

HONITON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Meeting held on 18 April 2016 at the Council Offices, The Beehive, Dowell Street, Honiton, commencing at 7.00 p.m.

Members present**St Michael's Ward**

Cllr A Alder
Cllr S Edwards

Cllr D Perkins
Cllr Jackie Wadsworth

St Paul's Ward

Cllr H Brown
Cllr R Coombs
Cllr P Halse
Cllr V Howard
Cllr C Kolek
Cllr J lake
Cllr A Mountjoy
Cllr G Smith

7 residents (including Cllr D Foster (EDDC) & Cllr D Barrow (EDDC))
William Gillings – Tesco Community Champion
Press – Peter Hodges (Pulmans)
Town Clerk
Deputy Town Clerk

65. Chairman's Welcome

The Chairman welcomed the Elector to the meeting and introduced the Councillors.

Apologies were received from:

Cllr L Harvey-Ingram (P)
Cllr McNally (P)
Cllr Melbourne (P)
Cllr K Smith (P)
Cllr Taylor (P)

66. Mayor's Report

Cllr Kolek reported:

I was very honoured to be selected as your Town Mayor leading a Council that has been democratically elected following the first local election for both wards in many years. On the whole the Council has come together with new and returning Councillors working hard to ensure we represent you the people of Honiton and meet the needs of the Town.

I was keen to give something to the Town and therefore nominated the relative's room at the hospital as the Mayor's charity for the year. We have launched an annual Mayor's Ball which I hope will raise a substantial amount of money for my chosen charity and I hope this will continue into future years.

We have improved our links with the Chamber of Commerce, liaising with local businesses and our MP, Mr Neil Parish to ensure that Honiton is a sustainable place to work, shop and conduct business.

The Christmas lights were a huge success and we have agreed that the Council provide more funds in order to continue with providing a colourful and seasonal display of festive lights attracting people to our town.

We are in the process of improving our market including introducing a monthly late night Thursday market from May to December and special themed Christmas market.

We continue to work closely with our schools and youth organisations to engage with our young people, celebrate their successes and encourage their participation in community matters as they are the future of our town.

We have worked with EDDC in improving play park facilities at Langford Avenue and Davey Playing Field using funding made available from former housing developments.

The past year your Town Council has been working very hard on your behalf including producing our Talk of the Town newsletter every quarter, the marshalling of Hot Pennies, Charter day, Armed Forces and working closely with a vast array of local organisations and charitable groups who provide events, meet the needs of the vulnerable and add value to the life of our town.

We are delighted that Honiton has achieved Dementia Friendly Town Status with 50% of our councillors participating in Dementia Awareness training in order for us to understand and meet the needs of those in our community.

I personally visited numerous organisations last summer after my election as Mayor to better understand the various workings of these organisations and find out how the Town Council can work closely with them to benefit you the members of our community.

Following a public engagement exercise with a stand at Honiton Show and a number of surgeries at the Saturday market we have listened to what local people would like for our community. It is clear that the environment and our heritage is high on the agenda. Therefore the Council has set up an open spaces working group who are working with EDDC to identify potential play pitch sites and projects to improve of our sports facilities and play parks.

We regularly inspect our footpaths, carry out general maintenance work at facilities such as Roundball Wood, the Glen and our flowerbeds around town.

We were delighted to hear that the Beehive obtained charitable status and is proving to be a sustainable asset to the Town. We would like to thank the Directors and the number of volunteers who work tirelessly to make this happen.

The Town Council has also been able to assist many local groups with grants. Many people are involved and work hard to run and support these groups and I would like to thank each one on behalf of us for all that they do. We gave the Honiton Tourist Information Centre a large grant and we are currently looking at ways we can improve this service in order to be fit for the 21st Century.

We are now working with the community in establishing a Neighbourhood Plan which will have legal status and ensure our town develops in the way the community desires. The success of the Neighbourhood Plan will depend on the whole of the Community planning the future of Honiton together.

We have had a difficult period recently with an application for a Judicial Review and we have tried to protect the public funds at all times. This was not about the work that the Town Council does but about the behaviours of councillors. However we will not let this affect the work we do or impact on the dedication of our councillors who give up so much of their time in serving you our constituents.

It goes without saying that I extend my thanks and gratitude to our committed, dedicated and hardworking councillors without whom none of our work would be possible.

I would also like to thank our Town Crier, Dave Retter whose advice on Civic matters and Mayor decorum has been invaluable. He is an excellent ambassador for our Town.

Our Council staff, Chetna Jones, Sarah Jenkins, Carolyn Bowles and Mike Vernon who are a pleasure to work with, who regularly go beyond the call of duty and keep us councillors in place.

Cllr Kolek also confirmed that the Mayor's Ball was a huge success and approximately £2,900 had been raised towards Honiton Relative Room.

67. Minutes of the last Town Meeting

The minutes of the Town Meeting held on 20 April 2015 were signed and received in evidence without further proof.

68. Policy Committee Report

Cllr Halse reported:

The Policy Committee primary purpose is to give the Council a forum in which to consider issues in more detail than a full time Council meeting would allow. It enables issues to be debated at length and take

various points of view into consideration. This allows more time to be given to prepare a detailed response to a consultation or to review a change in regulations to ensure the Town Council is compliant. We are able to set up working groups to formulate a response based on the discussions that took place in the Policy meeting. The Policy Committee does have delegated powers, however; these are limited to responding to consultations and internal policies. For wider scoped matters once an item has been discussed, the committee can only make recommendations, which need to be ratified by a full Council meeting. The Policy Committee also produced a forward plan to ensure the Council worked more effectively.

The SWAP Report produced in March 2015 has carefully been examined to ensure all actions identified were completed. This led to the Policy Committee reviewing the Code of Conduct of Councillors and introducing sanctions as per the report recommendations. This task proved to be quite difficult and the decisions made at the time were based on very little information being available. We have since then found through legal advice that this subject was very new, untested and based on not clearly defined legislation. We are therefore working towards re-defining our Code of Conduct.

In the past year the Policy Committee has formulated responses to several consultations concerning Boundary Commission amendments for Devon County Council (DCC), Devon Mineral Plan and Licensing and Gambling Act. Our focus this year has been on communicating and engaging with the public by attending the Honiton Show, holding "meet you councillor" market stall surgeries, defining a community engagement strategy and setting up a community engagement forum. Common themes that came up were improving our High Street and surrounding area to make Honiton a more attractive place to live and visit, providing more flowers and trees, better Christmas Lights display, safer streets, free or reduce rate parking and protecting our heritage. These were either pursued with the relevant authorities or considered in the budget arrangements for 2016/17 in order to implement them directly. The Policy Committee also agreed an Action Plan in order that local people were able to see at a glance the Town Council's actions and achievements and how they have benefited the community.

On a final positive note, the Policy Committee was able to make recommendations to the Council with regards to the improving our open spaces and sports facilities. By working closely with East Devon District Council we have improved Play Parks and added a new sports wall to Allhallows field.

I would like to thank Officers at both the Town Council and East Devon District Council for their invaluable help and advice as well as our other very hardworking Town Council staff and without them all we would not be able to complete these tasks.

Finally I would like to thank members of the Committee for their long standing work and congratulated the Mayor on her efforts through this difficult period.

69. Report of the Finance Committee

Cllr Brown reported:

The Finance Committee usually meet on a quarterly basis, with additional meeting as required. The purpose of the Committee is to review all financial matters which relate to council activities including staff issues.

The Committee have met 5 times during this financial period 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016 and have made several recommendations to full council for their approval. At quarterly meeting members view all cheques that have been issued during the period as well as scrutinising the quarterly Income and expenditure details and the reconciliation report. Other matters that have passed through the finance committee during this period are:

- The councils risk management register
- Grants for community groups.
- Review of the councils asset register
- Financial Regulations and Internal Control
- Member's allowances.
- Review of financial audit reports
- Annual Budget/Precept forecast

Budget/Precept

Over the past few years setting the council budget/precept has been difficult set against the national austerity measures taken by central government. The Finance Committee are well aware of the financial impact any increase in the precept has on the community, however, the Committee have to ensure that

sufficient funds are available for the council to meet its obligations to the community. This year (2016/17) the precept has been increased by approximately 13p per week per band "D" household. The precept was set against a further reduction of the Council Tax grant of 14%. This increase was also as a result of listening to the electors on what they would like to see in Honiton and where possible we have made a financial provision in order to make these improvements.

During the 2015/16 financial period money from the precept was used to cover the annual expenditure for providing administration, staffing, marketing, room hire for meetings, service charge the Town Council offices at the Beehive and environmental services to the town. Funding was also made available for providing grants to various community organisations such as:

- Tourist Information centre.
- Citizen Advice Bureau
- Youth Support
- Charter Day
- Hot Pennies
- Christmas Lights.
- Community groups.
- Youth Centre
- Honiton Together

The Finance Committee will continue to oversee expenditure and other financial issues when they arise and where appropriate make all necessary recommendations to council. It will strive to maintain stability and financial openness to the community.

Cllr Brown confirmed that draft year end accounts were published in the Annual Report and that final Accounts will be available for viewing in May/June.

70. Planning Committee Report

Cllr Coombs reported.

This report is for the Council year from April 2015 to March 2016 inclusive.

I would like to thank previous Committee members, Mr Les Bayliss, Mr Peter Corke and Mr John Zarczynski, the previous Committee Chair, who were not returned in the contested Town Council elections in St. Michael's and St. Paul's Wards in May 2015; those Councillors, together with the two Committee members who retired from the Council mentioned in the previous annual report and the other members, set by their dedication and commitment an example for the new Committee to follow.

Three Committee meetings prior to the elections and 20 meetings since, usually held fortnightly, have considered a total of 123 planning applications including 21 for work on trees covered by tree preservation orders or on other trees within the Conservation Area and 8 for advertisements as well as planning applications situated very close to the Honiton boundary, in neighbouring parishes.

East Devon District Council has announced that it is shifting to a paperless electronic means of distributing planning applications to the parishes in the district. We know this is going to be challenging. Committee members will do their utmost to ensure that all planning applications are properly considered.

I would like to thank the office staff for their administrative support to the Planning Committee which includes undertaking research and liaising with the Local Planning Authority, members of the public and developers as appropriate.

Finally, I would like to thank the current members of the Planning Committee for fulfilling the Town Council's role as a consultee on planning applications for the town and parish of Honiton.

71. Open Forum

Cllr Foster praised the Town Council and re-iterated that as a former Town Councillor he understood the commitment and time that was needed in order to carry out this voluntary role.

72. Close of Meeting

The Mayor thanked everyone for attending and thanked all the Councillors for their hard work this past year.

Meeting closed at 7.28pm