

Minutes of the **ANNUAL TOWN MEETING** of Buckingham held in Buckingham Community Centre on Wednesday 23rd March 2011 at 7.30 pm

Present: Cllr. M. Smith –Town Mayor
9 Town Councillors
Mr. Jon McGinty – AVDC
Mr. Mark Grindall - BCC
Insp. E. Garside – Thames Valley Police
11 Parishioners of Buckingham
6 non-residents

Also present: Mr. Christopher Wayman – Town Clerk
Mrs. Anita Simonds – Deputy Town Clerk

1. Apologies for absence

RESOLVED to note that apologies were received from Councillor Bloomfield, Mr. J. Bercow MP, AVA, Mr. J. Byrne (AVDC Planning), Cllr. D. Shakespeare & Mr. C. Williams (BCC), Miss A. Wells (The Buckingham School), Mr. D. Hudson (Royal Latin School), Prof. T. Kealey (University of Buckingham) and Mr. A. Johnson (Buckingham Town Cricket Club).

2. To receive and approve the minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 24th March 2010

The Minutes were approved. There were no matters arising.

3. To receive a report by the Mayor of Buckingham and the Chairmen of the different Committees on the work of Buckingham Town Council

The Mayor thanked the Town Clerk, staff and Councillors for their hard work towards the Council's achievements in a challenging year.

After last year's concerns about investment by the District in Buckingham, AVDC had contributed to a Shopping Directory, a branding exercise and the Christmas Spectacular in collaboration with the Traders' Association and, via AVA, funded a report on updating the Town's Vision & Design Statement and a Parking and Access Survey.

However AVDC withdrew funding from the TIC and the Buckingham Summer Festival, and the County Council from the Youth Centre, leading to the Town Council finding money for these rather than lose them.

Looking forward, 'Localism' will increase the work of town and parish councils, as will Neighbourhood Planning; the Bourton Park play areas are in need of refurbishment and the town needs more cemetery space.

The Green Spaces team has been working with the Thames Valley Probation Service Community Payback scheme to improve the appearance of the cemetery and parks. 30 fruit trees and 2500 crocuses (via a Rotary Charity scheme) have been planted in Bourton Park by local children and Chandos Park has a new playground and multi-use games area.

The town has fewer empty premises than other similar market towns.

The Council will be increasing its staff to cope with the additional workload, and moving into more spacious premises at the Buckingham Centre in Verney Close, thereby releasing the Council Chamber back for meetings of both the Council and other groups.

The Town Council element of the Council Tax will remain the same for the third successive year. We will continue to work with Buckingham Economic Group, Buckingham Green Group, the Neighbourhood Action Group and the Probation Service.

Cllr. Warren Whyte, Chairman of the Planning Committee, noted that over 100 applications had been considered over the year and several consultations responded to. Considerable effort had been put into the now withdrawn Core Strategy, and more would be needed on the Buckingham part of the Vale of Aylesbury Plan, using this work and the existing Buckingham Plan.

As a result of a workshop held with stakeholders, including AVDC, BCC, the University and town businesses, the Buckingham Plan Action Plan had been updated; details are on the Council website.

Significant housing growth has been approved, but as yet no parallel expansion of employment areas.

As the Vision & Design Statement produced by the Buckingham Society is now 10 years old, it was decided to update it and AVA commissioned a report from consultants on how to move forward on this, and the work will be carried out in the coming year.

Councillors and residents collaborated on a Conservation Area Survey of the town.

The Council is also represented on many bodies such as the Local Planning Liaison Group and the North Bucks. Parishes Planning Consortium, useful bodies for the exchange of views and making Buckingham's voice heard all over the north of the Vale.

The Committee has been active in Enforcement matters, reporting breaches of planning rules, unauthorised changes of use, etc.

The Council will shortly receive the Parking & Access Study commissioned from consultants via AVA, and this will be a useful evidence base on how to manage existing parking and cope with future expansion; the proposals and conclusions should be interesting.

Next year will be as busy, keeping up with legislation and working on the Vale of Aylesbury Plan.

Cllr. Ruth Newell, Chairman of the Environment & Property Committee, noted that the work of the Committee had changed considerably from when she had previously chaired it; its remit was to protect and improve the town environment, its street furniture, seats, bins and planters; maintain and administer the Cemetery; maintain Bourton and Chandos Parks, the Ken Tagg Play Area, the Railway and Circular Walks; assist AVDC and BCC with the paths, cycleways and public open spaces; make recommendations to the Council on the purchase, sale and disposal of land and ensure that works were properly carried out. All but one Councillor was a member.

Mr. Phillips now oversees all burial work and administration and the work done by the Probation Service personnel:

- a regular gravedigger has been employed;
- Cemetery Lodge has been rented out;
- a new equipment store has been rented replacing the garage at Overn Crescent;
- the War Memorial has been cleaned and repaired;
- two new play areas in Chandos Park have been completed and appropriately named for Cllr. Pam Desorgher, a supporter of the Youth Centre, and Cllr. K. Liverseidge, a lifelong cricket fan;
- we continue to work with the Chandos Park Bowls and Tennis Clubs to improve facilities;
- with the co-operation of BCC, additional salt/grit bins have been installed in the town;
- we support the 2 conservation groups (Railway Walk and Maids Moreton Avenue), the Wildlife Project and BTCV;
- the Green Fair is organised in partnership with the University, the *Advertiser* and the Green Group and takes place on Saturday 26th March in the Community Centre; all welcome.

Cllr. Isham asked if the Committee was investigating the purchase of new land for burials.

Cllr. Newell answered that it was being looked at and a report would be made to the Committee in due course; the Town Clerk added that 8 potential sites had been considered; 2 sites might lead to traffic problems, and one was not large enough. Ownership of the others was being investigated and tests would need to be carried out to ensure sufficient usable depth.

Cllr. Robin Stuchbury, Chairman of the Town Centre and Events Committee, noted that emergency funding had been found for the Buckingham Summer Festival to continue after AVDC withdrew; a prestigious event with internationally-known artists should not be lost to the town. This year the Festival and the Town Council week of events had been separated: the Buckingham Fringe would take place in June with, amongst others, Shappi Khorsandi the comedienne, the Oxford Fiddle Group, and the only known rock band composed of MPs - MP4 - who would be raising money for Help for Heroes.

Last year, both Music in the Market and Band Jam had been very well attended (and had excellent weather). The same was true of the Bonfire and Fireworks; people came from miles around both because it was free and the park was a safe environment. He thanked Cllr. Mahi for organising it for the last two years.

The Committee's involvement with the young people of the town had carried on, with members of both senior schools meeting to debate before the Speaker, Mr. Bercow, during Local Democracy Week; 30 fruit trees had been planted in the Park and he hoped would bear fruit soon for the children to pick. A new Councillor, Mrs. O'Donoghue, was actively involved with setting up a Youth Council and also with this year's Youth Drama Project; scripts submitted for this were currently being judged, and the performance is scheduled for 10th July.

The market income had fallen after the introduction of parking charges, and some stalls lost, but was beginning to pick up maintaining this integral part of a market town. The Deputy Town Clerk was looking into reviving the Farmers Market.

A new member of staff was being considered to run the events and release the Deputy Clerk to do more strategic work.

He thanked the Deputy Clerk and all the Councillors who helped with the events throughout the year.

Cllr. Mrs. Geraldine Collins, Chairman of the Finance, Administration and Personnel Committee, was pleased to report that, once again, the precept was 0% increase on last year even though more staff would be employed to clear the backlog as well as cover an expanded workload as services are passed down to the Town Council due to Government legislation and District and County Council cuts. The staff would soon be moving into improved accommodation; those who visited the office knew how cramped it was. She thanked the Town Clerk and all the staff for the excellent job they continue to do.

4. To receive a presentation from representatives on their work in 2009/2010

4.1 Buckinghamshire County Council

Mark Grindall gave a Power-Point presentation showing the workings of the Locality Strategy, which aims to erase duplication and help parish and town councils achieve more – the move of the Town Council to the Buckingham Centre was an example; all three Councils would then be in the same building.

50,000 households were now able to access an active Neighbourhood Group, LAF funding was doubled, and local transport issues were being addressed. The LAFs enabled local councillors to champion local causes. There are 19 Local Areas, Buckingham being the largest with 36 parishes in it.

The Young People budget had enabled Community Impact Bucks' i-van to visit 50 parishes, some more than once, and provided diversionary activities for young people for a modest outlay. Local Priority Funding of a sports cage which can be erected in a village hall, for example, and provide a safe area for ball games to be played, has proved popular.

Buckingham LAF also provided funds to support Twyford Village Stores which sells locally sourced food and is manned by volunteers.

The final slide showed how the Bucks. and Local Strategic Partnerships linked via the LAFs to the Town and Parish Councils/community led organisations.

Cllr. Stuchbury expressed concern that the drop-in centre at the Youth Centre would be lost; this was a useful advice source for young people. He appealed to the County Council to find funds to continue its work: £1200 was not very much.

Mr. Grindall indicated that it would be discussed, and could also be raised via the LAF. He could not comment on the funding, but noted that £1200 x many community requests could amount to a large sum.

4.2 Aylesbury Vale District Council & Buckingham Partnership

Jon McGinty praised the greater partnership working between the different councils evident this year.

The new play area at Stratford Fields was now open, and work would start on those at Otters Brook and Overn Avenue later in the year.

An on-line survey of young people had led to better holiday activity provision – arts and crafts at Easter, and skatepark-based in the summer.

Buckingham Primary School had planted black poplars in the Heartlands and new trees had also been planted on Badgers.

AVDC had contributed £12,000 towards the branding exercise carried out by the Traders, Town Council, LAF and University, and the branding of Buckingham was being carried forward.

More than 90 Buckingham households now had flood protection installed by AVDC contractors, paid for from Government funds.

AVDC were working with the Police on community safety, particularly the Nightsafe scheme with advice and information packs.

Usage dropped after the controversial parking charges were introduced, but the scheme has been refined following feedback on Stratford Fields and Western Avenue, and the results of the survey would be useful.

Three Business Grants have been given out in the Buckingham area, and £4000-£5000 to organisations from the Community Chest.

AVDC has become a Friend of Buckingham Canal Society and is supporting its aim of eventually connecting with the Grand Union at Milton Keynes.

Progress on the Vale of Aylesbury can be followed via the Newsletters on the website, but requirements are still being worked out. The Buckingham Partnership and the Town Council are working on a master plan for Buckingham.

Savings of £2.5million – 10% - need to be found, but these will not be to front-line services.

Cllr. Mrs Blake, Chairman of AVDC, wished to thank Buckingham Town Council for its support of the recent RAF Halton Freedom Parade, which had brought many people into the town.

Cllr. Isham remarked that, given the propensity of the town to flood, he was glad the vulnerable households now had some protection. The EA modelling showed that there would be a flood event twice in a hundred years, which was contrary to experience; he hoped they would now see sense over the canal project.

Cllr. P. Lewis (AVDC) reported that Anglian Water, the Town Council and the Canal Society had recently met to consider drainage in the east of the town; more information was to be expected shortly.

Cllr. Hirons asked what AVDC was doing to help access to the Silverstone employment area – SNDC had provided grant funding. The road access from Buckingham was totally inadequate.

Mr. McGinty said that AVDC had been active players in the master plan and sourcing funding streams, but the Council had no funds of its own.

4.3 Thames Valley Police

Inspector Garside, responsible for the rural areas of the North Vale, informed the meeting that TVP had to find savings of £5billion and were collaborating with neighbouring forces to combine activities – eg IT with Hampshire Constabulary. The 5 Commands will be abolished and the 15

local units will remain; it is unlikely that residents will notice the change. 800 posts will be lost, but these are mostly staff not officers, and it is hoped by wastage rather than redundancy. Aylesbury Vale will remain as a single unit.

Supt. List is moving to HQ and will be replaced in April by Supt. Wrigley.

A new matrix across the whole force aims to place the right numbers in each area, depending on the population and the type of police work required. There will be 15 new police officer posts in the Vale, and the number of Special Constables is also to be increased.

She felt the Police and Community Support Officers on her staff are the right people for the job, as evidenced by their success.

A move from Moreton Rod is still planned: the building is not suitable, and the parking area for the marked cars not secure. However if a suitable place is found, possibly an industrial unit, the Old Gaol office would be maintained for public accessibility.

Taking figures from 1st April 2010 to 28th February 2011, crime was down 25% in the area; reports of anti-social behaviour are down from 34 reports/month in 2010 to 19.

She thanked the *Buckingham & Winslow Advertiser* for their support, both with news items and challenging misconceptions.

A speed gun had been purchased.

3 HGV checks had been carried out in the town centre in response to local concerns.

They had worked with AVDC Licensing on taxi checks, BCC Trading Standards on under-age alcohol sales, and Bourton Meadow School on dangerous and anti-social parking.

The Police had built up a good relationship with local youngsters via the monthly football game, and had played a combined team against Buckingham Athletic recently. This would have been unthinkable a year ago.

Cllr. Isham asked how funding cuts would affect the move to Special Constables.

Insp. Garside pointed out that, though Specials had the same powers as full-time Police Officers, they were volunteers; cuts would not affect them, and they would enhance the existing team.

Cllr. Stuchbury expressed concern that the cuts to staffing and pensions might lead to disaffection, causing officers to leave. Might this lead to a rise in crime?

Insp. Garside indicated that it was her job to see her staff were happy.

5. To receive reports by recipients of 2009/2010 grants over £1000

Buckingham Athletic Sports & Social Club, Buckingham Summer Festival, Project Street Life and St. Peter and St. Paul's Church attended the meeting and gave brief presentations of how their grants had been used. Buckingham Town Cricket Club had sent a written report which was read out by the Town Clerk.

6. Cllr. David Polhill (BCC, Buckingham North)

Cllr. Polhill wished to speak on the success of the LAF, which he said was due to the activity of Mr. Grindall, who was capable of making a little money go a long way.

He also thanked the Town Council for finding the funds to keep the Youth Centre going; due to BCC cutbacks its future had been in jeopardy, but the Town Council and the Buckingham School had combined with the management committee to keep it open.

7. Questions from the Residents of Buckingham

No written questions had been submitted.

Cllr. Mrs. Collins asked Mr. McGinty to look closely at the Parking Survey when it was received: Stratford Fields was empty most of the week, whereas the area round the Church and local

streets suffered from excessive numbers of cars parked all day. There were lots of spaces in Cornwall's Meadow, but the cost was too great for some workers.

Mr. McGinty said that they would look closely at the study to see if it covered displacement; Stratford Fields may be empty now, but provided expansion places for the future.

8. Mayor's points for information

The Mayor gave details of the Green Fair on the forthcoming Saturday, and invited people to attend his Civic Service on the Sunday.

The Meeting finished at 9.15pm.

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Chairman of Buckingham Town Council

Date