

**MINUTES OF THE
ALTON TOWN ELECTORS MEETING
HELD IN THE TOWN HALL, MARKET SQUARE, ALTON
ON 23 MAY 2002**

Present: **Councillor D J Willoughby** - **Town Mayor**
 Ms P J Bradford
 A B Chick
 Mrs P A Cole
 D Crocker
 R J F Evans
 R T Fitzer
 Mrs P E Jones
 P V Mendham
 J F Smith
 P M G Whitmarsh

20 Members of the public and press

In attendance: **Mr S J Parkinson** - **Town Clerk**
 Mr G C Burt - **Deputy Town Clerk**
 Mr C Taylor - **Hampshire Highways**
 Mr B Soutar - **Hampshire Highways**

The meeting opened with prayers offered by the Reverend James Croft, who was thanked by the Town Mayor for his service as Mayors Chaplain over the past year.

1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 May 2001 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

2 Presentation by Hampshire Highways

The Town Mayor welcomed Colin Taylor, Chief Engineer of Hampshire County Council's Highway Unit East, based in Petersfield, along with Bruce Soutar, Assistant Highway Engineer responsible for the Alton area.

Mr Taylor explained that the Highways Unit East covered the area of East Hampshire District Council as well as Winchester City and Eastleigh Borough Councils. The unit's responsibilities included highways inspections, road signs and markings and dealing with the effects of accidents and emergencies.

Resident Anne Reynolds complained that no action had been taken following a petition to Hampshire County Council about the state of Alton's roads, submitted 15 months ago.

Mr Taylor stated that there was currently a backlog of maintenance work because planned maintenance budgets had been used to deal with recent flood damage in Hampshire. Roads needing maintenance were inspected and given ratings so that priority could be given to the worst roads. Bruce Soutar would be inspecting Alton critically and putting in a submission, however Mr Taylor emphasised that this would not guarantee that any roads in Alton would be prioritised.

Mr Soutar added that a maintenance gang would shortly be commencing work on minor footway repairs in Market Street, Church Street and High Street. Heavy vehicles parking on kerbs and footways were a particular source of concern because of the damage caused.

3 Public Questions on Highway Matters

Mrs Gregory pointed out that a large pothole outside Swifts shop had generated considerable paperwork from the county council but no visible action. There was also a hole near the mini roundabout near Greenfields Avenue, which had not received attention.

Another member of the public commented on poor repairs by BT contactors in Stillions Close, which had to be done 4 times before they were satisfactory. Mr Taylor explained that the County Council had the power to make contractors take remedial action where works were not up to required standards.

Pat Lerew, on behalf of the Alton Promotion and Marketing Forum, commented that it was difficult to market a town full of potholes.

Beechwood Road was cited as an example of the state of Alton's roads, with four potholes within the space of a few yards. Councillor Mrs Cole commented that the quality of patching and repairs seemed to be part of the problem. Rather than holes being filled in while they were small, matters were left until holes were quite large before they were patched. Poor quality patching was rapidly broken up by the passage of vehicles.

Mr Galpin, one of the council's voluntary footpath wardens expressed concern that no action was taken on many of the items reported. The Town Mayor said he felt that there was a need to improve communications with town and parish councils. Councillor Whitmarsh added that continuity was important for communication as contacts sometimes broke down due to staff changes. Mr Taylor offered to arrange for other county council officers to attend meetings to discuss specific issues if this would help maintain communications.

Asked how often roads were inspected, Mr Taylor replied that this depended where they were situated. Roads on housing estates were inspected at least once a year, while those in main areas of town would be inspected six times a year. However, the highways unit relied heavily on the public to report problem areas and Mr Taylor encouraged those present to report problem situations promptly.

Councillor Chick raised concerns about the number of signs becoming obscured by foliage, while Councillor Crocker noted that 53% of responses to a recent questionnaire on Alton put potholes and the state of the roads as a priority issue. Councillor Ms Bradford asked if more action might be taken by the police or traffic warden to deal with lorries parking on the kerb.

The Town Mayor thanked Mr Taylor & Mr Soutar for an informative presentation and encouraged members of the public present to report highway problems to the county council.

4 Town Mayor's Address

The Town Mayor noted that his year in office had seen too many sad events, with the attack on the World Trade Centre, the deaths of Princess Margaret, the Queen Mother and a member of staff all occurring during the past year.

This period had seen activity on a number of council projects. The Public Gardens Compound had been rebuilt, the skate park improved and Miss Bell's Fountain refurbished. Plans were in hand for the Assembly Rooms and councillors had also been consulted on the welcome proposals for the new library. Compliments had been received on the condition of the town's parks and gardens, while the council still had ambitions for the future of Flood Meadows.

Open government was a principle that the Town Council supported and information on its activities had been disseminated through the press & the council's own *Altonian* newsletter. The Town Mayor thanked the press for their support and for their coverage of events that he had attended.

Councillor Willoughby thanked the new Town Clerk, Steve Parkinson for pushing the council forward. The proposed Town Plan and vision for Alton 2020 was an important commitment to the town's future. Regrettably a review of the council's finances had indicated that an increase in precept was overdue and the council had had to increase its portion of the council tax for the first time in ten years.

The Town Mayor said that he had particularly enjoyed meeting with the various agencies, clubs and other organisations working for the betterment of the town. One of the key actions of the council during his term in office was the creation of Alton Initiative Management Ltd (AIM for short), a company established jointly with the district council and chamber of commerce to help revitalise Alton. The council had also been working with others to prepare for HM the Queen's Golden Jubilee commemoration.

Councillor Willoughby thanked the Deputy Town Clerk, Greg Burt and the rest of the council staff for their assistance during his year as Town Mayor. He also thanked his wife and family for their support.

In closing his report, the Town Mayor expressed a deep appreciation of the many unsung heroes who were contributing to the culture of the town.

5 Public questions

One resident asked whether the proposed refurbishment of Miss Bell's Fountain would be completed in time. The Deputy Town Clerk responded that once started, the scheme would be completed relatively quickly and was certainly expected to be complete by the due date.

Mrs Gregory asked if it was possible for the grass cuttings to be collected each time the area around the fountain was cut. The Town Mayor explained that this area was the responsibility of East Hampshire District Council and their current grass-cutting contract did not provide for collection. The Town Council did not feel that the grass was cut frequently enough and discussions were ongoing about the possibility of the Town Council taking over this function.

Mr Mangan asked if the council had considered the potential risk to children when granting landlords consent for the proposed telecommunications mast at Chawton Park Road. Councillor Crocker replied that the council had considered all the information available. Councillor Whitmarsh added that information produced by the National Radiological Protection Board did not indicate that there was a notable risk from such installations.

District Councillor JMJ Janes asked if the Town Council would add Westbrooke Road to the list of streets considered for residents parking. This was agreed to. Councillor Janes also advised those present that district council planning officers were not following council policy on conservation areas. They were being trained to offer advice, rather than consulting professional conservation officers.

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

John F. Lick
24/4/03