

Witham Town Council

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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Annual Town Meeting**

Date: **Tuesday, 24th April 2018**

Present: Councillors

Mrs	J.	Williams	(Town Mayor)
	J.C.	Goodman	
Mrs	A.	Kilmartin	
	M.C.M.	Lager	
Mrs	S.C.	Lager	
Mrs	J.M.	Money	
	T.	Pleasance	
	J.R.	Pullen	
	R.P.	Ramage	
	W.J.	Rose	
	R.	Williams	
	M.	Squire	(Town Clerk)
Mrs	G.	Kennedy	(Committee Clerk)

And seven members of the public.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P.R. Barlow, J.C. Bayford, P. Horner, Mrs J.A. Kempf and Mrs P.M. Ryland.

The Town Mayor welcomed everyone to the Meeting.

1. INTERESTS

No interests were received.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held 25th April 2017 were received.

3. REPORTS

REPORT OF THE TOWN MAYOR

Councillor Mrs JoAnn Williams, Town Mayor of Witham, said it was an amazing honour to represent the town and she had learnt so much. She thanked first the staff for their help and advice, particularly thanking her secretary, Mrs Dee Halliday for keeping her diary up-to-date and assisting with charity events. She thanked her fellow Members for their support and guidance.

She said that there were too many highlights to mention. She referred to her two charities Witham Operatic Workshop and Little Havens Hospice and the fund raising events which had been held including a very successful Bridge Drive organised by Clare Lager and the recent Highland Dinner Dance. She hoped that in total she would have raised circa £3,000 to be divided between the two charities.

She said that with the lack of visible policing and increasing anti-social behaviour, she had organised a public meeting the previous evening to address some of these issues with the police. She spoke of the need to work together to make Witham a better place to live and work.

She thanked everyone she had met during her year in Office and wished the new Mayor every success.

REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

Councillor Rob Williams, Chairman of the Community Committee, gave his Report.

He explained that the committee has been actively engaged in a number of issues that affect the future of the town. One key issue is community safety and a task and finish group has been set up to deliver solutions to the lack of policing in the town. The Town Mayor's initiative brought together over 110 residents to question the local police commander. The CCTV system, which is monitored 24/7, has been upgraded to provide high definition pictures and has the facility for police officers to monitor from their mobile phones. The second initiative is to actively encourage the recruitment of Special Police Constables for the Witham area. Finally the Town Council will be encouraging the setting up of active Residents' Associations which has proved to reduce crime.

Another important issue is the Town Council's fight to get better medical facilities for the residents of Witham. The GP facilities are already over-stretched and the new housing developments will exacerbate the situation. The Town Council has been influential in building support from GPs, the NHS and Braintree District Council (BDC). There is a clear desire to create a new GP facility to deliver more cohesive healthcare for residents with less reliance on facilities outside the town.

He was extremely proud that the Town Council organises three major events annually, free of charge to the public. The Puppet Festival has proved to be increasingly successful with visitors from far afield increasing the footfall in the town and subsequent up-turn in takings for the local traders. In November the Dickensian event is held marking the start of Christmas in the town when the decorative lights are turned on and tree lit. The newest

venture is the Community Day held in the town park when volunteer organisations can be show cased.

He added that support is also given to local charities by means of grants and detailed those benefiting including the Citizens Advice, Carnival Association and the Boys' Brigade.

He closed by promoting the Information Centre which provides an excellent service for residents and visitors alike and welcomed Kim Lumb as the new face of the Centre.

REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Councillor John Goodman, Chairman of the Environment Committee, gave his Report.

He explained that a number of issues have been on-going for a number of years. One such issue is the Integrated Waste Management Facility on the former Rivenhall Airfield which remains a concern for the Town Council as possible air pollution or visual impact will affect residents. He referred to the assistance being given by Priti Patel MP who fully supports the rejection of the proposed development.

Parking issues in the town continue to be monitored and the County Council and North Essex Parking Partnership are lobbied to bring a satisfactory resolution to these problems. HGVs transiting through the town continue to be of concern and the problem is exacerbated by poor HGV signage. This problem was raised with the County Council several years ago and despite numerous attempts it is still to be rectified however recent meetings have given hope that the matter will be properly investigated and resolved.

Highways England has held several consultations on the proposed widening of the A12 yet still no decision has been taken with regard the preferred option. The Town Council remains concerned over the possible impact on Whetmead Nature Reserve. The preferred route for the proposed new A120, the responsibility of the County Council, has likewise still to be decided.

The Planning Applications & Transport Sub-Committee, which reports to the Environment Committee, meets on a fortnightly basis to review planning applications which range from Tree Preservation Orders, individual properties to whole scale housing development. The Town Council is only a consultee but Members will attend the District Council's Planning Committee to make personal representations on applications which we consider should be refused.

The south of Witham, in particular, has evidence of the new housing developments. We continue to monitor the impact of these developments on infrastructure with particular attention to health facilities, schools and transport.

On a disappointing note the Listening Bench provided and funded by the Essex Record Office was wantonly vandalised and has had to be removed from the Town Park. A safer position for the repaired bench is currently being considered.

The Town Council is proud of the River Walk, Whetmead, James Cooke Wood and the Closed Churchyard, which offers such pleasure and tranquillity, and is testament to the tireless efforts of the Open Spaces Team. He mentioned too the volunteers who are the Tree

Group and work closely with the Town Council. He referred to the floral displays in the town centre which are now the sole responsibility of the Council.

He closed by thanking his fellow Councillors and staff for their support and assistance and gave the assurance that the Environment Committee would continue to address those areas of concern.

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Councillor Michael Lager, Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee, gave his Report.

He explained that the Committee supports the delivery of the Town Council's Business Plan, finances and staff. The staff are a vital resource and he welcomed Kim Lumb, the new Customer Services Manager in the Information Centre, and Jamie Brownlow, part of the Open Spaces Team, to the Town Council. He said as an employer the Town Council has a duty of safety, so the Open Spaces Team now wear body cameras. In the past year major repairs have been necessary to the Town Hall and recently a new boiler has been installed.

He then spoke of the need to raise Council Tax to £61.70 at Band D to prevent a potential financial deficit. BDC is expected by the Government to pass on a proportion of the grant they receive in relation to tax relief but has failed to do so. He said that the District Council is nearing introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy where 15% is passed on to local councils but this would rise to 25% if a Neighbourhood Plan exists. Following extensive consultation the Town Plan has been updated and covers the period from 2017 – 2037. The Plan will be reviewed and up-dated annually.

He was pleased that clean internal and external audits had been received.

A major change in legislation is the new General Data Protection Regulations which needs the Town Council to be transparent in what information it keeps. The website has recently been improved but something more radical might be required. The Town Council continues to produce its quarterly Voice newsletter and recently acquired Foundation Status as part of the Local Council Award Scheme. Boundary realignment to take into account residential development is in the final stage of a Government Review. He mentioned the misnomer that Rickstones School would remain in the Parish of Rivenhall yet with potential parliamentary boundary changes would be in a different parliamentary constituency from where most of the students live.

He said that the District Council lacks interest in exploring with us the local management of public open spaces and other services, by contrast the County Council is keener to devolve services. A feasibility study will be carried out.

In conclusion he thanked his colleagues for their positive approach and support.

WITHAM CARNIVAL ASSOCIATION

John Cox of the Witham Carnival Association thanked the Town Council for its continuing support. He said that spectators enjoy the procession and he was proud of the young people involved with the carnival. They are looking ahead to 2019, the 90th anniversary of the

carnival and hoping to find past Carnival Queens. He said that it is a fantastic event which unfortunately is disappearing in today's modern society.

The Town Mayor thanked John for his report.

WITHAM 41 CLUB

Rob Matthews explained that in 1926 the Round Table was created for young men between the ages of 18 – 40. The 41 Club came into existence to give older men the opportunity to be part of an association but unfortunately this folded in the late 60's. In 2004 the Club was re-formed. They back the Round Table in its endeavours and arrange some events of its own.

He was concerned that people do not know about the 41 Club. He said they meet once a month and give assistance to other groups.

He was informed that the Information Centre has an area which can be used for displays and recruitment of members. The Community Day which will be held in June is also a good venue to promote clubs and organisations. Social Media was also mooted.

COUNCILLOR MRS ANGELA KILMARTIN

Councillor Mrs Angela Kilmartin advocated the Community Day as a wonderful event for the town as 10,000 people will walk through the park during the course of the day. She spoke of charities she is involved with and the assistance her District Community Grant has given to the Knitters and Stitchers at Witham Library, the Operatic Society and Templars School as well as SHED. She said that the library is a wonderful resource with groups and classes meeting.

She spoke of HOST, where foreign students stay for a weekend or just come for a meal. She introduced her current guest from Oman who she met originally two years ago who had asked to stay again. She said how extremely satisfying it is to volunteer to support organisations.

BOYS' BRIGADE AND GIRLS' ASSOCIATION

Jason Pfeifer explained that he had been on loan to the Witham's Boys' Brigade for the past 18 months which has given him the opportunity to become part of the community. He detailed the four sections open to children and young people from 5 years old up to 18. He said that they would be taking part in the third Community Day, Open Crowd Festival, Tour de Witham, Remembrance Day Parade and in addition they manage the Community Hub in the Newlands Precinct. They also own a nature reserve where young people can take part in activities as well as learning about conservation. He said in 2019 they are organising a trip to the USA to meet one of the last three brigades left in America.

He was grateful for the support of the Town Council which meant they could engage with as many young people as possible. He added that young people who engage in anti-social behaviour are unlikely to want to be involved in organised activities which is a quandary. He said that in the event of young people being unable to afford subscriptions they are waived.

WITHAM AND COUNTRYSIDE SOCIETY

John Palombi, from the Witham and Countryside Society, explained that the Witham Town Trail had been launched last March and this year the scheme would be extended. He said that the idea is to promote Witham as more than a Georgian town. In the past there had been leaflets but these cost money to print and quickly get out of date. The new Trail is on-line, you can scan a QR code using your mobile phone and the description of the building and business is displayed. He said that the Society also comments on planning applications relating to historic buildings and they had been involved with the Essex Records Office and the Listening Bench. They hoped to be involved in the Community Day if they can borrow a gazebo and table. The Town Clerk said that the Town Council might be able to lend them both a gazebo and table.

TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY GROUP

John Palombi then reported on the Strategy Group which had been formed in the 1970's. Lately the District Council had promoted Witham Town Team in its place but when it was dissolved the Strategy Group made a come-back. There will be an AGM in May and it is hoped that all three tiers of Council will wish to be involved as it is a vehicle to communicate with local businesses.

TOURISM IN THE DISTRICT

Members then spoke about the District Council's Tourism Committee which are producing a long report. Tourism brings a lot of money to the district. Members considered that good quality hotels are needed.

Aisha from the Oman, said that she had lived in the UK for five years and never knew about Witham until she stayed with Councillor Mrs A. Kilmartin as part of the HOST scheme. Witham is a nice town and should be promoted.

WITHAM AND DISTRICT RNLI FUNDRAISING BRANCH

Marilyn Lazell, Chairman of the Witham and District RNLI Fundraising Branch, had been unable to attend, but the Town Clerk read her report explaining that they are a small committee whose aim is to raise money for the work of the RNLI. As well as holding street and store collections and emptying collecting boxes in various locations they have stalls at the Community Day, Carnival and Dickensian Day. They raised £3,666.67 in 2017 with all money going to the RNLI. In addition some of the group help in the shop at West Mersea Lifeboat Station when needed. She said that more volunteers are needed to assist.

REPORT FROM PRITI PATEL, MP

Priti Patel, MP, had been unable to attend but sent a letter which was available for people to take home to read.

She said that she had been pleased to work closely with the Town Council. She had been working with local businesses and Essex Police in relation to a crime wave in the area. She continues to press for a new multipurpose healthcare centre for Witham as well as for better public services and new infrastructure.

She said that she is in regular contact with Chief Inspector Craig Carrington, Police Commander for the District, and Roger Hirst, Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. She had organised a meeting with the Town Mayor in early April which culminated in a Public Meeting on 23rd April. She is organising another Public Meeting on 31st May 2018 to which she will be attending along with Roger Hirst. She has stressed to him the importance of ensuring additional police resources to be focused in Witham.

She said that during a recent debate in Parliament she was able to raise with a Health Minister the need for improvements to health facilities in this part of Essex and support was given. Progress is being made toward the new healthcare centre and a business plan is being developed. She successfully helped Anglia Ruskin University secure government investment in 100 new medical places a year to train more doctors who hopefully will wish to work locally to where they trained.

She spoke about the support given for pupils with special needs and their struggle to fulfil potential and her concern about the performance of both academies. She will continue to press for pupils to get the best of education in Witham. She referred to the Get Witham Reading Day which will be held on 5th July 2018.

She is working with local residents in opposing the proposals for the Rivenhall Incinerator and has been making representations to the Environment Agency, the Government and Essex County Council.

She has continued to campaign for investment in the strategic road network including the A12 and A120; and for repairs to roads and footpaths. The recent bad weather has exacerbated the damage and she has secured additional funding for the County Council. New investment has also been secured for the A12 widening which will improve safety and congestion.

She continues to press for improvements to rail services and this year became Chair of the Great Eastern Main Line Rail Taskforce which was set up to improve rail services. £1 billion commitment has been made to deliver new trains. Rail infrastructure is out of date and a cause of many delays. She is campaigning for over £2 billion investment. She is pleased that proposals have come forward to renovate Witham Railway Station and double car parking capacity.

She was concerned by the recent decision by First Bus to axe service 72. She has called for re-instatement and continues to press them to review its decision.

She is a strong supporter of local business in Witham. She considers a number of industries to be outstanding but understands the pressures faced from rates, rents and regulations. She said that the town centre needs to be promoted to generate greater footfall and vacant units brought into use.

She successfully campaigned to secure millions of pounds of Government investment in broadband services in Essex.

She then referred to the District Council's Local Plan which sets out strategic development priorities and development sites, but whilst there is a need for new homes especially for local people, there must be investment in public services and infrastructure.

The Town Mayor thanked everyone for their reports.

4. ACCOUNTS

The audited accounts for the year ended 31st March 2017 were received.

The Town Clerk advised that he is finishing the current year's accounts.

He highlighted the reduction in the Localism Fund which is getting less each year. The income from Information Centre Sales has been going down as commission is being reduced. The Centre, which is a Community Hub, will be updated. He said that profit made at the successful Community Day helps fund the following year's event. The Town Council has taken over Witham in Bloom and continues to pay for the floral displays in the town centre. He said that during the past year significant repairs were undertaken to the Town Hall and new state-of-the-art CCTV equipment was installed. He said that the Town Council funds the Puppet Festival and is seeking new sponsors. The event has been expanded and other venues, such as the library, have been included but reserves are gradually depleting.

The Town Mayor thanked the Town Clerk for his comments.

5. MATTERS RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Members were upset that the Listening Bench had been vandalised and were concerned about its future. It was pointed out that the Town Council had not funded the bench and another location will be found. Other benches throughout the District have not been vandalised.

Mr Gordon Crick from the Bethel Christian Fellowship asked about the Section 106 funding for Maltings Lane Estate and how it is progressing.

He was informed that the Town Council has been asking BDC why this has not been delivered. The housing density had been increased and the Section 106 was re-written. The residents had expected facilities to be delivered and they were still waiting. The land for a Community Hall has been handed to BDC along with £790,000 towards the building. Section 106 money from Lodge Farm will also be used.

The new sports field at Maltings Lane and who would run the facility was also raised. It was understood that the new field has not been fully commissioned yet and the suggestion was made that FUSION is likely to maintain the area

There being no further business the Town Mayor thanked everyone for attending and closed the Meeting at 9.01p.m.