing role as a service deliverer, place shaper, culture creator and builder of community resilience. Internal systems and processes have been developed to enable the Council to better monitor its work and this, along with a healthy budget, puts it in a strong position to take advantage of the opportunities that will come its way through the restructuring of local government in Somerset and any other opportunities that present themselves to enhance the quality of life for the residents of the town.

Mark Lithgow  
Mayor of Wellington 2022/23

Dave Farrow  
Town Clerk

## APPENDIX A

### WELLINGTON TOWN COUNCIL COUNCILLORS LIST

#### Rockwell Green

<p><b>Zoe Barr</b> 21 Meyer Close Wellington TA21 9FE Tel: 07510 872972 zuebarr@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk</p>	<p><b>Andrew Govier</b> 47 Laburnum Road Wellington TA21 8EN Tel: 01823 667589 andrewgovier@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk</p>
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#### Wellington East

<p><b>Wayne Battishill</b> 31 Aspin Road TA21 9EE Tel: 01823 975424 waynebattishill@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk</p>	<p><b>Ross Henley</b> 20 Trinity Close TA21 8TZ Tel: 01823 665988 rosshenley@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk</p>
<p><b>Janet Lloyd</b> Hazelwood, Whiteball Wellington TA21 0LS Tel: 01823 672877 janetlloyd@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk</p>	<p><b>Nancy Powell-Brace</b> 3 Clifford Mews Wellington TA21 8QJ Tel: 07565 688827 nancypowell-brace@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk</p>

#### Wellington North

<p><b>Samuel Booker</b> 23 Old Court Mews Wellington TA21 8FR Tel: 07999469540 samuelbooker@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk</p>	<p><b>Mark Lithgow</b> 17 Clifford Terrace, Scott's Lane Wellington TA21 8PQ Tel: 01823 662540 marklithgow@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk</p>
<p><b>Kieran Canham</b> 38A Church Fields Wellington TA21 8SE Tel: 07879 441516 kierancanham@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk</p>	<p><b>Mike McGuffie</b> 13 Tone Hill TA21 0AU Tel: 07922 831733 michaelmcguffie@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk</p>
<p><b>John Thorne</b> 3 Rose Mews, Fore Street TA21 8AA Tel: 01823 663146 johnthorne@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk</p>	

#### Wellington South

<p><b>Marcus Barr</b> 16 Brooklands Rd, Rockwell Green Wellington TA21 9DJ Tel: 01823 661817 marcusbarr@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk</p>	<p><b>Chris Booth</b> 25 Stoneleigh, Tonedale Wellington TA21 0AR Tel: 07956 607829 chrisbooth@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk</p>
<p><b>Catherine Govier</b> 6 Hyacinth Terrace Mantle Street Wellington TA21 8BE</p>	

Tel: 07928425163 catherinegovier@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk	
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**Wellington South East**

<b>Keith Wheatley</b> 9 Wellesley Park Wellington TA21 8PT Tel: 07710 326698 keithwheatley@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk	
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## APPENDIX B

### COMMITTEES WITH MEMBERSHIP 2022/23

**Finance Committee:** Councillors M Barr, Z Barr, S Booker, A Govier, M Lithgow, J Lloyd, M McGuffie, N Powell-Brace and J Thorne

**Environment and Open Space Committee:** Councillors M Barr, C Booth, K Canham, C Govier, M Lithgow, M Lloyd and M McGuffie

**Policy and Resources Committee:** Councillors M Barr, S Booker, K Canham, A Govier, M Lithgow, J Lloyd, M McGuffie, J Thorne and K Wheatley

**Allotments Committee:** Councillors W Battishill, C Booth K Canham, C Govier, M Lithgow, and J Lloyd

**Town Centre Committee:** Councillors M Barr, C Booth, K Canham, C Govier, M Lithgow, J Lloyd, N Powell-Brace, and K Wheatley.

### REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES 2022/23

**Wellington Twinning Association** (2 members) Councillor J Lloyd and one vacancy

**Wellington Community Association** (2 members) Councillors C Govier and M Lithgow

**Somerset Association of Local Councils** (2 members) Councillor J Lloyd and one vacancy

**Hospital of Sir John Popham Knight** (3 members) Councillors M Lithgow and M McGuffie – one vacancy

**Friends of Wellington Park** (1 member) Councillor M Lithgow

**Wellington Museum and Local History Committee** (1 member) Councillor K Canham

**Devon and Somerset Metro Group** (1 member) Councillor M Barr

**Representative Governor at Wellington School** Councillor K Wheatley

**Wellington One** (2 members) Councillors C Booth and C Govier

**Basins Volunteer Group** (2 members) Councillors M Barr and N Powell-Brace