

**ALTON TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE ALTON TOWN ELECTORS' MEETING
HELD AT ALTON TOWN HALL ON 04 APRIL 2012 AT 6:00PM**

Present:	Councillor R Saunders	-	Town Mayor
	M Bayliss		
	T Eccott		
	D Gardner		
	P Hicks		
	G Hill		
	Ms S Hodder		
	J Nixon		
	J Smith		
	K Stevens		
	D Willoughby		
	A Joy	-	HCC/EHDC
	20 members of the public		
	1 member of the press		
In attendance:	G C Burt	-	Deputy Town Clerk
	Mrs P Harris	-	Admin Officer
	C. Campbell	-	ALUA

31 **Welcome and Housekeeping**

The Town Mayor:

1. Welcomed all to this Annual Meeting of Electors.
2. Asked that all mobiles be turned off or silenced.
3. Advised the only exit to the building is the way you came in and to this end, requested that people do not stand in the doorway.
4. Advised that water is available from the Water Cooler situated just inside the door.

32 **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Branch (District), Lawrence (Town), Ms J Saunders (Town), S Parkinson (Town Clerk) and Mrs S Brown (Admin Officer).

33 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2011 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

34 **Town Mayor's Address**

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

35 **Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2011**

Accounts were available at the meeting and the Deputy Town Clerk and Chair of Policy and Resources Committee offered to take any questions, but none were raised.

36 **Presentation on Rail Matters**

South West Trains had been invited to send a representative to the meeting back in February but had been unable to supply a speaker. However, Chris Campbell, Chairman of the Alton Line Users Association kindly gave an update on matters affecting the Alton Line which included:

- 20 Minute Waiting Area to be reinstated and ALUA have been pressing HCC also. In next 6 months and tied into the Waitrose development and its car parking arrangements of 89 spaces; 3 or 4 will be allocated to a 20 minute waiting area. In the meantime the car park can be used as a waiting area only if advising ticket office at the time of purchase. Further support has been forthcoming from MP, Damien Hinds.
- Station Enhancements:
 - The existing footbridge will remain, with a second bridge (for disabled access) being erected within the next year. (Alton & Aldershot have funds allocated for this purpose).
 - Replacement bus services will be routine during next 12 months between Alton & Aldershot for upgrades to take place:
 - Bentley platform extension to take 8 coaches
 - Additional loop & upgrade to signalling to allow double track between Alton & Bentley
- Potential link with Eco town (Bentley to Bordon) a complete unknown due to high costs.
- Rail times since 2004 slowed down for off peak travel. Numerous complaints about the slow service which can be up to 90 minutes, as with the new trains it is 2½ to 3 minutes for the doors to open and close at each stop. An alternative to reduce journey time is to catch the Portsmouth service from Waterloo to Woking and then change to the Alton Service. Normally no change of platform involved.

A number of questions were raised:

Councillor Saunders – observed that a number of trains were running without toilets. SWT had responded that as Alton Line is classed as a Suburban Line and not a Main Line their franchise does not require toilets to be provided. **Response from Chris Campbell:** SWT have confirmed that the line is a Main Line and toilet facilities must be provided; however awaiting replacement toilet parts from Siemens.

Christopher Salter – does anyone check the car park? **Response from Chris Campbell:** Yes and on a very regular basis and ample time should be allowed to purchase a car park ticket from the ticket office if you do not have a card to put in the machine.

Carol Kennedy – when will engineering works commence and replacement bus services be in operation? **Response from Chris Campbell:** From the beginning of June (and after HM Diamond Jubilee Weekend) most Saturdays and Sundays engineering works will be taking

place. Notifications will be placed in the local press and full details are available on the website.

Edward Hepper, Alton Society – welcomed improvements in booking hall/toilets/access and delighted at Government's new commitment to improving access for the disabled to the far platform. However, are concerned about architectural design impact on our classic small Victorian station of new bridge despite assurances given by SWT that the replacement design will be sympathetic. Alton Society request that they be involved at an early stage with planners and designers and that sign off be deferred until they have been consulted. **Response from Chris Campbell:** Contact details for SWT to be provided, although at this stage exact location of bridge not determined.

Bill Jabelman – issue of bridge and access to Platform 2 for which he felt there were 2 possible solutions. A lifting bridge (Brockenhurst Station was an example of this technology) and installation of a separate set of points before Alton Station - both options could provide a much cheaper solution than the proposed new bridge. He urged that designers look at alternatives before proceeding with a new bridge. **Response from Chris Campbell:** The comments are noted, but added that Mid Hants Railway are set to increase the number of accesses to the main line so may not be kept on any 'obstructions'.

Ian King – Waitrose development - what improvements are proposed for pedestrian access to the station as there will be increased traffic with the opening of a supermarket in the vicinity. **Response from Chris Campbell:** Agreed that improvements required and pavement extensions should be high on the list of requirements, especially from the Station Cafe to the Station entrance.

Councillor Andrew Joy commented:

- that he would be reluctant to see any form of a "block" (bridge or any alternative) to the western end of Station as this could be viewed as prohibiting any development of an Alton to Bordon rail link.
- that there is a 6 stage evaluation process being undertaken for Whitehill/Bordon Transport Links. Just concluded 3rd of the 6 stages, but a long way to go.
- Wished to raise a question to SWT (via Chris Campbell): Sunday train journeys were advertised as taking 1 hr 51 minutes last week. Reality was journey times were in excess of 2 hours which is totally unacceptable for rail users bearing in mind a steam train could do it much quicker, and driving would equally be quicker. Requested that Alton Town Council formally write to SWT on both journey times and also lack of toilet provision on services.

Bill Jabelman – responded that he was not advocating a "block", but a movable bridge!

Councillor David Willoughby – asked for clarification for designation of a suburban line as opposed to a main line. **Response from Chris Campbell:** Designated main line when over 40 mile journey length – SWT confirmed some 18 months ago that Alton Line was a Main Line.

Councillor David Willoughby – if no toilet facilities provided, could SWT provide portable toilets? Opinion was that some viewed current toilet facilities (when provided) could be classified as portable toilets!

Councillor Derek Gardener – will engineering works be published? **Response from Chris Campbell:** Yes.

Christopher Salter – would bridge be painted green, rather than blue and could there be a move to re-establishing the use of Southern Region green? **Response from Chris Campbell:** confirmed that old bridge is painted the old Southern Region Green, but was unsure of the colour for a new bridge. Noted that a patch on Platform 2 was the right shade of green; the rest was not!

Councillor Andrew Joy commented: British Racing Green might be more appropriate as it may improve the journey times currently evidenced!

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked Chris Campbell for his most informative update.

37 Electors' Questions

Q1 Professor Mike Biddiss: Bearing in mind the passing of the 2012 Localism Act and last week's publication of the government's new National Planning Policy Framework...

- a What preparations has the ATC so far made in order to seize the vital opportunity now given to it of developing its own Neighbourhood Plan in a form capable of complementing and influencing the broader Local Plan that needs to be completed by the District Council?
- b For this same purpose of influencing the nature of Alton's future development, in what ways does the ATC intend to involve other local bodies such as the Alton Society who might be willing to offer expertise likely to assist councillors in the formulation of a Neighbourhood Plan?
- c What are the ATC's best estimates of the timescale needed for its completion of such a Neighbourhood Plan?

Councillor Hicks, Chairman of the Planning and Transportation Committee confirmed that any Neighbourhood Plan must complement East Hampshire District Council's own Core Strategy. It was the council's intention to undertake the consideration of such a plan and would be looking to work with other groups such as the Alton Society in taking it forward.

Prof Biddiss felt that the overall tone of the response was unsatisfactory, especially since it suggested to him a certain lack of urgency on the part of the Town Council.

Councillor Joy added that whilst that the Localism Act may have been passed on 27 March; his understanding was that further secondary legislation was needed to enact the Act. A Neighbourhood Plan would take 15/18 months to complete and would not be completed therefore before East Hampshire District Council's own Core Strategy would be adopted (examination in public this summer/autumn; publication in December). Neighbourhood Plan must be based on existing Core Strategy and not detract from it.

Prof Biddiss felt that the preparatory work should start now, both to influence the Core Strategy and also to explore the new opportunities offered to the Town Council in regard to 'non-strategic' aspects of the planning process. He commended in particular a more careful reading of Para 185 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Mrs Pam Jones advised that she had sent an e-mail to all Town Councillors and Officers asking what the Town Council were planning to do about a Neighbourhood Plan for Alton as part of the Localism Act. Responses from the Mayor and Councillors Lawrence and Smith indicated nothing had been discussed. The Town Clerk said that not all parts of the Act were in force yet and went on to say, and I quote....

'The council has not formally considered the need for a plan, nor had it identified any lack of development in EHDC's emerging Core Strategy'.

Last weekend I visited a small village in Northamptonshire, population 6,000. I read their latest monthly magazine with interest, especially the minutes of their Parish Council Meeting in March where they accepted a number of proposals all relating to the establishment of their Neighbourhood Plan Project Group and Community Champions. The magazine also contained two articles explaining why such a plan was important.

The National Planning Policy Framework was published on 27th March, and the Minister for Planning, Rt Hon Greg Clark MP says in the introduction

'In order to fulfil its purpose of helping achieve sustainable development, planning must not simply be about scrutiny. Planning must be a creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve the places in which we live our lives. This should be a collective enterprise. Yet, in recent years, planning has tended to exclude, rather than to include, people and communities.'

This council is currently considering selling off some of its land. In view of all the speculation and rumour surrounding the South Alton Masterplan, I respectfully request that a Neighbourhood Plan be initiated by this council without delay. All Town Councillors have a duty to their electorate, who are the people of Alton, to ensure Alton gets what Alton really wants and not what is dictated to us by other authorities.

Councillor Hill responded that the Town Council did take the issue of the Neighbourhood Plan seriously. Councillors were anxious to attend the forthcoming Community Forum meeting where there will be a presentation on the subject and Councillors would consider how to take the matter forward after that.

Q2 Doctor James Willis said that the Alton Society welcome EHDC's recent announcement of some £60,000 being spent to keep the Sports Centre up to scratch but were concerned about the assumption that the Centre needs to be completely replaced in the near future - as opposed to the successful rehabilitation of the Farnham Sports Centre while still, at least partially, in service. Can ATC confirm that a full up-to-date structural and market survey has been undertaken to support this expensive solution and that it can be made available for public inspection?

Councillor Hill responded that Town Councillors were doing their utmost in championing to get the very best for Alton including an upgraded or new Sports Centre.

Mike O'Mahony of EHDC had advised that they were currently undertaking a Leisure Built Facilities Study which would inform the decision on whether the Sports Centre should be refurbished or replaced. Given that the Town Council was a significant stakeholder in the land *jigsaw* in the vicinity of the Sports Centre it followed that the Town Council would also be heavily involved in the discussions surrounding this matter and it would look at all options affecting its land holdings at Chawton Park Road.

Doctor James Willis recounted the claims when the Sports Centre was originally built, that it was built with longevity running through its veins.

Councillor Joy confirmed that the Leisure Built Study would be reporting soon. It was possible that Developer Contributions from houses not just built in Alton, but the wider area, could be used to help fund a new Sports Centre. Any proposals would be emanating from a consortium of developers.

Mrs Pam Jones asked whether the developers had given presentations to all Councillors or just The Leader?

Councillor Hill responded that he had attended meetings with the developer, accompanied by the Town Clerk and had kept all Town Councillors briefed on the matter via regular e-mails and verbal briefings.

Mr Edward Hepper felt that current discussion on a South Alton Masterplan showed exactly why a Neighbourhood Plan was required.

Councillor Willoughby advised that at this moment in time there were no plans available for any consultation to be held upon because discussions were still on-going and advised that the general essence of the South Alton Masterplan was nothing new and had been something that many people had been aware of for many years, including previous Town Councillors. The public would be invited to comment when a viable package was on the table. Alton Town Council's own Strategic Plan had been updated the previous year and he was also keen on a Neighbourhood Plan.

Councillor Joy took issue with the comment that Alton was not particularly well represented at East Hampshire District Council; citing that Alton had seven District Council including Councillor Glynis Watts who was the current Deputy Leader.

Doctor James Willis said that all the Alton Society, like everyone else wanted was a First Class Sports Centre and as a Society, did not expect exclusive access rights to plans and discussions over and above any other group or individual.

Councillor Hill echoed Doctor James Willis' sentiments.

Q3 Ms Nicole Penn-Symons – Curtis Museum and Allen Gallery – highlighted the exciting plans being developed to improve the Museum which would require moral and possibly in the future, financial support from all councils which larger funders, such as The Lottery, would expect. She also mentioned the on-going hard work of the

50 volunteers in keeping the facilities open which were now attracting higher foot-flow. This was a testament to the original campaign to keep the facilities open which attracted a signed petition of 6,000 names.

Councillor Saunders confirmed that he believed that a formal request for Town Council moral support would be on the Agenda for the Full Council on 18 April.

Councillor Willoughby supported everything that Ms Nicole Penn-Symons had said.

Councillor Joy added that everyone was very grateful to all the volunteers and groups that had made the continuation of these facilities possible. Hampshire County Council were looking at using the volunteer model in other service delivery areas.

Q4 Mrs Pam Jones recalled that it was reported at the previous Full Council meeting that the Community Centre would be in deficit by £4,000 at the turn of the full financial year. How was this going to be covered?

Councillor Willoughby advised that with a £400,000+ turnover, such a small deficit was of no serious concern and the forthcoming year was projected to show a small surplus which would counter balance. He added the importance of funding for the Community Centre from local authorities.

Councillor Hill advised that the Town Council was running on a very tight budget and any requests for support should be received through the Grant Process in sufficient time for consideration of the budget for the following financial year.

Q5 Mr Chappel from Energy Alton reported on the success of the campaign. Although the funding technically finished on 31 March they were continuing their Advice Centre in the High Street for a further two months. He suggested that councils should insist on higher energy efficiency standards than were required by law and also that Alton should perhaps consider community renewable energy solutions which had been championed elsewhere.

Q6 Mr Atul Patel asked when parking enforcement would commence? Councillor Saunders advised that warnings were currently being issued by the new Enforcement Team and Fixed Penalty Notice issuing would commence on 16 April 2012.

Q7 Mr Ed Broomfield asked what the Council's top priorities were. Councillor Hill and Saunders advised that the Council's top 4 priorities were:

Town Centre vibrancy, Forward Planning, Events and Giving Best Value

Q8 Ms Pam Bradford asked when work was going to commence on the Tesco store as the site was currently being advertised as being available for short term lets. Cllr Hill advised that a position statement from Tesco's would be made available at the Exhibition in Assembly Rooms on 10th and 14th April.

Ms Pam Bradford asked why the Tesco statement could not be made available now?

Councillor Hill said it was because he wanted to see Pam Bradford at the Assembly Rooms on 10 April!

Councillor Joy added that believed it was good that the Town Council was leading on this issue and the Consultation exercise on the projects was valuable irrespective of when the Tesco store was eventually built.

Q9 Councillor Joy was disappointed that the re-opened Sainsbury's Petrol Station was still charging petrol prices in excess of the national average and asked the Town Council to write to Sainsbury's asking why?

The Town Mayor then thanked everyone for attending.

The meeting finished at 7:50pm.

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TOWN MAYOR'S REPORT
TO THE
ANNUAL MEETING OF ELECTORS

As we approach the final weeks of my Mayoral term I would like to share with you some of the experiences over the year.

What a year it has been! I don't think I could find just one word to describe it – amazing, momentous, memorable all spring immediately to mind.

First of all: events within the town in which I have been involved on the town's behalf, and please do not be offended if your own organisation's functions are not mentioned individually. I have viewed each engagement with the same level of commitment and importance, but I simply cannot refer to everyone.

My year started with the re-opening of the Curtis Museum and Allen Gallery following the successful public campaign to ensure a sustainable future for these important facilities.

I was honoured to be invited, but somewhat apprehensive, to address several thousand people at the annual Ahmadiyya Association Jalsa Salana at East Worldham. Apparently, the speech can be viewed on YouTube!

In August, I opened the new allotment site at Hawthorns and laid a foundation stone for the new Finnimore Pavilion which we hope will re-open with much enhanced facilities for the sports clubs at Anstey Park in the next month or so.

In September I attended the regional In Bloom awards ceremony and collected four certificates on behalf of the town.

Hampshire's military links have figured prominently; I attended a Battle of Britain Sunset Ceremony at RAF Odiham and Beating Retreat at Bordon Garrison.

The Annual Remembrance Sunday service organised by the British Legion and the Town Council was an extremely poignant occasion and had, by a mile, the best turnout I have ever seen.

Sadly the past year has seen the deaths of three former town councillors and town mayors, Roger and Robyn Fitzer and Bob Evans. We also said farewell to John Sadler who retired after many years of dedicated service as Head Groundsman.

I chaired a meeting of local organisations to discuss how the town would wish to celebrate HM The Queen's Diamond Jubilee this Summer and I am pleased to report that I have passed the batten for co-ordinating the town's celebrations to Cllr Stevens who is doing a magnificent job.

At the first official Jubilee event last week I helped plant an Oak tree kindly donated by Hampshire Country Council at Jubilee Playing Fields.

My civic service last month was held in the beautiful chapel at Alton Abbey on an unseasonably warm early March Sunday afternoon. I thank Damian Hinds MP for supporting this event and agreeing to do a reading.

It has been my pleasure and privilege to visit many of the clubs and organisations in the town. These have included: Probus, ALFI, Alton Lions, Alton Tennis Club, Alton & District Sports Council, Horticultural Society, Allotment Society, Alton Society and All Saints Hard of Hearing Club.

The Town values and appreciates the economic vitality and jobs provided by existing businesses and welcomes new enterprises to the community. It is always pleasing in difficult economic times to welcome new businesses to the town and during the year I have helped launch the Bell House Dance Studio, Bodycheck, a new pharmacy at Alton Health Centre and Crank Cycles.

I have represented the town at civic events in our neighbouring towns of Farnham, Haslemere and Whitehill.

This summer the UK hosts the Summer Olympic and Paralympic games. I recently attended an exhibition of Olympic-themed art from local schools and had the honour of holding the 1948 London Games torch.

So far a touch under £1,000 has been raised for my two charities – the National Autistic Society and Opensight. I am grateful for the generosity of Altonians and local businesses in their support for these very worthy causes.

Thank you to everyone who has supported me in whatever way, and here I include the Deputy Mayor, Cllr Hodder, fellow town councillors and their partners, the Town Clerk and the Town Hall staff - Greg, Samantha and Pat and Ian, Jason at the Assembly Rooms and my chaplain, Canon Peter Doores. I also want to thank my employers who have been so supportive in allowing me time off to undertake my civic duties.

It has been a great honour to serve as Town Mayor and the past twelve months have, without doubt, been the best, truly amazing and unforgettable, and I am grateful to everyone who has shared in it with me.

It is also a privilege to be able to report on another busy year for the Town Council itself.

Last year's elections saw significant changes. We welcomed 11 new town councillors and I can say without exception that personally I feel you have all stepped up to the plate admirably. Getting to grips with local authority bureaucracy and protocols was always going to take time.

The number of projects being delivered by the council seems to show no sign of abating; just as one seems to be finishing, another seems to take its place! Amongst those completed this year or still ongoing are exciting new play equipment in the Public Gardens (including kit for children with special needs); the Fimmimore Pavilion which I have already touched upon; a significant tree planting program; a new Equipment Shed at Jubilee Playing Fields and further refurbishments at the Assembly Rooms. Looking ahead, we hope to have a new bandstand in place before the end of the year to commemorate this Jubilee year and

comments on the plans are currently being invited. This is all in addition to the day to day services that the council provide.

Much of the council's energies are expended on delivering some of the town's favourite events. Whilst these do cost time and money, they are highly valued by residents and help keep our community vibrant and our town attractive to visitors.

We plan to submit our application for *Walkers are Welcome* status, which will hopefully bring added customers to our local businesses, later this year, and as part of our portfolio to demonstrate community support, we are aiming for 500 signatures. Before people leave this evening, I do hope that anyone who has not yet signed our petition will do so.

The council continues to take a leading role in trying to influence some of the bigger, more strategic issues facing the town.

One such issue is the future of our town centre. Next Tuesday and Saturday the council will be hosting an exhibition at the Assembly Rooms of possible Town Centre projects to which the Tesco S106 Developer's Contribution could be put. I do hope that this will be well supported because we need Altonians to tell us what they think.

The council has a proud record of championing the needs of Alton and delivering quality services with limited resources, both financial and human.

The precept for each household for the forthcoming year remains largely unchanged, thanks to a very small increase in the total number of households in the town over which the total precept has been spread.

Due to the careful budgeting and the hard work of our very dedicated and loyal staff, I believe that Alton Town Council continues to deliver very good value for money.

This concludes my annual report and I am happy to take any questions on it.

Councillor Robert Saunders
Town Mayor of Alton
2011-12