

**CHATTERIS TOWN COUNCIL**  
**Annual Town Meeting**  
**Minutes Dated Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2024**

Minutes of the Chatteris Annual Town meeting held at the King Edward Centre, King Edwards Road, Chatteris, on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2024.

**Present:** Cllr A Hay (Mayor), Cllr I Benney (Deputy Mayor), Cllrs L Ashley, J Carney, A Gowler, V Joyce, P Murphy, K Perrin, S Selman, M Siggee and S Unwin, and about 15 members of the public/electors.

**1) Apologies for Absence**

An apology for absence had been received from Cllr A Charrier.

**2) Mayors Report**

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and said she had had the honour over the past year of representing the residents of Chatteris as Mayor. She gave thanks to her fellow councillors for giving their time freely for the benefit of the town.

The Mayor said she had attended in excess of 30 civic engagements from the High Sheriff of Cambridgeshire's Justice service, to US Independence Day celebrations at Alconbury and the opening of the North Cambs Training Centre in Chatteris by HRH Princess Anne.

She said the Council was now nearing the end of the Growing Fenland Project funded by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA). The Town had successfully bid for funding in excess of £1m which allowed it to purchase the Old Barclays building which had been used to re-home Chatteris Museum in a more prominent position.

The funding had also allowed the Town Council to enlarge their office space and meeting room and to provide extra meeting rooms and two residential flats. These, along with the office space rented out on the first floor of the museum building, would bring in an income for the Town Council in the years to come. This would allow the council to keep the town's share of Council tax charged to residents to a minimum.

The Mayor completed her report by thanking the Town Clerk and the Financial Officer for all their hard work.

**3) Financial Report**

The Financial Officer presented her report (**copy attached**) which included a budgetary control statement for the Revenue (Precept) Account as at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 showing

expenditure of £611,754.02 and income of £607,923.60 compared with budgets. She also included a bank reconciliation statement and a summary statement of reserves and funds balances.

The report said the general fund balance had decreased by approximately £13,917 compared to the budget set which was due to a combination of under and over spent budgets during the financial year and balances being transferred from the general fund to keep the effect on the Band D council tax cost to a minimum. The report also gave details of reserve and holding accounts and the precept budget for 2023/24.

The Financial Officer invited questions about her report but there were none put forward.

#### **4) Report of the Year's Activities**

The Clerk presented her Annual Report of the Council's activities for the year ending April 2024 (**copy attached**).

She said the Growing Fenland project delivery has once again been a major part of the work of the Town Council's officers over the past 12 months. Once the works to convert the former Barclays Bank to a new museum were complete, preparations began for the conversion and expansion of 14 Church Lane (the Council Chambers and Offices and the former home of the museum). Those works were now well underway and once complete the income from the flats and the offices at 2 Park Street would help the Town Council to support organisations and services in the town.

In order to complete both projects, the Council secured more funding from the CPCA, money which was originally allocated to other towns who failed to deliver their projects.

The Clerk also gave a summary of all the work carried out by the Council and its officers over the year, attendance figures for councillors and information about speakers and topics raised at meetings.

#### **5) Reports from District and County Councillors**

Fenland District Council: Cllr Murphy gave the report from Fenland District Council focusing on his role as portfolio holder with responsibilities for the environment.

He gave out statistics which gave an insight into how FDC featured in the day to day running of the district.

- a) The Council collected and emptied 3 million bins a year.
- b) On average 11 26 tonne vehicles collected refuse every working day plus 10 street cleansing vehicles.
- c) There were 24,000 garden waste customers and 600 trade waste customers.
- d) Rapid Response attended 1,422 incidents from fly-tipping to graffiti removal.
- e) The Street cleansing team cleaned 12,000 miles of streets a year.

- f) The grounds maintenance teams maintained and cut 210 million square meters of grass areas.
- g) Play areas were inspected weekly.
- h) FDC maintained 5,000 trees and unknown metres of hedges.
- i) They also looked after over 500 pieces of street furniture and emptied 1,500 bins
- j) FDC ran weekly markets and helped to run Festivals and Christmas markets.
- k) There were 18 Street Pride/In Bloom groups working to improve the environment and volunteer litter pickers in virtually every town and village.
- l) The Council arranged over 300 burials a year.
- m) It also Maintained and updated car parks, bus shelters, toilet blocks and war memorials.

Cllr Murphy said he was Chairman and on the board of RECAP, a county wide organisation which dealt with all aspects of recycling.

### Cambridgeshire County Council

The Mayor gave a report on the work of Cambridgeshire County Council having served as the County Councillor for Chatteris for the past 7 years. She said she had been disappointed that the coalition of Liberal Democrats, Labour and Independent Councillors, who had run the Council for the past three years, had increased the Council tax by the maximum allowed of 5% per year for the past three years.

She said the previous Council had increased the budget for road maintenance but the current administration had cut that budget with the result that there was now a high number of potholes across the county. The Mayor also criticised the decision to cut the number of Council meetings and claimed this had resulted in decisions either not being made in a timely fashion or being delegated to officers. One result had been the decision to stop spraying weeds growing on footpaths and roadways without consultation with local councils or residents.

The Mayor said she and fellow councillors had lobbied for the decision to be reversed and the administration had finally admitted they had got it wrong and had carried out a consultation. The overwhelming response was that residents did not agree with the policy. As a result, the weed spraying had been re-instated.

The Mayor said she had responded to residents' concerns about pot holes, schools' admissions, social care funding and disabled parking bays. She pointed out two new zebra crossings were being installed to help with highways safety.

She ended her report by inviting residents to contact her about County Council concerns.

## **6) Reports from Local Clubs and Organisations**

Midsummer Festival: Cllr Selman gave a report as Chairman of the Midsummer Festival committee. She said the theme for 2024 was Movies and the group was encouraging all

groups, including nurseries and schools, to take part in the walking parade. Volunteer helpers were needed for the Festival weekend of 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> June.

Royal British Legion; Miss Anne Wells said as Chairman of the Chatteris RBL she would like to thank the Council for their help with the Remembrance Parade, in particular for organising the road closures.

In Bloom: As Chairman of Chatteris In Bloom, Miss Wells said she would like to thank the Council for their grants but she did have a couple of complaints. The first was about the weeds on pavements. The Mayor said the weed spraying should have begun and she asked for photos of problem areas. She had already reported problems at Eastwood which had now been sprayed.

Miss Wells said the other problem was that the group would not be able to put up their hanging baskets because of difficulties obtaining a licence. Cllr Unwin said in the past a volunteer with the Christmas Lights committee had filled out the licence paperwork for In Bloom allowing them to hang baskets on the lighting columns but this year a new employee at the County Council had decided new regulations had to be met. There were concerns about the suitability of the lighting columns to take the hanging baskets and Christmas lights. Cllr Unwin reminded those present that the Christmas Lights committee, the Council and In Bloom had fought hard to keep the existing lighting columns as their proposed replacements would not have been strong enough to take the Christmas Lights and hanging baskets.

She said for the past 20 years the baskets had been put up by a local farmer and there had been no problems but now there was a suggestion the lampposts could become live and as a result only trained people should work on them. In Bloom could not afford specialist contractors to put the baskets up or the time and costs of a course to train volunteers on how to put them up. Cllr Unwin said bureaucracy had gone mad.

Cllr Unwin also paid tribute to former chairman Miss Tina Prior under whose leadership Chatteris In Bloom had won 5 golds in In Bloom competitions.

The Mayor said she would contact the County Council for more information about training courses for working on lampposts.

Chatteris Museum: Mrs Sue Spooner said the museum had had an incredibly busy year. The museum was run entirely by a team of volunteers who had given up their time to safely move 12,400 artefacts, install new tracking and storage systems as well as work on local projects and exhibitions. The Town Council had helped the group to obtain planning permission for a much needed outside store.

Thanks to lottery funding the museum had been able to many new items of equipment from furniture and display cabinets to specialist machinery. The museum had delivered the lottery funded community project on Chatteris in the 1920s which included “Who lived in my house.”

There had been special evening openings of the museum when local organisations, including brownies and cubs and the U3A, had been invited to look round the new museum and over 200 schoolchildren had been welcomed (including those from local villages whose transport costs had been met by the lottery funding).

The museum's next project was to look into the gypsy/Romany traveller history in the town,

The museum was open to the public 3 days a week and admission was still free for all.

Mrs Spooner thanked the Town Council for their support, in particular the officers who had worked incredibly hard to make the vision of the museum become a reality.

She said the museum's work was now being acknowledged in the eastern region and the museum was achieving its goal to become a forward thinking, community based museum in Chatteris.

Finally, Mrs Spooner said the museum was to be officially opened on the 11<sup>th</sup> May and everyone was welcome to attend.

Cllr Benney said Mrs Spooner and her husband Andrew had done an amazing job and the work being undertaken by the museum volunteers was highly commendable.

The Mayor thanked all the volunteers who worked for groups and organisations in Chatteris and said without them the town would be a less welcome place to live.

#### **7) PowerPoint Presentation**

Cllr Linda Ashley presented her PowerPoint presentation on the works of the Council over the past year. She began with the Growing Fenland project and the works to the new museum and 14 Church Lane.

She then showed photographs and spoke about the works to the Little Acre Fen Pocket Park and the Old Railway Line Footpath and Bridleway, the FACT bus services available to the people of Chatteris thanks to the Town Council, the Midsummer Festival and the Christmas party for the Over 70s residents of Chatteris.

Her presentation concluded with a tribute to the late Florence Newell, a town councillor for over 40 years, district councillor and Chairman of Chatteris Parish Council for 16 years.

#### **8) Questions from the Public**

The Mayor invited questions from the public.

Mr Alan Melton congratulated the Town Council on the work they had carried out and said it was easy to dismiss the work of town and parish councils. He pointed out the Town Council had brought forward the King Edward Centre ensuring its future when the County Council were considering selling it, they had also put funding into the Multi Use Games Area and the gym with the support of Fenland District Council and the County Council (thanks to help from district councillors).

Mr Melton said the Old Railway Line was a major asset for the environment, purchased by the Town Council, and the Council was a major force behind the Festival which was one of the highlights of the year. The Christmas Lights had been the idea of himself and Cllr Murphy, who were town councillors at the time, and had advertised for a committee to make the lights a reality. An appeal for every household to give £1 to help purchase the lights had been very successful and the lights had been launched at no cost to the taxpayer.

Mr Melton pointed out that the Town Council gave grants to any organisation willing to help itself. It also ran some of the best allotments in the area after buying farmland to replace land which was sold for development.

He said the town council should be proud of what it had achieved in securing a new home for the museum by taking on a prominent redundant building. It was a fantastic facility for the town and would serve future generations for years to come.

Mr Melton said would the members of the public agree the Town Council did a fantastic job for the community?

Mrs Spooner said in the past she had thanked the Town Council and FACT for providing a free bus service around the town and she now wanted to thank the driver as the kindness he had shown to her father was incredible.

Another resident said she supported the work of the Town Council but she was feeling ignored by Fenland District councillors as her concerns about a development had been largely ignored when a planning application was considered. She claimed the decision was heavily weighted in favour of the developer even though there were highways issues. She said if the development went ahead it would be destructive to her life. She was invited by the District Councillors present to contact them with her concerns.

Mr Ian Salter was concerned about parking in the centre of the town. He said development applications never addressed the issue of car parks and asked if there were any proposals to improve car parks.

The Mayor said FDC was looking in to civil parking enforcement which would enforce the parking time limits in the High Street and motorists and shop owners would then have to use car parks. She pointed out motorists did not use Furrowfields car park as they should. Cllr Unwin agreed pointing out there were empty parking spaces in Furrowfields every day. Cllr Gowler said the standard of parking throughout the town was dreadful with motorists continually parking illegally. He also said business owners parked outside their premises all day long which meant their customers could not park there. The issue was that parking enforcement was the responsibility of the police who did not have the time to enforce it.

Mr Salter said the town was very lucky with the nature it had and he was happy to report a cuckoo was back but he stressed if the fields at West Street were built on the cuckoo, a rare bird, would be in danger as its food source would be cut. He urged councillors to discuss the consequences of development and biodiversity. Cllr Perrin said he was opposed to the West

Street development and was having a biodiversity survey undertaken. He said infrastructure was needed before development and he had started to oppose planning applications.

The Mayor stressed the Town Council was merely a consultee on planning applications; the decisions were made by Fenland District Council.

Another resident asked about grants for voluntary organisations. The Financial Officer explained the Council had a budget of £4,500 for grants but this was underspent as organisations did not come forward. She said applications were promptly dealt with and encouraged any organisation that needed help to put in an application.

The Mayor said she represented the Town Council on the Red Tile Windfarm Trust and the Metalcraft Community Fund and both organisations also gave grants while Cllr Ashley said she had joined the Feoffee Charity committee and they also gave out grants but struggled to get applications. Cllr Carney said the Court Lett charity was also looking for applicants for grants.

An elector asked why the Old Railway Line Footpath had not been cut all the way to Somersham in 2023. The Clerk explained that under an agreement the County Council was bound to cut the line twice a year and she asked to be informed if the line was not cut in 2024. Mr Melton said the circular route to the Pocket Park had been cut but there were problems cutting back the hedgerows further along the Line as this was not allowed until the nesting season was over.

Another elector asked where Chatteris had gone. He said the police station had closed and policemen never patrolled and it was not possible to get an appointment at the doctors' surgery. A facility for everybody was needed.

The Mayor said the Council had met with representatives of the doctors' surgery and had been assured there was ample space to accommodate the needs of the growing town, the problem was NHS personnel. They could not get enough doctors as there was a national shortage. It was up to the NHS to sort the problem. The Mayor also pointed out the George Clare surgery was a private practice.

She assured those present that the police were about in Chatteris, explaining she regularly met with the local police sergeant to discuss issues and the Council received confidential reports about the work of the police in the town. The Council also put in requests for patrols in areas where there were problems.

The Mayor ended the meeting by thanking all those who had attended.

