

## **FORDINGBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of the Annual Town Assembly held on Wednesday, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2022 at 7.30pm in the Town Hall, Fordingbridge**

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

**Present:**

Cllr. Wilson (Mayor)  
Councillors Adams, Anstey, Goldsmith, Hale, Jackson, Lewendon, Paton, Perkins & White

**In attendance:**

Paul Goddard, Town Clerk  
Rachel Edwards, Asst Town Clerk  
Martine Coatham, RFO  
Cllr A Bellows, NFDC  
Cllr A Sevier, NFDC  
Donna Jones, Hampshire Police and Crime Commissioner (Guest Speaker)  
Terry Norton, Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner  
Inspector Darren Ord  
PCSO Steve May  
PCSO Rhys McCormick  
Ruth Croker, Footpath Officer  
A reporter from the Salisbury Journal  
30 members of the public

**1. To receive apologies for absence**

No apologies were received.

**2. To confirm the minutes of the minutes of the Annual Town Assembly on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> April 2021.**

It was proposed by Cllr Hale and seconded by Cllr Jackson that the minutes of the Annual Town Assembly held on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2021 be signed as a true record.

No matters arising.

**3. To welcome the guest speaker, Donna Jones, Hampshire Police and Crime Commissioner**

Hampshire Police and Crime Commissioner Donna Jones said she was keen to hear from local people in order to represent them properly. She has been in position since the May 2021 elections and as a result of feedback from the community, launched the new Police and Crime Plan, 'More Police, Safer Streets'. This legal document sets the strategic direction and priorities for policing across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight for the next three years.

The key priorities set out in 'More Police, Safer Streets' are:

- 600 more police officers by 2023
- Improve police visibility, bringing policing to your community
- Tackle anti-social behaviour
- Making it easier to report crime through 101
- Prevent young people from committing crimes
- Zero tolerance approach on knife crime
- Crack down on unauthorised encampments
- Improved outcomes for victims
- Targeting rural crime

Commissioner Donna Jones said that prior to becoming the PCC, she worked in banking until 2008 before becoming a magistrate and working in government.

She is currently in the process of moving her offices from Winchester to Fareham and cutting 20 members of staff, to save a total of £750k. This money will fund extra police on the streets.

The Commissioner said: "My vision is for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to be the safest places to live, work and visit in the country. 'More Police, Safer Streets' sets out the policing priorities for the next three years to achieve this. All nine of the priorities in the Plan gained significant support from the public.

"We need things to change across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. People want the police to respond to medium and lower level crime reporting and they want to feel safer in their local communities. As your Commissioner that's my job. By working with the Chief Constable and partners I am going to make our communities safer for you and your family."

Questions from the floor followed.

### **There is a lack of police presence in Fordingbridge, what is being done about this?**

Commissioner Jones said that police budgets are stretched. However, over the last 12 months, she has increased budgets enabling the Chief Constable to employ more police officers. By March 2023, the additional funding commitment she has made will have resulted in 102 extra officers being recruited. This is coupled with the 498 coming from the government's police uplift programme, totalling 600 new additional police officers since 2020.

The probationary period lasts for two years so the first wave recruited in March 2020 have recently qualified as officers. Commissioner Jones reported that there is a net drain on the force initially as existing officers need to tutor new recruits. She said that 1000 extra police are needed, rather than just 600, and that this need will rise as the population increases. Every pound saved will go towards more police.

**Non-dwelling burglaries are increasing. There are frequent break-ins of vans and outbuildings with theft of horse boxes, quad bikes and expensive machinery. People no longer see the point in reporting non-dwelling burglaries as the police response is simply to tell people to claim on their insurance.**

Commissioner Jones said that the police are working closely with NFU insurance. Investment has been made into drone technology costing £20k with an additional £8k for the camera. Greater use is being made of ANPR (automatic number plate recognition) and cross-border working to give greater detection and to crack down on OCGs (organised crime gangs).

Rural Crime Inspector Korine Bishop is looking at how modern technology can be used to increase the intelligence picture through partnership working, including securing funding for thermal imaging and drones to target rural offenders. Inspector Bishop is developing an app allowing members of the public to upload information such as photographs of number plates.

The police are working with local Councils to increase CCTV coverage. A bidding process is in place for CCTV which costs £18k each and gives good imaging quality.

Inspector Ord reported that the number of police constabulary is increasing. Currently PCSOs May and McCormick cover Fordingbridge, as well as the Ringwood Officers. However, there is not 24/7 cover of the town, with a shift pattern in operation and officers have days off too. Working hours have been extended until 3am on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. In addition, there is a large team at Lyndhurst who provide 999 and 101 support to Fordingbridge.

Officers are trained in stopping vehicles when leaving scenes.

Commissioner Jones apologised for the lack of police response to non-dwelling burglaries. She said this has not been good enough and has arisen from the Government response to austerity. She said that things need to change, she understands the frustrations and that people should have a response. She reported that she is working through this.

### **What is being done to tackle anti-social behaviour and drug and alcohol abuse in the Town Centre?**

The discussion became heated and members of the public made the following comments.

- It is against the law to smoke drugs. Please do something.
- I reported a house supplying drugs but nothing was done.
- My 18 year old son asks why I bother reporting anything to the Police as nothing will get done.
- There is open substance abuse at Roundhill. The local PCSOs don't want to intervene, as they want to maintain a good rapport with the young people. Instead, they tell the public to report incidents on 101. The police just have a joke with the lads in the car park.
- Youth ASB needs to be nipped in the bud.

Commissioner Jones reported that Hampshire has been a high harm force, with other issues not responded to. She wants the force to become a high and medium harm force instead saying that there are better and smarter ways to engage with young people.

Inspector Ord agreed that ASB is a problem in Fordingbridge and with the lighter evenings, youth are staying out later. He said an ASB hotspot exists in the town centre car park and reported that two people were arrested yesterday and released on bail. The police are looking at other alternatives including the removal of the benches and diversionary tactics.

The Mayor said that the Council needs to work together with the police. She said that some parents are no longer allowing their young people to go to the town centre because of the ASB there.

Commissioner Jones reported that there is a ASB Task Force and a £250k fund to tackle Youth ASB. Dirt bikes have been purchased for police, CCTV is being installed in town centres and Z-gates in alleyways. She said that drugs are now used by children from all backgrounds. Commissioner Jones awarded St Giles Trust funding to deliver County Lines, Child Criminal Exploitation, Knife Crime, Organised Crime and Gang Culture awareness raising sessions in schools. A trauma-informed approach is used to help angry teenage boys who have started using or dealing drugs and carrying knives. Commissioner Jones reported that there are 48 Organised Crime Gangs in Hampshire. Drugs, turf wars and crime gangs are rife; there is one kidnap every week in Hampshire. Hampshire Police have close links with teams in Wiltshire and Dorset to tackle rural crime. They are working with BT to improve location data.

Commissioner Jones said that petitions can be shared online, for example a petition to remove the benches at Roundhill.

**Businesses on the High Street have experienced a lot of crime, there are no effective prosecutions and cases have not been progressed further by the police. Small businesses are bearing the brunt of the cost despite having limited funds. Insurance companies either do not pay out or it's not worth claiming. Will there be any resolution to this?**

Commissioner Jones reported that ASB crime is often fuelled by alcohol or drugs. The Police are working with a charity called Catch 22. However, there is currently a better success rate with alcohol than with drugs.

**Could the police promote positive news on social media and make their progress and presence more visible?**

This is more difficult to do within a small team. Posts are vetted through corporate communications and even a quick update can take two hours to be approved. There are limits on the number of social media licenses issued.

**Would the police work with Neighbourhood Watch teams? As the police are stretched and volunteers can give up their time?**

Yes, please pass on details at the end of the meeting.

**What is being done to support the mental health of officers, especially those dealing with fatalities on the roads policing team? It is woeful in comparison to the support given to the fire service.**

This has changed greatly. Officers are de-briefed after incidents and psychological screening is used. A new site HQ is being built which gives better support. Mental health and wellbeing is being given greater attention along with health improvements.

The Mayor thanked Commissioner Donna Jones for her presentation. Commissioner Jones said that she was contactable on Facebook.

*[Commissioner Jones and other police representatives left the meeting, as did several members of the public.]*

**4. To discuss the future of Christmas Lights in the Town**

The Mayor reported that there is one year remaining on the current Christmas lights contract and asked for thoughts and feedback from residents on last year's display. Feedback included the following comments.

1. The lights don't always work.
2. The lights are too small and an embarrassment to the town.
3. Salisbury Street has no lights
4. The lights should be quality checked before installation to ensure they are all working.
5. The Merry Christmas sign on the Town Hall is tacky
6. Wickham only have light bulbs and it looks really pretty

The Clerk responded as follows.

1. There were staff contractor absences last winter due to Covid and this made the response time to outages slower. There were also issues with the power sources from some of the buildings; local businesses supply the electricity for the lights and some businesses switched off the lights.
2. Alternatives to cross-street lighting could be considered or there could be an infill of extra lights at each end of the light string.
3. The legislation has changed and it is no longer possible to hang lights across Salisbury Street.

The Town Clerk reported that the Town Council spends £16k on Christmas lights each year. Some of the tenders cost three times that amount, and the cheapest tender was chosen. The Clerk asked for any further observations to be made by October 2022, when the Council will consider Christmas lights for 2023.

A member of public complained that the High Street is a mess and has many empty shop premises, highlighting the old Martin's newsagents shop in particular. The Clerk reported that the old Martin's newsagents building, 47-49 High Street, is subject to planning applications 21/11559 and 21/11560. The Clerk said that the Sorting Office railings have now been painted after intervention from the Town Council. There was a complaint that The George has been painted purple and black and was out of keeping in the town.

## **5. To receive the Annual Report from the Town Mayor**

The Mayor gave the following report.

*Twice during the year, we have had residents of Fordingbridge come to our meetings to make impassioned pleas to do something about the traffic in the Town. One concerned Local business paid for a traffic survey. Whilst this did not prove excessive speeding, it did show us that nearly 50% are travelling at more than 20 miles an hour.*

*Having a twenty miles per hour speed limit (at least in our shopping area with some raised courtesy crossings) would help pedestrians feel safer than at present and allow them to shop freely, crossing the road where they wish. None of this would break the budget at Hampshire County Council and may help us claim back the Town from the traffic.*

*At present, our High Street appears as just another piece of highway. This has to change if we are to improve the shopping experience and sustainability of the Town. Hampshire County Council Highways could remove some signs at very little outlay, and more trees and soft landscaping would give our Town a sense of place.*

*I have learned over the last year, that a great deal of what happens in our Town relates to land that belongs to New Forest District Council. Sweatford Water Meadow, the area behind the CO OP, for instance. Decisions are made about land in our Town by officers of the district council, not by elected members. We spend a great deal of time writing to NFDC to find out what is happening. And we are rarely consulted. My first request would be that whatever else, officers must at the very least respond to correspondence from Town and Parish Councils.*

*I have learned that the Local planning authority (NFDC) makes most decisions unilaterally, without consultation with members or us as a town council. In our survey, 90% of those who responded wanted public land on new developments to be owned and managed by the Town Council. Yet the planning authority is steaming ahead with plans for this land to go to a private management company. Play areas and roads included. The new houses are going to be built without solving the phosphate issues. However, they cannot sell them until this problem is resolved. So, let's see how long that condition stays in place. Overall, I think that we have one heck of a fight on our hands, not with any elected members but with faceless employees who are taking us for fools.*

*I have learned that there appears to be little or no framework for the district council's CIL Spending (That is the developers' contributions to infrastructure). Surely, these infrastructure projects should have been included in the local plan. The proposed spending needs to be far more transparent, and The Local Authority needs to consult with Town and Parish Councils to see if they have projects to put forward.*

*Now some good news. This Year has seen the completion of the improvements to the Sports pavilion, providing much better facilities for our sports clubs. New adult Gym Equipment is now in place at the recreation ground. New seats and benches have been provided around the Town as we still continue to enjoy walking and being outside. Working with Fordingbridge Greener Living has allowed us to progress the Community Garden which will be coming very soon. The Paddling Pool is now open and the Hanging Baskets are going up tonight.*

*Thank you to a great deal of people who have organised tomorrow's Jubilee events. The sun is going to shine and I am sure we will all have a great time.*

## **6. To report on finances for 2021/22 (un-audited accounts) and the budget for 22/23.**

The RFO read the finance report to the meeting (Appendix 1). She noted that the Town Council has £5000 to award as grants under the S137 funding but last year only allocated £1400 of this money. She invited more grant applications.

There were no questions.

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

A member of the public complained about the poor condition of many roads in Fordingbridge and asked who is responsible for repairing them. The Clerk replied that Hampshire County Council Highways Agency is responsible and said that he had met with Cllr Edward Heron (HCC) and the Highways Manager to discuss the poor state of the roads. He said that HCC are undertaking work on the good roads to maintain them, but damaged roads are not being repaired as they will become damaged again. The Clerk encouraged residents to report potholes online at <https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/roadmaintenance/roadproblems/potholes> and to email Cllr Heron at [edward.heron@hants.gov.uk](mailto:edward.heron@hants.gov.uk)

A member of public complained that small cul-de-sacs are being resurfaced while the larger and more heavily used roads are still full of potholes and reported that damages can be claimed from HCC if caused by the poor condition of the roads. It was advised to take a photograph of the pothole at the time of the incident as evidence.

**8. To receive any other relevant parish business**

Nothing further to report.

The Mayor, Cllr Wilson, thanked everyone for attending. The meeting closed at 9.04pm.

## APPENDIX

### Report on finances for 2021/22 (un-audited accounts)

#### Income

For 2021/22 the Town Council received a precept of £261897, this represented a 2.98% increase to meet the increasing costs of wages and utilities.

In 2021/22 the Council received additional income of approximately £114177 (£60K down from the previous year, primarily due to no further COVID grants and £40k less in S106 funding). This includes lengthsman income (£13200), burial fees (£11640), allotments (£2364), S106 funds (£37107), CIL funding (£5333), hall lettings (£2898), recreation ground fees (£8138), hanging basket fees (£2979), fishing fees (£506), lease income (£7500), information office income/map/leaflet sales (£12988) and sundry income/donations (£6654).

#### Expenditure

During the year the main expenditure items of note relate to the changing room refurbishment (£127755 to be partly met using CIL and S106 funds); replacing the fence and repairing the car park at the recreation ground (£9350); repairs to the paddling pool (£5182) and a new shed for the community allotment plot (£1000).

The Council continued to support the Christmas Lights and the Hanging Baskets/Floral Displays. The new CIL funds will be transferred to reserves where it is ring-fenced until agreement has been reached for their use. During the financial year a grant from these CIL funds was made to Avonway Community Centre of £10000 towards the replacement roof.

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

#### S137 Grants

The Council have a budget of £5000 for S137 grants, during 2021/22 £1400 was allocated (compared with £2472 in 2020/21) – this is primarily due to a low level of applications from local groups.

New Forest CAB	£350.00
Hope for Tomorrow	£700.00
Little Buds	£250.00
Victim Support	£100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>£1400.00</b>

#### Budget for 2022/23

For 2022/23 the Town Council requested a precept of £285144.

	<b>Council Tax Requirement</b>	<b>Tax Base</b>	<b>Council Tax per Band D</b>
<b>2021/22</b>	£261987	2353.20	£111.29
<b>2022/23</b>	£285144	2413.30	£118.16
<b>Increase</b>	£23247	60.10	£6.86

Members are attempting to balance the increasing costs facing the Town Council due to above inflation rises in utility costs and an increase in the population due to local housing developments. The increase per Band D property has been limited to £6.86 over the year.

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  
May 2022*