



Windmill Estate Maintenance Company (WEMC)

Annual General Meeting

Monday 7th October 2024 – 7.30 pm

Present

Rob Hey - Acting Chairman
Ann Hester - Secretary
Ann Noke – Committee Member
David Powell - Committee Member
Paul Hester - Estate Manager
Paula Murphy - Committee Member
Michael Monk – Committee Member
Gill Richardson – Committee Member
Scott Engel – Works Contractor

Apologies

Alice Ramcharran
Helen Brown
Paulette Nicoll
Tom Baxter
Nick Morris
Rosemary Pennells

Approx 26 WEMC residents plus
Councillor Linda Derrick also attended
A TEAMS link was available but 0 joined.

1. Introductions

Rob Hey opened the meeting by thanking the numerous residents from around the estate for attending and introduced himself and the committee members as above.

Rob went on to explain, the committee members are a group of volunteers who all live around the estate and do their best, they would always welcome new committee members to share the load and help WEMC to do more and more quickly. They would happily speak to anyone who was interested in joining WEMC, especially if they can assist us with their building, legal, or accountancy experience.

2. Summary of WEMC Situation

Ann Hester explained that the committee members are residents and pay their fees just like everyone else. Before Ann purchased her home she walked around the estate and alleyways to get a feel for the estate. That was 45 years ago and still lives here enjoying the friendly and safe community environment and is pleased how well the estate is being maintained. She joined the Committee 25 years ago after an AGM meeting and knows the effort that the committee puts in to try and keep the costs down.

WEMC work with a great group of people, Andy for tree surgery, Scott our works contractor and Paul the estate manager who all work for the estate's best interests. They have been working with us for several years and the work they do is improving the Estate, thus enhancing the value of our homes. Scott and Paul both live on our estate, Andy lives on the Rose Avenue Estate, and he pays 3 times what we currently pay for our maintenance fee.

Ann went on to advise that many estates locally have maintenance charges around the £400 mark such as the private area behind Tesco Garage (Milton Place). Knowing personally of a new estate in Aston Clinton charging £500 with only young trees and small areas of grass to maintain. The Wellbrick estate off Rose Avenue charges £270 and their website states *'it goes without saying it is only possible to keep these charges to this minimum because we are self-managed thanks to residents putting themselves forward. To hire the services of a management company would cost each homeowner in excess of £800 each.'*

Ann puts together and prints out newsletters and often puts articles in the Widmer End News, the quarterly magazine delivered by the Resident's Association. She tries to update people with works that have been done and how we are dealing with various aspects and issues on the estate. Despite that, a resident emailed about the 'massive' amount of money WEMC receive and wanted to know what we do with it. Ann responded by detailing our many costs and responsibilities and this list was also included in the notice of the AGM that was delivered to all residents for clarification.

3. Accounts & Maintenance Fee

Ann explained we have printed a few copies of full set accounts if required for attendees, and these will be made available on our website soon.

A graph had been printed out and distributed to make understanding our accounts a little easier. Ann went through the graph, which showed what our expected costs would be to 30 June 2025 and how the contributions we received did not cover these costs and therefore WEMC would be in deficit.

Ann advised that due to prices, raw materials and the cost of services increasing and because WEMC have kept the maintenance fees so low, we will probably spend £8,500 more than we have actually received from fees this year. WEMC members will try to put together a forecast for future years so this does not happen again and we shall have to limit our financing to essential jobs only in the interim.

4. Condition of the Estate & General Information

Paul Hester explained his role as Estate Manager and the difficulties he faces trying to maintain the estate. He advised that his primary job is litter picking the whole estate, reporting tarmac, drain and pothole issues to FixMyStreet and repairs needed with various utilities.

He went on to explain that some of the issues he deals with are repairs that fall outside of WEMC's responsibility, for example the steps outside the shops are in need of repair. This area is owned by a landlord and managed by Estate Agents Duncan Bailey Kennedy and very little is ever done to carry out any repairs. The split pavement on Columbine Road, that has sunk because of the water mains, took a year to eventually get repaired, as Bucks Council who own footpath and Infinity Water who own the water mains couldn't agree whose responsibility it was. His remit has now extended to look at the WEMCs owned footpaths with Scott's help in the future.

He has reported a couple of problems lately to Bucks Council re problems with footpaths on Primrose Green and public footpath which have been rejected as non-serious and not being repaired – no further action taken. Paul feels they need repairing but BC has different criteria to be met.

Question – Is there anything residents can do to help?

Answer – Paul Hester advised that they could also report issues to FixMyStreet. He explained how to use the website and it is very effective. The more reports they get, the quicker they are to respond.

Paul went on to explain that his reporting led to getting the bus shelter cleaned, the bus timetables and the glass replaced. Also informed various utility companies of issues culminating in Cowslip Forecourt sub-station being re-fenced, meter covers made safe etc. He also liaises with neighbours just outside the estate about cutting back their hedges/trees that impinge on our footpaths, washed all the street signs, he reported a broken drain on Candytuft Green and 4 repairs were carried out.

He continually badgers Duncan Bailey Kennedy about the state of the shop forecourt and the rear of the shops, they told us they litter pick once of month, but that doesn't seem to be the case. We have spoken to the church about the broken fence between the church and the shops, the fence belongs to the church and the brick wall belongs to the shops, we await the outcome.

He attends Widmer End Residents Association (WERA) meetings and advised that anyone who was interested could go along. WERA are very short on committee members, and any residents could volunteer to join. They have a meeting once a month in the Cricket Club behind the village hall. He explained what is addressed at the meetings, eg planning issues, problems with speeding, events etc.

Rob and Paul attended many Hughenden Parish Council (HPC) meetings, to object when they wanted to turn off our streetlights. HPC subsequently admitted ownership so we considered this a success. There is a sticker on each light that HPC own with a telephone number to call the Parish Clerk if a light is out or requires repairing. In April 2024 Paul reported 3 streetlight replacements and 1 repair, but advised delays with the Locum Clerk to get quotes for the works and Cllr Derrick suggested WEMC send a chaser email (**UPDATE** : Email sent 9 September 2024). Hughenden Parish Councillors are up for re-election in May so we may have to revisit this situation. Any help from residents would be appreciated as monies were supposedly put aside for ongoing maintenance. Rob explained that HPC's staff turnover and meetings are pretty unproductive to say the least and it struggles to spend the excess monies of around £400K it appears to have which Linda Derrick expanded on.

5. Expenditure

Ann Hester explained that we have had 4 changes of administrator, the costs associated with this role have all increased, insurances, IT etc. The volunteer committee, in trying to be empathetic over covid issues, kept the fee unchanged for 3 years. Therefore our finances were affected as raw materials and all costs rose dramatically during this time. We haven't been realistic with our charges in the past and have already overspent in this financial year. With prices continuing to increase we will have to put through a larger fee increase next year. The estate is getting older and requires more maintenance as a result, for example caring for the older trees is getting more expensive.

Question – What are you thinking of increasing it to?

Answer – Ann Hester advised we are waiting for some quotes to come back for works, we are also trying to put together a forecast of costs for future years for discussion by the committee to agree a fee as soon as possible. At the moment we are thinking about £150 or so and this caused much concern amongst attendees. Although some residents could understand the need for the increase and appreciated our efforts, it was obviously not welcome news but the estate infrastructure is deteriorating therefore costs will continue to rise on ever more problem areas.

Ann went on to say WEMC may explore the possibility of letting people who are struggling pay quarterly or half to try and help out but this would be a very costly exercise. WEMC do not make any profit as all monies are used for the maintenance of the estate or the admin that enables us to exist as a company. If we can't survive, the maintenance could be passed to a management company then the year 1 fee could be £5-600, year 2 fee £650/700 and so on. They will not give the personal touch or be interested in our community and will have to run offices, cars and employees' wages, as well as make a profit. It was pointed out that WEMC fought to have Georges Hill resurfaced and to keep the streetlights as the Committee members live here and care for their environment.

Non-payers cost us additional money, legal and bank fees, admin time etc and despite some residents wishing us to consider monthly payments, this would add to the maintenance charge and could well be impossible to administer. (**UPDATE:** *Also possible legal issues as the **owner** on 1st July is the person responsible for the year's annual charge and may sell up during that year but WEMC could not legally claim balance from purchaser. WEMC will discuss and also check with solicitors*). Within the fee request we do always state that anyone in financial difficulties should contact us to discuss possible options.

We need to rebuild our reserves and put through this increase to break even and then start to add to the funds for "crystal ball" jobs around almost 4 acres of responsibilities including brick walls, steps, greens, hedges, fencing, forecourts, paths and the like. Thankfully Scott had kept his contract price down over the last 6 years and this has made the low annual fee possible, his contract will renew in 2025 and we await the figures and a survey of the trees to highlight problem areas.

6. The Works Contractors Role

Scott Engel explained his role includes planting trees, he had planted 2 areas of 3 new cherry trees and bulbs in the last two years, fencing repairs, general maintenance, grass cutting, and has a team of people who help him. During his autumn clear-up all the leaves he clears (10 van loads) are used as compost by a local farmer. He had stopped using chemical weedkiller some years back and other options are more time consuming but safer. Scott enjoys living here and being able to maintain the Estate. Residents appreciated the work Scott and his team do – going over and above for the past 8 or 9 years.

7. IT

David Powell explained that we are just trying to 'up' our profile in terms of online presence. Facebook is a way of keep residents informed, it is a 'free' way to communicate and the more residents that sign-up the better. We now have a new website in place where we will continue to upload information, newsletters, maps etc. The address is <https://www.windmillestate.co.uk/>

8. Elections of Officers

The existing committee stood down as a whole and all stood again for re-election. This was proposed by Martin Bailey of Lavender Way and seconded by Tom Cox of Honeysuckle Road.

Ann Hester put out a request to anyone who would like to join the committee, in particular those who would be able to assist the committee with their knowledge of accounts, gardening, legal aspects etc.

9. Meeting Open for Questions & Comments

Cllr Derrick discussed our lack of response from Council regarding footpath issues etc and suggested we steer our complaints to Steve Broadbent, which WEMC will bear in mind.

Martin Bailey expressed his thanks for the Committee's work over the last year and others agreed.

10. Chairman Closes the Meeting

Chairman closed the meeting at 20.47pm

*** For information :** WEMC Telephone number 07394 332262 Email wemc67@yahoo.co.uk
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