



New Alresford Town Council

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MINUTES OF THE NEW ALRESFORD ANNUAL TOWN ASSEMBLY HELD ON TUESDAY 8 MAY 2018, AT THE ALRESFORD RECREATION CENTRE, THE AVENUE, ALRESFORD, SO24 9EP, COMMENCING AT 7.30PM

PRESENT: Cllr Margot Power in the Chair, sixteen members of the public and Mrs Sue Hobbs Locum Town Clerk.

1. Welcome from Chair of New Alresford Town Council and introductions

Cllr Power welcomed all to the Assembly and outlined the items which would be covered by the meeting. Introductions were made to Cllrs Deeming, Evans and Gordon-Smith, who would make their reports as Chairs of New Alresford Town Council's (NATC) committees. Other NATC Members present were attending in their private capacity.

2. To receive and accept apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Mr and Mrs Jeffs and Winchester City Councillor Jackie Porter.

3. Minutes of the previous Annual Town Assembly held on 28 March 2017

The minutes of the previous Annual Town Assembly held on 28 March 2017 had been previously circulated and were signed by Cllr Power as a true record of the meeting.

4. Report from PCSO Rhys Griffiths (if available)

Regrettably PCSO Griffiths had not been able to attend the Assembly and had not been able to provide a written report in his absence.

5. Chair of New Alresford Town Council's Report – Cllr Margot Power

Cllr Power read from her report to those present:

'It is never a dull moment for NATC. In January 2017 the budget set for 2017/2018 included sums to fix and redecorate buildings and publish a five-year plan.

‘Sadly, in April 2017 NATC lost five councillors, which impacted on the council’s corporate memory of what we plan to do, how and why. Five new Councillors were co-opted in June 2017, who needed to learn what we can and can’t do and quite rightly question everything – and need to make their contribution to the five-year plan.

‘We had also lost a Town Clerk who had been with us for many years and Karen Ross had joined us as a Locum Clerk. This is never an easy job and Karen brought a robust approach to what we did and how. Inevitably, the continuity of care for both Council and town fell on Julie Cleeve as our Finance Clerk and Frances Simpson as our Committee Clerk, both of whom work part time. They are backed up by Bill, our passionate litter clearer and Paddy who has stepped in to look after this building. They work together to find solutions to problems and make the town a safer, nicer place to live.

‘In order to allow staff to get on with their own work, some of us Councillors have manned the phones and desk over the last 18 months or so. The interruptions are continuous: trees, dogs, lost property, street lamps. Any of these may be a quick phone call or a matter of public safety, or travellers on Stratton Bates. All of these matters have to be dealt with properly, legally, and can take a lot of time. It’s not an easy job and we and the town are grateful to staff for this very important work.

‘Karen has now moved on and you see before you our new Locum Clerk. Sue Hobbs is very experienced and well qualified and will bring us into perfect condition for a new permanent Clerk to take control.

‘This upheaval has been very hard on staff and in order to relieve the workload, we agreed that only essential work should go forward. This is why we haven’t done all we planned to do. In spite of all this, play equipment was repaired, hanging baskets hung, grass was cut, we implemented a new finance system, soakaways were mended, grants awarded, the outside of this building was painted and the travellers dealt with legally and effectively, plus public queries were dealt with competently.

‘A quick plug for those who might think of working for the town council – you make a difference, you are at the heart of the community, and you get paid – unlike the Councillors. Talking of Councillors, Marion Boyes moved away early this year and Michael Byrne has recently been co-opted to her vacancy.

‘Councillors give a great deal of time, effort and expertise to this voluntary role, it has been estimated as six hours per week, but sometimes it seems far more. Thank you, Councillors, for volunteering!’

6. Reports from New Alresford Town Council’s Committee Chairs

Cllr Power invited the Committee Chairs to provide a verbal report of the work undertaken during the past year.

6.1 Recreation & Environment – Cllr Steve Deeming. Cllr Deeming opened his report by advising that the two committees had merged to improve efficiency and had dealt with a

number of Health & Safety issues at Stratton Bates pavilion, plus improvement works to play equipment. The five-year plan referred to by Cllr Power, will consider the options for the refurbishment of the skateramp.

The local football and rugby clubs had enjoyed a successful season and congratulations were in order on these achievements.

Following the traveller encampment at Stratton Bates, consideration was given to commissioning preventative measures, to minimise the possibility of a repeat occurrence. The recommendation was made to maintain the status quo, after consultation with Hampshire County Council and the Police, as it was a rare event and local residents expressed a wish not to install any such measures, which could also be costly.

Cllr Deeming continued that NATC was working with partner organisations to improve landscaping at Drove Farm and concluded his report that the car park flowerbeds at Arlebury Park would shortly be converted to community gardens.

6.2 Economy & Tourism – Cllr Simon Evans. Cllr Evans highlighted that this committee had agreed to terminate the engagement with the Market Towns Officer and that this function would be undertaken by the Committee and the local Chamber of Commerce. This action was taken to reduce costs and to continue tasks within the five-year plan, which had a further four years to run. The Chamber of Commerce representatives were well placed to connect with other town partners and the ensuing work was being undertaken by the Committee.

Cllr Evans also commented that the Committee had an aspiration to amalgamate all of the town's social media platforms into one definitive source of information. This was intended to avoid the duplication or mis-interpretation of information for residents, visitors and businesses alike.

6.3 Planning – Cllr Russell Gordon-Smith. Cllr Gordon-Smith noted that much of the Committee's work is routine, mostly commenting on minor planning applications. The Committee does not have decision-making powers and NATC only has a statutory right to be consulted on applications received. Members of the Committee have a range of skills and views, but the observations are collectively made, with only constructive objections being forwarded to Winchester City Council as the planning authority. The Committee was sensitive to the setting of precedents which could be exploited by future applications and is mindful of the conditions within the Local Plan and Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) requirements for building control.

Cllr Gordon-Smith highlighted that whilst no agreement had been reached at the present time, the Sun Hill development may include 15 hectares of open space land and the provision of affordable housing may help alleviate the housing shortage in the local area.

Cllr Power thanked Cllrs Deeming, Evans and Gordon-Smith for their reports.

6.4 Finance – Cllr Margot Power.

Cllr Power commented that due to the reluctance to undertake all but essential work, there is an underspend of about £85,000.00, part of which is an unbudgeted income of £11,000.00 from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) development funds. This cannot be budgeted for, as it is not known how much and when CIL will be credited to local councils. NATC agreed during the year that CIL receipts would be reserved for major projects and that Council may spend reserves on traffic measures, which make a significant contribution to the safety of residents.

Cllr Power noted that this gives NATC more of a voice when projects are in the planning phase, giving an example that there was no need to be ‘fobbed off’ with a cycle lane that will be washed away within months. Cllr Power concluded her report by reminding those present that the tip and potholes are beyond NATC’s current financial resources or powers, to improve.

7. Open Forum for Parishioners

Cllr Power invited members of the public to pose questions and a resident queried the post on Facebook that NATC had underspent by £85,000.00 in the 2017 – 2018 financial year. Cllr Power responded that this sum was due to the suspension of major projects and was currently in reserves. The year-end accounts would be finalised later in the month.

A member of the public advised that he had yet to receive a response to a question he raised at the previous Annual Town Assembly, regarding the closure of the Alresford Recreation Centre (ARC) bar facility. Cllr Power responded that NATC had provided a statement on the decision to close the bar and asked the Locum Clerk to forward a copy of the same to the member of the public, apologising for the oversight.

A member of the public commented that it was shown on social media that the ARC would re-open on 1 June 2018, to which Cllr Power advised that this information was not known to NATC.

Congratulations were expressed for Cllr Power becoming a Winchester City Councillor at the recent district council elections.

A comment was received that it was noted that NATC had made a formal objection to the Sun Hill planning application. A response was made that the NATC Planning Committee had listened very carefully to the comments made at the last meeting and the objections had been submitted to Winchester City Council as the planning authority. As this was a potentially important application for the town, a suggestion was received that a steering group be formed by NATC, comprising of Councillors and interested parties, to deal with the infrastructure implications of the up-coming development. Cllr Power asked the Locum Clerk to include this suggestion in the agenda for the Annual Meeting of the Council to be held on 15 May 2018.

A resident expressed his concern that NATC had set its current year precept at the same level as in 2017 – 2018, despite an underspend of £85,000.00. A response was made that the Council's financial position as at 31 March 2018 would be made clear when the year-end closure had taken place at the end of the month.

Cllr Power closed the meeting at 8.05pm and invited all present to refreshments.