

STURMINSTER NEWTON TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES of the ANNUAL PUBLIC TOWN MEETING held on Thursday 14th March 2019 in the Council Chamber at 7.30pm

Present :

Councillor H Lacey – Town Mayor and Chairman
of the Town Council
Mrs Emma Lindsay – Town Clerk

In attendance:

Cllr M Jones (Deputy Mayor)
Councillor V Fox

Cllr C Fraser
Cllr G Rose

Mr J Read – Chairman of Open Spaces
Mrs L Plumridge – Assistant Town Clerk
Miss K Squire – Finance Officer
9 members of the public

1 Welcome and Introductions

Councillor Lacey (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 12th April 2018 were approved as a true and correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman of the meeting.

Cllr Rose
Cllr Fox

3 Annual Report of the Town Mayor

Cllr Lacey presented her Annual Report as Town Mayor which follows as Appendix 1 to these minutes.

4 Report on Town Council Finance by the Town Clerk

Mrs E Lindsay, the Town Clerk, presented her finance report which follows as Appendix 2 to these minutes.

5 Presentation on the work and purpose of the William Williams Charity

Cllr Rose gave a very interesting presentation on the work and purpose of the local William Williams Charity which serves the areas of Sturminster Newton, Blandford and Shaftesbury.

6 Open Forum:

The following issues were raised:

6.1 - William Williams Charity - A member of the public thanked Cllr Rose on the fascinating work of William Williams Charity and would follow up with Cllr Rose to see if there were possibilities for the High School to seek grants.

6.2 – Sturminster Newton Neighbourhood Plan – a member of the public expressed the need for the Town Council to take a leadership role within the community to help people understand how the Neighbourhood Plan can be referred to in the planning application process, particularly for large developments such as Elm Close or Honeymead Lane. The process is not well understood by the local community. It was accepted that the Town Council can give advice on process but not to express views.

Cllr Fox, who for many years has served on the North Dorset Planning Committee, advised that the Neighbourhood Plan represents the views of the community of Sturminster Newton and, now that it has been formally adopted as a supplementary document, all the information therein can be used positively to accept planning applications or have the evidence to argue against undesirable developments.

6.3 – Council Tax and Precepts – a member of the public strongly expressed his views on the precept increases over the years for Sturminster Newton and felt that the town got very little in return.

6.4 – Jubilee Path – a member of the public enquired about the situation with the Jubilee Path. Cllr Rose advised that, having taken legal advice, the Town Council had decided against taking on the liability in the light of potential high costs for remedial works and maintenance in the future. The developer, Highwoods, who own the footpath are not required to open it. Cllr Rose stressed it had been a difficult decision for the Town Council to make. Mr J Read, Open Spaces Chairman, suggested the finger post signs directing people that way should be taken down.

6.5 – Sturminster Mill – another member of the public asked about liability for The Mill. He was advised that the Town Council lease The Mill and funding for any works required are not the responsibility of The Town Council.

Poignantly, to end the meeting Cllr Lacey read the final report of the Town Crier Kevin Knapp, prepared by his widow Melanie Knapp.

Appendix 1

Annual Report of the Town Mayor

Welcome to the Town Council's Annual meeting, which is being held earlier than usual due to the forthcoming Unitary, Town & Parish elections, which will be held in May. I'm grateful to those of you who have come out this evening, especially as the March Winds are doing their best to get their selves named at every opportunity.

There have been some staff changes in the last year -:

Staff Changes

- Pam Naylor and Steve Dalison retired Summer 2018
- Kate Squire took over the Finance role and Ken Wilson joined the Grounds team Summer 2018

We also had a couple of Councillor Changes

- Luisa Chater joined June 2018, co-opted to cover the resignation of Nick Cowell
- Chris Spackman resigned Jan 2019 – because this occurred within six months of the elections we chose not to fill this vacancy at this time.

Planning And Environment Committee

The Council has commented on 42 applications during the year

- The Neighbourhood Plan has been externally examined, passed through referendum and been "made by the District Council".
- Station Road – Consultation in May to seek views of residents and businesses, work on going, we realise there is still more to do.

Amenities

- Official opening of the skatepark in August, well attended event with displays from both skateboarders and BMX Riders. Fortunately I didn't have to have one jump over me as I cut the ribbon!
- The Town Council, working in partnership with the Mill and Museum Society, successfully submitted an successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund. This work will now enable us to hopefully negotiate obtaining a longer term lease with the Estate. A longer lease will help when applying for funding & grants.
- Representation at Civic Events - I have been honoured to represent the Town at several

Civic Events throughout the last few months. It was of course the last Civic Events for the District Councils, a bittersweet moment for their Chairs.

Cllr Val Pothercary of NDDC chose the Cheese Festival for her event and I found myself in the slightly bizarre situation of being a guest at our own local event which I help organise. But how wonderful that this town has an event that others want to show off.

- Town Council represented on external bodies e.g. William Williams, of which Cllr Joe Rose will explain more shortly. It is a remarkable charity, which continues the work of a man with considerable foresight & vision.
- The Town Council helps to support town events where it can. We are granted 5 free parking days a year – these are used for the Boogie Woogie festival, Christmas lights switch on, Sturs Big weekend, the Car Rally on New Year's Day. The remaining day will this year be used for the new Literary Festival on 15 June. I hope the new Unitary Authority will continue with this practice as free parking does help make a difference to these events.
- My own Civic Event went down a slightly different route to that normally taken as I chose to celebrate the volunteers in the town. We had a very nice 'Afternoon Tea' held in Bow Room of the Exchange. Around 70 people attended representing a number of different organisations in the Town. As well as a chance to me to express the Town's appreciation it was also an opportunity for these organisations to get together & talk to each other, something they don't normally get the chance to do. The feedback I have received has been very positive.

Moving forward – what's going on at Westminster aside..... The next year will be interesting in many ways, there will be the new Unitary Council to work with. The new Authority will have less Councillors and those Councillors will have bigger wards. The Town Council will also have a couple of new faces perhaps? There will be an event here next Wednesday 20th March in the evening to give anyone interested in standing as a Town Councillor a chance to come along and find out what it's all about. It's very informal, - if you thinking of standing but aren't totally sure of what is involved - do come along and find out.

Finally, Cllr Fox is standing down at the next election after a great many years' service. We will miss Vic's knowledge, wisdom & gentle anecdotes of times past. Thank you Vic for the time you have given to Sturminster as a Town & District Council.

Appendix 2