

**ALTON TOWN ELECTORS' MEETING
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 24th APRIL 2003**

Present: Councillor J F Smith - Town Mayor
Town Councillor Ms P J Bradford
D Crocker
R T Fitzer
Mrs P E Jones
~~R T Fitzer~~
D J Willoughby

6 Members of the public and press

In attendance: Mr G C Burt - Deputy Town Clerk

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Town Councillors A B Chick, R J F Evans and P V Mendham.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd May 2002 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.


3 Street Cleansing

The Town Mayor explained that it had been hoped to have a representative from East Hampshire District Council to speak about street cleaning (and grass cutting) and take questions. Unfortunately due to holidays this had not been possible, nonetheless EHDC had said that it would welcome any feedback from the meeting on the subject.

Mr Tony Rice from John Eggars Square said that he had recently moved to Alton from Farnham and whilst he liked Alton very much he was disgusted by the amount of litter in the town. He had picked up litter himself whilst walking his dog and he was disappointed to learn from the District Council that the town centre area was litter picked by only one man and that two people in a van were responsible for the rest of the town and surrounding district. He felt that the education of youth in not dropping litter should be given more emphasis in schools.

Councillor P J Bradford confirmed the current manpower and zoning arrangements for cleaning the town provided by EHDC.

Councillor D Crocker said that street cleaning was one service which he and others felt should be devolved to the Town Council. EHDC had said in a recent *Partners* magazine that services were/had been devolved but he had seen little evidence as such. Given that it was unlikely that EHDC would make available the finance for the Town Council to provide services such as street cleansing and grass cutting to the standard that the town would like, he would welcome a debate in the town generally as to whether Alton residents would be prepared to pay more council tax to Alton Town Council to enable better quality services such as these to be provided.



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Tom Arnott said fast food outlets should be encouraged to make packaging bio-degradable commenting also that much litter consisted either of auto-parts or other household items such as carpets. This was particularly bad in the Russett Road area where the railway embankment was regularly used as a dumping ground for such items.

Geoff Nicholas said that there were not enough litter bins, litter pickers and that litter bins, including dog waste bins, were not emptied often enough. Vegetation growing in gutters, pavements and alleys, which was the remit of HCC, did not help the situation as it then trapped litter, although it was pointed out that if areas were swept more often then weeds might not be so likely to grow. Dog bins at Anstey Park needed emptying more often.

Councillor Mrs P E Jones, herself a local school teacher, explained that primary schools did take their responsibility for educating children not to drop litter seriously, although more could be done. The Citizenship courses run in secondary schools could focus on matters such as litter in the future.

~~Mr Rice added that the new Household Waste Recycling Centre at Omega Park was excellent and HCC should be congratulated. On this point the meeting did hope that the new longer opening hours of the new centre would cut down on fly tipping. More information was needed on what could and could not be taken to the tip, including the rules on vans and trailers.~~

Councillor D J Willoughby echoed the comments of Councillor D Crocker on Altonians paying more for better services. He also suggested that youth in particular should be better educated on care of the local environment suggesting that it would be a suitable subject for the Youth Council to discuss when formed. France, he said, was very clean whether due to a culture of not dropping litter or better cleansing services.

The Deputy Town Clerk pointed out that the zoning arrangements indicating the frequency with which various areas of the town should be cleaned were probably adequate, but there was a lack of contract monitoring by EHDC officers to ensure contract compliance.

The Town Mayor felt that the debate had been most useful confirming that litter and the cleanliness of the town was a subject that obviously concerned all Altonians. He suggested that the need for more bins, particularly near schools, and better education were two proposals which could be taken forward to improve the situation.

4 Town Mayor's Address

The Town Mayor gave a resume of the many events that he had attended during the past year and also some of the achievements of the Town Council. A copy of the address is appended to and forms part of these minutes.

5 Alton Town Council – Accounts for the Year Ending 31st March 2002

Copies of the above accounts were circulated at the meeting. There being no questions resulting.

6 Public Questions

The Town Mayor invited questions/comments on matters affecting Alton.

(1) Logos

Councillor D J Willoughby said that the *Alton has time for you* brand still needed replacing and hoped that new suggestions would come forward.

(2) Clocks

Councillor Ms P J Bradford commented on the two clocks in the High Street, neither of which worked. The Deputy Town Clerk advised on the situation regarding the new Rotary clock outside Help the Aged, which should be working soon; he would also contact Travelbag and ask them to attend to the clock above their premises.

(3) Conservation

Mr Rice complimented all those groups involved in bringing about the restoration and improvements of many of the towns old buildings.

(4) Pavements and roads

Several speakers commented that the resurfaced High Street had a coarse appearance and was not aesthetically pleasing for a town centre location.

Disabled bays outside Ganziannis and the Post Office had still not been repainted. Many of the pavements in the town centre remained unrepaired and it was pointed out that vehicles mounting/parking on pavements was responsible for much of the damage. The absence of a Traffic Warden for several months had not helped, but the newly appointed warden appeared to be getting to grips with the situation.

Large white unsightly markings had been daubed on pavements in the High Street, presumably to assist the location of market stalls. The Deputy Town Clerk would contact the market manager to ascertain why they had been put down and to ask for their prompt removal.

The Deputy Town Clerk reported that HCC had today advised that Market Street was still due to be resurfaced but until it could be added onto another resurfacing scheme it would be patched temporarily.

Tanhouse Lane was due to be resurfaced. Redress may be sought from the contractors who carried out works in Normandy Street last year for defects/poor quality workmanship. A major programme of surface dressing footways in Whitedown Lane, Queens Road, Kings Road, Butts Road and The Butts areas of the town would commence shortly. A new replacement handrail for the steps up to The Dell at Ashdell Road had been ordered.

(5) Library

The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that work on the Library was due to start in the next few weeks.

As there were no more questions, the Town Mayor thanked all those present for attending and brought the meeting to a close.



Town Mayor's Address

Councillors, Ladies and Gentlemen

It has been quite a challenge for me to follow past mayors such as Pam Bradford, David Willoughby and the remarkable Pat Cole who we all wish well.

It has been an auspicious year starting with the Queen's Golden Jubilee but one that I think most characterises Alton in that it brings out the sociable side of Altonians. I have visited many charities and groups who form an integral part of Alton and I am convinced that the way forward for Alton is partnership. Partnership with local self-help groups such as those who tend The Butts flower planting, partnership with the Alton Society, who I must commend for the excellent work in restoring Flood Meadows, partnership with AIM who, despite many misgivings, have proved some of us wrong and have reinvigorated the Tuesday Market and partnership with the Allotment Society and Alton Sports Council.

One of the most important examples of partnership within the community is the work that is going on with the Alton Town Plan. This is an example of long-term planning that I think has been severely lacking in the past. It is community led and the Town Council has deliberately taken a back seat so that ideas can come from the people. The response that we had from the Altonian newsletter was fantastic. Over 1240 replies is, as Steve Parkinson would say if he were here and not on honeymoon – statistically sound. I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in the Town Plan giving up their valuable time. Although much still remains to be done, it is clear that a Vision for Alton is emerging – that Altonians would like to preserve the countryside and wonderful scenery that makes Alton so special whilst developing facilities for recreation, transport, affordable housing and youth. At some stage there has to be compromise because we can never develop as a town unless we are prepared to change. No change means no development and as a town we do not want to stagnate.

To get back to events and partnership. I would like to pay tribute to Mike Baker, Greg Burt and Pat Lerew and all those involved in the Jubilee celebrations. It was a wonderful day and I shall treasure it all my life. Thank you. Alton should party more often.

Other events stick in my mind. Christmas in Alton seems to get bigger and better every year. The lights are wonderful and, if reports are true, put Petersfield's to shame. Alton in Bloom has been a great success and the great strides the town has made in Southern England in Bloom has been reflected throughout the town with wonderful floral displays. This has undoubtedly improved the appearance of the town and it was a particular pleasure for me to unveil Miss Bell's Fountain which has improved the western approaches to the town. Another landmark was reached when Alton celebrated 150 years of the railway coming to Alton. It must have been just like the Wild West back then. Some say it still is.

As someone who strongly believes in community politics I believe that, where possible, control should be devolved to grass-roots level. I should like to see the town moving forward actively to take over areas such as grass cutting of all open spaces



and litter collection throughout the town. Certainly these are areas where I feel local involvement will give us better results. Negotiations are still at an early stage and inevitably come down to money. Would the public be prepared to see an increased town precept if it brought tangible improvements in these areas? Much has been done to keep up the pressure on District and County to improve performance in areas such as road maintenance and litter collection which, I know, causes so much grief to us all. We are suffering badly from lack of central funding and recent poor weather conditions but it is still clear that there is huge scope for improvement in these areas.

I would like to pay tribute to my fellow councillors. They spend many unpaid hours poring over local plans and planning applications. They do a great deal of service to the community and all of it unpaid, and I would like to think we are having some impact with the local District planners with 85% agreement on planning applications. And as a reward they have to deal with conflicting opinions. Still we all love the cut and thrust of local democracy. I feel it is a great shame that more people are not putting themselves forward to stand in elections. The democratic process is not well served by lack of competition so I would like to congratulate all those who are prepared to stand whatever their political persuasions. I think Town and Parish Councils are the proving ground of the political process. Unless you have a record at grass roots level it is, I think, naïve to think you will easily find your way at a higher level. I would like to pay tribute to retiring councillors and past mayors Pat Cole and Peter Whitmarsh. Thank you for serving the town. Thank you too to the Town Hall staff for their work throughout the year. I think we have an excellent team and results are beginning to show. Thank you to John Sadler and his groundstaff who keep our parks and gardens so wonderfully well.

I would like to thank my wife, Chris, and my family for their support. It's not easy always when you get home and announce you have a meeting in 10 minutes! Thank you to Pam Jones my Deputy.

Most of all I would like to thank the public. It has been a rare privilege to serve the people of Alton. I am very honoured to have served as Mayor of Alton, to have met and talked to you all. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Whitmarsh". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font. The first part of the signature is a large, looped "P", followed by "eter Whitmarsh".

