MINUTES of the Annual Meeting of St Andrews Parish held on Monday 12 May 2025 in the Redhouse Community Centre at 7.00pm.

PRESENT : See attached Sheet.

1. **Apologies for absence**

There were apologies from Cllr Cherie Adams. No other apologies from residents were received.

1. **Minutes**

Minutes from the meeting held on 22 May 2024 were not available for confirmation and adoption at this meeting.

1. **Chairs Report**

Cllr Jake Chandler gave a verbal report, explaining he took over as chair at the end of December from Vera Tomlinson. He thanked Vera for all her hard work as chair to the Parish Council, moulding the council to what it represents today.

Cllr Chandlers full speech is attached.

1. **Community Hero Award**

Each year at this meeting someone is presented with a Community Hero Award. This is to celebrate the work they have carried out around the parish. This year the award goes to Roger Cole. Roger can be seen around the community each week helping to repair bicycles, amongst other activities.

Unfortunately, Roger was unable to attend so his award will be presented to him at the Parish Council meeting to be held on 9th June 2025.

1. **Councillors Forum**

Councillors gave verbal reports on work they had carried out in the parish, giving residents the opportunity to ask questions.

1. **Close of Meeting**

The meeting closed at 7.25pm. No date was set for the next Annual Parish Meeting. Next year (2026) will be an election year and so this meeting may not be held on the same evening as the Annual Parish Council meeting due to that meeting needing to be held within 14 days of the elections.

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Chair of Council

A logo of a city council

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I took over as de facto Chairman over half-way through the year, so first I wanted to use this opportunity to pay tribute to the Council’s former Chair, Vera Tomlinson and Mary Friend, who retired after decades of service of a local Councillors. Serving for many years first in the Wyre Forest, before becoming literally the first ever Councillors for St Andrews, topping the poll when the ward was first created. She had a distinguished record on SBC as a Cabinet Member and Chair of several Committees. Her efforts in 2016 along with other concerned residents, are the whole reason this Council came into existence.

Aside from Vera and Mary’s incredible contributions over the years, I also wanted to pay tribute to Emma Faramarzi, who for personal reasons decided to step down earlier this year, but was an excellent Chair of Planning Committee, I thank Emma for her service.

Now no year is without challenges, and this year has been no exception. Circumstances this year have tested our mettle at times, but as a collective group of Councillors and staff, the Council has shown true grit over the course of this year. I would be remised, if I did not commend Councillors and staff for going the extra mile in the last year, they know who they are. As a resident of St Andrews first and Councillor second, I am immensely proud to call this community home, and I am sure I speak for everyone in saying we want to move on from last year’s experiences and step forward in bigger and better things for this area.

It is imperative that we continue to take a proactive approach to address the problem of residents living under management fees, and getting little services provided by this Council as a result. Tadpole Garden Village, Abbey Farm and Stadium View are equally a part of this Parish as Abbey Meads, Ash Brake, Groundwell West, Redhouse or St Andrews Ridge.

For the Parish maintained areas, the Council is responsible for grass, hedge and small tree cutting. It also has responsibilities for collecting communal bins, responsibility over play areas and responsibility over Redhouse Community Centre. We also have our statutory roles as a consultee for things like planning. Over the course of this year, the performance of these services has been scrutinised though the Council’s dedicated committees and Full Council.

This year we are bolstering our offering by trialling a weed spraying and road sweeping service, that has become reduced to the point of virtually disappearing by SBC. We are also expanding our provision for children and young people in the Parish by offering new events and exploring providers for Summer based activities. Aside from our statutory obligations, we regularly go beyond our statutory duty by collecting fly-tipping or advising on drainage/flooding matters, which is the responsibility of SBC. As we look to the new year, there will be opportunities we can look to explore in greater detail, such as ensuring a functioning library service, which is at risk of cuts.

Our budget this year, added unavoidable increases into the Parish Precept. The primary reasons for this are increases to the cost of administration in the Council, especially the Governments increases to National Insurance. We also made the difficult decision to bear the cost of new services, like weed spraying and road sweeping to offer a service we regard as essential but has been left by SBC. We also took on capital spending on new equipment and renewing major vehicle leases for the coming year.

As we look to the year ahead, whoever is Chair, I would like all Councillors to participate or lead their own projects. The Council's work may begin in its meetings, but it does not end in them, and Councillors should set the example of motivated proactive citizens. Aside from projects work, our Committees which will be appointed later, will be presenting their own work programmes with specific objectives over the coming year. These are all vital to the Council’s work over the coming year. Next, all Councillors should support in achieving our long-standing ambition to provide a proper, permanent solution to our staff’s office.

The Council, through Deborah and Emma when she returns, will have its own to-do-list as it relates to modernisation. Councillors now make use of Teams and Sharepoint, but we should be encouraging this process further by working with the Clerk to put more items like this on the Council’s agendas. The website, social media pages are all ways residents reach out to us or get information, that experience should be as easy and approachable as possible.

The Parish Council is bolstered by new faces, Cllrs Cherie Adams, Tomlinson and Young, as well as a returning Cllr Vince Williams. Existing and new Councillors have led on community projects, such as tree planting, litter picks, providing warm spaces in the winter, new youth provision and even helping to bring the Circus to town through our community grants.

We also have the Parish warded from next May into St Andrews East and St Andrews West.

The Parish, mainly as a result of Luke being proactive enjoys much closer communications with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. The Parish is home to an interesting ecological recovery story with Great Crested Newts. I’ve done a few volunteer days personally, now I’m told BBC Points West will be covering it soon. There are applications being brought forward by the Wildlife Trust to protect the habitat, which entitles it potentially to grant funding.

We are aided in our effort always by the incredible charities and clubs which call St Andrews home: Tadpole Garden Village in Bloom, Benjamin's Smile, Mums on a Mission, Swindon Downs Syndrome Group, Guide Dogs UK, Ridge Coffee Club, Ridge Wombles, Cornerstone Art Group, Headstart Skillz, Save Swindon Speedway, and the Tadpole Community Market are just a few examples of organisations in the Parish that have made a positive contribution to our community, and as Chairman I am grateful to all of them for that.

Finally, I want to thank all of the Council’s incredible staff for their work this year. From Office Staff, RCC Staff, and the whole Grounds Team – they have done our parishioners proud. It’s been a pleasure working alongside all of you since stepping in to be Chair. A personal thanks I have to make is to our amazing Locum Clerk, Deborah. She will be too humble to take the credit, however those of us know how hard she has worked, to put the Council back on an even keel, after a period of uncertainty. She has personally been very helpful to me taking the Chair on St Andrews for the first time.

Good days are definitely coming for St Andrews Parish, and I have full confidence in this group of people to grow the Parish’s current offering to better services and reaching out to help residents.

**Councillor Jake Chandler**

Chairman

St Andrews Parish Council