

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 26 March 2019 at 7.30pm in the Upper Chamber, Thame Town Hall

Present: 31 Residents and Councillors

1 Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 27 March 2018 were noted to be a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

2 Town Mayor's Report for 2018-19

Cllr Midwinter explained the meeting will be in a different format to previous years with no presentations. Instead a panel made up of County, District and Town Councillors were ready to answer questions from the electorate in item 3 – the Open Forum.

Due to the timing of the District and Town / Parish elections taking place on 2 May 2019 this meeting had fallen on the first day of Purdah. Cllr Midwinter asked all Councillors to be mindful of Purdah and not to use the meeting for electioneering purposes.

Cllr Midwinter presented her report for 2018-19 and stated that had this meeting not fallen in the period of Purdah she would have publicly praised individual Town Councillors for all their hard work in supporting different organisations and projects in the Town. As it was she would present a high level report of what the Town Council had been doing.

Cllr Midwinter began by praising the work of the dedicated, well trained team of staff and officers, ably led by a very good Town Clerk. The Town Council supported many annual events and encouraged new projects and events to come forward. The Maintenance Team ensured the play areas are clean, tidy and safe. The team cut 102,924 sqm of grass within the parish boundary (including 50,000 sqm under contract for the County Council), maintained the Memorial Gardens and cleared and gritted the main walking routes in town during the severe weather.

As well as staff and officers, Councillors have supported many local organisations and initiatives such as: the formation of Thame Community Land Trust, the RSA Thame Group to develop and consult the community on a Green Living Plan for Thame, the replacement community pavilion at Church Meadow, Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve, Thame Town Centre Working Group, Thame Carnival, the Red Kite Family Centre, Thame Youth Projects, Thame & District Day Centre, Thame Remembers Project, Thame Barns Centre and Thame Museum as well as responding to various District, County and National planning consultations.

3 Open Forum – Questions from Electors

Cllr Midwinter introduced the members of the Panel: Cllr Nick Carter (Oxfordshire County Council), Cllr Nigel Champken-Woods (South Oxfordshire District Council), Graham Hunt (Town Clerk), Cllr Mike Dyer (Chairman, Policy & Resources Committee), Cllr Linda Emery (Deputy Chairman, Community, Leisure & Recreation Committee), Cllr Helena Fickling (Chairman, Planning & Environment Committee) and Cllr Bob Austin (Chairman, Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Committee).

A resident asked if there was any information on the future of the Cattle Market site and whether the people of Thame would have a say in what is developed on the site? The Town Clerk replied that the planning application submitted by Thame Farmers Mart for a new 'state of the art' Cattle Market on Rycote Lane had been granted permission by the District Planning Authority.

The Town Clerk went on to say that the Town Council has consistently asked South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) for a meeting to discuss the future of the Cattle Market site and the ideas brought forward through public consultation. The latest communication from the Head of Properties at SODC states that they are waiting for news from Thame Farmers Mart as to when they are likely to move to their new premises before meeting with the Town Council.

Cllr Champken-Woods added that this is a difficult one from the District's point of view. Currently this is the only site in the centre of town that provides long term parking which cannot afford to be lost. The site must be developed as mixed use as set out in the Thame Neighbourhood Plan.

The Chairman of the Cattle Market Action Group (CMAG) responded from the floor and stated that CMAG continue to campaign for the site and recently responded to the consultation on the District's Draft Local Plan to point out the Cattle Market site had not been specifically included.

Another resident asked about mixed use, stating that the proposal by Sainsbury for a supermarket on the site had been defeated. The last thing the town needed was another large supermarket in the centre of town. What did the Panel mean by mixed use? Lack of parking enforcement by the police in the town centre is also a problem.

The Town Clerk replied mixed use is defined in the Thame Neighbourhood Plan and could for example provide for a mix of retail, offices, residential, community facility, parking. The Town Council have some ideas they want to share with SODC. The Town Council commissioned Carter Jonas study showed the least worst supermarket option would be a deep discounter store in the centre of town.

Cllr Carter responded in relation to parking enforcement that it was a problem and was currently a matter for the police. Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) have had conversations about taking over responsibility for parking enforcement. If successful OCC will devolve power to SODC to manage, we hope in conjunction with the Town Council.

The Town Clerk stated that he had met with Jack Creeber at OCC to discuss the different options open to the Town Council, none of them were short term. There were four possible options; 1) install free parking meters for on street, 2 hour parking spaces, 2) if parking is decriminalised the Town Council could put in a proposal to take control of all parking in Thame. The Town Council would need to prepare a parking strategy in advance of power being devolved to SODC, 3) The police precept has recently been increased by a large amount, this may mean more officers available to enforce parking and 4) Newquay Town Council are attempting to use the Sustainable Communities Act to give Town Councils the direct power to enforce on-street parking. If successful the Town Council may not need to wait for SODC.

Cllr Champken-Woods stated SODC had set aside money in the budget to look at parking enforcement across the District.

An Oxford Road resident raised the problem of the pavements, particularly along the southern side of the High Street which were a disgrace and a trip hazard. Cllr Carter responded he was unaware of the problem until now but will get Highways to look at it.

The Town Mayor read out two questions submitted by a resident who was unable to be present at the meeting.

Firstly, at the Annual Town Meeting last year the resident raised the issue of flooding at the turning circle at Lord Williams's Upper School. It has flooded following rain fall for at least 35 years and still floods, what can be done about it?

Cllr Carter replied that this had been a problem for a long time and OCC have been involved in conversations with the school. It is the school's responsibility to sort out and take the initiative, if it is a question of available finance then OCC may be able to help.

There was a suggestion from the floor that there had been recent works executed in the latest attempt to alleviate the problem.

The second written question related to the junction of Wenman Road and Thame Park Road, a roundabout would increase safety. I use the junction frequently and it is unsafe.

Cllr Carter responded that the junction was deliberately altered 5-6 years ago to encourage traffic to use the ring road rather than travelling through town which had led to some success. This success would be reversed if a roundabout were to be introduced not to mention the significant cost involved.

A resident added that if travelling along Wenman Road and turning right onto Thame Park Road it was difficult to see traffic approaching from the left along Thame Park Road. Cllr Carter agreed and will ask Highways to look at the junction to see if something can be done to improve visibility.

A resident asked that given the current climate crisis is the Town Council looking at signing up to climate change commitments?

The Town Clerk replied there is the Green Living Plan (GLP) which will be the driver for the Town Council. The results of the draft GLP consultation and subsequent action plan will provide the next steps. The Town Council could also look at different initiatives local councils can sign up to.

Cllr Champken-Woods responded that he had asked the District questions about air quality monitoring following discussions at the last Community, Leisure & Recreation Committee meeting. There are 6-7 points in Thame where air quality is monitored, none of the results show areas of concern. The bottom end of the High Street is not currently being monitored. Henley and Watlington have bigger air quality problems. Cllr Champken-Woods will share the information with the Town Council and perhaps it could be included in a future Town Council newsletter.

The resident further added it is not just about the climate crisis but also where the Town Council gets its energy supply from and what it can contribute through changes to its own activities.

Cllr Fickling responded the Town Council had already made changes within the Town Hall following the results of an Energy Audit and taken initiative re waste recycling. It was everyone's responsibility to think about their environmental footprint.

Cllr Carter replied OCC are looking at what they can do to embrace the challenge. Oxford City has the benefit of greener technology through hybrid buses, it's a shame Thame and other towns in the County are not able to benefit too.

The Town Mayor shared one further written question from a resident who was unable to attend the meeting. Could the wire fence at the extension to the churchyard at St Mary's be replaced with a hedge to make it more private for visitors to the graves?

Cllr Fickling replied that St Mary's Parochial Church Council had arranged for a hedge to be planted which had been done in the last couple of days.

Cllr Carter stated the Town Council had a responsibility to ensure there was sufficient burial space in and around the town. The Town Clerk replied the Town Council was not legally responsible but was working hard to ensure Thame residents who wanted to be buried in Thame were able to do so. The Town Council are looking at other burial spaces and had met with the vicar of St Mary's to discuss the issue.

The meeting concluded at 8.15pm

Signed.....
Chairman, Annual Town Meeting - 24 March 2020