

STURMINSTER NEWTON TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES of the ANNUAL PUBLIC TOWN MEETING held by Zoom on Thursday 22nd April 2021 at 7.30pm

Present :

Councillor C Fraser – Town Mayor and Chairman
of the Town Council
Mrs Mal Derricott– Town Clerk

In attendance:

Cllr N Dobson

Cllr A Donaldson

Cllr H Lacey (Deputy Mayor)

Cllr M Jones

Cllr P Marks

Dorset Cllr Carole Jones

Councillor V Fox – Open Spaces Co-opted Representative

Mrs L Plumridge – Assistant Town Clerk

Cllr Roake

Cllr R Taylor

Cllr G Rose

1 member of the public

1 Welcome and Introductions

Councillor Fraser (Town Mayor and Chair of the Town Council) welcomed and thanked those present and introduced Councillors and staff to the public attending.

2 Approval of the minutes of the last Annual Public Town Meeting

The minutes of the last annual Public Town Meeting held on 14th March 2019 were approved as a true and correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman of the meeting.

3 Annual Reports of the Town Mayors

Cllr Fraser presented his Annual Report for the year 2020 - 2021

Cllr Lacey presented her Annual Report for the year 2019 – 2021

Both reports are attached to these minutes.

4 Report on Town Council Finance by the Town Clerk

Mrs M Derricott, Acting Town Clerk, presented her finance report which is attached to these minutes.

5 Open Forum:

The following issues were raised:

Cllr Donaldson congratulated everyone on what had been a very difficult year.

Cllr Jones reported as follows:

- Trail way project – he had received very good support, particularly the encouragement from Jeremy Read for the Trail way project. Some funding has been raised and the project will be starting soon.
- Electric charging points – he and Cllr Donaldson are looking into the feasibility of an electric vehicle charging facility. Ricketts Lane could be a possible location as the Cheese Festival are investigating a permanent electric supply and also the Youth Club/Scout project at the Scout Hut – it could be that all 3 projects could benefit in one go by the installation of electricity in that area.
- The Mill – with funding from Historic England the project has started and surveys taking place. A new lease is also being negotiated.

The meeting closed at 7.49pm

Cllr C Fraser – Annual Report 2020-2021

Another strange year as life continues under Covid restrictions, the Annual Town meeting taking place in July rather than May at which Helen Lacey stood down and I took over as Mayor.

The Town meeting and all subsequent meetings of Council and Committees had to take place via "Zoom", which has its own protocols and problems (how do you notice which of the 10 other Councillors wish to speak) when viewing rows of small boxes on one's screen).

Changes that have occurred including Fowler Fortescue taking over management of the Rivers Estate from Symonds and Sampson, Steve Bevis having to step down as a Councillor due to work commitments and being replaced by Peter Marks from Stalbridge Lane. Just before Christmas our Clerk Emma Lindsay retired to take care of her Mother.

During my 9 months as your Mayor I have attended the opening of The Emporium and a brief ceremony in the War Memorial Gardens for VJ Day.

Our Local Council Associations on both County and National level continued to hold meetings again by Zoom.

My last function before this meeting was sadly attendance at a Civic Service following the death of HRH Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh organised by our Vicar Reverend Phillipa Sargent.

My thanks to Helen Lacey for her assistance as my Deputy, to Louise and Kate in the Council Office and to Adam and his team working in separate pairs) for maintaining our streets and grounds.

Finally particular thanks to Mal Derricott (our Clerk in 2006 – 2012) for coming out on retirement to take over as Acting Clerk following Emma's departure.



Cllr Helen Lacey Annual Report – 2019 – 2020

Civic Events: In November 2019 the Mayor, Cllr Helen Lacey, held her civic event which concentrated on those working with dementia. This took the form of a speed networking event working in partnership with Andy Watson of Stour Connect. This created a very lively environment where over 40 organisations taking part, encouraging all to work more efficiently to improve the quality of life for people in the Sturminster Newton area. The event successfully generated a comprehensive contact list to help maintain the network. Feedback from the attendees was very good: "Excellent event - never been to one like this before, good way to speak to a maximum number of people", "Innovative idea, very well organised event", "Great to meet so many other businesses from our community, thank you".

In February I attended the 2019 launch of the Hall & Woodhouse Community Chest fund accompanied by Cllr Martin Jones. Little did we realise that this would be the last civic event for some months.

In March 2020, Cllr Helen Lacey, should have held her second civic event. The Council have been concerned at the lack of provision for support services to help the mental health of young people, from primary age to 18. With so many pressures for young people, she is keen to get a group of people together to discuss what can be done to help to generate positive change, at some point in the future I do hope that this council will support and run the event.

In May I raised a toast for the 75th anniversary of VE Day. Due to the circumstances I was on my own in the garden rather than the celebration that had been planned for the town.

In June we started to emerge from lockdown (part 1), Dorset Council had looked in to ways and spaces to help local businesses operate in a safe manner. After carrying out some investigations it was discovered the area in front of Gallery 1 was in fact highways land and then offered to the town for seating for customers of local coffee shops and the like.

Dorset Councillors Carole Jones, Pauline Batstone (then Chair of Dorset Council) and I did a formal opening of the space with the cutting of a ribbon - in the rain. I also did a short piece to video for the Dorset Council website on the reopening of the town, to promote what Covid19 measures had been put in place, and to try to encourage people to visit local shops.

In July we held our annual Town Council Meeting virtually and I was delighted to hand over the office of mayor to Cllr Charles Fraser, and I have been pleased to have supported him as his Deputy. *Cllr Helen Lacey*



STURMINSTER NEWTON TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT 2020/21

After a council year like no-other, due to the Covid pandemic, this financial report covers 2 years, as last year's (2020) Annual Public Meeting did not go ahead. Never-the-less, the council's work and projects continued, albeit combined with working at home and the ever changing Covid pandemic restrictions.

Briefly, the precept for the 2020/21 financial year was £341,412, an increase of 13.5% and to date there have been no questions or queries relating to the accounts from the Internal Auditor, who has been undertaking interim audits over the year.

This current year the precept is £342,112, which was a very small increase of 0.21%. Due to the slight increase in housing over the year the Band D equivalent Council Tax per household per year will be £213.37 (20/21 - £215.86), therefore a slight decrease of £2.50 per year or 1.16%.

In the year 2019/20 the council implemented an interactive digital mapping programme for the Town Council Cemetery. This is still a work in progress.

After a break-in at the Grounds Workshop and research into options for the replacement of the stolen equipment, the council has agreed to choose battery operated machinery (wherever possible) when replacing equipment.

The council has devised a Business Plan for the future and within that it conducted an asset review (including machinery and recreational equipment etc.) in order to create a reserve for equipment and for a forward look to the future needs of the council.

In response to the Covid pandemic the council needed to purchase 2 laptops and a printer for the staff to enable them to work from home following the government's guidelines. It was agreed that the laptops will replace the existing PC's in the office when they need replacing.

Two major projects are currently being worked on:

Sturminster Newton Mill – the council has a lease on The Mill and is currently negotiating to re-new it. A survey has been carried out and there is much work to be done to keep this historic building safe for the future. The Council has been offered a substantial grant towards this work, subject to the completion of the renewal of the lease.

Trailway Entrance Enhancement – this is a project to enhance the entrance to the Trailway from the Station Road Car Park. It is an ambitious project and will need to be carried out in stages. The Council has, so far, received grant funding towards the project from the Cheese Festival of £500, Sturminster Newton Economic Development Society (SNEDS) of £2500 and Stour Management (Dorset) Limited of £5500 . Therefore, this project will be starting very soon.

