

A draft Framework Guiding Semington Parish Council Activities

Introduction

At its August meeting, the Parish Council considered how to respond to the many ideas arising from the Village Questionnaire survey that was carried out earlier in the year. This document, a draft framework guiding Semington Parish Council activities, is the result.

Following a discussion at its September meeting, the Parish Council wants to adopt this framework to guide its work, but would like input from villagers, businesses and other organisations in the community to ensure we have considered all views before we do so.

The document has 4 sections, beginning with a characterisation of the Semington community. This is followed by a description of the Parish Council, its vision and goals. Then comes the framework itself which sets out 5 themes and the specific activities the Council undertakes in relation to each of these, either directly or by supporting the work of community and other groups. Finally, there is a proposal to use this framework as a means of prioritising and communicating the work of the Council on a rolling 12-month programme.

The Village

Around one thousand people live, work and go to school in the Parish of Semington, which includes the neighbouring rural settlements of Little Marsh and Littleton. Semington is linked by road and other rights of way to the nearby towns of Melksham to the north, and Trowbridge to the southwest. These towns are important to Semington as centres of employment, commerce, transport, secondary schooling, further education, health and leisure. We are well connected to these towns, but we are separate, and culturally distinct, from them.

The character of Semington is actively rural. In and around the parish, we have at least five working farms and several other agricultural small holdings, with much of the land being flood plain and used for non-intensive pasture. The village, which lies to the south of the Kennet & Avon canal, was once dominated by the A350 running through its heart, but the opening of the bypass in 2004 provided a welcome respite, and since then the village has been actively rebuilding its rural character. The High Street is increasingly the heart and hub of the village; the place where people gather at the village hall, the pub or around the Christmas tree. The architecture of the High Street, with its attractive blend of old farmworkers' cottages, grander houses and the C18th pub, is a key element of the rural character of the village. There are 33 listed buildings in Semington.

Semington is well connected, with the A361 and A350 providing road and rural bus network links to neighbouring towns and further afield, where many of the residents work or go to school. But like many Wiltshire villages, we also have multiple rural rights of way. The byway to the west and the old road to the north provide cycle, equestrian and pedestrian access to Trowbridge (via Hilperton) and Melksham respectively. The canal and its towpath also offer pedestrian and cycle access to Trowbridge, Devizes and beyond, as well as to multiple footpaths and minor roads for circular walks and cycle rides.

The community of Semington is active, with over 20 clubs and other groups covering a wide range of interests. There are also multiple small businesses, from farms to garages and narrow boat maintenance to the small businesses at the Turnpike. A wide range of community institutions including the primary school, the Independent Living Centre, the church, village hall and the Somerset Arms and the crematorium actively support the community and bring in visitors.

We are fortunate to have several buildings and structures of significant historical interest, including the 16th century church, the Brunel aqueduct on the canal, multiple pill boxes and other WW2 relics,

Georgian and earlier stone houses, many of which are in the village, but others are in the surrounding countryside including the early 18th century packhorse bridge at Whaddon.

The relatively light agricultural use of the farmland around Semington, with much of it set to grazing and grass cropping, together with the water courses of the canal and brook, provide attractive habitats for wildlife, both flora and fauna. Deer, foxes, badgers, hares and rabbits are complemented by herons, kingfishers, pipistrelle bats, great crested newts, kites, kestrels, ravens and buzzards. Water voles and even otters have been seen in the brook, as well as less welcome mink. The canal is well stocked and draws people from afar to fish, while the brook hosts a wide range of smaller fish and the occasional trout. Wildflowers are abundant throughout the area and ancient hedgerows are evidenced by the huge variety of species they host.

The Parish Council

The Parish Council has nine elected councillors who are guided by an experienced and qualified Clerk. The Council has discretionary and legislative powers and rights laid down by Parliament to represent and provide services for the community. It looks after a number of assets that are held on behalf of the public and supports community groups that use these and other facilities. The council acts as a sounding board for local opinion and is formally consulted by Wiltshire Council on a number of matters affecting the parish, most notably on housing development and other planning issues. It holds all its meetings in public and anyone living or working in the village is able to attend, and raise issues.

Parish Council Vision

Over the next ten years, we want to help the village to further benefit from the reduction in traffic made possible by the A350 bypass. We will build on the actively rural character that residents and visitors know and love. The Parish Council will enable and encourage this vision, using this character as the compass to help guide the decisions we make and the activities we support.

Parish Council Goal

The overall goal of the Parish Council is to promote the best interests of the entire community, consistent with its statutory and financial obligations and within the guidelines of the Vision. To achieve this, the Parish Council sets out to support, safeguard and strengthen the community, to enable social and economic developments that meet the existing and emerging needs of the people who live, work and go to school in the village, to encourage and enable a sense of belonging and inclusion, and to enable individuals, families and organisations in Semington to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from living in this actively rural community.

A Strategic Framework Guiding Parish Council Activities

The work of the Parish Council can usefully be set out under five themes. In what follows we identify how each theme aligns with the vision and goals and then list the specific activities the Council undertakes in relation to each of these themes, either directly or by supporting the work of community and other groups. Our idea is that individual councillors will identify with each of the Themes and to lead on their development.

I Planning and Development

We will seek to influence planning decisions to maintain the character of the village. We do not want to stop all development, but rather ensure that it is proportionate and compatible with our vision and goals and specifically that change happens at a pace that allows the community to adapt. We shall achieve this through ...

- Scrutinising routine planning applications and commenting to Wiltshire Council
- Informing parishioners of significant new proposals; consulting, capturing views and commenting as appropriate
- Encouraging villagers to respond to significant planning proposals
- Responding to statutory consultations
- Conducting village-wide surveys on needs and development priorities
- Representing the village at Wiltshire Council planning committees, community area boards and public inquiries, and liaising with other parish councils
- Monitoring proposed legislative changes and submitting views

2 Transport and Traffic

We will encourage the management of roads and other transport networks in a way that maintains the actively rural character of the village, seeking to reduce the A-road feel of the high street and adjoining roads within the village. We shall achieve this through ...

- Liaising with the Highways Authority and the police (as appropriate) on village traffic issues: speeding, parking, road safety, street furniture, bus gate, speed limits and other traffic management issues including the promotion of road safety improvements.
- Promoting transport links that benefit the village: bus services, cycle routes, bridleways, footpaths
- Identifying changes wanted, and finding ways and means for these to happen
- Representing the village at Community Area Highways meetings
- Consulting with villagers about possible transport developments and supporting appropriate actions that align with our vision and goals

3 Environment and Street Scene

We will actively nurture and enhance the rural character of the village within its wider rural landscape. We shall achieve this through ...

- Encouraging and helping community efforts to keep the built areas clean and attractive by supporting volunteer groups to: pick litter; control weed growth on pavements and in gutters; prepare, plant and maintain displays in village planters; clean and repaint village assets such as telephone kiosk, litter bins, railings at the canal bridge
- Monitoring, maintaining and encouraging the use of rights of way (public footpaths, canal towpath and bridges, bridleways and by-ways) and ensuring they remain open and safe for all users
- Encouraging and helping community efforts to improve and maintain the green environment and natural rural feel of the village by: nurturing, improving and increasing wooded areas (such as Jubilee Wood and the Memorial Oaks); encouraging and maintaining wildlife areas within the built up areas of the village
- Supporting landowners in the maintenance of the rural landscape around the village
- Liaising with home and landowners regarding maintenance of rights of way and of the wider village environment, encouraging them to consider providing permissive rights of access such as those at Giles Wood. Liaising with the Parish Steward, Wiltshire Council, neighbouring parish councils and other organisations (e.g. Ramblers Association) to provide knowhow and support to village groups

4 Community and Communication

We will ensure that members of the community have input to this framework and the themes. We will also ensure that residents know who the Parish Councillors are and can contact them to seek their support and involvement. We shall achieve this through ...

- Encouraging and supporting the work of village groups, clubs and societies financially and in other ways
- Working in support of the Semington, Little Marsh and Littleton Support Group to help meet the needs of parishioners throughout the Covid-19 pandemic
- Communicating with parishioners through all Semington media: magazine, newsletter, village website, and Support Group Facebook page
- Helping promoters of new community initiatives (e.g. village shop) access advice from Wiltshire Council and Community Area experts
- Communicating with local businesses to encourage their engagement with the village and to help them to thrive in the village
- Supporting village social events such as fetes and street parties
- Encouraging members of the village to actively participate in village life. In particular seeking wider support for the activities listed under each of these Themes.
- Maintaining relationships with neighbouring parish councils, villages and towns.

5 Recreation and Wellbeing

We will encourage the village community to be active, enhancing the formal recreational facilities around the village, as well as the wider rural landscape. We shall achieve this through ...

- Encouraging and supporting community groups to develop and maintain parish recreational facilities: St. George's Tennis Court; the Wessex Close Play Area (decision on adoption pending)
- Working with other organisations to promote village use of recreational space: Recreation Ground and football pitch in Little Marsh; St. George's Allotments (once established)
- Supporting efforts to improve public safety within the parish: Neighbourhood Watch; liaising with police to tackle anti-social behaviour
- Encouraging visitors to come to Semington to enjoy its facilities and landscape, walk their dogs, ride their horses and bikes, as well as visiting the pub and other businesses and participating in Semington's organisations to help them thrive

Reviewing and budgeting

This framework will be reviewed by the Parish Council each Autumn with a view to identifying development priorities for the coming year. These priorities will be used in setting the budget in order to ensure [i] that sufficient funds are available for what is planned and [ii] that any resulting increase in the annual precept is proportional and justified.

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Peter Smith, Acting Chair, Semington Parish Council

October 2020