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THESE MINUTES NOT YET CONFIRMED

**LOUGHTON TOWN COUNCIL**

**ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

**Minutes of the Annual Town meeting held on  
Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 in the Murray Hall, 106 Borders Lane, Loughton**

**Chairman:** Councillor C C Pond, Town Mayor of Loughton Town Council

**Also present:** Town Councillors: K E Angold-Stephens, J W Angold-Stephens, R Barrett, R E Brookes, M R M Chalk, A Copland, C Davies, T Frankland, B Glassman, S M Harper, P House, L Howe, R Law, S M Murray, T G Owen, S Pewsey, C P Pond, R Richardson, R Thomson, D J Wixley

Approximately 16 members of the public.

**Officers:** E K Walsh (Town Clerk), S Haynes (Deputy Town Clerk)  
P J Hoy (Services Manager), J Innis (Administrative Assistant)  
S Weymess (Caretaker)

**1 Introduction of Councillors**

The Councillors introduced themselves and the part they play in the Council.

**2 Minutes of the Town Meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2008**

These were approved as a correct copy.

**3 Matters arising from the last meeting**

There were no matters arising.

**4 Reports on Council's Activities**

The Town Mayor welcomed everyone to the 14<sup>th</sup> annual meeting.

He reported that the newly elected Council had taken office in May 2008 at a time when the council was in a period of transition. Following the retirement of the long-serving Town Clerk, Louise Fuller, her Deputy, Enid Walsh, had been appointed to the post. The vacancy this created was filled by the Town Clerk of Ongar, Shirley Haynes, who took up her duties in January 2009.

In December 2008, the Council received its Quality Status reaccreditation, and as one of the first Quality Councils in the country, it was fitting to be one of the first to be reaccredited. In response to the new community engagement requirement the Council had introduced two new initiatives, a citizenship awards scheme, to recognise public service and public-spirited acts and Mayor's Notes on the website. The Citizenship Awards would be presented at a Civic Church Service on St. George's Day, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2009.

The silver collar or chain of office to go with the already extant badge, decided on by the 2004-08 council, was delivered and first worn on the visit of HRH Duke of Gloucester to the Warren to mark 30 years of the Epping Forest Centenary Trust in June 2008.

An innovation this year had been that of agenda planning meetings between the Town Clerk and the various committee chairmen and vice chairmen. These meetings

are also attended by the senior Town Council officers involved in the work of each committee. The Council had always been fortunate in the calibre and dedication of its staff and this change followed a restructuring early in 2008 that sought to devolve more responsibility to senior officers thus freeing the Town Clerk's post from much of the detail so as to concentrate on wider issues.

The Council had expressed concern following the adverse Ofsted report received by the Epping Forest College in February 2009. Whilst the Town Council has no responsibility for the College as the only elected representative body of Loughton it could and should articulate the concerns of the town and of parents very concerned about the lack of post-16 courses for their children. There were also worries that the College may wish to close and sell the Sports Hall which is used by the Debden Community Association and a host of local clubs. This facility was built by public subscription over 50 years ago and in the Council's view should continue to be enjoyed by the community.

The Town Council was saddened to learn of a number of deaths, including those of former Councillor Mike Sellears, Marine George Sparks in Afghanistan who lived in Theydon Bois but had attended Debden Park High School. George died doing his duty for us all and we salute his memory. County and District Councillor, Howard Kleyn, who had been one of the strongest advocates of parish councils in the former Chigwell Urban District and Jade Goody whose much publicised fight against cancer touched the nation, and whose funeral came into Loughton on Saturday morning (4<sup>th</sup> April 2009). A few moments silence was observed in memory of them all.

The Town Mayor commented on the current economic conditions and those unemployed or made redundant, failed businesses and empty shops. There was not a great deal the Town Council could do against this international crisis, but it had kept the council tax down – the Police authority increased by 4.9%, Fire 3.7%, Epping Forest District Council 2.5%, Essex County Council 1.9% and Loughton Town Council lowest of all at 1.8%. We want to do our bit to let Loughton recover.

On a happier note, on Friday (3<sup>rd</sup> April 2009) the Town Mayor reported he would make a presentation to Rosalie Pilgrim on her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, most of which had been in our town. What changes she would have seen – two world wars not the least, and he felt the whole town meeting would want him to take their congratulations to this remarkable lady.

Finally, he concluded by thanking councillors and staff for all their hard work over the past year.

### **Planning and Licensing Committee report 2008/09**

Councillor Wixley, Chairman of the Planning and Licensing Committee, reported on the activities of the Committee over the past year and described the role of his Committee as advisory as the power to approve or reject a planning application rested with the District Council. However, the strength of the committee was the possession of local knowledge which was often reflected in their comments when applications were forwarded onto the District Council for its planning officers and councillors to consider.

The committee of 7 councillors with a dedicated planning clerk, had dealt with 298 planning applications in the course of 22 meetings with 3 meetings still to be held before the end of the council year. This was consistent with previous years despite a relaxation of planning laws which had occurred in October 2008 and been expected to reduce our workloads.

Although the majority of applications concerned alterations and extensions to houses the remit is much wider and had included for example proposed advertising signs on roundabouts, 'Change of Use' applications for commercial premises and work on trees protected by Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). Safeguards were sought for trees not covered by TPOs if it was thought they could be harmed by building work.

Concerns about the environment had extended to applications regarding illuminated signs where low wattage bulbs should be used and that the signs switched off by 11.30pm, which had been supported by the Planning Department at the District Council.

The Committee was entitled to comment on applications outside of Loughton if they were likely to have an impact on Loughton. Examples had been the proposed commuter car park at Theydon Bois and the Olympic Delivery Authority's security compound under construction just off the M11 at Chigwell.

The Committee were restricted regarding Licensing Applications and could only comment if representations had been received from a person or persons residing in the area of the proposed application.

As a 'Statutory Consultee' the council had been consulted on a diverse range of issues including proposed changes to airspace over parts of London and southern and eastern England, Licensing and Control of Lap Dancing Establishments, an alteration to a public highway, Taxi Licensing and the provision of Gypsy and Traveller Sites within the Epping Forest District Council area.

Members of the public may attend the meetings without prior notice, but if they wished to write or speak to the Committee about an application rules apply and it is best to contact the Council at the earliest opportunity.

Finally he thanked his fellow committee members and officers, and referred to the meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, a day when the country had experienced its heaviest snowfalls for 18 years but the meeting still went ahead to ensure deadlines were met.

### **Recreation Committee report 2008/09**

Cllr Harper, Chairman of the Recreation Committee reported on the activities of the Committee over the past year and reported that whilst after many years of frustration the lease from Epping Forest District Council for the Roding Valley Recreation Ground had finally been concluded, sadly negotiations were still continuing with Loughton Athletic club with regard to their lease for an all weather running track. Her Committee had agreed to install a multi-sports court on one of the existing tennis courts and a much more robust type of tennis net for the tennis courts for ease of maintenance.

The Committee had agreed to outline proposals for the installation of outdoor gym facilities on the recreation ground drawn up with assistance from Epping Forest District Council officers. Despite the bad weather, football had only been cancelled twice on the pitches this season.

The Committee had agreed to recruit an assistant park warden to help keep the open spaces as pleasurable as possible and allow weekend inspections of our playgrounds. The Town Council maintain eight playgrounds and litter picking and inspections were carried out regularly.

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The refurbishment of the Newmans Lane playground had been completed with grant assistance of £9,200 from the Essex County Council's Community Initiatives Fund. Westall Road playground will be the next to receive attention and pupils at local schools are being consulted on the design and choice of equipment.

The Council had continued its policy of replacing trees on the Millennium Remembrance Grove off Rectory Lane / Pyrles Lane by concentrating on the re-planting of mature trees in the Asian section.

Sadly plans for a skateboard facility on the college field at the junction of Ladyfields and Borders Lane had come to nothing due to the college's financial difficulties. It had been decided to use one of the areas of land over which the Council had control and an initial visit with young people to possible sites would be made during the Easter holidays prior to making a final decision.

The Committee had decided that the open space beside the Willingale Road allotments would be used as a nature reserve and a further programme of clearance work was being undertaken in conjunction with Epping Forest Countrycare.

Meetings had been held with staff from the Loughton Centre for Young People (the other half of our building in Borders Lane) to discuss the facilities provided for our young people and with members of the Epping Forest Youth Council to learn more about their activities. The Youth Council had agreed to provide articles for "Think Loughton", would attend our Civic Service on 23<sup>rd</sup> April and help to progress the plans for a skateboard park.

The Committee had been consulted on the West Essex PCT's planned development of a GP led health centre in Loughton.

The Neighbourhood Police Inspector attends alternate meetings of the committee and we were pleased to welcome Simon Werrett and Tom Simons to our meetings this year. Members had been able to quiz the inspectors on many local concerns. Members of the Committee attend the local NAPs meetings.

The Chairman promoted the Council's Kingsley and Murray Halls as suitable for all sorts of events and explained how the Council would like to encourage more community events.

Finally, the Chairman thanked the members of the committee, the clerk and her team for all their support and hard work during the last twelve months.

### **Environment and Heritage Committee report 2008/09**

Cllr C P Pond, Chairman of the Environment and Heritage Committee reported on the activities of the Committee over the past year explaining how the committee had carried out its usual work and responsibilities, and small but important initiatives, to encourage the environmental well being and heritage of the town. These included allotments, the cemetery, some street furniture including the war memorial and drinking fountain, extra grit bins, and alleyway signs.

Work had started on registering 6 open spaces in Loughton as village greens in order to protect them from development following the appearance in August, of a list of sites owned by Epping Forest District Council for possible housing development. There had been an excellent response from residents, who had used these areas for recreation over a 20 year period, and provided the evidence required.

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Last Christmas there had been an outcry about the lack of lights in Loughton High Road and so this year this Committee recommended to the Resource and General Services Committee that the grant made to the two Town Centre Partnerships for Christmas lights be greatly increased. This meant that there were some lights in the High Road, and in the Broadway, despite the works that were in progress there. Thanks were expressed to both partnerships for their hard work in organising the lights.

The Committee was pleased to have installed flower baskets on the lamp posts along the central parts of the High Road and something similar will be installed in the Broadway when the enhancement had finished. In order to equip more lampposts the Committee would like to encourage people and firms to sponsor a basket.

Renovations were approved for the war memorial on Kings Green to reinstate and improve the paving, and clean and restore the stone work.

Blue heritage plaques to notable past residents were installed to pianist Gladys Mills, and to football manager Ron Greenwood. The Committee was very pleased to have the second one unveiled by ex-footballer, Sir Trevor Brooking. Three more had been approved by the property owners and were awaiting installation.

All plot-holders on the Council-owned allotment sites were to be commended for a generally high standard, and the Committee has introduced a new annual prize for the best kept allotment. It is hoped all 3 sites in the town will take part. It had also been agreed to investigate setting up a community garden scheme on the three disused plots behind Pyrles Lane.

Last Autumn, the three ancient milestones in Loughton were cleaned and re-lettered by councillors on a cold but sunny day.

The annual Best Dressed show window Christmas competition was again well supported and the winners were Evergreen in the High Road, and (in the charity shop section) St Clare in the Broadway.

An Interpretation Board had been ordered for the Conservation Area in Staples Road, and the Council has received ECC funding for green walking and cycling routes including designation and discreet signage for a cycle by-pass along existing quiet roads, and walking routes to the Roding Valley fields.

Much of the Committee's work is concerned with keeping an eye on matters which affect Loughton, which others are responsible for, but which the Council can only try to influence. Meetings had been held with the newly appointed Town Centre Manager, the ECC Highways department, (and lists of concerns are regularly sent to them), councillor representatives attend regular meetings with the waste and road cleaning teams from EFDC, and a successful appeal was made for a 9.00 rather than 9.30 start to the concessionary bus fares scheme.

The Chairman thanked Committee members, the Town Clerk and officers for their hard work over the past year.

### **Resources & General Services Committee report 2008/09**

Cllr S Pewsey, Chairman of the Resources and General Services Committee, reported on the activities of the Committee over the past year explaining that his Committee co-ordinates the finances and strategic decision-making of the Town Council, included recommending the council tax levels for the following year, and

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making grants to local good causes.

The Town Council component of the council tax for 2009-10 would increase by only 1.9% for a Band D property, which represented very good value for money and would be welcome news for many families in Loughton struggling with the effects of the credit crunch. This small increase was the result of many years of careful management of the Town Council's finances, steadily building up the reserves for a rainy day. To achieve this, without cutting any of our flagship projects, savings have been made on staff costs, by reducing some planned additions to project allocations, drawing on general reserves while maintaining them at a safe level. Review costs would continue to be monitored to ensure value for money, and our internal financial controls had been strengthened to ensure that they continue to stand up to audit requirements. Fortunately, Loughton Town Council had not invested any council taxpayers' money in "dodgy" foreign banks, but was suffering, like all other investors, from very low interest rates which give a poor rate of return on the Council's invested money.

The Committee oversees annual grants to local good causes; in 2009-10 these amount to around £20,000. A priority for 2009-10 was to support groups working with our young people, including Loughton Youth Project, Kidz Club, and Home Start. Support has been given to projects aimed at improving our environment, such as the Loughton Brook Project, Loughton Potato Ground (allotments), and better access to St. John's Church Cemetery. Support has also been given to local businesses through grants to the Broadway Town Centre Partnership and Loughton Festival, which stimulated interest in the town's history and to bring in visitors. In particular, we made a significant increase in our grants to the Broadway and High Road Town Centre Partnerships to make sure there was a good show of Christmas lights over the festive season, which we believed would help bring in more shoppers during these difficult times.

This fitted in well with another function of the Committee, which was to make sure the town – and the work that the Loughton Town Council does – had a high profile, both to enable local businesses to compete in bad times as well as good, and to inspire civic pride in the town. Loughton Town Council had been reaccredited in 2008 as a Quality Parish, a government award for a well-run council, and continued to distribute Think Loughton, our award-winning town magazine, to over 13,000 homes and businesses.

There was a range of civic pride initiatives across all committees and this Committee already organises the annual Christmas Card competition, and for 2009 had set up an annual Civic Award as a way of recognising outstanding local citizens, as well as reviving the Annual Civic Service. As more powers are devolved to town and parish level, town councillors were undergoing a training programme to help make them aware of new legislation so that the Council can meet the new challenges which lie ahead.

The Chairman thanked committee members and officers for all their hard work over the past year.

## **5 Questions**

Questions from the public were invited and discussion took place on the following issues:

- Roding Valley Recreation Ground – an outdoor gym facility; the design and structure was discussed and concerns raised over the potential for vandalism

- Skateboard facility – a location to be considered on a site under the control of the Town Council
- The state of the footpaths near Station Road and the discussions with Transport for London and Epping Forest District Council.

**6 Address by Councillor Norman Hume, Cabinet Member and Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transportation, Essex County Council**

The Town Mayor welcomed the speaker.

Councillor Norman Hume introduced himself as the portfolio holder for Highways and Transportation and stated that his number one priority was road safety, having already achieved a 21% reduction in accidents. He clarified that there were three main actions to be taken to improve road safety – engineering improvements, enforcement against bad behaviour (such as not wearing seat belts, use of mobile phones and driving at excessive speeds) and education by constantly sending out messages on road safety to reduce KSIs (killed or seriously injured) on county roads.

He recognised that the condition of some of the County's roads was not perfect and £10m was being put into the budget for roads and footways in Essex. In Loughton, £450,000 was spent last year and it was hoped £850,000 would be spent this year.

Use of public transport and cycling was also to be encouraged.

Cllr Hume responded to issues raised by the public that included:

- unsafe pavements for mobility scooter users
- the cost of closing the Broadway for its annual fun day
- the unfinished lay-by in Burton Road
- extra traffic using the roads in and around the forest
- proposed works to junction 5 on the M11
- advertisements on roundabouts
- inadequate and irregular road inspections
- KSIs and mobile phone use
- speed restrictions on Pudding Lane
- parking on grass verges
- cleaning road signs
- general traffic congestion and parking on both sides of the road in Traps Hill

The Town Mayor thanked Councillor Hume and everyone for attending and invited them to stay for refreshments.

Signed.....

Date: 24<sup>th</sup> March 2010