

ALTON TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE ALTON TOWN ELECTORS' MEETING
HELD IN THE ASSEMBLY ROOMS ON 22 MARCH 2017 AT 7:00PM

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

28 members of the public
1 member of the press

In attendance: Mrs L Coney - Town Clerk
 Mrs P Harris - Admin and Finance Manager
 Mrs S Brown - Admin Officer
 Mrs J McLatch - Business Development Manager
 Councillor A Joy - HCC/EHDC
 Mr D Tigg - Sound Technician

65 **Welcome and Announcements**

The Town Mayor welcomed all to the Annual Meeting of Electors. As a mark of respect before the formal proceedings the Town Mayor announced that there would be a minute's silence following the tragic events in Westminster, London, earlier in the afternoon and the loss of lives.

66 **Minutes**

Mr Mike Hellis had advised the Town Clerk of a small number of grammatical errors in the minutes of the meeting held on 13 April 2016. The Town Clerk had corrected these and the minutes were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

67 **Town Mayor's Address**

The Town Mayor reported that his mayoral year had been an enormous amount of fun and the common theme running through was that it is was a real privilege to meet so many people which make up the rich fabric of Alton. He had met many groups and organisations, many of which he did not know existed and there are many more events still to attend.

The mayoral year had given the Mayor an opportunity to do things differently and an opportunity arose for Open Forums, two have taken place during the year where ideas have been exchanged. The most recent was a Business Forum with the Business Development Manager and Town Clerk in attendance. The Town Mayor said that he would be looking forward to the ideas and outcomes from the Business Forum being taken forward.

It was also the Town Mayor's pleasure to support Home-Start WeyWater as his chosen charity for the year and at the recent Quiz Night managed to raise just over £900.

The Town Mayor ended by paying tribute to the work undertaken by the Town Council staff saying he was impressed by the care and passion they showed for the town and provide real value for money. He was particularly impressed by the efficiency lead by the Town Clerk and the team had made real gains for Alton and its people.

68 Guest Speakers

The Town Mayor welcomed all four Guest Speakers, Lucy Bayliss – East Hampshire Youth Council, Martyn Dell – Jane Austen at 200, Stephen Lewis – Friends of Alton Station - Heritage Footbridge and Sean Herdman-Grant – East Hampshire District Council – Alton Sports Centre.

Lucy Bayliss – East Hampshire Youth Council

Miss Bayliss, Chair of the East Hampshire Youth Council started by saying it was wonderful opportunity to be invited to speak at the Annual Electors' Meeting. She has been involved in a new collaboration, "New Voice", which was started by Alison Cliff of Alton Buckle. Miss Bayliss had visited schools and listened to the views of the young people. The main focus coming out of the meetings were more activities and safe places for young people. Miss Bayliss also advised that a group of students had also met with MP, Damian Hinds.

An Alton Youth Conference was organised but unfortunately, this was not well attended. A Transport Survey for young people with East Hampshire District Council has been carried out showing young people had problems using both buses and trains. The Youth Council has also focused on Education, this academic year sees huge changes in the examination system. This resulted in a letter being written to the Minister of State for Schools with a response received from the Education Minister, which unfortunately, was not positive.

The Youth Council were also volunteers at Busterfest which is an alcohol and drug free event. They also have a "Money Pot Grant" and have granted funds to various different youth groups such as; Alton Buckle, Amery Hill School's Library and Gardening Club, Alton College towards the funding of a new music PA, Riding for the Disabled and the 3rd Alton Brownies.

The Youth Council is under review in June and it is hoped for a better structure with a local focus. Miss Bayliss ended her presentation by saying it had been a pleasure also working alongside Alton Town Council.

Martyn Dell – Jane Austen at 200

Mr Dell, Trustee and Steward of Jane Austen's House Museum gave a presentation on the work that had been happening at the Museum in readiness for the visitors over the next few months.

To commemorate Jane Austen's life there will be an exhibition of 41 items, Jane died at the age of 41. These items range from her turquoise and gold ring, which is on permanent display at the Museum to a "Clueless" doll which was manufactured upon the release of the film, Clueless, which is loosely based on the novel Emma. Rooms have been decorated and wallpapered used to replicate what would have been hung during Jane's time.

Mr Dell also revisited highlights for the Museum over the last couple of years. Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England visited in 2013 to unveil the new design of the next £10 note which features Jane which is due to be release in 2017. Harkness Roses have also created a rose to commemorate Jane's life which was launched at the Chelsea Flower Show.

Mr Dell concluded by saying the Jane Austen's House Museum is releasing a significant amount of activities over the next few months. Further details of these can be found by visiting the following websites www.janeausten200.co.uk or www.jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk.

Stephen Lewis – Friends of Alton Station - Heritage Footbridge

Mr Lewis gave an animated presentation on the history of the heritage footbridge at Alton Railway Station. The bridge was built in 1892 and until 2013 was the only way to get from platforms 2 to 3 when Network Rail spent £1.7 million on a new bridge to provide access for all. It was assumed that the original footbridge would be relocated and preserved elsewhere. A group of local residents felt that something should be done to retain the bridge and this led to the formation of Friends of Alton Station.

The footbridge when opened in 1892 by the London and South Western Railway was open to the air and had lattice-work sides. In 1894 due to demand by the ladies of Alton the footbridge was roofed, boarded and later glazed to protect the travellers crossing over the platforms. The footbridge is the only surviving example of its kind.

Mr Lewis was joined for the presentation by Mr Paul Ebbutt, a retired Structural Engineer, who outlined a number of options that could be considered to preserve the footbridge. Although it has aged well it was in need of repair and restoration. Network Rail have advised that they plan to demolish the footbridge in April 2018. This is a challenge for the Friends of Alton Station who wish to take ownership of the footbridge and are therefore trying to raise fund to restore the footbridge to a museum standard and need the public to support the Friends of Alton Station and keep the footbridge in Alton.

Sean Herdman-Grant – East Hampshire District Council – Alton Sports Centre

Mr Herdman-Grant gave an update on the proposed new Sports Centre. They are at the end of the current management contract which looks after Alton Sports Centre, Mill Chase in Bordon and the Taro Centre in Petersfield. A new operator, SLM – Everyone Active takes over at the beginning of April as they were the preferred bidder. They employ 12,000 staff and are keen to develop their staff.

It is an exciting time, SLM are market leaders and are the fastest growing operator in the region with 146 centres nationally. Part of the contract will see two new Sports Centres, one for Alton the other for Whitehill/Bordon and a renovation of the Taro Centre at Petersfield. The Taro is to be renovated during 2017; scope and fine tuning of the facilities for the new Alton Sports Centre for a new building, September 2019 and the new Sports Centre for Whitehill/Bordon September 2020.

Mr Herdman-Grant advised that all interested parties and users have been invited to speak and give feedback to the District Council. It is an ideal opportunity for a new Sports Centre to deliver not only what is needed now but also for the future. The benefits will be shared with the District Council with £30 million being invested.

Mr Herdman-Grant confirmed that the current Sports Centre will remain open during the building of the new Sports Centre.

The Town Mayor thanked all four speakers.

69 **Alton Town Council's Corporate Strategy Annual Review**

The Town Mayor asked for comments on the Corporate Strategy Annual Review, no comments were received and it was therefore agreed as tabled.

70 **Alton Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring Annual Review**

The Town Mayor asked for comments on the Corporate Strategy Annual Review, no comments were received and it was therefore agreed as tabled.

71 **Alton Town Council's Audited Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2016**

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 and the Accounts were accepted as presented.

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

Mr Joe Walters – Chair of Alton Sports Council, the aim of the Sports Council is to act as an advisory and to develop and encourage sports participation in the town. Mr Walters reported that there are hundreds of people waiting to join some sort of sports club within the town and are all looking forward to a new Sports Centre.

Mr Walters thanked Councillor Dean Phillips for an earlier briefing he had given the Alton Sports Council which had raised a number of concerns:- Timescales – Up and running by the end of 2019 is a tall order and the Sports Council are concerned that a full consultation will not take place. The Sports Council has had difficulty in obtaining information from East Hampshire District Council and may under the Freedom of Information Act ask for details.

Mr Walters also raised a question over the size of the contract for the new Sports Centre; the public have no idea of its contents and trusts what is in it and they would like sight of it once it has been signed. Mr Walters also stated that the Sports Centre needs to be built on trust, at the moment there is mistrust. He concluded by saying that when the Sports Centre was first built on the facing was the slogan “Sport for All” but feels the new Sports Centre will be “Sport for those who can afford it”.

Councillor Phillips thanked Mr Walters for all his hard work and interactions on behalf of Alton Sports Council.

Councillor Andrew Joy added that he had followed the Sports Centre story for many years. The Swimming Club based at the Sports Centre has an astonishing and good reputation with sporting

excellence. The original Sport Centre was built with a 25 year life span, it is now over 40 years old and a new Sports Centre is a long time coming. There is a considerable demand and requirement for a modern eight lane pool, repeating dialogue over the previous four to five years. Councillor Joy commented that assurances had been received for an eight lane pool would be considered but recent publicity states there will only be a six lane pool and he wanted reassurance that there still remains scope for further discussions for an eight lane pool.

Mrs Pat Lerew spoke in support of the Friends of Alton Station. Tourism is going to be increasingly important to Alton this coming year. Alton has lost its agricultural and brewing industry history and tourism is going to be increasingly important to Alton. Alton needs tourism and the footbridge at the railway station adding her thanks to Councillor Phillips and fellow District Councillors from their grant funding for their financial support to help pay for an independent report on the footbridge. Mrs Lerew added that this year is the 10th anniversary of the Jane Austen Regency Week, running from 17 to 25 June. The Regency Week had recently made the national press appearing in The Sun on Sunday and the Radio times. Mrs Lerew ended by thanking Councillors for their support and the Town Council for the grant funding for the Regency Week.

Ms Louise Fletcher – Alton and District Swimming Club has been involved with the Club for 15 years and spoke in support of an eight lane pool with a pool of that size allowing shared use and flexibility.

The Town Mayor reminded the meeting that the Guest Speakers were here to present and the Councillors were here to answer questions. Mr Herdman-Grant did respond by saying when the contract is in place, hopefully in mid-April, there will be a series of site presentations and individual meetings with Clubs.

Mr James Lyne – Alton Squash Academy echoed the comment raised by Alton and District Swimming Club by stating that the Squash Academy will be losing facilities within the new Sports Centre seeing reduction of four courts down to two asking if there was time for consultations.

The Town Mayor asked Mr Herdman-Grant asked a general question, to what extent can the public influence the decision on the new facility? Mr Herdman-Grant responded by saying there was a limitation physically with what can be done within the space. The design is being worked through and feedback had been invited to gauge views. These views will be listened to and the operator needs to get the best possible solution to ensure user participation and the new facility is well used. Councillor Phillips reported he had already been in consultation with Mr Laurie Cufley of Alton and District Sports Council and a date is already in the diary.

Councillor Mrs Pam Jones said that in 2015 there was a Stakeholders Group meeting established with only one representative from Alton Town Council and would like to ensure that the Town Council still has a representative on any future meetings. She added that it had also been reported that there would not be a learner pool stating it is essential that User Groups are consulted.

Councillor Phillips responded by saying there had been a number of reincarnations and there is still open dialogue. It was reported that there will be no learner pool, which was mis-reported and confirmed there would definitely be a learner pool.

Councillor Bayliss added that there is a real interest in sport and the bigger picture is that a briefing is urgently required on the new Sports Centre and dialogue needs to commence.

Mr Bob Booker – Alton Society extended a big thank you to the Town Council for hosting the recent Business Forum and those who attended the Forum left with their spirits visibly lifted and thanked Mrs Julie McLatch, Business Development Manager for arranging the Forum. Mr Booker asked if there were any plans to bid for government or regional funding. Mrs McLatch responded by saying she is an employee of East Hampshire District Council but funded 50% by Alton Town Council and yes, there are many grant funds available, both centrally and locally. At this current time she is looking to see what is appropriate and available.

Mr Bill Griffin raised the Section 106 Agreement of £150,000 from the Bass Sports Ground to find 1.6 hectares of recreational ground and asked what progress has been made to find the land and also what will happen if the land is not found after five years will the money go back to Molson Coors? Mr Griffin asked for a line to be added to the Corporate Strategy so the Town Council can monitor. Councillor Graham Hill responded by saying the £150,000 is an obligation on East Hampshire District Council and Molson Coors in agreement passed on to Miller Homes and agreed to put a specific line in the Corporate Strategy and will be put before Full Council.

Mr Chris Youngs – Chairman of Cardiac Rehab wished to address the Town Council on two items relating to Cardiac Rehab. 1) The Cardiac Rehab shop in Market Street and 2) the Sports Centre.

The shop has problems financially with trading struggling over the last few years and is not making money. The shop suffered a major flood and there are 13 charity shops in Alton and there is a risk that the Directors/Trustees may have to make a decision to close the shop. The lease comes to an end on the 1 January 2019 and Mr Youngs wishes to encourage the people of Alton and the Town Council to support the shop.

From 1986 to 1990 Mr Youngs managed the Sports Centre, since the mid 1990s the building has needed replacing and he is pleased to see that there is going to be a new building. Cardiac Rehab need to negotiate a new lease as a new exercise track is proposed where Cardiac Rehab is currently located and would like to see compensation. Mr Youngs asked if there were any constraints, which there is not. Mr Youngs had come to the Council when the planning application was received under Reserved Matters and advised that Mr Herdman-Grant had spoken with three of Cardiac Rehab's Trustees to discuss the impact of the building process and in the interim the area needs to be kept safe for the users of Cardiac Rehab due to new facility's close proximity.

Mr Youngs concluded by saying the new Sports Centre will benefit the town and should at the very least, have the same facilities as we currently have and need to grow to meet the needs and be best value for the town.

The Town Mayor responded by saying Alton is richer for have the Cardiac Rehab Centre and asked Mr Youngs to keep the Town Council informed on the development of the shop. As for the sub lease this would need to be discussed with East Hampshire District Council and dialogue need to be established with them direct in respect of any compensation.

Mrs Gwen Clifford and her family have been regular users of the current Sports Centre and also have involvement with Girl Guiding, Scouting and Education in the local area. Any consultation on the new Sports Centre needs to include the surrounding villages and involve the wider community. Mrs Clifford's concerns is that the new Sports Centre will not accommodate the future needs.

The Town Mayor thanked Mrs Clifford for sharing her concerns with the Town Council informing her that her comments need to be directed to East Hampshire District Council and for her to look out for the upcoming consultations.

Mr Rod Hudd – Alton Operatic and Dramatic Society wished to thank the Town Clerk and the Admin and Finance Manager for their recent meeting looking at the needs at the Assembly Rooms for the Society. Mr Hudd asked, as a commuter to Guildford, was there any update on a direct train link from Alton to Guildford. The Town Mayor answered that there is regular and ongoing dialogue with the train service provider and the Town Council has been lobbying South West Trains and National Rail for a dual track between Alton and Farnham. Councillor Hill added the simple message is that passenger numbers need to double before any dual track is considered and as a Town Council we do not have direct control.

Ms Pam Bradford heard with interest Mr Herdman-Grant's presentation and commented that with two new Sports Centres being built and a renovation at Petersfield will there be enough money to carry out all three projects? Mr Herdman-Grant advised that all bidders had to meet the criteria of the financial requirements. Ms Bradford responded by asking but we will get what want? Mr Herdman-Grant responded by saying Alton will get the lion's share but the new Sports Centre needs to serve the whole district.

Councillor Phillips concluded by saying there had been fears heard at the meeting about the Sports Centre and has so far been an epic journey. East Hampshire District Council need to brief and meet Alton Town Council as soon as possible.

As there were no more questions the Town Mayor thanked the Guest Speakers, members of the public for attending and their questions and was grateful for those sharing their opinions and thoughts.

The meeting closed at 8:50pm.