

Annual Town Meeting

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 27 March 2018 at 7.30pm in the Upper Chamber, Thame Town Hall

Present: In excess of 100 Residents and Councillors (143 listed on signing sheet)

1 Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 28 March 2017 were noted to be a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

2 Town Mayor's Report for 2017-18

Cllr Wyse presented his report for 2017-18. There had been many highlights throughout the year, Cllr Wyse was impressed by the number of groups and volunteers in the town who worked hard and made Thame a great place to live.

The first ever Town Music Festival took place last July and was a big success. Johnnie Littler and his small team of volunteers were already working on plans for this year's Festival which would be bigger and better. The new cricket club pavilion, currently under development, will be a great asset for the town and the Mayor had the once in a lifetime opportunity to be able to operate a JCB at the groundbreaking which took place last month. This year the Town Awards celebrates its 10th year at the Barns Centre on 3 May 2018 and all previous award winners will be invited to join in the celebrations.

It was a very moving experience to lead the Town in Remembrance at the Memorial Gardens in November and to read a poem about an old soldier and his comrades. It was a privilege to be invited to Violet Bottom's 100th Birthday celebrations and listen to her recollections of her life in Leeds and her work welding armoured tanks during the Second World War.

Finally the Mayor thanked everyone who had helped him during his year as Mayor, it has been an honour to be Mayor of the town in which he grew up.

3 Highway Maintenance

County Councillor Carter introduced Mr Keith Stenning, Group Manager Area Operations (South) at Oxfordshire County Council.

Two factors were highlighted which had led to the deterioration of the roads; the weather and the constant freeze / thaw, especially this winter and the volume of traffic, especially the increase in HGV traffic associated with the various development sites around the town.

It would take £150m to sort out all the roads in the county. The budget for pothole repairs was £1.6m. Funding had shrunk enormously over recent years.

Keith Stenning thanked the Town Council for the opportunity to explain the work carried out by the Highways Department and would try to answer any questions. The Highways team in the south of the County consisted of 23 people covering South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse.

Across this area there were just over 5,000 current reported defects of which 3,254 were awaiting repair and around 2,000 were waiting for a highway inspector to assess them. The picture was very similar in the north and west of the County.

The Country had just experienced the worst winter for some time in that it was not uniformly cold but as previously mentioned the constant freeze / thaw had led to even more potholes developing. It had been a nightmare and the Highways Department was not in a good place. In the Thame / Chinnor area, as of Monday this week the highways inspector had 18 reported defects to visit and 147 potholes awaiting repair. The £1.6m budget had been overspent by £300k.

Every possible road gang was out fixing potholes and every trained member of staff was out inspecting and marking up defects for repair. A red line around a pothole indicated repair within 24 hours, a white line indicated a repair within 28 days. But please do not line yourself as it would be outside the system and could prevent proper reporting / repair.

Another significant cause of damage to the road was surface water and the Highways team was working to ensure drainage pipes were cleaned and encouraging local land owners to clear ditches.

Different types of road repair included; a 'quick fix' referred to as a sticking plaster which filled the hole with asphalt, this was not ideal but was the universal approach adopted by County Councils across the country (cost, £40 per repair). Minor patching involved a square cut out (cost, £60-£65 per repair), structural patching going down to the base layers and 'tar and chip' applying a layer of micro asphalt / chipping. The County had two Dragon Patching machines used for repairs and to seal roads to try and prevent damage. These machines could only be used on rural roads and not in built up areas.

Funding was key, the government had recently provided £1m revenue funding which had allowed the County to pull projects forward. An example was the planned work on Tythrop Way by the Rugby Club which then had to be postponed due to wet weather. This has been rescheduled for April. In the last week or two the government had announced a further £1.8m of funding which the County would use as wisely as possible for minor patching and structural repairs.

The resurfacing of Park Street is planned to take place in late spring / early summer as this was the optimum time weather and school holiday wise to get the best possible result. To give some idea of cost, repairs to the pavement to the south side of Park Street from the mini roundabout to the school will cost £60k and partially resurfacing the road a further £75k.

Cllr Wyse then invited questions from the audience.

Residents raised a wide variety of issues related to surface water on Oxford Road, East Street and the turning circle at Lord Williams's Upper School, the high volume of HGV traffic using local roads, could HGV operators be charged a contribution towards road repairs. Who did the County Council employ to carry out repairs and whose responsibility was it to sign off the completed work. The inspection regime. The interaction between Highways and the Utility Companies, gully clearance, why potholes in one road were not all repaired at the same time and a request to install a pedestrian crossing in Wellington Street.

Keith Stenning answered all the questions raised and committed to look into the problems raised in relation to Oxford Road. He explained that contractually potholes had to be repaired within 28 days of being identified. In order to keep within this timescale potholes were repaired in the order they were reported which meant not all potholes in one road were repaired at the same time.

Constant effort was required to ensure the appropriate balance between resources available, safety management and county wide coverage.

Keith Stenning finished by saying the system was not perfect and Highways did not get it right all of the time but they were doing the best they could with the resources available.

4 Open Forum – Questions from Electors

Cllr Wyse invited questions from the audience. Apologies from District Councillors, Champken-Woods, Dodds and Matelot Green were reported as they were attending a Special Full Council meeting at District to discuss the SODC Local Plan.

A question was raised regarding infrastructure and increasing provision for health facilities and doctor's surgeries in the town. The Town Clerk replied that house building had been up front without the necessary infrastructure being implemented at the same time. The Town Council was doing all it could to apply pressure to the various stakeholders to get the identified infrastructure in place. Discussions were taking place between developers, clinical groups and GP practices regarding a new health hub but it would not happen overnight.

A question was raised with regard to the Cattle Market and whether a new site had been allocated? The Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer replied that Thame Farmers Auction Mart had identified a new site along Rycote Lane and a planning application had been submitted to the District Council. The new site would provide a fit for purpose facility and overnight grazing for animals.

A resident asked if there were any plans to install a pedestrian crossing at Kingsey Road where a lot of children and adults crossed the road to get to the Rugby Club and events held on the Showground? Cllr Carter replied that there were no plans he was aware of.

A resident asked why such a high percentage of the rise in council tax was going to adult social care when other funding streams were being cut? Cllr Carter responded stating the rise in the County Council portion of Council tax was 5.99% of which half was ring-fenced for additional spending on adult social care. It was a reflection of the times and an ageing population. The County Council had two big statutory obligations one to adult social care and the other to child social care of which adult social care accounted for 40% of the County Council's overall expenditure.

A member of Lea Park Residents Association asked for the speed limit on Cromwell Avenue to be reduced to 20mph. A member of the Moreton Residents Association asked for the current 60 mph speed limit as you enter Moreton changed to a 30 mph limit and then the current 30 mph in the village changed to a 20 mph limit. Other Thame residents asked for the 30 mph limit to be in place from the A329 roundabout in Thame to beyond the Moreton turn. A town wide limit of 20 mph was suggested. Cllr Carter responded saying there were a number of legal hurdles to overcome and large costs associated with reducing speed limits. Currently there were limited resources available.

5 Thame Neighbourhood Plan

The Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer thanked everyone for attending. The Thame Neighbourhood Plan had been incredibly successful and one of the front runners for others to follow. Houses have and are being built where the people of Thame wanted them with views to and from the countryside, built at a density which provided good sized gardens and landscaping that has been correctly managed.

The Plan provided for employment land on which two companies, Groves and Windles, now operate. The housing allocation on the Lord Williams's Lower School site has given the school confidence to move towards becoming a single school site.

The benefits of Section 106 and Community Levy Infrastructure contributions had not always been visible but this funding had enabled the redevelopment of the cricket club pavilion, extra burial space at St Mary's church and a lighting solution in the car park at Southern Road Recreation Ground.

There is some unfinished business, outside of the Town Council's control, such as development of the Cattle Market site, a sizeable community facility, better health facilities, new retail units on identified sites in the Plan not progressing and the loss of employment sites through Permitted Development Rights equating to the loss of 600 jobs.

The new District Local Plan is proposing another 510 new homes for the town and has under allocated the amount of employment space needed. There are cross border issues to consider with the planned growth in Haddenham, the need for affordable housing and housing provision for the elderly. The Thame Community Land Trust currently being formed aims to provide affordable housing in perpetuity for people with a strong connection to the town.

There is an identified need to tighten policies in a revised plan for example the housing mix and density in Moreton and with regard to the possible effect HS2, the East-West Rail link and the proposed Oxford to Cambridge Expressway may have on Thame.

The Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer invited people to join in small groups with one of the 11 facilitators to discuss the Vision Statement in the current Neighbourhood Plan and whether it was still valid. The Principles of the Plan – did they need changing or adding to and what other things people felt were needed in the next Neighbourhood Plan?

Those who were unable to stay for the workshop were invited to take a comment sheet home to complete and return to the Town Hall.

The meeting concluded at 10pm

Signed.....
Chairman, Annual Town Meeting - 26 March 2019