

On Thursday 16 June, we held the first full meeting of the newly-elected Town Council, with five members of the public present. Along with a number of apologies for absence, I was sad to advise that Councillors Sue Worthington and Sarah Wilson had decided to retire, and that these two vacancies would be advertised very shortly – so if you are interested in working for the community, this will be your opportunity. Unfortunately I was unable to present my predecessor with his Former Mayors' Badge as Cliff Thomas and his wife had both contracted Covid and could not attend.

In the preceding month I had the honour of representing the town at a number of events, including the opening of the new facilities at our Community Plant Nursery, the installation of the new fish pass at Mill Yard, and the successful Open Gardens weekend a few days ago, when Godmanchester in Bloom raised over £1000, half of which is to be donated to assisting Ukrainian refugees in the area. County Councillor (and former town councillor) Graham Wilson then gave an update on CCC initiatives, particularly those affecting traffic in towns such as Godmanchester. While for the longer term, these include blanket 20 mph speed limits, possible improved on-street parking for residents, and enforcement of parking limitations such as on pavements and on double yellow lines.

Councillor Hooker provided the report on Environment matters. He highlighted the need to plan now for future expansion of the cemetery, and we agreed to proceed with improving parking management at Judith's Field, and to formalise a minor change in orientation of the fabulous new climbing frame – Skyworld – which has now opened on the Recreation Ground. This may require retrospective planning agreement from HDC. The Property Portfolio, chaired by Councillor Radford, reported on ongoing discussions with architects as a preliminary to refurbishing the Town Hall, albeit this work is also unlikely to start for some time. We agreed on a new three-year contract for Christmas lights along the Causeway.

The Business Portfolio report was given by Councillor Simpson, with 11 items requiring Council agreement. These included: to prepare a bid for HDC Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding for a new polytunnel at the Community Nursery, and to continue with previously agreed groundworks; to support the Armed Forces Covenant; and to continue to allow the Porch Museum to use QES for free over 6 weekends a year (but to make a nominal charge for any fund-raising event). Following a spate of vandalism on Judith's Field, we agreed to install additional high-definition CCTV cameras to help deter such anti-social behaviour, particularly around the new toilet building. These will allow the Police to gather evidence for prosecutions and I hope that this will go some way towards addressing concerns expressed earlier in the meeting by a member of the public.

Our last item of business was the report of the Planning Portfolio, given by their new Chair, Councillor Pauley. We agreed to support five planning applications from within the town, but to recommend refusal – mainly on environmental grounds - for a Clubhouse and separate 4-bedroom dwelling at Woolpack Fisheries on Cow Lane; the final decision lies with the Planning Committee of HDC, of course. We are studying the Atkins Report on Travel and Transport in Godmanchester, and the council will now rapidly identify which suggestions are achievable, affordable and would make the biggest impact for the greatest number of residents; five councillors have been elected to that working group. Now that the A1307/A14 works are finished, the Council are determined to push forward with improvements in the shortest possible time, albeit many solutions will also require CCC/Highways approval prior to being implemented.

It was a very positive meeting, and covered a great deal of work by councillors during the past month. Your dynamic Council will continue to identify and deliver improvements for the town.

Dick Taplin, Mayor