

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING MINUTES

Minutes of the proceedings of the **Annual Meeting of Duly Registered Local Government Electors held at Diss Youth & Community Centre on Wednesday 27th April 2022 at 6pm.**

Present: Councillor Eric Taylor (Town Mayor) in the Chair
Sarah Richards (Town Clerk)
Sonya French (Deputy Town Clerk)
Councillors Browne, Collins, Gingell, Kitchen, Kiddie, Murphy, Olander (Council Leader), Robertson, Peaty, Warren, Welch and Wooddissee.
District Councillor Minshull
38 members of the public

Apologies received from District Councillors Kiddie & Wilby.

1. WELCOME BY THE TOWN MAYOR OF DISS

Councillor Eric Taylor welcomed those in attendance to the Annual Town Meeting of Diss and asked for any questions at the end of the meeting.

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on **Wednesday 29th September 2021** were agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Town Mayor.

3. ANNUAL REPORT FROM DISS TOWN COUNCIL

With just six months since our last meeting, Diss Town Council has worked tirelessly to make our town an even better place to live, work, and visit. We have improved facilities, considered planning applications, spent hundreds of hours planning events, provided £6,670 in grant funding, and responded to over 2,000 public enquiries. These achievements would not have been possible without the dedication of our councillors, staff, volunteers, and partners, and we thank them all for their invaluable contributions.

Investing in Facilities and Community Initiatives

We are proud to have delivered several improvements to local facilities. New interactive play equipment has been installed in the park, designed for a wide range of ages and inclusive play for children with additional needs. Security across the town is being enhanced with upgraded CCTV, including new cameras at the Skateboard Park, the Park, and the Diss Youth & Community Centre (DYCC). The DYCC has also become home to the community fridge initiative, helping to reduce food waste and support local families. To complement this, we planted three fruit trees on-site, providing a sustainable food source and contributing to our shared goal of reducing carbon emissions. Work is also underway to restore the historic walkway behind the DYCC, a project that will be detailed later by the Parish Field Friends.

Bringing Back Events

2022 marks a return to key community events following the pandemic. The celebrations begin with the Diss Organ Festival on 15 May, followed by Glow in the Park on 2 June in honour of Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. On 3 July, we look forward to welcoming back the much-loved Diss Carnival. We also hosted our first car boot sale of the year, raising funds to support the Carnival.

Thanks to a successful National Lottery grant application, we can deliver these events on a larger scale while reducing costs for local taxpayers. This funding covers most of the expenses for the beacon surround extension and key elements of Glow in the Park, ensuring that our community enjoys memorable celebrations without additional financial burden.

Building a Greener Future

Environmental responsibility remains a priority for Diss Town Council. We have supported the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill and taken significant steps toward creating a greener town. Almost all streetlighting lanterns have been upgraded to energy-efficient LED, reducing consumption by over 50%. We have increased in-house recycling and are exploring renewable energy opportunities across our sites to further reduce our carbon footprint.

Improving Infrastructure

Partnership working continues to deliver tangible benefits for Diss. Through Parish Partnership Schemes with Norfolk County Council, we are making highway improvements and enhancing accessibility. This year, the Public Right of Way linking Walcot Green and Burston Road will be upgraded, including the installation of a culvert at the bridge. We are also awaiting approval for a third speed sign to improve road safety and have scheduled improvements to the Causeway PROW.

Further projects include junction upgrades at Vince's Road, pedestrianisation proposals for Mere Street, and a review of parking restrictions. These initiatives aim to make Diss safer, more accessible, and better connected for residents and visitors alike.

Planning for the Future

The Diss & District Neighbourhood Plan is progressing well and is due for submission to the Planning Authority in May. We anticipate a referendum toward the end of the year, marking an important milestone in shaping the long-term development of our town.

4. ANNUAL REPORT FROM NORFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL

District Councillor Minshull kindly delivered the Norfolk County Council update on behalf of Councillor Keith Kiddie, who is currently recuperating following a recent accident. District Councillor Wilby also sent his apologies.

The report reaffirmed the strong partnership between the County Council and Diss Town Council, with ongoing work to improve highways, enhance accessibility, and support local infrastructure projects. While detailed updates were deferred due to Councillor Kiddie's absence, the commitment to collaboration remains clear, and further information will be shared as these initiatives progress.

5. ANNUAL REPORT FROM SOUTH NORFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

District Councillor Minshull provided an update on behalf of South Norfolk Council, focusing on the transition from the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic to a period of recovery and renewal. During the pandemic, the Council invested an extraordinary £1 million per week to ensure residents and businesses were supported. As we move forward, the priority is rebuilding finances while maintaining stability - Council Tax has been kept at pre-Covid levels, and importantly, no services have been cut.

Councillor Minshull also praised the remarkable community response to the Ukrainian evacuee crisis. Diss stood out as one of the best responders in the district and county, with hundreds of offers of toys and support for children. Events were organised to bring Ukrainian families together, including opportunities to connect with loved ones back home, demonstrating the strength and compassion of our community.

Looking ahead, the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) fund continues to provide opportunities for investment in local projects. Although funds are received in stages, parishes can apply to South Norfolk Council for an advance loan to deliver larger projects sooner. The Council is also committed to sustainability, with initiatives such as installing solar panels at leisure centres to heat water and adding more electric vehicle charging points.

Councillor Minshull outlined proposals for South Norfolk Council to relocate from Long Stratton and share offices with Broadland District Council. This move would deliver significant benefits, including a carbon-neutral building and estimated savings of £1.5 million. Importantly, South Norfolk will retain an office presence in Diss to ensure continued local access to services. Finally, while a couple of major projects remain confidential at this stage, Councillor Minshull assured residents that these developments will bring further positive change for the district.

6. UPDATE FROM GRANT RECIPIENTS

Representatives of Parish Field Friends expressed their gratitude to Diss Town Council for their continued financial support and provided an update on recent activities.

A representative of MTM Youth Services reported on the grant received during 2021–22 and outlined the significant impact it has had on local youth and community initiatives. Despite the challenges posed by

Covid-19, the team adapted their delivery format, moving Youth Council meetings online and continuing to provide essential services. Over the year, they delivered 175 hours of youth and community work, organised a community Christmas mask competition, and ran 51 FareShare sessions to support families in need. Volunteers played a vital role, collecting food and ensuring its distribution.

The results speak for themselves: 1,059 attendances were recorded - more than double the previous year. The intergenerational project also made a meaningful difference, connecting isolated members of the community through letters and artwork, which received overwhelmingly positive feedback. These efforts were strengthened through partnerships with numerous local organisations, demonstrating the power of collaborative working.

It was also recognised that the Chair of the Youth Council has since become a Diss Town Councillor, and the team received the prestigious JGC Award in recognition of their outstanding contribution to the community.

7. QUESTIONS RAISED BY ELECTORS

The Q&A session provided an opportunity for residents to raise a wide range of important topics, reflecting both immediate concerns and long-term aspirations for Diss.

One question focused on the former Hamlin's building on Park Road, which was recently demolished due to asbestos and vandalism. Councillors confirmed that the site has been cleared and made safe, and while plans are at a delicate stage of negotiation, proposals for new leisure provision remain firmly in the pipeline. Prior to the pandemic, £5 million had been earmarked for a new facility, but Covid-19 diverted funds. Discussions are ongoing to bring a modern leisure centre to Diss, including all-weather pitches and a sports hall - watch this space for updates.

Residents also raised questions about the Parish Fields and the town's green spaces. Councillors explained that while Diss once had the opportunity to take ownership of Parish Fields, the site is now protected within the Diss & District Neighbourhood Plan (DDNP). The plan, developed in partnership with seven parishes, identifies key housing sites to meet government targets of 400+ homes by 2038. These include areas such as Shelfanger Road and Nelson Road, with provisions for sheltered housing and care facilities. Councillors stressed that housing growth drives infrastructure investment and that careful planning is essential to balance development with community needs.

Concerns about cemetery provision were also discussed. While expansion is planned, burial habits have changed, reducing immediate demand. A reasonable agreement has been reached with developers, including a ten-year maintenance contribution, and the extension will provide a tranquil, meadow-style space for reflection.

Young people and cultural activities featured prominently in the discussion. Residents called for more facilities and outreach, and councillors highlighted ongoing work with MTM Youth Services and Corn Hall to deliver projects and free activities for children. The Skateboard Park was cited as an example of successful collaboration between young people, councillors, and the community.

Other issues raised included anti-social behaviour, improvements to Diss Mere and Market Place railings, and recycling provision. Councillors noted that fly-tipping remains a challenge, particularly following the closure of Suffolk's Eye recycling centre, but South Norfolk Council continues to offer green bin recycling and brown bins for garden waste. Plans for additional recycling facilities are under consideration.

Finally, residents were reminded that Diss has grown by 25% since 2011, and future plans - including leisure facilities and cultural initiatives - must reflect the needs of a growing and diverse population.

8. AWARDS PRESENTATION

The Town Council's opportunity to thank members of our community who have made a real difference to the lives of others. This year, we were privileged to recognise several outstanding individuals and organisations.

Honoured Citizen Awards

We received a number of very worthy nominations for the Honoured Citizen Award, and for the first time, decided to present two awards in this category.

The first recipient was George Waterman, whose dedication to improving Diss has been exceptional. George founded the Diss Litter Picking Group, which now attracts up to 30 volunteers each month, including young people working toward their Duke of Edinburgh Award. He also volunteers with the Quaker Wood Group, plays a key role in the Community Fridge initiative, and contributes to the Diss & District Neighbourhood Plan online community. A professional horticulturalist, George brings energy and creativity to every project he undertakes, from green corridor work in Roydon to supporting sustainability efforts in Diss. His enthusiasm and commitment make him a truly deserving Honoured Citizen.

Our second Honoured Citizen Award went to Lou Hines, who has worked tirelessly to support young people's mental health. Following personal tragedy, Lou turned her grief into action, fundraising for vital services and creating a support group that has helped over 200 young people. Her events, including "Beers, Bands and Bikes," have raised awareness and funds, while her compassion and determination have provided hope and opportunities for those who need them most. Lou's impact on the community is immeasurable, and her recognition as an Honoured Citizen is richly deserved.

Junior Good Citizen Award

The Junior Good Citizen Award was presented to Plamena Marinova, a passionate advocate for young people's voices. Since joining Diss Youth Council in 2019, Plamena has served as Chair and taken on numerous volunteering roles, supporting youth projects and charities such as SYNAB. She led Project Orbis and has represented young people locally, across Norfolk, and nationally. Her energy, leadership, and commitment to community engagement exemplify the spirit of this award.

Special Award – Revd Canon Tony Billett

A special award was presented to Revd Canon Tony Billett, Rector of Diss Team Ministry, in recognition of more than 20 years of dedicated service to the Diss community. Gerry Hoskins paid tribute to Tony's exceptional organisational skills, his compassion, and his sense of humour, which have made him a trusted and much-loved figure in the town. From ensuring civic events run flawlessly to offering care and support to those in need, Tony has been a cornerstone of community life.

Tony received a framed certificate, and a commemorative plaque will be installed on the boardwalk later this year as a lasting tribute to his service. As he prepares for retirement, we thank him for his extraordinary contribution and wish him a long and happy retirement.

Additional Recognitions

Earlier this month, Council Leader Councillor Simon Olander presented Chris Moyse, former Station Manager at Park Radio Ltd, with a certificate acknowledging his significant role in establishing a truly local radio station for Diss.

We also marked the community's resilience during the pandemic with a commemorative plaque presented to the Town Council by Philippa Taylor, one of Norfolk's Deputy Lieutenants. This plaque will be installed as part of the Park Beacon extension project later this year.

Town Mayor's Charity – MIND

Finally, the Town Mayor announced the total raised for the year's nominated charity, MIND, which provides vital mental health support. Despite challenges caused by cancellations and bad weather, the community rallied together to raise over £1,555. Ashley Bunn and Alex Wiseman from MIND were invited to accept the cheque, and the Mayor expressed heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed.

The meeting was declared closed at 8.13pm.



Signed as a true record - _____

Cllr Eric Taylor
TOWN MAYOR