

GODMANCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD IN THE QUEEN ELIZABETH SCHOOL, GODMANCHESTER ON TUESDAY 2nd MAY 2017

Present: Councillor P Morgan: Town Mayor
Councillors: Mrs S Conboy (Deputy Mayor), G Campbell, A Hooker, D King, Ms J Macleod, P Malley, A McInnes, Mrs M Radford, R Taplin, D Underwood, C Vane Percy, G Wilson, Mrs S Wilson, Mrs S Worthington, J Young

Town Clerk: Mrs M Crampton

In attendance:

Mace Bearer: M Williams

Chaplain: Reverend D Busk

33 members of the public

Apologies: Cllr Spowart

Reverend David Busk was invited to begin the meeting with prayers.

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD ON 3rd MAY 2016

All those who had been present at the meeting held on 3rd May 2016 AGREED they be signed as a proper record.

TOWN MAYOR'S REPORT

PORTFOLIO GROUP REPORTS:

Business & Finance Portfolio

FINANCE

Information which showed the receipts and payments for 2016/17 and the Town Council's budget for 2017/18 had been presented with the Agenda. This year the Town Council had completed the work to provide a more accessible town office in the Town Hall and had progressed the investigations and plans to develop the Queen Elizabeth School (QES). The Town Council had stopped taking regular bookings at the Judith's Field building (JFB) and were now planning its refurbishment using money coming from the Romans' Edge developers. The Town Council had continued to run the QES, JFB, the Town Hall, the cemetery and open spaces and play equipment.

The main source of income had been the precept, which had been received as part of the Council Tax payments to Huntingdon District Council (HDC). The Town Council had also received income from letting the QES, JFB and for burials at the cemetery near London Road. The Council Tax paid by an average Band D Council Tax payer had been increased from by £3.73 or about 7p per week, which represented a 5% increase. The Council Tax in Godmanchester had remained lower than Huntingdon and many neighbouring villages yet would enable the Town Council to continue to maintain and improve facilities. Over the next few years the Town Council would receive money from developers in the town through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The first tranche of CIL income linked to the Romans' Edge development had been received in April 2017.

BUSINESS

Over the past year the Town Council had seen plans for the expansion of Godmanchester begin to come to fruition. Over the period of the next 3 to 5 years the town was set to expand considerably. The Business Portfolio had been set the task of ensuring that Godmanchester Town Council was fully prepared to serve its growing community both new and old residents alike.

The redevelopment of the Judith's Field Building.

In addition to the CIL payments, the development of Romans' Edge would also deliver a Section 106 Premium (S 106) payment, which had been earmarked for the redevelopment of JFB. In July 2016, Jack and Jill Playgroup which had used the building for many years had finally closed. It had been decided that the building would be taken out of use on a temporary basis to enable the major refurbishment. The Town Council had used the time since then to prepare detailed plans and to obtain planning permission so that the refurbishment could go ahead as soon as the funds were triggered. It was hoped that this work would commence in the spring of 2018.

Legal issues

The Business Portfolio, as part of the Town Council, had been attempting to unravel a number of land ownership issues which would need to be settled in order for other development work to take place. Several of the cases under review go back many years and there was considerable uncertainty after a series of local government re-organisations.

The Town Council staff team.

The Town Council had sought to further develop our experienced and professional team who would continue to support and assist residents. The Town Council had excellent staff but greater demands were being placed on them by the increasing growth of the town. The Town Council was aiming to both improve existing services and provide additional services to residents. A Facilities Assistant and a Street Orderly, had been appointed and both had provided extra service to the town. It was hoped that the Town Office Team would also benefit from extra support and be more able to support both the growing requests of the residents and the future plans of the Town Council. In order to comply with new government regulations the Town Council had subscribed to the new government pension arrangements.

Council Business Plan

The Business Portfolio had developed a structure for the Town Council's Business Plan for the next three years, which had set out the priorities of the Town Council and how they would be funded.

Twinning

A new relationship with the Huntingdon and Godmanchester Twinning Association would be developed to encourage positive, friendly relationships with our twin towns in Europe and ensure good value for money for Godmanchester residents.

YOUTH COUNCIL

The Youth Council had continued to meet each month and had contributed their views on a wide range of Town Council projects. They had met with the Police and with Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) officers to discuss and find solutions to local issues. They had supported the Town Council at the Christmas event and at Gala Day.

There were spaces on the Youth Council and anyone aged between 11 and 23 years old, resident in Godmanchester could contact the Town Clerk for more information.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Christmas Lights Switch On and Market

The Town Council had hosted a successful Christmas Market alongside the annual Christmas Lights Switch On. There had been over 40 stalls from the Town and the event had raised money for the Mayor's charities. The Town Council was grateful to all who had supported this event through the loans of equipment, donations towards the tree and all who had attended or helped were thanked.

The Great Garage Sale

The Mayor's Great Garage Sale had taken place in the summer with 30 stalls selling all manner of things. The contribution to the Mayor's charities had been much appreciated.

Environment Portfolio

The Town Council had planted several trees on the Recreation Ground. In memory of all who had served the Town in the World Wars, the Town Council together with the Community Association, would plant two stands of 'sentinel' willows on the river bank. These would be pollarded, in keeping with the pre-World War 1 local tradition and would help frame the view over Portholme. There would also be new benches sited alongside to allow people to pause for thought and to enjoy the view.

In the closed churchyard of St Mary the Virgin, the Town Council would replace four trees and had also planted additional trees at Judith's Field. The Town Council had put a policy in place to enable the planting of memorial trees and the donation of memorial benches: more details were available at the Town Office.

The Town Council continued to maintain land and had worked with other councils and landowners to help maintain green spaces. The new Street Orderly had been working hard to deal with litter and weeds throughout the town. The Town Council had installed three new dog poo bag dispensers, which provided free bags to help combat the problem of dog mess. All bins in the Town were emptied regularly and dog poo bags could be placed in these bins.

The Town Council had introduced a rolling programme for the review of play equipment to consider what would need renewal in the coming years. Consideration would be given to additional play equipment for older children and the Town Council would explore the possibility of a skate park. The Town Council had been delighted to receive a donation of picnic benches from the GMCiB Open Gardens event and it was noted that they had made a great addition to the Queens Walk area.

Property Portfolio

The Town Council had been responsible for a number of properties including two Grade II listed buildings. Good progress had been made towards the upgrading of these buildings to ensure that future generations can benefit.

The re-modelling of the Town Hall had been completed during the year and the Town Office had been moved downstairs to improve both the working environment and the access for Godmanchester residents. The CCTV system had been renewed and an access intercom installed to improve safety of staff when working alone. Improvements to the Council Chamber would be planned for the following year.

The Queen Elizabeth School had been at the center of community activities for the last 32 years and had been an important focus for all Gumcestrians. However, it had been agreed that it was in desperate need of upgrading and modernising. A scheme had been designed to incorporate the existing public toilets into the building and this had received wide community support. A single disabled access toilet would remain accessible from School Hill but the interior of the School Building would have enlarged and improved kitchen and toilets which would include a toilet for the disabled. Ventilation, lighting and acoustics would be improved and audio visual system installed. The historic exterior fabric would also be repaired. Tenders for the work were due back in May. If the costs were within budget it was intended to close the building in July to allow work to commence. Current hirers had been offered the use of the Judith's Field building during construction.

During construction there would be reduced parking on School Hill. It was hoped that the end result would justify the temporary inconvenience.

The Council had put in a lot of effort to apply for a number of grants in an attempt reduce the financial burden on Godmanchester residents for the work.

The Council had continued to work towards improving the environment of the Mill Steps, the site of the old Godmanchester Water Mill, which had been demolished in the 1920s. This would involve replacing the railings and hard surfaces. Negotiations with the Environment Agency had taken place and were nearing completion. However the structure of the sluice was in poor condition and would require considerable expenditure. It was the Town Council's intention to look for grant aid where it was available and to

consider the potential of additional funding from the community infrastructure levy.

Designs for the upgrading of the Judith's Field Building have been completed and planning permission granted. It is hoped to commence construction work once the Queen Elizabeth School is completed. It is intended to fund this work out of the Section 106 money which will begin to be released in the coming year.

A location for a new Town Noticeboard to replace the existing one by the Chinese Bridge has been agreed and will be installed as the work to the Queen Elizabeth School nears completion.

The Council continues to press the County Council to properly maintain the Chinese Bridge and to press for the maintenance of the boundary wall at the non-conformist burial ground.

The employment of the Street Orderly has resulted in the improvement of the environment of School Hill with weeds and rubbish under control.

The Council continues to maintain and improve the Cemetery with new tree planting and to seek a solution to the maintenance of trees on the Avenue.

Planning Portfolio

PLANNING

Planning applications are considered by the planning working party, who then make a recommendation to the main council meeting, within a required timescale, before final determination by HDC. The planning applications are publicised on our noticeboards and any interested parties are welcome to make representation at Town council meetings, before our decisions are made. The year has been dominated by continuing work on the Bearscroft development, now known as Romans' Edge. Any concerns about unauthorised planning matters have been discussed with HDC.

During the past year 2016-17 we have commented to HDC on 59 planning applications, compared to 44 in 15-16, and 60 in 14-15. The drop in numbers in 15-16 was caused by more building taking place using "permitted development legislation" which means full planning permission is not required under some circumstances, We make our recommendations in recognition of the impact on individuals and our community, and also conformance with planning policy. We have paid particular attention to the listed building applications so we maintain the integrity of our wonderful town

Of the 59 applications received, we recommended refusal for 19, representing 17 different sites. For many of these the applicant modified the design to our satisfaction before being passed by HDC. Others HDC refused. Full details of these are in your printed report and I

think demonstrate our skill at successfully commenting on planning applications and influencing HDC.

GMC have recommended refusal to Romans' Edge parcels 7,8,9 and 11 on grounds of non-conformance with the design code criteria and not providing all facilities we were expecting. We feel strongly all community facilities should be provided as the estate grows, not at the end. A LAP(playground) , allotments, green corridor etc. are expected. As yet, this particular application has not been determined by HDC.

Following consultation with residents we have submitted proposed street names for the first 14 roads on Romans Edge development. All of these names except one celebrate people or families who have made a significant contribution to making Godmanchester the vibrant historic place it is. We have a further list of suggested names ready for the next phase.

We have now started welcoming new residents to Romans' Edge and hope they are enjoying our wonderful town.

The HDC Local Plan (effective to 2036) remains in draft status, with major stumbling blocks relating to the infrastructure for the proposed housing on Wyton airbase. This document identifies sites for housing requirements in our district according to a national formula. The major development at Wyton is now on hold due to the inability to provide infrastructure in a timely affordable way. This means that, at least for now, a road across the Ouse Valley Way, down Cow Lane is on hold. Other sites have been identified for these houses and we were pleased to see in the latest consultation of the local plan no new additional sites are proposed in GMC.

As identified during the Neighbourhood Plan consultation, the wish of residents is that there is no further large scale development in the town, so we will continue to fight against further development sites. The Town Council has been approached by a large developer wishing to develop the site behind Romans Edge with 950+ homes. This area is not in the list of sites HDC has identified for homes, and cannot be added without significant consultation, which HDC does not have time for. This is optimistic for Godmanchester in the short term. The long term is uncertain.

The Town Council has lobbied CCC and Balfour Beatty about the inadequacy of the new street lighting in some areas, which does not fulfil the agreed specification. As a result the streetlights are not now switched off overnight, but some areas remain with inadequate lighting.

In the next year we expect to see HDC's Local Plan to 2036 finalised, more residents moving into Romans' Edge, and the work on the A14 continuing.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Over the last 18 months, we have asked you to tell us what you think the issues are for the Town and to give us your thoughts about what we might do to make Godmanchester an even better place. This was to enable us to draft a Neighbourhood Plan, which if voted for by you, would add planning policies that address our needs and would enable us to claim an extra 10% of the CIL levied on all new houses in the Town.

Between November 2016 and January 2017, we shared the draft Neighbourhood Plan and asked you for your feedback. We thank all those who took part. We have updated the draft taking this into account. We are required to do a further consultation through HDC which will start shortly – please do take the time to let us know your thoughts.

Later this year there will a referendum on the Neighbourhood Plan. HDC will contact all those registered to vote in Godmanchester and will ask you if you support the plan. If more than 50% of those who turn out say ‘yes’ then the Plan is ‘made’ and we start using it. We will keep you updated on progress.

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Mr Welton asked whether the extra percentage of CIL money would be applied retrospectively if the Neighbourhood Plan were adopted. He was advised this would not happen, but future applications would attract the higher percentage level of CIL.

Mr Spencer asked for clarification on how litter bins in the town would be affected when HDC discharged their responsibility for regular emptying of certain bins. He was advised that it would only affect 2 litter bins on School Hill which would be emptied by the Grounds Maintenance Contractor.

A question was raised about the proposed redevelopment of the QES and loss of public toilets. Cllr Campbell confirmed there would be an improvement to the facilities inside the hall and one improved unisex public toilet would remain.

A resident asked for clarification on the proposed development of the RGE Engineering site and also on the building adjacent to the footbridge at Bridge Place. Cllr S Wilson reported that the Town Council had been pleased to see work underway to the building in Bridge Place which had been halted pending a further planning application for floor strengthening. The draft HDC Local Plan indicated half the Bridge Place carpark and the RGE Engineering site would be used for up to 35 houses but the majority of the car park would remain.

Mrs Arch thanked the members of the Town Council for giving their time and enthusiasm to the variety of issues facing the community.

The Mayor thanked everyone for attending, and there being no further questions, the meeting was closed at 9.28pm

Signed Dated