

HONITON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of the Town Council held at the Town Council Offices on Thursday 31 May 2012

Present

St Michael's Ward

Cllr Mike Allen* **
 Cllr Nick Cornwell*
 Cllr Gary Elliot
 Cllr David Foster*
 Cllr Peter Halse* **
 Cllr Vera Howard*
 Cllr John Taylor*
 Cllr Vernon Whitlock*

St Paul's Ward

Cllr Vivienne Ash*
 Cllr Les Bayliss
 Cllr Roy Coombs*
 Cllr Peter Corke*
 Cllr Sharon Pavey*
 Cllr Liz Tirard*
 Cllr John Zarczynski

* Trained in Power of Wellbeing

** Also EDDC Councillor

In Attendance

Town Clerk
 1 Student Advisor

12/91 To receive apologies for absence

Cllr Groves (P); Cllr Harman (P)

12/92 To receive declarations of interest

Cllr Ash – Community Complex (Trustee of HCCA) (P)
 Cllr Pavey – Community Complex (Member of HCCA) (P)

The Chairman declared the meeting out of session

12/93 Public QuestionTime

Copies of all submissions had been tabled for the Town Councillors.

The Chairman asked the Student Advisor to give his input as he understood he had limited time available for the meeting due to exams but that he wished to speak on behalf of the young people of the town.

The Student Advisor reminded Members that the recent e-vote at Honiton Community College showed 90% of students in favour of the Beehive and he advised that there were at least two bands connected with the school that currently had nowhere to perform. The young people of the town felt that the Beehive would be a good social area for the college's summer drama performances and also for the various dance groups. He reiterated the comments of the student making the welcoming presentation at the Mayor Making that it was hoped to bring the town and community together and that the community complex was vital for the youth of the future.

The Chairman thanked the Student Advisor for his contribution, especially at such a busy time for him at school.

Mrs McNally

- a) Why not start again and think the whole thing through? Please do just that. This second Town Poll has told you in clear terms that you are not providing what this town wants.
- b) Why use this site? I know of at least one site that was looked at that is not on the list. There is room for manoeuvre.
- c) What will it cost the taxpayer? We are told the precept will not rise to cover building costs. Yet repayments and interest on the loan to cover just some of the building costs has to be precepted for over the next 40/50 years. The annual income has not been guaranteed by the Registrar or ROC. For them to show an "interest" is not enough for this Town Council to ignore us and borrow and spend against our wishes.

Signed Chair

11 June 2012

- d) How much is needed to be fundraised? We had been told an extra £106,000 was needed for the build and £92,000 to fit out. Miraculously the total sum is now only £100,000. The sums just don't add up. Fundraising is now falling short of targets.
- e) Why does the Town Council need to move? The money allocated is for a community facility, not the Town Council premises. Look individually for premises or look more closely at this place – but don't sit back and coast into new premises on the tails of the "Beehive". The clerk says she has no option but to close these premises if you don't accept her recommendations. I'd look very carefully at that statement if I were you.
- f) How do you know people want this? The majority don't. Two Town Polls have told you so, despite the recent huge leafleting exercise promoting a "Yes" vote

Recommendation : This seems to be : carry on because so much has been spent already. That does not make it right. It is time to cut your losses and look at something smaller that this town might support in these financially straitened times.

Finally, I would like to say that I for one am insulted that this Town Council did not bother to agenda the town poll as a stand alone issue tonight. Your electorate deserved it and you promised it on your website. You have let us down badly and now is the time to put it right. You will not be acting as a Quality Council if you carry on ignoring us. I am just one of the 60.5% who voted No.

Mrs McBrearty

It was decided at the last Honiton Town Council general meeting to convene an Extraordinary General Meeting to discuss the results of the second Town Poll – again, a very convincing two to one against the proposed build. This was publicised on your website. However, the agenda for tonight's EGM does not mention this as a reason for the EGM. Instead, the agenda is concerned only with the promulgation of the proposed build. This was not the stated intention, nor is it a proper/appropriate subject for an Extraordinary General Meeting.

The Clerk advised that she had replied to Mrs McBrearty as follows :

The minutes of the Town Council meeting held 14 May state "The Chairman advised that he would be calling an Extraordinary Meeting of the Town Council in the near future to provide an opportunity for all the issues to be raised and discussed and final agreement reached on proceeding with the project". The agenda item for tonight's meeting fully reflects that advice from the Chairman and I can confirm, as the Clerk to the Council, that this is a proper subject for an Extraordinary Meeting, which has been called in compliance with the Town Council's Standing Order no 17a and is called to discuss matters that arise that require discussion between normal Town Council meetings.

Mr Payne

- a) Why is there 2 versions marked version 6 but are totally different?
- b) Please explain the change of name from HCCA to Friends of the Beehive and is there any legal framework change?
- c) The council intends to sell the Beehive facilities to outside organizations, what estimates have the council on the increase in traffic and the demand on parking spaces?
- d) Would the council tell me the risks associated with the proposed theatre and musical activities?
- e) Is it correct that a shortfall in income of 10% would place the complex in a loss making situation?
- f) If the Beehive is loss making who will bear the costs?

Mr Burgess

Those who oppose this scheme use the Town Poll result for 13% of the electorate to claim a mandate against the building of The Beehive Centre. Will the members of the council in considering their mandate for the Beehive take into account

- a) That a Town Poll result does not give a mandate to build or not to build
- b) That the arrangements for the poll excluded (i) those under 18, who given the opportunity at the Community College e-poll were two thirds in favour (ii) those who live in the local villages that will also benefit and to some extent pay for the centre
- c) That councillors who stood for election on a manifesto of building The Beehive have a democratic mandate from the electorate
- d) The wide ranging consultation process that was followed

- e) That they have a mandate from the councillors of East Devon in the form of (i) approval of the council for the project and recognition by the recent award (ii) approval of the business plan (iii) granting a significant amount of money (iv) planning consent
These East Devon councillors would surely be amazed if HTC did an about turn at the 11th hour and kicked the whole process into touch.

Mr Sherman

We have now had two town polls both resulting in overwhelming defeats for the supporters of the Beehive project, this tells us that 80%+ of the electorate is just not interested in this project. My suggestions on how HTC should now proceed and possibly raise more interest with the electorate are

- a) Shelve the current plan
- b) Continue and increase fundraising
- c) Accept EDDC's offer of facilities within their new offices in Honiton
- d) Start negotiations with EDDC to get instead of 106 monies a plot on any new housing estate
- e) HTC along with EDDC should continue as project managers
- f) When the building starts a management committee should be made up and consist of (i) two members from each – not councillors – ward (ii) two members from the Town Council (iii) two members from HCCA – not current councillors (iv) one teenager from each ward. A chairman and vice chairman should be selected jointly by HTC and EDDC, their right to between them would be to cast the deciding vote in the event of an undecided vote by the rest of the committee.

I make these suggestions in the hope that the electorate would have a feeling of ownership leading to a greater community spirit.

Mrs Sharman

The Town Council have made frequent statements that if the community complex was to be built, there has been a commitment by business and other users that they would use the facilities of the complex, thus bringing in a revenue. How many of these so called users have actually given written confirmation of their commitment, not just verbally, to support the Council's claims and if so what revenue would be generated per annum from these committed users.

Mrs Morgan

It is widely known that the current council chambers are under threat due to the lack of disabled facilities; however I don't think it is right to rely on the community complex being built, especially in these uncertain times. Have Honiton Town Council got a Plan B to provide alternative council chambers?

Mr Dalton

I was very disappointed that the open meeting called to discuss the community centre was to be on the same night as the final concert of the Honiton Festival, in which I am engaged. It means that I and a number of other people who are "for" the centre are unable to attend, and so I forward my views in this letter.

I came to Honiton over 50 years ago to become headmaster of the primary school and since then I have worked tirelessly in many capacities for community projects, but have always found that there was no suitable venue in the town to house such events. It is shameful that, what is arguably the most important town in East Devon has no suitable civic amenity while all surrounding towns have these facilities. And not only the towns, but village communities have also pulled together to provide similar facilities. The Honiton position is now even worse with the closure of such places as the British Legion Hall.

Now that we are on the verge of success in this direction, it is sad that a group of unelected "backwoodsmen" are leading the opposition to the provision of a centre. They have no vision for the future of this expanding town and their arguments just do not hold water. What will future generations think if we back down now? Their suggestions for alternatives will not provide adequate facilities. St Paul's church is uncomfortable, and cold for three quarters of the year, the British Legion is a non-starter and so is the Magistrates' Court. The suggestion that a site be found on an already overcrowded school site is ludicrous and where do those who advocate a more central site think that it is to be found?

I believe that the results of the referenda should be completely ignored. They did not reflect the town's needs. Many of those who voted against were selfishly concerned with their own pockets and not the good of the community. Remarks in the queue while voting bore this out. It is also sad that many people from surrounding villages were unable to vote. They may not pay Honiton's council tax, but they bring money into the town and would support the centre, helping to make it financially viable. They may live in a village, but Honiton is their town.

Do those who want to spend a lot of money on starting again want to end up with a wooden hut with a tin roof? No, Honiton must have a centre worthy of the town, so I implore the Town Council to ignore the opposition and proceed with their present plans. We must have a new centre fit for purpose.

Mr & Mrs Weller

Like many people who do not live in Honiton, we have a huge interest in the new centre and all the activities it will provide for all people in the area. We have viewed the public outcry about the centre with growing alarm. Surely everyone from the very young to the very old who live in the area deserve a building fit for purpose in the 21st century.

A new centre will bring much needed prosperity and vibrancy to Honiton and everyone should strive for this in the community. Why should people who live in Honiton and surrounding areas be disadvantaged, unlike those in towns such as Chard, Axminster, Sidmouth? Why should they have amenities and those in the second largest town in East Devon be denied what others have?

For too long Honiton has not been given the recognition it deserves, we want a town that carries forward the aspirations and vision of its forebears. Let's make a town we can be proud of, with hope and a future. A town fit for the next generation and generations to come and create a positive and welcoming centre for us all, where we can say, at this meeting, on this day, at this time, we fought with heart, imagination and vigour to move this on and get this centre built.

Mr Teare

Since planning permission for the community complex was granted in March I have been part of the team fundraising for the complex, a need identified by both the Town Council and those members of the public who have raised concerns.

The experience has been a remarkably positive one given we, in effect, have been approaching businesses in the town, local residents, visitors to the town from the neighbouring parishes and visitors from far and wide, asking for money or goods in kind in a time of recession for a project that has been described as controversial in the press.

Almost all the businesses in town have supported us, hundreds of tickets have been sold and over £14,000 raised in a few months.

As a former Town Councillor I know there is a danger that a small but determined group of opponents to a project can make their presence felt to the extent that you begin to question the validity of the project.

The opposition like the town poll has to be placed in context. In the case of the latter 90% of the town eligible to participate didn't feel the need and, as the public meetings over Tesco showed, if people are strongly opposed to something they come out en-masse.

Setting out our stall on the High Street I can confirm the project has the support of the town and the surrounding parishes, if anything the view has been "haven't you built it yet?" Working with local business, local residents and the young people of the town, who weren't able to participate in a poll on a facility they intend to use, to progress this project has been a highly positive community experience.

Councillors have shown dedication, determination and diligence to bring this project so far and I hope they retain the courage of their convictions tonight and continue with this worthwhile project, the town you serve needs it.

The Chairman thanked all the members of the public for their contribution. He advised that most of the comments and questions received had been raised many times and had been answered in full but he would ensure that the Clerk responded in writing. He was sure that the issues would also be addressed during the debate but he asked for specific questions to be answered at this time.

The Chairman declared the meeting back in session

Cllr Cornwell advised that Mr Payne had asked for a draft copy of version 6 of the business plan and this had been provided to him with the explanation that it was not complete and would include changes in the final version. He also advised, with regard to Mr Payne, that questions concerning HCCA were the business of HCCA and not the Town Council and would therefore be passed on.

Cllr Cornwell, in response to Mrs Sharman, advised that it would be unreasonable to ask anyone to fully commit to a scheme at this stage but that the Council had received strong indications that outline commitment was in place.

Cllr Cornwell, in response to Mrs Morgan, advised that the Town Council's Plan B regarding its premises would have to be to find alternative premises at full commercial rent or purchase.

Cllr Halse, in response to Mr Sherman, advised that EDDC's plans to move were still in early stages and it would be some time before this was achieved. He also advised that no offer of shared premises had been received by the Town Council, and none would be forthcoming from the District Council.

12/94 The Building of the Beehive Community Complex

Cllr Cornwell proposed that Honiton Town Council should accept the Town Clerk's recommendation to continue with the building of the Beehive Community Complex on the Dowell Street site under the current plans. This was seconded by Cllr Tirard.

Cllr Cornwell advised that the proposal was backed up by a factual and highly comprehensive briefing paper. He went on to say that parish polls were well known to be anomalies and that representatives were elected to take on responsibilities. He cited a recent by election for the Town Council when one candidate had been strongly in favour of the project and one strongly against; the winner of the by election with a 3:2 majority had been the candidate in favour. He noted that this was how people understood democracy worked.

Cllr Cornwell advised that the recent town poll told the Council that 1 in 13 of the residents had expressed serious reservations about the scheme but that nearly everyone had said they wanted an alternative. He stressed that he did not believe there was an alternative.

Cllr Allen asked for an amendment to the motion with the addition of the following words :

However this Council resolves to have one final meeting with the school, District Council and Town Council plus the owner of the Cattle Market site in order to finally discuss this option and if a real opportunity exists the Town Council should call another meeting.

The amendment was seconded by Cllr Howard and Cllr Allen asked that a recorded vote be taken.

Cllr Allen went on to explain that he had been in correspondence with East Devon District Council and he believed there was a possibility that this site may be viable. He believed that the amendment would only lead to a delay of a few days.

Members discussed the amendment and raised concerns about the viability of the option put forward, based on previous advice from the District Council and the Community College. Cllr Halse asked whether the Council would allow Cllr Twiss, who was in the public area that evening, to confirm whether the Leader of the District Council had changed his mind on the viability of the two options. This was agreed.

The Chairman declared the meeting out of session

Cllr Twiss confirmed that the Leader of East Devon District Council had not changed his mind about the Cattle Market not being a viable option.

The Chairman declared the meeting back in session

Members voted on the amendment proposed by Cllr Allen

	For	Against	Abstain
Cllr Allen	X		
Cllr Ash		X	
Cllr Bayliss		X	
Cllr Coombs	X		
Cllr Corke		X	
Cllr Cornwell		X	
Cllr Elliot	X		
Cllr Foster		X	
Cllr Halse		X	
Cllr Howard	X		
Cllr Pavey		X	
Cllr Taylor		X	
Cllr Tirard		X	
Cllr Whitlock		X	
Cllr Zarczynski		X	

THE AMENDMENT WAS DEFEATED

Members discussed the substantive motion and Cllr Allen asked for a second amendment as follows :

In the event of proceeding with the community complex proposal, responsibility will be put into a separate company.

The Clerk advised that she could not allow this amendment as the Council had not yet had the opportunity to debate and resolve the adoption of the General Power of Competence, which would be necessary to set up a separate company or co-operative.

Members voted on the substantive motion. Cllr Cornwell asked for a recorded vote.

	For	Against	Abstain
Cllr Allen		X	
Cllr Ash	X		
Cllr Bayliss	X		
Cllr Coombs		X	
Cllr Corke	X		
Cllr Cornwell	X		
Cllr Elliot	X		
Cllr Foster	X		
Cllr Halse	X		
Cllr Howard		X	
Cllr Pavey	X		
Cllr Taylor	X		
Cllr Tirard	X		
Cllr Whitlock	X		
Cllr Zarczynski	X		

THE MOTION WAS CARRIED

The Chairman thanked all Councillors and members of the public for their input into the meeting.

12/90 Close of Meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.40pm

Signed Chair

11 June 2012