

THESE MINUTES ARE NOT YET CONFIRMED

LOUGHTON TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Town meeting held via Zoom digital platform on Wednesday 10 March 2021

Chairman: Councillor Stella Murphy, Town Mayor of Loughton Town Council

Also present:

Town Councillors P Abraham, J Angold-Stephens, R Brookes, P Beales, T Cochrane, B Cohen, C Davies, T Downing, J Jennings, J Jogia, S Murray, S Pewsey, C C Pond, C P Pond, M Stubbings and D Wixley

Approximately 20 members of the public.

Officers: M Squire (Town Clerk)
B Smith (Assistant Town Clerk - Finance)
P Bryce (Assistant Town Clerk - Civic)

The Town Mayor, Cllr Stella Murphy welcomed everyone to the 26th annual meeting.

1 Introduction of Councillors

The Councillors introduced themselves, the wards they represented and their respective roles within the Council.

2 Minutes of the Town Meeting held on 11 March 2020

These were approved as a correct copy and will be signed by the Town Mayor.

3 Matters arising from the last meeting

No questions arose.

4 Reports on Council's Activities

Cllr Stella Murphy presented the Town Mayor's report.

"The purpose of this meeting is to update you on what we, as your Town Council, have been up to in the past 12 months, we also make the presentation of awards to our Citizen of the Year and our Loughton Building Design winners and we present the recipients of the Financial Assistance Award Scheme with their certificates. All of which is very different this year.

The past 12 months have presented many challenges for all Town and Parish Councils due to the Coronavirus outbreak and lockdown back in March 2020.

Loughton Town Council is very fortunate to have a dedicated team of Councillors and staff working together to fulfil our obligations to the town and community, but of course, the pandemic did mean we had to look at new ways of conducting our business, which has been very challenging for all.

Firstly under normal circumstances, the first meeting of the Local Government Year, is the Annual Meeting of the Council, Mayor Making, this takes place in May each year; but, with restrictions in force regarding public gatherings, the government introduced legislation which meant I remained as Town Mayor for a second year and what a different year it has been.

All of our annual events and engagements, which I so enjoy, were cancelled but Loughton residents have still shown great community spirit and have worked together.

When covid restrictions allowed, and socially distanced, I was able to make some doorstep visits to residents celebrating their 100th birthdays, and a diamond anniversary. I was invited to Woodland Grove Care Home to cut the ribbon and officially open a new garden area created by the residents during lockdown.

On Remembrance Sunday, on behalf of the Town Council, I placed a wreath at the War Memorial on Kings Green, where the wonderful poppy arches stood, we were overwhelmed by the amount of poppies that our residents knitted and crocheted, during their time spent at home. The displays were enjoyed by all.

And in December 2020 I attended the lighting of the Menorah on Standard Green, which was recorded live and enabled residents to watch the event from the comfort of their armchairs – the wonders of technology.

I was extremely pleased to secure another generous donation of £10,000 from the Joseph and Lilian Sully Foundation Trust which enabled me to distribute equally to both the Epping Forest Foodbank and 3Food4U charities who, throughout the last year, have worked tirelessly assisting Loughton residents in need.

We will shortly hear the annual reports from each of our committees' chairman, so I will not go into detail here, but I will say that meetings in the past 12 months have taken place virtually. This has been a new experience for most but has enabled us to continue with the decision-making process and to ensure that we continue to work for the good of the town. The business of the Council has continued to function efficiently and professionally, I have been extremely proud of the way our Councillors and staff have conducted themselves, despite some difficult times.

Before I move on I would like to take this moment to offer my sincere condolences to everyone that has lost a loved one or friend. This year has been devastating for families especially with the additional restrictions on how we say our goodbyes to those lost through natural causes, accident, or illness, including covid-related deaths. My thoughts are with you all.

Thank you and I look forward to the award presentations after the Chairman's Reports".

Planning and Licensing Committee 2020/21

Cllr Jill Angold-Stephens, Chairman of the Planning and Licensing Committee, reported on the activities of her Committee over the past year.

"Over the last year we needed to consider planning applications in a new way as after our next meeting following the Annual Town Meeting we could no longer meet in person due to Covid-19 restrictions. It was decided that all applications would be considered under what is called 'delegated authority'. This means that each meeting would be cancelled and the applications would be sent by email to each committee member to consider and produce a report with recommendations that would then be returned to the Planning Clerk, Debra Paris, for her to collate all the replies and produce comments that would then be published in the same way as the usual minutes of the meeting. This has resulted in considerable extra work for the Planning Clerk both in preparing the emails for distribution to members and collating the results all whilst working from home.

Despite this it has all gone smoothly and we have actually processed some 32 more applications than last year. Clearly, the residents of Loughton have discovered that they need more space to work from home and to home school! Because there have been no 'in person' meetings we have not had members of the public for or against applications

addressing us; but we have taken into account all objections that have been received in advance of the published date of the meeting.

One of the ongoing concerns has been consideration of the protection of Epping Forest both from air pollution caused by traffic and soil erosion caused by all of us enjoying the outdoors in the Forest. The Corporation of London has designated the Forest as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in an effort to protect it. This has impacted on our decision making for all applications that include the potential for more people to be living in the area and likely to exacerbate the problem. This has caused the number of applications for which we have raised an objection to rise to over 140.

There have been only 4 amended applications being submitted and where we object and can see a way forward if plans are amended we usually suggest this for consideration by EFDC and the applicant. There have been 19 applications for which Notices of Appeal have been submitted. We are able to add further comments to some of these but depending on how they are considered some are passed back to us for information only.

There have been some 10 applications for Licenses and we have tried so far as possible to be consistent in the hours for which licenses should be granted. Sadly, EFDC sometimes ignores this and grants the hours for which the applicant has asked. We have only had 2 applications for Street Trading Licenses this year, one we objected to and subsequently it was found to be for a pitch that was on the defunct Loughton Golf Club site so the applicant did not have legal permission to trade there! We also considered two consultation papers: one a Licensing Policy Consultation (EFDC) and the other the Government White Paper on The Future of Planning.

With all applications we continue to do our best to balance the concerns of both applicants and those who would be affected were permission to be granted.

Despite the current restrictions the Town Mayor, the Chairman of the Environment & Heritage Committee and I have still considered the 3 applications for the Building Design Award. It was such a difficult choice this year that we finally decided to present two awards, both to conversions of iconic Loughton buildings into flats – 2 Connaught Avenue and Royal Oak Court. They have both maintained the street scene and do not look like blocks of flats. Congratulations are offered to both architects and developers.

This being the last report from this committee before the LTC elections in May I should like to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has worked so conscientiously over the past year despite the difficulties involved. My particular thanks go to Debra Paris as Planning Clerk who has been fantastic in all that she has managed to do for us and to Kevin Latchford my vice-chairman whose support has been invaluable as always”.

Recreation Committee 2020/21

Cllr David Wixley, Chairman of Recreation Committee, reported on the activities of his Committee over the past year.

“It is inevitable that this report is dominated by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic which led to the cancellation of last year’s Local Elections resulting in the Committee serving for an additional year.

Uncertainty as to whether or not we could hold our initial meeting in person eventually led to its cancellation. Our remaining four meetings have been virtual Zoom meetings which have worked well with only a few problems.

The enforced closure of the Murray and Kingsley halls and the cancellation of football pitch hire has resulted in a loss of income offset, to some degree, by not having to fund cancelled events such as the “Countdown to Christmas” and “The Jessel Green Family

Fun Day". In addition the use, by the NHS, of The Murray Hall as a vaccination centre, is a welcome source of income.

However, the overall consequences for our finances means that we have had to significantly reduce our earmarked reserves set aside for ambitious plans to refurbish the Roding Valley Recreation Ground football changing rooms and car park. We are currently looking at ways to proceed with a reduced scheme which would include installing gates at the car park entrance which would be locked overnight.

Despite budget constraints it is intended to focus resources on replacing the existing Roding Valley Recreation Ground playground with a new one to be located away from the risk of flooding.

The frequency and severity of flooding on the Roding Valley Recreation Ground seems to have increased in recent years. At the time of writing this report notification has been received from the District Council that they intend to start work on their long awaited flood alleviation scheme. This will include riverbank restoration, tree planting, and repairs and relocation of some stretches of the riverside footpath.

I'm pleased to report that we have again been successful in receiving awards from the Essex Playing Fields Association with a Gold award for the Roding Valley Recreation Ground and Silver for the Traps Hill playground.

In my last annual report I advised that the freehold of the Loughton Cricket Club ground had been transferred to the Town Council. This year I'm delighted to report that the cricket ground has been awarded "Fields in Trust" status thus giving it protection against the risk of development. There is a full report on this on the front page of the Spring 2021 edition of "Think Loughton".

I will finish my report with a number of "thank yous".

During the lockdown periods the Roding Valley Recreation Ground received a substantial increase in visitors. Sadly this also resulted in a corresponding litter problem. The Committee are grateful to Cllr Murray for his daily litter picking walks with occasional help from Cllr Brookes.

I would also like to thank LTC Officers who have had to cope with changing Government directives regarding the shutting and re-opening of playgrounds and tennis courts as the Government has sought to deal with the pandemic.

Finally I thank my fellow members of the Committee and Officers, past and present, who have contributed to the running of the Committee during the last five years".

Environment and Heritage Committee 2020/21

Cllr Chris Pond, Chairman of Environment and Heritage Committee, reported on the activities of his Committee over the past year.

"During this year of covid restrictions, the activities of the Council overseen by the Committee have been severely limited. All the community events had to be cancelled, and Remembrance Day was completely different, with no parade or massed gathering at the Memorial, this replaced by a socially spaced wreath laying, and by poppy arches near the Memorial. Our homage to the war dead was different, but no less sincere. A most impressive display of knitted poppies, organised by the Town Clerk and his staff, formed a cascade down the wall of the Library and Town Hall; but because of opening restrictions, not as many people saw it as had been intended.

One activity not restricted was the installation of plaques (though of course, we couldn't have unveiling ceremonies). That to Rudyard Kipling and Stanley Baldwin was installed

in the summer, to coincide with the publication of a book about their stay here in 1877; those to Barbara Harmer (first female supersonic airline pilot) and Peter Abrahams (south African freedom writer and journalist) were installed. We thought the epidemic of 2020-21 could be marked appropriately by plaques to the Loughton epidemiologists of previous years; notably Arthur Bacot (who died 100 years ago studying typhus and entomology, and Sir Leonard Hill (Trench fever and influenza) and his son, Sir Austin Bradford Hill (who jointly discovered the link between smoking and cancer). The father and son are to be marked by a specially designed double plaque.

In order to guide the vastly increased number of visitors to the Forest, we have decided to install direction markers to and from Forest, shops, and station in some of the alleyways and streets near the forest edge.

We received reports on the District's "mitigation" measures to reduce damage caused by toxic emissions to the Forest, and will be considering our position on the Major Modifications to the Local Plan to be consulted on during 2021; we may have again to seek professional representation if there is a further public enquiry. The committee has discussed and heard development s in the EFDC idea of imposing a charged-for zone through the Forest so as to facilitate the building of 1000 new houses in Loughton, and 1500 in Epping, near the SAC, which is a national and international designation.. We have taken the view that diversion of the building would be a safer and more certain way of avoiding damage to the SAC, and one more in keeping with the Holohan judgement with which EFDC must comply. We have transmitted our views to the Inspector and await the next chapter in this sad story.

We are planning to create extra cremated remains plots in the Town Cemetery by reusing graves designated in the past - back to 1877 as "public", as is permitted by law. This may put off for a time the need to create a new cemetery off Debden Lane (a project first mooted by our predecessors as far back as 1940).

Despite site meetings, we have had no success in getting EFDC to require the moving of industrial waste bins that block the pavement in the Drive.

We have had regular meetings with the City of London as conservators of the Forest. The City decided to remove our much-appreciated seats near the Gardeners Arms PH because of justifiable complaints by residents nearby about anti-social behaviour. The seats are in storage: we know they are much appreciated by the general public. I'd like to thank members of the Committee (and mention in passing that Cllrs Pewsey and Cochrane I know are not seeking re-election) and officers for their diligent work in such difficult circumstance. Stephen Pewsey in particular has served on this committee for 17 years, and has been the fount of much wisdom, good ideas, and depth of knowledge. Thank you, Stephen".

Resources and General Services Committee 2020/21

Cllr Judy Jennings, Acting Chairman of the Resources and General Services Committee, reported on the activities of his Committee over the past year.

“ The Resources and General Services Committee is responsible for the Town Council's finances and ensures that the Town Council acts openly, transparently and ethically. It also oversees the day-to-day financial transactions that are necessary for the smooth running of the Council and is responsible for other items as staff salaries, insurance and the payment of bills.

Each year we undertake internal audits and review our banking and investments. I am pleased to report that the External Auditors rated the Council's finances as 'good'.

Each year we review all the Council's subscriptions to outside bodies and we ensure we have the correct levels of insurance for the coming year.

We also review the Council's policies, including this year, its Equal Opportunities policy and the Data Protection policy.

We agree a budget, set the precept and produce a quarterly "Think Loughton", magazine.

We arrange an Annual Town meeting and grant financial assistance applications and citizenship awards.

This year has been a particularly challenging time for the Town Council as a result of the impact of Covid-19 on our income.

In order to maintain a low precept, we reduced expenditure on certain projects and postponed others. Savings have also been made from not hiring personnel. A new Financial Assistant and a Caretaker posts have been postponed.

There will be no increase in the Councillors' Parish Allowance. Careful organisation and planning has meant that Council officers have been able to work from home on a rota basis successfully during the pandemic.

Due to the pandemic, there has been a fall in income from sports pitch hire, hall lettings and other sources, but this has been offset by the Council agreeing that the Murray Hall be used by the NHS as a Covid-19 vaccination centre for at least the next six months.

It is with great regret that we have had to also cancel many community events this year but are looking forward to an improved situation after the summer.

Awarding grants to local groups and organisations is one of our most important functions and we have set aside £27,000 for 20/21 with 10% held back for emergency applications. We work closely with local voluntary organisations and we provide grants for projects that provide a positive benefit to local residents. In 2021/22 we will support fourteen local groups, including Epping Forest Re-Use, Loughton Voluntary Care, 3Food4U and Oakwood Hill Community Centre among others.

The Town Council continues to support Epping Forest Citizens' Advice with a significant grant of £8,500.

Elections are a big expenditure and this year will be held on May 6th having been postponed from last year due to Covid-19. These are paid for from the Councils earmarked funds, which are set aside for that specific purpose.

This year the tax base is £12,534.10 and the precept has been set at £782,675.00. This will mean a Band D property is set at £62.44, an increase of £2.97. I am pleased to note that this is considerably less than Waltham Abbey at £111.49 and Epping Town at £98.76. This low increase has been achieved by prudent financial management supported by a transfer of funds from General Reserves.

Finally, I must mention the very generous donation by the Joseph Sully Foundation that has benefitted two very important charities working in Loughton, The Food Bank and 3Food4U.

My very grateful thanks go to our Town Clerk, Mark Squire who has coped superbly well in this difficult year, to Assistant Town Clerks Brent Smith and Pippa Bryce and our team of hard-working officers.

I would particularly like to thank my Deputy, Cllr Jill Angold-Stephens for all her support and her experience of financial matters and her work checking current accounts and payments, and also Cllr Jayna Jogia for carrying out internal financial checks.

Finally, to all the members of the Resources Committee I would like to say a big thank you for their careful and conscientious scrutiny of the Town Council's finances and for their commitment and dedication to the welfare of the residents of Loughton”.

5 Presentation of the Citizenship Award

The Town Mayor Citizenship Award to Mr Pesh Kapasiawala in recognition of his dedication and voluntary work within the community.

Pesh has been involved in local community work for many years and has gone above and beyond in all his involvement and work for local charities including; The Loughton Men's Institute, The Loughton Memory Café, A member of the Yes Partnership. He is a Governor of Roding Valley High School and a past president of the Loughton, Buckhurst Hill and Chigwell Rotary Club.

Most recently Pesh established 3Food4U which was initially set up by bringing together a number of chefs who supplied ready cooked meals to vulnerable members of the community and keyworkers, something that was very much appreciated at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, this has now grown and 3Food4U has become an extremely valuable and much needed service providing free food and clothes to Loughton residents who are disadvantaged as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Pesh will receive a cheque of £250 for his chosen charity 3Food4U and a presentation of the silver engraved Rose Bowl will be arranged when we are able to hold our first “in person” Council Meeting.

6 Presentation of the 2021 Loughton Building Design Award

The Loughton Building Design Award was awarded to 2 Connaught Avenue and Royal Oak Court. They were chosen as both developments maintained the street scene and do not look like blocks of flats. Congratulations were offered to both architects and developers. Their plaques will be presented when lockdown restrictions are relaxed.

7 Financial Assistance Grant Awards

A list of the fourteen local organisations and charities who will receive financial assistance totalling £22,100 from the Council in 2021/22 was read out. Additionally the £8,500 allocated to Citizens Advice – Epping Forest District was noted. Certificates will be posted out to all recipients.

8 Questions

There were no questions from the public.

The Town Mayor thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Signed.....
Date: