

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD AT SWANMEAD SCHOOL,
ILMINSTER ON THURSDAY 18 April 2013 AT 19.00 HRS**

1 Present:

Chairman: Cllr R Swann (Mayor)

Councillors: P. Burton, D. Miller, J. Pallister, A. Shearman, S. Storey, E. J. Taylor,
K. Turner (Electors)
L. Vjeh (Non Elector)

Officers: Michelle Clayton (Senior Administration Officer), Joy Norris (Town Clerk),

Nicola McIntosh (Administrative Assistant, Marilyn Shelley (Deputy Town Clerk),
Police Officers: Inspector T Coombe, PC A Stuart

16 members of the public attended, 15 of whom were Electors.

2 Chairman's Address

The Chair welcomed people to the meeting and then handed over to the Town Clerk Who explained that the Annual Town Meeting is not a Council meeting but a statutory meeting, where once a year, the Mayor is charged with reporting to the electors of the town on the activities over the last year. The Clerk stated that it is also an opportunity for the electors to ask questions for clarification or to gain further information and informed attendees that it is a statutory meeting for citizens who are on the electoral roll for Iminster, other members of the public are entitled to attend but as observers only.

3. Minutes of the previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Thursday 3 May 2012 were confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the following amendments being noted:

- Cllr A Shearman had been present at the 2012 meeting
- -The 2012 meeting was held at Swanmead School not Greenfylde School.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the previous minutes.

5. Mayor's Report

The Mayor, Roger Swann, gave a report on the activities of the Town Council for the year 2012/2013 and the events he had attended. Included in the Mayor's report were the following:

- The Mayor thanked Cllr Goodall and everyone who helped to make the Olympic Torch Celebrations a great success, also the Lions Club of Iminster & District and the Carnival Club, for the excellent marshaling of the event.
- The Mayor also thanked the Jubilee Committee for the accomplishment of the Queen's Jubilee Celebrations which included the open air civic service; the tug o' war, talent contests and the lighting of the beacon.
- The Town Council is continuing to work with the County Council regarding parking in the East Street area
- The Mayor spoke of the relentless inclement weather which saw key areas of the town under water and gave rise to the Town Council arranging a public meeting of interested parties, the outcome being a comprehensive report compiled by the

Town Council which is to be the foundation for tackling the problem to prevent any reoccurrence of similar severities.

- Works currently being undertaken on the Town's open spaces included the opening of pathways, for the improvement of public access on Herne Hill, the clearance of undergrowth and the ongoing programme of maintenance and refurbishment of litter bins, benches, play equipment,
- The Mayor informed members of the public of the four pathways that the Town Council now maintain around the town and assured the meeting that the Town Council looks for every opportunity to enhance the look of the town and pursue the involvement of young people.
- The supply of bulbs donated by South Somerset District Council, were planted by children from Sunny Ile Playgroup and Cheeky Monkeys with the Open Spaces Wardens, which made a fine display along the canal and the
- The Woodland Trust Organisation had provided whips which together with some young trees provided through public donation, had been planted at West Crescent, with the assistance of Swanmead School pupils.
- The work on the canal had been mainly maintenance,
- That a new family of bird species, "Mallards" had joined the "Moorhen" species on the canal and were happily living beside one another.
- The importance of youth provision, especially with the cutback in funding for County and District Councils,
- The development of recreational facilities in Ilminster, should be seen as part of a strategic plan for the whole town –
- The development of the Skate Park, which met with universal approval, and was the start of a policy of providing activities for young people and engaging with them.
- The garden competition had been re-styled for 2012 and the Miniature Garden Competition organised within the local schools had been very successful. The Town Council planned to concentrate on the young peoples' competitions in the future, and to develop the scarecrow competition
- There had been significant staffing changes at the Town Council; a new Town Clerk had been appointed and there had also been changes within both the office and open spaces team
- The Town Council was currently in the process of co-opting a new Councillor.

The Mayor finished his report highlighting the hard work and dedication of fellow Councillors, Town Council staff, organisations and Individuals in the town, who working collectively keep the town a lovely place to live and raise children.

6. Financial Statement

The Town Clerk circulated Ilminster Town Council's Income and Expenditure Account and Balance Sheet for the year 2013/2014.

The format of the financial information had been changed so that more up to date information could be provided this year. The Clerk highlighted that money is moved from Reserves and Contingencies provision into areas of need, for example to fund replacement seats, benches and bins etc.

The Clerk reported that the Council's audited accounts are available for the public to view, between the 8th May and 28th June 2013, and all documents are available from the office or website in keeping with the Town Council policy to be open and transparent.

The Town Clerk raised the subject of the precept and the rise in Council Tax and highlighted that for Band D property the amount payable in 2013/14 would increase by 31p per property per week. Much of the increase was due to government changes to the housing benefits system which are outside of the Town Council's control; Ilminster had been badly affected by these changes as had Chard.

The Clerk informed the public that an allowance of £2000 had been made for Safety Surfacing equipment for play areas and an order had been raised for the dismantling of the Football Stand reporting that work is hoped to commence in June 2013 costing approximately £2000.

The Town Council was currently seeking prices to improve the drainage, of the Recreation Ground at the Mead, and had been in discussions with South Somerset District Council, regarding a replacement of the fencing at Winterhay Lane Play area. The Town Clerk informed attendees that all expenditure reports are regularly circulated to all Councillors to oversee, but that she would be happy to go through the accounts in detail with any member of the public if they wished.

7. Police Report

Inspector Tim Coombe and PC Andy Stuart provided the police perspective on a number of town events that had happened in 2012 and current topical matters:

- The Olympic Torch Celebrations, Carnival and Victorian Evening had passed with no related incidents, this was particularly pleasing given the huge numbers of people that had attended the Olympic Torch relay.
- Records for the time period when the fair had visited showed a reduction in crime in comparison to previous years; it is believed this was due to poor weather.
- The current year's statistics were showing a 21.5% reduction of crime.
- There has been an issue of underage drinking in and around the Ilminster and the Police Officers reminded the meeting that it is an offence to supply alcohol to anyone under the legal age and it can lead to prosecution.
- People attending the meeting were reminded to be mindful of rogue traders and cold callers and asked to warn elderly neighbours and the vulnerable so that they are aware of the dangers,
- Following November's election, Sue Mountstevens took up appointment as the first Avon & Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). The PCC has a keen interest in reducing commercial burglaries and wishes to retain neighborhood policing in rural areas.
- There is a new Superintendent for South Somerset, a new Chief Inspector and a newly appointed neighborhood Sergeant who covers Crewkerne, Chard and Ilminster.
- The Avon and Somerset Police Service have had to implement substantial cuts.
- The powers of PCSO's are being reviewed and changes should be implemented by the end of 2013. PCSOs provide visibility and are an important presence in the town and surrounding areas.
- There had been a reduction in rural crime such as thefts of fuel/diesel from farms, and working with rural communities and farmers has resulted in many arrests,
- There had been an increase in evening burglaries through the seasons of winter and spring and everyone was asked to be vigilant to opportunists, keeping properties secure.
- It is necessary for the Police Service to ensure that officers are deployed to the areas where they are going to have most impact. Therefore from time to time it is

necessary for Officers to be abstracted from their usual places of work and deployed elsewhere. In that context Police Officers who patrol in Ilminster have been working to support colleagues in Yeovil Town Centre.

8. Public Question Time

A number of questions were raised by electors.

- A) A member of the public reported that he had written a letter to the Town Council nearly a year ago, requesting a pedestrian crossing at Listers Hill, but the letter was not acknowledged.

Cllr Swann apologised and acknowledged the request to look into the matter.

- B) Mr M James had submitted the following question

“Can the council please justify and explain the use of the 20% increase in it's part of the council tax?”

In light of all other recipients of council tax, with the exception of the fire brigade who I don't think anyone can begrudge it's 2% increase, making no increase in charges just what will the town council be doing with this extra income over and above what it was already doing ?

I would bet very few people if any have seen an increase in income of 20% in total for the last 4 years let alone the last 12 months.”

A supplementary suggestion was made that in the future the Town Council circulate documents which are more user friendly, for means of comparison and a further question was asked about whether or not the Town Council makes a profit.

The Town Clerk acknowledged the suggestion and agreed documents should be more consistent for future meetings.

Councillor Miller, the Chairman of the Town Council's Finance and Policy Committee, explained the context of the recent Council tax rises and that allowances were now being made to replace items. Cllr Miller gave the precept figures for nearby towns and villages as a comparison. Councillor Miller also explained that Council finances are very different to those of a business and budgets would be based on “break-even” rather than trying to make a profit.

- C) Julie Fowler asked the following

“Given the recent furore caused by the public wanting footpath access to the Northern part of Winterhay Lane, despite the fact that there are perfectly acceptable alternative footpaths accessing the same destinations,; is it not time that the Town took a more positive attitude to farmers and the fact that private working farm roads are not compatible with public rights of way.”

The Mayor said that as a long term member of the community that he believed historically there had been a harmonious relationship between private land users and

the public, and there are generations of walkers that have always thought that “Bumpy Lane” was a public footpath even though it is not marked on the definitive map? The Mayor reminded the meeting that The Town Council had met with members of the public, considered the information available and then formed its view and made that view known to Somerset County Council. It is the County Council who are the decision maker as to whether or not the route should be included on the Definitive Map. The Mayor advised that no one should put themselves deliberately in a confrontational situation.

D) Mr Scott Waldie posed the following question

“The Ilminster Warehouse Theatre is facing hard economic times, due to rising costs and dwindling audiences. If the Warehouse is not to suffer the same fate as the Brewhouse in Taunton, the Town needs to rally round. Of course the Theatre management must sharpen up and face the challenge full on, but this is a Community Theatre, and belongs just as much to the town as it does the IES. It is not just our theatre. It is also your theatre. If Ilminster wants a community theatre (which serves very different needs from the Meeting House), what should the community be doing to make it sustainable? If it closes, we will never be able to reopen it.”

Cllr Swann agreed that the theatre was an asset and suggested that Ilminster Warehouse Theatre’s management look into a wider range of advertising to reach out to the community.

The Mayor asked if there were any questions from Councillors.

E) Cllr K Turner (South Somerset District Council and Somerset County Council) commented that she felt the precept increase was unreasonably high as families are currently continually struggling, and asked made the following queries:

- Whether the rise was to improve the Town, MUGA, or Skate Park?
- Where is the funding for the Sports Hall being held?

Councillor Miller replied that the skatepark had cost more than expected and the Town Council did not have sufficient funds to develop the MUGA at the same time.

The Deputy Clerk reported that money for the sports hall is placed in a separate account.

F) Councillor Turner then asked what action is being taken to rectify the damage caused to the rec and adjacent land by the visit of the fair in October.

The Town Clerk reported that the Town Council had recently been seeking prices for drainage at the Recreation Ground, and it intended to consider proposals at the next Open Spaces Committee Meeting. In the meantime, the Town Council was trying to plan ahead and minimise potential further damage, and had made the fair organiser aware that the Recreation ground will not be available for use in June but that Britten’s Field was available as an alternative. Ilminster Midsummer Experience was also seeking to use the Recreation Ground, (currently going to Open Spaces for approval), and have been informed of the circumstances.

The Town Clerk confirmed that the Planning Committee include the “drainage” factor in, when considering Planning Applications.

- G) A member of the public asked whether the Town Council has a Sustainability Action Group.
Cllr Goodall responded that the Town Council does not have the same powers regarding sustainability as the County and District Councils, but assured the meeting the Council does consider sustainability issues when coming to a decision.
- H) A member of the public asked whether the police are willing to justify costs on the Council Tax Bill.
The Police Inspector responded the Council Tax is the major funding source for policing and the Chief Constable working with the Police and Crime Commissioner is responsible for making sure that money is allocated where it is most required.
- I) A member of the public asked if speed cameras in Somerset have been switched off. Inspector Coombe reported that fixed speed cameras are not currently in use. The camera safety partnership had been dissolved other methods of monitoring speed are used; such as Speed Watch groups, mobile camera vans and mobile camera sites. Reinstatement of fixed cameras in the future was an aspiration. Councillor Vijeh asked that as a result of not having working cameras if there had been a noticeable change in speed offences. Inspector Coombe replied the detection of speeding offences has reduced and fatalities have not increased he believes this is because the presence of a speed camera still acts as a deterrent.

The meeting closed at 8.35 pm

Chair's Signature & Date