

Agenda Item: 7

CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL MINUTES of the meeting of the ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

held on Monday 18 May 2023

Councillors:

Councillor Parveiz Aslam
Councillor Wilford Augustus
Councillor Alan Bacon
Councillor Joseph Baum
Councillor Simon Booth
Councillor Qaser Chaudhry
Councillor Emily Culverhouse
Councillor Majid Ditta

Councillor Justine Fulford
Councillor Francis Holly
Councillor Chasey Hood
Councillor Jane MacBean
Councillor Rachael Matthews
Councillor Fred Wilson

In attendance:

Danny Essex
Ashley Myers
Kathryn Graves
Georgina Fernandez

Head of Operational Services
Head of Corporate Services
Community, Economy and Environment Manager
Democratic Services Officer

1. TOWN MAYORS WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the Annual Town meeting, saying he appreciated people taking the time to attend, and welcomed contributions to events. This is a great opportunity for us all to get together, ask questions and share points of view and reflect on the year.

Councillor Augustus presented a summary of the Town Council's achievements over the past year.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Fayyaz, Southworth and Williams. Councillors Harding and Hyatt were absent.

3. PRESENTATIONS FROM LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUPS

Sergeant Roy Evans from Thames Valley Police gave an update on the Chesham Neighbourhood Policing team and highlighted that three priorities had been set from January 2023; Serious Acquisitive Crime, Anti-social Behaviour and Speeding. He also confirmed that a new Chief Constable, Jason Hogg, had been appointed who had set new objectives; Supporting Victims, Fighting Crime and Building Trust and Confidence. A full copy of Sgt Evans' summary may be found in Appendix 1.

Phil Folly, Chair of the Environmental Group gave a summary of the year's events. He confirmed that the group hold four meetings a year, and he was grateful that CEO Tony Marmo had attended the AGM. He thanked the team and volunteers for all the work that they do and thanked the Town Council and the Waste Team at Buckinghamshire Council for their support.

New volunteers are always welcome to help continue their work. The group meet on the first Sunday of the month 10am-12pm at different places requiring clearance and always welcome further suggestions from the public.

4. TO RECEIVE COMMENTS AND DEAL WITH QUESTIONS FROM THOSE ELECTORS WITHIN THE TOWN OF CHESHAM ON ANY MATTER WHICH AFFECTS THE TOWN

Councillor Wilson thanked Roy Evans and his team for the great work that they do, saying how honest they are and successful. A round of applause was given.

Councillor Aslam asked about issues caused by car traders parking untaxed vehicles on Chesham's streets and whether operations were continuing with the DVLA. Sgt Evans confirmed that they are still in liaison with agencies and working with Buckinghamshire Council to try and resolve. Councillor MacBean confirmed that this issue has been elevated to Buckinghamshire Council who are trying to simplify the process.

Jenny Cooper, a local resident thanked the council for repairing and refurbishing the swimming pool. She asked if the town council will lobby Buckinghamshire Council for more funding to improve pavements, as the routes to town and the station are in poor condition. She also asked for consideration for the underpass to be filled in. Councillor MacBean confirmed that circa £173million has been prioritised for highway improvements and that it is a mammoth task. A section of Bellingdon Road pavement has been re-surfaced. Councillors will continue to flag and lobby where pavement improvements are required.

Trevor Brawn, who belongs to a local group promoting cycling for sustainable reasons, questioned the strategy for road maintenance as he felt the road repairs/refills were of poor quality and do not last. He appreciates this is not within Chesham Town Council's control, but stated that it affects the residents of Chesham and he hopes to see an improvement.

Andy Garnett congratulated Sgt Evans on his policing in the community and Phil Folly for his longevity. He also thanked Councillors Parviez and Baum for the delivery of a fantastic Coronation event. He also expressed his concern for the Council and their lack of engagement with the youth as the youth is our future.

Phillip Coleman, Chairman of Pub Watch in Chesham asked Sgt Evans for his contact details as he had not had any contact with the police since October. He felt that Pub Watch has a vital role in the community, helping to reduce violent crime.

David Cooper congratulated the Town Council for its piece on the website 'What Can You Do To Tackle Climate Change'. He asked why then did the Council cut the grass near the library in No Mow May. Councillor MacBean confirmed that Chesham Town Council introduced a wildflower policy on grass verges before any other parish council. We have to find a balance. She confirmed that there had been a review at the parks' depot to cut less. We cannot please everyone all of the time but we are trying to do different things in different places.

Gill Walker asked if the Council will be flying an inclusivity flag in a prominent position, whether this be on a flag pole or from the town hall. Councillor Booth confirmed that this is an inclusive Council and that currently the outdated flag flying policy is up for review and this will be taken into consideration.

Aneta Stranc asked if town events were scrutinised in terms of their carbon footprint. Councillor Fulford thanked Aneta for a question she asked about the climate emergency earlier in the year, as this had led to the incarnation of the Climate Café at the Town Hall. Councillor Booth confirmed

that the Council aim to run events which are sustainable and aligned to our strategic aims and objectives and which we have direct control of. There are a lot of community groups in Chesham that put-on events which are outside of our control. Aneta was of the view that the Council should show these groups the way.

Hannah Marsh, representing the residents of Germain Street, thanked the Council for the fantastic work completed at the swimming pool, and for keeping The Elgiva going. She asked Councillor Augustus why she had not heard back from him with regard to Asquith House planning application concerns. Councillor Augustus recounted a meeting they had had on the High Street and confirmed that these concerns had been raised at the planning committee of which he is a member. Councillor Augustus confirmed he tries to make himself as available as possible and that he works in London, volunteering for the Council, and that he would pass his phone number to her.

Councillor Aslam thanked Kathryn Graves for her input into the Coronation Event, saying she goes above and beyond the call of duty. He also thanked Andy Garnett and Councillor Baum for their support saying that we work very hard to put these events together.

Andy Garnett commented that heating the open-air swimming pool has more environmental impact than the Italian Auto Moto Car festival scheduled in May. We need to regenerate the High Street.

Jenny Cooper was of the view that maintaining the open-air pool was important, as everyone should be able to swim, and not just people with their own pools. Solar panels will help with this and there are things that can be done to make it more sustainable e.g. ground source heat pumps. Councillor MacBean said the trade-off was heating the pool. We cannot get rid of everything in the name of sustainability. We have heard tonight how great Chesham Moor Gym & Swim is and we have a whole regeneration plan in place. The Gym & Swim is one of the first places in Chesham to have solar panels. Everything we do we look at off-setting carbon and being eco-friendly.

Phillip Coleman asked if there were any updates on the road closure coming to an end in Market Square. Councillor Macbean said that the pedestrianisation of Market Square was done under COVID measures and that it ends in August. Councillor Matthews is doing good work looking at consulting to extend pedestrianisation on the High Street. This process takes time.

Councillor Wilson commented on the recent article in The Sunday Times about the neighbourhood plan. Councillor Baum said that Councillor Southworth was quoted in the article and that the Neighbourhood Plan is our long-term vision for Chesham. We are looking at housing, infrastructure, the High Street and cycling amongst others. Meetings are in the diary to move forward and we are looking at consultation over the next few months. We have dedicated sessions booked on the environment, economy and communities.

Chris White, a resident and business owner just off the High Street said he liked the idea of the Neighbourhood Plan and consultation but that it was absolutely crucial that councillors listen and ask local residents and business owners for their views. Councillor Baum replied saying that his full-time job is to ensure that local residents and businesses are consulted on planning issues and this is what we intend to do in Chesham. Invites for discussion will be sent out shortly as we want you to be part of the conversation.

Masud Ahmed, resident, asked how long this plan will take. Councillor Baum replied that this piece of work commenced three years ago and the Local and Neighbourhood Plans are statutory documents. Since being elected we have been pushing forward, but it takes time and we must ensure we do this robustly, do it right. The consultation will be submitted to the planning inspector

to ensure that it is sound, and then to referendum. It is a long process for a reason but we are moving forward. Councillor Aslam asked where the funding will come from. Councillor MacBean confirmed that some had come from Levelling Up for the NDO's and design code. Buckinghamshire Council are very aware of what we are doing as we are seen as a pilot for the country, hence The Sunday Times article.

Isabelle Hatfield, resident and Vice Chair of Chesham Youth Centre asked if the youth will have a seat at the table to discuss these ideas and will the Council be looking at Pond Park. Councillor Baum replied that he and Councillor Culverhouse set-up Chesham Youth Council 5 years ago who will wish to engage, alongside Bucks Youth Voice and other young groups. We will be taking the consultation to residents and want to engage with all, whether this be via face to face, online webinars, social media, etc.

Gill Walker said that we need lots of decent quality social housing as properties in Chesham are expensive. Is there space in the Neighbourhood Plan for good social housing? Councillor MacBean confirmed that under planning law a certain percentage has to be allocated to social housing.

Tony Molesworth commented that the content of the Neighbourhood Plan was laudable, but there were concerns over sustainability. It looks as if the housing will not be economical to build. He didn't think developers will be rushing to Chesham, nor that the housing would be truly affordable. He suggested that the timescale for the process could take up to a decade. Councillor Matthews confirmed that a considerable amount of work is going into the Neighbourhood Plan and that the timescales, once the NDO's go through, is down to the individual sites. She was much more optimistic on the timeframe as there is a lot of work going on behind the scenes with Buckinghamshire Council officers.

Peter Squire, of the Rotary Club of Chesham, asked councillors to consider a response to Buckinghamshire Council's Charitable Collection policy consultation, which closes on 20th June 2023. The proposed change will limit opportunities for charitable collections, restricting the times and frequency of house to house and street collections. This will have an impact on the Rotary Santa Sleigh as a consequence. Mervyn Edwards from Rotary re-iterated that if this policy is accepted there is likely to be no sleigh at Christmas as the float would only be allowed for one day under these proposals. Councillor MacBean confirmed that she would try and set up a meeting with the relevant Buckinghamshire Council officer to discuss, and that the Council would be reviewing.

Andy Garnet asked if a date had been set for Christmas in Chesham. The Community, Economy and Environment Manager confirmed that no date had been set currently.

Chris Marsh, Germain Street, asked why the Neighbourhood Plan posters are sited in the most dilapidated shop in Chesham. Councillor MacBean replied because this is the most central point with the highest footfall, and that the Parks team are looking to clean the windows and sweep the floor.

5. TOWN MAYOR'S REMARK AND THANKS

The Mayor thanked everyone for coming and the Town Council CEO Tony Marmo, the officers and staff for the dedication and hard work they have shown the Council in the past year and for the great progress they are making in the many projects which they are working on.

The meeting closed at 8.58pm.