



ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

7:00pm, Thursday 29 April 2021
(held via Zoom)

Minutes

Attendees:

Councillor L Kirk (Mayor), Councillor K Green (Deputy Mayor)
Councillors D Budd, M Cotton, R Dean, V Green, M Humphries, M Russell and R Schofield.

4 members of the public

Apologies:

Councillors D Cleaton, K Critchley, H Goodinge and S Kemp.

1. Welcome

The Mayor welcomed Members and members of the public to the Annual Town Meeting. It was noted that this was the first meeting of this kind in Wareham to have been held via Zoom due to the pandemic.

2. Introductions

The Mayor introduced the Members of the Council present and gave a brief description of their roles within the Council.

3. Annual update from the Town Clerk

The Town Clerk presented the following report:

“The previous Annual Town Meeting took place in April 2019; such a lot has changed since then: we have a new Council, new Members, a new Town Clerk and a pandemic. I started working for WTC in September 2019 and it was obvious that a lot of work was required to improve the transparency, lawfulness and financial controls of the Council. The first 6 months were a whirlwind for both Members and I as we brought in new policies and regulations to meet the legislation that governs our sector.

At the end of that 6 months we went into lockdown with Covid19 and from March 2020 we were unable to meet in person. We managed to get a scheme of delegation approved and Council Members and staff continued to meet regularly by zoom to discuss the issues affecting the Council and to make decisions that were reported through the Council's website.

The Government passed emergency legislation to allow our sector to meet virtually and zoom Council and Committee meetings became the norm, starting at the end of June for Annual Council Meeting. We have carried on our normal calendar of meeting ever since to ensure the business of the Council can be carried out. The requirement for an Annual Town Assembly was removed last year but this year we can hold it virtually. Virtual meetings must cease from 6 May this year as the emergency legislation runs out. However, we cannot meet face to face lawfully due to coronavirus lockdown and social distancing restrictions until 21 June at the earliest, so once again we will require a scheme of delegation in order to function.

These have been trying times for our sector as we are constantly having to adapt to the ever-changing legislation and guidance issued. My staff team have adapted admirably to all the challenges we have faced and have been exceptional in their flexibility and diligence and I would like to thank them for all they have achieved this year. I would also like to thank our Members for their support."

The Mayor thanked the Town Clerk for her report and for her guidance and diligence during a difficult 18 months.

4. Committee Chairmen Reports

The reports of the Committee Chairmen were presented as follows:

Councillor D Budd – Chairman of Amenities

"Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic the Amenities Committee has only met on five scheduled occasions via Zoom. The following are the issues which may be of interest.

2 Mill Lane

This Council owned building is leased to Purbeck Citizens Advice. In 2018 the western quarter of the roof was subject to emergency repairs requiring stripping of the roof tiles, replacement of the roof timbers, re-felting and refixing the existing tiles at a cost of nearly £20,000.

The Council has let a contract for the remaining three quarters of the roof, which is in poor condition, to be similarly removed and rebuilt. The work is due for completion by early June, the cost being fully met from the Council's budget.

Hauses Field Skate Park

Following local residents' concerns including noise and anti-social behaviour the Committee set up a Working Party which has to date met four times to examine the issues raised, taking account of the evidence provided and input from the police.

A questionnaire has recently been distributed to households adjacent to Hauses Field to obtain their views before the Working Party make their recommendations to the Committee.

Howards Lane Car Park

From last September payment of parking charges can now be made using a Parking App. Dorset Council are now applying parking charges from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and to avoid confusion the Council has followed suit; the charge remains at 70 pence per hour.

Public Seats

A seat in North Street which was removed following complaints of anti-social behaviour has been reinstated in a new position outside the Post Office adjacent the bus stop. A seat has been donated in memorial to an employee of Sainsbury's to replace an existing seat outside the store, the old seat has been relocated to the top of Shatters Hill.

Litter Bins

The eight small litter bins around the periphery of Howards Lane Car Park have been replaced with two large bins similar to those on the river edge at The Quay. Four of the removed bins are suitable for reuse to replace other small bins when worn out.

Gateway Stones

The Council received a sum of money under Section 106 of the Planning Act in respect of the Westgate development to commission two large Purbeck stones engraved Welcome to Wareham as a gateway feature at the Worgret Road entrance to the town.

The stones await delivery; however, a Dorset Council policy has come to light which among other things requires a Road Safety Audit of the location at an additional cost to the Council. The project is currently on hold whilst the problems are resolved.

Council Owned Trees

Following a tree survey and quotations from three tree surgeons work has been undertaken to trees along the road frontage of Howards Lane Car Park and in Hauses Field where branches overhanging adjoining properties was an issue.

Summer Planting

Plants have been ordered for delivery this month to continue the floral displays between Saxon Roundabout and The Quay."

The Mayor joined Councillor Budd in expressing thanks to the Council staff for the excellent floral displays in the town.

Councillor K Green – Chairman of Planning and Transportation

"This year has been very trying because of the Covid pandemic and therefore all our meetings had to be held over Zoom, which meant we all had to be trained in how to operate within this.

Over the past year civic year, we have handled some 30+ applications. These have ranged from new windows etc. in listed buildings, to both large and small extensions on buildings.

We have had very few, if any, applications for whole buildings except the developments on the old Cottee's Market Site, and one along Bere Road.

On the whole things have been extremely quiet this year.

It has been identified that there are several "Parking Hotspots" around the Town. In an effort to both investigate and possibly solve this, a working party is being set up but, because of Covid regulations, it is proving difficult to find volunteers for this and also to arrange a meeting with the aim of a "Walk Round".

Councillor B Dean – Chairman of Museum Committee

"The museum has been closed for the past year due to the Coronavirus pandemic and has not received any visitors. However, the work of the Committee has continued to ensure that when the

museum opens that everything will be in order. The Committee are working on updating the accreditation of the museum and this work is ongoing with a deadline of 2022. The new opening dates will be set in accordance with Covid regulations.”

Councillor K Critchley – Chairman of Policy Resources and Finance (read by the Town Clerk)

Members IT

Under the Coronavirus Act 2020 provision was made for local authorities to meet virtually. This legislation would remain in place until May 2021. In order for all members to be able to partake in virtual meetings PR&F resolved that all members should be offered a laptop for Council use together with an Office 365 package installed.

Wareham in Bloom

A report was brought to the June meeting stating that under the Local Government Act 1992 and 2003, local authorities are unable to fund-raise to support its activities and augment the precept. A recommendation for flower planting and displays to be taken in-house and funded by the Council was agreed, with help from volunteers.

Policies

Some of the policies agreed include:

Laptop Policy

Social Media Policy

Virtual Meeting Protocol

Royal Deaths Policy

Freedom of Information Policy

Grant Award Policy

Member Officer Relations Protocol

PR&F committee supported a recommendation from the Personnel Committee to carry out a full staffing review.

Budget

The past year has been extremely challenging financially for the Council, we have lost approximately £60,000 in income with unbudgeted costs to mitigate against Covid around £15,000.

Wareham in normal times has the benefit of supporting its precept with generated income. Many Parish and Towns do not have an income stream. When the budget was set in December the advice from national bodies was to expect the same reduction this year.

Members took the difficult decision to increase the Town Council proportion of Council Tax for the average Band D property by £3.44 a month, making the Town Council contribution for the average Band D property £17.03 per month.”

Councillor L Kirk – Mayor and Chairman of the Council

“The Mayor’s role has been uneventful this year due to the pandemic. I have attended some Zoom events including a silence for HRH Prince Philip Dule of Edinburgh. I have chaired meetings of the council via Zoom which have been challenging.”

5. Questions to the panel

The Council was thanked for its support of the Youth Club.

A question was raised regarding the on-going work on 2 Mill Lane. The Clerk replied that it was nearing completion.

A question was raised regarding the Swanage paramedic car. It was noted that this matter would be considered by Council.

The Mayor thanked the panel and guests and closed the meeting at 19.42hrs.

DRAFT