

FORDINGBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Town Assembly held on Wednesday, 19th April 2017 at 7.30pm in the Town Hall, Fordingbridge

Present:

Cllr. Connolly (Town Mayor)

Councillors Anstey, Hale, Lewendon, Perkins, Price, Bailey & Earth

In attendance:

HCC Cllr. E Heron

NFDC Cllr A Sevier

Mrs H Richards, Town Clerk

Ms R Croker, Footpath Officer

Mr T Daykin (Guest Speaker)

10 members of the public

1. To receive apologies for absence

There were apologies for absence from Cllr Wilson and Cllrs Errington & Burtenshaw, EHI PC.

2. To confirm the minutes of the minutes of the Annual Town Assembly on Wednesday 20th April 2016

It was proposed by Cllr Hale and seconded by Cllr Lewendon that the minutes of the Annual Town Assembly held on 20th April 2016 be signed as a true record.

Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

3. To welcome the guest speaker, Tim Daykin, former Fordingbridge vicar and now BBC Radio Solent presenter

Tim gave an interesting and witty account of his time as vicar of Fordingbridge, a post that he took up 25 years ago before leaving some 12 years ago to commit fully to his role with the BBC. He spoke of his involvement with the Quadrant Almshouses Trust and associated allotments at Sandleheath. He gave an account of his current role presenting on BBC Radio Solent on a Sunday morning as well as his involvement with other projects for the BBC.

Tim referred to the vital role that he has seen undertaken by volunteers in the community of Fordingbridge and asked the audience to reflect on the greater need for this role to continue and be strengthened in the current and future times of difficulty in service provision.

The Mayor thanked Mr Daykin for his presentation.

4. To receive the Annual Report from the Town Mayor

Our Town Council continues to offer our residents the high quality of services to which they expect. Despite having less financial resource and feeling the increased demand required through the ever-changing playing field of transparency and due diligence...we have managed to portray the town in an appealing and aesthetic manner. With help from various organisations such as Fordingbridge Rotary Club, St Marys Church, The Salvation Army, All the Cool Stuff, I N Newman and many other Clubs, Organisations and indeed some individuals... we continue the Christmas Lights and Trees, The Summer Festival and Remembrance Day and the Flower Baskets. Our Church, St Marys, organise our Everyman Remembered where we pay our respects to the local residents who died during the First World War. Mark Sigston continues with his Youth Club run at Avonway which is very popular while Mike French at the Salvation Army also takes on another aspect of Youth work, the Summer Playscheme for youngsters is amazingly well received. Our Council applauds and thanks, not only the names I have mentioned, but also the many, many people who run places and groups which our residents can meet and take part in the social activities which are such an important part of our lives. I have referred to the facts of people

working together for a reason as everyone is aware that all services appear to be undermanned and or short of financial resource. Our local Police force is no exception and I'm well aware of the "Spot the Policeman" competition currently doing the rounds...we will never experience the level of policing we used to have but could we help ourselves to help ourselves...could we drive at the required speed through town and over the forest...could we stop parking on the yellow lines that are there to advise us not to do exactly that...perhaps the fact that some people consistently ignore the rules and regulations goads us on to do the same? It's the same with litter...we walk past litter without picking it up...because someone else dropped it!

Town Council this fiscal year was deluged by planning...many applications for more infilling which, in general, the Council took decisions within the planning framework which, again, were generally accepted as the correct advice to suggest to the local planning authority NFDC. The Whitsbury Road development continues to create debate and while the Town Council decided to vote against the application information continues to surface which I would suggest makes the decision making somewhat difficult for NFDC. Objections were and continue to be made about house design and density, the potential of flooding in adjacent areas appears not to have been considered while the width of the estates arterial road also draws concern. Town Councils worries emanate from the quite significant increase in traffic on route to Sandheath and Aderholt this we consider will have an effect on our High Street and the many listed buildings in that area. Alderholt has or will have planning application's which could and will increase traffic density...as you are aware this application was being considered as the new local plan was being formulated, which will now be issued in September. On another planning issue that continues to be talked about...The old Fordingbridge Club which only today we have been informed of a residential development application for six properties and a shop fronting onto Roundhill.

Our wonderful staff continues to perform beyond the call of duty and our thanks must be extended to Kathy and Sue at our information office in Kings Yard to Andy and Derek for the maintenance of all our green areas. I visited Stuckton Road only this afternoon and it looks stunning. Office wise our very able team led by Town Clerk, Helen, with our Financial Officer Martine ably managing the accounts but also assisting in the general everyday business. Currently we are undergoing a couple of staff vacancies which has created more work for everyone...I thank you for your patience as we strive to recruit.

This financial year we have several projects which we need to attend to and we need to agree priorities in line with the demands being made on our financial capabilities...The Town Hall roof may well need attention...we are looking at bringing all Town Council resources under one roof...the sports pavilion still needs to be looked at and our Youth fraternity require a new skate park.

Lastly I would like to thank my fellow Councillors for their continued cooperation and for the diligence they have demonstrated through what has been a difficult period and I trust they will continue to extend during the oncoming months

5. To report on finances for 2016/17 (un-audited accounts) and the budget for 17/18.

The Town Clerk presented the report prepared by Martine Coatham, Finance Officer on the 2016/17 (un-audited accounts). The main highlights are:

- No major expenditure/investment during the year
- Continued support of the Christmas Lights and Hanging Baskets in association with The Rotary Club and Business Forum.
- Ongoing concerns regarding town hall roof and clock tower – await contractor's report. Anticipate considerable works required to alleviate leaks and carried out remedial works to damaged areas. (underspend on Town Hall budget to be transferred to reserves)
- Replacement vehicle not yet purchased
- Overall transfer to reserves approximately £30,000
- Precept received for 2016/17 £187,217.00
- S137 Grants - £3100 allocated (11 grants) – low level of applications, need to encourage more applications

With regard to the budget for 2017/18, with a precept request of £194,657.00 to be received solely from Council Tax as no Identifiable or Transitional Grants will be paid this year. In order to maintain essential services and support the residents and businesses an increase is necessary to cover the loss of the grants and also business rates that are now due on both of the Council's properties (Town Hall and Information Office).

Looking ahead to 2017/18 the council will continue to improve facilities at the recreation ground (new sports pavilion, MUGA, adult gym equipment and replacement play equipment and youth facilities). The Council will continue provision of the Christmas Lights and Flower Displays working with the Rotary Club and Business Forum. The Council will consider how to make savings and are reviewing the Information Service provided at Kings Yard and how to make better use of the Town Hall.

The Clerk advised the audience that copies of the report will be available at the end of the meeting.

The Clerk then reinforced the praise given by the Mayor for the standard of upkeep at the Cemetery and advised that only that day she had received a compliment and thanks from a local resident.

A query was raised regarding the S137 Grant process, who could apply and the criteria set. The clerk advised that the Council have a S137 Grant Policy which sets out the details and then advised the meeting of the different organisations who had received funding during 2016/17.

6. To receive any matters raised by members of the public.

The following items were raised:

a) Fordingbridge Club site – Concern over condition of building and site, vermin present etc. Thought that a new supermarket was going there. The Mayor responded that the original developer had pulled out and the site sold. However a new planning application has now been submitted to New Forest District Council for re-development of the site for residential and a small retail unit & this will be presented at the Town Council Planning Committee meeting on 10th May 2017.

b) Website - The Town Council's website needs to be updated as it contains information regarding shops and businesses that no longer exist (PDF link). The Town Clerk undertook to review this information.

c) Town Centre – Empty shops being converted to residential and associated parking issues, will the Town Council address this – the Mayor responded that the Town Council's hands are tied, we continue to raise concerns with New Forest District Council, however it is difficult to attract new business – proposed development at Whitsbury Road may attract a new supermarket.

7. To receive any other relevant parish business

There was no other parish business.

The Mayor, Cllr Connolly, thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.26pm.