

**HARPENDEN TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

**HELD IN PARK HALL,
ON MONDAY 11 APRIL 2016**

Present: Councillors B. Ellis Chairman (Town Mayor), Chichester-Miles, Cooley, Gilham, Heritage, Mrs Kent, Mrs Linacre, Martyn, Pawle, Weaver and Williams

Also in Attendance: Jim McGown Deputy Lord Lieutenant,
District Councillors Clarke and Rosemary Farmer

51 Members of the Public, Press

Apologies: Cllrs Callé and James
County and District Councillor T Heritage

The meeting was chaired by the Town Mayor, Councillor Brian Ellis.

1. WELCOME

The Town Mayor opened the Meeting and welcomed those present.

2. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD ON 30 MARCH 2015

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 30 March 2015, previously circulated, were duly signed as a correct record.

3. PRESENTATION BY DIANE BRENT, ESTATES MANAGER, HERTS COMMUNITY NHS TRUST

Diane Brent highlighted the key issues for the Trust:

- Population in Herts is aging – creating challenges.
- Local changes – rapid response team to connect services together, care in the community and stop blocking of acute needs beds.
- Living well strategy – multi-speciality team all under one roof, new ways of working including working with GP's and Herts County Council to have joined up care approach.
- New development for Harpenden – focusing on current/future need and how best delivered.
- Health needs assessment required, growing population,
- Memorial Hospital high priority for the Trust, keep the building well utilised, opening new facility in 2019.

4. PRESENTATION OF THE 2015/16 MERIT AWARDS IN RECOGNITION OF OUTSTANDING WORKS IN THE COMMUNITY OVER MANY YEARS

4.1 The Mayor congratulated the recipients of the Award of Merit. He was delighted that they were able to be here to accept them adding that the awards were well

deserved as the individuals have made outstanding contributions to the life of our town. The Award of Merit is the Town Council's way of recognising the achievements of individuals and showing how grateful we, as members of the community, are for their efforts on behalf of everyone in Harpenden.

4.2 The Mayor presented awards to:

Mrs Ellen Hill in recognition of her voluntary work to Harpenden Helping Hand, Harpenden Trefoil Guild and the All Saints Church.

Mrs Jane Murray in recognition of her voluntary work to the Harpenden and Wheathampstead District Scouts.

5. PRESENTATION OF THE TOWN MAYOR'S CHARITY CHEQUES

5.1 The Mayor was delighted to announce that £10,240 had been raised for his chosen charities which included some additional funds coming from Charles Wilson Engineers Ltd and William Hill which had already been received by the relevant charities.

5.2 The Mayor presented cheques to his two chosen charities, The Harpenden Trust and Southdown Play Areas Working Group, for £3,258.56 each representing the balance of the funds.

5.3 The Mayor hoped the meeting would agree that his chosen charities were extremely worthy beneficiaries. He was grateful for the hard work put in by his Charity Committee in helping him organise a series of fund raising events which proved to be very successful and enjoyable. He went on to thank everyone, friends and businesses, in the wider community for supporting these events without whose support he would not have been able to generate the funds presented.

6. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE TOWN COUNCIL 2015/2016

The Mayor presented the Town Council's Annual Report for 2015/2016.

6.1 The Mayor began by thanking Diane Brent for her presentation. As a result we were all wiser about the work of the Community Health Trust in Harpenden and have a better understanding of the issues and challenges facing it. He thanked her for taking the time to keep us all informed of the extraordinary job that the Trust does on behalf of Harpenden.

The Mayor stated that as usual, the Town Council had been busy during the year delivering services to the community, working in partnership with our District and County Councils and seeking to engage with other parties for the benefit of the town.

The Council continues to manage its finances carefully and did not increase our portion of the Council Tax this year. Nor did the District Council but the County Council increased its portion slightly; the Town Council does not receive any of this increase.

This year, the Town Council started video recording all of its Council and Committee meetings which are then uploaded onto the Council's website. So if a member of the public cannot attend a meeting held at the Council offices they can, usually within 24 hours, watch the meeting and see what transpired. This was being done in the interests of transparency and as far as the Mayor was aware Harpenden were the only Town or Parish Council in the County which does this.

6.2 **Events**

A number of large events take place in Harpenden every year. Apart from being enjoyable in themselves, they attract large numbers of people to the town. This footfall brings trade to our shops, pubs and restaurants and contributes to the viability of our High Street, which is a top priority for the Town Council.

We were very fortunate with the weather this year. The Highland Gathering, Summer Carnival, Armed Forces Day, Classics on the Common and the Christmas Carnival were all very well attended. The Mayor congratulated the organisers of these events.

A special mention was made for the Christmas lights. In 2014 these were disappointing but the Mayor was pleased to report that the 2015 lights were a great success. He had received a lot of positive comments about the attractive displays. This did not happen by accident and he thanked the Officers and Councillor Mary Maynard in particular for their work on this.

The Mayor noted that the next day the Freedom Parade of the Royal Anglian Regiment would take place with a march along the High street. The Freedom of the Town was granted to the regiment in 2013 but it had not been possible to arrange the parade until now because of their overseas commitments. This would be an opportunity for the Town to show its support for our armed forces and he encouraged everyone to attend.

6.3 **Property Transfers**

Under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011, the District Council has transferred ownership of two properties to the Town Council.

The first property is the Batford Springs Volunteers HQ on Lower Luton Road. The building became derelict when a large tree fell on it. The intention of the Town Council is to demolish and rebuild the HQ so that the volunteers have the facilities to continue to help to manage the Batford Springs nature reserve. Planning permission for the site had been obtained and it was hoped that rebuilding can start in the next few months. As a temporary measure, the tools and equipment of the volunteers were being stored in a container on the Marquis Lane open space.

The second property is the small Heath Close allotment site. The two plot holders have relocated and this provides the opportunity for the Town Council to develop the site as a depot for its maintenance team. At present, the Council has to rent storage space but in future this money could be invested in plant and machinery.

6.4 **Westfield**

Significant progress has been made this year for the planned investment on this site which consists of two sections:

1. The recreation ground, where the facilities will be improved; and
2. The long disused former allotment site where we plan to develop much needed affordable housing.

With regard to the recreation ground, the Council has worked closely with local residents to understand their aspirations for the site and has established a Working Party, involving members of the community, to consider designs and leisure mix. This is an exciting project which is nearing fruition and will result in a much improved leisure facility. The recreation ground will stay as a recreation ground.

With regard to the former allotment site, in April last year plans for the development were presented at public exhibitions held at the Red Cow public house in Westfield Road and here at Park Hall. These events were well attended. The plans were a surprise to some residents who had been misled into thinking that the development would be for expensive private housing covering the recreation ground as well, instead of 100% affordable housing on the former allotment site only. The Council is delighted with the support it has received for its plans.

An outline planning application was submitted but withdrawn temporarily to complete further work required by St Albans District Council Planning Officers. It will be resubmitted as soon as this work is completed.

6.5 **Neighbourhood Plan**

The District Council has produced a draft Strategic Local Plan which will govern the way the District develops over at least the next decade. In parallel with this the Council has started the process of developing a Neighbourhood Plan, working in conjunction with Harpenden Rural Parish Council. Harpenden is the only local Council in the District to be working on a joint plan.

The area of designation has recently been approved and the Council will be looking to establish a Steering Group to take the process forward. The Mayor will be looking for community champions to come forward and be involved in the process.

Neighbourhood Plans cannot prevent development but can help to shape it and this is an important opportunity for Harpenden.

6.6 **Parking**

The Council receives regular complaints from residents and businesses about the lack of parking space in Harpenden. Others complain about too much parking in their roads and want Controlled Parking Zones. We are also aware that Govia Thameslink's bid for £5 million of funding from the Department of Transport for an extra deck at the main station car park was not successful.

The Council believes that a parking strategy for the town is needed and have started to do some research. The District Council is responsible for most of the

car parks in Harpenden and also decides on CPZ applications. We intend to start discussions with them and Govia to see if we can improve the situation.

Finally, the Mayor expressed his thanks for the wonderful support he had received during his Mayoral year.

7. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

- 7.1 The Mayor invited questions from the floor:
- 7.2 Carol Hedges was concerned about small shops in the town having to close due to high rents and business rates and wondered whether there was anything the Town Council could do to help by reducing the rates. The Mayor advised that the Clerk would provide a response direct to Mrs Hedges.
- 7.3 Councillor Rosemary Farmer asked for an update on Community Meeting Point (CMP). The Mayor said that CMP was part of Hightown Housing Association. He had been advised by Hightown that the landlord had not sent an invoice for the quarterly rent as usual and then employed bailiffs when the rent was not paid. He hoped that a solution could be found to keep the shop open but as an interim arrangement Community Meeting Point had been able to find alternative premises in the United Reform Church in Vaughan Road.
- 7.4 Mr Robertson enquired what was being done with regard to the car parking situation. The Mayor responded by acknowledging the problem and advised that Councillors had been monitoring empty car parking spaces and once this information had been collated it would be fed back to the District for their comments with a future review of parking in the town centre.
- 7.5 John Davis made an observation that although the car parking consultation was being conducted it would be a retrograde step to increase parking duration times.
- 7.6 Harry Hill enquired why Harpenden Youth Town Council numbers had dropped. Councillor Mary Maynard responded that this item had been discussed at Policy and Finance where it was recognised that a number of different strategies needed to be rolled out including Town Councillors promoting the youth town council within schools.
- 7.7 Carol Hedges enquired about housing development in Harpenden and affordable housing, asking how could they be affordable. The Mayor responded that some would be social housing, i.e. rented at below market rents, and some shared ownership.

There being no other questions or statements at this time the Mayor called the meeting to a close at 8.30 pm.

Chairman.....

Date.....