

FORDINGBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Town Assembly held on Wednesday, 24th April 2013 in the Town Hall, Fordingbridge

Present:

Cllr. Connolly (Town Mayor)

Councillors Adams, Anstey, Fulford, Hale, Lewendon, Perkins, Price, Perkins, Robbins, (A) Wilson & (G) Wilson

In attendance:

HCC Cllr. E Heron

NFDC Cllrs R Bellows & A Sevier

Ms K. Mason, Town Clerk

Mrs M Coatham, Finance Officer

Ms R Croker, Footpath Officer

Mr M Weakley (Speaker)

25 members of the public

1. To receive apologies for absence

There were apologies for absence from Jamie Burton, NFDC and John Marsh, Fordingbridge Sports Club.

2. To welcome the speaker, Mr Michael Weakley of Michael Weakley Associates.

Mr Weakley addressed the meeting on the proposed Sports Facility and Concession buildings to be sited on the Recreation Ground.

Sports Facility – the footprint is the same as the current pavilion and sport club buildings although it will be slightly elevated to raise it beyond the floodplain. The building has a pitched roof with the first floor rooms within the pitch. There are planned 6 changing rooms all of which are self-contained to allow for flexible use and have their own entrance, showers and toilets. There are also disabled changing facilities.

The Youth room will give greater ability for the building to be multi-functional so that it covers recreational, sporting and social needs. It can be used separately from the rest of the building and will allow for the building to be used during the week, not just at weekends when matches are played.

There are a minimum of windows on the ground floor (to lessen the opportunity for vandalism) and natural light is maximised by the use of velux windows and glass bricks. On the upper floor the windows face east and west and have balconies each side.

There will be a ground source heat pump which provides 4kW of energy for each 1kW used, rainwater recycling for use in the toilets and the possibility for solar heating panels for heating the showers. There will be a lift which is large enough for a wheelchair and carer.

It is unlikely that the planners would allow the current car park area to be expanded but this will be resurfaced and marked out with 87 ordinary, 5 disabled, 2 mini bus and motorcycle spaces.

Concession Building – the current toilet block is old and outdated and in need of replacement.

The new Concession building will be situated in the rose garden which would be opened up to include the rest of the children's play area by the removal of a fence which currently bisects the rose garden and play area. This will give more room for families to picnic while having direct access to the play equipment, paddling pool and river. A further fence will be put in place near the workshop making the area secure.

Planners are concerned that the building needs to blend in when viewed from the conservation area (i.e. the bridge). The proposed position means it is near the other buildings (the bungalow and the workshop) so not standing out on its own and near utilities.

There are 4 unisex toilets and one unisex disabled toilet, together with a concession space, with a hatch, which can serve snacks, ice creams, sweets and drinks. There is scope to expand the building if the need arises. While there may be occasional need for more toilets during very busy periods these are few compared with normal usage. Additional toilets will increase the cost.

The Mayor advised that the hard work of raising the funds to complete both builds was starting. HCC, NFDC and various sporting bodies have been approached.

The Mayor then gave those attending an opportunity to ask questions.

The Mayor thanked Michael Weakley for his presentation.

The meeting then adjourned for 10 minutes and reconvened at 8.20pm.

3. To confirm the minutes of the minutes of the Annual Town Assembly on 18th April 2012 and to report any matters arising.

It was proposed by Cllr Lewendon and seconded by Cllr (A) Wilson that the minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on 18th April 2012 be signed as a true record. All in favour, Carried.

Matters arising

The Mayor thanked the Jubilee Committee for organising an excellent 'Picnic in the Park' event at the Recreation Ground on Saturday June 2nd 2012.

4. To receive the Annual Report from the Town Mayor

It has been, yet again, a very busy year for Fordingbridge Town Council with our prediction of localism being correct; more work and responsibility for less money.

2012 was an eventful year with the Queens Diamond Jubilee being the highlight. The national celebrations as well as our own local celebrations were something to be remembered; our party in the Park, friends from Vimoutiers and the many street parties made it a very special occasion and on behalf of the Fordingbridge residents we sent a letter of congratulations to Her Majesty to thank for her 60 years of dedicated service to our country.

In 2012 we continued our commitment to support our business owners with our VIC attracting a record numbers of visitors. We continue to fund the Christmas Lights, Hanging Baskets and Christmas Trees. We liaise closely with the Moto Guzzi Motorcycle Club and the Fordingbridge Summer Festival as well as the Dorset and Hampshire Whippet Club, all of who continue to use Fordingbridge for their main events.

Last year I stated that the Town Council were looking at projects to improve facilities at the Recreation Ground and as you have heard from Michael Weakley tonight, plans have been drawn for the new Sports Club/Changing Rooms. I would like to thank Michael not only for a first class design but also for his very valued advice during our planning meetings. We are also looking to replace the very aged and not fit for purpose toilet facility at the recreation ground. If all goes well we will replace them with a building that accommodates a small concession facility as well appropriate toilets.

Another change occurred during 2012 as a result of NFDC's decision to close its office in Provost Street. This coincided with the Town Councils review of the VIC., our Fordingbridge office being one of only three in the district that had not been closed. After some lengthy negotiations with NFDC and our own Councillors a business plan was formulated and I am happy to say that the Town Council now runs a combined VIC, Information and NFDC services at Kings Yard, The Landlord was also very accommodating to our plans.

Like any well run organisation we owe a great deal of thanks to our Staff who keep everything going on a day by day basis: our two new Information Officers, Kathy and Julie, at the new Fordingbridge Information Office have hit the ground running; Andy Lane and Derek who together with our Caretaker Ann keep our Town Hall, Recreation Ground, Open spaces and Stuckton Road Cemetery in first class order. We have a new financial officer in post (Deborah having decided to pursue other hobbies) and have been joined by Martine whom in my estimation was thrown in at the deep end but has managed – with brownie points! With Martine's assistance The Town Council has adopted a more commercial attitude to its accounting which will make our budgeting procedures a little easier to use in the forthcoming years.

Our Town Clerk Kate and Assistant Town Clerk Debbie have undertaken a huge amount of work this year: planning, new facilities, staffing responsibilities, Health and Safety and new committees are just some of the areas of their working week coupled together with my never ending requests to undertake more and more...my sincere thanks to you both.

Our local Council representatives from Hampshire County and New Forest District have been very helpful during the past year and while Edward Heron is now an old hand our two District Councillors Anne and Roxy have now found their way around the system and are always available for us...many thanks to you all.

Our main objectives for 2013/14 will be the raising of capital for our two major projects; the new Sports Club and a new Concession facility. Our recent formation of two committees for Transport and Disability matters has involved members of our community and we will be putting every effort into producing some results on those fronts during 2013/14. Planning is in place to safeguard the Christmas Lights not only this year but for future years.

Financially we expect a difficult year in the financial year 2014/15 in which we fully expect to have our precept lowered by at least 10%. As a consequence this year we will, together with our Financial Officer Martine, be looking at potential cost savings. All areas of our business will be scrutinised to make Council even more aware of costs and we may need to make difficult decisions. At the same time we need to be maintaining services to our electorate and our commitment to our business owners, our youth and community facilities as they are important to our Towns future. As you can see our Council will be busy during the next 12 months.

I would like to personally thank the assistance of the many residents who have taken the time to involve me in their ideas and projects and in particular thanks are extended to our Neighbourhood Police Team, Fordingbridge Rotary Club, Fordingbridge Society and Mr Ian Newman and his staff and I am sure others that I have missed.

In closing I would like to thank, most sincerely, my Fordingbridge Town Council colleagues for their continued support. I would like to think that while not always agreeing with my point of view we have reached a point whereby they are comfortable to voice their own opinion and I value that very much as it is the basis of our democracy. I very much believe decisions and opinions should be discussed fully to arrive at the correct conclusion.

5. To receive a report from Ruth Croker, Footpath officer

The Breamore Railway Line Path was opened officially last autumn by Councillor Edward Heron. Our Mayor was present at the ceremony. It can be accessed from the bus layby opposite Burgate Cross. An Information Board has been erected there. The route provides level walking with plenty of interest. The path can form part of a variety of circular walks taking in Breamore and the nearby Downland and the New Forest National Park. There is an easy link on a pavement to the Avon Valley Path both towards Salisbury and Christchurch.

The Hale and Redlynch Transition Group are hoping for extensions to the Breamore Path both to the north and south and are seeking improved links to Hale. At the moment the path is only a footpath. Further development is a sensitive issue and is unlikely in the near future. I believe this group is also interested in getting an improved route between Fordingbridge and Alderholt.

Avon Valley Footpath - Badgers on the AVP south of Fordingbridge Church are still very active. Sam Jones the HCC Countryside Manager with responsibility for our area has been in contact with natural England who need to agree any remedial action.

The AVP south of Fordingbridge in particular and all of our rights of way have been difficult or impossible to use at some times this winter/spring due to the high water table. It is still wet in places but drying out.

Fordingbridge Junior School - Improvements to the footpath near the Junior School have been discussed and the National park and HCC have been supportive of improvements. These have been put on hold by the school. If the development off the Whitsbury road goes ahead there is likely to be a better walking and probably cycling route to school.

The Godshill Bridge which was dismantled as it was unsafe is yet to be replaced. Money is in place and Sam Jones is waiting for agreement by the Bridge Projects lead (HCC) in order to proceed.

Stiles to gates. During the last year many stiles have been replaced with gates. This is appreciated by all users but can only be done if the land-owner agrees. The AVP route east from Burgate towards Sandy balls has benefited from such changes. Gates have also been erected on Fordingbridge footpath38. Unfortunately 1 of the gates on this path has since been padlocked shut and sheep hurdles have been tied to it making it almost impossible to use this path.

Godshill Parish has a programme to replace most of its stiles with gates and have been successful in obtaining funding through HCC Small Grants Scheme (50%) and the New Forest National Park (25%). Fordingbridge may wish to consider a similar project.

New Forest Community Routes - The Town Council have been asked to comment on a working draft of 'New Forest Community Routes'. These will be well maintained and easy to use paths and other connecting routes that people can use to walk, cycle and ride between settlements and popular countryside areas within the National Park. I have maps showing the proposed routes with me and if anyone wishes to see them please ask me and tell me if there are other routes which you consider fall into this category. This will be considered at a Town Council meeting at 7.30pm on 15th May in the Town Hall. Interested residents may attend.

The Mayor thanked Ms Croker for her work as footpath officer and for her report.

6. To report on finances for 2012/13 (un-audited accounts) and the budget for 2013/14.

Martine Coatham, Finance Officer, presented the un-audited accounts and invited those in attendance to view them at the end of the meeting. In the budget for 2013/14 she explained that the rise in Council tax was to mitigate the likelihood that the transitional grant, added to the precept request by NFDC, might not be available in 2014 so there will be money available to prevent a shortfall and protect services. The amount of transitional grant had therefore been added to the precept set by members which was the same as last year. Additional spending is also needed for staff pensions, vital repairs to the paddling pool, fees towards the new Sports facility and Concession building and increased utility bills.

The Mayor thanked Martine for her report.

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

Nothing raised

8. 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 8.50pm.