

Great Somerford (incorporating Startley) Parish Council

Annual Parish Meeting

held in The Community Room on the 6th May 2026 at 7.30pm

Minutes

Present; Cllrs Sturgis (Vice Chair), Evans, Todd, Gravell, Phillips, Harrison, Barker & Harper

Also present: Claire Mann (Locum Parish Clerk), Cllr E Threlfall (WC) and ten members of the public.

In the absence of Cllr Griffiths, Cllr Sturgis chaired the meeting

19/26 To receive apologies for absence

Apologies received from Cllr Griffiths.

20/26 To approve minutes of the Annual Parish meeting held on the 21st May 2025

Cllr Sturgis proposed the approval of the Minutes as a correct record, this was seconded by Cllr Harrison and all agreed. Cllr Sturgis signed the minutes.

21/26 To receive Chairs Report.

Attached as appendix 1

22/26 To receive report from Wiltshire Councillor, Elizabeth Threlfall.

It has been an interesting and challenging year with a new LibDem minority administration making lots of changes. I have some concerns about their latest budget and its impact on residents. These include the increase in parking charges in WC car parks, the change to 3 weekly bin collections and £20m of new borrowing. Changes to parking in WC car parks: blue badges have been given free parking all day but for others charges will go up 20% in 2026 plus a further 5% in 2 years time, hours of charging will be extended to 7am - 7pm and include Sundays. My concerns are the damage to our town economies, the costs to enforce additional hours and the greater difficulty for shoppers - which will only benefit online shopping.

Changes to waste collections: from 2027 residual waste will only be collected every 3 weeks. This may cause problems for groups such as families with small children and nappies. Recycling collections will include plastic film and weekly food waste collections will be introduced with caddy bins. Late last year it was announced that two main Household Recycling Centres (or tips) in the North were going to be closed – leaving us only Marlborough and Stanton - but the resulting outcry led to a U-turn and both will stay open for now while another site is identified. However, slots to visit will have to be booked online – despite the evidence during Covid that this increased fly-tipping.

Concerns about road conditions and potholes still fill my inbox. I am now being asked for suggestions of which road repair would bring the greatest improvement for the most people – I welcome your thoughts today. I am told that works in West Street and Hollow Street are already in the system and after the last PC meeting I added sections of Dauntsey Road. I have also recently spotted a new generation speed camera being trialled in Swindon which I am trying to find out about. A reduction in money being invested in road maintenance is a concern, about £4 down per annum on previous allocation and this

despite the decision of the majority LibDem administration to borrow £5m a year to put towards road maintenance. (Worryingly the budget papers show this will cost future generations £58.8m over 60 years) I consider that having roads without bad potholes is the top priority and in my opinion is more urgent than changing speed limits. One bright spot is that an opposition budget proposal for 'lane charging' was adopted – this is the charging of utility companies for the length of time they close off roads. It should raise over £2m a year and encourage companies to speed up works and reduce disruption from closures. Also cheering was the U-turn by the administration of the decision to defund the wonderful LINK community transport scheme – although it is not yet clear where the money for this will come from in the future.

Other changes: Area Boards are going to have a change of name and be reduced to 3 meetings a year from 4. It has been proposed that LHFIFG (Local Highways and Footpaths Improvement Group which deals with small scale road improvements like dropped kerbs) will have its budget halved and be more focussed on larger substantive bids - which are likely to be those in towns rather than villages. Also Parish Stewards will be more centrally controlled.

The administration is very keen on renewable energy projects and keen to get parishes involved in hosting them – but we in the North seem to have been left out of this offensive for now – perhaps because of the hostility shown against Lime Down and Minety BESSs.

My last piece of gloom is the Planning Inspectorate's decision to reject Wiltshire's Local Plan after many years of work and much money has been invested in it. There is a suspicion of politics behind the decision – the assessment was delayed until there was not enough time to amend the Plan. Had it been adopted it would have secured a few years using the previous government's target for housing. Instead we will now we have the Labour government's much higher target (+ 82%) against which to make decisions on planning applications. This will exert huge pressure on committees and officers to approve applications or risk losing at appeal. I already have 4 speculative applications being considered on sites which would never have been in contention before. This rejection also affects the Gypsy and Traveller Plan which now must be started again with a reassessment of numbers and need - using the Labour government's extension of the definition of travellers to include non-travelling 'travellers'.

Recent Great Somerford news: I have no update as yet on the HGV signs for Winkins Lane but the next LHFIFG meeting is in early June. The pruning of the trees outside Manor Park was undertaken by SSE. Initially they only cut the branches near the cables leaving the trees looking lopsided. I spoke to the tree surgeons and they promised that a team would return within a fortnight to finish the work, and I am glad to see that this has been done.

I want to thank the GS Community Fund for organising a very well attended drinks party for newcomers to the village which was much appreciated by all. Finally on behalf of the parish, I thank the parish councillors and clerk for all their hard work for the community.

23/26

To receive reports on Village Matters.

Community Fund

Attached as appendix 2

Free Gardens CIO

The Great Somerford Free Gardens were established in 1809 by the Reverend Steven Demainbray and are possibly the oldest allotments in England. Following the approval of the Charity Commission and the signing of the Vesting Document and Land Transfer document by representatives of the Parish Council on 4th September 2024, the Unincorporated Free Gardens Charity and the Free Gardens CIO, the Great Somerford Free

Gardens CIO is now the owner in trust of the land. This has meant that it has been bought in line with modern legislation and regulation, and to preserve this important historic space for future generations. It is still used today for allotment holders and is also enjoyed by many as a green space to relax. Many dog walkers also enjoy walking through the Free Gardens. It is used in the summer by some local groups to meet.

Since the CIO was initially established there have been some changes to individual Trustees. I would like to thank all past and present trustees for their valuable contribution. The Trustees have devoted significant time establishing new systems and managing the Free Gardens. This work has included updating tenancy agreements, handling queries, introducing a new financial scheme, developing infrastructure (including borehole planning and accurate plot mapping on Parish Online), ensuring GDPR compliance, exploring a new website and recreational facilities, liaising with the Allotment Holders Group, fundraising, auditing tree health in the Jubilee Garden, and related activities.

In terms of funding, it is important to note that, in order to make the Free Gardens viable and sustainable we have introduced some funding safeguards. We now require new plot holders to provide a £50 deposit, returnable when they surrender their plot if it is in good condition. If not, we will retain the deposit money to help return the plot to a reusable condition. In addition, we now ask non-resident plot holders to pay a modest fee of £30 a year. We have also asked resident and existing plot holders to consider making a voluntary annual donation. This has increased our available funding by £505.00 (donations £355 Fees £150) at the time of writing this report (040526). The CIO is very grateful for grants of £1000 from the GSPC which have been put towards grass cutting and paying for an arborist to survey the trees in the Jubilee Gardens. The GSPC also pay for Parish Online. Our mowing contract now starts earlier and finishes later, meaning increased costs to the CIO.

The Dauntsey Road Hedge was cut again by Toby Sturgis for which we are very grateful. The hedge on the lane and the trees at the Jubilee Garden will need to be considered for maintenance in due course. We have had a full survey of the trees in the Jubilee Gardens undertaken and now have a comprehensive list of tree maintenance needed. We are in the process of getting quotes to carry out the necessary work. The Free Gardens have 69 allotment holders which represents a little under 90% occupancy. We are most grateful to the Allotment Holders Group for their continued support, and for the extremely useful volunteer working parties that they have organised to help keep maintenance costs as low as possible. At the latest one we were also very grateful to Toby Sturgis for providing a trailer to remove the green waste that volunteers managed to collect, cut down or prune.

At present there are 11 plots that are vacant and up for adoption and advert will go into the Signpost. There have been some requests from outside the Parish. We have some plots, not currently occupied, that are under for consideration for potential projects such as a community orchard, a wildlife area or other suitable leisure activities. We currently have plans to install two more boreholes which will be installed when groundwater conditions allow. Great Somerford (Incorporating Startley) Parish Council has kindly agreed to fund this with money from the Community Infrastructure levy pot.

Lizzie Russell, Chair CIO

Questions

Members of the Community Fund asked if it would be possible to undertake additional planting given the success of the daffodils, a proposal would be forwarded to future meeting.

It was noted that refreshments should be made available to Parishioners at the next Annual Parish meeting.

Meeting closed at 8.22pm