STURMINSTER NEWTON TOWN COUNCIL

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Council Offices
Old Market Hill
STURMINSTER NEWTON
Dorset DT10 1FH
Tel: 01258 475136
Email: admin@sturminsternewton-tc.gov.uk

ANNUAL TOWN PUBLIC MEETING
Thursday 25th April 2024
7.30pm in the Council Chamber

1. Welcome and Introductions.
The Mayor welcomed the 32 people in attendance.

2. To approve and sign the minutes of the Annual Town Public Meeting held on 27th April 2023.
The minutes were agreed and signed by the Mayor Cllr Helen Lacey as a true and correct record.

3. Grant Recipients Reports.
Project reports were given by the following:
Sturminster Newton Football Club – Town Council grant awarded towards a pitch grooming kit.
Sturminster Newton Heritage Trust – Town Council grant awarded for visitor data collection.
Sturminster Newton Amateur Boxing Club – Town Council grant awarded for gym equipment.
Sturminster Newton Amateur Dramatic Society – Town Council grant awarded for tech equipment.
Stour Connect – Town Council grant awarded for pictorial electronic till.
Sturminster Newton Literary Festival – Town Council grant awarded for promotional materials.
The Vale Pantry – Town Council grant given to fund school holiday activities.

4. Community Star Awards.
The Mayor presented Community Star Awards to recognise outstanding service to:
Christine Willis for her unwavering commitment to many organisations, clubs and societies.
Maggie Damerell for her support and service to the Parish of Sturminster Newton.
Mike Neville for supporting the Sturminster Newton Expedition Group.
Nigel Matthews for supporting the Sturminster Newton Expedition Group.

5. Report from the Town Council.
The Town Clerk reported as follows:

Along with our routine tasks of providing governance, community representation, grounds services and clerical support. In the last year the Town Council have been working on a number of projects.

Neighbourhood Plan Review

It resolved to review the neighbourhood plan, to keep the document updated and valid so that the views of the Town are prioritised when any planning decisions are made by Dorset Council. This project is in the final stages

of revision before a public consultation period. Costs to engage a professional consultant were obtained through grant funding.

Community Engagement

The Council began a project to increase community engagement, starting with pop up events at the Boxing Club and The Exchange. This will be continued as a rolling programme to gather the thoughts and views of residents. Feedback received will determine future Council projects. Where the queries raised concerned outside organisations, we have contacted these to flag up issues, these include Dorset Council Highways Department, Sovereign Housing Association and Dorset Police. The other main areas of concern related to youth services and anti-social behaviour, these are areas we are currently working on.

Railway Gardens Electrical Points

Three electrical points have been installed in the Railway Gardens to make better use of the space for events in the Town Centre. We are currently looking at costs to upgrade the wiring in the lighting columns so that these can be reinstated.

Working with Dorset Police

Following the installation of CCTV in the Town Centre in the previous year, the Council agreed to provide remote access to the system via a tablet to the local Police Officer. It was hoped that this would help in combatting the anti-social behaviour in the Town.

Our new Police Officer arrived at the beginning of the year, and we are working closely with him. The difference has been noteworthy, and we are very encouraged to see an increased police presence in the Town, with action being taken where issues have arisen. We would still urge people to report problems online so that data can be gathered which directly determines the level of policing we receive.

Youth Hub

The Council are just as concerned with the lack of facilities for young people as other residents. A great deal of time and money have been invested in the project. Due to rising building costs the original plans would have cost over double the funds available to implement, so the Council have had to consider other options. The main issue being the lack of anywhere suitable to build the hub.

Currently we are awaiting an estimate of costs to extend our grounds workshop, the original plans for this have been changed to try to incorporate a youth facility on the site. We are also looking at additional grant funding. Currently we are investigating the costs of a temporary structure and looking at where this could be located. Though we have encountered various setbacks we are still continuing with the project behind the scenes, though we realise it may look as if we are doing nothing. As soon as we have information we will share this.

Grounds Operations

In June last year we welcomed Hannah as the newest member of the grounds team. Our team work incredible hard to keep Stur looking great and each year, this involves dealing with the unpredictable British weather. This summer was so dry that need for constant grass cutting was replaced with constant watering, then over the winter and spring the opposite has been true, with everywhere being saturated. The wet weather did however, grant us the opportunity to refurbish many of the Town benches. Unfortunately, we have experienced an increase in fly tipping and anti-social behaviour which has taken up a lot of time in clearing up, repairing and reporting incidents, it is frustrating and demoralising but the team still take great pride in their work and we thank them for this.

Looking Forward

We are looking forward to commemorating the 80th anniversary of D-Day on the 6th June this year and have an evening Civic service of thanksgiving at St Mary's Church followed by participation in the national beacon lighting. Other events are also planned prior to and proceeding this date, and details will be publicised shortly.

We will continue to fund the 'What's Happening in Stur' newsletter and thank the Learning Centre and Penny Mountain for their hard work putting this publication together.

Our Council meetings are open to members of the public and anyone in attendance can comment, ask questions or raise concerns that they would like the Council to consider. The next meeting which will be the annual Town Council meeting will be held on the 16th May, here in the Council Chamber at 7.15pm.

6. Play Area Presentation.

The Town Council Grounds Manager gave a presentation on plans for new play equipment at Ricketts Lane and Rixon recreation grounds including costings and designs. He also gave an overview of the timescale and upgrade plans for the smaller play areas in the town.

7. Open Forum

- Dorset Councillor Jones asked if any of the play equipment being replaced could be re-sited in the Drovers play area. The Grounds Manager explained that due to the very high cost of play equipment and the stringent rules on safe installation, the Town Council would not replace equipment that was still useable. The Clerk added that due to the close proximity to houses in that area, play equipment had to be low level.

There being no further comments or questions, the meeting was declared closed at 8.30pm.

Signed……. Date ……..