

ELLESMERE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held in Ellesmere Town Hall on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> May, 2016.

<u>PRESENT:</u>	Town Mayor:	Cllr Ian Ward
		J Frost, P Goulbourne, R Hartley, S Thornton, Mrs L Davies, Mrs K Chenery, Mrs J Williams.
	Clerk & RFO:	Mandy Evans
	Assistant Clerk:	Jo Butterworth
	Unitary Councillor:	Cllr Mrs A Hartley
	Members of the Public:	17
	Press:	1
	Police:	0
	Guest Speakers:	2

- 1/16 To receive apologies and reasons for absence. Cllr Mrs J Clayton – Away. RESOLVED: that the apologies and reasons were approved and confirmed.
- 2/16 Minutes. To read and confirm the minutes of the Town Annual Town Meeting held on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> May, 2015. RESOLVED: that the minutes were approved, confirmed and signed as a true copy.
- 3/16 Guest Speakers. Janes James, Shropshire Council and Adrian Degg, Wales & West. Mr Degg gave a talk about the necessity for the gas pipe replacement planned in Scotland Street and Wharf Road starting on 25<sup>th</sup> July, 2016. Due to the age and condition of the pipe it is important that it is replaced before the end of the year and to minimise disruption Wales and West have been working with Shropshire Council to co-ordinate the works for the same time as Shropshire Council are planning to resurface the roads. Mr Degg assured members of the public that they are aware of the summer events happening in the town and will ensure the works will either be completed or cleared on these days. RESOLVED: to note.
- 4a/16 Honorary Freeman. Town Mayor, Councillor Ian Ward presented the first Honorary Freeman Award to Mr Alan Clarke for all his achievements whilst serving as Councillor on Ellesmere Town Council. The second award was presented to Mr Terry Davies for all he has achieved as bell ringer and Tower Captain at St Mary's Church over the last 60 years.
- 4b/16 Youth Organisations. Throughout the year Cllr Ian Ward has held a number of fundraising Coffee Mornings to raise money for local Voluntary Youth Organisations in the Town. Cllr Ward presented cheques to Ellesmere Girlguiding, Ellesmere Town Scout Group and Ellesmere Youth Project. A cheque for the Ellesmere Army Cadets will be presented on a separate occasion. RESOLVED: to note
- 4c/16 Town Mayor's Annual Report on the Civic Year 2015/2016.

It is both an honour and a pleasure, as Town Mayor, to present my annual report for the people of Ellesmere.

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The key themes for the Council during the year have been improving communication and positioning and equipping it to meet the challenges of significant change and transition over the coming years.

In order to improve communication with the community the Council has taken a number of actions, including launching a 'Council Briefing' newsletter and developing a 'Facebook' page. A review to update the Council's website has also commenced.

To support this, as Mayor, I undertook a series of visits to a range of community groups within the town. I would like to thank all those made myself and my wife so welcome when we visited.

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Planning issues have once again dominated Council business and the concerns of the local community during the year.

Once again the town was faced with having to fight to defend the area surrounding the Mere from undesirable development. Fortunately, two significant planning appeals were 'won' protecting the cartilage of the Mere.

There are currently two other sites of concern adjacent to the Mere that are under threat.

First, an application for a static Caravan site at Castlefields, which after significant public opposition, was refused by Shropshire Council, is currently under appeal.

Second, the former Estate Yard at Swan Hill at the entrance to the Cremorne Gardens is still at risk of seeing a further revised application for housing after the original application was withdrawn last year.

We are also currently awaiting the Planning Inspector's decision regarding an appeal at land off Grange Road for 68 Houses which was refused by Shropshire Council and has been consistently opposed by the Town Council.

The Town Council was also disappointed at the decision by Shropshire Council to grant outline planning permission for a significant housing development at the site of the former Railway Station in Brownlow Road. This was approved despite the serious concerns expressed by the Town Council and local residents regarding the failure to address the significant highways implications for this scheme which poses a major risk for the Town.

This problem is compounded by the receipt in February of a detailed application for 131 houses off the Hawthorns, Elson Road, which had already been granted outline permission against the wishes of the Town Council and local community.

Apart from the former Railway site, which is windfall infill development, all the above applications involved development outside the Shropshire Council draft SAMDev and pose sustainability concerns.

The Town Council was very pleased and relieved that finally in December 2015 the SAMDev was formally adopted by Shropshire Council.

However, the Town Council is determined not to simply rely on the SAMDev to ensure planning within the area is effectively managed. The Town Council has agreed with



Ellesmere Rural Parish Council to jointly develop a Neighbourhood Plan to improve and strengthen local control over various aspects of development for the area.

During the year the preferred site for mixed residential and commercial development of the Town adjacent to the Canal has been progressing with ecological and heritage issues being resolved.

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The Town Council's finances continued to remain healthy, with the Council Precept held unchanged for the fourth year and again an unqualified external audit approval was received.

The Council's reserves were further strengthened to make provision for the future major expense of the replacement of the roof and other improvements to the Town Hall. After 48 years the Town Hall is in need of significant repair to ensure that it continues to serve the local community for a further 40 -50 years.

In reviewing the changing landscape of local government finances for future years, the Town Council decided that it could no longer maintain existing level of precept if it was going to meet the challenges of taking greater responsibility for local services and so, for this year, agreed to increase it by 1% and that a major review of its finances and precept requirement would be necessary in setting the level for next year. These actions are necessary, in the main, due to the financial problems facing Shropshire Council.

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The increasingly difficult financial situation faced by Shropshire Council, as the Government continues to reduce its grant contribution, has reached a point where the budget for running services not recognised as core to its business and statutory responsibilities will be seriously curtailed from 2017 - 2018.

From the end of 2015 Shropshire Council launched a major rolling public consultation process the 'Big Conversation' to identify what people regard as priority services to be protected and to help it with making the difficult major decisions ahead.

The Town Council has responded to meet the challenge that the impact of these decisions will have on services and facilities that are valued by our local community. A Task and Finish Group was established to discuss Assets and Services for which the Town Council may be able or wish to take on responsibility or provide assistance in maintaining. This will form the basis for discussions with Shropshire Council during the summer months in order to be in place before or from next year.

The proposal by Shropshire Council to relocate the Town Library with the Meres Day Centre at the Ellesmere Community Nursing Home building predated the launch of the 'Big Conversation' but was the first impact felt in the Town of the difficult financial situation. The Town Council has voiced its support for the continued provision of a high quality Library service within the Town. The difficulties experienced in finding a provider interested in running the Library service with the Day Centre services poses a question for the Town Council as to how it may be able to help.

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Centenary events to mark World War 1 continued during the year and on 27<sup>th</sup> June, Armed Forces Day, I had the honour, with local resident and RAF Veteran Mr Fred Baker, of unveiling the plaque to commemorate those from the Town who served in the War.

Arrangements were also made for the cleaning of the War Memorial and the name plaques and work on this is currently under way. Also, an additional name, from World War 1, has been put forward and validated for inclusion on the memorial. Much of the work has been organised and arranged by Mr Bob McBride and the Town Council is very appreciative of all his efforts.

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Highways issues are a further area where the Town Council has continued to press for change and improvement.

The areas where local priorities have been proposed include speed limit problems and changes and road resurfacing. The development of a local community speed watch has been proposed.

The challenges of increasing traffic, through proposed housing developments, affecting Trimpley Street, Cambria Avenue and Brownlow Road in particular, although not exclusively, continue to be of concern.

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The Town continues to benefit from the work of the Ellesmere Chamber of Trade and Commerce and its diverse range of small traders and businesses, which make a significant contribution to making the Town such an attractive and vibrant place for people to visit and also through support for local community events.

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I would also like to pay tribute to the invaluable contribution to the life of the local community made by the many volunteers and voluntary organisations which makes the lives of so many so much better.

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Events to mark the Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday have and continue to take place in the Town.

For example, the Girl Guides "Clean for the Queen" as part of the Keep Britain Tidy campaign.

More events are planned in the next few weeks.

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Some of the many other issues affecting the Town during the year have included problems with dog fouling and repeated vandalism to the Cross Street toilets and also other town centre properties.

The Town benefits from the local policing team having access to the Town Hall as a local base, which enables excellent liaison with the Town Council in dealing with many issues.

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I would like to thank my fellow Councillors for their support and giving their commitment to the ever increasing demands and responsibilities being placed upon the Town Council. I think that it is important to restate the fact that Town Councillors receive no payment for the responsibilities they take on in this role which is undertaken in a purely voluntary capacity.

During the year three Councillors resigned from the Council, Alan Clarke, Malcolm Harris and Elspeth Cross, who the Council would like to thank for their valued service.

We welcomed one new Councillor, Paul Golbourne.

There are currently two vacancies being advertised.

I would like to thank the Deputy Mayor, Councillor John Frost, for his much valued support throughout the year, especially in representing the Mayor and Town at events locally and elsewhere in Shropshire at times when I was unable to attend.

The Town Council is also extremely fortunate to have the services of our Town Clerk, Mandy Evans and Assistant Clerk, Jo Butterworth. As will be reported later, their considerable experience, dedication and commitment to the Council continues to be invaluable in ensuring that it meets the ever changing challenges with which we are presented.

I would also like to thank my wife, Karen, for meeting the challenge to support me in undertaking the numerous official commitments locally and elsewhere in Shropshire throughout the year.

Thanks to the excellent work by our Clerk and Assistant Clerk the Town Council achieved the Foundation Level of the Local Council Award Scheme and the Certificate was presented to the Council at its February meeting.

During the year our local Shropshire Councillor, Anne Hartley has continued to maintain excellent links with the Town Council in order that the Town and its issues can be effectively represented. Congratulations are also due for her appointment as Chair of Shropshire Council.

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There are many challenges for the year ahead, but the Town Council is well placed with dedicated staff and Councillors to meet these and make the difficult decisions which will be required to ensure that the Town prospers.

Councillor Ian Ward, Town Mayor

RESOLVED: to note.

4d/16 Elector's Issues and Concerns. RESOLVED: none received.

