

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

held on Monday 16th May 2024

Councillors:

Councillor Wilford Augustus
Councillor Alan Bacon
Councillor Joseph Baum
Councillor Simon Booth
Councillor Qaser Chaudhry
Councillor Majid Ditta

Councillor Mo Fayyaz
Councillor Justine Fulford
Councillor Francis Holly
Councillor Rachael Matthews
Councillor Nick Southworth

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.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Culverhouse, Hood, MacBean and Wilson. Councillors Aslam, Harding, Hyatt and Williams were absent.

3. PRESENTATIONS FROM LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUPS

Thames Valley Police

A pre-recorded video from Sergeant Roy Evans from Thames Valley Police gave an update on the Chesham Neighbourhood Policing teams three priority areas; burglaries, drugs and speeding.

He confirmed that he is working with other forces sharing information and intelligence.

The Youth Council

A pre-recorded video from the Youth Council outlined all the activities they had taken part in during the year and they thanked all their sponsors for their support.

The Environmental Group

Phil Folly announced that after 16 years he is handing the chairmanship over to Byron Harding, but remaining as a volunteer. He thanked all the volunteers for their support over the years.

Byron Harding thanked Phil for all his years of service and a round of applause was given.

Byron Harding outlined the work of the environmental group: 30% Bio-diversity e.g. Moor Road and Coop Field; 30% River and Parks; 20% Path clearing; 20% Litter picking.

A member of the public commented that he thought the gardens at Meades Water were poorly looked after. Phil Folly responded that the environmental group work there twice a week and that some years ago it was decided to let the gardens go wild for the environment. Councillor Fulford replied that Meades Water Gardens belong to the Town Council and that there is a management plan in place which is being worked to. It is 15 years since the project commenced to naturalise the chalk stream. Ken Austin a member of the environment group confirmed that a naturalised area for Meades Water Gardens is desirable. Not just looking at the water but invertebrates which come with it, and this only comes with all sorts of different vegetation. People can see what we have achieved in Chesham and can see we know how to look after it.

A member of Chesham in Bloom encouraged residents to volunteer and help across the 30 sites across the town.

A local resident who backs onto Berkhamsted Fields said that she was very grateful to the work of the Environmental Group but asked them to consider people that live in the vicinity, as they now look out over breeze blocks and bug houses which resembles fly tipping. She asked if these initiatives could be hidden behind a bush so as to get the benefits but not to distract from the view. Byron Harding replied that these items are to be covered in earth/turf and so should blend in.

A resident of Chesham thanked Chesham Town Council for the wildflower verges across town saving wildlife and carbon emissions.

It was announced that it was Phil Folly's birthday and Happy Birthday was sung by all.

4. DONATIONS ANNUAL SUMMARY

The Mayor gave a summary of the Donations Scheme for the year 2023, encouraged local groups to apply and thanked volunteers for their time.

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

A member of the public asked on the status of the clock tower and commented on the number of empty shops in the town. The Mayor confirmed that the clock tower will be fixed during the last two weeks in June. Councillor Matthews said that Chesham had been earmarked by Buckinghamshire Council as part of their regeneration strategy and that a small public realm scheme by the station was to be implemented. Trying to develop relationships with owners and landlords and empty shops have the possibility of 'wrapping' whilst empty.

A member of the public said that we have lots of independent shops which we should 'big up'. Buckinghamshire Council could improve footfall by offering more free parking at the weekend. Councillor Matthews agreed that there are some great independent shops we wish to support and the many events put on in Chesham drive traffic to these businesses.

Kate Hutchinson of Chesham Connect/ Hats off Chesham confirmed that they had received a grant for wrapping shops, two already completed with funding for 7 more. She confirmed that some shops had not committed to the wrapping as they were hoping for new tenants. She agreed that events were good for the high street and encourage people to return and that ideally would like an event per month.

Chesham Museum confirmed that they were now ensconced in the Town Hall but were looking for other premises on the High Street.

A member of the public stated that there are many things around town not fixed and just told it is Buckinghamshire Councils responsibility. Can we take back control? e.g. paths around Waterside are crumbling and the barriers thrown into the river; weeding; empty shops. Councillor Booth confirmed that pavements and roads are Buckinghamshire Councils responsibility, and that Councillors continue to put pressure on Buckinghamshire Council with regards to the orange barriers. A short-term solution for the subway has been found which looks better. We have limited resource but are making sure we get things done.

A member of the public asked about the Chesham Masterplan. He said that there had been a succession of studies with a lot of money spent but it is not clear what has happened to them. Councillor Southworth responded that Chesham Town Council are in the process of developing the Neighbourhood Plan. There was excellent public engagement from recent consultations but there had been delays in progressing the plan due to the Beechwood Strategy and the hold on new building. Buckinghamshire Council have been working through this strategy which has taken time. Chesham Town Council have taken the feedback from Buckinghamshire Council and the public consultation and are looking to present the final Neighbourhood Plan to full Council in June with the aim to go to referendum next May. There are good environmental policies and designs in the plan, which have come from the people of Chesham, which new developments will need to comply with. After that it is out of our hands and up to private interests to take forward. After we press the Neighbourhood Plan we get 25% CIL payments which will enable us to invest in Chesham e.g. play grounds.

A member of the public asked what the plans are for Temperance Hall. The CEO/Town Clerk responded that the Town Council has always owned Temperance Hall and that it will run as an extension of the Elgiva, and that trying not to change anything. In August the hall will be updated and aiming to expand the Youth Theatre and in the future a café.

A member of the public asked if public transport could be improved. Councillor Baum replied that a community bus was being considered as buses good for the environment and good for people suffering loneliness.

5. TOWN MAYOR'S REMARK AND THANKS

The Mayor thanked everyone for coming and voluntary groups and Town Council colleagues, members and officers alike.

The meeting closed at 8.46pm.