

LOUGHTON TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

**Minutes of the Annual Town meeting held at
The Murray Hall, Borders Lane, Loughton IG10 3SB
on Wednesday 18 March 2026**

Chairman: Councillor David Wixley, Town Mayor of Loughton Town Council

Also present:

Town Councillors R Brookes, C Davies, W Dodd, A Fricker, S Harriman, K-W Lee, N MacKinnon, S Murray, M Owen, C Pond, J Riley, M Stubbings, R Sylvan, C Ubah and K Valentine.

Approximately 90 members of the public

Officers: M Squire (Town Clerk)
P Bryce (Deputy Town Clerk)
C Carroll (Responsible Financial Officer)
J Graham (Halls & Bookings Officer)
O Drew (Community & Services Officer)
J Glynn (Finance Officer)
T Horton (Cemetery Attendant)
J Bayley (Principal Caretaker)

The Town Mayor, Cllr David Wixley welcomed everyone to the annual town meeting.

1 Introduction of Councillors

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

2 Minutes of the Town Meeting held on 19 March 2025

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 David Wixley presented the Town Mayor's report.

"At the time of presenting this report this evening I still have two months remaining of my term as Mayor Loughton, so my final report will appear in the summer edition of "Think Loughton".

It has been a great honour to be Mayor although it has come about due to the unfortunate circumstances. The normal practice is that whoever is Deputy Mayor becomes the Mayor for the following year. If things had gone according to plan Cllr Les House would have been the Mayor for the Council year of 2025-26. Unfortunately, Les was unable to accept his appointment, and I was asked to take on that role and I'm grateful for the support from my fellow councillors that I should do so.

I very much hope that Les will become the Mayor in due course. I know he will be a good choice as will the current Deputy Mayor Cllr Stephen Harriman.

I've enjoyed invitations to a wide variety of local organisations and learning about their activities and the contributions they make to the life in Loughton and beyond. Often

these organisations are run by volunteers whose efforts I admire and respect. I would like to name all organisations and the people I have met but that isn't possible, but I can record a big "Thank You" to all of them.

I can give a flavour of my activities by mentioning the following. I've attended several plays performed by the LADS (Loughton Amateur Dramatic Society) and a Cinderella Panto by the UpStage Theatre Company and the 25th Anniversary Showcase performance by the Anna Fiorentini Theatre & Film School at the Hackney Empire was a night to remember.

Musical performance including a Dolly Parton tribute act (Woodland Grove Care Home). Epping Forest Singers concert, National Jazz Archive events and the Roding Rotary Club's "Youth Makes Music" concert.

Religious celebrations and events have been a feature of my year and I must mention Diwali, Hanukkah, Holocaust Memorial Day, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Christmas Carol Services at the St John the Baptist Church, the Chigwell Riding Trust Nativity and gratitude to the Methodist Church for hosting the "Light up a Life" event.

I have been welcomed to YES (Youth Employment Strategy) Partnership Conferences for years 9 & 10 students who receive guidance on "motivation" and the "World of Work".

Other highlights have been the Kings Award to 3Food4U and later it's 5th Year Anniversary celebrations.

Events at the Epping Forest Museum and I recommend visiting their informative exhibitions. A day with the 41st Epping Forest Scout Group at Gilwell Park and an invitation to the GROW Community Garden.

I've opened several enterprises, STOREX, the ICON Shopping Arcade and Taylors Cards in Debden and "Wild Ways" in Loughton.

My chosen charity is the St Clare Hospice and to date several hundred pounds has been raised by the sale of strawberries and cream and plants donated by Matthews Plants at LTC events. I have developed my own "Favourite Walk in Epping Forest". So far, the walk has been done five times and my thanks to all who have taken part and/or made donations.

I'm indebted to LTC officers for helping me with all my engagements and making things run as smoothly as possible.

I finish by paying tributes to two people whose funerals I attended as part of my duties.

Victor Walker was a member of the Loughton Royal British Legion and a Second World War Veteran. He served in the Royal Navy protecting convoys crossing the Atlantic and took part in 'D' Day. Sadly, Victor died five days after his 100th Birthday.

Former councillor Caroline Pond served for many years as a Town and District Councillor and was a colleague whose advice and support I benefited from. Her achievements included being Town Mayor and also Chairman of the District Council and much else besides. A tribute can be read in the Autumn 2025 edition of "Think Loughton" available on the LTC website. Caroline is missed by all who had the privilege to know her."

Planning and Licensing Committee 2024/25

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

“During the 2025–2026 municipal year, Loughton Town Council’s Planning and Licensing Committee has continued its important role in representing residents’ interests within the planning process.

Up to 2 March 2026, the Committee held 20 meetings, during which members considered 235 planning applications affecting Loughton and the surrounding area. Of these, the Committee objected to 126 proposals and raised no objection to 109.

Each application is carefully reviewed by members, who consider a range of issues including design, the impact on neighbouring properties, parking and traffic pressures, and the protection of Loughton’s character and environment.

A number of applications related to trees, which are an important feature of Loughton’s landscape. During the year the Committee considered 28 tree applications, including 21 proposals for works to trees and 7 applications to fell trees. In 17 cases the Committee submitted strong comments raising objections, while 11 applications received the Committee’s usual comments, indicating no objection where the proposed works were considered reasonable.

The Committee was also re-consulted on five planning applications where proposals had been amended following earlier submissions. After reviewing these changes, members-maintained objections to three applications, while two proposals were considered acceptable, resulting in no objection.

In addition, 16 planning applications were taken to appeal by applicants. In seven cases the Committee received notification for information only, meaning there was no opportunity to comment further. However, for the remaining nine appeals, the Committee submitted additional representations to the Planning Inspectorate. In one instance the Committee had originally raised no objection, but after reviewing the Local Planning Authority’s refusal reasons, members agreed that these concerns merited support and therefore withdrew their original position.

Alongside planning matters, the Committee also considered 12 licensing applications during the year.

These included two street trading applications, to which the Committee raised no objection. Members also reviewed three pavement licence applications, objecting to all three where concerns were raised about pedestrian access and public safety.

The Committee also considered seven premises licence applications. Members raised no objection to two applications but objected to five proposals. One of these applications was later invalidated as it did not comply with licensing legislation. In another case, following further clarification from the applicant and agreement to earlier closing times, the Committee agreed to withdraw its objection.

The Committee also contributed to two wider consultations during the year: the review of Epping Forest District Council’s Licensing Policy, and the Waltham Abbey Masterplan, ensuring that Loughton’s interests were represented in discussions affecting the wider district.

Members also considered planning proposals outside the parish where there could be an impact on Loughton residents. The Committee submitted an objection to a proposed development of 250 homes on Green Belt land in neighbouring Chigwell, raising concerns about environmental impacts and potential effects on the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation.

Under the District Council’s planning procedures, applications which receive objections are often determined by Epping Forest District Council’s Planning Committees. Where appropriate, the Chairman or Vice-Chairman attended those meetings to speak on behalf of Loughton Town Council.

During the year, representations were made on nine applications, of which six were approved and three were refused by the District Council.

Overall, the level of activity remains broadly in line with last year’s figures, reflecting the continuing number of development proposals affecting the town. Through careful scrutiny of applications and active engagement with the planning process, the Committee seeks to ensure that development in and around Loughton respects the

town's character, protects its green environment, and reflects the interests of local residents."

Recreation Committee 2024/25

Cllr Katie Valentine, Chairman of the Recreation Committee, reported on the activities of this Committee over the past year.

"Last year, we reported that the Newmans Lane playground had been refurbished, and this year, I'm delighted to say that this playground won two awards from the Essex Playing Fields Association as the outright category winners for both "best children's playground" and "best project carried out in the year". The judges were especially impressed by the inclusivity of the playground, and we are very proud to have playgrounds that all children in Loughton can access, regardless of their needs. The Roding Valley Recreation Ground won two gold certificates, and Traps Hill playground also won a gold.

Matters regarding the Roding Valley Recreation Ground occupied much of our time. At the end of 2024, EFDC agreed a sum of £318,102.23 to be used for enhancements across the whole of the Recreation Ground, to enable it to become a SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space) to Epping Forest. The council has received a proposal outlining various opportunities to improve the space. Suggestions in the report include ideas to create more visual interest, increase biodiversity and enhance its usability. A meeting is currently being arranged with EFDC to discuss next steps.

After commissioning a structural survey to explore the possibility of converting the changing rooms on the Roding Valley Recreation Ground to a Men's Shed, the committee found it would unfortunately be unviable. At the time of writing the committee is in the process of receiving quotations to demolish the building.

We've been pleased to liaise with long-standing clubs, which operate from the Rec, South Loughton Cricket Club and the Loughton Athletics Club, about their upcoming new lease documents.

The Recreation Committee is also responsible for the Council's two community halls, and I'm pleased to report that The Murray Hall will be receiving some new decking and steps this year, partly funded by a Locality Fund Grant of £5,000. Kingsley Hall is also now the home of a new nursery, which opened in January.

A tree survey was carried out at the end of last year, and although most trees were found to be in good health, there are a number of cherry trees adjacent to the Recreation Ground that will need to be felled. The committee will consider future budget reserves for regular tree replanting.

On the subject of replanting, the committee also oversaw the replanting of new roses at the Memorial Garden on Roding Road. This was funded via Locality Funding, secured by Essex County Councillor Marshall Vance.

The committee continued to support the school holidays initiative Play in the Park, across the Recreation Ground and Jessel Green.

The annual Jessel Green Community Fun Day will take place on the 28th June, and Loughton Day will be held on the 19th September. Both continue to be very popular events.

I thank my fellow members of the Recreation Committee for their contributions, and the officers' help and advice in running the Committee throughout the year."

Environment and Heritage Committee 2024/25

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

"A number of benches have been repaired and refurbished throughout the town.

Markets. The committee have been unsuccessful in re-establishing the food markets in the High Road. This has been largely due to unhelpful/obstructive behaviour by the two

principal authorities, EFDC and Essex County Council, together with the North Essex parking partnership.

There was no progress on the issue which had been raised with us last year, that is the assumption of town council control over St John's churchyard. The parish appear to have shelved this idea.

A tree of grief was established in the cemetery following the death of an ornamental tree near the entrance: an interpretation panel was made.

Davenant school raised the issue of the boundary between town council land and theirs. The school were informed that if they wished to fence the boundary, LTC would have no objection. But so far there has been no action.

We raised with EFDC, the registration authority, the possibility of registering the Debden campsite, owned heretofore by Newham Council, as an asset of community value. This is ongoing.

We have been exploring whether the route 397 bus could be extended to run in the evenings, following the very extensive development of housing in Borders Lane. This is ongoing.

A dedication ceremony was held on 19 February 2026, marking the 51st Loughton Town Council (LTC) heritage plaque, installed in December last year at 62 The Uplands, commemorating Percy Thompson, a Loughton historian

Loughton Wombles are still going strong and celebrated their 4th year anniversary in December 2025. Typically 2 larger groups meet up once a month and clear copious amounts of litter. New members are always welcome.

We have been grateful to Councillor Alan Fricker for suggesting updates to the council's environmental policy.

We said goodbye this year to Paul Hoy, who has retired after 20 years' service to the council as services manager. He will be much missed."

Resources and General Services Committee 2024/25

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 (new 3 year contract being agreed), bill payments, banking arrangements (moving accounts this year), admin for the whole Council, personnel and employment matters, staff management, IT and office equipment, Members' expenses, management of Buckingham Court. 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. The committee is also responsible for organising Civic Celebrations, such as the Christmas Card circulation and the Citizenship Awards, and undertakes policy reviews, contract reviews, training strategy, internal audits, and banking and investment reviews on an annual basis. Additionally this year we have helped to Establish a Town Partnership for Loughton High Road and our we have highlighted one of other main priorities for this year is to ensure all payments are being made through the Unity Trust account, signatories are up to date and to ensure Council

reserves are achieving the best available interest rates and implementation of new digital phone system as the analogue system will cease in Jan 2027. This year's internal audit prompted a prerequisite for the next financial year, in terms of new AGAR (Annual Governance and Accountability Return), principally GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations) requirements and for Government domain emails addresses across the board. The External audit emphasised the importance of an all-encompassing risk assessment grid, covering all aspects of Council work.

Each year, 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. The tax base which will be used to calculate the 2026/27 Band D Council Tax for LTC as confirmed by Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) is 13,204.5 in 2026/27). This is the figure that when divided into the precept gives the Band D annual amount per household. Effectively this means that the base precept level available to the Town Council is slightly increased from last year. The town councils increase is 3.64% on the Band D charge from £80.48 (last year) to £83.28. There will be no increase in the Councillors' Parish Allowance.

The Council's existing loans are due to mature in January 2026, March 2027 and June 2027. Their completion will result in annual savings of approximately £98,000 in loan repayments, leaving the Council debt-free by the end of this period and in a strong financial position. We are also reviewing potential long-term capital projects during the current year and will determine our strategic approach to these in the year ahead.

Awarding grants to local groups and organisations is a critical function of the committee, and we ensure that these awards benefit people living in Loughton and provide a positive impact on the local community. This year, we are supporting 30 organizations with £35k (29% increase), and the full list is available on the February 2026 minutes from the resources committee. Additionally, there is a separate grant provision of £8,000 to Citizens Advice Epping Forest.

I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to our Town Clerk, Mark Squire, who continues to do excellent work and our new Responsible Financial Officer Caroline Carroll, our Deputy 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 Citizenship Awards

Cllr David Wixley, Loughton, Town Mayor presented the award to the Citizen of the Year, Ian Thomas, recognising his dedication and voluntary work for the Loughton Community. The Town Mayor highlighted "Ian's enormous contribution to the Air Ambulance Service, and volunteering with Loughton Voluntary Care, he always goes that extra mile to deliver a wonderful service to all the voluntary organisations he is involved with'.

Elizabeth Knapman was announced as Young Citizen of the Year, in recognition of her voluntary work as a sports coach at Davenant School and Loughton Athletics Club and playing a key role delivering community youth activities with Loughton Methodist Church Holiday Club and Youth Club. Lizzie is an excellent role model and encourages young people to get involved; she has a natural ability to make everyone feel included and valued. Lizzie inspires other young people to volunteer too.

Ian will keep the presented Rose Bowl for the first six months of the year, and Lizzie will hold it for the remaining six months. Both recipients also received an engraved glass plaque to keep along with an illuminated scroll and a cheque in the sum of £250 to their chosen charities.

Special Certificates of Recognition was also presented by the Town Mayor to Barry Rudderford and Jamie Hardy, employees of Terra Verde Services, for their dedication and friendly manner while carrying out street-cleaning duties in Loughton.

6 Financial Assistance Grant Awards

Representatives from local groups, organisations and charities that were successful in their grant applications received certificates to mark their achievements. In total the Town Council presented £42,339.99 to Community Groups in Loughton, helping very worthy local causes.

The Town Mayor commended all the recipients and expressed how delighted the Council was to support all these community organizations in the good work they carry out for the benefit of the residents of Loughton. He also welcomed the local MP, Dr Neil Hudson, to the meeting, who had arrived during the presentations.

7 Questions

There were two questions from the public, one regarding the possibility of a refreshment / café on the Roding Valley Recreation Ground when it is given an overhaul with the SANG money to be used for the enhancements. This is something that can be considered. The second question was regarding a market on Debden Broadway, the Town Council will happily issue a license for a market but are waiting for the Broadway Town Centre Partnership to provide a market agreement.

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

Signed.....
Date: 17 March 2027