

Annual Town Meeting

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 23 April 2013 at 7.30pm in the Upper Chamber, Thame Town Hall

Present: 84 Residents and Councillors.

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Butler, Dite and Dodds.

2 Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 24 April 2012 were noted to be a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

3 Report from the Mayor

The Mayor Cllr Nigel Champken-Woods remarked 'it has been quite a year since May 2012' with the celebration of the Queen's Jubilee, the London Olympics. He personally had attended a Royal Garden Party in Henley and the torch relay as it passed through Wallingford.

Other highlights of the year were a visit to Sinaia in Romania to sign the Friendship Charter and the Graduation Parade at RAF Halton. Closer to home the Mayor had judged window displays, best allotment plot and tallest beans to name a few and helped to organise the Senior Citizens Christmas Party, a joint effort between the Town Council and Thame Rotary.

The Town Council and residents had worked hard towards producing the Neighbourhood Plan which sets out the future for Thame over the next 15 years. The Plan had passed Independent Examination in February with the Examiner stating that it had 'undergone public consultation and reflected the passion and pride local people had for their area'. The Mayor urged residents to vote in the Referendum and get their voice heard.

The Mayor presented his two Cadets, Cpl Miles Grant, Army Cadet Force and Sgt Mike Roberts, Thame 594 Sqd Air Training Corps with certificates in recognition of their service during the past year.

Finally, Andy Ford, Watch Manager at Thame Fire Station was presented with his Long Service and Good Conduct Medal by the Mayor on behalf of Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service having completed over 20 years service.

4 Citizens Advice Bureau

Tom Fox, Manager of the Thame Citizens Advice Bureau highlighted a couple of typical

scenarios that a volunteer adviser may deal with; very often the adviser is unaware of the final outcome of a situation. The Citizens Advice Bureau started in 1938 and by September 1939 over 200 CABs had sprung up around the country operating out of village halls and homes as families increasingly experienced problems with debt as a result of male family members giving up their jobs and going off to war. The CAB in Thame has been operating for 34 years and now, as in the 1940s, a high percentage of problems are around money and debt with the mis-selling of PPIs and people suffering with the cumulative effect of payday loans.

Today 50% of enquiries are resolved over the phone by speaking with an adviser. If not resolved the enquirer is offered an appointment to visit the offices in Market House for a confidential discussion with one of the trained volunteer advisers. The CAB receives 60% of its funding from South Oxfordshire District Council the remainder being made up by grants from the Town Council, various parish councils and fundraising by the CAB Friends Organisation.

The CAB needs volunteers but not just advisers, people with skills in plumbing, building, project management, finance, sales, marketing and business are required to help improve the day to day running of the Bureau.

5 Sharing Life Trust

Phil Stratton gave an introduction to the work of Sharing Life Trust whose motto is Seeing, Caring, Helping and operated in the UK and overseas. The Trust had built up relationships locally with Citizens Advice Bureau, debt councillors, doctors, clinics, Good Neighbour Schemes, Thame Alliance Group and Aylesbury Credit Union.

Internationally the Trust is working to help people in Burundi and have helped to build the Rema clinic. Closer to home the Foodbank is an example of the Trust responding to local needs. The food parcel provides 3-5 days of non perishable emergency supplies. In the first year 150 people were provided with parcels. 85 parcels were distributed over the Christmas period and from January 2013 to date 116 people have benefited. The Trust was grateful to local people for their donations and support.

As one of the Mayor's chosen charities this year Cllr Nigel Champken-Woods was delighted to present a cheque to the Trust for just over £1500.

6 Thame Players

Tony Long and Pat Shepherd gave a presentation on behalf of Thame Players. The theatre building was celebrating its centenary this year and started life as St Mary's Church Hall, opened by Rev Spooner in 1913. The earliest record of Thame Players performing goes back to 1944 with plays performed in the Upper Chamber of the Town Hall until 1977 when the Players moved into the Theatre in Nelson Street.

Typically in a year Thame Players produce 5 shows with 32 performances, play host to 25 visiting performers and have 20 cinema screenings. Off site murder mystery evenings have proved very successful. Looking forward there are plans to extend and improve the theatre at an estimated cost of £200,000.

7 Open Forum – Questions from Electors

Residents from Harrison Place raised concern about safety at the exit from Queen Elizabeth Circle play area onto Lea Park. Many children used the pathway through the park to ride bicycles and skateboards and did not stop at the exit but rode straight out onto the road. Cllr Champken-Woods replied that the Council was aware of the problem and it was a priority in this financial year to look at different options to improve safety at this exit of the park.

Mike Smith from the Patients Group at Rycote Practice reported that building work was in progress to improve facilities for patients and staff. However, there was an ongoing problem with patients visiting the Practice and not being able to find a car parking space as it was full with cars parked by people walking into town, especially on market days. Mike appealed for ideas on how to stop people using the car park who were not visiting the Practice.

The problem with the large amount of water that accumulates during wet weather on the paving by the bus stop outside the Co-op in the High Street was raised yet again. County Councillor Nick Carter responded that he had spent the last 18 months talking with County Council experts to come up with a solution. Various options had been discussed but it would cost a considerable amount of money to rectify due to the different services which lay directly under the paving. However, Cllr Carter confirmed the work was a priority for the 2013-14 financial year.

Beatrice Dobie expressed her gratitude that residents in Thame had the opportunity to use the 'kneeling bus' which enabled people with a disability or in a wheelchair to access public transport easily.

Owen Davis asked why there had been a large increase in the Precept this year? The Town Clerk replied that changes in the Council Tax Benefit system had impacted on all levels of government and although Central Government had given a transition grant to help ease the impact the decision by the district council to only on 88% of the grant had affected the decisions being made at a local level. This together with the changes to the number of 'Band D' properties had resulted in the Town Council deciding to levy an increase to ensure a sustainable budget for the next few years.

Mr Jeffries raised the question about a pedestrian gate at Elms Park. Cllr Champken-Woods replied that it had been four years since the configuration of the gates had changed. Since then several RoSPA inspections had taken place, the most recent being two weeks ago with no requirement for a gate to be installed. The Council were aware of the perceived issues surrounding safety at the Park entrance and it would be discussed at the next Culture, Leisure and Recreation Committee meeting in June.

The meeting concluded at 9.20pm

Signed.....
Chairman, Annual Town Meeting 2014