

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Wednesday 9th March 2022 at the Birchwood Leisure Centre, Longmead, Hatfield at 7.30pm

PRESENT: Councillor Richard Griffiths – Town Mayor
Plus 2 Members of the electorate

1. WELCOME

The Town Mayor, Cllr Richard Griffiths, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. REPORT OF THE TOWN MAYOR

I had the honour to represent Hatfield Town Council as Mayor for the year commencing from May 2021, and my period of office ends in this coming May. I attended many places during my time in office and I experienced many different types of activity.

I enjoyed, particularly, the opportunities to converse with people across a wide spectrum of subjects and found that most people agreed that a balanced approach to the way the Council conducts its functions was favoured.

I am not going to try to say that any one of the places I visited and events that I attended were more important than any others. It would not be a fair reflection.

The age groups of people and organisations I visited ranged from primary school children to elderly people This included Primary and secondary schools, meals on wheels, Church services, visits to construction sites and opening ceremonies.

It would not be right if I did not mention the support that I had from Jane Anderson in the Hatfield Town Council office for organising my programs and contacting people where arrangements were needed for me to attend various events as they came along. I thank her for all the help and support she gave me during my year.

There was an attendance for the children's Halloween fancy dress competition in the FunZone, and parents and children made some excellent costumes and outfits to take part. It was difficult to make a choice as the most outstanding, and the really sad part for me was that they could not all be the winners.

Taking part in the Annual Santa drive arounds is always uplifting particularly when the youngest children visit the sleigh showing wide-eyed excitement on their faces. Unfortunately, the pandemic issues restricted the normal participation with this activity.

The visits on the Meals on Wheels day produced much the same effect from the people we visited, and it was enlightening to see the pleasant expressions on people's faces and in their eyes when the member of staff who took me with her on her trip around the District introduced me as the Mayor. It ended with a sample of the food handed out to people we visited, and the quality of the food was very good.

There were ceremonial visits which included the Rail Crash Memorial, VJ Day and Armistice Day, plus a visit to St. Albans Cathedral for a ceremony in remembrance of the victims of road accidents in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire.

I attended the Vice Chancellor's lecture at the University of Hertfordshire as well as the opening ceremony for the construction of a new Science Block, and I accepted an invitation to visit the redevelopment site at Hilltop in Bishops Rise.

More recently, I visited the Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the refurbished offices which they now occupy in Salisbury Square in Old Hatfield. I learned that many Councils in Hertfordshire are members and that Hatfield Town Council was at one time, but not anymore. Surely, the Town Council ought to have connections with the Chamber on a formal basis particularly since we both operate from bases in Hatfield.

Similarly, I attended the North Mymms Parish Council Civic Service in St Mary's Church. I am surprised that there is not even some sort of informal coming together of our two Councils from time to time, and perhaps this needs to be addressed also.

Many people are appalled at the amount of crime that takes place, generally, and knife crime is an issue that is prevalent in many places. Hatfield Town Council has excellent well-being facilities, and if we could assist by offering our facilities to help with providing opportunities to prevent would be individuals from taking part in knife crime, it would be good for the Town Council.

At this point in time I have two more confirmed visits one is at the end of March when I will be attending the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Mayor's annual charity dinner and in the middle of April I will be attending a luncheon arranged by the Isabel Hospice.

I wish the best of fortune to the person who takes over from me, I hope they have as an enjoyable time as I have.

3. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL – CLLR CARON JUGGINS

The last two years have probably been the most difficult time that Hatfield Town Council has ever gone through. We have lost a lot of income, had to eat into our reserves and unfortunately make staff redundancies. I am proud of how we all have rallied round and managed to keep Hatfield Town Council a going concern.

We have a lot to look forward to this year, we have a public consultation regarding the ongoing football and sports development at Birchwood which I hope will move this project forward.

I wish to thank our outgoing Town Clerk Carrie Lloyd who gave 14 years of dedicated & loyal service to Hatfield Town Council under some difficult conditions at times. I wish her well in her new role and also look forward to welcoming our new Town Clerk Jonah Anthony on 19th April.

4. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE – CLLR JACKIE BRENNAN

I have been on the planning committee for nearly 4 years and have been chair since May 2021. During that time we have had numerous meetings. Before May 21 we had many of the meetings via Zoom and shared screens and lived by emails. In May the rules changed and we went back to in person meetings. This coincided with a growth in applications for home offices and the building of flats. During the year these two themes have continued.

As a council we have commented regularly on the need for new family homes, three or four bedroomed properties and gardens. Converting family houses into HMO properties and splitting houses into flats have also been on the planning list and relevant comments and objections made.

The final and most widespread issue linked to planning applications of all sizes has been the amount of parking provided. As a council, we understand the green issues about encouraging people to walk, cycle, catch a bus or train. However the integrated infrastructure for safe cycling and east west connectivity is not present, so residents will use their cars and will need to park somewhere.

A member of the planning committee attended the Borough Development Management Committee meetings when relevant to explain our major objections. It is important the Hatfield town voice is heard and comments taken into account (we hope) when decisions are made.

Two members of the planning committee attended the Public Enquiry about the Ellenbrook Quarry and many Hatfield voices were heard by the inspector who turned down the appeal. Round 2(or is it 3?) of the battle to save Ellenbrook Fields is still to come.

Although our role is to consider and comment only I feel it is vital that we contribute to the planning decisions for Hatfield in the borough so that our distinctive identity and history can be protected.

5. REPORT OF THE SPORT & LEISURE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN – CLLR JOHN PERCIVAL

As I suspect you can imagine – as a sports and leisure provider Hatfield Town Council has had a very challenging couple of years.

We've had to shut venues and services, re-open them and keep up to date with seemingly ever-changing rules on how we are permitted to operate.

I am proud of how Town Council staff have responded to this challenge, and I would like to thank all those who have kept us going throughout COVID.

Jane & Denise - who run Funzone which I had the pleasure to attend last summer with my children at one of their friends' birthday party – and they both had an amazing time.

Sophie – for taking our bookings

Donna – for running our pitches and bars

Sarah - in the front office & café

Pav who runs our Health & wellbeing and pilates services here at Birchwood

Kaylem – for bars and front office

And Jodie our finance

I'd also like to thank our Estates team - Ali, Mick, Martin, Colin, Lewis and Liam. I think the pandemic really brought home how important our green spaces are – I know just going for a walk up to Roe Hill really helped my mental health during the first lockdown in 2020 - and our estates team really do a wonderful job at looking after them.

Finally I'd like to thank our former Town Clerk Carrie Lloyd and Head of Operations Sam Frake for keeping things going through what has been the most challenging of circumstances.

Touch wood – the worst is now behind us, we are now running nearly all the services we did previously and we can now look at how we can improve what we can offer to the local community.

We have recently had new play and gym equipment installed at Roe Hill and we have a number of projects in the pipeline.

We will be putting new equipment into Funzone in May to truly bring it into the 2020s New outdoor gym equipment will shortly be installed at St Albans Road East recreation area and we are looking to install a basketball court here at Birchwood as well as supporting new community health and wellbeing projects from the leisure centre.

I know the committee and chair for the next year will be looking to build on this work in the year ahead.

6. REPORT OF THE RESOURCES & POLICY COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN – CLLR TRISTAN WILTSHIRE

I am very pleased with how the Council has managed to survive a pandemic and emerge a stronger more cohesive organisation. We have managed to stay within budget albeit using some of our reserves due to a severe loss of income.

We will continue to build on the lessons learned during the pandemic to deliver services to the people of Hatfield providing best value for money. We have formulated a robust budget for the year ahead which saw a small increase in the precept. Unfortunately we had to trim our staff numbers and we have expected more from the staff remaining in post and thankfully they have delivered for this council and community.

7. QUESTIONS

There were no questions from the electorate