



WELLINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2023/2024

JOINT REPORT OF THE TOWN MAYOR FOR 2023/24 COUNCILLOR MARCUS BARR 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 line with the Somerset Council election cycle.

At the time of writing the report the political composition of the Council is Labour four, Liberal Democrat five, Conservative one and Independent four with one vacancy. Importantly however, Councillors work together to serve the town without political bias.

During this year three councillors have stood down, Nancy Powell-Brace and Wayne Battishill who represented the East Ward and Zoe Barr who represented Rockwell Green, and one, Samuel Booker who represented the North Ward, automatically ceased to be a councillor having failed to attend a meeting for 6 months. As a result of these vacancies the Council co-opted Sean Pringle-Kosikowsky and Justin Cole to vacancies in the East Ward of the Council and Steven Mercer was elected unopposed to the vacancy in the North Ward. Notice of the vacancy in Rockwell Green was published on 10 May.

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

3. Overview

This has been another busy year for the Council as it has taken on more responsibilities, run significant events in the town and continued to raise its profile in the town and with partners.

Last year saw 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 year Somerset Council has faced severe financial difficulties and was only able to set a balanced budget for 2024/5 with support from central government and by asking town and parish councils to consider taking on responsibilities for services and assets, albeit with no additional funding to do so. Much of the latter part of 2023/4 was taken up with discussion with

Somerset Council in relation to what that meant for Wellington and I will cover this in more detail later in the report.

4. Council Priorities

The Vision for the Town Council that had initially been agreed in March 2022 remains in place 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

The current staff of the Council are as follows:

Town Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) – Dave Farrow

Deputy Town Clerk/Deputy RFO – Alice Kendall

Assets and Events Officer – Annete Kirk

Open Spaces Manager (appointed April 2024) – Darren Hill

Part Time Climate Change Project Officer – Stephen Tate

Part Time Community Connect Champion – Peter Joint

Project Assistant – Rebecca Hunt

Community Warden – Sheldon Hancock

The Council will be advertising for a part time receptionist shortly and as it takes in more responsibility in 2024/5 will be expanding its Community Warden team.

6. Council Offices

In March 2024 the Council completed the purchase of its base at 28-30 Fore Street from Somerset Council.

The intention had been that we would open up 30 Fore Street as an accessible reception area but this has been put on hold as there was a need for a temporary premises for the Banking Hub whilst its permanent location is finalised. The Council agreed to offer this space to avoid the town being without any banking facilities when Lloyds Bank closed its branch. It is hoped that by the end of the summer this year the reception area will be handed back to us.

The 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 January 2024 the Council approved the budget and Precept for 2024/25.

It was a challenging budget to set because of the complications caused by Somerset Council's financial difficulties and uncertainty about what the Town Council would have to manage or pay for in 2024/5 or what it might need to prepare to take on in 2025/6. This only really became clear early in January 2024 with the budget having to be finalised and Precept set by the end of that month.

The Council agreed that in 2024/5 it would:

- Take on the management and eventually the ownership of the public toilets in the town to avoid them being closed
- Pay for bedding planting in Wellington Park and around the town centre including the watering of baskets, containers and beds
- Pay for the unlocking and locking of Wellington Park
- Take on a range of minor highways functions
- Pay for the continuing provision of a monitored CCTV service for the town
- Contribute to the funding of a school crossing patrol at St John's School

It also agreed that in 2025/6 it will take on responsibility and eventually ownership of all the green spaces in the town including Wellington Park, the Recreation Ground, the Playing Fields and all the play areas in the town.

To enable the Town Council to take on these responsibilities in 2024/5 and to prepare for 2025/6 required a substantial increase in the Precept from £466,332 in 2023/4 to £945,392 for 2024/5 – a 96.4% increase. This was not unique to Wellington with Taunton increasing its Precept by 172.9% and Bridgwater by 163.5%.

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.

For 2024/5 the Council has reorganised its committee structure so that it now has five sitting committees:

Policy and Finance
Planning
Economic Development
Environment
Community

The Green Corridor Advisory Board has continued to meet 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 Committee. The Council also established an Allotments Advisory Board which again reports to the Environment Committee.

During 2023/4 we also established a Basins Allotment Advisory Board to replace the Allotments Committee which consists of plot holders, councillors and officers. It reports to the Environment Committee.

Details of the committees 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.

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 they have attended to the Council every month.

Councillor Janet Lloyd has been elected as Mayor for 2024/25.

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, until the next Council elections in 2027.

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 2023/24 were:

Eat Festival	£750.00
Life Education Wessex	£310.00
Life Education Wessex	£620.00
Rockwell Green War Memorial Institute	£3,000.00
Skintight Samba	£500.00
St John's Church	£960.00
St Margaret's Hospice Care	£1,500.00
Transition Town Wellington	£3,000.00
Wellington Cricket Club	£720.00
Wellington Home Education	£240.00
Wellington Rugby Club	£2,000.00
Wellington Street Pastors	£2,000.00
Wellington Tennis Club	£1,120.00

Wellington Twinning Association	£2,711.00
Whirlwinds Academy	£3,362.22
Wellington Carnival	£1,885.00
Total	£24,678.22

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 £12,000 – Supporting local people with dementia
- Wellington Community Counselling £17,400 – providing free and affordable counselling services for the people of Wellington, taking referrals from GPs, PFSAs, and directly from individuals.
- Citizen’s Advice Somerset £5,000 – delivering free, impartial and confidential welfare advice both in person and via digital outlets.
- Mind Somerset £5,565 – affordable (free or subsidised) weekly 2hour Peer Group session for 15 young people with a min. of 3 youth workers present.

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 the 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 a place of 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 Climate Change 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.

The Community Farm is now in its second year and the Council agreed to extend both the amount of land being ~~used~~ used for the farm and the length of the initial lease.

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 year 5 students from Beech Grove Primary School, Rockwell Green Primary School, and Wellesley Park Primary School. The age group of the Civic Award Scheme was changed from year 6 as these children found it harder to complete the award amid SATs.

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 into 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 in late 2023. Following the reorganisation of our committee structure oversight of heritage matters in the town now sits with the Economic Development Committee. This committee will continue to receive 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. In addition to setting the budget for 2024/5 the Council set aside a sum of money to commission specialist heritage support if required given the reduction in staffing in Somerset Council's heritage at Risk Team.

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 Jon O'Connor has been in post for a year and attends 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.

19. Transport

The Railway Station

Progress continues to be made on reinstating the station in the town and it is hoped that it will be up and running by Spring/Summer 2026. The Planning Application for the site adjacent to the station has been approved by Somerset Council and the Town Council has agreed to lead on the design of and provide some funding for the Station Square and take responsibility for its management and the management of other green spaces on and adjacent to the development. The Town Council will continue to be represented on the oversight body through Councillor Marcus Barr and the Town Clerk.

Cycling

The work by Somerset Council on developing a cycle route between Wellington and Taunton has not progressed as we would have hoped with no funding being available to deliver anything that is proposed.

However, a separate project is gaining traction which is the concept of a greenway route between Wellington and Taunton stations utilising the route of the Grand Western Canal. The Council has allocated funding to support this project as has the developer responsible for the development around Wellington Station.

Work on developing The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan has been contributed although it is taking longer than we had hoped for the consultants to deliver the final report. This continues to be chased.

20. Town Centre

(i) Events

The Town Council held two significant events in 2023/4 namely to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III, where we held a Family Fun Day and gave a commemorative coin to all children that are educated in the town, and to grant The Freedom of the Town to The Rifles Regiment when the Regiment paraded through the town with fixed bayonets and a marching band followed by a reception at Wellington School.

The end of November saw our new Christmas Lights in place along with a tree that would have done Trafalgar Square proud with both receiving exceptionally positive feedback.

(ii) Pop-Up-Shop

The Pop-Up shop has continued to operate and over the year and was booked for 45 weeks in 2023/24, an increase on the previous year of 25% and an overall booking rate of 87% over the year. At present there are only two weeks available in July and bookings are already being made for 2025.

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 as part of its activities to commemorate its 50th anniversary in April. As well as historical information being displayed, current projects were publicised.

In January, the Mayor used the shop to raise funds for his chosen charities.

(iii) 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.

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.

September saw parts of the town experiencing severe flooding with a number of houses being flooded particularly Ditchford Cottages at Hilly Head and on Oaken Ground. As a result, Somerset Council is conducting an inquiry in accordance with its statutory responsibilities and the Town Council is reviewing its emergency planning arrangements.

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 5 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.

After a lengthy and drawn out wait we are now on the verge of taking ownership of the Longforth Farm Allotment site. The site has been fenced off and once the transfer is confirmed we will be able to start inviting people on to the site to set their allotments up.

24. Longforth Road Public Toilets

Following the incident in December 2023 the block was at last demolished in April 2024 and consideration is now being given to how they should be replaced.

25. Community Warden

In September we appointed Sheldon Hancock as our first employed Community Warden and acquired an electric van with support from Wellington Nissan.

26. Community Safety

The Council has one community defibrillator at the Rockwell Green Christian Fellowship Centre. A defibrillator at the Reminiscence Learning Centre was funded through a Council grant. The one that had been located on the Longforth Road toilet block had to be removed when the block was demolished but there are plans to reinstate it when we are able to.

The town is 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. The rugby club has recently started work on expanding and improving its provision and the funding for the football club is now being used to contribute to developing junior sports pitches at Longforth farm.

Work on installing the 3G pitch at Court Fields School also commenced recently and it is hoped it will be in place for the start of the next academic 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.

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. Increased staff capacity reflects the growing role of the Council as Somerset Council devolves more services to town and parish councils. The Council is clear that as and when it takes services on for Somerset Council it will ensure that they are delivered to a higher standard and at better value than before.

Councillor Marcus Barr
Mayor of Wellington 2023/24

Dave Farrow
Town Clerk

May 2024



WELLINGTON TOWN COUNCIL COUNCILLORS LIST

Rockwell Green

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Wellington South East

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Wellington Town Council Committee Membership and Representation on Outside Bodies

Committee Membership

Policy & Finance Committee

Councillors: M Barr, C Cole, A Govier, C Govier, M Lithgow, J Lloyd, S Mercer, S Pringle-Kosikowsky and J Thorne.

Environment Committee

Councillors: C Booth, C Govier, M Lithgow, M McGuffie, S Pringle-Kosikowsky and K Wheatley (1 vacancy). C Booth, C Govier, M Lithgow, M McGuffie, S Pringle-Kosikowsky and K Wheatley (1 vacancy).

Community Committee

Councillors: C Booth, J Cole, A Govier, C Govier, M Lithgow, J Lloyd, and M McGuffie.

Economic Development Committee

Councillors: C Booth, M Lithgow, J Lloyd, M McGuffie, S Mercer, J Thorne and K Wheatley.

Planning Committee

Councillors: C Booth, A Govier, C Govier, J Lloyd, M McGuffie, S Mercer, S Pringle-Kosikowsky and J Thorne (1 vacancy).

Representation on Outside Bodies

Wellington Twinning Association Councillor S Mercer

Wellington Community Association Councillor M Lithgow

Somerset Association of Local Councils Councillor J Lloyd



Hospital of Sir John Popham Knight Councillor M Lithgow

Friends of Wellington Park Councillor M Lithgow

Wellington Museum and Local History Committee Councillor S Pringle-Kosikowsky

Devon and Somerset Metro Group Councillor M Barr

Representative Governor at Wellington School Councillor K Wheatley

Wellington One Councillors A Govier and M McGuffie

Basins Volunteer Group Councillor M Barr

Local Community Network Councillor C Govier