

FORDINGBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Town Assembly held on Wednesday, 17th April 2024 at 7.00pm in the Town Hall, Fordingbridge

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

Present:

Cllr. White (Mayor)

Councillors Anstey, Cameron, Hinton, Howard, Lewendon, Millar, Paton, Perkins, Shering and Wilson

In attendance:

Paul Goddard, Town Clerk

Rachel Edwards, Asst Town Clerk

Martine Coatham, RFO

Kate Ryan, Chief Executive of NFDC

Cllr Phil Woods, NFDC

12 members of the public

1. To receive apologies for absence

No apologies received.

2. To approve the minutes of the Annual Town Assembly of 23rd May 2023 and to report any matters arising.

It was proposed by Cllr Wilson and seconded by Cllr Paton that the minutes of the Annual Town Assembly held on 23rd May 2023 be signed as a true record. All in favour. No matters arising.

3. To welcome the guest speaker, Kate Ryan, Chief Executive of the New Forest District Council

The guest speaker, Kate Ryan, thanked Fordingbridge Town Council for the invitation to speak and gave the following presentation on the New Forest District Council's new corporate plan and priorities for the future, and its relevance for Fordingbridge and surrounds.

NFDC Corporate plan 2024 to 2028

Kate Ryan said this is an ambitious forward looking corporate plan with an agreed set of priorities developed with members and with staff and based on consultation with partners and the public. It would focus the work over the next four years and in effect this current administration's plan. The Corporate Plan was recently approved by the New Forest District Council.

NFDC Vision

To secure a better future by supporting opportunities for the people and communities we serve, protecting our unique and special place, and securing a vibrant and prosperous New Forest.

NFDC Values – Learning, Empathy, Ambition, Fairness (LEAF)

These values underpin NFDC's vision and priorities by shaping their behaviours and the way they work:

Learning - NFDC will support individual development and organisational growth, learning from what they do well and where they need to improve.

Empathy - NFDC will show kindness, actively look to understand people's different needs, and ensure their services are responsive.

Ambition - NFDC will be ambitious for people and place, embracing innovation and best practice.

Fairness - NFDC will act fairly, honestly, and openly in all that they do.

NFDC Priorities

People priorities

1. Helping those in the community with the greatest need.
2. Empowering residents to live healthy, connected and fulfilling lives.
3. Meeting housing needs.

Place priorities

1. Shaping our place now and for future generations
2. Protecting our climate, coast, and natural world
3. Caring for our facilities, neighbourhoods, and open spaces in a modern and responsive way

Prosperity priorities

1. Maximising the benefits of inclusive economic growth and investment
2. Supporting our high-quality business base and economic centres to thrive and grow
3. Championing skills and access to job opportunities

Future New Forest – Transforming tomorrow, together.

Investing in the people and services to meet customer needs, protecting NFDC's financial position, and embedding sustainability through the Future New Forest transformation programme.

- Putting customers at the heart of what NFDC do
- Being an employer of choice
- Being financially responsible
- Designing modern and innovative services

NFDC priorities are underpinned by their transformation programme.

Kate Ryan finished her presentation of the Corporate Plan by mentioning some of the other New Forest District Council priorities that are relevant to Fordingbridge:

- Elections – Police and Crime Commissioner 2 May, possible General Election
- Waste strategy implementation
- Local Plan review
- Housing Strategy
- Taxi licensing policy review
- Air Quality Strategy
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund delivery
- Climate action plan
- LGA Peer Challenge this autumn

Kate Ryan then spoke about working together with Fordingbridge Town Council on the following projects and emphasised the good record of joint working between the District and Town that has developed over recent years.

Infrastructure

- UK Shared Prosperity Fund £15k for Recreation Ground Play equipment
- Community Infrastructure Levy funding – Recreation Ground circular pathway
- CCTV investment with proposal for 4 cameras in Fordingbridge

Health and wellbeing

- Burgate School artificial pitch
- NFDC s.106 £250k
- Culture in Common, Fordingbridge Storytelling, 'Acting up' events
- Community resilience with Town Council

Place-shaping

- Housing development
- Affordable home delivery through s.106
- Local Plan review agreed
- Potential for a Neighbourhood Plan

Kate Ryan reported that NFDC will hold a civic service later this month to mark 50 years since it was first established. She said that the NFDC coat of arms slogan 'Old yet ever new' is just as relevant now as they modernise and drive forward as a Council and look forward to the next 50 years.

Kate Ryan then answered questions from the floor.

Q1. A member of the public asked if there a Climate Plan for new and existing housing?

A1. Kate Ryan said that for new homes, as part of the planning process, there is a Climate Change SPD (Supplementary Planning Document). For existing stock, NFDC will invest to achieve EPC (energy performance certificate) C rating for all properties.

Q2. Cllr Woods (NFDC) asked what the District Council considers to be the core issues that Fordingbridge Town Council should consider for its Neighbourhood Plan? Do the benefits of having a Neighbourhood Plan outweigh the costs of producing it?

A2. A Neighbourhood Plan works to shape what the town wants. The timing of FTC's Neighbourhood Plan works well with NFDC's Local Plan and NFDC can support FTC in putting this together. It will require its own resource and will give 25% CIL from new developments. A Neighbourhood Plan will give a say over the area, quality and style of what matters to a town, as well as giving a more formal process of engaging with other Councils. Kate Ryan emphasised that a neighbourhood plan needs commitment, pace and resource to achieve.

Q3. A member of the public said it is good to see targets and performance as part of the Corporate Plan and asked what would make a difference to NFDC achieving elements of the Corporate Plan.

A3. There is a need to work together to maximise taxpayers' money, both across the different tiers of government and with outside bodies. For example, NFDC spend £500k each year on public toilets but there may be interest from others to provide facilities in the town centres instead. To have prosperity at the local level NFDC needs to be outwardly focussed.

Q4. Cllr Wilson said that the town centre needs greater investment and asked whether it was in the town's best interests for NFDC to own areas of land that they aren't able to maintain. An application for CIL funding to improve the land behind the Co-Op had been unsuccessful.

A4. Kate Ryan said that there needs to be a review of assets to consider the purpose of what we have and in which to invest. She said that the land behind the Co-Op could be considered for future CIL funding and asked Cllr Wilson to contact her about this.

Q5. Cllr Hinton asked about partnership working between the NFDC and the Town and Parish Councils. He suggested NFDC organise a biannual forum, beginning with a presentation on housing.

A5. Kate Ryan replied that NFALC organise a forum for councillors and that she invites Clerks to meet twice a year. She said she would take the idea back and wants everyone involved as early as possible.

Q6. Cllr Anstey asked about NFDC's priority of protecting unique places, raising concern that so many housing developments did nothing to protect the uniqueness of Fordingbridge.

A6. Kate Ryan said it is important to engage in dialogue about what is working well and what can be improved. She agreed it was painful to turn green fields to housing and said that the demand for housing is increasing even though the last census did not show an increase in the District population. This will be explored further through the preparation of the next Local Plan. She advised FTC to focus on their Neighbourhood Plan and then engage in dialogue.

Q7. Cllr Leila Cameron asked about the funding challenges facing HCC and whether any of these would impact NFDC.

A7. Kate Ryan said that NFDC has given strong representation on HCC's consultations but that there is likely to be a local financial impact to the District if the HCC proposals go forward. She

gave the example of the closure of HWRCs being detrimental to the environment (e.g. number of miles travelled) and there is likely to be an increased cost to NFDC as fly tipping increases.

Q8. A member of the public said it was good to see empathy listed as a value and asked if the play area at Whitsbury Road could be moved further from the river to a higher area which does not flood.

A8. Kate Ryan said that this land and play equipment is owned by FTC rather than NFDC but noted that NFDC own land nearby and said it could make a good joint project.

Q9. A member of the public asked about new developments and associated infrastructure.

A9. Kate Ryan advised that there will be a new call for sites for development. Local community infrastructure would be funded by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and partners such as the NHS request money, for example for the doctors' surgery.

Q10. A member of the public asked Kate Ryan's thoughts on smaller builds and materials for new housing, with a view to being more affordable and environmentally sustainable.

A10. Kate Ryan said it was important to look at key local elements, and to include in the Neighbourhood Plan something that is fitting in the community.

Q11. A member of the public asked about the increase in traffic as a result of the new developments and whether there were any plans to address or limit the traffic, saying that it is killing animals and ruining the environment.

A11. Kate Ryan said that the police and HCC did not support an average speed camera on the B3078 Roger Penny Way. Kate Ryan recognised that public transport is a challenge in rural locations.

Q12. Cllr Millar said he likes the fact that the public can contact NFDC directly. Also, that NFDC has employees rather than using outsourced companies e.g. waste operatives.

A12. Kate Ryan responded that this is a challenge for NFDC and requires appropriate investment in staff, technology, and processes to keep up with outsourced companies, but it also means that NFDC has good resources, for example to cope with blizzards. She confirmed there was no plan to change this way of working.

4. To receive the Annual Report from the Town Mayor

The Mayor thanked the guest speaker, Kate Ryan, and gave the following report.

Good evening and many thanks for attending this year's Fordingbridge Town Council Annual Town Assembly.

It is now almost a full year since the Town Council was elected by the local community with the Councillors now serving for the next four years.

During our first year in office, we have:

- *Built a good working relationship with the new NFDC District Councillors, David Millar and Phil Woods, jointly working on several issues that have impacted on our local community.*
- *Supported various groups that benefit the local community with financial contributions.*
- *Considered and commented on new planning applications with feedback provided to NFDC with the best interest for our Town always being taken into account.*
- *Opened a Community Orchard in the heart of the town for all to enjoy.*
- *Worked with Fordingbridge Events Group to put on a celebration of the King's Coronation at the Recreation Ground.*
- *Worked with Wessex Water and the Fordingbridge Avon Bathing (FAB) Group to apply for Bathing Water Status in the River Avon.*
- *Supported the Avon Valley Men's Shed in providing use of the Town Hall for their weekly meetings.*

- *Set up a working group to look at improving the Recreation Ground to include a circular pathway accessible to all, new improved play equipment, improvements to the riverbanks and hopefully the introduction of a weekly Saturday Park Run in the medium term.*
- *Agreed with NFDC the implementation of new CCTV within the Town to improve security for all.*
- *Established a joint working group with the Fordingbridge Events Group, Fordingbridge Rotary Club and the Town Council to plan and implement the Fordingbridge Christmas Lights event for 2024. We are also working on the summer festival for next year and the 80th D-Day anniversary celebrations on the 6th June.*

I would like to personally thank the Town Clerk and our Assistant Town Clerk for the constant assistance and help with the day-to-day business of FTC and supporting all the councillors.

Thanks also to our Finance Officer, for helping keep the books balanced and to our Information Officers who work tirelessly. Also grateful thanks to our Grounds Staff for their hard work and efforts keeping all our wonderful open spaces clean and tidy for everyone to enjoy.

Finally, another big thank you to my fellow councillors for the time and dedication they provide and dedicate to our Town of Fordingbridge.

5. To report on finances for 2022/23 (un-audited accounts) and the budget for 23/24.

The RFO read the finance report to the meeting (Appendix 1). She invited more grant applications. There were no questions.

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

A member of the public asked about the publication of the minutes of this meeting. They will be uploaded to the website.

7. To receive any other relevant parish business

Nothing further to report.

The Mayor, Cllr White, thanked everyone for attending. The meeting closed at 8.10pm.

Appendix 1
Report on finances for 2023/24 (un-audited accounts)

Income

For 2023/24 the Town Council received a precept of £318152, this represented a 11.6% increase to meet the increasing costs of wages and utilities.

In 2023/24 the Council received additional income of approximately £206389 (£92K up from the previous year, primarily due developers contributions (CIL)). This includes lengthsman income (£13800), burial fees (£7160), allotments (£1991), CIL funding (£122098), hall lettings (£4587), recreation ground fees (£17309), hanging basket fees (£4942), lease income (£7500), information office income/map/leaflet sales (£13045), sundry income/donations (£7376) and interest (£4684).

Expenditure

During the year the main expenditure items of note relate to the demolition of the old toilet block (£13680); replacing the fence in the play area at the recreation ground (£5027); and installation of the clock winder at the town hall (£6833).

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.

The forecast year end position (taking into account the use of reserves and CIL funds noted above) will be an underspend of £17000, to be transferred from the general reserves held by the Council, this is primarily due to the planned second loan not being taken as the town hall works have not been approved.

S137 Grants

The Council have a budget of £5000 for S137 grants, during 2023/24 £3478.77 was allocated (compared with £1400 in 2022/23) – this underspend continues to be due to a low level of applications from local groups.

Victim Support	£100.00
Avon Valley Community Matters – summer picnic	£340.00
Hope for Tomorrow	£800.00
Green Gram – IT equipment for new premises	£650.00
Avonway – Friends on Friday	£500.00
Sandleheath Sea Scouts – replacement tents	£500.00
Fordingbridge Museum – CCTV	£400.00
Fordingbridge Greener Living – public meetings	£188.77
Total	£3478.77

Budget for 2024/25

For 2024/25 the Town Council requested a precept of £285144.

	Council Tax Requirement	Tax Base	Council Tax per Band D
2023/24	£318152	2427.90	£131.04
2024/25	£335981	2423.80	£138.62
Increase	£17829	-4.10	£7.58

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 £7.58 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
April 2024