

## CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

### MINUTES of the ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

HELD ON THURSDAY 12<sup>th</sup> MAY 2016

**PRESENT** Councillor P. Hudson, Town Mayor (presiding)

Councillor	A.K. Bacon	Councillor	Mrs J.E. MacBean
"	M.Z. Bhatti M.B.E.	"	R.C. McCulloch
"	N.L. Brown	"	Mrs D.M. Varley
"	Miss E. Culverhouse	"	N. Varley
"	M. Fayyaz	"	B.R. Whitfield
"	A.W. Franks	"	S.P. Willmoth
"	P.J. Hudson	"	F.S. Wilson
"	D. MacBean		

Officer: W. Richards - Town Clerk

In Attendance:

Sgt Paul Cossey and PCSO Andy Mayhew - Thames Valley Police.

31 members of the public, including representatives from outside organisations.

#### **1. TOWN MAYOR'S WELCOME**

The Town Mayor, Councillor Peter Hudson, welcomed everyone present to the Annual Town Meeting.

The Town Mayor then gave a brief outline of the Town Council's achievements and actions during the administrative year 2015/16. He explained, that the new Council elected in May last year had committed itself to three main principles, namely:

- Enabling the Council to do more as the closest council to the people, with the support of its town partners
- To lead on the issues affecting the town rather than looking to others to solve challenges for it and to work more collaboratively with the District and County Councils
- To modernise where there is benefit to residents to do so.

To undertake this properly, the Mayor advised that a proactive Finance Working Group had been set up to scrutinise finances more closely to improve efficiency and a reformed Staffing and Strategy Review Group has developed a strategic plan for the Council to look at how it can better support and strengthen the teams at the Elgiva Theatre and Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre. He also took the opportunity to publicly name and thank the official town partners who had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Council.

In respect to the Council leading on actual projects during the last twelve months, the Mayor mentioned the following had been achieved:

- Reflected the public's views during the major consultation period on the Local Plan.
- Took on Devolved Services from the County Council in respect to verge cutting.

- Invested in community facilities - most notably in partnership with community groups to provide a new play-area at Botley Road Playing Field and renovation of the Hearse House in Chesham Cemetery.
- Advanced the town-wide Parking Review - though not as quickly as hoped for by the Council, due to many external factors.
- Continued success for the Elgiva Theatre and the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre, though the latter had suffered slightly due to poor weather during the school summer holidays and a number of internal mechanical and structural problems.

Looking ahead to the new administrative year, he highlighted the following proposed targets:

- Actively participating in the next phase of the District Council Local Plan.
- Bringing the Parking Review to a satisfactory conclusion.
- Supporting the Elgiva and Chesham Moor Swim and Gym Centre to continue to thrive and look to bring forward capital investment plans to assist with this.
- Continue to modernise the workings of the Council to provide maximum value for the taxpayer whilst delivering improved quality local services, wherever possible under local control.
- Continue to build on the partnership work with the Town Partners and deliver further improvements to the town through investment in play areas and other community facilities.

## **2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Town Councillors Q. Chaudhry and M.W. Shaw.

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

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015 were agreed and signed by the Town Mayor as a true record.

## **4. POLICING IN CHESHAM 2015/16 REPORT**

Sgt Paul Cossey and PCSO Andy Mayhew gave a brief overview of policing in Chesham for the last administrative year.

Sgt Cossey began by giving a brief history of his career as he had only just joined Chesham's neighbourhood policing team. He explained that he had been a police officer for some 13 years in the south Buckinghamshire area, working both in C.I.D. and community policing and was looking forward to an extended stay in the Chesham team.

In respect to Chesham over the last year, he reported that he had been aware of 'tensions' between two extended families over a number of months that had resulted in acts of sporadic violence early in 2016. He advised that, following arrests in February, this tension and associated problems had appeared to have dissipated. He also commented that he was apprised of the recent graffiti outbreak across town and that his team was working hard to apprehend the culprit(s).

PCSO Mayhew then briefly reported on the question of speeding which he knew was of major concern to residents. He advised on a recent speed checking campaign which the police had recently undertaken in Chartridge Lane and reported several motorists were stopped and cautioned after exceeding 40mph. He stated that it appeared that most speeding offenders in

town remained, regrettably, Chesham residents and said he would welcome suggestions for other 'hot-spot' speeding areas to be monitored, subject to it being logistically possible for the police to use their hand-held speed recording devices practicably.

Specifically for Chesham, Sgt Cossey reported that burglary of dwellings was down by 30%. Non-dwelling burglary had also fallen by 23%. Anti-social behaviour had fallen by 7%. On the negative side there had been a rise in reports of sexual offences (although from a low base; 21 calls as opposed to 17 in the previous year) and a 30% rise in theft from motor vehicles. However, to put this in perspective, Sgt Cossey reported that the arrest and sentencing of one local resident recently had, on its own, produced a fall in both thefts from property and motor vehicles and he reiterated the town remained a low crime area in comparison to most other parts of the country.

He then briefly reported on the successful continuation of two local police operations, ('Op Grab' - tackling purse snatching crime and 'Op Greystock' - tackling rural crime, particularly non-dwelling burglary) and the successful launch of two time limited operations ('Op Ghostbusters' - deterring anti-social behaviour at Halloween and 'Op Gift' - tackling burglary in the run-up to Christmas.)

Looking forward, Sgt Cossey concluded that he believed Chesham was quite fortunate to have a stable team of 15 regular and community support officers and was confident that the successful policing system for the town would continue.

The Mayor thanked Sgt Cossey and PCSO Mayhew for their presentation and invited those in attendance to ask questions and make observations.

Mrs Georgina Lomnitz asked Sgt Cossey whether there was any update on the future of the Chesham Police Station. Sgt Cossey replied that he had no definitive answer to this but general discussions with his colleagues appeared to suggest that, if a decision was taken to leave the current location, another venue in town (possibly sharing with another statutory service provider) would be utilised.

Councillor Fayyaz queried whether the officers had any statistics on crimes relating to drugs. Sgt Cossey reported that he did not but suggested Councillor Fayyaz approach the team again personally if he wanted any specific information.

There being no further questions, the Mayor thanked Sgt Cossey and PCSO Mayhew again, and reminded those in attendance of the importance of reporting all crimes to the police for them to compile the data on crime in the area.

## **5. HONORARY FREEMAN OF CHESHAM STATUS**

The Mayor, Councillor Hudson, advised that he was delighted to announce that, at a Special Meeting of the Council held on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> April, it had been unanimously agreed that Mr Phil Folly be admitted to be the second Honorary Freeman of the Town of Chesham.

It was explained that while the powers to grant such status have been around for many years, such powers lay only with the district and county councils. However, the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 granted powers to town and parish councils to confer the title of 'honorary freeman' or 'honorary freewoman' to persons of the town. Last year, the Council awarded its first such status to Mr Vincent Crompton.

In April 2016, the Council received a nomination from Mr Andrew Clarke and the Mayor informed the meeting that he had been honoured to have sponsored the nomination of Mr Folly. Councillor Hudson reported that Mr Clarke had highlighted Mr Folly's exceptional volunteer work, being a member of many different groups and non-statutory organisations within the town. The Mayor added that Mr Folly's efforts went well beyond what could be reasonably expected from a member of the public and much of the town's environmental well-being could be single-handedly put down to his efforts. Similar citations and tributes were forthcoming from the Previous Past Mayor, Councillor Fayyaz, and the Chairman of the Chesham Over 50's Positive Action Group (COPAG).

Councillor Hudson then invited Mr Folly to formally collect his certificate of status, embossed with the Town Council seal, and to say a few words to the Town Meeting.

Mr Folly stated he was honoured and humbled to be granted such status. Having lived in Chesham for some 34 years, he opined that he felt it important to give something back to the community. He added that his nomination was merely a reflection of the hard work so many other volunteers put in across the town.

## **6. CHESHAM ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP**

Mr Phil Folly, Chairman of the Chesham Environmental Group, gave a verbal report on the Group's activities for 2015/16. Among the projects this year were:

- Ñ Active involvement in 'Chesham in Bloom' by litter picking and fund-raising, resulting in the town receiving the Gold Award for the second year.
- Ñ Helping Lowndes Park obtain a 'Silver Gilt' award for the first time from the 'In Bloom' judges.
- Ñ Regular clear-ups at Jacobs Ladder, Meades Water Gardens, Amersham Road Allotments and Holloway Lane.
- Ñ Continued and regular maintenance of the River Chess, working alongside the River Chess Association. Three members are trained riverfly monitors to check on water quality.

Looking ahead, he suggested the town faced many challenges, most notably from the pressures on the environment from new houses forthcoming from the Local Plan; continued abstraction from the River Chess and increased littering, particularly on highway hedgerows. However he pledged the Group's continued support to the Council, particularly as it took on the verge cutting and hedge trimming devolved services from Buckinghamshire County Council.

Mr Folly thanked his colleagues in the group and officers at the Town Council and Chiltern District Council.

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

## **7. 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 affects the Town.

Mr Tony Savage enquired as to whether the Council could stop Amy Lane being used as a ‘rat-run’ by commuters during peak rush hour times. The Mayor replied that, unfortunately, these powers were not at the behest of the Council but emphasised that it was keen to liaise and engage with both the Principal Authorities and the Police in all transportation and highway matters on behalf of residents and cited the example of the parking review to support this statement.

Mr Phil Folly asked whether the Council could try and ensure the pavements were kept clear of goods for sale at a certain retail outlet in Broad Street as, visually, it created a bad impression of the town to those visitors driving in. The Mayor reported that it appeared that the offending items were actually on private land so did not constitute an obstruction of the highway and therefore the County Council and/or police would have no enforcement powers. Councillor Mrs MacBean added that a better avenue might be reporting the matter to Chiltern District Council as the current displaying of goods outside the shop could fall foul of Environment Health legislation and/or be a breach of planning consent.

Mrs Rachel Watts enquired whether the Chesham Town Twinning Association’s position in respect to falling membership, as raised last year, had improved. The Clerk replied he was meeting the Association members imminently as he had been kindly invited on a twinning trip to Houilles but, as far as he was aware, current membership remained disappointingly low.

Mr Tony Molesworth, from the Chesham Society gave a brief update on the next round of consultation proposed for the Local Plan and asked whether he could be assured that the Council would continue to support the Chesham Society in its responses. The Mayor replied that the Council was very grateful for the Chesham Society’s efforts in eliciting and collating the residents’ views on the Local Plan and there was every intention in continuing to work with the Society on this though, ultimately, the Council needed to submit its own views separately.

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

Councillor Hudson thanked all those present for their attendance. He also stated his appreciation of the Town Clerk, the Town Council’s officers, fellow councillors and his wife, Emma, for their support during the year. He wished his Deputy, Councillor Brown every future success in his likely role of Mayor in 2016/17.

## **11. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 8.35pm.

Town Mayor