

CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES of the ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

HELD ON THURSDAY 14th MAY 2015

PRESENT Councillor M. Fayyaz, Town Mayor (presiding)

Councillor	A.K. Bacon	Councillor	R.C. McCulloch
"	M.Z. Bhatti M.B.E.	"	Mrs D.M. Varley
"	Q. Chaudhry	"	B.R. Whitfield
"	A.W. Franks	"	S.P. Willmoth
"	P.J. Hudson	"	F.S. Wilson
"	Mrs J.E. MacBean		

Officer: W. Richards - Town Clerk
Mrs R. Watts – Administration Manager
Ms K.A. Graves – Policy & Projects Officer

In Attendance:

Sgt James Ellis - Thames Valley Police.
Miss Camilla Goodman – Bucks Examiner.
76 members of the public, including representatives from outside organisations.

1. TOWN MAYOR'S WELCOME

The Town Mayor, Councillor Mohammad Fayyaz, welcomed everyone present to the Annual Town Meeting.

The Mayor opened the meeting by explaining that, although a new Council had been elected on the previous Thursday, he remained the Town Mayor until the Annual Meeting of the Council on the 18th May, where the new Mayor is elected, and therefore it was his privilege to chair this Annual Town Meeting tonight.

The Town Mayor then gave a brief outline of the Town Council's achievements and actions during the administrative year 2014/15. These included:

- Financial and administrative involvement with the completion of the culvert repairs in the Market Square, overseen by the Environment Agency.
- Development and progression of the Parking Review.
- Dignified and well-supported Council led World War One commemoration events in Chesham.
- Restoration of Town Bell in the clocktower, in partnership with Chesham Museum.
- Active involvement with 'Chesham in Bloom' entry which resulted in the town winning the Thames and Chilterns 'Large Town' category and, for the first time, obtaining the 'Gold' category.
- The gym at the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre Moor having an excellent year with income exceeding £100,000 for the financial year and up by some 36% up on the previous year.

- The success of the new satellite live streaming (now in its first full year) at the Elgiva that had grossed over £25,000 by showing productions from such places as the National Theatre and the Royal Opera House.
- Development of the Town Partner Scheme. He read out the list of those currently acknowledged.

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

- Further progression and, hopefully, completion of the Parking Review.
- Working in partnership with the newly formed Botley Playing Fields Association to totally renovate Codmore Play Area.
- Working in partnership with the Friends of Chesham Cemetery to (thanks to a HLF lottery grant) renovate the cemetery hearse house and provide a permanent exhibition there.
- The Elgiva planning a major overhaul of its seating.
- Review, and deciding upon, the possible advantages of the Council taking on the grass-cutting service from the County Council from April 2016.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Town Councillors N.L. Brown, Miss E.A. Culverhouse, D.J. Lacey and M.W. Shaw.

3. MINUTES OF LAST ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 15th May 2014 were agreed and signed by the Town Mayor as a true record.

4. INTRODUCTION OF NEW MEMBERS

Councillors Bhatti, Chaudhry, Mrs MacBean, Mrs Varley, Whitfield and Willmoth, newly elected to the Council, briefly introduced themselves and confirmed the wards to which they were elected to serve.

5. MAYORAL AWARDS SCHEME

The Mayor gave details of the tenth Mayoral Award scheme. He offered his thanks to the Council's Policy and Projects Officer and the judging committee for its hard work and thanked the sponsors, the Buckinghamshire Examiner and the Chiltern Chamber.

The Mayor then read out the achievements of the nominees.

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

- *Business Award* – **Brazil's Cafe** in recognition of developing a caring, community-minded environment in their retail establishment and their support of local charities.
- *The People's Award* – Joint Winners.
Mrs Claire Rooney for developing the concept of a Christmas Toy Bank in Chesham and then helping to organise over 200 volunteers and local businesses in

just 5 weeks to make it happen, thus ensuring that more than 250 of Chesham's poorest children had a toy to unwrap on Christmas Day.

Mr Stirling Maguire for being instrumental in launching and overseeing the major project (including significant fundraising efforts) to re-install the town bell into the Council's clocktower in time to commemorate the centenary of the outbreak of World War One in August 2014.

(The Mayor also presented Mr Maguire's young grandson, Frederick Withers, with a special certificate of recognition for the help he gave to his grandfather in fundraising for the bell.)

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

6. HONORARY FREEMAN OF CHESHAM STATUS

The Mayor, Councillor Fayyaz, advised that he was delighted to announce that, at a Special Meeting of the Council held on Monday the 27th April, it had been unanimously agreed that Mr Vincent Crompton is admitted to be the first 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. The meeting was further advised that the Council first considered adopting the power in the autumn of last year and adopted the appropriate criteria at the Council meeting in November.

In early April, the Council received its first nomination from the Chiltern Chamber and the Mayor informed the meeting that he had been honoured to have sponsored the nomination. Councillor Fayyaz reported that the Chamber had highlighted Mr Crompton's work as the Chairman of Chesham in Bloom since 2012 and emphasised that, under his stewardship, Chesham won the highly coveted and prestigious regional Gold Award from the Royal Horticultural Society. The Chamber also alluded to his personal efforts planting hanging baskets and weeding across town; being a founder member of the Chesham Allotments Group and serving as Chairman for several years and acting as the membership secretary of the Chesham Horticultural Society. As well as the environmental aspect to Mr Crompton's community work, the Chamber had also highlighted his work for older people including donating and cooking lunch at Christmas for the elderly at Trinity Baptist Church; being Trustee and Vice-Chairman at the McMinn Centre and visiting and cooking for housebound older persons across town.

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

Mr Crompton stated he was honoured and humbled to be granted such status, and, particularly, since he was the first recipient. He said that his nomination was merely a reflection of the hard work so many other volunteers put in across the town and opined that Chesham must be one of the best community-minded towns in the country. Specifically, he gave a recent example of young people from the Skills and Enterprise Centre who had gone well beyond what Mr Crompton had expected of them to assist him with flower displays in Lowndes Park. He urged more people to get involved however in order to continue this excellent work for the good of

the town. He paid tribute also to the efforts of the out-going Mayor and stated he looked forward to working with the Mayor-Elect. He also commended the hard work and support of the Town Council staff and thanked the Bucks Examiner and the Bucks Free Press for promoting Chesham in Bloom. He concluded by saying he would try and continue to abide by the town motto to 'Serve One Another' and hoped others would continue to do so as well.

The Mayor congratulated him again and then invited Mr Andy Garnett from the Chiltern Chamber to present Mr Crompton with a 'Special Recognition Award' commissioned by the Chamber.

7. POLICING IN CHESHAM 2014/15 REPORT

Sgt James Ellis gave a brief overview of policing in Chesham for the last administrative year.

He began by giving a synopsis of recorded crime in the area but firstly reminded the meeting that the area was already one of the safest places to live in the country and therefore the likelihood of experiencing any sort of crime was low. He was pleased to report that crime was down both nationally, and for Chesham, by about 20% from last year. He opined that this was especially rewarding since, with the year-on-year fall in crime levels, the force believed that simply maintaining the status quo would have been deemed a success.

Specifically for Chesham, Sgt Ellis reported that burglary of dwellings was down by 20% with a 9% increase in detection levels. Non-dwelling burglary had also fallen. Violent crime (excluding domestic violence) had fallen by 5%. Domestic violence was down by 17% and there had been a 4% fall in domestic violence injuries. Putting these figures in perspective, Sgt Ellis said that the latter figure equated to little more than one or two incidents in a year. Drug related crimes were up by a negligible amount, approximately 2%. Having recalled that the question had been asked last year, Sgt Ellis said he had looked up hate crime figures for Chesham for last twelve months. Numbers remained very low and, other than some racist graffiti, there had been only three reported race hate crimes, one of which was racially aggravated GBH (and which had led to a conviction) and one of which had been racially aggravated harassment.

Sgt Ellis continued by stating that for him, and his team, tackling anti-social behaviour remained a priority but, with an overall reduction of a third in three years, he opined that it was no longer a pressing concern and much of the anti-social behaviour that still continued was in the form of neighbourhood disputes that could be easily contained.

Sgt Ellis remarked that he was aware that speeding remained a concern for residents of Chesham and therefore stated he was grateful to receive the statistical information from the Council forthcoming from the Mobile Vehicle Activated Speed device. The police were now dovetailing around the Council's own speed monitoring by use of their own speed recording handheld devices.

He then briefly reported on three recent local police operations: 'Op Grab' - tackling purse snatching crime; 'Op Greystock' - tackling rural crime, particularly non-dwelling burglary and 'Op Gamble' - neighbourhood police coming together to tackle crime 'hot-spots'.

Looking forward, Sgt Ellis concluded by saying it was inevitable that further cuts would be forthcoming but he was not envisaging any local staff reductions in the short to medium term and, while the police station would be vacated by 2019, he was confident the police would still have a base and visible presence in town after this time.

The Mayor thanked Sgt Ellis for his presentation and invited those in attendance to ask questions and make observations.

Mr Robert Walker asked Sgt Ellis to clarify the 'detection' figures. Sgt Ellis advised this covered when cautions were issued but not arrests.

Councillor Bhatti queried whether, in fact, police staffing levels had not gone down in recent years. Sgt Ellis replied that the current number for Chesham was two sergeants; five police constables and thirteen Police Community Support Officers and, as far as he was aware, these numbers had remained constant for several years.

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

8. CHESHAM ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP

Mr Phil Folly, Chairman of the Chesham Environmental Group, gave a verbal report on the Group's activities for 2014/15. Among the projects this year were:

- Ñ Work with the newly formed Chesham Flood Action Group, including ditch clearance in Pednor Road.
- Ñ Flora and fauna survey in Francis Wood and Berkhamstead Field in association with the Chesham and District Natural History Society.
- Ñ Regular clear-ups at Jacobs Ladder, Meades Water Gardens, Amersham Road Allotments and Holloway Lane.
- Ñ Major clear-up of Moor Road in March, taking out the trees and the vegetation blocking footpaths in association with local residents.
- Ñ Removal of Himalayan Balsam from riverside habitats.
- 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.
- Ñ Active involvement in 'Chesham in Bloom' by litter picking, helping with open gardens, plant sales, creating the wildflower cricket wicket nectar bar and planting daffodil bulbs.

Mr Folly thanked his colleagues in the group and officers at the Town Council and Chiltern District Council. He then paid particular tribute to the out-going Mayor, Councillor Fayyaz, for his excellent support of the group.

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

9. 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.

Mrs Ruth Juett asked, on behalf of residents in Higham Road and Sunnyside Road, whether guarantees would be forthcoming that the on-going parking review would be brought to a conclusion and a parking permit scheme introduced. The Clerk replied that the scheme was

progressing more slowly than the Council wished, due, predominantly, to budgetary and staff restrictions within the County Council. However finances had now been confirmed to undertake the legally required formal and informal consultation and a final report should be with the Council by late autumn. From there, a decision would be required on parking permits and other parking restrictions and the implications of funding these accordingly.

Mr Peter Fletcher enquired about what, if anything, the Council could offer to the Chesham Town Twinning Association and twinning generally in terms of support. The Clerk replied that the Council had always maintained a position of trying to support the Twinning Association but not subsidised through the tax-payer. He opined that the new Council may wish to consider its position anew, particularly if there was a danger of the Twinning Association ceasing to exist totally.

Mrs Gill Walker asked about the current status of Chesham Youth Council, opining that it was important young people contributed to local decision-making. The Clerk reported that, unfortunately, the Youth Council no longer met due to waning interest but the Council was keen to reform it to assist with individual youth projects and initiatives as and when they arose.

Mr Robert Walker enquired as to whether further environmental initiatives to improve the aesthetics of the town could be implemented and, specifically, gave the example of possibly 'greening' the St Mary's Way wall. The Clerk replied that, obviously, this was not the Council's land but he would be happy to suggest this to the County Council, particularly if individuals and/or groups were prepared to fund such an initiative.

Mr Gello Ilczuk suggested that the town may be enhanced by the purchase and maintenance of the old red telephone boxes. There was much support for such a project but it was noted that this probably needed to be a partnership initiative rather than a Town Council one.

Mr Tony Molesworth, from the Chesham Society outlined a vision of how the town could look in 2036, as envisaged by the Chesham Society. He explained that such a vision was being submitted to Chiltern District Council as it formulated its Local Plan and urged local people to support the Society's submission, particularly as the town could not afford to develop its own Neighbourhood Plan.

10. TOWN MAYOR'S CLOSING REMARKS

Councillor Fayyaz thanked all those present for their attendance. He also stated his appreciation of the Town Clerk, the Town Council's officers and his wife, Ifra, for their support during the year. He wished his Deputy, Councillor Hudson every future success in his likely role of Mayor in 2015/16.

Finally Councillor Fayyaz stated that it had been a pleasure and privilege to serve the town in his capacity of Mayor and particularly with being able to be involved with judging the awards' schemes.

11. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 8.50pm.

Town Mayor