

ALTON TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE ALTON TOWN ELECTORS' MEETING
HELD AT ALTON ASSEMBLY ROOMS ON 10 APRIL 2013 AT 6:00PM

Present: Councillor Ms S Hodder - Town Mayor
M Bayliss
T Eccott
D Gardner
P Hicks
G Hill
J Smith
K Stevens
D Willoughby

143 members of the public
1 member of the press

In attendance: Mr S J Parkinson - Town Clerk
Mr G C Burt - Deputy Town Clerk
Mr J A Passingham - Assembly Rooms Manager
Cllr J Butler - East Hampshire District Council
Mr T Horwood - East Hampshire District Council

38 Welcome and Housekeeping

The Town Mayor welcomed everyone, pointed out the emergency exits and toilets and explained the arrangements for public speaking using the roving microphone.

39 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 April 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

40 Town Mayor's Address

The Town Mayor gave her report for the year, a copy of which is attached to and forms part of these minutes.

41 Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2012

The Town Clerk presented the accounts for the year ending 31 March 2012, explaining that the significant increase in expenditure from the previous year related to the rebuilding of the Fimmimore Pavilion, which was funded by a combination of grants, developers' contributions and capital receipts from the sale of property.

A resident asked for confirmation that the sale of the Queens Road property disposed of 1/6th of the council's domestic property and also asked what the rent income was. The Town Clerk confirmed that it was one of six properties and that the rental had only been in the region of £6,000 as it was a protected tenancy.

Electors' Questions

- 1) Mr Broomfield asked when the council would replace missing paving slabs that had currently been replaced by tarmac. Councillor P C Hicks responded that this was Hampshire County Council's responsibility but the town council would keep the pressure on to get it done promptly.
- 2) Mr Hutton observed that several footways had not been swept for weeks and asked whose responsibility it was? It was explained that this was East Hampshire District Council's responsibility, but it was known that the contractor had had staffing problems in recent weeks.

Mr Hutton also asked why the town council's staff could not clear snow from public places during bad weather. The Town Clerk responded that the staff did clear snow in places such as the Market Square, but first they had to clear safe routes for users of the council's own property, including routes into town through Flood Meadows and the Public Gardens.

- 3) Mr Chick referred to quantities of bottles being left in Greenfields Avenue. It was agreed that this should be passed on to Hampshire County Council (HCC).
- 4) Mr Hepper asked whether there was any progress on securing a full time locally based and accountable Lengthsman? Councillor P C Hicks responded that this was currently only a pilot project for HCC, but some had been appointed in rural parishes.
- 5) Mrs Jones asked who was in control of the process to select sites for future housing and when would the Town Council put itself in the driving seat? Councillor Hicks responded that East Hampshire District Council remained the planning authority but the town council was a key stakeholder and playing a meaningful role alongside them.
- 6) Mr Heelis asked what the current position was regarding Tesco coming to Alton and when would the electorate get to know the outcome of the consultation held on how to spend the £1million they promise to bring? He also asked about the promised improvements in connection with Waitrose.

Councillor Hill responded that Tesco had confirmed that they still intended to build on the site but did not have a timetable for activity. The response to the consultation had been excellent and only one project had been dropped, but the council did not plan to spend time on this activity until it was clear that Tesco were actually coming.

Councillor Hicks confirmed that HCC were looking at proposals for the funds provided by Waitrose.

- 7) Mr Alexander asked if the town council would make its position clear with reference to the putting in position of a "Town Manager"? Councillor P C Hicks confirmed that this was one of the proposed Tesco projects, but required confirmation of funding.
- 8) Mr Heelis asked if the Town Council could confirm that from their perspective the Alton Town Design Statement, written with support from ATC and endorsed by EHDC, was valid and implementable? The Town Clerk and Councillor Hicks confirmed that it remained a valid planning document, but would need updating before long, due to Government pressure over housing.

- 9) Doctor Rice asked what would happen if Tesco did not come and also referred to verge damage being caused by building works at the entrance to Holybourne. Councillor Hicks responded that funds would only become available if Tesco actually opened, but the sum to be provided would be subject to inflation if there was a delay. He added that the work by Persimmon homes should be subject to planning conditions to reinstate any damage and the council would keep an eye on this to ensure that it was enforced.
- 10) Mrs Hobbs asked what the projects that had been consulted on were. The Town Clerk and Councillor Hill outlined these and confirmed that they remained on the council's website.
- 11) Mr Roberts asked who policed dog fouling in public parks. The Town Clerk responded that if staff or Community Safety Officers were present they could take action on this, but sites were not attended on a full-time basis. Councillor Gardner praised the Anstey Residents Group for their efforts to reduce dog fouling in Anstey Park.
- 12) Mr Booker asked what plans there were for revitalising the High Street and what were the town council doing on this? Councillor Hicks responded that the council were working with the Chamber of Commerce on the Tesco proposals and other activities to progress this. Alton had successfully hosted an Action for Market Towns event on high street revival the previous year.
- 13) Mrs Key asked why the community centre was missing from the list of projects. Councillor J Butler responded that EHDC were under tight financial constraints but were working with the community association to improve the facilities.
- 14) Mr Broomfield asked why EHDC could not reduce the business rates in Alton. Mr T Horwood explained that these were set nationally, but EHDC may gain some minor scope to address specific issues from 2013.

43 **Presentation: "Does Alton need a Sports Centre"**

Councillor P C Hicks gave a presentation drawing together the information currently available about proposals for the refurbishment or replacement of Alton Sports Centre, emphasising that studies were currently being undertaken to look at potential locations, future needs, building costs and running costs. He went on to explain the current pressure for new housing and why funding for a sports centre might be linked to new housing development. Councillor Butler explained that consultants were still working on surveys and no decisions had been made yet

A number of questions were raised and discussed, particularly:

- 1) The need for infrastructure (including water supplies, sewage treatment and schools) to support new housing. Mr Horwood explained that all infrastructure needs would be looked at and developers would be expected to contribute.
- 2) The suspension of the local plan examination. Mr Horwood indicated that quite a number of plans had been suspended around the country, around half of them due to

dispute over the housing numbers included. He added that the planning inspector had not thrown the plan out, just asked for more work to be done. The risk of major developments being pushed through in the absence of an up to date local plan was relatively low, if a revised plan was agreed by the end of 2013.

- 3) The need for more car parking, to cope with increasing numbers of visitors. Some sports centre users said that the current car park was typically full after 10am.
- 4) Concerns were expressed that money allocated for a new community centre seemed to have disappeared and that the same might happen with the sports centre. Councillor Butler said that this would not happen.
- 5) A number of clubs said they had been told by the consultant that the new sports centre would be smaller and would not have the facilities they wanted. Councillor Butler said she would go back and talk to the consultants. Mr Horwood explained that the key issue was to get the right facilities in for the needs of the area, rather than worrying about the overall size of the building.
- 6) The lack of Alton representation on EHDC's planning committee. Mr Horwood explained that the committee was made up of councillors from across East Hampshire and the fact that it met in Petersfield didn't mean that decisions favoured Petersfield. Strategic planning was looked at by the Development Policy Panel and there were two Alton councillors on that.
- 7) The impact of the South Downs National Park on planning. Residents sought reassurances that areas outside the park would not be pressured to take more housing. Mr Horwood explained that EHDC was not the planning authority for the park, but was working with the National Park Authority. The planning inspector had asked for more information regarding the impact of areas being in or out of the park.
- 8) The current Alton Study, which seemed to be a smaller piece of work than the Alton Masterplan previously proposed. More work was needed for the future and there were concerns that the sports centre would absorb all the money from development, leaving nothing for schools and other services. The Town Clerk responded that developers' contributions were identified separately for different things, such as schools, highways, open spaces and other facilities so this wouldn't happen.
- 9) A number of residents thought that refurbishment might be a preferable option and asked if the survey would contain a strong engineering content, to explain the issues with the building. It was confirmed that this would be the case.

The Town Mayor thanked everyone for attending.

The meeting finished at 8.30 pm.

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