

**MINUTES OF THE HIGHAM FERRERS ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD ON
TUESDAY 15th MARCH 2016 AT THE TOWN HALL 7.30PM.**

PRESENT:

Cllr R Gell (Mayor) - Chairman for the meeting.
12 Town Councillors
1 District Councillor
2 Members of the Public
Sandra Mitcham (Town Clerk)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies were received from Cllr B Prigmore, Cllr Mrs A Sauntson, Cllr D Drage and Nigel Cheetham (Chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group).

2. MINUTES OF THE 2015 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING.

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 17th March 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. MAYOR'S REPORT.

Cllr Richard Gell gave the following report:

Council

Elections took place in May 2015. We said good bye to Celia Ingram, Simon Wiles, Mick Beesley, Margaret Tuffnail, Alan Dunn and Kathy Dunn. We welcome new Councillors Barry Prigmore, Jason Smithers, David Hamblin and Olwen Mayes and welcome back David Drage.

It was with great sorrow that the Council heard of the sudden death of George Whiting in his final days as Mayor on the day of the elections.

The Council then proceeded to co-opt to fill two vacancies in Chichele Ward and co-opted Tina Reavey and Christopher O'Rourke.

Gwen Murdin

During the year Gwen Murdin BEM, Honorary Freewoman died. Gwen served the Town as a Town Councillor from 1968 to 2011, during which time she served as Mayor 3 times; and as a District Councillor.

Neighbourhood Plan

The Neighbourhood Plan has almost completed the process. The Referendum took place on 18th February 2016 and just under 92% voted in favour, the plan is now awaiting formal adoption by East Northamptonshire Council. Thank you to all those involved.

School Crossing Patrol

Due to the withdrawal of funding by Northamptonshire County Council the Town Council has continued to contribute £2400 towards the cost of providing this service. Following the resignation of the previous incumbent at the end of March 2015, a new

person started in September. She left after 1 term and the vacancy is being advertised.

Christmas Sparkle

This year's event was again very successful and attracted in excess of 1000 people. There was a change from the large fair rides this year with an artificial skating ring.

Plans are already underway for this year and the date is 19th November 2016.

Farmers' Market

The market continues to be successful. It has its own Facebook page. Birthday celebrations were held in April and there was a cake and entertainment. Rushden Town Band performed at the Christmas Market.

Additional Cemetery land

Work to find suitable land is still ongoing. It is hoped that further tests on land owned by the Duchy of Lancaster will be completed soon.

Rushden Rider

To ensure the continuation of the service, the Town Council has continued to subsidise the service to the tune of £5400. The subsidy should continue in 2016/17.

Planning.

The Council has considered 44 planning applications over the last 12 months. Works continue on 3 sites in the town - 88 dwellings off Station Road, 166 dwellings at Garden fields and 36 dwellings off Midland Road.

Works have started on the Rushden Lakes development which should open in 2017.

CCTV

The Town Council continue to provide this service after East Northamptonshire withdrew their funding in 2013. Monitoring of the system moved to Daventry in September and the cameras were upgraded and increased.

Outdoor Gym Equipment

Five pieces of Outdoor Gym Equipment was provided on Saffron Road Recreation Ground in November 2015. This was funded by a grant Awards for All.

Heritage Centre

The main focus since the end of August 2016 has been the possible provision of a Heritage Centre at 19 College Street. The property was offered to the Council by the Duchy of Lancaster on a 15 year lease. After consideration of the potential costs of converting it and the possible running costs the Council decided at its February meeting to decline the offer.

Local Council Award

In June 2015 the Council was the first local council in Northamptonshire to be awarded an award under the Local Council Awards Scheme. The scheme is the successor to the Quality Council scheme. This achievement recognises that the council achieves good practice in governance, community engagement and council improvement. This award shows that the Council goes above and beyond their legal obligations, leading their communities and continuously seeking opportunities to improve and develop even further.

Planters

The Council has worked with Higham Ferrers Tourism to provide the appearance of the town. Four barrier troughs were purchased and funded by a grant from Higham Ferrers Tourism. The group then provided the plants and the Council watered them.

Grounds Maintenance Consortium

The Council is part of a consortium for its ground maintenance. The contract was retendered in 2015 and Turneys were again the successful contractor.

Common Land at the end of Mallard Close

Works are being undertaken to improve and tidy the common land at the end of Mallard Close. The land has been cleared and a new fence is due to be installed shortly.

Phase 5 Kings Meadow Lane

Phase 5 has still not been transferred. There are some outstanding issues that need to be resolved before the Council take it over. We are in regular contact with the developer on these issues.

4. DISTRICT COUNCILLORS REPORT

Cllr Mrs P Whiting gave the following report:-

I sit on the Planning Policy Committee which has had three meetings since May, we look at all the different Policies and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) Sometimes it can be very detailed and involves a great deal of study and investigation by the Officers.

The July Meeting saw us looking in detail at our own Neighbourhood Plan, it was considered to be a very detailed and well put together document.

November we looked in detail at the 2015 Authorities Monitoring Report calculating a Five Year Housing Land Supply for the district. Each meeting we receive a Planning Policy and Conservation Update, which enables us to see how the Local and Neighbourhood Plans are progressing.

The February Meeting was a long one, with the meeting lasting just over two hours, as several documents needed attention. I will not go into too much detail of each one as they were very detailed but briefly

We approved the North Northamptonshire Joint Care Strategy's Main Modification Stage

National Planning Policy Framework Consultation on Proposed Amendments. We approved the Officer response to the public consultation on the proposed changes to national planning policy.

A long discussion followed on the Surface Water Management Plan for East Northamptonshire-Proposed Priorities for Scheme Implementation. Issues were raised on the amount of Surface Water in Rushden, we noted the progress of the Scheme and with a few amendments agreed that it should go to Town and Parish Councils for consultation.

The Biodiversity SPD was adopted as a Statutory Supplementary Planning Document so that it can be considered by the local authority and developers to aid decision making and ensure the biodiversity is appropriately considered as part of new development proposals.

The Committee also adopted the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Special Protection Area SDP as a supplementary planning document for the same reasons as above.

We approved the public consultation on the Ashton Conservation Area proposals and also the Pilton/Stoke Doyle/Wadenhoe Village Design Statement. A Village design statement does not carry as much weight as a Neighbourhood Plan.

The meeting closed with the normal Planning Policy and Conservation Update where Higham Ferrers was praised most highly for the excellent work carried out by the Steering Group and Staff which enabled us to be the first Town to go to referendum.

Along with Cllrs Richard Gell and Anna Sauntson I sit on the Planning Management Committee where over the year we have granted and refused many applications, some small and some large developments.

In October I joined, and received training for the Licensing Panels but so far have sat on just one taxi panel.

5. COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT.

Cllr D C Lawson MBE gave the following report:-

Last year I reported that the County Council had to make massive savings and that some services might suffer.

Unfortunately this is still the case and the County Council has to make savings of £130,000 over four years with 65 million of that figure having to be implemented in the coming financial year.

The County Council has agreed that an increase of 3.95% to council tax and will do its very best to provide essential services as far as possible.

Under consideration at the moment is combining blue light services and although the Police and Fire Services may well merge, the ambulance service is less likely to be part of the integrated system.

I told you last year that children's services were having a tough time and that the OFSTED report was not favourable. Happily things have been improving, but the worrying aspect is the number of agency Social Workers that cost more money. We have now established an Academy for Social Workers and this is working really well. This should eventually mean that we will be able to dispense with some if not all of the agency Social Workers.

The new County Council Headquarters in Angel Street is on course to be finished next year and will house some 2000 members of staff.

Last year we were having problems with the Recycling Centre in Rushden but I am pleased to report that as people get used to the new times and days of opening, there is now less of a problem and it seems in the main to be working quite well.

School places in Higham for Higham children still present a challenge and I know that some Higham Ferrers children are attending Rushden Primary Academy in Bedford Road. This may not suit everyone but Henry Chichele Primary School is now taking two forms of entry i.e. 60 new pupils every September. I suspect that secondary school places will eventually become a problem as both Ferrers and Rushden Academy will fill up over the next few years. As you may know Academies do not come under the Northamptonshire County Council and are funded by Central Government. With the building of possibly 600 new homes in Higham over the next few years I expect there will be problems in finding school places in Higham Ferrers for Higham children.

The subject of re-organising Local Government is back on the agenda and various items are being put forward. As I understand it the Borough and District Council are not very keen to lose their identities and at the moment there does not seem to be much of an appetite for the single unity authority i.e. the County Council taking on the responsibility for all services. This would mean a big reduction in the number of councillors across the County and would be tantamount to District and Borough Councillors being in a similar position to turkeys being asked to vote for Christmas. In my opinion, unless reorganisation of local government is imposed by Central Government, nothing will change.

That concludes my report and I will be happy to answer any questions.

6. REPORT FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STEERING GROUP.

Sandra Mitcham, Town Clerk, gave the following report on behalf of the Steering Group Chairman, Nigel Cheetham:

What has happened since March 2015?

Neighbourhood Plan

This year has seen five main areas of action:

- 1) Finalisation of the draft Neighbourhood Plan,
- 2) Submission of this draft to East Northants Council for their approval and Statutory Regulation 16 consultation,
- 3) Independent examination of the Plan by a Chartered Town Planner,
- 4) Production of the final Neighbourhood Plan incorporating minor modifications proposed by the examiner and finally,
- 5) Holding a **referendum** on the Plan.

As most of these activities were outside the control of the Steering Group (SG) we only needed to hold three meetings during the year.

Our April meeting confirmed changes to the draft Plan resulting from the Regulation 14 Consultation.

At the July meeting we noted the changes had been carried out and that the Plan had been submitted to East Northants Council as the Planning Authority for their formal Regulation 16 consultation. Following this consultation, which did not amend

the Plan to any extent it was then formally examined by an independent planner. This examination took place during August and September 2015 and was carried out by Christopher Collison (Chartered Town Planner, Economic Development Professional and Heritage Professional). His report dated 15 September 2015 confirmed that apart from some minor conditions and adjustments of text the Plan met the basic conditions required. East Northants Council approved the Plan at their Planning Policy Committee meeting on 17 November 2015. The Plan then moved on to its final stage, a **referendum** by the residents of Higham Ferrers.

In December we held a meeting to consider how we would approach the **referendum**. It was noted that the due date was likely to be 18 February 2016 and we discussed our final consultation strategy to encourage a good turnout and hopefully obtain the required 50% of those voting to be in favour of the Plan:

- 1) We arranged for information to be included as a flyer in the **Reporter** newspaper
- 2) We arranged to conduct a drop-in morning at the Farmers Market to be held on 30 January 2016
- 3) We arranged to erect two Neighbourhood Plan banners at either end of the market square giving the date of the **referendum**.
- 4) We arranged to erect **referendum** date information boards at a number of locations in the town
- 5) We agreed to deliver flyers to all houses in the town a week before the **referendum** date stating the main points of the Plan and encouraging residents to turn out and vote.

The **referendum** was duly held on 18 February 2016 with 1026 eligible votes and a 91.62% vote in favour of the Plan so it passed the required 50% pass percentage with a substantial margin. It now remains for East Northants Council to formally **make** the Plan, which means to formally approve it as planning policy for all new development in the Plan area of Higham Ferrers.

Community Plan

In previous annual reports I noted progress achieved by the Town Council in completing the various actions in the Community Plan, which it approved back in 2014. However this progress reporting will not continue into the future. The SG has now completed its task and will be dissolved once the Neighbourhood Plan had been **made**. The SG has no authority other than to prepare the two Plans. It is the responsibility of the Council or other **authorities** to deliver the policies and outcomes of both Plans. At the December meeting the Town Clerk suggested that the knowledge and experience of some members of the Steering Group could be helpful to the Council's working parties involved in delivering the outcomes of these Plans, particularly the Community Plan. It was agreed that when invited a number of members of the SG would make themselves available to assist the Council on this basis.

Conclusion

As Chairman I should like to thank all members of the Steering Group for their voluntary work and dedication in the preparation of both Plans (Community Plan and

Neighbourhood Plan). Our job is now over. As mentioned last year, and on behalf of the community of Higham Ferrers, I trust the relevant authorities will do all they can to ensure the Vision and Objectives of the community are fulfilled, policies are implemented in the way the Plans envisage and that the facilities and town centre improvements the community would like to see, are carried out.

Nigel Cheetham - Chairman Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

7. REPORT FROM HIGHAM FERRERS TOURISM

Simon Wiles gave the following report:-

One of the main areas of focus for Higham Ferrers Tourism, Business and Community Partnership (Tourism) is Chichele College, which is used by a number of groups on a regular basis, and has also established itself as an important art gallery in East Northamptonshire.

This year, 17 Artists will be exhibiting and in addition, with the help of the Town Council, there will be 6 music and poetry performances during the year. Through successful bids with the Heritage Lottery Fund, and Awards for All, the medieval Cloister Garth was developed and is managed through the summer months by members of Tourism and a happy band of gardening volunteers. The second award improved the toilet facilities at Chichele College providing a disabled toilet with suitable access.

To fund such improvements Tourism arranges or contributes to, a number of Town activities. Some events are featured regularly. Examples of these are Open Gardens, where approximately 16 or so gardens are opened each year in June. This event regularly attracts up to 1000 people to the town. In November, The Christmas Sparkle is a winter fair, which was originally started by Tourism and is now a community wide event. This brings over 3000 people into the town. These events bring Higham Ferrers to the notice of many people outside the town. Other events are of a smaller scale. This winter, we have had a successful season of Classic Black/White Films, there will be a Race Night in October and The Town wide Garage Sale has grown in participants year on year. Here, Tourism advertise where the sales in the community are being held, and then eager bargain hunters have the opportunity to walk round the town purchasing highly desirable items.

We support the Mayor's Market on the Square, and we will be playing a large part at the Queen's 90th Birthday celebrations on Saffron Field on June 11th, funding the entertainment by way of a lottery grant.

Tourism not only funds its own projects such as the disabled toilet mentioned above, but has contributed to community wide projects such as the renovation of the Market Square trees, the renovation of the bells at St Mary's and provided The Friends of St Mary's with a start-up grant so that they could develop their publicity campaign.

We have provided the finger posts in the town, set up (in conjunction with the library) a Tourist Information Centre, and we have planted and provided plants,

hanging baskets and flower troughs to help the town look even more beautiful than it naturally is.

Our plans for this year and forthcoming are to support the Council in the provision of finding and developing a heritage centre in the town environs, so we can display the heritage and history that we are so proud of.

8. REPORT FROM HIGHAM FERRERS BUSINESS FORUM

Simon Wiles gave the following report:-

Higham Ferrers Business Forum was formed in 2014 in order to bring together business people from around the town and surrounding areas once a Quarter, so they could network and develop relationships for business.

The group meets on the last Thursday of the Quartermonth . March, June and September, and then on the second Thursday in January, at various locations in the town from local pubs, business offices, function rooms, the medieval Chichele College and the Town Hall.

As the organisation grows, more and more businesses are getting involved and many have generated additional trade by being able to let everyone know about what they do. There are over 200 office-based and home-based businesses in the Higham Ferrers town boundary, and we are always looking for new members to come and join us once a Quarter.

While there are lots of businesses that are now joining the Forum, most of them are home-based, and we would like to see more high street shops, pubs, restaurants and cafés becoming involved. There are clearly a lot of opportunities in and around Higham Ferrers, but apart from paid advertising, there's not a lot of networking opportunities.

Our aim is not to be a Chamber of Commerce, but to be a non-political organisation that gains business by chatting, networking and talking about your wares, your promotions, your opportunities and your unique selling points.

Many businesses who have been involved in the past year or so have seen quite significant increases in business from other attendees of the Forum.

The fee is £10.00 per meeting, and this includes a buffet lunch (provided by a local business!).

As we say at the Business Forum -

As a customer, we don't know when we'll need a Business, but

As a Business, we always need a customer.

9. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM.

The Mayor thanked, on behalf of the Council, the members of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, Higham Ferrers Tourism and Higham Ferrers Business Forum

for their continued contribution to the Town.

Chairman

Date

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