

MINUTES OF THE HIGHAM FERRERS ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 11th
MAY 2021 VIA ZOOM AT 7.30PM.

PRESENT:

Cllr Mrs C Reavey (Mayor) - Chairman for the meeting
9 Town Councillors
1 Unitary Councillor
2 Town and Unitary Councillors
1 Member of the Public
Sandra Mitcham (Town Clerk)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies were received from Peter Tomas.

2. MINUTES OF THE 2020 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING.

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 10th March 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. MAYOR'S REPORT.

Cllr Mrs C Reavey gave the following report:

Good Evening, I am Tina Reavey, the current Mayor. This has been a strange and difficult year for all. Who would have thought over a year later we would still be in the midst of a pandemic.

Before I move on with my report, I need to give thanks and pay tribute to Councillors who have stood down at the recent elections and also to Anna Sauntson who passed away on 1st May.

A Minutes silence was held at this point.

It was with great sadness that the Town Council and staff received the news of the death of Cllr Anna Sauntson. Anna was one of our longest serving Councillors with over 35 years' service. Anna was Mayor of the town on three occasions and she always carried out her duties with immense pride and respect for others. Having been an active part of the birth of the Tourism Group she has supported it for many years. She was also involved in the local neighbourhood plan, where she fought for the towns heritage to be maintained for future generations and had concerns on how many new developments were being built with a lack of infrastructure to accompany them. Anna was passionate about keeping the towns ancient Civic Traditions, and a great supporter of the local Bedesmen. When Higham Ferrers twinned with Hachenburg in Germany, Anna was the person who signed the deed and has since visited on several occasions. Anna also served on the East Northamptonshire

Council for thirty- three years and she was Chairman in 2003 -2004. During that time she served mainly on the Planning Management Committee and was also involved with the Licensing Panel. She was always on hand to give advice to local residents with a monthly "District Council Surgery". Anna was standing down at these elections due to ill health. She will be greatly missed on the Council as she had a great deal of knowledge and experience which she was always happy to pass on to others.

In 1964 a young Derek Lawson was elected to the then Higham Ferrers Borough Council. He saw the formation of the East Northamptonshire District Council which led to Higham Ferrers becoming a Town Council. Derek is the longest serving member of the Town Council with over fifty- seven years' service. His knowledge of local government is vast, and his experience is second to none. Derek was a member of the East Northamptonshire District Council for over twenty years, where he was Chairman between 1987-88. He was also a Member of the Northamptonshire County Council for forty years and Chairman 2007-08. Derek was Vice-Chairman of the Police and Crime Panel which was part of the Northants Police Authority before the position of the Police and Crime Commissioner was created.

Derek has been a very well-respected Mayor of Higham Ferrers on three occasions, and the Leader of the Council for five. For all his years of commitment to local government, I am delighted to say that Derek's work was recognised when he was awarded a well-deserved MBE in 2007. His knowledge and experience will be missed by us all.

Sheila Mantle who has been a Town Councillor since 2007 and Mayor in 2012-2013. Sheila is local through and through, having been born here and living in the town all her life. Many will know Sheila from her working in the Wharf Road Post Office for seventeen years.

When Jason Smithers joined the Council, by his own admission, he knew little about how local Council worked, but was keen to learn and have the opportunity to put something back into the Community. Luckily, Jason was a very quick learner and he has gone from strength to strength. Through being a very busy Mayor in 2018-19 he became interested in another level of local government and stepped forward when the Higham Ferrers seat became available on the County Council.

David Hamblin joined the Council in 2015 as the first UKIP member. He has always contributed his ideas and knowledge and has been an important member of the Council. David will always say what he thinks and express his concerns on certain issues, but you always know where you stand with him.

On the staffing front we said goodbye to Julie Thorneycroft, the Town Manager we shared with Rushden Town Council. We wish her good luck in her new role with Northampton Town Council.

I could not miss touching on the pandemic as it has been such a big part of our lives over the past year. Thank you to all the volunteers who have worked in the community to support others with shopping, fetching prescriptions and a friendly voice.

The Town Council have continued to operate throughout the pandemic with the staff working at home. We quickly managed to get used to a new way of working and have continued to meet as a council on zoom each month. Apart from March 2020 the Farmers' Market has continued to operate with social distancing measures in place to keep it safe to shop. Once we are through this, we are planning with the Church to hold a memorial service in memory of those who lost their lives to the virus.

The Town Council launched a campaign in June to say a big thank you to those essential businesses and workers that have kept Higham Ferrers going throughout the lockdown period, and to welcome back the newly reopening shops to the high street and surrounding areas. As Mayor I visited some businesses to personally pass my thanks, on behalf of the Town Council and the people of Higham Ferrers, for their hard work and dedication over a difficult and challenging time. The campaign was launched on our Facebook page where we highlighted one business per day. It was wonderful to see so many people like and comment on these posts, adding their own personal messages of thanks, and we are sure that this support is greatly received from these businesses.

55 planning applications were considered during the year. Outline permission was approved for up to 300 houses next to the Ferrers School and 120 houses on the Former Textile Bonding. A decision on the outline application for Rushden East decision is awaited.

In 2020 we were pleased to be able to grant £2000 to the East Northants First Responders. The First Responders are a fantastic and hard-working group of volunteers who live in the local community and are trained by East Midlands Ambulance Service to be dispatched to 999 calls to provide emergency care. The £2000 grant was used to purchase new and much-needed equipment for the group. Representatives from the group came to the Town Hall in July to meet me and show me the equipment they were able to purchase with the grant.

Paul Parsons, The High Sheriff of Northamptonshire, visited Higham Ferrers in October 2020 to tour the Town Hall, Chichele College, St Marys' Church and Bede House.

In August 2020 Highways England presented us with 3 carved wooden benches made from the 'Three Oaks' tree that had to be felled for the Chowns Mill Roundabout Project. I officially received the benches and unveiled them in their new permanent home at Castle Fields where they can be admired and enjoyed by the whole community. The work with Highways England continues as three individual seats are currently being carved for Nightingale Way Play Area. A Mayoral competition has been held with the local schools asking the children to design the backs of the three seats. In conjunction with the

competition a carved item was gifted to each of the 3 local schools participating in the competition.

As Mayor of Higham Ferrers, I formally opened the Timber Trail at Castle Fields on a beautiful cold frosty morning. Helen Howells, Chairman of East Northamptonshire Council, attended the socially distanced ceremony to hand over a plaque, as the project had been funded by a Community Facilities grant of £7500 from East Northamptonshire Council. For several years, the Council and the residents of Higham had had an aspiration to improve the facilities on Castle Fields. As it is a Scheduled Ancient Monument this had not been straightforward and after some negotiation Historic England agreed to a low-level timber trail. On behalf of the Town Council, I thanked East Northamptonshire Council for the funding. I know that the facility is already being enjoyed by many children from Higham Ferrers and particularly during these difficult times, it is important that there are opportunities to exercise and play outside.”

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, we had to cancel our traditional Christmas Sparkle. To keep the town twinkling we harnessed the crafters in the town and we yarn bombed the bollards in the town. We were overwhelmed by the fantastic response from the community. A Christmas Tree was also added to the Market Square and the War Memorial was lit up.

A hamper competition was held with items from every shop in the town. The hamper was presented at the December Farmers’ Market along with the prize for my Christmas card competition.

In December some of the Councillors spent time organising, collecting, and packing 60 hampers for residents in Higham Ferrers including the lonely, vulnerable and elderly. These were funded by a grant from Western Power and my Mayors’ Allowance.

Plans are already underway for this year’s Sparkle event and the date is set for 20th November 2021.

As the Charter partnership project moved from its second year into its final year the restored Charters were ready to go to their new home at Northampton Records Office. The Charters were carefully transported in their special handmade boxes and are now stored in the appropriate climate-controlled conditions to ensure their protection for future generations. Alongside the framed copies hanging in the local schools, the framed copy of the Byelaws was hung in the Town Hall. The framed copy of the earliest Charter of 1251 hangs in Chichele College and the 1556 Philip and Mary Charter in the Bede House.

In the light of Covid restrictions the planned for Town Tour training and tours could not happen and were placed on hold. An innovative alternative is being created and will soon be available to the town and its visitors. An audio tour has been recorded and will soon be available from an App downloadable from Google Play or the App Store. The audio tour is

approximately an hour in length and provides a fascinating glimpse into the history, main sights, and treasures of our medieval town.

Other Projects

- Higham Town App was launched in April 2021. We hope you will download and use to support local businesses.
- The extension to the Greenway phase 2a is almost finished.
- A new Interpretation Panel has been installed in the churchyard, which provides information about the Bede House, Chantry Chape and St Marys' Church.
- An Interpretation Panel was installed and tree planting carried out at Nightingale Way play area.
- The Tennis Courts have been repainted and the MUGA resurfaced.

4. REPORTS FROM PRINCIPAL AUTHORITY COUNCILLORS

Cllr Ms H Pentland gave the following report: -

Dear Councillors and members of the public,

It is my pleasure to give my report for this Annual Town Meeting.

It has been a strange year since the last annual meeting due to the pandemic and I am so pleased that we are moving towards 'normality' once more.

Over the past year, at East Northamptonshire Council, we really got to grips with online meetings which worked well and allowed us to continue with committees and council meetings.

I have attended many planning meetings virtually and there have been a number of notable planning applications in what was the Higham Ferrers Lancaster ward, including the new school next to Moulton College and the housing development off the Kimbolton Road. There were more planning meetings than perhaps other years, but as councillors, and with the support of officers, we worked hard to get through the applications, debating them in detail and listening to the public speakers able to participate through the online system.

In addition to this, and a number of other council meetings across the year, we had the last full council meeting of East Northamptonshire Council recently, which provided the opportunity to reminisce on the life of the council and the important contributions many people have made to the Council over the years.

I have also regularly attended briefings on the Covid-19 situation locally. These briefings have been a very useful tool to understand case rates in Northamptonshire and the

response to these, as well as to ask questions of officers. These briefings are continuing as we progress through the Government's 'roadmap' and I will continue to participate in them.

As well as attending the Town and Parish Council meetings locally, I have continued to correspond with local residents on a range of matters from planning to policing and I always enjoy being able to offer my assistance.

As I am issuing this report after the elections on the 6th of May, I am hugely honoured to have been elected to the new North Northamptonshire Council for the Higham Ferrers Division, alongside Councillors Bert Jackson and Jennie Bone. I am incredibly grateful to those who voted for me and I look forward to working as hard as I can for all residents of the Division and the local community.

Whilst this is just a snapshot of the work I have been doing over the past year, so as to not take up too much of your time, I hope this is of interest to you. If I can ever be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

5. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM.

Nothing was raised.

The Mayor thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

Chairman

Date