

THESE MINUTES ARE NOT YET CONFIRMED

LOUGHTON TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

**Minutes of the Annual Town meeting held at
The Murray Hall, Borders Lane, Loughton IG10 3SB
on Wednesday 16 March 2022**

Chairman: Councillor Rose Brookes, Town Mayor of Loughton Town Council

Also present:

Town Councillors P Beales, B Cohen, C Davies, T Downing, S Fontenelle, J Jennings, N MacKinnon, S Murray, C C Pond, C P Pond, K Rainbow, M Stubbings, K Valentine and D Wixley

Approximately 43 members of the public.

Officers: M Squire (Town Clerk)
K Lumb (Deputy Town Clerk)
P Bryce (Community Manager)
J Graham (Halls & Bookings Manager)
D Taylor (Community & Services Officer)
J Glynn (Administrative & Finance Officer)

The Town Mayor, Cllr Rose Brookes welcomed everyone to the 28th 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 10 March 2021

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 Rose Brookes presented the Town Mayor's report.

"Good evening everyone, welcome to Loughton Town Council's Annual Town Meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to update you on what we, as your Town Council have been up to in the last twelve months. We also make the presentation of awards to our Citizen of the Year and our Loughton Building Design winners and finally we present the recipients of the Financial Assistance Award Scheme with their certificates.

After the postponed elections in May we welcomed several new faces to the Town Council. We were particularly delighted to welcome some younger Councillors; many of whom are juggling very busy jobs with young families. The fresh perspectives they have brought have been particularly welcome. We tentatively returned to face to face meetings. Despite the rapid spread of the omicron variant in December only one Council meeting has had to be cancelled.

Many of our annual community events had to be postponed last year but detailed planning has already gone in to this year's Jessel Green Day in June , the Horticultural Show in early September and the first Loughton Day - a Community event in mid September. The Remembrance Sunday commemoration on Kings Green was especially

well supported in November Light Up a Life for St Clare Hospice, the first for two years, helped raise much needed funds for their excellent work.

My colleagues will give you detailed descriptions of the work of their individual committees but I wanted to mention one or two significant events or initiatives. After several months of delays the newly formed Loughton Wombles group did their first major litter pick in November and have continued to meet regularly. I should like to say a big thank you for all who have volunteered to make our town as litter free as possible.

Despite our emergence from the pandemic life continues to be a challenge for many households in the town. The two food banks in Loughton continue to be extremely busy and a vast army of volunteers help these two initiatives run smoothly. I should also like to pay tribute to the many staff in schools and New City College in Loughton for their hard work during the various lockdowns and now as they try to catch up the ground that has been lost and I feel certain that you would all join me this evening in wishing our young people all the very best as they face over the next few weeks their public examinations.

I have been privileged to attend many local events including the excellent Grow Garden in Pyrles Lane, many different plays and cultural events at Lopping Hall including the hilarious Loughton Panto and the attendance of a lunch at Holmehurst House for surviving Holocaust Survivors and their families the Holocaust being something we should never forget and always learn from.

This followed an exhibition at Epping Forest District Museum 's about the Loughton Boys who escaped the holocaust to make a new life in a hostel in Epping Forest.

Finally, I should like to thank the Loughton Town Council staff who are extremely helpful in running the Council so smoothly and the commitment of my fellow Councillors in helping make Loughton a better place to live."

Cllrs C C Pond, C P Pond and J Jennings joined the meeting at during the following item

Planning and Licensing Committee 2021/22

Cllr Trevor Downing, Chairman of the Planning and Licensing Committee, reported on the activities of her Committee over the past year.

"Since I took over as Chair of the LTC P&L Committee after the TC elections in May 2021, we have been able to revert to our face to face Meetings. Over the last year we have considered 307 planning applications: we have objected to 164, had no objection to 133 and considered 17 amended plans. There were 10 application for which the Committee requested amended drawings as the plans were insufficient/incomplete for the Committee to comment on (I will return to this later). We also considered 6 licensing applications.

As before, we offer suggestions to many that we object to in order to help with the refinement of the application.

One of the advantages that the P&L Committee of LTC Councillors can bring to the planning process is local knowledge and appreciation of our local architecture in Loughton. However, our opinion is only consultative. The final decisions on planning applications are taken by the District Council EFDC, which of course may involve delegated powers to officers, or to committees that include Councillors from areas outside the town.

Also as before, 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 Government 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. As a result, this has increased the number of applications that we have objected to.

Unfortunately, we have a difference of opinion with EFDC Planning Department over the SAC. We believe that an agreed pollution mitigation strategy has not been approved by the Inspector of the Local Plan. EFDC believes that they have a pollution mitigation strategy because they have voted on it, but have not yet enacted it. Effectively, this mitigation strategy will be to charge developers of new houses to make an unspecified contribution.

They are also likely to institute a clean air zone (CAZ) which will charge motorists for driving through the forest.

One result of this stance by EFDC is that they reject any planning objections that we submit solely on the grounds of the SAC, even though their mitigation strategy is not yet in force. This is a ridiculous situation. We will continue to object to planning applications that impact the forest.

We have also flagged up issues with the quality of plans. We often object on the grounds that the plans are not detailed enough – no elevations for example; the problem with this strategy is that we have a very short time frame in which to register our objection, and the plans may well be approved by an EFDC planning officer in the interim. Our position is that EFDC should not have validated the plans in the first place!

We also have issues very often on enforcement strategy. We think this could be more stringent.

The head of planning and development management manager attended a meeting with the Committee in February 2022, without coming to any understanding as to how these differences might be sorted out.

On a brighter note, EFDC has recently published its draft Sustainability Guidance and Checklist Volume 3: Extensions and Refurbishments, which we have been invited to comment on. All new planning applications now require a sustainability assessment as this Guidance has been passed by EFDC's Cabinet.

Also on a brighter note, the Town Mayor, the Chairman of the Environment & Heritage Committee and I have considered the 5 applications for the Building Design Award. With our eye on the local architectural heritage, we have agreed to issue the award to 140 Forest Road together with a Certificate of Merit to 68 Church Hill. One of these was a renovation of an historical building; the other was a reconstruction of a 1920s house in the style of its Victorian neighbours.

I wish to thank my Committee Members in particular my deputy Cllr. Carol Davies. I also wish to thank our very able Clerk Debra Paris, without whom we would not be able to function.”

Recreation Committee 2021/22

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

“Following the Local Elections in May 2021 the committee was reconstituted with four new councillors replacing departed members.

The Roding Valley Recreation Ground has occupied much of our time with flooding being a continuing problem causing football matches having to be cancelled.

Progress on a new relocated playground, away from the risk of flooding, has been made with the possibility of completion by the Autumn.

Gates, to be locked overnight, have been installed at the entrance to the football changing rooms car park. Anti-social behavior and resulting disturbance to neighbours has made this an expensive necessity.

In previous years I have reported on plans by the District Council for a flood alleviation scheme. This would involve river bank restoration, tree planting and repairs to the footpath. Unfortunately this beneficial plan seems to have stalled but I hope for clarity as talks with the District Council seem to be a possibility.

Likewise a lack of resources means that even minimal refurbishment of the football changing rooms isn't possible at present and so they remain out of use.

On a brighter note the council was again successful in receiving awards from the Essex Playing Fields Association. Awards were received for the Roding Valley Recreation Ground and the Westall Road and Traps Hill playgrounds (the latter voted the best playground out of 120 entrants). A full report can be found in the Spring edition of "Think Loughton".

The committee is responsible for two community halls.

At the Kingsley Hall new window frames and windows were installed last Autumn.

The Murray Hall has now been returned to the Council by the NHS following its use as a Covid vaccination centre and is available for hire again.

There are plans to replace the obsolete lighting system with a new energy efficient LED lighting.

The installation of Wi-Fi is being investigated but this is likely to be expensive and with technical difficulties to overcome.

The committee is also responsible for the Willingale Road Nature Reserve. This is the area of land adjacent to the allotments. While not open to the public there are volunteer working days there undertaken under the auspices of the District Council's Countrycare team. A special visit was arranged in January for Committee members to learn more about the Reserve. Although none were seen on the day we were advised that it was a habitat favoured by Slow Worms, the Common Lizard and Grass Snakes.

Difficult decisions were made to discontinue the holding of the "Mayor's Charity Fun Run", and the "Countdown to Christmas" event and instead to focus resources on the "Jessel Green Family Fun Day" and a new "Loughton Day" event to be held on the Loughton Cricket Club Ground in September.

Another responsibility of the Committee is the Memorial Garden in Roding Road which suffered damage from Storm Eunice. Windblown trees left damaged railings and broken benches but work is underway to carry out repairs.

Finally, with the easing of Covid restrictions, it was good to be able to return to in-person meetings rather than the virtual Zoom meetings that became the norm last year.

As always I thank members and officers for their contributions in running the five committee meetings held during the Council year."

Environment and Heritage Committee 2021/22

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

“Following the town elections in May 2021, the Committee was reconstituted with new members, including some councillors in their first term.

Cemetery

An immediate problem that had to be tackled – with budgetary implications – was a leakage in the water supply to the Cemetery. This had been installed more than fifty years ago, and had never previously given trouble. Thames Water issued a legal notice to remedy the defect. The Committee considered various options to deal with it, and after much effort by the officers, decided on employing a contractor to replace the old metal pipes, work that was successfully completed in the Autumn.

Allotments

Regular reports were received. There had been some churn in the number and composition of plot holders following the pandemic, but the situation had stabilised. There was still a small waiting list. The situation re Pyrles Lane allotments was discussed in the light of EFDC’s desire to develop the nurse depot adjacent, which had been compulsorily acquired as allotments in 1947.

An application to alter the gate into the Roding Rd site was refused on the reluctance of the Managers to change the existing arrangement.

Seats, York Hill Green

There have been numerous reports of anti-social behaviour on and near these seats, and in the adjacent PH’s land. The committee expressed its desire for the seats to be restored, but because of a planning application decided nearby in December, the benches were not immediately put back. After a further discussion, the City of London, who own the land, decided not to permit them to be restored whilst ASB allegations were ongoing. At the close of the reporting period, it became known the pub’s licence had been put under review by the District Council, with a decision not expected until April 2022. The view from these seats is superb; and the loss of public amenity has to be balanced with the annoyance caused to residents nearby.

Litter picking

The committee is always grateful to volunteer litter pickers, of who there are many throughout the Town. The Town Clerk initiated a scheme – the Loughton Wombles, to systematise this, and the first litter sweep by the Wombles took place before Christmas.

Heritage Plaques

A decision was taken in lockdown to commemorate some of Loughton’s health heroes, and the plaques were erected over the year, including a special oval one to father and son, Leonard and Tony Hill, the former a public health innovator, and the latter the man who co-discovered the link between smoking and cancer. Arthur Bacot, who died in Egypt whilst investigating the role of the mosquito in spreading malaria in 1920.

Remembrance Day ceremonies

Were held again in 2021. A large crowd was present, and despite a certain isolation for the Town Council in its preparations, went off very well. The knitted poppy appeal was again successful. We also supported the Light up a Life event held at the Methodist Church with St Clare Hospice. The work put in by Officers on these events is considerable, and much appreciated by the Committee. It was agreed to clean the War Memorial again. A Roll of Honour from Claybury Hospital was acquired from the Royal British Legion; it will be presented to Redbridge Museum when it reopens.”

Resources and General Services Committee 2021/22

Cllr Stephen Murray, read on behalf of Cllr Judy Jennings 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 ensuring that the Town Council acts openly, transparently and ethically.

It oversees the day-to-day financial transactions that are necessary for the smooth running of the Town Council and is also responsible for staff salaries, insurance and the paying of bills.

It is responsible for banking arrangements, admin for the whole council, all council finances and end of year accounts, personnel and employment matters and staff management, IT and office equipment, members’ expenses, management of Buckingham Court, and also maintaining the Kingsley and Murray Halls and producing the quarterly Town Council Magazine, “Think Loughton,” and the Town Noticeboards and Website and the Financial Assistance Scheme.

We run Civic Celebrations including the Christmas Card Competition and the Citizenship Awards.

Each year we undertake Policy reviews, contract reviews, training strategy, internal audits and review our banking and investments.

I am very pleased to report that the External Auditors again gave the Council a clean interim audit report.

Every year we review the Council’s insurances, Council -wide priorities and policies including, this year;

- the Essex Pension Fund Administration Strategy
- Investment Strategy and Policy
- Members Remuneration Scheme
- Procedure to fill a Casual Vacancy
- Laptop Policy
- Staff Absence Policy
- Data protection Policy
- Code of Conduct and Complaints procedure
- Freedom of Information Publication Scheme
- Health and Safety
- Training Strategy

This year has been very challenging again for the Town Council as the Covid Pandemic continues to affect the budgeting process especially in income generating areas.

Income has been reduced from sports pitch hire, hall lettings and other sources but this has been offset by the Murray Hall being used by the NHS as a Covid -19 Vaccination centre.

Careful planning has meant that Council Officers have been able to work from home successfully on a rota basis.

Regretfully we had to cancel some Community Events again but we are now looking forward to some exciting new projects later this year including the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee celebrations in June and Loughton Community Day in September.

This year the tax base which will be used to calculate the 2022/23 Band D Council Tax for Loughton Town Council is £12,732.8. This will mean Loughton Town Council’s

annual council tax for a Band D property will be £65.16. An increase of approximately £2.72

In order to maintain this low precept we have made savings and reduced expenditure on certain projects, a reduction in Earmarked Reserves and postponed other projects. There will also be no increase in the Councillors' Parish Allowance.

Awarding grants to local groups and organisations is one of our most important functions and we are careful to ensure that these awards are for the benefit of people living in Loughton and that they provide a positive benefit to local residents.

This year we are supporting 14 organisations that help our local community.

These include Counselling Sessions for adults and a complex case counselling service for young people, assistance in equipping a new emergency services doctor, food parcels and 3Food 4U, Loughton Voluntary Care, Voluntary Action Epping Forest and the Samaritans.

Our grants also support operational costs for the many Restore Community's work in Youth and Community projects.

There is also a separate grant provision of £8,500 to Citizens Advice Epping Forest.

There have been some staffing changes this year this year. We have appointed a new Part-Time Assistant caretaker/Concierge, a Finance and Office Assistant and the appointment of a new Deputy Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer to replace the previous Assistant who has moved on.

In December 2021 Cllr. Murray visited the Office and undertook a financial check on purchase Orders and Receipts for the Financial Year 2021/22.

My very grateful thanks go to our Town Clerk, Mark Squire, who continues to do sterling work, to our new Deputy Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer (the latter formally as from 1 April 2022), Kim Lumb, to Pippa Bryce, Community Manager / Assistant Town Clerk and to all our hard-working officers.

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

5 Presentation of the Citizenship Award

The Town Mayor presented Janet Thomas with the Citizenship Award in recognition of her dedication and voluntary work within the community.

In her speech Cllr Brookes Janet Thomas has been volunteering for Loughton Voluntary Care for well over 30 years. During that time she has driven clients to hospital and doctor appointments, served on the committee, organised visits and shopping for the housebound. Janet started weekly shopping trips by minibus, to a large supermarket with a café. Since becoming coordinator, she has encouraged social activities and a games morning (historically in the library and silver surfing – teaching computer skills, fish and chip lunches and Christmas meals. The Community of Loughton, especially elderly people have benefitted greatly both for transport needs and social activities which Janet has helped provide.

Janet and Loughton Voluntary Care have been invaluable in the community, during the ongoing covid pandemic and especially during the early lockdowns.

6 Presentation of the 2022 Loughton Building Design Award

The Loughton Building Design Award was awarded to 140 Forest Road. The owners were congratulated for the refurbishment which included the restoration of the front

elevation which had been very inappropriately altered in the 1980s with alien design windows and vivid green painted brickwork. Authentic wooden sash windows were replaced, with the brickwork cleaned off and beautifully pointed. This property is prominent in the street scene and the renovation respects the style of the Victorian cottage retaining the character of this part of Loughton. Mr and Mrs Kosh were unable to attend the meeting and will collect their plaque from the office when convenient.

7 Financial Assistance Grant Awards

Representatives from local organisations who will receive financial assistance from the Council in 2022/23 totalling £29,275.98 were presented with a certificate and a group photograph was taken with the Town Mayor. Certificates will be posted out to all recipients who were unable to attend.

8 Questions

There were no questions from the public.

The Town Mayor thanked everyone for attending the meeting and were invited to stay for refreshments.

Signed.....
Date: