

**ALTON TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE ALTON TOWN ELECTORS' MEETING
HELD ON 13 MARCH 2024 AT 7:00PM**

Present: Councillor Annette Eyre - Town Mayor
 Matthew Bayliss
 John Chubb
 Don Hammond
 Graham Hill
 Matthew Kellermann
 Nick O'Brien
 Janice Treacher
 Peter Wadman
 Jonathan Waugh

Apologies: Councillor Barbara Tansey
 Mark Boyce-Churn

In attendance: Pat Harris - Interim Town Clerk
 Hayley Carter - Deputy Clerk
 Samantha Brown - Councillor Support/
 Admin Officer
 Mike Heelis - Chair, Alton Neighbourhood
 Plan Steering Group
 Karen Murrell - Dementia Friendly Alton
 Gordon Anderson - Alton Men's Shed
 3 members of the public

110 Welcome and Town Mayors Address

The Town Mayor welcomed all to the Annual Meeting of Electors and made the following address:

A warm welcome to this evening's Annual Electors meeting.

I would like to begin this evening with extending my thanks and gratitude to:

- all the staff that make up the Town Council, for all their hard work and for always going that extra mile that often goes unnoticed by many, to ensure the smooth running of the council throughout the year.
- I would also like to warmly thank my colleagues and fellow councillors for their commitment and hard work in performing their role and for the time and contribution they all give to making Alton a better place; some have been a councillor over many years and some who are still fairly new to the role and are still learning - thank you one and all.

- Alton is a community that thrives on the back of its volunteers; some of whom have given years serving in the community – and a lot of the time this is something that goes un-noticed. I believe passionately that these unsung and unpaid volunteers (and Alton has a great many) deserve our thanks for all they do for Alton and the wider area; without them our town would be a much poorer place.

I am aware of the honour I have had this year in serving as Deputy Mayor up until 1st March after which time I was elected by my fellow councillors to take up the role of Town Mayor of Alton.

It has been a busy but a wonderful year so far attending a great many and varied events and meeting so many different people.

I find it hard to single out just one memorable event but one of the highlights must surely be the Christmas lights switch on which was such a joyous occasion and when it seemed like the whole of Alton turned out on the evening – the High Street was absolutely buzzing and a hive of festive activity. Equally, just recently, two further orchard planting projects were completed; the first at the top of the Hawthorn Allotments site when volunteers from the Allotment Association and plot-holders joined with the grounds team and St Lawrence school to plant 14 trees. More recently, I joined volunteers with fellow Councillors Graham Hill & Suzie Burns together with students from Year 8 at Eggar's School and pre-school children from the Lime Tree Nursery & Holybourne pre-school to plant out 29 trees that forms phase 2 of the at Barley Fields Orchard.

I feel privileged to call Alton my home and I am proud to serve the town not only as a Councillor, but now as it's Mayor. I know that Alton has seen many great changes over the last year, but I believe it is still a great place to live despite those changes. It remains surrounded by wonderful accessible countryside and continues to enjoy a vibrant community life with so many local groups and associations to join and be part of.

I will continue to serve Alton for as long as it needs me and along with my fellow councillors will endeavour to continue making Alton the very best it can be.

111 **Minutes of the Annual Meeting held on 15th March 2023**

On the proposal of Councillor Matthew Bayliss, seconded by Councillor Annette Eyre, it was

RESOLVED

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record and will be signed by the Town Mayor at a later date.

All councillors voted in favour except Matthew Kellermann who abstained.

112 To table the Alton Town Council Audited Accounts for the year ending 31st March 2023

Councillors noted the Audited Accounts as presented and that the External Auditor had raised no comments

On the proposal of Councillor Graham Hill, seconded by Councillor John Chubb, it was

RESOLVED

To approve the Audited Accounts for the year ending 31st March 2023

All councillors voted in favour except Matthew Kellermann who abstained.

113 Town Mayor to welcome representatives of Community Groups to speak about the work they do in the Community

The Town Mayor welcomed each of the speakers in turn.

Mike Heelis, Chair of the Alton Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (ANPSG)

Mike introduced himself and read out the following extract taken from the draft Plan:

1. This Neighbourhood Development Plan has been created by Alton Town Council in Hampshire in order to shape the town's growth. It has been written to become a part of East Hampshire District Council's (EHDC's) statutory Development Plan (the plan for the whole district outside of the South Downs National Park). The purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan is to set out a series of planning policies that will be used to determine planning applications in the area in the period to 2040. The Plan will form part of the development plan for East Hampshire which will eventually be replaced by the emerging Local Plan and will cover the same period.
2. Neighbourhood Plans provide local communities with the chance to manage the quality of development of their areas. Once approved at a referendum, the Plan becomes part of the Councils statutory development plan and will carry significant weight in how planning applications are decided in the neighbourhood area. Plans must therefore contain only land use planning policies that can be used for this purpose. This often means that there are important issues of interest to the local community that cannot be addressed in a Plan if they are not directly related to planning. Although there is scope for the local community to decide on its planning policies, Neighbourhood Plans must meet all of the relevant basic conditions.
3. "The essence of Alton resides in the fact that the town is 'hidden' from the landscape whilst being an integral part of it. Development has been constrained from breaking the green skyline formed by the neighbouring hills, which can be seen from all parts of the town. The undulating, yet open, nature of the land allows panoramic views which give a sense of space, freedom and tranquillity.:"

Mike stated that Alton is our town, and that is why nine members of the public have been motivated to form the steering group to write the new Neighbourhood Plan. The plan is now mostly written and includes all the policies including climate change, transport, education, design codes and health.

Alton Town Council is yet to endorse the Steering Group's recommendation to not include site allocations. Not all neighbourhood plans have site allocations so it would not be unusual for Alton to decline to do so, and faced with the level of pushback from residents, it is imperative that the plan does not fail at referendum.

Having a neighbourhood plan results in 10% additional CIL funding for the town to spend on infrastructure.

The next step in the process will be the Reg 14 consultation, planned for early June, then the document must be submitted to EHDC for sign-off before going forward for 'examination'. This will then lead to a public referendum and hopefully adoption.

Questions from the floor

Councillor Bayliss asked what would happen if site allocations are left in and the plan failed at referendum, but the EHDC Local Plan had not allocated as they thought the ANP was doing that.

There would be a hole which would need to be filled by EHDC or central government and the town could be open to speculative development. However, the current ANP is valid until November 2026.

Councillor Chubb asked would he be right in thinking that if they don't allocate in the ANP then EHDC will allocate anyway.

Yes that is correct.

Mr Andrew Joy said that the quality and quantity of the work that Mike and his team have done deserves a huge amount of thanks and must be acknowledged. He went on to ask whether the ANPSG felt assured by EHDC that the infrastructure would be improved along with all the development.

No, Mike does not believe that Alton has received the fair amount of infrastructure for the amount of development it is getting.

Karen Murrell – Dementia Friendly Alton (DFA)

Karen thanks everyone for coming to the Assembly Rooms; the new home of DFA, and said she would be happy to show anyone around at the end of the meeting to show them the work they had done so far.

DFA were established in 2014. They were the first Dementia-friendly Community in East Hants (2014) and the first UK Meeting Centre in Hampshire (2023).

DFA provide 'joined up' local support for Persons with Dementia and their carers / families:

- Better physical health for PLWD and carer
- Increased sense of being 'able to cope'
- Access to essential information
- Improved economic status
- Happier and supportive communities (in Meeting Centre and at Home)
- Living with healthier lifestyles and enhanced sense of Wellbeing

Relocation to Alton Assembly Rooms enhances Culture, Health and Wellbeing for ALL.

Five Ways to Well-being:

1. Be active

- Varied programme for regular physical activity – across 6 days a week. Other venue users engage in range of activity. Associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety across all groups.
- Regular exercise is essential for slowing age-related cognitive decline and for promoting well-being.
- It is important that a person finds something which suits their mobility and level of fitness.
- Pleased to be able to support a varied range of activities for all groups: U3A / Dance School / Yoga / Zumba / Dance Sanctuary

2. Connect

- Feeling close to and valued by other people is a fundamental human need contributing to a sense of wellbeing. Key factor of the support group
- People (Carers) who are connected with family, friends or people living in their community are happier, physically healthier, live longer and generally have fewer mental health problems.
- Alton Assembly Rooms is an ideal location to connect and socialise – AODS already established, new hirers encouraged and introduction of cinema

3. Give

- Individuals who report a greater interest in helping others are more likely to rate themselves as happy – this relates to our whole community
- It has been proved that people who commit an act of kindness once a week over a six-week period report an improvement in their wellbeing
- Volunteer opportunities are many and varied
- Our members – PLWD – also have a sense of fulfilment in that they are ‘custodians’ of this important venue for the Town – which has ‘given them back their life’ (quote from one member)

4. Keep Learning

- People should never stop learning and challenging themselves
- Diverse range of activities within the dementia programme and for other venue users
- Learning throughout life enhances self-esteem, increases confidence and encourages social interaction
- It generally leads to people having a more active life
- Opportunities for learning include: Music / Dance / Art / Drama / Writing / Horticulture

5. Take Notice

- Life can be very busy with little time to stop and reflect, and opportunities can be limited

- Reminding people to 'take notice' and take opportunities can strengthen and broaden awareness.
- Studies have shown that when people are aware of what is taking place in the present it directly enhances well-being.
- People worry less about the future and what has happened in the past and can see what really matters, allowing them to make positive choices.

How can you get involved?

We want as many people as possible in Alton to recognise the value of and benefit from looking after their health and wellbeing, and engaging with what's on offer at the Assembly Rooms and other community venues in Alton

- There are many interesting sessions available at the Assembly Rooms and more to come
- Visit any of our sessions to find out more about what we do
- There are lots of volunteering opportunities – whether it's supporting the dementia sessions as an activity helper or getting involved in the running of the venue and associated events

Visit our websites – to find out more about what's on offer - Dementia-friendly Alton / Alton Assembly Rooms

Karen said she feels the Assembly Rooms will be a great fit for DFA and is very excited to be able to reinvigorate the building and share it with the whole community. They currently have about three and a half days of support a week for their members, but coming to the Assembly Rooms will enable them to increase this to five, including some evenings. They currently have the U3A, Zumba, and other community activities in the building and will be introducing a community cinema. It is a great space where people can connect, and they are anticipating that they will be able to get more volunteers as it is such a good location.

Karen quoted a member who said that "I'm so excited we are going to be looking after this building. You've given us back our life"

There are future plans for a Holistic Treatment Centre and DFA are putting in an application for funding to achieve this.

Karen invited people to pop in and meet the team anytime from 0900 – 1600 – Mon – Fri from Good Friday in the Assembly Rooms.

Questions from the floor

Councillor Chubb said that he thought DFA would be excellent custodians of the building and asked what 'New Age Curling' is (in their latest newsletter)
It is curling that can take place in the main hall

Councillor Hill thanked DFA and particularly Karen for everything they have done and asked if the Alzheimers awareness and inclusiveness scheme is still going in the town
It is not still going. DFA will be developing something similar but cannot use the same branding.

Gordon Anderson – Chairman and Trustee, Alton Men's Shed (AMS)

Gordon has been living in Alton for ten years, but in the area for much longer. He explained that there are myths around what a Men's Shed is. It is not:

- just a workshop
- just for old men
- just for men!
- just for tradesmen
- just dusty oily greasy projects
- NOT got high expectations of your abilities
- NOT a panacea for all ills!

It is about helping mental health and giving people some self-respect and self-worth back. It's objectives include:

- To provide a space in which to meet and pursue practical activities with like minded people.
- To share lifetime skills & learn new skills from others in a casual friendly environment
- To work on personal and community projects with a focus on working together with others
- To help each other understand modern technology, medical concerns, ageing and their challenges

Shed activities include:

- Walks, Visits, Coffee & Cake, Just Chat
- Even the young are stressed in today's society
- An outlet for artistic flare and purpose
- Outdoor Personal and Community Projects
- Support to ALFI, schools, sports clubs, Beavers
- Try using lathes & other professional machines
- Others have experienced your problem too

Who joins a Men's Shed?

- Some Men's Sheds are just social groups
- We have members in their 20's & 30's
- Our Project Assessor & Craft Leader is a lady
- We have folk from all walks of life
- A wish to from learn or teach others a craft
- Share troubles and problems with others
- A burden shared is a burden halved

Participants:

- The retired
who suddenly find they no longer have work colleagues or social relationships

- The bereaved
who find themselves on their own after many years living with a partner
- Daytime television addicts
Those at home watching daytime television on their own with little else to do
- The unemployed
Those who are keen to be actively involved in something productive
- The isolated & lonely
Those who feel they have lost their self worth and are not appreciated by society
- Care home and flat residents
Those with limited facilities or lack like minded people with which to associate
- Carers
Carers who need a few rest bite hours away from daily chores and responsibilities
- GP practices / social prescriber referrals
Those who Suffer from Anxiety , Bi-Polar Conditions, Stress etc

Their first shed was literally a shed – 4mx3m, which worked fine until the numbers coming along had increased. AMS are now located at Edgar Hall in Anstey Park.

- Wonderful accommodation
- Leased from Alton Town Council
- A vacated St John's Ambulance Centre
- A ready made brick workshop with facilities
- Appropriate non-residential location
- Scope to increase membership
- Flexibility to Open Monday to Friday from 9:00 am
- Easy access & car parking space

Since moving to Edgar Hall they are able to expand their numbers:

- 2 people joining most weeks
- Close to 40 registered members
- Currently open most weekday mornings
- Scope to take on many more participants
- Diversifying the range of activities
- Undertaking more mainly community projects

They were previously sharing the space with DFA, but moving forward will be in partnership with Brazilian Jujitsu, which should be a better fit for both groups:

- Complimentary use of the building
- AMS 9:00 till late afternoon
- BJ Late afternoon and evening
- Building security improved by constant use
- Shared resources reduce individual costs
- AMS skills available for maintenance tasks
- Joint administration of the building overall

AMS Management now:

- A Charity Commission Registered Charity
- Five Registered Trustees
- Eight Strong Management Team Currently
- Challenges arising with increased membership
- Everybody is a volunteer with limited time
- Commitments cannot always be fulfilled
- Policy & Procedures have become essential

Funding:

- Excellent support from our Councillors
- Increasing support from local companies
- Our fundraising coordinator is always active
- Project activities are generously supported
- Planned 2024 participation in local events
- Membership Fees cover insurance premiums
- Our move to a new workshop and future growth has been helped by our supporters and sponsors.

Non-discretionary expenses include:

- Public & Trustees Liability Insurance
- Contents & Personal Injury Insurance
- Gas, Electricity, Water, Fire Protection
- Rent & Rates (discounted)
- Consumables (Soap, Bleach, Toilet Rolls etc)
- Administration & Subscription Costs
- Workshop Consumables & tool maintenance

Many funders want to fund projects but will not fund sustainability costs

Successful projects undertaken so far include:

- Planters for ALFI & local School Initiatives
- Beavers support: Bird Boxes & Craft Projects
- Community Repairs – Benches, Pews & Gates
- Personal Repairs: Lawn Mowers & Tools
- School & Playgroup Play Equipment
- Provision of wheelchair ramps & access issues
- Workshop & tool development
- Edgar Hall Building & Garden Maintenance

Material costs are charged and work is done for a donation.

It's not all work – AMS has a very active social side:

- Every year we have a Summer BBQ and a Christmas lunch. All very informal and well attended by many of the members and wives/partners.

- In addition, we aim to have at least three outings every year. These are generally trips to museums, heritage sights, any where that takes our fancy.
- We also meet once a month for "The Shedders Social". A Coffee , cake and chat session held on a Friday morning at our craft Shed.

Questions from the floor

Councillor Bayliss asked how many members they could have.

Anticipate around 50 by the end of the year. There is the potential to have around 100.

Mrs Diane Wood said that when Resurrection Furniture opened AMS did a lot of good work for them and they could not have managed without them.

Councillor Hill said there are certainly lots of benefits to it and asked if there are many others.

There are 57 in Hampshire.

Councillor Hill went on to say that AMS had done a good job on the town noticeboards and that AMS had asked them to research using a local craftsperson first.

Gordon confirmed that AMS do not want to take business from local tradesmen and so they will always check first that they are not doing so. They also have to consider health and safety and public liability so it is not always appropriate for them to take on certain projects.

Councillor Chubb asked, given that there are so many Men's Sheds around the county, and indeed the country, whether there was scope to pool together to get cheaper insurance and the like.

UK Men's Shed did take on the problem and there is now the possibility.

114 **Open Forum - To receive questions and statements from Electors of the Alton Town Council area, including those received in advance**

The were no questions for the Council.

115 **Closing Comments**

The Mayor took the opportunity to thank everyone for attending this evening.

There being no further questions, the meeting closed at 8.13 pm.