

ALTON TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE ALTON TOWN ELECTORS' MEETING
HELD IN THE TOWN HALL ON 13 APRIL 2016 AT 7:00PM

Present: Councillor Mrs P Jones - Town Mayor
M Bayliss - Deputy Town Mayor
A Chick
Mrs S Cullen
M Dicker
B Eni-Olotu
D Gardner
P Hicks
G Hill
A Hunt
D Phillips
G Titterington
J Voller

22 members of the public
1 member of the press

In attendance: Mrs L Coney - Town Clerk
Mrs P Harris - Admin & Finance Manager
Mrs S Brown - Admin Officer
Councillor A Joy - HCC/EHDC
Councillor R Saunders - EHDC
Mr S Jenkins - Guest Speaker EHDC

58 **Welcome and Announcements**

The Town Mayor welcomed all to the Annual Meeting of Electors. She advised that this meeting would be audio recorded and also tendered apologies from Mr John Pritchard. Councillor Peter Hicks commented that at the Electors Meeting 10 March 2016 the published audio of the meeting included recordings made before and after the meeting and asked that the recording of this should only include the meeting itself and Ms Gill Cooper confirmed this.

59 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor. The minutes of the Electors Meeting of the 10 March 2016 were signed off the by Chair of the meeting Ms Pam Bradford.

Councillor Hicks raised a question from the Electors Meeting of the 10 March. The minutes stated that a collection would be held towards the cost of hiring the Assembly Rooms and the remainder would be donated to St Michael's Hospice. Councillor Hicks asked if the invoice had been paid and the Town Clerk confirmed the invoice had been raised, followed by a reminder at the end of March and to date the invoice remained unpaid. Ms Cooper also advised that she had not had an opportunity to check with the attendance sheet with the electoral register as she had been away.

60 Town Mayor's Address

The Town Mayor reported that she had been recently asked by a pupil of Wootey Junior School if it was fun to be Mayor. On reflection, as her term of office was coming to a close, she had been reflecting on the past eleven months. She had attend over 100 appointments, given countless speeches at home and abroad, cut many ribbons, supported a wide variety of organisations and opened new businesses. At the heart of all this activity though are the people she served as Mayor; Altonians young and not so young and from all walks of life. She used the word 'serve' because she was ever mindful that it is the people of Alton who put her there to do just that.

The highlights of the Mayoral year was a difficult question to answer. The Town Mayor reported that she had attended so many events. A highlight during the Mayoral year had to be the success of the Neighbourhood Plan and having been a member of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group for two years was delighted to be at the referendum count when the people of Alton voted 'YES'. She thanked all Altonians who helped achieved this and commented that it could not have been done without them.

The Town Mayor reflected on what she believed she had done most, smiling was at the top of the list. She said she was always being asked smile whether it being cutting a ribbon, starting a race or just attending a function.

She also added during her Mayoral year it had not always been fun. The Mayor is not just a Civic role but also Chair of the Council which can often be overlooked. As Chair of the Council it has proved to be a challenging year with many ongoing controversial issues. The threat to the service offered by Bushy Leaze Children and Family's Centre worries many. The Town Mayor's Charity, Homestart-Weywater, will be affected by the proposed closures of children's centres. There is also the uncertainty about the future of Alton Community Hospital as part of the ongoing review of Alton's Health Services. Added to that the controversy over the Assembly Rooms, it has not always been easy to 'keep smiling'. Through it all the Town Mayor continues to listen to the people's voice and has tried to speak on their behalf on many occasions as their ambassador.

This current Mayoral year has seen the introduction of social medial being used to keep people up to date with Mayoral activities. This has given Altonians the opportunity to understand the role that the Mayor plays within the town and the Town Mayor encouraged all future Town Mayors to continue this practice. Good communication with the electorate is vital in this modern age.

The Town Mayor ended by saying that she has had the opportunity to meet so many Altonians and is humbled by the number of voluntary organisations that underpin the well-being of the town and its people. The Town Mayor concluded that when the chain of office is handed over the on the 18 May she will continue to serve the people as an ordinary Town Councillor and will continue to listen concerns of residents and thanked everyone for their support during her year.

61 Presentation – Simon Jenkins, Head of Planning, East Hampshire District Council

The Town Mayor welcomed Mr Simon Jenkins, Head of Planning at East Hampshire District Council. Mr Jenkins gave an introduction about himself, he was born in Hampshire and continues to live in the county. He has worked extensively within local government at East Hampshire District Council, New Forest District Council, Winchester City Council, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, Hart District Council and also Thames Valley District Council. As a consultant

he worked with East Hampshire District Council on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and the Neighbourhood Plan for Alton.

Mr Jenkins was appointed Head of Planning on the 1 March 2016 and before that he was Policy Manager. During this time he worked supporting the development of the Alton Neighbourhood Plan. His current role will see the hot topics such as the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), affordable housing and sustainable development. The NPPF review has challenges, particularly around starter homes.

The Alton Neighbourhood Plan is the first to pass in the East Hampshire District area and has one of the highest positive votes in the country. The Plan will need to be continually monitored to ensure actions are followed through and will also be subject to review. It is a Statutory Plan and will be referred to in all planning decisions.

Sometimes developments could cause harm which can be mitigated by doing something or providing funds for others to do them. A process has been negotiated through S106 and from the 8 April 2016 it is through CIL (The Community Infrastructure Levy). As Alton now has its Neighbourhood Plan the town will automatically get 25% of the CIL and not the 15% if we did not have the Neighbourhood Plan.

Alton has seen a large number of major planning applications, as has the rest of the East Hampshire district. Alton Town Council has worked well round these to successfully develop the Neighbourhood Plan. As a key consultee the Town Council worked with Mr Jenkins, who developed a tool kit to aid comments on applications. With local knowledge the Town Council was able to make robust and comprehensive comments on all the applications and took every opportunity to shape the developments to the advantage of the town.

In the Neighbourhood Plan there was a policy on requiring a Development Brief for Molson Coors site but this was removed by the Examiner. However, Alton Town Council and East Hampshire District Council have insisted on a Development Brief and both councils are working proactively to ensure Alton gets a good deal from the redevelopment of this site. Town Councillors and officers, along with Mr Mike Heelis, Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group are involved in the managing and inputting to the Development Brief. Alton Town Council has been upfront in trying to maximise the gain for the town and there is an opportunity for the community on the site. Mr Jenkins hopes Alton Town Council can take the lead with the Community Team at East Hampshire District Council to make sure the opportunity is maximised with a deliverable scheme.

The Development Brief will be subject to a four week consultation, starting on the 2 May running through to the 27 May. During the consultation period there will be three opportunities for residents to view the Brief. On the 4 May and 24 May there will be a late afternoon and early evening session and on the 7 May a daytime session, all sessions will be at the Assembly Rooms. At all three sessions there will be a range of experts to ask any questions raised about what the Development Brief can and cannot do.

Mr Jenkins concluded that he hoped to continue working closely with Alton Town Council and all Altonians moving forward. He commended the work of the town council and hoped to continually work proactively on the Neighbourhood Plan and Molson Coors Development Brief for the benefit of the community.

Mr Jenkins then invited questions from the Electors at the meeting.

Mr Jonathan Hughes had a problem in where the initiative lies within local development; has central government passed the power down to localities? In practice this has not worked. Mr Hughes has observed the local authority only appears to have control on housing, other factors are mentioned but these disappeared such as infrastructure, including roads and parking problems. He stated that the District Council's response has previously been that parked cars act as speed control. Mr Hughes' key question was why the planning authority has the power to grant permission for housing in the knowledge that other problems such as infrastructure and drainage are not covered.

Mr Jenkins responded that the planning authority have to consider applications under government policy and when applications are approved highways funding is provided as mitigation. The Neighbourhood Plan also ensures car parking standards for new developments are adhered to. Mr Jenkins added that it does appear that developments are going ahead without infrastructure in place. This is not the case; Whitehill and Bordon is a prime example where a new road is under construction but he does understand the frustration of residents.

Mr Peter Desmond-Thomas asked to what extent is a holistic approach taken towards highways, utilities and also doctors and dentists? Mr Jenkins informed the meeting that there is a new development of 800 homes in Horndean. As part of the new development there is a new access onto the A3M, a new primary school, an employment site, new doctor's surgery and a public open space. Mr Jenkins also added that he knows there will be pressure on Alton schools and Regulation 123 acts as a "shopping list", 25% of funding will go to Alton for expansion of schools and highways expenditure.

Mr Mike Biddiss echoed the Town Mayor's comments that he was grateful to Mr Jenkins for his enormous help and support developing the Alton Neighbourhood Plan. He then asked Mr Jenkins to comment on the fact that, until very shortly before the recent Budget Statement by George Osborne, there had been an expectation that the Chancellor's speech would include an announcement of some sort of regional devolution either to a Hampshire or to a so-called 'Solent' authority, in a form that might well overtake some parts of East Hampshire District Council's existing Joint Core Strategy and thus also affect certain aspects of the Alton Neighbourhood Plan particularly with regard to housing allocations.

Mr Jenkins responded by saying categorically, on behalf of the Leader of East Hampshire District Council, that the allocated number of homes to be built as part of the devolution deal will be developed and no more than the allocation plans agreed as the Joint Core Strategy runs until 2028.

Mr Ian Sutherland asked as four major developments are being proposed for the town will the 40% allocation of affordable homes be achieved. Mr Jenkins replied that the Planning Policy has a target of 40% and government policy states it should be. Some development schemes may have less or more than the 40% which is the average target across the East Hampshire district.

Ms Gill Cooper informed the meeting she had read the Neighbourhood Plan but could see no provision for travelling communities or people who want to live on their own sustainable land, some people do not want to live in boxes. He confirmed Part 3 of the Development Plan will look at site allocation options for Gypsies and Travelling Show people and this is out for consultation and will be the final piece of the jigsaw.

Mr Tony Souter asked what East Hampshire District Council was doing on sustainable energy for example solar panels on proposed new housing and business units. Mr Jenkins replied that every new home built in 2016 should be zero emission builds but due to legislation this only applies to social housing not private house builds. Mr Haydn Chappell added that Energy Alton had written an Energy Plan for new developments.

Mr Jonathan Hughes had attended one of the presentations on the Molson Coors site and had asked who would be responsible for the Molson Coors site community facility. There is a proposal for a community facility and in planning terms he wanted to know who would be responsible for putting the vision forward? Mr Jenkins said that there had a number of responses from the previous two presentation briefings and public comments have been taken on board with an emerging development brief. Officers and members from East Hampshire District Council and Alton Town Council will ensure sufficient land is dedicated to deliver such a facility that the community identifies and ensure it will be something that can be delivered.

Mrs Hazel Cantoni asked does the building have to be a new community centre? Can it be workshops, for example, for students from Treloars similar to the Maltings at Farnham rather than a replacement for the Assembly Rooms or the Community Centre. Mr Jenkins welcomed ideas like the one proposed by Mrs Cantoni. He added that the District Council had been working with Treloar College in respect of housing and adaptable accommodation needs. She was right to say that there is a need to live and work in the same place. Ms Cooper added that they was already live/work units at Omega Park and these had failed miserably and asked if it was thought that this would do better in the town centre. Mr Jenkins said they would focus on a group of people to try and meet their needs with their involvement in the design of the any proposed housing and also will be dependent on the market place.

Councillor Peter Hicks asked Mr Jenkins for an update on the replacement Sports Centre. Mr Jenkins advised that outlining planning permission had been granted and it is now going through the procurement process.

The Town Mayor thanked Mr Jenkins for attending the meeting and Mr Jenkins received an applause from all those in the Council Chamber.

62 **Presentation from the Town Clerk – Alton Town Council's activities**

The Town Clerk, Mrs Leah Coney, gave an overview on the Town Council's current activities based on the Town Council's committee structure.

The Open Spaces Committee will develop and improve public spaces and produce inclusive facilities to give Altonians the best possible opportunity to pursue an active lifestyle at minimal direct costs. Protecting and enhancing the town's natural environment and ensuring equal opportunities for all to access open spaces, wildlife and the countryside. The Council works with local football, bowls, rugby, netball, cricket and athletics clubs. The Public Gardens will see improvements to pathways, sensory planting which will encourage community use and involvement. The Town Council continues to work with East Hampshire District Council and Hampshire Constabulary addressing any open spaces issues.

The Community and Events Committee raise the profile of the town as a tourist destination, working with neighbouring parishes to provide an events programme for the town and surrounding area ensuring the benefits of a rich cultural heritage. This coming year will see community

cohesion and inclusivity with a tactical events programme including Walking Festival week, Queen's Birthday Party, Rio Festival, Jane Austen Regency Week, Shakespeare 400 anniversary, 10th Proms in the Park, Classic Car Show, street markets, summer entertainment, finishing the year with Christmas Lights switch on and the Yuletide Festival.

The Policy and Resources Committee will ensure the sound financial management and risk management of the Town Council's resources and the public purse. They will also facilitate the delivery of the Neighbourhood Plan Action ensuring proactive engagement with developers, also in the pre-application stage.

The Planning and Transportation Committee will continue to work towards an effective and affordable public transport and lobby to improve the quality of service provision.

Councillor Graham Hill advised the meeting that the Neighbourhood Plan had taken two years to produce and this included having to wait for the transport study. It had been an enormous achievement in delivering the Alton Neighbourhood Plan. Each member of the Steering Group had put in excess of 1,000 hours to produce the Plan, the Steering Group included two current Town Councillors, himself and Councillor Mrs Pam Jones and former Town Councillor, Mr David Willoughby. The cost to develop the Neighbourhood Plan to the Town Council was £34,000 which includes external consultancy, graphic design and printing. This compares to Petersfield's Plan which cost £150,000.

The Plan consists of 23 policies which have to be adhered to with 40 action points arising for the Town Council. All the action points are reviewed and updated every three weeks at the Town Council's Planning and Transportation Committee. Some of the action points are simple to resolve with others being very involved.

East Hampshire District Council are currently aiming to recruit a Business Development Manager for the Economic Development Project. Two rounds of interviews have already taken place without success and Councillor Hill commented that the search for the right person continues.

Mr Mike Heelis thanked the officers of the Town Council for all the additional work they had undertaken. He asked what was the current vision/strategy for the town, who owns it? Councillor Peter Hicks responded that it was a good question, a lot of work goes on outside of the Town Council's remit and many questions outside of planning are raised such as infrastructure and public transport, such as the recent number 65 bus survey. Mr Heelis responded by asking does that mean there is no vision or concept.

Councillor Hill replied that it was a perceptive question and needed a good answer. The Neighbourhood Plan has a good action plan and has very specific objectives. Actions for the Town Council are being progressed with actions being delivered. The Town Council will continue to lobby both East Hampshire District Council and Hampshire County Council on their actions.

Councillor Hill also added that a lot of work has been undertaken over the last few months on the Corporate Strategy, which includes the corporate action plan and which is available on the Town Council's website. As a town council we need to work with volunteers and obtain public engagement.

Mr Peter Desmond-Thomas sought to ask "what do you want Alton to become?" There is no heart or soul or reason for being, it was a brewery town that has now been lost, what do you want to

replace it with? Mr Heelis responded that “we” did this in 2005 and we have done this work, I would like it to continue to be what it is – I want it to stay the same. I can cover the whole town on foot. It has good communications and a lot of history”.

Councillor Mrs Pam Jones added that Alton Town Council’s responsibility and contribution had been rather limited to herself, Councillor Graham Hill and the Town Clerk. Other Councillors need to take it on board rather than leave it to a few. She concluded it was “just an observation”.

Mr Jonathan Hughes asked for the council’s view of the new “community facility” to which Councillor Graham Hill responded that this had been covered earlier. One of the Action Points arising from the Neighbourhood Plan was to lobby the District Council via District Councillors to progress the delivery of a new facility (page 67). To do so required two things (1) a site and (2) funding to build Mr Hughes responded “to build what?” Councillor Hill stated that he would agree with the easier vision of delivering a community facility and the most important thing now in the immediate future is to consider very rapidly what is required as this will potentially have an immense effect on the spirit of the town and we must make sure that the council ensures a facility for community use is included within the development brief currently being evolved.

At this point of the meeting, with the arrival of Ms Pam Bradford, the Town Mayor asked that the meeting break protocol to allow the Minutes of the Electors Meeting called by electors to be signed and for Councillor Peter Hicks to raise his question which related to page 10 of the minutes of that meeting in asking was there money raised at that meeting as no monies had been received by the Town Council in settlement of the invoice raised for the hire of the Assembly Rooms. Ms Bradford responded that as far as she was aware there was enough money raised to pay the bill, however she had not counted it. Ms Gill Cooper added that she had spoken to Mr Christopher Say and he had indicated monies had been raised but he had not received a bill. Officers confirmed that in fact an invoice had been sent on 12 March with an overdue invoice sent on 31 March. Ms Cooper advised she would chase it up. With the only question raised answered, the Town Mayor asked whether everyone was happy that Ms Bradford sign the Minutes; which she duly did.

The Town Mayor then returned to the Agenda items and moved on to the next item being the Audited Accounts of the Council.

63 **Presentation of the Alton Town Council’s Audited Accounts**

The Town Clerk, tabled the accounts and offered to take questions on the Accounts as presented to council. Councillors asked no questions of the Town Clerk although noted that they were pleased to read that the Council now had Reserves.

64 **To receive questions and statements from Electors**

Ms Gill Cooper asked for confirmation as to whether the contract for the Assembly Rooms had been signed, which was confirmed and that Councillors Dean Phillips and Matthew Bayliss had signed on behalf of the council and not the Town Mayor. It was further confirmed that the contract had been signed on 29 March after the meeting held on that date.

Ms Gill Cooper questioned the passing over of marketing on social media and why an officer of the Town Council had administrator’s rights to the Assembly Rooms website if this had passed to the Community Centre to take over the marketing of the facility. The Town Clerk advised that it was important that Alton Town Council retains control.

Ms Gill Cooper stated that despite previously advising the Town Council that the Last Night of the Proms link on its website took you to a business website which was run by a previous owner of the Last Night of the Proms website this had still not been deactivated. This was duly noted and confirmed that efforts would be made to ask the owner of the Last Night of the Proms website to remove its link.

Ms Cooper stated that there had been a lot of support for the Neighbourhood Plan and that people had got behind the council and went on to offer that the council had “killed that” with the Assembly Rooms. Councillor Hill advised that there were 40 Action Points arising from the Neighbourhood Plan and that he personally spent one to two hours per week on average working on delivery of that action plan and every three weeks it was an agenda item on the Planning and Transportation Committee meetings when updates were given.

The effective use of social media by Alton Town Council was questioned and Councillor Graham Hill in his response advised that all scheduled committee meetings are on the website and start at 7.00pm and Minutes of all those meetings are published on the website together with all other pertinent council information, concluding that this is how “we” communicate.

Mr Tony Souter suggested that in terms of public relations the council came across as being cross and defensive; however conceded that committee papers were published on the website in a timely manner. Further debate on the use of social media took place with suggestions that notification of meetings be considered by the council to alert the public of upcoming meetings rather than the public having to “hunt” through the council’s website. Mr Souter asked why the council do not stream council meetings on the internet to which Mr Desmond-Thomas countered that he does not do social media and whilst he can see the value of social media and generally applauds its use considers that it is a generational thing and commended the council on all the work that it does undertake and suggested that it does itself a dis-service as generally it (the council) keeps the public updated and “lets us hear”.

Ms Sarah Buxton enquired as to the progress being made in the recruitment of a Town Manager whose job she assumed would include communication. On being advised that the Town Manager role would not include communication as this was covered by the Community and Events Officer at the Town Hall, it was also noted that social media because of its immediacy could also be open to interpretation and information posted misleading and inaccurate. The council has to ensure the integrity of its information. Ms Buxton suggested that more needs to be done on the PR front to which Ms Gill Cooper added that this was the point she was making that social media is more effective than people going to a website to retrieve information. Mr Tony Souter added that the Assembly Rooms Manager had been very good at social media.

Councillor Peter Hicks advised that the use of social media would be on the Agenda of the next meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee when further consideration would be given to its role in the council’s future business.

Mr Sutherland enquired as to the Will Hall Farm planning application as Winchester College had sold the land. He queried as to what progress had been made on the suggestion of a Wey River Walk; having raised the question with Councillor Matthew Bayliss together with access across the field belonging to Thames Water and whether anything had been done. Councillor Bayliss advised that contact had been made but it was a very slow process. The Town Mayor advised that Mr Glen Skelton from River Search is involved in preservation work on the water board land and he

is in dialogue on the matter. Councillor Graham Hill advised that Thames Water are presenting to the council on 11 May having initially looked to come along to a Planning and Transportation Committee meeting on 20 April but unfortunately the slot had already been taken. Councillor Hill confirmed he would raise the matter with Thames Water.

Mr Sutherland asked what decision had been taken for additional names to be added to The Cairn to include all those who had fallen in action since WWII as the previous Town Clerk had said he would like to do something. It was confirmed that this would be placed on a future agenda of the Community and Events Committee.

Mr Souter wished to follow up his letter to the Alton Herald on the question of the Leader of the Council and added that it was a personal view and acknowledged that Councillors are unpaid volunteers and that the role itself is a thankless task. However, the appointment of the Leader of the Council is one that sets the policy for the council as a whole and clearly sets out the direction for the council. Party politics should not play a part and he went on to suggest that the "public" are appalled by recent events describing its actions as regressive and divisive leading to a toxic atmosphere and that hard gained progress had been lost.

Mr Souter went on to make the following statement:

"I would just like to expand a little on the recent letter in the AH about ATC leadership. This is my opinion: other opinions are available.

We shouldn't forget that our councillors are lay, unpaid volunteers who give of their time freely. It's sometimes a thankless task and, needless to say, we owe all our councillors a debt of thanks for the dedication and the huge amounts of time they put into the job.

While our town councillors are elected, the appointment of Leader of the council is solely in the gift of the majority party. The prime role of the leadership is to establish town council policy so it's an important job, and his/her decisions affect all of us.

What the recent Herald letter reveals is an expression of frustration by a sample of concerned residents who care deeply about their town, fear for its future and who believe that we would benefit from a fresh approach by those who represent us. What that expression is NOT, is a desire to humiliate anybody nor is it politically motivated.

It may be too much to hope that, in the short term, we can take party politics out of proceedings conducted here but all councillors must be aware that the public are appalled at what they have been witnessing recently.

The current leadership oversees a majority party that, by default, promotes a style of governance that, in the view of many, is aggressive and divisive as well as being overtly party-political. Council meetings are a now a place where personal and party agendas are being ground-out in a very toxic atmosphere.

At first glance, this council's achievements are not insubstantial: the Neighbourhood Plan and the proposed engagement of an Economic Development Officer are two notable achievements. But these have been hard-won gains and the result of a lot of noise and some strenuous lobbying by various stakeholder groups, often in the face of resistance from a leadership which never seems to miss an opportunity...to miss an opportunity.

Potentially, an auspicious and exciting future lies ahead for Alton but we are light-years behind where we should be. This is the time for leadership with a clear vision of the future and creative, innovative thinking. It is NOT the time for serial mediocrity or the distraction of the squabbling and party political dogma which has characterised the last two administrations.

Change is a good thing....a leadership dynasty is not healthy, particularly when dissatisfaction with this council's performance is growing into open hostility.

Effecting a change of leadership is no small thing and requires a big and selfless gesture from the majority Party. We hope that Conservative councillors are listening: they say they are. They should not mistake the public's desire for a new direction as a challenge to their political virility, nor an attempt to make mischief...instead, they could and should see this as an opportunity.

A new Leader installed alongside a new mayor in four weeks' time would signal a fresh beginning and a new, more harmonious, way of this council doing business."

Mr Haydn Chappel stated that the public demand for a change was based on the views of half a dozen people. In reference to the Assembly Rooms he believed the situation had been fuelled by mischievous lies and destructive engagement through social media in relation to the Alton Community Centre and advised that the organisation who had been accused of making losses had actually made a profit over the last three/four years. Several of the postings had been misrepresentative and had caused great distress to the staff. Mr Jonathan Hughes said that the problems had been exacerbated by minutes of the council being redacted which had led to suspicion that the truth of what was going on was not in the public domain.

Mrs Penny Webster-Brown stated that she did not know about that but that the public had been asking for a clear direction and "we need a clear vision and a Leader who is able to fulfil that". She wanted to see a change in the leadership and that would be for a new person to come in with new ideas. Councillor Derek Gardner offered that he had been approached by several people over the letter that appeared in the local paper as they had been offended by the suggestion that it was representative of their views but that they did not want to publicly respond due to the comments they felt would be made on various websites. Mr Tony Souter countered that if the reference was to the Anstey Residents Group (ARG) website he was a ringleader for the site and he had implored the council to engage with the residents of Alton through the ARG website and still no Councillors had chosen to do so. Councillor Graham Hill advised that whilst this was a personal view and he had in fact been a founder member of the Anstey Residents Group and its website he had never posted on it but acknowledged that it does provide a lot information. The reason he does not post is that he does not wish to get into a "ding dong" and that he chooses to engage with the wider public via meetings with all minutes published on the council's website which also publishes the council's Standing Orders and Code of Conduct so the public can understand how a council operates. Mr Souter advised that some councillors do post on the website and noted that District Councillor Robert Saunders was a regular poster to the site. The ARG website had received 7,000 visits re the Assembly Rooms on its blog which indicated to him that the electorate are there!

Councillor Miss Bisi Eni-Olotu stated that she is not a big fan of social media and that she does not post. Facebook in her opinion can be dangerous and she is wary to not say the wrong thing or that she could be misunderstood or misquoted. Standing Orders and meetings are the best way to communicate and that the electorate can communicate with councillors with their e-mail address, telephone numbers and addresses published on the council's website. The public are also able to attend all committee meetings.

Mr Souter asked why Councillors do not hold surgeries to which the Town Mayor advised that maybe Councillors should have their own blogs and maybe this is something that could be considered at the next meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee.

Mr Jonathon Hughes stated that this (the Electors Meeting) was the only occasion the electorate is invited to meet in an unstructured way and that nothing is more boring than meeting minutes and that this is not the way you communicate with the electorate. He had lived in the town for 25 years and it had been his experience that only one Councillor had ever knocked on his door.

Mr John Hubbard requested that the discussions be brought back to the original point which was the leadership of the council and that as an elector he believed the strategy of the council is about harnessing Alton Town Council, East Hampshire District Council and Hampshire County Council in a way that engages with prospective developers and business to bring money and wealth back into the town. He quoted Bicester as an example of where a joined up strategy connecting all parties could lead to growth and stability to Alton. He went on to add that Alton Town Council is getting the rough end of the stick in terms of bad press and that it should be a co-ordinated and united front that is presented.

The Town Mayor stated that there is only one way to engage and that is to sit on Outside Bodies. She herself is on the PPG (Patient Participation Group for Chawton Park Surgery) and Alton Buckle and she would encourage all Councillors to get involved on outside bodies.

Councillor Matthew Bayliss stated that this meeting had provided Councillors with the opportunity to listen to the messages being sent by those attending this evening and that was that the council had to communicate better and do things better and promised that “we” would listen, digest and consider how we do this going forward.

Miss Tanya Applegath asked about Christmas Lights and asked whether permission has been granted to affix to the buildings in Market Street to which Councillor Derek Gardner, as Chair of the Community and Events Committee, advised that this was currently being addressed.

Mrs Penny Webster-Brown asked whether the contract with the Community Association had been signed directly after the Extraordinary Meeting of the Full Council on 29 March which was confirmed. On the question of the Leadership of the Council in suggesting that if the current Leader remained in post this would mean that he would have been Leader for seven years. Councillor Graham Hill corrected her assumption and stated that the Leader of the Council held the post for a period of one year and that the post is elected on an annual basis and confirmed that the Leader is appointed by the council (which is normally determined by the majority party). Councillor Mrs Jones stated that most posts can be nominated but that when it came down to a vote it was normal for the majority party to have the deciding vote. However, as evidence of the non-political status of the council he offered that the current Town Mayor was in fact a Liberal Democrat, to which Councillor Mrs Jones, the current Mayor stated that “I am non-political”. Councillor Allan Chick stated that as a councillor of Alton Town for many years, he had observed that it was always the case that the Leader of the Council was chosen by the lead party. Councillor Mike Dicker stated that the council’s Standing Orders stated that the Leader if elected by the lead party and that nominations are received for the post.

Mr Desmond-Thomas asked if he could go “off piste” for a moment to take up a point as to Councillors being made more available and maybe they could consider a “come and meet your

councillor” type session. Councillor Mrs Jones advised that Councillors did use to have surgeries but nobody came and suggested that maybe Alton Town Council should have a garden party.

Ms Sarah Buxton offered that Alton was a fantastic place to live with a great sense of community. Farnham was a different type of place and had become an increasingly divided town with a “them and us” set-up. She went on to state that we (Alton) are standing on the brink of a big decision and again offered that it is a fantastic place to live and she did not want to see the division currently evident and that we all want to see Alton as a better place; we are here tonight because we love Alton and felt that the brewery site being one of the best things she had read about, providing a great opportunity for people to get involved and have a voice in the decisions being taken.

District Councillor Robert Saunders said that he, being a born and bred Altonian, was extremely proud of the town and that he had listen to two impassionate speeches tonight from Ms Sarah Buxton and Mr Peter Desmond-Thomas in their desire for Alton to be a better place and that they should be honorary ambassadors for the town for the way that they had conducted themselves.

Ms Short asked whether the Town Mayor of Alton, Councillor Mrs Pam Jones, should have declared a personal interest in the discussions surrounding the Assembly Rooms being a personal friend of the Assembly Rooms Manager, to which Councillor Mrs Jones responded that the Manager of the Assembly Rooms has been a member of staff for seven years and when she sees him she speaks to him but would not regard him as a personal friend. Councillor Allan Chick stated that the gentleman in question is no longer a member of the Liberal Democrat party.

A member of the public asked whether there were any plans for a 99 octane fuel at fuel stations in Alton. East Hampshire District Council are shortly to install a charging point for electric cars in the Bank car park.

Mr Tony Souter asked whether there had been any discussion on the Leader of the Councillor which Councillor Mike Dicker advised that it has been very clearly stated that the election of the Leader is governed by the council’s Standing Orders with Mr Souter countering and asking if there are any candidates being put forward and suggested that the Conservatives had held a meeting on “Saturday” night to which he was strongly advised that no such meeting had taken place and that the election of the next Leader of the Council would be undertaken at the Annual Meeting on 18 May 2016.

The meeting closed at 9.16pm.