

**Minutes of the Winsford Annual Assembly
Held on Thursday 14th May 2026 at 7.30pm in Winsford Village Hall**

Present: Colin Wilkins (CW) Chairman of the Parish Council), Jennifer Yates (Clerk to the Parish Council) and 28 parishioners and guests, including parish councillors Sarah Little, Sam Winzer, Kevin Connell and Mike Hillier and Somerset Councillor Steven Pugsley.

Colin Wilkins opened the meeting at 7.30 and welcomed everyone

Apologies: Councillors Bryany Neal and Ian Brooks, Somerset Councillor Frances Nicholson and Claire Sams.

1 Introduction: CW explained the format of the meeting and invited people to ask questions at the end of each session.

2 Winsford Church Council: David Godsall gave his Churchwarden's report summarised as follows;

After 19 years I have now decided to retire from my Churchwarden role as I have decided to move house to be nearer to my family. It has been a great privilege, but not without its challenges. Responsibility for the maintenance of a Grade 1 Listed building, not to mention supporting a couple of Grade 1 Rectors, has involved a great deal over those years, but it has been incredibly rewarding. My responsibilities will be divided up in future. When I arrived in the village 28 years ago the Rector, Terry Staples had 4 churches, which meant two or three services, in Winsford, every month, with a larger number of regular church goers living in the village. Now, David Weir has a Benefice of 8 parishes. We cannot have as many services in our church as in the past, but it is encouraging to see so many people going to other churches in the Benefice for services when we don't have one here.

Our architect completed her quinquennial inspection in August – happily there was nothing major or unexpected. Those who have been into the church recently will have seen the large area in the Northwest corner wall where the plaster has been removed, and also the scaffolding outside, where work has been done to prevent water getting in. It is important that everything gets properly dried out before replastering takes place, which will probably not be until this time next year.

Sadly, Dan Passmore is no longer able to mow the churchyard, but we are extremely grateful to Nick Edwards, who keeps the grass in this part of the village under control, for taking it on, we are very grateful. The pathways still need further clearing. The verges of the main path have been cut back so that now people can walk 2 abreast once more. Both the other paths still need to have the grass removed – one to expose the tarmac and the other to remove the grass that has grown across the gravel. Sarah Cox is planning to put a notice in the next issue of Across Exmoor suggesting a volunteer working party to help with this, and she is also – seeking occasional help with cleaning inside the church.

Heartfelt thanks to Carol Cottle and the bell ringers, to Brenda Staples, both as organist and as the leader and inspiration behind the Benefice Choir, to Bernie for his incredible support to both and to Mel Mileham and those who help her with their amazing flower arrangements and who would welcome helping hands. To John Titcombe for all that he does, especially with the linen; the Urrys for the daily unlocking and locking of the church, a task generously taken on by Lynne Davey when Jill is not able to; and Ian Chamberlain for his noble work in climbing up and down the 95 steps in the tower to raise the

appropriate flag. Thank you also to all members of the PCC, past and present and my fellow warden Richmond who has been on the PCC for just under 70 years.

The Church is, I know, regarded as a very important part of the village – the proof of that is that many of those who support us with bellringing, cleaning, flower arranging and singing are not regular church goers. It is very gratifying to see that the visitors book shows us just how many visitors to the village come into the church and write very appreciative comments. Thank you all for your support.

3 Winsford Recreation Association: Frazer Lawrence

Brigadier Lawrence mentioned how much he values the support of the Trustees. Their primary role is the upkeep of the recreational facilities in the village, but also to conduct activities for the benefit of the village, including fundraising.

The cricket pitch team do a lot of work keeping the recreation field and pavilion in good condition. The WRA have taken responsibility for trees, hedges, and meeting the pavilion costs including items such as insurance, electricity and fire inspections. There was an unexpected cost of needing to remove a number of trees which is ongoing but largely completed now.

The Tennis Courts were de-mossed with a machine during the previous year, and have recently been sprayed to keep this, and weeds, under control. The courts are looking in good condition given their age, and this will continue to be monitored. Thanks were given to Mike Hillier for his support with this, and his work on the tennis shed. The cricketers have taken on maintenance for the area around the courts, to be supported by a contractor.

A bench has been installed on the church grounds engraved for Jayne Davis's son Ollie as some of the contributions from the funeral and wake were donated to the WRA and they wished to make a commemoration in his name.

Events have included a VE day picnic, a duck race and skittles event, the Jersey Boys, Halloween and Santa at Christmas. Thanks were given to Steve Pickard for organising a successful quiz night. Some events are more profitable than others, but the pastoral value of events such as Santa's visit are viewed as very beneficial. Just over £1,000 has been given out in 100 club prizes. The 100 club income supports paying for routine costs such as the insurance, etc. Following these costs and the prizes there is usually around £1,000 income which can then be used towards unexpected or unusual costs such as the trees this year. Please do renew subscriptions, and there is currently a box in the shop where people can place their ideas for what kind of events they would like going forward.

Thanks were given to the Trustees. Special thanks were given to Jane Orchiston and Ros Rees who are standing down shortly. David and Jayne Luscott were also thanked for their help, and Sue Hayes who helps with fundraising. New Trustees are being sought and please make contact if you can offer support. Thanks were also given to all those who support the events.

A question was asked about use of the tennis courts. People do travel from Dulverton and Minehead and pay their 100 club subscriptions as local people are asked to in order to use the facilities.

4 Moors Movies: Prepared by Claire Sams, read out by Colin Wilkins

Winsford Moor Movies has been running for about 20 years now. The current committee of five has been in post for about 2 years, with Evelyn Connell being involved for much longer and Claire for about 5 years.

It is an organisation committed to providing regular film screenings for the local community, and those from the surrounding area. Films are shown on the second Tuesday of the month between September and April. There are currently 30 members, paying £8 per year and £3 per film. This provides good value for regular attendees. Non members are welcome to attend at the cost of £5.

Films are chosen from a menu of recent releases by a charity called Moviola who provide the licence for each film for a fee and percentage of the takings. A variety of genres are offered each season. After each film refreshments are offered, where possible themed to relate in some way to the film.

Recently there have been a couple of occasions where the sound quality was not good, mainly due to the way the films were recorded. There does seem to be an issue with the hearing loop system and the Moor Movies equipment which it is anticipated will be fixed soon. The committee are exploring the possibility of replacing some equipment to include the facility for streaming films in future. A donation has been received already from a bingo fund organised by Sue Hayes.

Thank you for your support and we hope to see you soon, or hear your suggestions for how to appeal to an even larger audience.

5 Winsford Village Hall Committee: Sue Hayes.

There is currently an 8 member committee. The weekly coffee club is very popular and money raised is used to support events and local organisations, including the church and cricket club.

Other regular events include Bowls, circuit training, table tennis and pickleball each week. Monthly events include an art club, Moor Movies and a craft club which make items to sell at an event at the end of the year. The Winn club offers talks from visitors during winter months, and trips in the summer with upcoming trips planned for Buckfast Abbey and Rosemoor.

The hall is also used for meetings by organisations such as the Parish Council, church meetings, the Exmoor Society and Caractacus housing. Events have included a quiz night, harvest supper, a cancer charity coffee morning, craft fayres, bingos, some special breakfasts and Father Christmas.

The Fete is on August 8th this year, with a planning meeting on 1st June, all are welcome. A Strawberry Tea will be hosted by Sue to raise funds for the Recreation Association on 5th July.

Thanks were given to all who use the hall, the committee appreciate and rely on your support.

6 George Joyce Charity Trust: Richmond Harding

Mr Harding has been a trustee for many years, and has been chair of the Trust for over 20 years. He has recently resigned as his grandson has taken up the tenancy of the farm. The Trust was set up in 1652 when East Nurcott farm, with 126 acres and a farmhouse, was left in Mr Joyce's will to the three parishes of Winsford, Cutcombe and Wootton Courtenay. Surplus funds were to be shared between those parishes for those in need.

The trustees are made up of three representatives from each parish. Winsford is now represented by Jeremy Brown, Steven Hayes and Ted Williams. There is a strong

farming focus on the committee to ensure the farm is being used and developed appropriately. The trustees are very knowledgeable and are supported by a secretary who keeps things in good order, and the local auctioneer.

Up until recently they were able to share approximately £4,500 per annum to the parishes. However, the house has required modernisation and the surplus funds have been diverted to support this which has cost £54,000. Some funds were donated to meet these costs and there will not be any funds available to be shared amongst the parishes until these donations have been repaid.

Colin Wilkins presented Mr Harding with a thank you gift from the Parish Council for his many years of representing the village on the Trust and Parish Council, and wished him a happy retirement.

7 Henry Leigh Educational Charity Trust: Debbie Debney

The Trust is a charity established from the proceeds of the sale of the former Withypool Primary School in July 2006 and is named after the gentleman who gave the land for the original school to be built.

The purpose of the Trust is to support the educational needs of persons of 25 and under who are, or have been, resident in the parishes of Withypool, Hawkridge, Exford, Simonsbath and Winsford. These educational needs can be technical, artistic, social or physical, and activities such as school trips, swimming lessons, piano lessons, trampolining and driving lessons have all been supported over the years. Further contributions have supported course books and equipment to be used at university. Since 2006 over 800 grants have been offered amounting to over £117,000. At the last meeting in April 10 residents of Winsford benefitted from contributions.

The Trust meets 3 times per year. Applications should be made in advance by sending a form to the Trust secretary. The next cut off date will be August 31st. Details can be found on the Trust website, and in the Across Exmoor magazine at relevant times.

8 Moorland Food Bank – Guest Speaker John Preston

The Moorland Food Bank started in Dulverton church during the Covid period. It then moved to the old school before the Youth Club recently became available. A huge amount of work has taken place to upgrade the building over the last 18 months. This has included a new kitchen and storage area, and the building has been painted and the flooring replaced thanks to lottery funding. Heating has been put in along with a de-humidifier.

It is important that people understands it covers the area from Wheddon Cross to this side of Tiverton. Donations are received from a wide range of people and organisations, and are collected weekly. The aim is to provide help for people, including using the new kitchen to give cooking lessons to help people learn to cook meals for themselves in an economic way. Thanks were given to all who have donated previously.

The Trustees are all volunteers. There are further plans for the use of the building to develop further and become a community hub. Homestart, Somerset Skills and Learning, a toddler group, a music group and Exmoor Trust all beginning to use the community space. There are also plans to try restore the swimming pool at the old school as a community resource.

Questions;

Who actually owns the building? The Food Bank own the building. Somerset County was able to make an arrangement where ownership of the building was transferred at a low cost, thanks largely to the hard work of Steven Pugsley and Frances Nicholson.

Do the donations currently meet demand? No, at the moment there are just dry goods. However, there is no longer a meals on wheels service and it is hoped to be able to provide hot meals in future, and the kitchen has received an excellent food rating. The need is growing but there remains a stigma about approaching the food bank but there is never any judgement, they are there to help. Schools, doctors and village agents are being asked to help promote their service.

Who can make a referral? Anyone. Referrals are treated confidentially and food can be delivered across the area.

Can you provide fresh food? It is hoped that will be the next step. In Wiveliscombe they have a pantry where people can go and take fresh foods, but this will need planning for. This will include installing raised beds where people can learn to grow their own food.

9 Winsford Parish Council: Colin Wilkins

The Village Green Trust. The trustees are the seven elected Parish Councillors. They are responsible for the Green itself and the Bridge. During the last couple of years all of the furniture has been replaced, using recycled plastic furniture with a lifespan of 25 years. This includes 3 picnic tables, one of which can accommodate a wheelchair. There are also two memorial benches, old and new, and a new rubbish bin which is emptied weekly. The furniture is fixed to the ground to meet health and safety standards, to prevent them being moved near to the swings. The finances are in a good position with the original amount of £30,000 from the sale of the old village hall being maintained due to the interest being used to meet costs, along with donations. A further bench has been requested and is being considered.

A moment of silence was taken to remember Frank Wilmott and Captain Walter Godsall who passed away during the last year.

Winsford Parish Council. Mr Wilkins passed his thanks to his fellow councillors for their time and devotion for attending the monthly meetings, and the clerk. In November Mel Mileham retired from the council and was replaced by Sam Winzer. Mr Wilkins gave special thanks to Mrs Mileham who over her 8 years on the council took responsibility not just for the regular council work but also for representing the parish at Flood Group meetings, and led the work on the village resilience and preparedness, gaining a grant and attending meetings all over the county. Her energy knowledge and dedication shown were unbelievable. She was thanked on behalf of the chair, the Parish Council and all of the residents for her hard work. Mr Wilkins also thanked our Somerset Councillors Steven Pugsley and Frances Nicholson for their regular attendance at meetings, giving advice and passing on information about what is happening at County level which would impact locally.

Winsford Hill Mast is now complete and the Parish Council are delighted that it is now fully working including providing WAN so that local properties should now be able to have a smart meter in their homes. It has been a long process and will make the parish more secure with better mobile phone coverage.

Regarding Highways work has taken place on the Exford Road to clear gullies and drains. A request has been made to complete those that were missed. When potholes are reported they are usually repaired within 2-3 week. Any resident can report problems on the highways using the Somerset Council Highways portal. The local engineer carries out checks in the area on a regular basis. Yellowcombe leat repairs have been carried out, but it is felt that the pipe needs to be sealed in and the Parish Council are following up on this. The pipes at the pub and old rectory were cleared out and water is now going into the river more effectively. Water is still coming onto Halse Lane from fields and runs down but is collected near Karlake House. During bad weather there is run off water

entering the highway from the 'new' development. This has been looked into, including seeking the original planning, but it can't be resolved at present. However, the Parish Councillors have worked hard to resolve the water issues in Halse Lane and feel that it is 90% better now.

The Citizens Advice Service will be handling a grant devolved from the government to help people with heating fuel costs, you can contact Mr Wilkins for details which are also on the Parish Council website.

The Parish Council funds are healthy with a balance of £13,000 with £3,000 in reserve. As a result, the precept was kept at the same level this year with no increase for local residents. It is planned to replace the defibrillator box, and potentially the defibrillator equipment, this year to a more modern design which is lit up and easier to access at all times of day or night when needed for an emergency. This will remain next to the blood kit. It is anticipated that the phone box will be decommissioned at some point now that the mast is in place. It is a Grade 2 listed building and the Parish Council will aim to obtain this.

The Parish Council have been working with Exmoor National Park re plans for the village Car Park. It is in a conservation area now but is in poor condition. Plans have been drawn up for renovation by the Exmoor National Park representative, who recently met with the Parish Councillors on site. Various revisions have been suggested. Once they are complete they can be made available for people to see. There are plans for the potholes to be filled in and a hard surface to be put in place. A border will delineate the land from County Highways. New signage will be put in place. Ownership may be taken over by the Parish Council going forward.

The Parish Council website is currently being updated and the address is being changed to a gov.uk domain as directed by the government. The email address will also be changing. Once this is in place the new details will be shared. Councillors will also have new email addresses in line with national government guidance.

This financial year will be the last for the current Parish Council. In May 2027 the new Parish Council will be elected. Residents may wish to consider whether they would like to put themselves forward.

Questions;

Concern was raised that with copper wire phone lines being taken out, in the event of a power cut there will be no phones if the phone box is decommissioned. Mr Pickard advised that the government want everyone to be using fibre now, and that residents can request they provide a battery which would provide temporary help with personal alarms etc during the upgrade process.

What has the impact been of becoming a conservation area? Mr Wilkins and Mr Pugsley felt that it helps the National Park view the village more favourably and are willing to work to support the village with projects such as the car park.

10 Public Forum

Mr Pickard mentioned that the village website is viewed very regularly along with the facebook page. Those, along with Across Exmoor, provide a good deal of useful community information. They are always willing to publicise local events and news.

11 Conclusion

Mr Connell proposed a vote of thanks to the Chair Mr Wilkins. Mr Wilkins mentioned that he will be carrying out a long walk in aid of the Alzheimer's charity on June 6th. He then proceeded to thank all of his fellow presenters, and to thank everyone for their attention and for attending this evening.