

LEDBURY TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON
25 APRIL 2024

PRESENT: Councillors Chowns, Hughes, l'Anson (Town Mayor) and Morris

ALSO PRESENT: Angela Price – Town Clerk
Julia Lawrence – Deputy Town Clerk
Trudie McGinnis – Minute Taker
6 Residents
2 Non-residents

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

13. TO APPROVE AND SIGN THE MINUTES OF A TOWN MEETING HELD ON 15 FEBRUARY 2024

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Town Meeting held on 15 February 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

14. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Mayor spoke at length about the duties and events that she had carried out in the past year. She listed the events which included a Smorgasbord evening, Ledbury Community Day, Great Big Green Week which included a sustainable coffee morning event, and a flag-raising ceremony for Armed Forces Day. Events for the Mayor of Evesham, Worcester and Hereford, Shaw Health Market Lodge 10th anniversary, Ledbury Walk & Talk, LEAF community family fun event day, The Bishop of Herefords evening drinks reception, High Sheriffs Summer party, carnival, Deer Park 1940's garden party, litter picking with the HMS Ledbury crew, Remembrance Parade 2023, Christmas Lights Switch On event, World Book Day, Women's International Day, Mayors Mile, and Ledbury's Got Talent auditions. The Mayor also hosted her civic service event and was pleased to see six Mayors and Deputy Mayors, the High Sheriff, Deputy Lord Lieutenant, the Chairman of Hereford Council, and the Commander of HMS Ledbury attend her event.

The Mayor gave her thanks to those who had supported her year in office, in particular her husband who had been her Consort for the year, Deputy Mayor, Councillor Chowns, David Taylor-Black the Mayor's chaplain. The Mayor also thanked all the businesses that have been generous in donating raffle prizes. She gave thanks to all the Council staff, under the Town Clerk's leadership, who she stated work hard and under a lot of pressure. Lastly, the Mayor gave

thanks Sophie the Mayor's Secretary for her hard work and dedication

The Mayor then went on to talk about Ledbury's Got Talent on 3rd May, tickets are selling well, and it should be quite a good show.

Lastly, the Mayor advised that it had been hoped that the timeline of events for the Ledbury War Memorial Restoration would be brought to this meeting. However, due to the heavy staff workload, as this was not a statutory item, the decision was made to postpone producing this at present. The Mayor thanked Councillor Sinclair for sending his version of the timeline, which she had received that afternoon, adding that there had not been sufficient time to verify the points included in the document. However, she advised that if anybody had any questions about the War Memorial, then she would be happy to receive them.

15. LEDBURY TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORTS

a. Planning, Economy & Tourism Committee (Councillor Morris)

Councillor Morris advised that he hadn't submitted a report this year because he had found it very difficult to address the issues that had been raised by residents and fellow councillors pertaining to the Charter Market. He did not feel able to write anything positive and supportive about the Charter Market because it seems almost non-existent.

Councillor Morris thanked the members of the Committee stating that the Committee had worked tirelessly accepting planning applications for consideration.

The Events Working Party has been a fundamental part of the town and Councillor Morris looks forward to the Events Working Party continuing to produce good quality work for the town and its people.

He noted that the John Masefield Memorial Working Party has gone from strength to strength and had recruited a Heritage Lottery professional fundraiser who seems to be taking the John Masefield Memorial Working Party forward.

b. Environment & Leisure Committee (Councillor Chowns)

Councillor Chowns introduced his report adding that it was pretty much as he had written, with the addition of a list of events that staff had kindly included, noting that these were a welcome addition to the report. He added to Councillor Morris' statement about the Events Working Party, which is a sub-committee of the E & I Committee and stated that it's very pleasing to see that it's a growing part of the town's life. Councillor Chowns advised that he doesn't think anything needs to be added to what had been written in the report and urged those present to take the report away with them to read at their convenience.

There are ongoing issues to do with the Cemetery and Christmas Lighting Scheme, so any suggestions and advice will be more than welcome.

He made reference to Green Spaces, which is one of the Council's responsibilities (page 11).

Councillor Chowns commended the report to the meeting.

c. Finance, Policy & General Purposes Committee (Councillor Hughes)

Councillor Hughes pointed out that the first pie chart (Out Turn 2023/24) illustrated as part of his report (page 5) was incorrect, in relation to the Legend.

He did not consider it necessary to read all of his report out, however he did want to highlight some of the content on page 8. He started at the bottom of the page in respect of the grant paid to the Daffodil Bus Service, which was a substantial amount of money to help pump-prime the project. He pointed out that as this request had been received after the budget setting process for 2023/24 there had been no budget provision for this and therefore the funds had been taken from the Council's General Reserve. He pointed out that this meant that the Council reserves were slightly depleted, however a decision to further support in 2024/25 was included in the budget.

Had it not been for the decision to further support the Daffodil Bus Service in 2024/25 the rise in the precept for 2024/25 would have been circa 4.8%, but because of the decision to further support the Bus Service there was an increase in the Council's precept request to 6.5%.

He added that it is important to notice that the Council have over the past few years endeavoured to build their reserves from when they became greatly depleted towards the end of the last decade. He stated that he believed that previously the Council had increased its reserves to in excess of £250,000 but without that it is very difficult for the Council to fulfil its duty towards the fabulous historic buildings in the town and do all the other work that the Council have to do and need to do. He stated that he believes the Council are getting towards the end of rebuilding their reserves and hoped that in future years they may be able to take a slightly different view towards any increases in the precept.

Councillor Hughes then expressed gratitude to fellow committee members who sit on the Finance, Policy & General Purposes Committee. He also thanked Vice Chair, Councillor Sinclair, for his support and for capably deputising on numerous occasions. Councillor Hughes said he would like to thank the Finance Clerk for her work and attention to detail. Finally, he would especially like to thank and express gratitude to the Town Clerk for her expertise, professionalism, and advice, who bears much of the responsibility without necessarily being able to take part in the important decisions, for which she is then responsible.

Councillor Hughes then commended the report to the meeting.

One of the non-residents of the town commented on the professionalism of the Annual Report and Newsletter that had been provided at the meeting, giving their thanks to all those who had been involved in their production.

16. TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET 2024/25

Councillor Hughes advised that he had nothing to add to the budget papers that had been presented at the meeting, other than he believes the council are going to review how budgets are presented going forward.

RESOLVED:

That the information regarding the Town Council Budget 2024/25 be received and noted.

11. COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS FROM ANY ELECTOR OF LEDBURY PARISH

Q1 – A member of the public spoke and said that the council need to find a better way of engaging with the public. They pointed out that not everybody has access to social media. She stated that she knows how hard the Councillors and staff all work but felt that the Council need to finds ways in which they can engage better with the residents of the Town.

The Town Clerk advised that the Council are trying to find ways to engage better and as part of this do have a stand at Town events to promote the Council and what they do. However, she pointed out that often these are being managed by staff, advising that they need the Councillors to participate more in these events. The Clerk spoke about how she believes there should be an increase in the number of Parish meetings, and perhaps we could look at providing refreshments at the Annual Meeting in future years and that these are things that are currently being discussed.

Q2 – A member of the public addressed the Mayor about an interaction at a previous meeting and outside the Barn in St. Katherine's Square. He made accusations against the Mayor and accused her of lying about her presence at the Barn at that time.

He also referred to a statement that he was aware the Mayor had made prior to a recent meeting, in which he believed the Mayor had stated she had denied being at the Barn. He asked if any of those Councillors present had heard that statement made by the Mayor, which four of them advised they had been present at. He pointed out that that statement had not gone into the minutes of that meeting.

The Barn owner stated that as the Mayor is head of Planning, Tourism and Economics, she has a great responsibility and duty not to lie, to do the best for the town and to encourage and get the town to a point where it is trying its best. He said he looks at the market and it's a sad thing that, as a Market Town, some days there are no traders. He spoke about the Farmer's Market that he had previously organised and the success of that market, even though he was criticised for doing it, he believes he was marred by petty bureaucracy and red tape. He feels the Town Council is afraid to do anything and these problems should be overcome.

The Mayor responded stating that the conversation had been about the Barn owners parking their van on St. Katherine's Square. The Mayor advised that she never denied having that conversation at all. The Mayor said she had no knowledge of Morris Dancers on St. Katherine's Square on a given Saturday, she wasn't there, she pointed out that she did not deny having had a conversation with the member of the public. She pointed out that what she read out as a statement was done before the meeting in question had started, reiterating that she had not seen the Morris Dancers on the Saturday and never had a conversation with him about the Morris Dancers.

Councillor Morris advised that the meeting should move on. It was advised that it is a personal issue. Councillor Chowns supported Councillor Morris' point and advised that this issue should be taken further outside of this meeting, this is not the appropriate forum, and felt that it was inappropriate for the Parish meeting.

Q3 – A member of the public spoke about the Bye Street Toilets. She advised that she knows that the Town Council are not responsible for these public toilets but that they had given some financial support towards repairs. It would be nice to know if they are ever going to be opened or if not, can they be knocked down and repurposed for something else?

Councillor Chowns advised that this is an ongoing issue which we hope to resolve in the next few months and that there is an item in respect of this for discussion on the agenda of the Environmental & Leisure Committee meeting for 2 May.

Q4 – A member of the public (also a Town Councillor) spoke about the lack of communication from the Mayor to which he had received no response. The Mayor advised that a decision has been made that email is not the forum for discussing Council business. The member of the public advised that he has sent an email which requires answers and would like to know why he hasn't received an answer. The Mayor advised that the email in question referred to correspondence between herself and member of the public prior to her becoming a Town Councillor on a personal email which she did not feel was appropriate that other individuals should have been copied in. She advised that one cannot demand an answer and she does not consider it relevant to council business today and therefore does not intend to reply.

The member of the public questioned the Mayor's integrity, in relation to events that the email referred to.

A member of the public asked "what right the individual has to bully the Mayor about an email that didn't involve them and did not consider their behaviour as acceptable.

Councillor Morris suggested that the current term of office of the Mayor is coming to an end and hopefully the Council can start a new Municipal Year with a new Mayor and move forward, to which the member of the public stated they would take that on board.

The meeting ended at 7.46 pm.

Signed Dated
(Chair)

DRAFT