

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 24th May 2023 at 6pm.**

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

Apologies received from councillor Sinfield.
District Councillors Kiddie and Minshull also apologised for not being present due to the District Council AGM the same evening.

1. WELCOME BY THE TOWN MAYOR OF DISS

Councillor Kieran Murphy welcomed those in attendance to the Annual Town Meeting. He explained that the other District councillors apologised for not being in attendance due to their Annual General Meeting coinciding and that he would be joining them in due course, having also been newly elected as District councillor. Cllr Murphy explained that he was honoured to be voted in by his fellow town councillors as Diss' Town Mayor having previously served and chaired both the South Norfolk Youth Advisory Board and Diss Youth Council and he is looking forward to making the most of the opportunities for Diss over the next year and beyond.

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Wednesday 27th April 2022 were agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Town Mayor. It was

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes from the April 2022 meeting.

(Action: Clerk; immediately)

3. ANNUAL REPORT FROM DISS TOWN COUNCIL

Members received an annual report on the activities of Diss Town Council. The Town Mayor referred to the Council's 3-year strategic plan objectives to create a greener, cleaner and safer town, develop and implement the Diss & District Neighbourhood Plan and reduce costs to deliver better value to residents in support of the Council's vision to make Diss a successful, vibrant, attractive town where people want to live, work and visit.

Cllr Murphy left the meeting and cllr Olander (Council Leader) took the Chair.

Cllr Taylor talked about his tenure as Town Mayor including attending many events in and around Diss, meeting new people, representing Diss Town Council and fundraising for his chosen charities. He thanked those staff responsible for maintaining the Council's website and social media channels. Highlights included meeting King's representative Lady Dannatt, Lord Lieutenant of Norfolk & the High Sheriff of Norfolk but most rewarding event was his visits to the elderly care homes.

He spoke of how the Town Council has excelled in putting on inclusive events for the whole community including the Christmas lights switch-on, a personal favourite and reminded attendees of the forthcoming Diss Carnival on 11th June, thanking all the volunteers that also make them possible.

Cllr Simon Olander and recently re-elected Council Leader & current Chair of the Council's Infrastructure committee thanked all for attending. He spoke of the activities undertaken to create a

greener, cleaner & safer town including investment in resources, managing green spaces to encourage biodiversity, litter picking, composter and community fridge project support, savings in carbon and CO² by dimming and switching off streetlights and protecting local green spaces within the Diss & District Neighbourhood Plan in its final stages of examination. Working with partners to deliver more artwork in Diss, updating information display boards, installing phase 2 of the beacon of hope and undertaking works at Mere's Mouth to drive footfall.

He also talked about how the Council is reducing costs and delivering better value including a 0% precept increase in the budget, reviewing contracts to identify costs savings and increasing revenue generated at our sites.

One of the Council's two newest councillors, George Waterman spoke next about his journey onto the Town Council and his experience since September when he was co-opted. Starting out with a litter picking idea and wanting to use his spare time to positively impact on the town, he enlisted the help of Karen Sheen and approached the Council for support with rubbish disposal. He has been involved in different projects including litter clearance in the river Waveney via kayaks, filling the DYCC main hall with food for the community fridge and acting as Dinsdale at the Coronation event. He transfers his skills from his day job in horticulture to help the Council with relevant projects, has helped support events, is grateful to the community for their support and is a happier person because of the experience.

Due the requirement for one of the award recipients to leave, this presentation was brought forward.

The Executive Head of Diss Infant & Junior School was invited to explain why she and her colleague nominated Yvonne Hensen for an award. She spoke of Yvonne's phenomenal character which not only children but the whole community get to experience every day regardless of the weather in her longstanding role as lollypop lady.

A special long service award was presented to Yvonne by former Mayor, cllr Taylor, for her considerable contribution to the school community in Diss.

4. QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION

Several questions were raised by electors including a request for an update on the Aldi planning application, whether the Town Council could join up with neighbouring parishes to create greener corridors, whether a traffic survey could be undertaken and incentivising people to shop in Diss given closures including better bus services.

Aldi update

The applicant has had to re-think the proposals due to objections and now state they have met the highways criteria. The application may be considered by the Development Management committee next month. The biggest challenge is the change of use to the site as it has not been allocated for retail and the application has divided opinion with the Council narrowly supporting it but the DDNPSG objecting. The DDNP will be going up on the Planning Portal soon.

Green infrastructure

Cllr Waterman spoke of the various groups in the town supporting a greener infrastructure including Quaker Wood, Frenze Beck, Parish Fields, Fair Green Neighbourhood Association and the connecting hedgerows between them and the parishes which act as 'bridges' for flora and fauna to move between habitats. He spoke of the requirement for cataloguing all the spaces in town followed by a discussion regarding how we can better connect these together.

Chair of the DDNPSG spoke of the importance of Diss for the parishes and vice versa and the complications and time associated with managing the most ambitious neighbourhood plan in England involving 7 parishes and crossing both County & District boundaries.

It was noted that the group has spent time together thinking about local green spaces and once the plan has completed the statutory examination phase and the public have approved it (requires 51% of public saying yes) at a referendum held later in the year, it will require the Planning Authority to

consider the plan's wishes when applications are being determined.

The government requires local authorities to create a certain number of new dwellings in its area over a specific period (in this case 450 houses in 15-years). Sites are not easy to find but the DDNPSG has tried to select sites that the community support whilst mitigating any interference with natural populations for example with the proposed site next to the Cemetery on Shelfanger Road, which will see land gifted to the Town Council for a Cemetery extension of approximately 60 years along with a link road between Burstons & Shelfanger roads to alleviate east-west traffic.

It was noted that the DDNP has been emerging for at least 4-5 years, that there have been several consultations where each parish had a say on sites twice and that the sites are put forward by landowners / agents.

Traffic survey / shop closures

It was noted that it has been a number of years since a traffic survey was undertaken in Diss and 16,000 homes would need to be developed to support a bypass.

The Town Council will continue to lobby higher tier authorities and local businesses to improve the traffic, parking and shop closure situation in the town centre. We have tried to engage landlords, but many are remote and not interested. The link road from the train station should also help.

(Action: committees where relevant; next meeting dates)

5. YOUR FEEDBACK ON OUR STRATEGY

The Town Clerk asked those present for their views on the Council's next strategic plan. This feedback will be collated, reviewed and included (alongside other community engagement activities) when putting together our next three-year plan.

(Action: Clerk; by 30.08.23)

6. AWARD PRESENTATIONS 2023/24

Cllr Waterman spoke about being one of the Honoured Citizens for 2022-23 including the reasons he was nominated and thanked volunteers for their help. He has found that the town has given back to him as well as what he has given to the town, and he has learned skills to help others.

The proposer for award Honoured Citizen winner, spoke of why she nominated Gabrielle Pagan including the baking in the kitchen to provide for the Welcome café at the United Reformed Church, which has become a popular venue especially since Covid where people come to meet friends and neighbours. Gabrielle also organises the Dove Dementia Café & Dove Song, which provides a safe space for patients and carers to undertake art activities and have some much-needed respite and Churches Together events such as lent lunches.

Gabrielle spoke of her Christian faith motivating her, her loyal volunteers without whom what she does would not have been possible, the support with encouragement through donations (which mean there are no charges to user groups), the money raised for charities and the beautifully restored church building which is a warm & welcoming space which can be adapted for many uses. She also thanked Age UK who made Diss a dementia friendly town 8 years ago. She spoke of her joy getting to know everyone involved, the generosity of Diss folk and her delight in accepting her award on behalf of all.

7. REPORT FROM DOVE SONG PLUS

Gabrielle also spoke of how the £720 grant from the Council made a difference to Dove Song Plus, which provides an opportunity for carers of those with complex needs who work at residential homes to have some time out and fun as part of a singing group. The funding has helped with the costs of heating the church and primarily the music therapist.

8. TOWN MAYORS CHARITIES

Former Mayor, cllr Taylor spoke of his charities being nominated due to personal experience.

He welcomed the representative of Marie Curie who thanked cllr Taylor for the funds raised and explained about the services they offer. As well as nursing, they provide an information and support service having supported over 427 people over the last year. The funds raised will help another 40 people locally.

Cllr Taylor presented the charity with a cheque for £1,278.76 with another cheque of the same value being delivered to Cancer Research UK who were unable to send a representative to the meeting.

A representative of the Royal British Legion thanked the people of Diss and one of their members for raising an incredible £16,700 in the poppy appeal from December 2021 to November 2022. He also acknowledged the support of Morrisons, Tesco and other local shops for collecting.

Cllr Olander closed the meeting by thanking all councillors, indoor & outdoor staffing teams, local group stall representatives and all for attending.

The meeting was declared closed at 8.15pm.

Signed as a true record - _____
TOWN MAYOR