

WIMBORNE MINSTER TOWN COUNCIL

**MINUTES of the ANNUAL TOWN MEETING held on TUESDAY 27 MARCH 2018
at 7.30 pm in the Town Hall, West Borough, Wimborne Minster.**

THOSE PRESENT AT THE MEETING

Cllr T F Wheeler - Town Mayor & Chairman of the Council (in the Chair)
Cllr S K Bartlett
Cllr Mrs S A Bell
Cllr Ms C L Butter
Cllr Mrs C Chedgy
Cllr R D Cook
Cllr Mrs D J March
Cllr W Richmond
Cllr Mrs A E Roberts
Cllr Mrs K F Webb

11 Local Government Electors

1. ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD ON 4 APRIL 2017

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 4 April 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Mr M Tidd, 24 West Street noted that towards the end of the last Annual Town Meeting there were various questions raised relating to the cemetery. One was raised by Victoria Sturgess and one by myself. I now know that there is going to be an Extraordinary Town Council meeting tomorrow which I appreciate. There was one comment made by Cllr S A Cook which was that the councillors involved were not removed from the Wimborne Cemetery Joint Management Committee (WCJMC) but that the Committee was changed. Mr Tidd asked that in view of the fact that the councils have now settled the case with Minster Memorials, would Cllrs Mrs S A Cook like to change that opinion.

The Chairman noted that Cllr Mrs S A Cook was not present to change that opinion. Mr Tidd asked why the membership of the WCJMC was changed and what brought about the change. The Chairman explained that there had been concern that the WCJMC was not operating in the way that it should and there was a need to ensure changes were made to ensure it was operating within its constitution. The whole Committee was changed simply to ensure that there was no member that could be tainted with the accusations that had gone on previously. Mr Tidd replied that he did understand this but he noticed that the documents relating to the cemetery

highlight that none of those councillors who sat on the committee are permitted to sit on it again. He believed this implied that there was something wrong.

The Chairman replied that it did not imply this. It was to make a clean break with the past and to make sure improvements were being made.

Mr Tidd noted he hoped there would be greater clarity communication at tomorrow's Extraordinary Council meeting. The Chairman responded that he did not wish to pre-judge the outcome of the meeting.

Mr Tidd advised that he had emailed 3 of the councillors involved over a week ago asking them if they would be attending the extraordinary meeting and to date he had had no reply. The Chairman noted that he did not feel that this was a fair question in relation to the minutes from the last Annual Town Meeting.

3. **ANNUAL REPORT BY THE TOWN MAYOR AND CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL – Cllr T F Wheeler**

It has been a really busy year again this year with the Town Council involved in a wide-ranging number of issues. The most significant event was the decision by the Secretary of State to approve the replacement of the existing 9 Councils in Dorset with two unitary authorities one comprising Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole and another comprising East Dorset, North Dorset, West Dorset, Purbeck, Weymouth and Portland and Dorset County Council.

A Joint Committee has been set up leading the development of the new authorities before the Shadow Authorities come into place. The timetable we can anticipate will be the legal orders concluded by June 2018 and the Shadow Authorities formed. Each Shadow Authority will include all councillors from within the areas covered by the new authority. Each Shadow Authority will elect an Executive responsible for making decisions until the first direct elections for the new councils take place in May 2019.

In September last year, the Town Council took the decision to upgrade all of the CCTV cameras in the Town to High Definition at a cost of about £30,000. The system is operated by Dorset Police and we are told there have already been significant improvements in identifying suspects.

The Town Council has also supported financially the start-up of a youth café following the closure of the Planet youth centre. The building they will be using is owned by the District Council and was formerly used by St John Ambulance in Allenvue North Car Park. The project is being led by Cllr Sally Bell under the auspices of Vision Wimborne and they hope to open next month.

In terms of notable events which happened over the last year I'd like to mention the Switch on of the Christmas lights had the largest crowd ever. Christmas was very good in the town. Carols in the Cornmarket raised a record amount for the Mayor's charities.

My Civic Service this year will be held on Sunday 6 May 2018 in The Minster and everyone is very welcome to attend.

May I now ask the Chairman of Resources Committee to present her report.

4. **ANNUAL REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

The Resources Committee is responsible for the maintenance and repair of the Council's buildings and office accommodation as well as for lettings and leases. We also manage and monitor the Council's accounts and make recommendations on grant applications received from local organisations. These then need to be agreed by the full Council.

The accommodation available for hire at the Town Hall, including for Civil Ceremonies and an office rented out on a lease, has raised income of approximately £11,040 in the last year.

Annual Grant awards for 2017/18 totalled £30,875 which included contributions made to 20 local organisations and town events, including the Folk Festival and Christmas Son et Lumiere. The Town Council also supported The Information Centre by contributing £7,000 to help with running costs.

All of these separate amounts are being grouped together for future years in the Grant Aid budget. Therefore, it looks as though the budget has significantly increased, but that is not the case, it's a simply how the budget codes have been tidied up to more accurately reflect the grants being made.

The Town Council and Wimborne BID jointly funded the £26,766.39 cost of the Christmas and New Year arrangements in 2017, which in addition to the lights, includes the stage and other costs associated with those events.

Town centre maintenance costs have also been shared with the BID. The cost to the Council is expected to be in the region of £3,000 by the end of 2017/18 financial year.

The Town Council's portion of the Council Tax increased from £108.45 in 2016/17 to £120.80 a year for 2017/18. Whilst some budgets were reduced, a particular reason for the increase was due to additional staff requirements. Also, following a number of suggestions for improvements and maintenance requirements for Redcotts Recreation Ground, a budget line has been added to the budget for 2018/19 that will build up each year to enable us to take such projects forward.

In last year's statement, we mentioned a Spending & Resources Review that we had recently embarked upon. This included a widespread review of the Council operation and expenditure. We wanted to be sure that we would be prepared for any changes that may come our way as a result of cuts in spending at District and County level and the Local Government Reorganisation that we now know is scheduled for 2019.

Some of the changes implemented in addition to the increase in staffing levels I mentioned, are – the new budget to help us manage recreational projects and changes to the Grant Aid process – making it more user friendly. It has also been aligned with the Council's priorities, so we can apply a certain level of scrutiny to applications ensuring that grants provided are in line with those. We will need to apply careful consideration to grant aid in future with the pressure we have on budgets, not just in this council, but in other tier councils, which could ultimately have an effect on our budgets.

Various projects have been created as a result of this Review which are now being overseen by a Steering Group made up of Committee Chairmen and the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council. These projects include a review of Council land and leases and its own adequacy of office accommodation and information technology. There are changes in the law regarding data protection which we also need to consider in line with our technology.

We continue to monitor expenditure very carefully whilst at the same time looking ahead to see what is on the horizon. We are working to further modernise and ensure we are ready for the challenges ahead.

5. **ANNUAL REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

I am Cllr Carol Butter Vice-Chairman of the Planning & Environment Committee. Cllr Pat Hymers, the Chairman, is unable to be here.

There are a number of issues to report.

Firstly, I would like to give residents an update on the three major developments in the Town.

Land North of Wimborne Minster

As the Chairman reported at last year's meeting Outline Planning Permission has been granted for residential development, a new local centre, a replacement Wimborne First School, public open space and new allotments and associated infrastructure on land to the east and west of Cranborne Road. Dorset County Council has recently approved the detailed planning application for the new First School on this site. The school is planned to be open in September 2019. The Town Council has met County to discuss the traffic arrangements and the concerns of residents regarding

parking by people taking children to the new school. Residents are worried that drivers will park in nearby residential roads. Other than changes to the road layouts no action is proposed until a pattern emerges following the opening of the school.

The development has begun following the approval of the ‘reserved matters’ application for 64 of the new homes. Another similar ‘reserved matters’ application was submitted by the developer for a further 254 houses and was approved by the District Council Planning Committee on 14 March 2018.

There have been complaints about construction traffic using roads they should not and we are working with Dorset Highways to rectify the problem.

Land at Cuthbury

An amended full planning application for this development is still being processed so there is nothing detailed I can report. However, the Town Council did object to the developer’s application to stop up and divert important public footpaths in the Cuthbury area connected with the development and the application is being considered by Dorset County Council’s Regulatory Committee.

Land South of Leigh Road

This developable area in the Core Strategy is divided between two developers – Wyatt Homes and Gleeson. We understand that the Section 106 Agreement for the Gleeson’s part has been signed and the issuing of the planning permission will follow shortly.

Service 88

Service 88 was discontinued on 21 July 2017 and the Town Council and Wimborne BID agreed to subsidise a replacement service provided by Dorset Community Transport using the same route during school term time for one day per week. Colehill Parish Council agreed to subsidise the bus operating on another day. Although this service now operates on only two days a week (Thursdays and Fridays) it is popular particularly with elderly residents who would not otherwise be able to travel to town.

Working Together

The first year of the ‘Working Together’ arrangement is about to end. The Town Council has funded cleansing of gullies and slotted drains some of which had not been cleaned in years. Consequently, no complaints were received about surface water not clearing from blocked gullies. When there was particularly heavy rain this year and the surface water sewer system could not cope there were flooded areas but the road surface cleared fairly quickly once the rain stopped. This was not the case in previous years.

Trees Around Wimborne First School

With the First School leaving its home after over 100 years and its future unknown, at the request of the Town Council, the District Council has made a tree preservation order on several important trees around the school.

Traffic Problems

In the few months, the Town Council has seen a gradual increase in the number of traffic related contacts and complaints we receive from the public. The Town Council has no jurisdiction on these matters but will continue to facilitate and signpost members of the public to Dorset Highways. Dorset County Council has communicated that it will not implement any changes to road infrastructure around Wimborne until the impact of the three major developments is known.

Wimborne Future Project and the Town Centre Strategy Project

The Planning and Environment Committee established a working party in December 2017 to review infrastructure in the Town. The membership of the group includes representation from the Town Council, Wimborne BID and Resident's Associations. The project group, called Wimborne Future, has met on a couple of occasions and is starting to collate and analyse data specific to infrastructure related issues e.g. traffic counts, air pollution etc.

Earlier this month, the Town Council approved a project to work in partnership with the Wimborne BID and District Council to deliver a Town Centre Strategy. It is anticipated that work will start in earnest on this project in late Spring 2018.

The two projects have some direct synergies and there is also the possibility of some duplication. With this in mind, it has been agreed that the role of the Wimborne Future Project will be reviewed in the summer 2018.

Can I thank all Members of the Committee for their input during the past 12 months.

6. ANNUAL REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE RECREATION & LEISURE COMMITTEE

I am Cllr Sally Bell, Chairman of the Recreation & Leisure Committee. Cllr Mrs Sue Cook is my Vice-Chairman.

This Committee is responsible for managing the Town Council's Sports & Recreational Activities at Leigh Park and Redcotts Recreation Ground.

Grass Tennis Courts

The Town Council set up a working party last year to look at options for the future of the grass tennis courts. The Working Party recommended that

the 3 grass courts be replaced with two hard courts and the area of land left near the boules pitch be converted into a dementia friendly garden. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons the new hard courts will not be able to proceed but the Town Council has agreed to retain two grass courts. The dementia friendly garden has been included on a list of projects for future consideration when funding is available.

Wild Flower Beds

The wild flower beds last year were a resounding success and the same sowing process will be followed this year.

Redcotts Blind Lane Entrance

The Town Council has tidied up the Blind Lane entrance to the Recreation Ground with resurfacing, a retaining wall and new gate arrangement. Wimborne in Bloom has agreed to plant out the bed created within the retaining wall this spring.

Litter and Anti-Social Behaviour

We had problems at Leigh Park Playing Field and Redcotts Recreation Ground last summer with litter and anti-social behaviour and vandalism. The Police took positive action and as a result a number of youths were dealt with which curtailed the problem.

South & South East in Bloom

On behalf of the Town Council, I am proud to say that Redcotts Recreation Ground was again awarded a Silver Gilt Award in the South and South East 'In Bloom' competition for 2017.

Dog Fouling

As mentioned by the Chairman of Planning & Environment Committee in relation to the Town Centre, dog fouling is also a growing problem in the recreation areas. I would urge all dog walkers to pick up after their dogs and be particularly vigilant when walking their dogs at dusk to ensure that they can see when and where their dog is defecating so that they can poop and scoop appropriately.

My thanks go to the Recreation and Leisure Committee for their support suggestions and debate in the past year, and also to the ground staff who work with us.

7. **QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC RELATING TO TOWN MATTERS**

The Chairman invited questions from the public relating to Town matters.

Victoria Sturgess of 24 West Borough asked for Cllr Ms Butter's thoughts on the fact that the residents of West Borough had fought a hard battle at the planning meeting last year with regard to the new development at Infinergy / Koh Thai and managed to get the licensing hours restricted to 11pm. Ms Sturgess explained that since then an application to extend the licencing hours to 1am throughout the week had been submitted. Ms Sturgess noted that she was confused as to why restrictions can be ignored and that it set a precedence for other establishments. She continued that licensing conditions were regularly ignored by drinking premises in the town and that residents were ignored when they complained to the District Council. Ms Sturgess asked what residents should do when restrictions are put in place but ignored as residents in West Borough were really suffering.

Cllr Ms Butter noted that the Planning & Environment Committee was disappointed that the planning application to extend the licence had come forward. She added that when the Committee considered the application last week, very few objections had been logged which didn't give the Committee an indication on the issues to base its comment upon. The Chairman added that when considering planning applications, the Committee checks the number of objections that are registered on the EDDC website. Cllr Ms Butter advised that the Council had objected to the planning application and added that if this was becoming an issue, it constituted an enforcement matter and should go back to EDDC.

Cllr Bartlett advised as this was a licencing issue and outside the Town Council's remit, he would be happy to meet with the residents and Cllr David Morgan, who sits on the Licencing Committee, to discuss these issues.

Martin Tidd of 24 West Street referred to the rise in the precept for 2017-2018 which he had queried at the last Annual Town Meeting and was advised by the then Chairman, Cllr Mrs S Cook, that this was only 60p per week. He referred to the fact that the precept for 2018/19 had increased by more than 3% and was disappointed to note that the Town Council had not supported this increase with an explanation behind the precept despite a request at the last Annual Town Meeting. Mr Tidd noted that the District and County Councils had not increased their element of the council tax by more than 3% and as a result Wimborne was suffering with an increase in its precept.

Cllr Robin Cook clarified that there was a cap on council tax increases as stipulated in legislation. However, a 3 % rise in adult social care had been made on top of the overall 3% increase. Currently, there was no cap on town and parish precepts although a paper went through parliament 18 months ago which considered introducing a cap. It was not known whether this had gone further. Cllr R Cook added that as town and parish councils take on more responsibility as powers are gradually devolved down from

the District and County Councils, there may be a case in the future to prevent excessive increases through the “back door”.

The Chairman advised that if principal authorities wished to increase the council tax by more than 3%, a referendum would need to be held. The Chairman highlighted that the District and County Councils were carrying out less non-mandatory services and this is why last year, the Town Council added £20,000 to its budget for cleaning drains etc. Budget increases have also had to be made due to increases in staffing to meet the demands of increased workloads, as well as pension contributions and salary increases which are decided at a national level. As Cllr Mrs K Webb advised in her report as Chairman of the Resources Committee, the budget for Redcotts Recreation Ground had been increased to make improvements which residents would benefit from. Overall, the precept had been increased by £12 per year (23p per week) on a Band D property but it was not starting from a large base mark. If residents wish to see those services previously provided by the District and County Councils continue, the Town Council almost feels obliged to take on such services. For instance, the Chairman provided an example in that if the drains along West Borough had not been cleared this year by the Town Council, they would not have been done and flooding would have occurred. The Chairman concluded that the services are either provided for in the precept or they are not carried out.

In response to Mr Tidd’s point relating to transparent increases through the back door, Cllr Mrs K Webb added that the Town Council had discussed this a number of times and agreed to increase the budget by £20,000 to absorb any of the potentially reductions in Dorset County’s Highway Services which was an unknown at that time. It had become clear towards the end of the year the impact this was having and the £20,000 had been reduced to £15,000. Cllr Mrs K Webb stated that the other increases had nothing to do with going through the back-door as they were normal increases such as costs associated with an increase in staffing, recreational projects and an increase in cemetery costs. In terms of staffing, research undertaken showed that the Town Council was understaffed in comparison to similar sized towns and highlighted the need to prepare for the future to meet the needs of the future demographic. As Chairman of the Resources Committee, Cllr Mrs K Webb noted she was satisfied that the Town Council was in a good position to prepare for the future.

Cllr S Bartlett explained that the impact in the reduction of services historically provided by the District and County Councils was already becoming evident. An example was Children’s Services where the County had seen a rise in mental health issues in children and self-harming in children was escalating. It was therefore important for towns such as Wimborne to have support services in place for vulnerable children and it had therefore been necessary for the Town Council to head up a project to open a youth facility in the town. Wimborne had difficulties in that it was confined within a small parish boundary so the infrastructure was within the town and therefore the precept supports that infrastructure and the amenities. A lot of the facilities are used by neighbouring towns and

villages who don't contribute funding which was an issue experienced by many market towns across the country.

Mr Tidd asked whether there would be a statement on the Council's website explaining the reasoning behind the increase. He was advised that this had been added under the Council Tax tab on the website. Mr Tidd believed that it should be placed as a 'News' item so it was more accessible.

Arthur White explained that a year ago he had asked the Town Council for assistance to encourage Dorset County Council to cut and clear the area of scrub along Leigh Road but to date this had not happened. He noted that the Town Council had painted the railings along Julians Bridge and asked if the Town Council could use some of the £20,000 budget to carry out the work along Leigh Road and recharge Dorset County Council or put it down to enhancing the entrance to the town. Mr White referred to another unkempt area which was at the junction of Station Road and New Borough.

The Chairman responded that, with regard to the junction of Station Road and New Borough, he would undertake to look at this area.

Cllr S K Bartlett apologised to Mr White that it had taken so long for the issue along Leigh Road to be addressed. He advised that he was waiting for costings from Dorset County Council to grub out the area and replant it with shrubbery and would follow this up. Cllr S K Bartlett referred to the area at the junction of Station Road and New Borough and advised that the Town Council had been approached by the County Council with an offer to take over the ownership of this piece of land. The Town Clerk was currently in discussions with the County Council with a view to the area being improved before the Town Council took it over.

Mr White commented that his understanding was that Dorset County Council may relinquish this responsibility to the Town Council over the next 12 months. Cllr S K Bartlett explained that the District and County Councils were pre-occupied with Local Government Re-organisation which was facing a tight timetable to create the new unitary authority by April 2019. In relation to the railings along Julians Bridge, Cllr S K Bartlett noted that the cost was split between the Town Council and Wimborne BID following a complaint from a resident and due to the town being a tourist destination. Mr White added that the area along Leigh Road was just as appalling and this road was used just as much by visitors in to the town.

The Chairman asked Mr White how the other residents felt about this matter. Mr White advised that they had the same opinion as he had. The Chairman noted that no other residents had made a direct complaint to the Town Council. Cllr S K Bartlett advised he had spoken to residents, door-to-door, who wanted the shrubbery to be cut to the level of the railings and kept tidy. He agreed that it did look appalling and it did not give a good impression to those visiting the town.

Mr R Froud of 35 New Borough referred to the Extraordinary Council Meeting due to take place the following day (28 March 2018) at 9am until 5pm. Mr Froud asked how those who were unable to attend during the day would be able to be privy to the discussions at the meeting. Mr Froud also stated that the residents of Wimborne would like to know how much it would cost to precept payers and how it related to the people of Wimborne Minster.

The Chairman advised that as it was a Town Council meeting it would be minuted in the same way any other Town Council meeting was and the minutes would be available on the Town Council's website. Mr Froud queried whether there was a better way in distributing the content of the meeting to residents as well as the cost. The Chairman explained that the only cost would be staff costs as councillors did not get paid. After seeking advice, the Chairman added that the Town Council would meet its statutory requirements by making the minutes available via the website.

Mr Froud stated he thought that the cost was a lot more than staff costs due to the out of court settlement recently reported in the Echo. The Chairman responded that he had misunderstood Mr Froud's original question and thought he was referring to the cost of the Extraordinary Council meeting, not the costs relating to the case. The Chairman added that this was up for discussion at tomorrow's meeting. He added that one of the settlements was confidential and a breakdown could not be placed in the public domain. The Council had recently responded to a Freedom of Information request relating to other costs associated with the matter which could be made available.

Mr Froud asked for a summary of what would be discussed at the meeting. The Chairman clarified that he would be making an introduction, he would then invite Mr & Mrs Case to make a statement and then offer those councillors who were members of the Wimborne Cemetery Joint Management Committee at the time to make statements. The Chairman would then make a statement outlining how the Town Council dealt with the matter and then other Town Councillors would have an opportunity to make statements. Members of the public would also be provided with the opportunity to ask questions.

Mr Tidd commented that he felt he could help Mr Froud with his queries as he had made the Freedom of Information request on how much money had been spent. The claim by Minster Memorials concluded in a payment of £43,000 which was covered by the Council's insurers. There was a payment of legal costs relating to the Cemetery's previous Clerk of approximately £19,000 but due to confidentiality, there was no information relating to the settlement paid to Anthony Sherman. In terms of officer time, the Town Clerk had estimated this at around £14,000. Mr Tidd added this was a considerable amount of money and this was why he and others had requested a public meeting to address this.

Mr Tidd stated the importance of the Town Council acting in a transparent way. Following a request for the Town Council's code of conduct for

councillors, Mr Tidd believed it did not reflect the Nolan Principles for Councillors especially when it came to being able to ask questions to councillors or to insist they attend a Town Council meeting. There was nothing in the Town Council's code of conduct to say that councillors must attend meetings which seemed to contravene the Nolan Principles. Mr Tidd asked the Chairman whether the Council would consider reviewing its code of conduct so it was more in line with the Nolan Principles. The Chairman advised that the Council's code of conduct policy followed national guidelines for local authorities.

Cllr R Cook wished to clarify the figures previously provided by Mr Tidd as they were not accurate. The figure of £19,000 relating to legal costs incurred in the Cemetery Clerk tribunal referred to by Mr Tidd was in fact £16,246.50 but it was split between Wimborne Minster Town Council, Colehill Parish Council and Pamphill & Shapwick Parish Council. Wimborne Minster Town Council's share came to £7,717 which was 47% of the total costs.

Mr R Thorne asked if the minutes of tomorrow's meeting would be available in hard copy from the Town Hall. The Chairman advised they would be.

The meeting closed at 8.31 pm.

Signed Date
Town Mayor & Chairman of the Council