

CHATTERIS TOWN COUNCIL

Annual Town Meeting

Minutes Dated 11th May 2018

Minutes of the Annual Town meeting held at the King Edward Centre, Railway Lane, Chatteris, on Friday 11th May 2018.

Present: Cllr W Haggata (Mayor), Cllr J Carney (Deputy Mayor), Cllr L Ashley, Cllr J Burrow, Cllr A Carney, Cllr A Hay, Cllr F Newell, Cllr P Murphy, and Cllr J Smith. A large number of members of the public/electors were also present and councillors introduced themselves.

1) Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence had been received from Cllr I Benney.

2) Financial Report

The Financial Officer presented her Financial Report (**copy attached**) and invited questions. The Financial Report showed a total income of £164,571.37 in 2017/18 and total expenditure of £145,448.05 for the same period.

3) Report of the Year's Activities

The Clerk presented her Annual Report of the Council's activities for the year ending April 30th 2018 (**copy attached**). She said after listening to the residents of the town the Council had worked on improving two open spaces in the town, were about to launch a community bus service to Ely and had substantially increased financial support for Christmas Lights and In Bloom.

4) Mayor's Report from Cllr Bill Haggata

"This last year has been a great privilege to serve as Mayor of Chatteris and I am very honoured to have been elected to serve a third term as Mayor of Chatteris .

During the year I've endeavoured to visit all requests made for the Mayor's presence in Chatteris and attended many civic functions in and around Cambridgeshire promoting Chatteris town, the people and facilities, of which there are too many to list. Suffice to say you learn a great deal about other towns' problems and successes, meet up with many interesting people and enjoy some very nice hospitality.

This has also been a year of historic importance for Chatteris with the George Clare VC commemoration, organised by Major Norman Larke, along with all the volunteers, with great efficiency and detail. (There will be more on this later).

In my last report we were awaiting news on the dormant Tesco site, thankfully half of the store is now occupied. This should bring about the occupation of the other half and the opening up of the potential of the rest of the site, so with tantalising suggestions of what's coming next - watch this space. Several new developments are also in the planning process pipeline, some of which will hopefully come to fruition very soon, e.g. the Tithe development, the new school, the Wenny Road and West Street developments and many other smaller ones e.g. the Huntingdon Road development. With Chatteris in the first phase of the Market Towns Masterplan, the future looks very exciting for Chatteris.

New development, housing, manufacturing, agriculture, office space and retail services are very important for Chatteris, generating income by the way of Section 106 contributions which are used to enhance facilities (more on this later), creating more potential business in the town centre for retailers and local services to take advantage of.

I'm particularly pleased that we have been able to retain a substantial amount of funding which was contributed by Tesco to run a shuttle service to their new store, which as we all know never opened. The funding was being retained by FACT and possibly waiting to be absorbed into general use for the rest of Fenland.

A strong argument was put forward that this was funding contributed for the use of Chatteris people and I'm pleased to say the funding is now going to be used for you in the form of a shuttle bus service to Ely. Cllr Linda Ashley will explain later.

There has been progress made on facilities for the young people of Chatteris, which now include: being able to get out of town to visit the Ely leisure complex, a café opening on one night a week (more on this from Cllr Florence Newell), a new organiser for KEC Youth Club, increased cycle ways and open spaces/parks. All were asked for in the Chatteris Town Plan consultation.

Which brings me to the Chatteris Town Plan which was also completed thanks to the hard work volunteered by Andy Smith and his team of volunteers.

Many of the questions and suggestions have now been completed and to highlight just a few see the Powerpoint presentation.

There are a few copies of the plan available for you to view and you will see that all the points raised have now been answered; some of questions raised are beyond the remit of Chatteris Town Council e.g. a new doctors' surgery, NHS dentists and better policing and restaurants.

You have heard from me, and will do during the AGM, a great deal about events that have taken place and are ongoing in our town organised by groups of volunteers, but a great deal that's not mentioned is the work that goes on in the background and for this I'd like to say thank you to Joanna Melton and Angela Papworth for their willingness to respond to requests for assistance and organising—without which many things would not take place.

Thank you Cllr James Carney, Deputy Mayor, and also thanks to all Chatteris Town Councillors for all their input and endeavour to make Chatteris a progressive, proactive, pleasant, and forward looking town in which to live.

Thank you also Ruth, my wife the Mayoress, for her support and accompanying me along to many events.”

5) Reports from Fenland District Council and Cambridgeshire County Council

Cllr Murphy gave the report from Fenland District Council. He said the Council had kept the council tax rise down to 1.98% (and had not taken up the Government’s offer of a further 2% increase) but the increase appeared to be more because FDC collected council tax for other local authorities, the fire service and the police.

Cllr Murphy outlined the Market Towns Masterplan for Growth project and said FDC was open for business. He spoke about the responsibilities of the new combined authority, which included a representative of Fenland District Council, economic development meetings with neighbouring councils and said FDC had a new structure under new leader Cllr Chris Seaton.

In his role as portfolio holder for environment, Cllr Murphy said he was responsible for overseeing the emptying of 3.4 million bins a year, cleansing 11,290 miles of streets and cutting 210 million square meters of grass along with other responsibilities such as cemeteries and markets. Cllr Murphy also spoke about how new play equipment had been installed, successful littering and fly-tipping enforcement (which included fines of up to £400 for littering and £2,500 for fly-tipping) and a new app which enabled users to download information on bin collection dates.

Cllr Anne Hay gave the report from Cambridgeshire County Council after explaining she had been the County Councillor for Chatteris since May 2017. She said it had been a difficult year for the County Council who had been pressing the Government for fairer funding. She explained 80% of the County Council budget was spent on adult social care and the care of young people as the number of elderly people had increased, the number of children in care had increased and there were insufficient foster carers.

The long spell of cold, wet weather had led to an increase in potholes and the Council was behind in its repair programme. However it had purchased a machine called a dragon patcher which could repair a large number of holes per week and it had been so successful a further two machines had been ordered.

The County Council had tried to save money on services where possible, this included looking to share service with other authorities and deploying staff from Shire Hall to county-owned buildings across the county. It also planned to move admin staff to a more central location, probably Alconbury, and Shire Hall would then be sold for development and the money used to improve services.

6) Powerpoint Presentation

With the help of fellow councillors, Cllr James Carney had prepared a Powerpoint presentation on the Town Council's recent achievements and how the Council had responded to points raised in the new Town/Community Plan.

Cllr Ashley outlined the arrangements for a Saturday shuttle bus service to Ely which would begin on the 9th June and would be funded by money given by Tesco's. She explained how the Council had demonstrated the demand for such a service.

Cllr Haggata spoke about the future for Chatteris businesses insisting despite the loss of some shops and Lloyds Bank the town still had a vibrant retail area. He explained the Council was very limited on what it could do but it would be supporting the Market Towns Masterplan for Growth and it supported volunteer groups whose work helped to attract visitors to the town, such as the Christmas Lights, In Bloom and the Midsummer Festival.

He said businesses needed to encourage people who lived in the town to shop in the town and the Town Council hoped to encourage businesses to set up their own group to come up with ideas. The Council would set up its own group, to be led by Cllr Benney, and the two groups would then meet to discuss ideas.

Cllr Carney showed photographs of how the Little Acre Fen Pocket Park was developing and gave the background to the project. He said it was hoped other groups and schools would be involved in the project and it might even be possible to set up a Friends of the park group. Cllr Carney also spoke about how the meadow at the rear of the Parish Church was being improved so it would become a family friendly space with a picnic area. Hopefully this would lead to a reduction in anti-social behaviour.

Cllr Haggata spoke about how the Town Council was substantially increasing grant aid to the Christmas Lights Committee to ensure the continuation of the scheme and In Bloom to help fund someone to water the displays. Other schemes were also supported by the Town Council.

Cllr Newell spoke about how the Town Council had taken over the provision of youth services in Chatteris and how it had recently employed a new leader for the youth club (who was introduced to everyone). In addition CAFY funds were helping to partly finance an open session at Wenny café.

Cllr Haggata spoke about the very successful George Clare VC commemorations and said the end of World War I would be commemorated with the beacon being lit and church bells being rung. The leader of the Royal British Legion youth section reminded Cllr Haggata that the youngsters had also worked hard organising a living history day, as part of the George Clare commemorations, which had been very well attended.

Cllr Smith then outlined the history of the gas lamps restoration project explaining how she had badgered the Town Council into rescuing the gas lamps, before she was even elected to

the Council, and had then see them turned into an attractive entrance to the museum and council chambers. She said if anyone had an idea they should put it to the Council and if it was within the Council's powers they would try and help.

Cllr Carney concluded the presentation by asking for support from the residents and promising the Town Plan would be used as a reference point for future planning.

Cllr Haggata said Chatteris was a very desirable place to live, with good facilities, a great volunteer force and a great atmosphere and hopefully with all the new development planned even more people would want to move to the town and improvements would continue.

7) Questions from the Public & Reports from the Town's Groups & Clubs

The following points were raised by those present at the meeting:

- a) A concern that the Ely shuttle bus would encourage people out of the town and away from the shops and services. Councillors pointed out they wished to give people the choice and pointed out poor bus services meant young people could not enjoy an evening out of Chatteris.
- b) A suggestion that it might be worth contacting organisations such as the Wildlife Trust for advice on which plants would be appropriate for the Little Acre Fen and Church meadow projects. Cllr Smith explained she had drawn up a list of possible sources of help and Little Bloomers had already offered to be involved. Another member of the audience suggested being wary of where the picnic bench was sited at the Church due to the crows.
- c) Further information on the Market Towns Masterplan was sought. Cllr Hay said the team looking at the plan would not just concentrate on the High Street but would consider regenerating the whole town. The team would comprise county, district and town councillors and interested individuals from the business community.
- d) A representative of Stainless Metalcraft said St Neots had already undertaken a Masterplan project and had since attracted investment of £5-6 million. He encouraged the town to grasp the opportunity and local businesses to feed into the plan. He also suggested telling the Mayor of the Combined Authority what was required in Chatteris as he had a large sum of money to spend. He said the important thing was to bring wealth and high quality jobs into the town. His company was looking at ideas which would create lots of jobs. He thanked Cllr Hay for sitting on the Metalcraft Community Fund committee and said many organisations had received support from the fund.
- e) The Council was asked to justify an 8% increase in its share of the Council tax bill. The Financial Officer explained it represented a 6.6p a week increase per household for a Band D property and was needed to fund the increased grants and services.

- f) The Vicar said a lot of people were committed to the town and wished to see it flourish. The church was also involved with youth work and ran a youth group attended by about 20 children. The food bank fed 6 to 25 families a week. The Church had also put in a bid for funding for a full time music teacher to help raise aspirations in the town. With schools cutting back on arts and music due to a lack of funding the church was hoping to employ someone as an outreach worker getting children involved in music. It was also hoped to use the Church as a venue for more musical and theatrical productions as it was a great venue.
- g) Another resident warned Chatteris Music Society was in danger of folding which would be big loss to the town.
- h) There was a suggestion that bushes should be planted near bus shelters and around the railings at Jubilee Gardens to help dissipate the toxic fumes and reduce smells. Another resident suggested planting wildflowers on grass verges around the town to help attract wildlife such as insects and butterflies.
- i) There was a call for a 20mph limit in Chatteris. The Mayor said the Council had put in a bid for funding for such a limit outside Cromwell Community College but the bid had been unsuccessful despite the backing of the school.
- j) The Town Council was asked to take action over empty decaying properties in the Town Centre. They explained it was not the responsibility of the Town Council, it was up to Fenland District Council to take enforcement action.
- k) A resident asked if the gym would soon be under new management. He was informed that a decision had still to be taken.
- l) The subject of overgrown verges and open spaces was discussed. Councillors explained that Fenland District Council was behind with its grass cutting schedule as the contractors who undertook the work had had all their equipment stolen on more than one occasion.
- m) A progress report on the plan for 350 houses at Wenny was requested. Councillors said it had yet to be granted outline planning permission.
- n) There was a complaint about the £1 entrance fee for Chatteris Festival and a claim that some families struggled to pay it. The Chairman of the Festival Committee, Mrs Sharon Selman, outlined all that was available for just £1 a day and said the fee was necessary to ensure the future of the Festival.
- o) Rotarian Mr Andrew Hay asked any organisation in need of financial help to contact him as Rotary had the money they collected at Christmas to distribute.

- p) Ms Becky Cooper praised the work of the members of the Royal British Legion youth section and said they would shortly begin repainting the bus shelter and would mark the end of World War I.
- q) Chairman of the Christmas Lights Committee Mr Chris Savill thanked the Council for the financial support for the lights, explained it was very necessary and said it was hoped some of the money would go towards expanding the display.
- r) Ms Helen Wootton spoke about the work of the Community Plan team who had worked hard over the past two years to gather the views of the town's residents. She said the final plan was on line and she urged people to look at it. She expressed disappointment that more had not been done to promote the plan at the meeting.
- s) Ms Wootton also spoke about a new community literacy project which aimed to make a difference to children's outcomes. Community groups would be able to apply for funding for projects to improve language development.
- t) Ms Tina Prior, Chairman of Chatteris In Bloom, thanked the Town Council for the extra funding for someone to water the displays and urged people to help with their own properties by picking up litter, pulling up weeds, etc. She said each year the In Bloom team faced new challenges and this year it was the empty retail properties in the town.
- u) Mrs Heather Wicks of the Community Cinema team said the monthly evening showings were very successful but they were still trying to attract people to the afternoon screenings.
- v) A representative of Chatteris U3A said the group was trying to raise money for another defibrillator in the town and was holding a race night in August to boost funds.

The Mayor thanked everyone for attending and invited them to stay and chat while enjoying homemade refreshments.