

FORDINGBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Town Assembly held on Wednesday, 21st April 2021 at 7.30pm

held remotely using appropriate technology in accordance with The Local Authorities and Police and Crimes Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 (“the 2020 Regulations”) which came into force on 4th April 2020.

(Minutes subject to approval at the next Annual Town Assembly)

Present:

Cllr. Hale (Mayor)

Councillors Adams, Anstey, Goldsmith, Jackson, Lewendon, Mouland, Paton, Perkins, White & Wilson

In attendance:

Paul Goddard, Town Clerk

Rachel Edwards, Asst Town Clerk

Kathy Downie, Information Officer

Cllr. E Heron, HCC

Cllr A Bellows, NFDC

Cllr A Sevier, NFDC

Wendy Reid (Guest Speaker), Fordingbridge Greener Living Group

A representative from Ringwood and Fordingbridge Footpath Society

A representative from Burgate School

A reporter from the Salisbury Journal

4 members of the public

1. To receive apologies for absence

There were apologies for absence from Cllr Earth and the RFO.

2. To confirm the minutes of the minutes of the Annual Town Assembly on Wednesday 17th April 2019.

The Mayor noted that the 2020 Annual Town Assembly had to be cancelled due to the Covid lockdown at the time.

It was proposed by Cllr Lewendon and seconded by Cllr Adams that the minutes of the Annual Town Assembly held on 17th April 2019 be signed as a true record. All in favour.

No matters arising.

3. To welcome the guest speaker, Mrs Wendy Reid, Fordingbridge Greener Living

Wendy Reid spoke about all that the Greener Living Group in Fordingbridge had done in response to the climate crisis, since they formed two years ago. Fordingbridge Greener Living is a community group which aims to educate, inform and encourage action from people in order for them to make informed choices to reduce their carbon footprint. The Fordingbridge Greener Living Facebook group has over 800 members and there is a website www.fordingbridgegreenerliving.org for those who don't use social media.

Wendy Reid detailed the projects and sub-groups already run by teams of volunteers, which include

- Community Recycling Shed
- Community Fridge
- Tree planting and community gardening
- Plastic-free communities
- Litter picks

Wendy said that the Town Council is in a unique position to help lead the change in the community and asked for the Council's support, not only for the upcoming litter pick on 8th May but also for the plastic-free group and any future projects and initiatives.

Upcoming future projects include

- Community Composter at Fry's Field allotments
- Repair Café
- Clothes swap events (twice-yearly)

Wendy Reid said that when considering what we as a community can do to address the climate emergency and increase resilience for our town, there is a need to support climate change mitigation, rather than adapting to the impacts. Out of the fifteen high or moderate impacts of climate change, Fordingbridge Greener Living is only addressing two of them – recycling and reusing - directly through specific projects. She said it's time to focus on things with high and moderate impacts such as energy, transport and food and how to work together to make changes. This will allow the community to become resilient to what's expected to happen in the next few years. She said that everything achieved so far has been made possible through the engagement of people in the community and through the Council's support and positivity since the group began.

Questions from the floor followed.

Q. Cllr Sevier was encouraged that there were so many members and active members and asked if the group would consider liaising more with other local parishes and getting them involved as well.

A. Wendy Reid confirmed that she'd be very happy for other parishes to make contact and get involved. She said that St Boniface Church in Woodgreen is already bringing many items for recycling to Fordingbridge. Also, that it works the other way too – some of the Fordingbridge recycling goes to Western Downland to raise funds through their Terracycling schemes.

Q. Cllr Sevier asked if there was any way of calculating how much carbon the town could save putting into the atmosphere – perhaps with a graph to show how the town is improving over a period of time. She appreciated this is a very specialist area, requiring someone with that sort of knowledge.

A. There are carbon calculators but this would need to be very specific to Fordingbridge. Wendy reported that there are scientists in the group who may be able to help with this.

Q. Cllr Bellows asked for further details about the litter pick

A. Saturday 8th May. Due to Coronavirus restrictions, people are asked to litter pick in their household bubbles and bring their litter to the Recreation Ground for disposal. All litter will be weighed in order to conduct a litter audit of the town.

Q. Cllr Moulard said that the Fordingbridge Greener Living Group had changed the way his family collects and disposes of their waste. He asked if caps could go in the Tetrapak bin.

A. Yes – just squash the Tetrapaks and put the caps back on.

The Mayor thanked Wendy Reid for her presentation, saying that he was really impressed with all that the group does and recognising that this work is becoming increasingly important.

[Wendy Reid and 1 Member of Public left the meeting]

4. To receive the Annual Report from the Town Mayor

The Mayor gave the following report.

Any review of the last year has got to start with planning applications as that has occupied a large amount of Town Council time. Although we all knew there was housing allocated to sites 16, 17 and 18 in the Local Plan, I had assumed this would come through gradually over the next 15 years or so. Instead, we have had applications on all of these sites already along with another potential

large development. These applications have been difficult to review as any response we make has got to take account of the Local Plan. All Councillors can do is try to minimise the impact of the developments on the town and try to arrange benefits for the town using CIL spending.

For Site 16 the Town Council raised many concerns about the highway provision and we asked the District Council to explore the option of linking Site 16 to Site 17 in order to reduce traffic flow into Station Road. Unfortunately, there were issues on ownership of the land and how to cross the old railway line so this could not be taken forward. I am pleased we explored this option and see this as an example of how a local council can try to achieve the best from a development. There has been no movement on Site 16 recently, but I suspect it will come back to us in some form in the future.

Similarly, for Sites 17 and 18 we have suggested the link to the A338 should be included early in the schemes so it can be used by construction traffic and new residents. Planning Officers at the District Council have supported this and we are waiting to see if the developers will agree to change the sequence of building on these sites.

One positive thing to come from recent applications has been closer working with New Forest District Council Planning Department to agree the best way forward. Two Senior Planning Officers have provided briefings to us on the applications, and we are working with them and Hampshire County Council on an Action Plan to address the priority items which Councillors have identified.

Away from planning, the Town Council has tried to keep other services operating during this difficult year. The Information Centre has been open as much as has been allowed, and staff at the Recreation Ground have continued to maintain it to a high standard. We have worked with other organisations in the town to ensure our residents have access to the most services. Our Finance Officer spent a large amount of time setting up a new Christmas Lights contract which should mean we have reliable displays each December for the next few years.

During the year the Council has worked on two main building projects, at the Sports Pavilion and at the Town Hall. A scheme to refurbish the Sports Pavilion was tendered and awarded to K&B Contractors to carry out the work from January until May. There have been some additional costs and issues with security of the site, but the works are a great improvement and mean the building now better complies with current recommendations for separate changing areas. The proposal to adapt the Town Hall so the Information Office can move there has not progressed so well. The designers have made some good proposals to adapt the internal space but are still struggling to get approval for these from the Conservation Officer.

Finally, I want to thank Councillors and Town Council staff for the work they all carry out on Council business. Residents will not realise the amount of time we all need to spend reading the documents relating to the items we are due to discuss, and the time which Councillors spend on other projects for the town. I thank Paul, Rachel, Martine, and the other Town Council staff for keeping our facilities operating and for dealing with the additional requests which we make to them.

5. To report on finances for 2020/21 (un-audited accounts) and the budget for 21/22.

The Town Clerk read the finance report to the meeting (Appendix 1). There were no questions.

6. To receive an update on the Open Spaces Survey

Cllr Wilson gave the following report.

During October 2020 a survey was conducted to determine the improvements that the people of Fordingbridge wish to see within the town and to set additional targets for the council.

The feedback from this survey, to which there were 430 respondents, and a meeting held by Fordingbridge Town Council (FTC) on the 29th November has highlighted several points of importance:

- the addition/repair of benches and the number of bins in the town
- access to streams and rivers,

- maintenance of overgrown hedges, trees and pathways,
- parking, lighting, concerns about the road in the High Street,
- as well as points about Bishops Pond, Roundhill, the new open area by Whitsbury Road and the Trailway;
- FTC needs to provide a better means for residents to inform us of concerns. Maybe we should have a specific link on our website or Facebook messenger.
- Walking environment should perhaps be an issue on an agenda at present we only have footpaths as an agenda item. Could this be broadened?

We as a town council have the closest link to the community. As such we are best placed to contribute to the long term vision and the priorities of New Forest District Council and Hampshire County Council. Throughout our community there is a considerable amount of dissatisfaction with the condition of pavements and roads. The Town Council has tried to encourage our residents to report defects directly to the relevant authority online. There is too much confusion about which council to report to; especially problems with pavements. The Town Council needs to develop a more productive and responsive relationship with both the principle authorities.

We would like to thank Claire Upton-Brown, Chief Planning Officer at New Forest District Council, for developing a plan to address some of the town's issues. This plan however, does not seem to cover our traffic problems. We will need to broaden out some of the actions to include traffic.

Cllr Anstey said he was interested in the comment by a member of the public about access to the river and asked if they wanted to get in it? Cllr Wilson confirmed that members of the public want to sit by the river but they couldn't do this because of the river embankments being overgrown, for example at Sweatford Water.

7. To report on Community Infrastructure Levy Spending and proposed spending and future consultations

Cllr Hale reported that the Town Council currently has £198,000 of CIL of which £95,000 is already committed - £80,000 for the pavilion refurbishment, £10,000 for Avonway, and £5,000 for the Avon Valley Shed project. The amount remaining is £103,000.

Cllr Hale reported that Councillors have voted on their top projects to go ahead this year, and the top four were:

- Adult / senior gym equipment - £30,000 to include fencing around the equipment.
- Recreation Ground car park works - £100,000 for full resurfacing.
- Picnic benches - £5,000.
- Memorial Gardens resin bonded gravel paths - £50,000 for all paths.

Cllr Hale pointed out that these four top projects total more than the £103,000 available and asked if anyone had any comments about what the Council should allocate the money to.

Cllr Goldsmith asked if the price for new benches included the cost of fastening them down. The Clerk confirmed that all Town Council benches are fixed in place and this is included in the price.

Cllr Wilson wanted to clarify that the Council are considering spending £100k on a car park in the Recreation Ground. Cllr Hale confirmed that would be the maximum budget and that the Council could allocate a lower amount and see if a solution could be found for it. Cllr Jackson reported that £100k would pay for a tarmacked car park with an oil interceptor and said that cheaper options exist.

The Clerk reported that the Council had decided to do a fix of the existing car park surface which should last a couple of years. This would give sufficient time to explore all the opportunities in relation to the car park. Three quotes have been received for this work and these would be considered by the Finance and Policy Committee at next week's meeting.

The Clerk reported that there might be grant funding available for adult gym equipment so some or even all of this expense may not need to come from CIL funds. He said that consideration needs to be given as to the best place to site this equipment.

Cllr Wilson reported that a company had recommended three pieces of senior gym equipment which should be placed close together, to encourage interaction between the people using them. This prevents isolation. She advised that the equipment should be placed by the café, the toilets or the children's play area and reported that the whole point of the scheme is that older people do not want to be separated from the rest of the community. She said if it's not acceptable to have this equipment in those areas then the Council should be considering a different scheme.

Councillors agreed to move forward with the picnic benches as soon as possible as they are reasonably priced and within budget.

8. To receive an update on the Neighbourhood Plan and the Dorset Local Plan

Cllr Jackson gave the following report.

The New Forest Local Plan 2016-36 sets out strategic site allocations and was approved in June 2020.

Three sites were identified for Fordingbridge,

- Site 16: Land to the north of Station Road Ashford
- Site 17: Land at Whitsbury Road
- Site 18: Land at Burgate

These sites have a minimum allocation of 1015 new houses but already the developers are applying for more. It is likely that the figure may be closer to 1500. That would increase the housing stock by 50%.

New Forest District Council calculated that they needed to find at least 1000 of their 10,000 requirement for new houses in Fordingbridge. Fordingbridge Town Council raised many objections to the sites proposed but NFDC had to weigh up the many conflicting issues and the Local Plan was approved and adopted last June. So, we are stuck with the Local Plan and must do the best to mitigate the impacts and look to see what benefits can be gained.

Potential Impacts

- The biggest impact is clearly increased traffic with its implication on parking and congestion.
- The school issue is not too serious because the local secondary school, Burgate, already has nearly half its pupils from outside the town so it has the capacity to cope.
- The local health provisions may improve because the CCG (Clinical Care Group) work on a head count before building in any more provision. So more people could bring more facilities.

Potential Benefits

- More money from the developers who must pay a contribution or provide greater facilities. And the sums of money involved are quite considerable.
- The Augustus Park scheme which is currently under construction will contribute £1.8million to the public purse. And this is for 145 houses. The total that developers might have to contribute could be in the range of £12 to £15 million.
- This has to be spread over a number of major schemes such as an upgrade to the sewer system and improved flood defence schemes.
- And the bulk of this money will be under the control of NFDC so it is essential that we work closely with them. This we are doing.

Next Steps

- Fordingbridge Town Council is working closely with NFDC and HCC to make sure their views are not ignored and suggestions are taken on board when NFDC eventually grant the planning permissions.
- Fordingbridge Town Council is planning to consult with as wide a section of residents as possible through Survey Monkey. The survey will go on Fordingbridge Town Council's website within the next month and I would encourage you to fill it in.
- As a result of discussions with the NFDC planning department, NFDC have come up with an action plan to help us all move forward. There are at least 15 different areas to address and we need your help and expertise to progress these matters. If you can help, please get in touch.

The impact on Fordingbridge of the draft Dorset Local Plan is considerable.

But further pressure will be brought on Fordingbridge if Dorset produce a Local Plan which increases the size of Alderholt by considerable numbers. Their current Draft proposals have two options. Option 1 is for 300 houses together with current approvals for 192 houses. Option 2 is for 3000 plus the 192. There is considerable local opposition to either option and an alternative option 3 is being proposed. That of zero new houses over and above the 192. The lack of infrastructure is the main reason for the opposition.

Fordingbridge Town Council is working with Alderholt Parish Council, and New Forest District Council to register our strongest complaints about these numbers.

There were no questions.

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

No matters raised.

10. To receive any other relevant parish business

Cllr Wilson reported that two new boreholes were dug at the existing Fry's Field allotments last Monday at a total cost of £900. She hoped this would allow Fordingbridge Town Council to negotiate with Pennyfarthing Homes regarding the water supply at the new Augustus Park allotments as the cost is not prohibitive. The Clerk reported that he'd asked Pennyfarthing Homes to reconsider but they had been advised that any boreholes would need to be 15m - 30m deep. Cllr Wilson reported that the new boreholes at Fry's Field allotments are 5m deep and perfectly adequate. She said the borehole at the Infant School struck water at 1.6m and this location is of the same land type, in close proximity to and at the same height as the new allotments.

The Mayor, Cllr Hale, thanked everyone for attending. The meeting closed at 8.23pm.

APPENDIX

Report on finances for 2020/21 (un-audited accounts)

Income

For 2020/21 the Town Council received a precept of £254322, as noted last year this represented a 10% increase to meet the increasing costs of wages and utilities.

In 2020/21 the Council received additional income of approximately £177661k. This includes Government COVID grants (£24167), Neighbourhood Plan grants (£1256), lengthsman income (£13200), burial fees (£9067), allotments (£846), S106 funds (£91942), CIL funding (£6853), hall lettings (£270), recreation ground fees (£2927), hanging basket fees (£2345), Playscheme grants/fees (£0), fishing fees (£471), lease income (£3750), information office income/map/leaflet sales (£19367) and sundry income/donations (£1200).

Generally income was down (with the exception of grants) due to lockdown – fortunately this only affected a small amount of rental income from the town hall and recreation ground and was covered by the Government grants received. CIL funding was lower than 2019/20 (CIL funding relates to developments in the town over which the Town Council have no direct control), and S106 funds were received towards the changing room refurbishment.

Expenditure

During the year the main expenditure items of note relate to the changing room refurbishment (£110000 to be met using CIL and S106 funds); the installation of lights for the skate park (£12344); the purchase of a replacement Kubota tractor (£5500); the replacement of the youth shelter screens (£1560) and the installation of a second height barrier at the recreation ground (£1344).

The Council continued to support the Christmas Lights and the Hanging Baskets/Floral Displays. During 2020 the Christmas Lights contract was re-tendered and a new contractor appointment (Sparkx) for a three year period – this includes the provision of new lights on a lease basis.

The CIL funds will be transferred to reserves where it is ring-fenced until agreement has been reached for their use.

The forecast year end position (taking into account the use of reserves and S106 funds noted above) will be an underspend of £20000, to be transferred to the general reserves held by the Council.

S137 Grants

The Council have a budget of £5000 for S137 grants, during 2020/21 £2472 was allocated (compared with £2250 in 2019/20) – this is primarily due to a low level of applications from local groups.

New Forest CAB	£700.00
Hope for Tomorrow	£680.00
Sandleheath Sea Scouts	£289.00
Victim Support	£100.00
New Forest Disability	£200.00
Fordingbridge Museum	£333.00
Fordingbridge Greener Living	£120.00
Burgate School Awards	£50.00
Total	£2472.00

Budget for 2021/22

For 2021/22 the Town Council requested a precept of £261897.

	Council Tax Requirement	Tax Base	Council Tax per Band D
2020/21	£254322	2304.60	£110.35
2021/22	£261897	2353.20	£111.29
Increase	£7575	48.6	£0.94

The increase will cover increased staff pension cost, increased IT support costs, and inflation rises for other services and utilities.

The full accounts will be available for inspection once the internal audit has inspected them – please contact the office for more information.

*Martine Coatham, Responsible Financial Officer
April 2021*

