

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 22 March 2016 at 6.30pm in the Upper Chamber, Thame Town Hall

Present: 60 Residents and Councillors

A minute's silence was held to remember the victims of the terrorist attacks in Brussels.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor Wilmshurst.

2 Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 5 May 2015 were noted to be a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

3 Town Mayor's Report for 2015-16

Cllr Dixon presented her report and made particular reference to the remarkable Town and its community. There had been so many fantastic events and initiatives during the year which had brought the community together and encouraged others to visit the Town.

Thanks was expressed, on behalf of the Council, to the many groups, volunteers, businesses and members of the public who took part in events organised by the Council such as the Service of Remembrance in November and the Christmas Light Switch On. The local project Thame Remembers had another successful year delivering crosses to the graves of those listed on the Town's War Memorial with volunteers travelling as far as New Zealand and South Korea.

One of the Town Council's largest achievements during the year was the development of the new Skate Park facility on Tythrop Way. Thanks to the young people of Thame and generous grant funding received from both the Town and District Councils the Town now had one of the country's best facilities.

The Town had been recognised for its hard work by receiving a number of prestigious national awards during the year including a Rising Star Award in the Great British High Street competition and 2nd Place in England's Greatest Places competition.

On a sad note Thame had lost one of its most beloved residents, Nick White, shortly before Christmas. Nick was the Town Council's official photographer and great friend to so many people in the Town and would be sorely missed.

Finally, it had been a true honour to be Mayor of this lovely Town and having the opportunity to meet so many remarkable people and take part in some wonderful events. One of my proudest personal achievements was my sky dive in August last year which raised funds for the Mayor's chosen charities; Thame & District Day Centre and the Thame to Thame Earthquake Fund.

4 Open Forum – Questions from Electors

Question from Mr Lord regarding the permanency of the proposed double yellow lines in Elms Road and the knock on effect that would have with regard to street parking in an area that was already congested.

Open Forum – Questions from Electors cont'd

The Town Clerk replied that the Consultation on the proposal to extend the double yellow lines in Elms Road had just been received and would be discussed at the Planning & Environment Committee meeting on Tuesday 5 April where the Council would formulate its response.

County Councillor Carter replied that he had only just been consulted and had requested more information on the reasoning behind the proposal. Cllr Carter would report any further information he received to the Town Clerk.

Mr Laver asked what the situation was with regard to the proposal to make the traffic flow along Nelson Street one way. Cllr Carter replied that the consultation had received a mixed response and in his view Nelson Street should not be looked at in isolation. The whole of the Southern Road area, including Windmill Road should be considered in any proposals. Cllr Carter is considering appropriate next steps.

Miss Dobie asked when the yellow lines would be repainted along Bell Lane? The Town Council would raise this with Oxfordshire County Council.

Mr Grant raised a question with regard to the Shambles and who was responsible for keeping it clean and tidy? Under the rules of Land Registry no one was able to register ownership of the Shambles and as such no one took responsibility for keeping it clean and tidy. Mr Grant said it was in the interests of the Town for it to be tidy and asked if the area could be included in the Town Council's programme of cleaning.

The Town Clerk replied that he would investigate the history of the Shambles and report back to Mr Grant in due course.

Mr Davies requested clarification on the significant increase in the Precept for 2016-17. The Town Clerk referred to the public statement and reported that the increase equated to an increase of £12.34 per annum or 24p per week on a Band D property. The increase was partly due to the withdrawal of a grant from the District Council, significant changes to National Insurance contributions, taking on more work on behalf of the District and County Councils due to austerity measures and other contributory factors. The District Council had decided to put the money, it did not pass on, into grant funding. Town and Parish Councils would then be able to apply for funding for different events e.g. Her Majesty The Queen's 90th birthday celebration events.

Cllr Carter stated that the County Council was responsible for 85% of public services. As a result of the Government re-engineering of national finances to attack the deficit the major burden of cuts had fallen on County Councils around the Country. To date the County Council had found savings of more than £200m with a further £70m of savings to be found. This would affect front line services that mattered to everyone including the vulnerable.

Mr Guest stated the Town Centre had changed over the years and had become more service industry focused. When he first wanted to open a pet shop in the town he had to apply to the council for permission and had to wait as there was already a pet shop. Mr Guest asked if there was any way of controlling occupation of units.

Cllr Carter reported that Fat Face had submitted a planning application to the District Council for changes to 18 Cornmarket (formally Cargo).

Mr Butt praised the Town Council for the support and good work it did on behalf of the Town.

Questions from Electors – Cont'd

Mr Parmar was organising a Street Cricket event on the evening of Friday 10 June 2016 in the Town Centre as part of the Queen's 90th Birthday celebrations and made a plea for volunteers to help with the event.

Mr Laver made a plea for a volunteer(s) to come forward to take on the organisation of the annual Charities Fair held in the Town Hall.

Mr Hartridge asked what the Town Council was doing with regard to the proposed cut in bus subsidies which would result in the total loss of the 120/121/123/124 bus services. This would particularly have a detrimental effect on young mums and the elderly. Surely the service could be run three days a week and still provide a meaningful service to the rural communities around the town.

Cllr Stiles, Parish Transport Representative, replied that she had organised a petition to save the bus route and had attended the County Council meeting, in February, to speak and present the petition. Unfortunately the 120/121/123/124 service would be cut, however, talks were taking place with representatives from the bus companies and the County Council to see whether some funding from Government could be used to help run a reduced service. Towersey Parish Council and village representatives were campaigning to save part of the 40 bus service that covered the Towersey loop. Cllr Stiles confirmed that Oxfordshire County Council had stated that current bus services would operate until 20 July.

Cllr Carter reported that the County Council had cut the bus subsidies but there was a team of officers talking to the bus operatives to see whether certain routes could be merged with the aim of avoiding cuts to services wherever possible. The outcome of these talks would not be known until well into May.

Angela Willson raised a question with regard to the two new bus stops in Howland Road, outside the new commercial development. The Town Clerk reported that Carousel was in communication with the County Council and as soon as it was safe to do so the 40 bus service would commence servicing the bus stops.

5 Vibrancy & Vitality Workshop

Miller Research UK, had been contracted to produce a Vibrancy and Vitality Study for the Town. As part of the Study Chris Jones, Sam White and Susie Stevenson had spent the day in the town interviewing individuals and groups.

Miller Research was based in South Wales and currently had 10 employees. The company had carried out studies for 20-25 market towns across the UK. The Vibrancy and Vitality Study had three main aims; to engage with the Town Council, local stakeholders and agree an action plan. The approach would take the form of desk research, stakeholder interviews, a day spent in Thame to carry out interviews and a workshop. To date 211 responses had been received to the online survey.

Chris Jones set the scene for the workshop following which people split into two groups for discussion.

The meeting concluded at 9pm

Signed.....
Chairman, Annual Town Meeting – 28 March 2017