

FORDINGBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Town Assembly held on Wednesday, 18th April 2018 at 7.30pm in the Town Hall, Fordingbridge

Present:

Cllr. Connolly (Town Mayor)

Councillors Adams, Anstey, Earth, Fulford, Hale, Lewendon, Paton, White, Wilson

In attendance:

Mrs H Richards, Town Clerk

Mrs R Edwards, Asst Town Clerk

Mrs M Coatham, RFO

Cllr. E Heron, HCC

Cllr A Sevier, NFDC

Cllr R Matcham, NFDC

Chief Inspector Robert Mitchell (Guest Speaker)

A representative of Salisbury Journal

12 members of the public

1. To receive apologies for absence

There were apologies for absence from Cllr Price and Rev Gary Philbrick.

2. To confirm the minutes of the minutes of the Annual Town Assembly on Wednesday 19th April 2017

It was proposed by Cllr Lewendon and seconded by Cllr Anstey that the minutes of the Annual Town Assembly held on 19th April 2017 be signed as a true record.

Matters arising

Minute number 6 – The old Fordingbridge Club is now in a state of demolition.

3. To welcome the guest speaker, Chief Inspector Robert Mitchell, New Forest District Commander

Chief Inspector Robert Mitchell has 21 years' service in the constabulary. He spoke of the pressures on the police service. Since 2010, Hampshire police force's budget has reduced by £80M and there will be further cutbacks of £21M. Ways of saving money have had to be considered, while still keeping people safe. Training is now shared across areas, as is technology, IT services and data analysis. There are 1000 fewer Police Officers now than in 2010. Resources are allocated where they are most needed and the cities usually have a greater demand for resources. Chief Inspector Mitchell is aware of policing concerns locally.

Despite being the third worst funded force in the country, Hampshire was rated 'Good' in the recent PEEL inspection process. The PCC have raised the precept and the force continues to do the best it can with the money available. Policing has changed considerably over 21 years. Previously many cases involved thugs, drunks or thefts. Now the Police more often deal with child, criminal and sexual exploitation cases. Domestic abuse accounts for 12% of all crime in Hampshire. The Police often work in partnership with other organisations – for example those specialising in mental health, drug and alcohol addiction and housing.

Burglaries will always remain a priority, as will maintaining a PCSO presence. There will be further cuts in the budgets for equipment, specialist units and roads policing, however this will free up four officers who will return to local policing, two of these will be allocated to the Ringwood and Fordingbridge area. It is also hoped to extend the Active Citizenship program by recruiting more paid volunteers with specialist skills, for example to coach and mentor young people or to operate a neighbourhood watch program.

The Mayor thanked Chief Inspector Robert Mitchell for his presentation.

Questions from the floor followed.

Q1. Why don't the Police advertise for motor companies to lend free vehicles for the year?

A1. Police vehicles are driven all day and sometimes involved in high speed chases. Vehicles must be of high quality and the Police must be seen to be impartial. Resources are amalgamated with other forces in order to save money instead.

Q2. Speeding is an issue in the New Forest causing injury or death to animals. What is being done about it?

A2. Community Speedwatch initiatives enable members of the community to become police support volunteers and take action against speeding on roads of concern within their area. Volunteers use equipment that can monitor the speed of passing traffic and then record the details, later adding them to a database. Vehicle checks are then undertaken by the police and letters are then sent to the registered keepers advising them of their speed and reminding them of why it is a community concern.

Ch Insp Mitchell said that although tens of thousands of letters have been sent to drivers as a result of the volunteers' work, volunteers aren't currently being told this information. He promised to follow this up and improve the communication from the community speedwatch team.

Action: Robert Mitchell to follow up

Q3. Why not buy another detector van to catch speeding motorists? Surely it would be self-financing?

A3. Speeding fines go directly to central government rather than to local policing.

Q4. When will the two new constables arrive?

A4. The new neighbourhood police officers will arrive next month.

Q5. How can crime be reported, there are difficulties getting through on the 101 number?

A5. There are apps for reporting crime online and tracking the progress of an investigation. A new IT system will be going live in May and will be advertised widely. The neighbourhood team can also be emailed.

Q6. Could speed van information be forwarded to Parish Clerks?

A6. The Chief Inspector will make enquiries to share data. He advised that the information is on social media and to follow the Twitter page where results will be updated.

The Mayor reminded parishioners to report all crime and thanked Chief Inspector Robert Mitchell.

4. To receive the Annual Report from the Town Mayor

The Council year 2017/18 has, as always, been a busy and, at times, traumatic year. In particular the Whitsbury Road housing development and the lack of consultation from our colleagues at New Forest District Council led to hours of meetings and correspondence. While our protestations fell on deaf ears, it was not through lack of effort from our Council. Building works have started and houses will soon start to appear. New Forest District Council has decided to name the estate Augustus Park with streets named after the artist's family.

We work as closely with New Forest District Council as we are allowed and apart from the Local Plan and Housing we have quite a happy relationship with our District Councillors. Ann and Roxy both turn up to our monthly meetings and inform us of what's happened at District Council, however it would be nice for District Council to consider our views before they actually implement their changes. Our County Councillor Edward is a font of information and advice and while our dealings with Hampshire County Council are small, Edward is also Deputy Leader of New Forest District Council and well worth keeping on side with.

Health and Safety responsibilities for all Councils continue unabated, with policies, risk assessments with many various obligations. Our Council has now employed the services of professional Health and Safety advisors and while we are currently up to date and legal, the working hours needed to keep everything in that condition is beyond our staffing capability.

The changes to the Data Protection laws are also creating more and more administration time and will involve major policy changes as well as operating procedures. Our residents will probably be unaware of our current data protection policy and will probably be unaware of the changes needed by the new policy however we have a legal responsibility to comply.

Recent changes to the National Planning Framework Policy together with the national housing needs may necessitate the undertaking of a Neighbourhood Plan and the Town Council will be looking at the implications of this undertaking in the near future. We will keep our residents up to speed on this important development, as and when a decision is arrived at.

Our Town Hall was built in the late 1800's called then, the Oddfellows Hall, the hall is in a poor condition and in a few days' time work will be undertaken to explore the depth of work needed to ensure the building is brought back to the condition it should be in. The roof and its connected parts are giving room for concern and have to be rectified. Our Council are also seeking architectural advice as to the possibilities of making changes to the Town Hall to enable all our staff and services to be housed under one roof thereby reducing costs and improving efficiency. I am happy to report that the Council Information Office is widely used and offers Tourist Information together with Fordingbridge and NFD Council services. This facility brings in residents and visitors from many of the surrounding villages, and beyond, many of which use the shopping facilities that the town has to offer. It is operated by Kathy and Kay with relief assistance by the Assistant Town Clerk, Rachel.

Our Council relies heavily on its Staff. The Information office I have mentioned, but my thanks, and indeed that of the Council, must also be extended to Andy and Derek for the work they do at the Recreation Ground and the surrounding areas. Even during the long winter months, the Cemetery at Stuckton Road looked spectacular.

I have briefly mentioned the Town Hall Staff. Our Team, and I do mean a Team, work together amazingly well and efficiently. They are managed by our Town Clerk, Helen, together with Rachel our Assistant Town Clerk and Martine our Financial Officer. If we had a little more space they could all work at the same time but we're working at that. I mentioned earlier that administratively it has been a very busy year but I can also report that even with extended working commitments Helen and Martine have both managed to fit in studying for and passing their professional qualification CiLCA. This is no mean feat and one that will only bring benefit to the Council and I wish to record the Council's congratulations.

As my term of office draws to a conclusion, I would like to thank my fellow Councillors, our wonderful Staff and the residents of our wonderful Town for indulging me over the past 10 years. I have enjoyed the experience so much and this would not have been possible without the co-operation of everybody who cares for our Town. I will miss dreadfully the Schools and Lunch Clubs. Stepping Stones our amazing toddlers group and many other events that our groups and organisations have invited me to attend. But nothing lasts forever and a new Mayor and Deputy will be elected in May and I wish them, sincerely, as much enjoyment as I have received from everyone.

5. To report on finances for 2017/18 (un-audited accounts) and the budget for 18/19.

For 2017/18 the Town Council received a precept of £194657.00 which was made up as follows:

Council Tax	£194657
Identifiable Grant	£0
Transitional Grant	£0

The contribution from Council Tax had not changed from 2013/14 to 2016/2017 – however the grants that were introduced due to the Localisation of Council Tax Support (the Transitional Grant) have been reduced to zero and so the income received reduced marginally. In 2017/18, following the loss of the grants and business rates becoming due, the Council took the decision to increase the precept in order to maintain essential services and support the residents and businesses in the town.

The Council receives additional income of approximately £75k. This includes lengthsman income, CIL funding, hall lettings, recreation ground fees, hanging basket fees, Playscheme fees, fishing fees, lease income and map/leaflet sales.

Expenditure of note during the year: planned works to the Memorial Bungalow were completed (re-pointing and replacement windows), the signage in the recreation ground have been replaced and a replacement vehicle has been purchased for the groundsman. The most significant area of expenditure has been the Christmas lights, where repairs and replacements have produced an overspend in that budget area.

The Council continued to support the Christmas Lights and the Hanging Baskets/Floral Displays, in association with the Business Forum and Rotary Club.

The Council have been working with the Youth Steering Group to replace the Skate Park – a tender was issued and consultation took place. Following presentations, a contractor was appointed. It is hoped that the final section of funding will be secured over the next few months (the majority of the funding coming from S106 funds and some Council reserves), and the project will go live in 2018/19.

There are continuing concerns regarding the town hall roof and clock tower, and investigation works are currently underway. It is anticipated that the works required will be considerable.

A number of planned works have not taken place (repairs to the memorial gates and the initial works to the town hall were delayed) and so the overall result will be a small transfer to reserves (approximately £3000, unaudited accounts). This represents CIL funding and grants towards the skate park which will be held in reserves until the works are completed.

S137 Grants

The Council have a budget of £5000 for S137 grants, during 2017/18 £2550 was allocated (compared with £3100 in 2016/17) – this is primarily due to a low level of applications from local groups.

New Forest CAB	£500.00
Salvation Army	£250.00
Victim Support	£150.00
Turn Up For Fun (TUFF)	£500.00
Rae Stratton Lunch Club	£400.00
Fordingbridge Day Centre	£250.00
Avon Valley Dementia	£200.00
Avon Valley Concerts	£250.00
Burgate School Awards	£50.00
Total	£2550.00

Budget for 2018/19

Due to increasing costs (primarily wages and utilities), the Council took the decision to increase the precept by 2%. For 2018/19 the Town Council requested a precept of £198550.00. It is likely that the Council will need a Public Works Loan to be able to undertake the necessary repairs to the town hall.

	Council Tax Requirement	Tax Base	Council Tax per Band D
2017/18	£194657	2251.5	£86.46
2018/19	£198550	2279	£87.12
Increase	£3893	27.5	£00.66

In 2018/19 the Council will continue to improve the facilities at the recreation ground, with a replacement skate park during the current financial year. The Council will work with the newly formed Events Committee to help support the summer festival and Christmas events, and with the Business Forum for the continuing provision of hanging baskets and Christmas lights for the town.

The repairs to the town hall are a priority, and a review is currently taking place to see whether alterations to the amount of office accommodation are viable in order to make better use of the Town Hall facilities and make savings in the medium term.

Questions from the floor followed.

Q. A query was raised regarding the S137 Grant process, who could apply and the criteria set.

A. The RFO advised that the Council have a S137 Grant Policy which sets out the details and then advised the meeting of the different organisations which had received funding during 2016/17.

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

The following items were raised:

a) Welcome Signs – The Welcome to Fordingbridge signs have been taken down for repainting. The work is almost complete and the signs will be put back up again shortly.

b) Potholes - Potholes need to be reported online to Hampshire County Council.

7. To receive any other relevant parish business

There was no other parish business.

The Mayor, Cllr Connolly, thanked everyone for attending and thanked Chief Inspector Robert Mitchell for his talk. The meeting closed at 8.29pm.