

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 28 March 2017 at 7.30pm in the Upper Chamber, Thame Town Hall

Present: 31 Residents and Councillors

A few moments of reflection were taken to remember the victims of the terrorist attack in Westminster on 22 March 2017.

1 Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 22 March 2016 were noted to be a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

2 Thame Town Music Festival

Mr Jonnie Littler gave a presentation on the Thame Town Music Festival (TTMF) to be held on Saturday 8 July 2017 from 12 noon to 10.30pm. Jonnie started the First Thursday Music Club seven years ago, has run a stage at the Towersey festival and been involved in other local events.

TTMF will be a free one day multi genre music festival at different locations all over the town. Thame was an inspiring community and organisers looked at what type of festival would add to the cultural life and vibrancy of the town and support the local economy.

An invitation was sent to anyone who would like to provide a venue for the event, the result of which are nine venues dotted around the town, within the proposed road closure, plus the main stage in the Lower High Street Car Park.

Despite every attempt to find a date that did not clash with another musical event in the town, after the securing the date it was discovered that there is a classical music event in St Mary's church, performed by Lord Williams's Festival Chorus. TTMF have made a decision not to offer any classical music performances at the festival and support the event at the church.

As well as live music there will also be food stalls and stalls selling music related products as well as face painting and a bouncy castle. Care has been taken not to compete with retailers in the town centre and support the local economy.

The aspiration is for the festival to become an 'Edinburgh Festival' over time where everywhere will be a venue for all ages. The organising group has formed a Community Interest Company (not for profit), funding has been achieved through successful grant applications, sponsorship, hire of stalls and advertising. The Town Council has provided £5k of funding and the option for the one day event to run for the next five years to enable it to become established.

Jon had spoken to every retailer and resident in the area of the festival and the group were nearing the end of their consultation period. Professional contractors would provide the security, safety and light & sound for the venues and the appropriate licences and public liability insurance will be in place.

Jon encouraged everyone to visit the website www.thametownmusicfestival.org to find out more about the performers who were already confirmed and make suggestions as to who else should be approached to perform.

Thame Town Music Festival is going to be a great event!

Jon concluded by answering a series of questions from the audience.

3 Town Mayor's Report for 2016-17

Cllr Linda Emery presented her report for 2016-17. The town, led by the Town Council, was committed to developing and strengthening our vision of the area that reflected the thoughts and feelings of the local people.

The community focused budget for 2016/17 looked hard at where it could make savings (both in terms of cuts and further efficiencies), whilst at the same time providing projects, functions and services that the community of Thame expected to be delivered.

There had been many highlights during the year including the continuation of the Town Charities Fair, campaigning against cuts to children's centres, adult social care and withdrawal of bus subsidies. Supporting the Great British High Street competition and finishing as a finalist in the 'Small Market Town' category. Promoting Small Business Saturday including a new competition for local young entrepreneurs. Providing funding to support projects at the Thame Cricket Club and Town Museum and the launch of the new Town Council website.

As well as the highlights there had been challenges including cost pressures and austerity as a result of direct cuts made by central government. The Town Council allocated £10,000 to the Red Kite Family Centre, £5,000 to the Thame Town Music Festival, £5,000 to help define a potential around town bus route, £10,000 to the Thame & District Day Centre and £5,000 towards Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve.

The Town Council continued to be committed to fostering a culture of community engagement, providing residents and businesses with opportunities to be part of the Council's decision making process.

Cllr Emery had attended many fun, special and enjoyable civic engagements whilst being Town Mayor and it was impossible to pick out any one in particular. Cllr Emery thanked her two chosen charities, the Red Kite Children's Centre and Thame Youth Café for their support and commitment and said it had been a pleasure to raise money for them.

Cllr Emery had met the most amazing people and extended her thanks to the residents, community groups, local businesses and volunteers of Thame for their contribution to our vibrant and diverse Town. Thanks was also extended to fellow Councillors, the Town Clerk and Council staff.

4 Open Forum – Questions from Electors

Cllr Lambert started off the Open Forum session with a question to County Cllr Carter on the poor state of repair of Park Street which was riddled with pot holes to the extent that vehicles swerved back and forth to avoid the pot holes as they travelled along the street. How did residents go about getting this issue addressed?

Cllr Carter replied that he was also concerned about the bad state of the pavement on the John Hampden side of Park Street and had been lobbying at County Hall for repairs to be undertaken for a long time. It was expected that work on the pavement would commence between September and December 2017. It would be good if work could be carried out to the street at the same time although Cllr Carter thought that unlikely as it was only feasible to carryout patching repair work due to monetary constraints as a consequence of enormous decreases in spending on highways from central government.

Questions from Electors – Cont'd

Mr Robinson read out a statement relating to the poor condition of the roads in Thame and spoke on behalf of the residents and frustrated road users. Mr Robinson had recently posted an article on this subject on Thame Bay. He drew attention to the Government's future plans for funding repairs to roads and the Pot Hole Action fund. £1million had been invested in Oxfordshire so far with some money still to be allocated but it now cost £12m to mend the pot holes in the County.

Mr Robinson understood that the funding was available to all layers of local government to bid for as required. Government had created the Localism Act to enable local councils to take responsibility for the roads connecting the town and the community. It was the Town Council's responsibility to inform District Council of what was needed. The main reason for speaking at the meeting was to share the information on funding and back up the article written on Thame Bay.

County Cllr Carter responded firstly by requesting that Mr Robinson send him a copy of the statement Mr Robinson had read and he would respond to the points raised. The District and Town Council did not have the legal authority or responsibility for maintaining the highway, this lay with the County Council. With regard to Thame's voice being heard, Cllr Carter replied the Town had two County Councillors and three District Councillors all speaking up for the town and the Town had long been able to make its voice heard. If there was a pot of money available from central government Oxfordshire County Council would bid for the maximum amount available and ensure the money was spent appropriately.

Cllr Stiles stated that it was not only vehicles that suffered from the poor state of the roads, cyclists were also affected with pot holes being responsible for a number of accidents, some resulting in serious injury.

The Town Clerk stated that the Town Council was very concerned about the state of the Parish and wanted to hear about the concerns of residents, he thanked Mr Robinson for taking the time to attend and speak at the meeting. Everyday people reported issues on a variety of things to the Town Council, however, the Town Council did not have the power to carry out repairs to the highway. The Town Clerk confirmed that the Town Council were in discussion with the County Council about taking on the responsibility of maintaining the Upper High Street car park. The Transport Plan Working Group created through the Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Committee were working on a transport strategy to improve Thame and this would be fed back to the County Council.

Cllr Carter suggested that the new proposals for a Unitary Council in Oxfordshire would eliminate confusion for residents as to which layer of local Government was responsible for the delivery of services and be more efficient. Sonja Francis raised the question as to whether a Unitary Council would be better placed to represent the views of local residents as the present three tier system.

Cllr Stiles stated that the Town Council had submitted a detailed response to the consultation on the proposals for a Unitary Council. Cllr Bretherton stated that the Unitary proposal was not the only one that would be considered.

Cllr Bretherton asked what the new building was on the outskirts of Thame on the road to Chinnor and when the associated work would be completed? Cllr Dixon added that the temporary boundary fencing was dangerous and an eyesore.

Cllr Carter responded stating the project had been a challenging one in many respects. The building was a transition and assessment centre for children. After the building had been occupied for the first time it was discovered that the internal specification had not been fully completed and contractors were recalled to carry out the work. Associated work to the highway had just started and the fencing removed and hedging would be replaced.

Cllr Midwinter asked if an invitation would be extended to Town Councillors to visit the assessment centre? Cllr Carter confirmed he would pass the request on.

Cllr Stiles reminded everyone that for those who could not attend the meeting and wanted to raise an issue that the next Councillor Drop-in Session would take place this Saturday 1 April 2017 from 10am – 12 noon at the Town Hall.

The meeting concluded at 8.38pm

Signed.....
Chairman, Annual Town Meeting - 27 March 2018