

**CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL**

**MINUTES of the ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

**HELD ON THURSDAY 10 MAY 2012**

**PRESENT** Councillor D. J. Lacey, Town Mayor (presiding)  
Councillor Mrs C. Littley, Deputy Town Mayor

Councillor	V.M. Abraham	Councillor	R.C. McCulloch
"	A.K. Bacon	"	Mrs C.M. Michael
"	Ms J.E. Bramwell	"	Mrs A.M. Pirouet
"	Mrs P.R. Cherrill	"	M.W. Shaw
"	M. Fayyaz	"	C.H. Spruytenburg
"	P.J. Hudson	"	F.S. Wilson

Officers: W. Richards - Town Clerk  
Ms K. Graves – Policy and Projects Officer

**In Attendance:**

Sgt Damian Eatwell and 59 members of the public, including representatives from outside organisations.

**1. TOWN MAYOR'S WELCOME**

The Town Mayor, Councillor Derek Lacey, welcomed everyone present to the Annual Town Meeting.

Councillor Lacey explained that he was chairing the meeting for the successive year because of Town Council elections in May 2011, resulting in the Town Meeting being scheduled after the Annual Town Meeting last year.

He informed the public present that they had copies of a full report of the Council's activities and achievements over the last year (**attached**) and he stated he would be delighted to take questions on any item in the report later on in the agenda.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received Town Councillor T. Franks.

**3. MINUTES OF LAST ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2011 were agreed and signed by the Town Mayor as a true record.

**4. MATTERS ARISING NOT COVERED ON THE AGENDA**

There were no matters arising.

## **5. MAYORAL AWARDS SCHEME**

The Mayor gave details of the eighth Mayoral Award scheme. He offered his thanks to the Council's Policy and Projects Officer and the judging committee for their hard work and thanked the sponsors the Buckinghamshire Examiner, the family of the late Rafe Chiles and the Chesham Chamber of Trade and Commerce.

The Mayor then read out the achievements of the nominees.

After announcing and introducing the short-listed nominees, Councillor Lacey revealed the winners as follows:

- *Business Award – Church View Funeral Service* for going above and beyond professional requirements to care for its bereaved customers. Church View was particularly praised for its annual Carol Service, held for the last 10 years, to provide support at a particularly difficult time of the year.
- *Rafe Chiles Young Person's Award – Adam Stephenson* for his involvement with St Columba's Youth Group since 2004 and also in the leadership team for youth events across the diocese of Northamptonshire and leader of a youth group in Beaconsfield. He is also involved in local amateur dramatics, with both Panda Players and Chesham Bois Catholic Players
- *The People's Award - Mr Bernard Meldrum* for his work for the town which has included serving as councillor, and Mayor, of Chesham; helping to set up and leading the town's CCTV initiative; Chairman of the Chesham Society; being the town's Tree Warden and a school governor; and being involved in a host of local groups, such as Chesham in Bloom, the Transport Users Group and the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England.

The Mayor presented both the winners and the short listed nominees with certificates.

Councillor Lacey also made presentations to Nadia Soukri, Billie Fisher and Jedd Heighett, winners of the special Jubilee Poster design competition.

## **6. POLICING IN CHESHAM 2011/12 REPORT**

Sergeant Damian Eatwell gave a brief overview of policing in Chesham for the last administrative year.

Sergeant Eatwell started his presentation by explaining what the Chesham Policing team comprised of. He advised that it currently consisted of Inspector Chris Oliver, 2 Sergeants, 5 Neighbourhood Officers and 10 PCSOs. Other than the Inspector, all of these officers were based at Chesham Police Station. He reported that, as of July 2012, the Police Station front office would be open to the public Tuesday–Thursday between 10am and 2pm. He recognised that many people were unhappy with the reduction of opening hours at the station but opined that the response from the police to the public would not deteriorate.

He then gave an overview of recorded crime in the Chesham area. He was pleased to report that there were 311 fewer victims of crime (-19%) in the past twelve months with violent crime down 45%. Regrettably burglary, robbery and car crime was up 7%, but this, Sergeant Eatwell explained, was due to a string of burglaries undertaken by just two miscreants who had subsequently been apprehended and given custodial sentences. Generally, Sergeant Eatwell opined, the crime figure reductions were very positive.

In regard to tackling anti-social behaviour (down 25% with 286 fewer incidents in Chesham), he explained that a partnership approach has been pivotal and that policing in this area was successful, in his opinion, because it was more victim focused and concentrated on identifying the vulnerable and repeat victims, coupled with patrols being in the right place at the right time. Moreover, he opined that young persons' diversionary activities such as 'Moor Stars' (football in Waterside) and 'At the Edge' (Pond Park Football), and activities at Chesham Youth Centre / Hivings Free Church had played a big part in reducing anti-social behaviour levels.

Sergeant Eatwell stated that he did believe that some Neighbourhood Action Groups were proving less effective than originally hoped but they had, nevertheless, been key to setting the agenda for community concerns. In regard to these concerns, he highlighted some recent successes, namely tackling Town Centre anti-social behaviour and resulting in a prominent individual now having a town centre ban; combating dog fighting leading to 7 men receiving custodial sentences and fighting overt drug taking/usage by effective linking in with external agencies such as 'Smart' and the Drugs Action Team.

Finally he concluded by reporting on priorities for next year, including strengthening neighbourhood area efficiencies, increased use of social media such as Twitter to inform people more quickly of potential crime risks and tackling house burglaries.

The Mayor thanked Sergeant Eatwell for his encouraging presentation and invited those in attendance to ask questions.

Mrs Beryl Meldrum enquired, in respect to the reduction in police station opening hours, why Chesham was being treated like a village with its opening hours now on a par with places like Hazlemere. Sergeant Eatwell accepted that it was a concern for people but regrettably Thames Valley Police had to find several millions of pounds in savings and it was felt that the current footfall warranted shorter, not longer, opening hours. He reminded the meeting that a yellow phone for emergencies was located outside the station and any calls would be dealt with promptly by the police located at Amersham 24 hours a day.

Mr Bernard Meldrum enquired whether the lower crime figures in Chesham may result in the police reducing officers to save monies. Sergeant Eatwell replied that he did not foresee a reduction in current staffing levels.

Ms Ruth Juette questioned why there were no hate crime figures and whether this meant there were no recorded crimes of this nature. Sergeant Eatwell responded such crimes had taken place but he did not have the figures to hand unfortunately. However he said he would happily supply them upon request. Ms Juette then asked whether the police were aware of the problems of commercial selling of cars on residential streets and how they could clamp down on this. Sergeant Eatwell replied that the police were aware of the problem and were working with

Buckinghamshire County Council Trading Standards who had the responsibility to deal with this.

County Councillor Michael Brand paid tribute to the former Area Commander Inspector Hunter who, he said, had done much to help reduce crime in Chesham. He particularly highlighted Inspector Hunter's willingness to feedback to the community on issues both big and small, thus gaining the confidence of residents and hoped such a style of policing would be continued by his successor.

There being no further questions, the Mayor thanked Sergeant Eatwell again and invited him to remain for the rest of the meeting.

## **7. ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP**

Mr Phil Folly, Chairman of the Environmental Group, gave a verbal report on the Group's activities for 2011/12. He firstly stated that, while the dry nature of the River Chess currently was a concern, he had with him an edition of the Bucks Examiner from 1997 which showed the river in exactly the same state then so he was hopeful this much cherished feature of the town would flow again.

Among the projects this year were:

- Fitting two flow deflectors at Canon Mill race.
- Removal of Himalayan Balsam.
- Regular clear-ups on the Moor, The Backs, Nashleigh Field, Meades Water Gardens and Captain's Wood.
- Continued and regular maintenance of the River Chess.
- Active involvement in 'Chesham in Bloom'.

Mr Folly paid particular tribute to his colleagues in the group, particularly Andrew Clark for website management, Georgina Lomnitz for liaising with volunteers and Ken Austin for overseeing the finances. He also thanked officers at the Town Council for their continued support and to Chiltern District Council for collecting up the bags of rubbish accumulated by the group.

The Mayor offered his congratulations and appreciation for all the works the Environmental Group had done during the administrative year.

## **8. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

The Mayor invited questions and comment from the public on matters in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affect the Town and on any issue raised during the police report.

Mr Richard Berry enquired about the on-going state of the town centre in respect to the unsightly orange barriers designed to protect the culvert. The Town Clerk explained that they were the responsibility of Buckinghamshire County Council and placed there to stop vehicles accessing a potentially dangerous area. He said he understood the frustration but the latest news he had heard from the Environment Agency was that the culvert in Market Square could be

repaired within the next twelve months if the funding could be found as it appeared that the costs appeared to be realistic in terms of financing.

Mr Anil Kantaria enquired whether the Council had a policy on High Street regeneration. The Town Clerk responded by saying that, while the Town Council had little direct influence over the Town Centre; neither owning the High Street nor being responsible for the setting of business rates, it was working closely with 'Better Chesham' and supporting its Portas Pilot bid in respect to the revitalisation of the town generally.

Councillor Chris Spruytenburg thanked the Mayor for his on-going support for the Museum. Through the Mayor, he advised that the facility was now open longer hours. He then asked the public to visit the Museum as often as possible and put in a plea for more volunteers and stewards and assistance with fund-raising to help defray the running costs of approximately £15,000 per annum.

Mr Ken Austin thanked the Council for widening Duck Alley and making it totally wheelchair accessible for those wishing to visit Meades Water Gardens.

Finally Mr Bernard Meldrum congratulated Councillor Lacey for all his efforts engaging with the community during his Mayoral year.

#### **9. TOWN MAYOR'S CLOSING REMARKS**

Councillor Lacey thanked all those present for their attendance. He reiterated how much he had enjoyed his Mayoral year and meeting groups and organisations, reflected in his 221 Mayoral engagements and the attending of seven carol services alone in December. He opined that Chesham people were always committed to a cause they believed in and to that end, he urged the public to write directly to Thames Valley Police to object to the reduction in the opening hours of Chesham Police Station.

He also remarked on the many fund-raising efforts that had taken place on behalf of his chosen Mayoral charity, the Douglas McMinn Centre, during the year. The amount raised had yet to be finalised but Councillor Lacey stated he expected to have raised a considerable amount. He expressed gratitude to all those who had raised money and, particularly to those who had undertaken the sponsored sky dive in April which he considered his most memorable highlight.

Finally he also stated his appreciation of the Town Clerk and the Town Council's officers for their support, his wife, Trudi, who was his Escort throughout the year and wished his Deputy, Councillor Mrs Littley, every future success in her role of Mayor in 2012/13.

#### **10. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 8.35pm.

Town Mayor



## **Mayor's Review of the Year**

Welcome to the Annual Meeting of the Town. This is your major opportunity to ask questions on the operations and services of the Town Council during the year 2011/2012. It is also a chance for me to briefly tell you about what Chesham Town Council has undertaken on your behalf over the last year and what is planned for the forthcoming year 2012/13.

Those of you who were here last year may be surprised to see me in the Chair again for this meeting. It is actually usual for me as the outgoing Mayor to chair the Town Meeting. However last year was an election year and therefore the 2011 meeting came **after** rather than **before** the Annual Meeting of the Council where the appointment of the Mayor for the administrative year is made. That's why you have had a double dose of me. Whether I should be apologising about that, I shall let you decide.

The Council is always pleased to welcome representatives from the local policing team and, this year, we are especially pleased to have Sergeant Damian Eatwell of the local policing team, here in person to address this meeting tonight and to answer any questions you may have.

One of the major highlights of the last financial year for me was to open the renovated Windsor Road play-area at a cost of £20,000. As the local ward Member for this area, I am particularly pleased to see this much-needed facility back in action and proud to say that this will be the fourth of the town's play-areas to be upgraded by Chesham Town Council in the last three years; a very creditable achievement indeed with council budgets being squeezed generally.

I was also extremely pleased to raise a flag again on the August Bank Holiday weekend as Lowndes Park regained its status as a 'Green Flag' park. This status, overseen by Keep Britain Tidy, BTCV and GreenSpace, is awarded to parks and open spaces that are judged to be both well-run, well-maintained and engage the community. It was gratifying to see that our marks from the judges this year were our highest ever. Moreover the weekend was a dual celebration as I was also able to officially open the renovated Performance Area and new seasonal canopy in Lowndes Park. The Friends of Lowndes Park did a superb

job in gaining a grant of £50,000 from the 'Community Spaces' Lottery funding stream to make this project possible and I've no doubt the new facility will greatly enhance the summer programme of activities planned for the park.

The Elgiva Theatre, despite the economic downturn that has affected theatres generally, again performed well, particularly in the last three months. Many of the recent films, such as 'The Artist' and 'The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel' have sold extremely well as have the performances of Jim Davidson and Showaddywaddy. 'Beauty and the Beast', this year's pantomime achieved a £8,033 increase (10%) in the net income from 2010/11 pantomime and, with the Manager managing to make savings on his production expenditure, it altogether produced a net surplus of around £30,000 and a net surplus improvement of over 27% on the 2010/11 pantomime.

The Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre has just celebrated 100 years of swimming on its site. The pool had a relatively successful season, despite the summer weather not being particularly attractive to open air swimming pool swimmers. The budgeted income for 2011 season tickets was £18,605 and it is pleasing to see this was slightly bettered, with £19,035 being received. Income from general swimming, pool hirings and merchandise profit was slightly below budget with £43,810 being received compared to a budget of £45,065.

The Moor Fitness gym continues to be popular despite the economic pressures and the arrival of two low cost gyms in town. Income has fallen in the last 12 months but has been offset by a very favourable renegotiation of the leasing agreement on the equipment, saving the Council considerable monies in expenditure.

Also at the centre, an excellent project was completed in December, namely the installation of solar panels on the roof of the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre. The Town Council has always been committed to sustainability as evidenced by its support for Transition Town Chesham. In the end, the project became a race against time following the Government's decision to half the tariff paid back to providers of solar-power electricity after December 12<sup>th</sup>. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of the Council's officers and the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre, the panels were installed with a week to spare meaning the Council will generate considerable revenue as well as producing 'clean' energy.

On green matters generally, I have been delighted to see the success of the Local Produce Market, organised jointly by this Council and Transition Town Chesham culminating in it being named as 'Britain's Greenest Market' at the turn of the year. This can only be a good thing for the town on a number of levels. We also widened Duck Alley to allow wheelchair users easier access to our well-loved green space, Meades Water Gardens, in March.

Another big project was the renovation of the Mausoleum in St Mary's Churchyard which is the responsibility of Chesham Town Council. The Mausoleum was built by Charles Lowndes in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 2010 it was surveyed and found to be in a dangerous condition. With the help and guidance of local surveyors, a special building company, Corinthian Stone, was located and commissioned to undertake major repairs to the roof and walls at a cost of £7,700. The works required facility consent from the Diocese of Oxford which was duly granted and repairs commenced in early 2012. The finances were forthcoming, not just from the Council but also from generous contributions from St. Mary's District Church Council and the Bucks Historical Buildings Trust.

Once again I would like to pay tribute to the many Friends and voluntary groups who assist the Council in getting the town and the Council's facilities looking as good as they do. In no particular order I would like to thank the Chesham Environmental Group; Chesham in Bloom; Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim; Friends of Lowndes Park; Friends of Chesham Cemetery; the Elgiva Board of Management; Chesham Allotments Group; Impress the Chess; Better Chesham; Friends of St Mary's; Chesham Rotary Club; COPAG; Chesham Youth Council; Transition Town Chesham; Chesham4Fairtrade; Chesham Action Partnership, Chesham Action Volunteers and the Chesham Society, amongst others, for their support.

Looking to this year, we shall be moving forward with the next stage of our play area redevelopment for the town, earmarked to be Gordon Road. The Council will also be playing a key role in monitoring the culvert and continue lobbying statutory organisations like the Environment Agency to give its repairs the highest priority. Highway repairs is a passion of mine and, following a very well attended public meeting I called in the autumn on this matter, the Council will continue to press the County Council to ensure the repairs are substantial and on-going. Obviously too the Council will be playing a big part in the many Jubilee and Olympic celebrations taking place in town.

Finally I would like to thank Bill Richards, the Town Clerk, and all the officers from Chesham Town Council, for their time and hard work and support in 2011/12; my escort Trudi for her support and to express my gratitude to my fellow Councillors for all their efforts during the last 12 months. May I also wish the Mayor Elect, Councillor Mrs Littley, every success in her role as Mayor this year. Finally I thank you all for attending tonight and congratulations again to all our Mayoral Award nominees in all three categories whose efforts reflect so well on the town's pride and civic responsibility.



Councillor Derek Lacey  
Town Mayor 2011/12