

FORDINGBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the General Council meeting held on Wednesday 1st April 2026 at 7.30pm held at the Town Hall.

(Minutes subject to approval at the next meeting of the Council)

Present: Cllrs Anstey, Balthazar, Brown, Johnston, Lewendon, Millar, Paton, White (Chair) and Wilson.

In Attendance: Paul Goddard, Town Clerk
A representative of the Ringwood and Fordingbridge Footpath Society ("RFFS")
A member of the public

1. To receive any apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllrs Hinton, Shering and NFDC Cllr Woods

2. To receive any Declarations of Interest

None

3. To confirm the minutes of the General Council meeting held on Wednesday 4th March 2026 and to report on any matters arising

Cllrs **RESOLVED:** that the minutes of the General Council meeting held on the 4th March 2026 are signed as a true record. All those present in favour.

AP5: The asset register does not need to be published

AP10: The new bus route was discussed with Pennyfarthing

AP10: Normandy Way - Officers have chased HCC re parking restrictions

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

None

5. To receive a report on any matters under Section 17 of the Crime & Disorder Act

Current 90 days up to: 31/03/2026

Preceding 90 days up to: 31/03/2025

Filters applied: FORDINGBRIDGE

	Current R90	Previous R90	Difference
1b Violence with Injury	8	9	-1
1c Violence without Injury	27	32	-5
2a Rape	0	1	-1
2b Other Sexual Offences	2	4	-2
3a Robbery of Business Property	1	0	1

3b Robbery of Personal Property	0	0	0
4a1 Burglary Residential	5	1	4
4a2 Burglary Business and Community	1	2	-1
4b Vehicle Offences	12	2	10
4c Theft from the Person	0	0	0
4d Bicycle Theft	0	0	0
4e Shoplifting	9	9	0
4f All Other Theft Offences	7	8	-1
5a Criminal Damage	8	13	-5
5b Arson	1	0	1
6a Trafficking of Drugs	1	0	1
6b Possession of Drugs	1	0	1
7 Possession of Weapons Offences	1	1	0
8 Public Order Offences	15	12	3
9 Miscellaneous Crimes Against Society	3	0	3
TOTAL	102	94	8
	Current R90	Previous R90	Difference
Residential Burglary (Excl Sheds/Garages)	0	0	0

Cllrs considered the police report and noted the increase in vehicle offences. If the police attended the meeting, context to the statistics could be provided.

6. To receive a report from the Town Mayor

The Mayor gave the following report.

Good evening & happy April Fool's day to everyone!

Seeing the start of April arrive sees the near end of another Town Council year & the start of another exciting 12 months with plenty to look forward to as well!

The next Ringwood & Fordingbridge business forum is being hosted by ourselves in the Town Hall on the 22nd of April. Caroline Roylance from The George will be giving a talk on the recent flooding & the effects on local business. It would be nice to see some local faces so please do come along from 4.30 to 6.30 if you can.

Our summer festival in July is now well underway in terms of planning & preparation thanks mainly to Kathy & Kay.

The application for UK Town of Culture has now been submitted & we must now wait to see how the hard work of Willard & his team progresses. Whatever happens it highlights Fordingbridge as a town for everybody.

The sterling work on our Town plan also continues to move along in a positive direction with, I am sure, some solid suggestions & plans for the future of our Town & residents being agreed & documented over the coming year.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank our council officers for all the hard work in firstly getting the response submitted to NFDC on the new housing consultations & also for getting sound advice on the current issues at the allotments which were a result of the prolonged flooding recently. Hopefully this greatly helped settle any concerns for the allotment holders.

The reintroduction to the Town of our own food bank, hopefully later this month, is a massive plus for all who depend on this facility. The new team seem very positive & again over the coming year I am confident we will see an excellent service back in place for our residents.

In terms of Mayoral duties of late I have attended a meeting about the food bank as just mentioned on the 25th March along with Cllr Paton & the Clerk.

On the 27th March I briefly popped into the Avon Valley Charity shops 3rd anniversary celebration since it first opened. The shop looked great & the home made cakes even better! A lovely & beneficial shop on our High Street & it was nice to chat to the friendly staff including Pat Earth.

On the evening of the 27th March I was proud to be invited to attend the annual Prize giving at the Fordingbridge Air Cadets. Over nearly 3 hours I handed out numerous certificates, trophies & personal achievements to a very vibrant group of young people. The life skills they learn through the Air Cadets is amazing & the determination shown by all the youngsters to achieve these awards including all levels of DOE was so nice to see. The troop are a real credit both to themselves & also Fordingbridge.

Earlier this evening I & several other councillors attended a meeting with representatives from the Rugby club, Turks & Whippet club to discuss the future of the Sports Club & possibilities for its replacement. A long way to go but we have made a start.

Here is to the coming 'busy' months ahead.

7. To receive a report from the County Councillor

No report received.

8. To receive a report from the District Councillors

Local Government Reorganisation

- The NFDC district is to be split under Local Government Reorganisation.
- Fordingbridge is to be in what is currently called Mid-Hampshire.
- The waterside of the NFDC is in South-West Hampshire.
- There is a clear growth agenda (not place, culture etc.) and the waterside, which with its businesses provides a lot of wealth to the NFDC, is to join the new authority including Southampton.
- It is not clear yet what the implications are or where revenue will come from in Mid-Hampshire.
- The first election cycle of the new authority will be a five-year one, with existing authorities putting forward a Cllr for a temporary board and will appoint a chief executive for the new authority.
- In May 2027 there will be elections for a shadow Unitary Authority, which will agree its processes and then come into force in May 2028, with the first term being five-year and then going to 4-year thereafter.
- In May 2028, the NFDC will cease to exist – consequently the NFDC councillors have an additional year in office to 2028.
- Town Council elections will be deferred from 2027 to 2028 (partly due to costs) and will then be back in a four-year cycle in line with the new Unitary Authority.
- The impact for the NFDC is it will have no additional resource for anything – it already has Phase 3 of the bin rollout, elections in May and two integration projects.
- The political impact is that, as the Conservative leader won't appeal the decision to divide the authority, a Conservative Cllr has moved to Reform, leaving the NFDC under 'no overall control'. This will result in the NFDC committees being redrawn to reflect the change in balance.

NFDC Cabinet met today and reviewed the risk log and the order to ban fires in the New Forest (more signage is needed).

NFDC Council meets in two weeks – Cllr Millar is planning on raising a question regarding infrastructure in Fordingbridge.

9. To receive the following Committee meeting minutes and any recommendations to General Council contained therein.

- Planning – 11th March 2026 – received Cllr Paton
- Extraordinary Planning – 18th March – received Cllr Paton
- Amenities and General Purposes Committee – 18th March – received Cllr White
- Finance & Policy Committee – 25th March 2026 – received Cllr Millar

10. To consider Highways (roads and pavements) in Fordingbridge

Cllr Woods is in correspondence with NFDC officers regarding the poor state of the town centre. The street furniture in Church Street is in poor condition and has been barriered off by HCC.

Action: Officers to raise with HCC Cllr.

Correspondence had been circulated from Beaulieu Parish Council regarding Forestry England parking charges in the New Forest. Cllrs agreed that the Town Council should write to the CEO of Forestry England requesting a delay in the introduction of the charging regime until Beaulieu Parish Council have had the opportunity to review the information Forestry England had undertaken to provide. **Action:** Officers to write to Forestry England.

The path to the post box at the Railway Hotel has been removed as part of the development work undertaken by Cala Homes. **Action:** Officers to ask Cala Homes for the path to be reinstated.

11. To receive an update on the Summer Event plans for 2026

Cllrs received an update on the current bookings for vendors and bars, the activities agreed, the confirmed booking of the stage, toilets and first aid, the confirmed acts for the stage and the current position regarding volunteers. The Rotary Club are not able to provide volunteers to manage the parking.

Through FAN, two more bands and two singing acts are available and arts groups are interested in having a presence at the event.

Subject to the need for additional volunteers to manage the event, Cllrs considered having a Town Council pitch to promote the work done by the Council.

The rugby club had provided details of the activities that they could organise for the event.

12. To receive an update on the Neighbourhood Plan and consider its scope.

The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group met again last week with discussion focusing on the evidence gathering tasks commenced in January, the Town Council response to the recent Local Plan consultation and next steps for the Neighbourhood Plan work.

Thanks to the Steering Group members and other local volunteers most of the evidence tasks have now been completed.

The resulting information, surveys, notes, etc. are being correlated and will be sent to FERIA Urbanism to review following which a decision will be made on the need for any more evidence work.

It was reported to the Steering Group that a further online meeting had taken place with NFDC planning officers to discuss the main points set out in the Town Council's Local Plan response and again offer the opportunity for more collaborative working with the NP. It was reported that the response had not been encouraging and therefore given the process and timetable being worked to by NFDC on the Local Plan a decision needed to be made as soon as possible on what type of Neighbourhood Plan to produce.

The view of the Steering Group was that there was merit in the Neighbourhood Plan focusing on Town Centre / High Street issues but also that there was an opportunity to influence other wider parish areas of planning policy even if this did not include housing site allocations. The phrase used was a *Town Centre plus*, plan.

It was agreed within the Steering Group that this was the preferred way forward and that the Town Council should be asked to endorse / support this approach. On this basis FERIA Urbanism agreed to put together a draft outline of the structure and form of such a plan, including possible policy themes and headings, to be tabled and discussed at the next Steering Group meeting in late April. Cllrs considered the implications of the NFDC Local Plan potentially not being adopted and the timing to achieve a Neighbourhood Plan given Local Government reorganisation. Cllrs agreed that the *Town Centre plus* approach was a sensible way forward.

13. To consider a revised date for the Annual Town Assembly

The Annual Town Assembly scheduled for 15th April will be deferred to a date to be confirmed before 1st June. A speaker has yet to be confirmed. Any suggestions for a speaker should be sent to officers.

14. To report on any Health & Safety issues

Nothing to report.

15. To receive reports from representatives on Outside Bodies and meetings attended

Cllr Anstey attended the Ringwood & Fordingbridge Business Forum on 5th March 2026.

Cllr Millar was due to attend the NFALC meeting but had not been provided with dial-in details.

16. To note any items of correspondence

Correspondence had been received from the Environment Agency regarding the possible installation of a permanent pump at Riverside Place, which remains a top priority for the agency who intend to proceed with the work as soon as funding becomes available.

17. To receive a report from the Clerk or any other relevant business

Cllrs considered the fly-posting in relation to the Recreate event in Alderholt and the practicalities of removing the posters. The organisers had been asked to remove them but had not responded to correspondence. Action: Officers to email Alderholt Parish Council regarding the fly-posting. Further correspondence had been received from a resident regarding the developing NFDC Local Plan and how residents might raise concerns. A public meeting was suggested to inform local residents with the potential outcome being the forming of a Local Action Group. Officers had discussed with the chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group the implications for collaborative working between the Steering Group and the NFDC. It was felt that it was unlikely that the NFDC would send an officer to a public meeting given that the formal consultation window had now closed and it is likely that the NFDC will rely on its formal public consultation when the plan is put to inspection.

18. To note the date of the Annual Council meeting as Wednesday 13th May 2026.

The meeting closed at 8:25pm