

## **CESHAM TOWN COUNCIL**

### **MINUTES of the ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

**HELD ON MONDAY 23<sup>RD</sup> MAY 2022**

**PRESENT** Councillor E.A. Culverhouse, Town Mayor (presiding)

Councillor P. Aslam  
Councillor W.L. Augustus  
Councillor A.K. Bacon  
Councillor J.L. Baum  
Councillor S.J. Booth  
Councillor Q. Chaudhry  
Councillor M. Ditta  
Councillor M. Fayyaz  
Councillor J.C. Fulford

Councillor P. Harding  
Councillor U. Hayyat  
Councillor F. Holly  
Councillor C.A. Hood  
Councillor J.E. MacBean  
Councillor R.S. Matthews  
Councillor N.T. Southworth  
Councillor G.D. Williams

Officers: W. Richards - Town Clerk  
T. Marmo – Chief Executive Officer

**In Attendance:**

Police Sgt Roy Evans - Thames Valley Police.  
63 members of the public, including representatives from outside organisations.

**1. TOWN MAYOR'S WELCOME**

The Town Mayor, Councillor Culverhouse, welcomed everyone present to the Annual Town Meeting and expressed her pleasure at seeing so many people in attendance. She took the opportunity to explain why the Council was holding this Annual Town Meeting on the same night as the Annual Council Meeting. She informed the public present that the agenda was a reflection of the concept to make this meeting a largely 'questions only' forum as required by law. It was the Council's intention to have a much more expansive 'Celebration of Chesham' occasion later in the year, following the success of the 2021 event, where the valuable work undertaken by local community groups and statutory bodies was properly showcased to a wider audience at the Elgiva Theatre.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor F.S. Wilson and Mrs Gill Walker.

**3. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

The Mayor invited questions and comments from the public on matters in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affects the Town.

A large number of written and oral questions were received and observations made; predominantly in respect to Speeding, the Environment, Local Infrastructure and the Council's Open Spaces and Democratic Services.

## **Speeding**

Q. What was proposed to be done to tackle an alleged speeding problem in Greenway?

A. *The Town Council has no enforcement powers in respect to speeding. However, the Town Council does locate the Mobile Vehicle Activated Sign (MVAS) there and forwards the data captured to the police. One of the local ward councillors is liaising with surveyors at Buckinghamshire Council about the logistics of installing calming measures on the road itself and the possibility of having a permanent VAS located there.*

Q. What is the Police's approach to dealing with speeding in Greenway?

A. *Sgt Roy Evans replied that his Neighbourhood Police team did pass on the MVAS statistics to Thames Valley Police's (TVP) Roads Enforcement team but it was not safe for his officers to use their hand-held speeding devices there due to the curvature of the highway. He opined that this needed a multi-agency approach involving other statutory bodies to deal with the issue.*

## **The Environment**

Q. In order to encourage biodiversity how many more grass verges will be added to the 'no-mow' list?

A. *The Town Council cuts the verges on behalf of Buckinghamshire Council. Expansion of the current numbers would need to be agreed by Buckinghamshire Council. The Town Council is committed to expanding the scheme where possible and is investigating different management techniques that might enable us to increase the number of verges we manage for biodiversity.*

Q. The Council's website states "In September 2019, the council declared a Climate Emergency and committed to reducing the Council's negative impact of council services on the environment, with an aspiration to be carbon neutral by 2030." The Council also made a commitment to working with partners (including local residents and businesses) to deliver widespread carbon reductions. Since declaring a Climate Emergency, by how much have measures you have put in place reduced the town's CO2 emissions, and are we on track for carbon neutral by 2030?

A. *The Town Council is proud of its environmental achievements to date. While it is not possible to list them all, it would be happy to share in detail our work since declaring a climate emergency for anyone requesting details. Becoming carbon neutral by 2030 was always likely to be a challenging target but this remains the Council's aim.*

Q. Has the Council as yet, investigated the environmental implications of the institutions it invested in, as many of the major banks still financed companies involved with the fossil fuels industry?

A. *The new Head of Finance has now researched this and it appears that the current banks the Town Council utilised were working towards phasing out such investments but appeared to have a poor rating in this respect from independent environmental assessors of such institutions. The Council was keen to see the survival of High Street branches in town which was a factor in continuing to bank with Lloyds but it would be monitoring its, and NatWest's, environmental pledges when reassessing its Banking and Investments' strategy.*

Q. Why is the Council still using plastic cups in the Council Chamber?

- A. *The cups are already of the recycled variety but would be phased out in any case when this stock had been utilised.*
- Q. The running of stationery car engines in cold weather, causing pollution and impacting on climate change, appears a big problem. What is the Council's plan to deal with this?
- A. *While not a Town Council area of enforcement, Sgt Evans stated that the Police are challenging motorists doing this and suggested that people witnessing it should report the matter to the Police.*
- Q. Can the Council help promote the work of 'Sustainable Chesham'?
- A. *As a Town Partner, the Town Council would be happy to promote its activities and indeed has already worked on joint initiatives with Sustainable Chesham such as the Monthly Local Produce Market.*
- Q. What was the current levels of pollution in Broad Street?
- A. *Air Monitoring systems were installed by the former District Council and the Town Council was not privy to the results but would attempt to get an update from Buckinghamshire Council in respect to this.*
- Q. For the town to achieve net zero emissions some, perhaps a lot, of public education will be necessary. What plans does the council have to put this education in place to help the residents to help you in this vital joint endeavour?
- A. *The Town Council's relatively modest staffing resources mean the initial focus for the Council has been on reducing its own carbon footprint. It has engaged in Great Big Green Week by holding a stall with Sustainable Chesham at the Local Produce Market, and gave a talk to a local interest group. It also provides officer support to Fairtrade Chesham, which actively lobbies on the climate emergency. An example of this is holding the free screening of the 'Thank You For the Rain' documentary. The Council talks about its carbon reduction work on its web site and social media. In addition, it participates in environmental social media campaigns by larger organisations such as Bucks Council and Affinity Water. This includes posts about reducing food waste, using public transport and saving water. It also encouraged residents to participate in Sustainable Chesham's 'Big Community Switch'.*

### **Local Infrastructure**

- Q. A wheelchair user was recently seen having coming down Lowndes Avenue on the road rather than on the pavement because he claimed that the pavements are too damaged and dangerous for him to use. Why are cars prioritised over wheelchair users and pedestrians, and what measures have you begun to turn this around?
- A. *The responsibility pertains to Buckinghamshire Council. A Buckinghamshire Councillor explained how Buckinghamshire Council utilised its Capital Maintenance budget and the financial pressures it was under. The questioner was encouraged to report the problem through the 'Fix My Street' portal.*

Q. What are the timescales for the Neighbourhood Plan? Is the Town Council waiting for Buckinghamshire Council's Local Plan to be produced and will it be cognisant of the need for affordable housing for young people and for the protection of green spaces?

A. *Consultation has already begun on the Neighbourhood Plan. Over 1500 responses had been received on the core issues within town pertaining to housing, employment and infrastructure. Further informal consultation was earmarked for July with a planned submission to the Planning Authority by early 2023. There is no intention to wait for Buckinghamshire Council's Local Plan to be produced. The provision of affordable housing and protection of green spaces were likely to be key components of the Neighbourhood Plan based on the response of residents.*

Q. The on-street parking congestion in Chartridge Lane around the Chiltern Hills Academy is a safety concern. Are there any plans to tackle this?

A. *On-street parking enforcement is the responsibility of Buckinghamshire Council. A Buckinghamshire Councillor opined that the main issue was the lack of relative parking at Chiltern Academy and considerable lobbying was taking place to increase parking spaces on site while, at the same time, trying to discourage parents and students from parking there.*

Q. How often were the town's bins and dog waste bins emptied and replaced?

A. *The Town Council is responsible for bins and dog waste bins on its land while those on and around the highway and other areas are the responsibility of Buckinghamshire Council. The bins in Lowndes Park and other areas are emptied regularly and certainly when close to becoming full. Dog waste bins on Town Council land are emptied by Buckinghamshire Council's contractors on the Town Council's behalf. The Town Council's bins are replaced when necessary and it has replaced and increased its number of bins significantly over the last few years in Lowndes Park. A Buckinghamshire Councillor stated that any broken bins that were the responsibility of Buckinghamshire Council should be reported on 'Fix My Street' and that he could confirm the missing Brushwood Road dog waste bin should be replaced shortly.*

Q. Why was a Kebab Van given permission to trade every week day in the centre of the High Street?

A. *Licensing is the responsibility of Buckinghamshire Council. A Buckinghamshire Councillor advised that the licence was up for renewal soon and would be reassessed accordingly by Buckinghamshire Council.*

### **Town Council's Open Spaces and Democratic Services**

Q. Would a review of the Council's Play-Areas be undertaken soon as many were in need of upgrading, particularly Lowndes Park?

A. *The Town Council had recently set up a Play Area Working Party. Ideas and designs for new equipment in Lowndes Park were being drawn up with a view to consulting on them in the school summer holidays.*

Q. Broken glass is a regular problem at the Skate Park. Has the Town Council a plan to deal with this?

- A. *Unfortunately, there is little the Town Council can do in stopping this anti-social behaviour that usually happens at night in a park that cannot be locked. The glass is cleared as soon as it has been seen by the Parks and Premises team or reported by a member of public.*
- Q. Can we have a cafe on Lowndes Park, similar to the fantastic one recently opened at Ashley Green, to encourage greater use of the park?
- A. *The Town Council is currently looking at all aspects of Lowndes Park including Skottowes Pond renovation, the upgrading of play provision and the possibility of a cafe/catering franchise. Clearly all come with a considerable cost and the cost/benefits of each need to be carefully considered.*
- Q. At Town Council meetings the public are limited to just 15 minutes to put questions to the Council. I have witnessed many residents being unable to ask their questions because of this. At a recent meeting it was stated that this time limit would be reconsidered. What was the result of those considerations?
- A. *The Town Council's Standing Orders which refer to the 15 minutes for 'Public Question Time' are reviewed annually and will be considered at a future Council meeting. It is important to remember however that a balance needs to be struck between public engagement and Councillors actually discussing and deciding upon the many varied reports presented by officers on Council's roles and responsibilities. It is disappointing that the Council receives very few written questions in advance of a Council meeting which would allow for a full and considered response to the member of the public and thus not require a curtailing of questioning on the evening to ensure procedural matters are adhered to in terms of fulfilling the Council's business of the evening.*
- Q. Why didn't the Town Council advertise this meeting on posters and flyers around the town instead of just on the website where the wrong time was given?
- A. *The Town Council has advertised the Annual Town Meeting as it has always done and in the correct legal framework. Certainly, as we all work towards a paperless society and to oppose fly-posting, it has never been its intention to cover the town with posters.*
- Q. Can the Town Council promote the Annual Town Meeting more comprehensively next year?
- A. *The Town Council will endeavour to do so in light of the answer given above. The Mayor reminded the meeting that questions could be submitted at any time during the year to the Town Clerk and questions were not confined to this meeting.*
- Q. Can the Council support/promote the U.N.s Anti-Racism Day on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2023?
- A. *While a laudable aim, the Town Council would consider offering formal support at a future Council meeting.*
- Q. What is the Council doing to tackle the current Cost of Living crisis?
- A. *A Buckinghamshire Councillor reported on various initiatives put into place by Buckinghamshire Council, notably the 'Helping Hands' scheme, working with the local VCS, extending free school meals and administering Community Board grants to those facing hardship. Leaflets with details of voluntary and statutory organisations who could offer assistance during the current economic difficulties had also been widely circulated.*

### **General Comments**

- The Neighbourhood Policing team was doing an excellent job under difficult circumstances
- The Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations were well advanced in Chesham and thanks were due to Councillor Aslam and others for their hard work in getting the plans in place for the proposed Street Party on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June.
- Thanks were offered to the Town Clerk who was shortly leaving the Town Council.

### **4. MAYOR'S CLOSING REMARKS**

The Mayor thanked everyone for their attendance and again suggested that written questions be submitted to the Town Clerk if any member of the public required further clarification or additional information on questions raised this evening.

### **5. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 8.25pm.

Town Mayor