

MINUTES OF THE **ANNUAL PARISH MEETING** OF ROSS-ON-WYE
HELD ON MONDAY 27th MARCH 2017 AT 7.00PM
IN THE LARRUPERZ CENTRE, GRAMMAR SCHOOL CLOSE, ROSS-ON-WYE

In the absence of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor Councillor Nigel Gibbs chaired the meeting.

1 Minutes of the previous Annual Parish Meeting

It was agreed to amend the minutes to include an additional question that had been raised under Item # 6 – ‘Matters raised by Ross-on-Wye Residents’ regarding councillors’ ‘interests’.

IT WAS RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 4th April 2016 be signed as a true record of the meeting.

2 Matters Arising

No matter arising

3 Mayor’s Annual Report

Councillor Gibbs addressed those present and talked about the three wards within the parish, he explained that the Council is made up of 18 members. Meetings take place in the Corn Exchange, which is where the Council offices are located and members of the public are able to attend to meet with the Council’s officers. Every meeting provides an opportunity for public participation and residents are always welcome to attend and ask questions. There has been a lot of work going on with taking over the asset transfers which has included a number of historic buildings. The committees and working groups have been busy and there have been new initiatives that include the reinstatement of funding a CAB face to face service that takes place in the Library. The Council also makes contributions towards the CCTV system which is used to help with the prevention and detection of crime. The Council has 6 standing committees which deal with day to day matters of the council, brief reports from the committee chairmen will follow. Thanks were given to the council employees who have had to deal with a number of complex issues which have taken time and effort. In closing, Councillor Gibbs was pleased to report there is steady progress on work on the Neighbourhood Development Plan within the town.

4 Chairmen’s Reports

The Chairman of the Amenities Committee Councillor Mayo, reported a very busy year again this year with the Committee taking responsibility for decisions about trees, open spaces, the riverbank, grass cutting and many other things. It was noted there have been many compliments for the improvements in what were some previously neglected areas. The Committee has worked towards the completion of a number of projects including the new fencing at the Deanhill play area and replaced and repaired some of the equipment in the park too. The Council officers were thanked for their hard work and achievements sometimes under difficult circumstances due to the steep learning curve with the additional open spaces that have been taken on. It is encouraging to see the results of all this hard work.

The Chairman of the Finance & Personnel Committee Councillor Gren reported he felt the Committee had made good progress in many areas and working to gain a consensus in its decisions and recommendations. The work has included the distribution of grants, the implementation of a Reserves Policy to ensure the Council has adequate funds to cover its responsibilities and plan for future needs whilst taking into account the Council’s approach to risk management. There has been a thorough review of Earmark Reserves and new budget heads set up to provide a sinking fund for the Council’s property portfolio. It was reported that with prudent financial management the Council’s finances would be coming in on budget at the year end. The Chairman ended his report by saying the challenge continues to be in balancing the expectation of Ross residents against the necessary obligations to provide an expanding range of services.

The Chairman of the Policy & Management Committee Councillor Bramer reported on the work with Historic England to commission a quinquennial report for the Market House and identifying the need to plan for expenditure to pay for future work on the Council's buildings. Work is continuing with the investigations into reducing the running costs of providing the public toilets and also the search to find a suitable tenant for the Old Chapel continues. The request by this Council to take over the car park at Homs Road has been accepted by Herefordshire Council and this will provide a site for the Council to have a self-contained area for storage, parking and workshop facilities. It will also provide a site for the Sea Cadets who will use part of the site for their new headquarters. The Committee has regularly reviewed the Council's policies and made recommendations to update and change them in line with legislation and best practice. Work is on-going to improve the use of social media to promote the Council's events and activities.

The Chairman of the Events Committee Councillor Lerego thanked her fellow Committee members for their work over the last year and reported the work the Committee has been involved with in arranging a number of events. One of the main events was the series of summer concerts at the Bandstand which attracted a large number of visitors last year. It has been agreed to develop this for 2017 and hold a new event 'Proms in the Park' which will take place in August. The other main event the Committee organised was the Christmas Fayre. This involved a lot of planning and hard work on the day but resulted in a very positive day that was built on the successes of the previous year and provided a fabulous start to the festive season. The Town Clerk was thanked for her encouragement and support.

The Chairman of the Planning & Development Committee Councillor Lister thanked the Committee for its input and consideration and recognised the experience and passion shown for the town when looking at the applications. He noted that the Town Council only acts in an advisory capacity and that Herefordshire Council is responsible for making the decisions. All the applications are considered using local knowledge and looked at within the context of planning legislation and guidelines. The Committee met 13 times during the last year and looked at 103 applications and 18 applications for work to trees, in addition to a number of licences and consultation documents. The Deputy Town Clerk was thanked for providing the information in the report. Councillor Lister concluded by saying it had been an interesting year seeing new businesses and buildings improvements being made within the town. Members of the public were invited to attend any of the meetings and comments on applications are always encouraged.

The Chairman of the Markets Sub Committee Councillor Bennett reported on the work undertaken by councillors as well as a two co-opted members, one being a market trader and another a town trader. The benefits of co-opting others onto the sub-committee has provided a breadth of knowledge and expertise in making decisions in trying to develop and promote the markets. Independent market research was commissioned last year which was used to help formulate a plan and target areas for improvement. A report from an officer of the Association of British Market Authorities offered some suggestions on ways to enhance what is currently on offer. Some new initiatives are planned for this year in an effort to boost our markets. Thanks were given to the Markets Officer and the Town Clerk for their continued support.

The Chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Sub Committee Mr Melvin Reynolds reported that progress has been made with good public engagement across a wide sector of interested parties. It is hoped that with further development the draft plan will move towards its final stages.

5 Presentation

Mr. John Campion, West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) thanked the chairman for inviting him to speak at the meeting. What is a Police and Crime Commissioner? This is the second term of a four year post which is an elected position, not an employed officer. The allocation of the budget of £207m for policing sits with the PCC who acts as a custodian of assets and works in partnership with the local police force. An important part of the role is to provide effective leadership and to oversee the appointment of the Chief Constable. The PCC works closely with the Chief Constable who, as a community leader, must inspire confidence. He is held in high regard nationally and this region is lucky to have him leading the

force. The PCC also has power to remove officers from the force. A key part of the role is his duty to engage with key partners and work towards a plan led approach that sits at the centre of the commissionership influencing investment choices and identifying priorities. The Plan is relevant and will be used as the driver for delivering promises. His last power holds him to account, for performance, for the level of crime and looking at targets of answering calls for emergency and non-emergency calls.

The Plan has 4 points

Victims and survivors - this aspect is about understanding needs and looking at a more bespoke, tailored approach to individuals

Secure West Mercia – this covers aspects of non-negotiable items, and identifying the right resources to fight serious and organised crime and counter terrorism, holding officers to account with the expectation of high standards

A reformed West Mercia – this is an efficiency drive towards improved business practices and technology. A trial in Evesham saw the whole station equipped with smart phones and laptops to enable mobilisation of systems and increased the visibility time of officers. It is acknowledged that the police have not managed to keep pace with technology in the force and a key priority now is to 'Catch up and keep up'. In order to ensure there is a high standard of local service recognition must be given to provide the right tools to do the job.

Reassured West Mercia – recognising we live in a safe part of the country and the crime rates are amongst some of the lowest in the country. However many people don't feel safe, this is a drive to reassure people and to make sure uniformed officers are visible. A partnership between community and police services is vital to ensure success. The understanding that improvements need to be made with customer care, to get better at feedback with information. At present feedback is not consistent and there is not a high level of customer service. The introduction of automated systems will enable these improvements to take place.

Public Questions

Has the Mayor of London been written to, to express sympathy and condolences to those affected following the recent act of terrorism? The PCC confirmed that the officer's family have been written to through the Police Federation. A request was made for a copy to be sent to the Mayor of Ross.

Concerns were expressed that the theory does not always accompany the practice and a request was made to see more officers on the street working within the community. A point was made that the public want to see police on the street to allow members of the public to communicate with them directly. The meeting was told there is support to keep the police station open and the importance of visibility within the community – 24/7 service that we all rely upon.

Thanks were given to the very able team working within Ross, a lot of work is being done with young people and the police are becoming more involved in this engagement.

Concerns were expressed about members of the traveller community coming into local towns and causing havoc. A request was made for a tougher response to deal with this situation swiftly and enable the use of legislative powers available. Recognition that there needs to be more pace as normally things take too long, work is being done nationally and hopefully this will improve things for the future.

A question was raised about public drinking in the town – phone calls are getting logged but there is still a lot of incidents within the town centre. It was noted that the approach to licensing could work better and initiatives involving those working within the night time economy working together might improve the situation. There is a desire for more high quality establishments and a better commitment from the police to deal effectively with the problem early on.

A request was made for better reporting by members of the public to the police which would help improve communication. A question was raised as to whether there is a better forum that can improve feedback.

Support for a Neighbourhood Watch scheme was requested, it was noted that a force coordinator is responsible for enabling communities to operate these schemes and members of the public should be signposted towards the coordinator.

A question was asked about cyber-crime and on-line fraud, and a view was expressed that there is more likelihood of being at risk of these crimes than a face to face crime. The PCC responded that he felt part of the answer was about vulnerability, keeping people safe on line, educating young people and older people about scams and the dangers of cyber- crime, recognising signs and responding to this area of criminality. This is a large problem for businesses as well as individuals, advice should be promoted to ensure people have up to date virus software and good practices and policies in place.

A request was made for a guide to rural services to point residents towards how to access help and who to direct complaints and queries to.

6 Matters raised by Ross on Wye Residents

Questions were put to chairman regarding;

Ms. Janette Draper - Praise for Amenities Committee and the work done along the riverbank

Mr. Tipton - Hildersley Roundabout – a disgrace, needs to have some work to improve it

Mr. Peter Mutt – communications – encourage something more local and more information to utilise technology and promote work and responsibilities of Council

Mr. Peter Mutt – by-election – not enough publicity – how can candidates promote their policies and what about the claims made in the local paper

Question to County Council – when are the white lines going to be refreshed within the town

Mrs. Sandy Cottrell - Ross Hospital – want it to be fought for in any way necessary, disgusted that councillors voted against sending a letter to safeguard the hospital services. A plea to work together not to scaremonger and frighten vulnerable people

Mrs. Mary Brewin – draft STP has mooted plans to decrease community hospital beds. What is meant within the plan by the term ‘wrap around services’, concerns about the people who might be at risk should these plans go ahead

Mr. Paul Deneen – nowhere has he heard at any meeting that there will be any reductions in the number of beds at Ross Hospital. There is a major consultation exercise between April and May, this is the opportunity to talk about what we want in the Ross Community Hospital. We have to remember this is such an important area in our community and people have been upset by comments made. We have to move forward, there will be an opportunity for everyone to put their views forward

Mr. Chris Bartrum – brought the subject of the Hospital up in December and is concerned about a bedless hospital in Ross

Mr. Utting – draft STP was issued as part of a public engagement for residents to complete. Mr. Utting asked for a vote to be called for, it was noted that a vote was asked for in relation to the question of a letter to go to the hospital. It was recognised that the debate should be reopened and that the Council will formally respond when the opportunity is opened to formal consultation

Mr. Marshall – commented that party politics should not be something that came into the council chamber

Mrs. Munoz – asked for clarification about the process of the council in relation to the issue of the hospital consultation

Mr. Lister – responded that the Council’s Planning Committee had agreed to recommend to Full Council that a response be made now

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.57pm.

Chairman..... Date.....