

CHATTERIS TOWN COUNCIL

Annual Town Meeting

Minutes Dated 17th April 2015

Minutes of the Annual Town meeting held at the King Edward Centre, Railway Lane, Chatteris, on Friday 17th April 2015.

Present: Cllr J Carney (Mayor), Cllrs C Colbert, B Haggata, C Howes, P Murphy, F Newell, County Councillors S Rylance and D Connor and seven members of the public.

The Mayor welcomed everyone and began the meeting with a minutes silence in memory of town councillor Terry Shad who had sadly passed away the previous Thursday.

Apologies for Absence:

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr J Burrow and Cllr A Melton.

Financial Report:

The Financial Officer presented the Financial Report (**copy attached**). He said the figures were not the final accounts as these had yet to be completed but there would be little variation.

Total balances at the end of the year showed an increase of around £38,500 and net assets amounted to £221,230.98.

The Financial Officer stressed the parish plan fund would be carried forward to the next financial year.

Annual Report:

The Clerk presented the annual report of the Council's activities for the year ending 30th April 2015 (**copy attached**).

She expanded on the supermarkets issue by giving a brief outline of Aldi's plans for the former Co-operative site and explaining why the store would not open until early 2016. Details had been contained in a letter to the Council.

She also commented that it was good to see so many people raising issues in the Open Forum at Council meetings.

Mayor's Report

The Mayor presented his report of the year recounting highlights of his time as Mayor following his election to the position in May (**copy attached**).

Report from Cambridgeshire County Council

Cllr Rylance presented a report compiled by herself and Cllr Connor and explained that the two county councillors for Chatteris worked together for the good of the town despite differing political views.

She said plans for yellow lines near the school had been agreed and they were now waiting for them to be put in place.

The most important issue of the year had been the maize digester. She and Cllr Connor had set up a public meeting with representatives of the developers regarding the issue. But while a public meeting regarding a digester at Wimblington had been well attended and a petition in opposition had been signed by 400 people, the meeting at Chatteris attracted just 18 people and the petition in opposition was signed by 50 people. As a result the Wimblington application was turned down and the Chatteris application got the go ahead despite sterling opposition from the town's district and town councillors. Cllr Rylance reminded the audience that there were numerous complaints over the winter about the state of the roads when maize was transported to the site.

Another issue which raised its head was the application to allow greater use of the motocross site at Block Fen, Mepal, and an application to delay restoration of the site. Conditions allowing its use were not being adhered to and following lobbying from Cllr Rylance both applications were refused. Cllr Connor was working on on-going problems with the site. Cllr Rylance said she and Cllr Connor wished to represent the people of the town but they needed to know what the electors wanted; public meetings and surgeries were not well attended.

Cllr Rylance said she and Cllr Connor were talking to Stagecoach about putting on a bus to Manea station, Doddington Hospital, Benwick and Ramsey. This would give people the opportunity to catch trains, attend the hospital and go shopping. It would be beneficial if they could prove the need for such a service.

Cllr Rylance sought questions from the audience.

Cllr Howes said in view of the millions still being spent on the guided busway, could Cllrs Rylance and Connor lobby for improved public transport for Chatteris.

Cllr Connor acknowledged there was an on-going problem with maintenance of the busway but he argued it had been a success. He agreed support was needed for local bus services and said the Fens were the poor relations with more money being spent in the south of the county but he assured those present he and Cllr Rylance were fighting for the Fens. Cllr Rylance said the problem was as soon as the Fens were mentioned everyone automatically thought of Wisbech but they were continuing to argue Chatteris needed investment.

It was agreed that Chatteris suffered from apathy, particularly compared with Doddington and Wimblington who were very switched on. Cllr Connor said he and Cllr Rylance would hold more surgeries in Chatteris but he did not know how to attract people to attend them.

Mr Ian Mason asked what was being done to get the message out to the public as living on a fairly new estate the only publication he regularly received was Centrepoint.

Cllr Rylance said information about the public meeting for the digester went into local newspapers, on posters in shop windows and even on notices on lampposts

Cllr Haggata pointed out Chatteris had a low profile, even the MP had included very little about Chatteris in his election literature and Mr Barry Payne said local newspapers contained very little news about Chatteris. The Mayor agreed and said he had reluctantly agreed the Tesco's community fund should be advertised through the Cambs Times simply because their website was better.

Mrs Wootton also complained about the Town Council's marketing of the meeting and suggested this was why there were so few people present. She suggested utilising the What's On in Chatteris Facebook page. Cllr Howes explained the annual town meeting was deliberately low key as the Council was at the end of its 4 year term of office. The Clerk explained it had been expected Councillors would have to observe purdah hence the low key meeting, the fact there were to be no elections to the town council was not known when the meeting was planned.

Cllr Carney pointed out there had been a good attendance at the public meeting about the town plan the previous month

Mrs Wootton said a lot of people did not know what the Town Council was for and were not aware of the open forum. Mr Andrew Hay pointed out support for events in Chatteris was notoriously low and Cllr Colbert agreed pointing out despite canvassing most of the town at various times there was little interest. However the turnout had been good when there were plans to close the postal sorting office.

Mrs Helen Wootton was concerned that the £1million arts funding coming into Fenland and Forest Heath would be spent on March and Wisbech and Chatteris would be left with the dregs.

Cllr Haggata suggested an hourly bus service, and a service after 6pm, was needed to Wyton so travellers could link up with the busway. He was concerned that bus services were not advertised.

Cllr Haggata also said if anyone would organise a large petition to go to Tesco's he would present it. Cllr Carney said the suggestion had been raised at an open forum with no results. Mrs Anne Hay said whilst out canvassing she had suggested households write to Tesco's but very few said they would.

Mr Payne said he had been led to believe that St Francis Drive had been adopted yet the road sweeper did not go down the road because someone in the engineering department at FDC had been informed it was not adopted. Cllr Colbert said she had been informed it had been adopted and Cllr Connor offered to make enquiries.

Cllr Murphy said one of his pet hates was unadopted roads, unfortunately many roads were not adopted and it was not possible to force developers to bring the road up to adoptable standards. Up to a few years ago part of Horsegate Gardens had not been adopted and it cost the residents £10,000 each to bring the road up to standard.

Mr Mason said he had spent many hours going through the adoption process and he had found it “shambolic”. Unfortunately no-one informed residents, the emergency services, etc., when a road was finally adopted.

Cllr Colbert explained that there was often a problem because no end date was given when the road had to be completed to adoptable standard.

Cllr Howes said a system should be established whereby things were done correctly, adoptions were followed up and all the relevant parties were informed when adoption had taken place.

Cllr Newell said she and Cllr Murphy spoke up regularly about the problem and fought for roads to be of adoptable standard but planning conditions were not enforced.

Cllr Howes said solicitors carrying out searches for prospective purchasers should point out conditions were not in place.

Cllr Connor asked the Clerk to send a note about the concerns and promised to follow up the issues by the June meeting of the Town Council.

Report from Fenland District Council

Cllr Murphy gave the report on FDC activities for the previous year. He said FDC had kept the council tax down to 0% and had also managed to save £1 million from the budget while continuing to provide front line services to the same standard.

The Council had provided a £50,000 grant for renaissance funding to improve derelict buildings and this had brought in £650,000. As a result work had already begun on properties in the High Street and Bridge Street.

FDC had pushed Tesco's to provide £10,000 inconvenience money for not opening but the company would not go higher.

The Council had also improved street lighting in some areas, particularly Wood Street and was now looking to improve lighting in the villages.

FDC put in a strong case for the retention of the March recycling centre. Hopefully it had been saved although there was likely to be a reduction in opening hours.

They also won the argument with the Boundary Commission for a return to the four wards in Chatteris.

A new grounds maintenance contract was currently out to tender and companies were being invited to submit two bids, one of which included street cleansing.

Cllr Murphy said the leisure centre was doing well and FDC also helped the Street Pride and In Bloom groups in the town and jointly helped to organise the Festival. The town had a dedicated Street Scene officer, Anne Marshall, who would act on concerns.

Cllr Murphy concluded by saying FDC's planning core strategy had been adopted after three years in development and the Council was also involved in talks to improve road networks in the area.

Reports from Other Organisations

Mr Payne said FROLIC (the friends of Chatteris Library) had enjoyed a fairly good year. The group had improved the garden area in front of the library (unfortunately people allowed their dogs to foul the area). They had also staged exhibitions by local artists in the library, including residents of The Gables, and currently there was a photographic display in the library. Later in the year a children's book festival was planned with authors and illustrators going in to the library and Kingsfield School. It was also hoped to run an event to attract older children to the library – a graffiti workshop was being considered. Mrs Julie Smith said another plan to attract older children was a lyric writing workshop.

Mr Mason thanked the Town Council, and in particular Cllrs Newell and Howes, for the support given to the museum. An invitation had been sent to the opening of the new exhibition on the 6th June. The museum was also working with two schools in the town – Glebeland's pupils would be visiting Flag Fen, and Cromwell's youth group were looking to put on a drama to mark the anniversary of the end of World War II. Cllr Newell thanked Mr Mason for the tremendous work he was doing helping to put Chatteris on the map as far as history was concerned.

Mrs Smith thanked Cllr Murphy for bringing renaissance money to the town and FDC for setting up civic groups in the four Fenland towns. She said improvements to the environment were being noticed and were having an effect on the town. Cllr Murphy confirmed FDC's money brought in other funds but it was often a long process to improve a property, on one occasion it took 15 months to find out who owned a property and many were owned by people who did not live in the area.

Mrs Smith said the civic society, Chatteris Past, Present and Future, was hoping to get more people involved in the heritage open days in the autumn which would promote the profile of Chatteris.

Questions from the Public

Mrs Wootton asked about progress on adult education provision in the town, she said only two courses were planned for the summer term.

The Clerk said Cllr Colbert had been carrying out considerable work on the issue and as a result of an article she had written several ideas had been sent in and these had been forwarded to the County Council. Cllr Colbert said the next meeting to discuss adult education was scheduled for June and the County was looking to get together a programme of courses for the autumn term.