

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 Tuesday 5 March 2024**

Chairman: Councillor Mick Stubbings, Town Mayor of Loughton Town Council

Also present:

Town Councillors B Cohen, C Davies, S Fontenelle, L House, W Kauffman, N MacKinnon, S Murphy, S Murray, M Owen, C C Pond, C P Pond, K Rainbow, J Riley, M Stubbings, K Valentine, G Wiskin and D Wixley

Approximately 70 members of the public.

Officers: M Squire (Town Clerk)
K Lumb (Deputy Town Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer)
P Bryce (Community Manager)
J Graham (Halls & Bookings Officer)
D Taylor (Community & Services Officer)
T Horton (Cemetery Attendant)

The Town Mayor, Cllr Mick Stubbings welcomed everyone to the 30th annual meeting.

1 Introduction of Councillors

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

2 Minutes of the Town Meeting held on 15 March 2023

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

3 Matters arising from the last meeting

No questions arose.

4 Reports on Council's Activities

Cllr Mick Stubbings presented the Town Mayor's report.

"As Mayor of Loughton, myself and my wife (lady Mayoress) have taken part in all sorts of occasions/events.

In our official capacity we have visited and spoken to people at Schools, where I gave out awards and we were entertained by the children.

Other invitations have been, the music Academy, Jazz afternoons
Lopping Hall Drama's / Panto, Shops in Loughton High Road/Broadway
Jessel Green fun day, Murray Hall Flower/ Vegetables/ Baking Show
Loughton Day

I also took part in the Remembrance Day Parade, where I met some of the people who had served in the armed forces. We all paraded down Church Hill to the war memorial on Kings Green. It was a very emotional moment and I was very proud to represent the Council and the residents of Loughton.

Whilst carrying out my duties as the Mayor, I still had to fulfil my duties as a Councillor, this meant attending Full Council meetings (which as Mayor I chaired) and also the Resources & General Services and Recreation Committee meetings.

I have taken part in 3FOOD4U on quite a few occasions, where we met the High Sherriff of Essex Charles Bishop and his wife (Charlie & Nellie). That was an honour I did not expect.

Each year the Mayor has a Civic Service, this year I based mine on Charity. The Deputy Lieutenant of Essex Amrik Singh Sandhu and his wife Narinderjit stood with me at the entrance and welcomed my guests as they came in.

Amongst my guests was Teresa Watts and her mum Jackie, they are both Pearly Queens, they came in their formal dress, which has pearl buttons sown onto the hat/top and dress. The buttons make up patterns that tell which borough of London they represent. They told everybody what the patterns meant and exactly what they raised money for.

We were also very lucky to have Annabelle sing, Food Glorious Food from Oliver. Everybody commented on how enjoyable it was to listen to her. Thankyou Annabelle for giving your time to entertain us.

The afternoon was lovely and ran so smoothly due to the hard work carried out by all the staff from Loughton Town Council, they do all the hard work and make all the arrangements. They have been by my side guiding me all the way.

I have also taken part in religious ceremonies, other than my own beliefs, which I have really enjoyed, and I have always been made very welcome. Looking back on all I have done, it has been an interesting, funny and a BIG learning curve.

I want to thank my fellow Councillors and the staff at LTC for all the HELP and SUPPORT they have given me”.

Planning and Licensing Committee 2023/24

Cllr Carol Davies, Chairman of the Planning and Licensing Committee, reported on the activities of her Committee over the past year. “This year we held 19 planning meetings. Dealing with 198 Planning application. Of those we objected to 121 (including Tree objections or TPO’S Tree Preservation Orders) and had no objection to 86. The number of appeals, that’s applications, that go to the Secretary of State, was 25. This year we have also had 6 new Mobile Mast applications - We take these quite seriously, because although we all like to have good mobile reception, some of these have been requests to put new, even larger masts, in some very prominent positions, or right across the street from existing masts! In these cases, we consider if the masts will be detrimental to both the street scene and the character of the road or will negatively impact the residents nearby, who will be most affected.

Another change this year, which needs to be widely publicised is the May announcement that Epping Forest District Council would no longer be consulting with neighbours on licensing applications.

Their reason being that as it was no longer a statutory requirement, they didn’t have to! Also, LTC Planning Committee has become very aware of neighbours not even being notified of some planning applications in neighbouring properties which could impact them.

So if you want to avoid any nasty surprises, I would advise everyone to keep an eye on the Town Councils website, where under planning meetings, you can check out the planning agenda before every meeting. It will list all proposals, so you can inform yourself and comment on or object, if you feel strongly about an application.

We note that EFDC made just one new Tree Preservation Order this year, at 78 Algiers Road. However, at the same time we're rather concerned to see that there is a readiness for EFDC to order removal of valuable mature trees, and even veteran trees, to avoid even the slightest possibility of future insurance claims against EFDC. The Committee regards tree removal as an absolute last resort, bearing in mind that mature oaks, for example, may support and provide habitats and sustenance for more than 2000 species of various moths, birds and other insects etc.

In September 2023 the latest government figures showed that the number of planning applications submitted to local planning authorities was the lowest since 2015. Also, the figure for the year to March 2023 was 395,227 which is actually 14% down on the previous year. I think Planning Committee members will find that hard to believe as at certain times of year our agenda is chock full, and our meetings can last the best part of two and half hours with back-to-back applications.

Also of note, is the matter of Enforcement – this is when building works etc have proceeded without planning permission or contrary to the agreed application, or when permission has been refused. I can report 2 appeals for Aura, have been dismissed by the Inspector of Planning. This has decreed that enforcement action for the removal of the outside structure and air vents should proceed. EFDC has allowed a further 13 weeks for removal, however, as there has been no action taken by the owners, EFDC are now taking the matter to the Magistrate's Court to enact. The justice system, as we know, has a vast 12–18-month backlog and this is having an impact here.

There have been some large developments in Loughton this year. The Lucton's Field, which was the playing field for Lucton Girls' School, is now edging towards completion. As well as housing, it also includes the Wellness Centre, a gym facility and café. The café is dog friendly, which I have sampled with 'Twinkle' our Bichon Frise, so I can recommend that for any dog owners in the audience. As some of you will know this gym is to replace the community gym that stood behind Loughton Hall and was sold off by the College to build a seniors' care home/apartments. So, we should I guess be thankful for that, even though I think it has taken what is it about 35+ years?"

Recreation Committee 2023/24

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

"The highlight of the year for the Recreation Committee was the building of the new playground on the Roding Valley Recreation Ground, work started on 17 July and was completed for use on 24 August with an official opening on 1 September. This was a happy event with children and teachers from Alderton and White Bridge Primary Schools present in recognition of their contributions during the public consultation phase.

We were also pleased that our playgrounds at Traps Hill, Newmans Lane and Westall Road received Gold awards from the Essex Playing Fields Association and look forward to entering, for the first time, the new playground into next year's EPFA competition.

At the time of writing this report discussions are taking place with Epping Forest District Council regarding the possibility of obtaining funding from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund. A sum of £30,000 may be available to spend on upgrading playgrounds.

The EPFA also gave Gold awards to the Roding Valley Recreation Ground and the Willingale Road Playing Field. Credit for achieving these awards is due to the work of LTC staff and contractors Pinnacle and Qualis Property Solutions (formerly EFDC Grounds Maintenance).

A survey of trees that the Council is responsible for, was carried out in late 2023. This revealed that a number of trees will have to be removed for safety reasons. However, there are opportunities to plant new trees.

The Willingale Road Nature Reserve continues to benefit from workdays carried out by volunteers and organized by the Epping Forest CountryCare Team. An overnight moth survey took place at the Reserve on the night of 3/4 July last year. This was a joint survey between EF CountryCare and the Wren Wildlife & Conservation Group. A total of 26 species of moth and 1 butterfly were recorded. A detailed report can be found in the Recreation Committee's Agenda for its meeting of 6 September via the LTC website.

The annual Jessel Green Family Fun Day was held on 25 June and again proved to be a very popular and well attended event. We were grateful for the support and sponsorship received from local companies and the Cottage Loaf pub. The event also raised funds for the Guide Dogs charity. And as referred to above, a detailed report can be found in the Recreation Committee's agenda of 6 September. Plans for this year's Fun Day, to be held on 23 June, are underway.

Another event to be held in June will commemorate the 80th Anniversary of D-Day on 6 June with the lighting of a beacon on the Hillyfields Open Space at 9.30 in the evening.

The Committee is also responsible for the Council's two community halls, and I'm pleased to report on improvements made to the heating system at Kingsley Hall and the installation of a defibrillator at the Murray Hall. A number of councillors and LTC staff attended a training session on the use of the defibrillator.

Finally, I thank officers and my fellow Committee members for their help and contributions throughout the year".

Environment and Heritage Committee 2023/24

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

"Work of the E&H Committee this year followed its usual pattern and also dealt with some unexpected issues, the principal of which was the unexpected removal by ECC, without notice, of seven salt bins round the town, these belonged to LTC, having been installed at our cost in the fifteen years up to 2011, when the rules changed. Detailed and lengthy negotiations followed, the matter was even referred to in ECC Full council, but no restitution had been made at the time of writing.

Another matter was the desire of St John's Church to declare their churchyard statutorily closed. This is likely to result in a saving to the church, but a distinct additional cost to LTC. Discussions are ongoing.

Walking signage from the Station to the Forest was completed.

The Loughton Wombles litter picking teams have been a great success. They have met on a generally monthly basis.

The restoration of food markets was much debated. A proposal from Hughmark Ltd to restart a market in Spring 2024 was agreed.

Completion of the alleyway naming project, to encourage walking rather than car use for short in-Loughton journeys, was, with one exception, achieved.

The usual business, such as allotment letting and blue plaque installation, was conducted, and a plaque tour conducted in May in conjunction with Essex Libraries.

As well as organising the Christmas lights for both Loughton High Street and The Broadway, we were able to mark the King's Coronation by adding colourful coronation bunting to both areas as part of the celebrations.

Jointly, with the Planning & Licensing Committee, we identified a lack of regard for Loughton's heritage areas. This was reported to EFDC but no action resulted.

Many thanks to all the staff who have supported aspects of the Committee's work this year".

Resources and General Services Committee 2023/24

Cllr Michael Owen, Chairman of the Resources and General Services Committee, reported on the salient activities of his Committee over the past year. Full written report below.

"The Resources and General Services Committee bears the responsibility of overseeing the finances of the Town Council and ensuring that it conducts itself with utmost openness, transparency, and ethical standards. The Committee carries out the day-to-day financial transactions necessary for the smooth running of the Town Council and oversees staff salaries, insurance, bill payments, banking arrangements, admin for the whole Council, personnel and employment matters, staff management, IT and office equipment, Members' expenses, management of Buckingham Court, and maintenance of the Kingsley and Murray Halls. Furthermore, the Committee is responsible for producing the quarterly Town Council magazine, "Think Loughton," managing the Town Noticeboards and Website, and administering the Financial Assistance Scheme, Civic Celebrations, such as the Christmas Card Competition and Citizenship Awards, are also organised by the Committee. Furthermore, it conducts policy reviews, contract reviews, training strategy, internal audits, and annual banking and investment reviews. I am pleased to report that the Council received a clean audit report from the External Auditors.

On an annual basis, the Committee reviews the Council's insurances, Council-wide priorities, and policies, such as 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, and Training Strategy. This year, the Town Council continued to face significant challenges due to the fallout from global inflation issues, which hinders our ability to plan for the longer term. Despite these challenges, we have tried to keep the increase in council tax to an absolute minimum, whilst making sure we are prudent and can continue to meet our obligations for the long term. We can also confirm there will be no increase in the Councillors' Parish Allowance and many Councillors continue to not take up this allowance. This year the tax base which will be used to calculate the 2024/25 Band D Council Tax for Loughton Town Council as confirmed by Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) is 13,017.5 (12,667.9 in 23/24). This is the figure that when divided into the precept gives the Band D annual amount per household and sets the annual council tax for a Band D property at £76.35, an increase of approximately £4.96 (£0.09p a week). The Council has 3 loans totalling £1.4m due to be completely repaid (amortising profile) between Jan 2026 and July 2027 which will save c£98k pa in loan and interest repayments once repaid. This along with our prudent approach to finances and operations should leave the Council finances in excellent shape going forward allowing the Council to battle anymore economic uncertainty that may come our way in the short term and to once again hopefully invest for the future of Loughton.

The Committee plays a crucial role in awarding grants to local groups and organisations, ensuring that these awards benefit the residents of Loughton and have a positive impact on the local community. This year, we are supporting 26 organizations (up from 17 last

year), and the complete list is available in the February 2024 minutes from the Resources Committee (totalling c£27k). The grants committee comprises four members as we have now included the previous cycles Mayor, who brings better insight into the decision-making process due to their involvement in local organisations during their mayoral tenure. Additionally, there is a separate grant provision of £8,500 to Citizens Advice Epping Forest.

On December 18, 2023, Cllr Murray visited the Office and conducted a financial check on purchase orders and receipts for the Financial Year 2022/23. I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to our Town Clerk, Mark Squire, who continues to do excellent work, our Deputy Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, Kim Lumb, our Community Manager/Assistant Town Clerk, Pippa Bryce, and all our hard-working officers. Lastly, I thank all the members of the Resources Committee for their commitment and dedication to the welfare of the residents of Loughton by scrutinising the Town's finances carefully and conscientiously”.

5 Presentation of the Community Recognition Award

The Town Mayor presented Paul Mellis with a Certificate of Recognition, for his exceptional work 'above and beyond' as a pharmacist in Roding Road, for the benefit of Loughton residents in Valley Hill.

6 Financial Assistance Grant Awards

Representatives from local organisations who will receive financial assistance from the Council in 2024/25 totalling £35,464.07 were presented with a certificate and a group photograph was taken with the Town Mayor. Certificates would be posted out to all recipients who were unable to attend.

7 Questions

There were no questions from the public, but one resident praised the Town Council for the playground on Traps Hill and another for the good work of the Town Council in general.

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

Signed.....
Date: 19 March 2025