

## Full Council

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<b>Date:</b>	<b>27 April 2021</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Annual Town Meeting</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Cassie Pinnells, Acting Town Clerk</b>

### Purpose of the Report

1. To consider options and agree arrangements for the postponed Annual Town Meeting 2021.
2. The purpose of this report is to provide background for the discussion on the structure and content of a “Virtual” Zoom Annual Town Meeting or to cancel this year annual meeting.

### Background

3. The report as presented to Full Council on 2 March 2021 is attached as Appendix 1 at the end of this report and provides further information on the Annual Town Meeting legalities.
4. At the Full Council meeting on 2 March 2021, it was agreed that the Annual Town Meeting should be held, but that it should be postponed until after the elections in May and that Officers would come back to Council with a suitable date.
5. Since that Council meeting, the Government announced on 25 March 2021 that legislation which permits virtual council meetings will not be extended beyond 7 May 2021. A legal challenge to the wording of the Local Government Act 1972 was heard by the High Court on 21 April 2021. At the time of writing this report, that decision has not been announced. Officers are currently investigating venues that can accommodate all Council members if virtual meetings cannot continue.
6. Officers are open to suggestions by Councillors to make the meeting operate as smoothly as possible for the electorate to engage with the Town Council.

### Proposed Agenda

7. The proposed agenda, regardless of whether the meeting is held virtually or in person, is:
  - a) Minutes from previous meeting (mandatory)
  - b) Community presentation from the Thame Youth Projects Group
  - c) Town Mayor’s report (note that this will be the 2021-22 Mayor as elected on 18 May 2021)
  - d) Open Forum – Questions from Electors (the main purpose of the meeting)
8. Options for organising the Open Forum virtually are explained in section 6 of Appendix 1.

### Proposed Date

9. This meeting had been scheduled to take place on 30 March 2021 but it was agreed to postpone due to elections / purdah.
10. The Local Government Act 1972 Part III requires that an annual parish meeting takes place between 1st March and 1st June (inclusive) each year. There is no duty for the Parish Council to convene this although it is customary that it is convened by the Parish Council Chairman at a date and time set by the Parish Council. There is no effective sanction should the Parish Council not set a date and time for this to occur or if the Chairman does not convene the meeting.
11. Currently, the only available Tuesdays to hold this meeting are 11 May (agenda to be published 28 April) or 1 June (agenda published 20 May).
12. To give Officers the maximum amount of time to prepare for this meeting (particularly if it must be held in person), it is recommended that it be held on Tuesday 1 June 2021.

### Proposed Venue

13. The venue will be determined based on the outcome of the High Court hearing. In the interests of the safety of Officers, Members and the public, it is Officer's preference that the meeting be held virtually if we have the option to do so.
14. The Town Hall cannot be used as a venue as it cannot safely accommodate all Members / Officers / public whilst maintaining social distancing. Officers are investigating alternative venues for this meeting and all council meetings after 7 May 2021. There will be a financial implication for this, as well as additional workloads for Officers. It is possible that restrictions on the number of public attendances may need to be introduced.
15. Members may wish to consider whether to hold the meeting at all, or only if it can be held virtually.

### Resource Appraisal

16. There are no financial implications for a virtual meeting.
17. There will be a financial implication for an 'in-person' meeting as the Town Hall cannot accommodate all Officers and Members whilst adhering to Covid-19 guidelines.

### Legal Powers

- Local Government Act 1972 sch 12 para 7 (1), 14(1) and (3)
- Localism Act 2011 s1
- The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

### Recommendation:

- i) To approve to hold the Annual Town Meeting on Tuesday 1 June 2021.*
- ii) To agree the agenda for the meeting.*
- iii) To authorise Officers to appropriately progress the logistics of holding the meeting, depending on the outcome of the High Court hearing, with the preference being a virtual meeting.*

**APPENDIX 1 – REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL ON 2 MARCH 2021****Full Council**

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<b>Date:</b>	<b>2 March 2021</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Annual Town Meeting</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Cassie Pinnells, Acting Town Clerk</b>

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To **consider** how and whether to hold the Annual Town Meeting on Tuesday 30 March 2021.
2. The purpose of this report is to provide background for the discussion on the structure and content of a “Virtual” Zoom Annual Town Meeting on Tuesday 30 March 2021 or to cancel this year annual meeting.

**Background**

3. The Annual Town meeting scheduled in 2020 was cancelled following Government Guidelines not to hold face to face meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. This meeting is a meeting of the electorate, not the Town Council, and at the meeting, the electorate are entitled to raise any question on any public matter, although normally only on topics relating to the parish.
5. The Local Government Act 1972 Part III requires that an annual parish meeting takes place between 1st March and 1st June each year. There is no duty for the Parish Council to convene this although it is customary that it is convened by the Parish Council Chairman at a date and time set by the Parish Council. There is no effective sanction should the Parish Council not set a date and time for this to occur or if the Chairman does not convene the meeting.
6. The proposed agenda is:
  - a) Minutes from previous year (mandatory)
  - b) Community presentation from the Thame Youth Projects Group
  - c) Town Mayor’s report
  - d) Open Forum – Questions from Electors (the main purpose of the meeting)
7. Managing the questions at the Open Forum
  - a) To continue to use a formal panel – made up of the Mayor (who will Chair if present), the Chairman of each Town Council Committee, a District Councillor, and the Acting Town Clerk – to provide answers to each question raised, or a commitment to take them away for further investigation and provide a later response.
  - b) Please note that no invitation will be given to Oxfordshire County Council to attend the Annual Town Meeting due to elections and the Purdah period commencing on

the 29 March 2021. Any questions raised would be deferred to Fix my street for the resident to investigate on themselves.

- c) When a physical meeting is held the maximum attendance is denoted by the fire regulations which state 80 seated or 100 standing, an attendance sheet is signed upon entry into the Upper Chamber.
  - d) Moderating Zoom numbers will be investigated with the current facility to accept 100 people into the meeting which would be in line with a physical meeting.
  - e) To aid management of the virtual meeting we propose that the same rules apply that the zoon link password is requested by those who wish to attend. This enable knowledge of contact details before the meeting which will aid Officers if questions need to be clarified and answered after the meeting.
  - f) Officers are looking at how best to manage answering questions during the meeting one possible solution is using the chat box and denoting a Q at the beginning of the message or a show of a hand.
8. Officers are open to suggestions by Councillors to make the virtual meeting operate as smoothly as possible for the electorate to engage with the Town Council.

### **Resource Appraisal**

9. There are no financial implications to highlight.

### **Legal Powers**

- Local Government Act 1972 sch 12 para 7 (1), 14(1) and (3)
- Localism Act 2011 s1
- The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

### **Recommendation:**

- i) To **approve** to hold a Virtual Annual Town Meeting on Tuesday 30 March 2021.