

## **ANNUAL TOWN MEETING MINUTES**

*A minute's silence was held in memory of the late Jim Bidwell, Honoured Citizen of Diss in 2019, stalwart member of the Diss and District British Legion who was heavily involved in organising the Remembrance Day activities over the years.*

Minutes of the proceedings of the **Annual Meeting of Duly Registered Local Government Electors** held at **Diss Youth & Community Centre** on **Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> September 2021 at 6.30pm.**

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

Apologies received from Councillor Warren & District Councillor Wilby.  
Councillor Murphy was not in attendance.

### **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. It was noted that it has been 18 months since the last meeting due to the Covid pandemic.

### **2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020 were agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Town Mayor.

### **3. ANNUAL REPORT FROM DISS TOWN COUNCIL**

Improvements to Council-owned sites include considerable investment in additional Park play equipment for the 4-8-year-old and children with additional needs following a public consultation, and CCTV at the Skateboard Park, and the Diss Youth & Community Centre. The Council is refocussing its efforts to improve the water quality of the Mere and consulting with a range of stakeholders including experts in the field of habitat enhancement, continuing to work with the Friends of Parish Fields to restore an ancient walkway to the rear of the DYCC site and supporting Norfolk County Council's plan to plant 1 million trees.

The DYCC has been home to the NHS's Covid vaccination programme being the only site in Diss to meet the programme's criteria enabling residents to access their vaccines more quickly.

There are several events being organised over the coming months. The Council is working with representatives of the Royal British Legion and St Mary's church on plans for a Remembrance Day parade and wreath laying ceremony on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> November. The Christmas Lights Switch-on committee are finalising arrangements for this year's event taking place on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> November. The Diss Carnival committee will reconvene next month to start planning for this year's event and the Beacon committee will be preparing a special event to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee 2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> June. Other forthcoming events to diarise include the Diss Ukulele Day at the Corn Hall on 15<sup>th</sup> October and the Diss Organ Festival on 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> May).

*Prior to the rest of the Town Council report, reports were invited from County and District Councillors to allow them to leave for other meetings.*

### **4. ANNUAL REPORT FROM NORFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL**

County Councillor Kiddie thanked the electorate who supported him and promised to represent the Diss & Roydon residents. Diss saw £1 million invested in highways improvements in the previous four years with a further £180k this year. Schemes have included the resurfacing of Uplands Way, Skelton Rd and the Shelfanger Road pavement outside the DYCC, tree and drainage works in Factory Lane, hedges in Mount St and Frenze Hall Lane and extra lines and signs to address parking and speeding issues outside Roydon primary school. Weather conditions have impeded remedial works to repair potholes, for which NCC has received an additional £10m from central government albeit to cover 8,000 roads in Norfolk. Minor schemes planned include extra drainage works on Walcot Road and on the Roydon part of the A1066. Plans to address flooding issues on Sawmills Road are scheduled for early 2022.

NCC is negotiating with one last landowner regarding the schemes to provide bus access to the train station and the Vinces Road junction improvements. The Causeway Public Right of Way leading to Chapel St will be resurfaced via a Parish Partnership Scheme, extra 20mph signs for the Heritage Triangle and beacon trail signage is being ordered. NCC is committed to planting million trees as part of environment programme and schemes are invited via the Town Council. Councillor Kiddie has been able to provide his member grant to local clubs and groups to support an irrigation system for Diss Bowls Club, leadership training equipment for Diss Air Cadets and a new hut for the Roydon Girl Guides.

It was noted that funds are restricted following Covid, which will need careful consideration when finalising the budget in February.

## **5. ANNUAL REPORT FROM SOUTH NORFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL**

District Councillor Minshull reported on behalf of the three District Councillors. The merging of South Norfolk and Broadland District Councils is estimated to save £8.7m over the first four years, £4.5m more than originally anticipated and a higher quality workforce given greater coverage. As Chairman of SNC two years ago, cllr Minshull was privileged to see closely the tremendous work that went into supporting residents and businesses through the pandemic. 85% of their staff now work remotely so accommodation requirements are being reviewed for future savings and all meetings are recorded allowing for greater accountability.

The District Council carries out 84 different tasks. Some staff were redeployed into the NHS and many volunteered to work on days off in the testing centres and vaccination centres. Their IT team equipped over 600 members of staff and members to work remotely during first two weeks of lockdown and the Help Hub, open 7 days a week until 10pm, brings together around 40 different organisations to solve problems.

£147.4m has been distributed to support local businesses and residents, 51,764 calls taken regarding benefits, £73k paid out through the hardship fund, £1.2m in council tax benefits, £163k to support track and trace. 10,000 businesses in the district were contacted to offer support. In the height of lockdown, they supported 3,700 shopping deliveries, fed 560 houses in food poverty to ensure no house went hungry and distributed 8 tonnes of food to residents. 45 community support groups were formed and are still operating. Accommodation was provided to 812 residents and 781 people were helped onto the housing register. Three out of the 12 business awards for the District were awarded to Diss recipients.

Finally, tribute was paid to the waste collection staff who didn't miss a single bin collection throughout the pandemic and also volunteered during the flooding on Christmas eve.

There were several questions for County / District councillors. The new Beacon trail maps would be distributed to the Visitor Information Centre at Diss Corn Hall, a request to clear the drains along Mere St would be submitted, and attendees were encouraged to report any works required e.g streetlights, drain covers, potholes, rubbish clearance on Fixmystreet.com which will direct the enquiry to the responsible Council. It was noted that the vegetation along the footpath from Desira garage to Scole has made it difficult to pass and that sports clubs and other groups can still apply for grant support via the Help Hub.

**(Action: Clerk; when available / KK; immediately)**

A member of the public reported that he has enquired about a pavement, which is narrower than 600mm and that there is a permissive path from Frenze bridge to Scole with plans for a cycle path underway.

There was discussion regarding the pigeon fouling in Mere St and the responsibilities of the District Council for pavement cleaning particularly given the savings made. The District Council and Town Council are working together during the weekly road sweeps, which also covers areas such as Mere's Mouth and the Market Place that are owned by DTC. It was noted that a combination of efforts from councils, shop owners and the public is needed to address the issue.

**(Action: DTC Action Group / KK; by 31.12.21)**

It was noted that central government set the £19k threshold regarding eligibility for the £500 Track & Trace payment.

*County and District Councillors left the meeting.*

## **6. ANNUAL REPORT FROM DISS TOWN COUNCIL CONTINUED**

*Councillor Olander, Council Leader presented the infrastructure improvements part of the presentation.*

The Council works in partnership with Norfolk County Council and the District Council on highway related improvements. Parish Partnership schemes, funded 50/50 by NCC and DTC, include upgrades to the Causeway PROW scheduled for delivery before the end of the financial year and a third speed sign next year so that key areas can be targeted more frequently.

Other projects include a District lead Residents Parking Scheme which will consider a range of parking restrictions including yellow lines and signs, parking permits and time-limited parking and a NCC lead project to pedestrianise Mere Street to encourage walking and cycling in the town centre and increase safety, which has been out for initial consultation with local stakeholders. Proposals include disabled only park outside the museum and time limited access for deliveries.

The double yellow lining work has been carried out and a new legal order is now in place to support the scheme for a link road between the railway station and Nelson Road and a public consultation for the Traffic Regulation Order (double yellows) is scheduled for October with the detailed design planned for completion by end of December for the Vines Road/A1066 junction scheme.

The Diss & District Neighbourhood Plan incorporating feedback from the Regulation 14 pre-submission consultation is about to be submitted to the Planning Authority for examination, which could take up to six months prior to the referendum given the Plan's complex nature across two counties and seven parishes. If the plan is approved, Community Infrastructure Levy contributions for major developments will increase from 15 to 25%.

Positive feedback has been received regarding the new picnic benches situated on the Mere's Mouth, which has seen an increase in footfall following the programme of works to fully pedestrianise the area. Additional planters and cycle racks are also being installed as part of a partnership project with the District Council and the Council is working with NCC's EXPERIENCE team and other stakeholders in support of an outdoor art installation destined for the Mere's Mouth area and linked to a 250-mile walking/cycling trail to encourage new visitors to Norfolk.

*Councillor Taylor, Town Mayor, completed the presentation.*

The Council has welcomed three new members of staff as well as four new councillors since May 2020 and sadly said goodbye to two former councillors who each contributed to the work of the Town council for over 10 years. Former councillor Mason was presented with a certificate to acknowledge his support of and commitment to the Town Council during which time he took on several pivotal roles including as Council Leader where he was instrumental in developing the Council's first strategic plan.

Fundraising for the Mayor's charities in aid of MIND, which has supported so many during the

pandemic, kicked off with a civic ceremony which welcomed dignitaries from many towns and across the County. Other fundraising activities planned include the Christmas Lights Switch-on event in November, a carol concert in December and a car boot sale next year.

Thanks were extended on behalf of the Council to the local volunteers and groups who have worked alongside the Council to name a few the Heritage Traders Trust for their work on maintaining the wildlife gardens, Floral Diss who have kept up the colourful planters around the town, the Diss Community Team for their efforts to help increase footfall in the town centre and the Friends of Parish Fields to restore an ancient walkway.

## **7. QUESTIONS RAISED BY ELECTORS**

Several questions were raised by electors including a review of car park capacity / long and short stay system within the residents parking scheme given the expansion of Diss, likely loss of spaces from the Wetherspoons development and pedestrianisation project and the difficulties in finding spaces.

**(Action: Infrastructure committee; by 30.03.22)**

Solo Housing have residents who may like to get involved with the Jubilee tree planting and was advised to contact the Town Council. There were concerns raised about the flooding last Christmas particularly given the works to address this are scheduled for the New Year. There is work being undertaken along the riverside to determine appropriate resilience planning and landowners are being contacted regarding clearance.

The meeting concluded with award presentations to Honoured Citizen Anne Beckett-Allen. Her proposer explained she had nominated Anne for her tireless work to help promote mental health first aid in the workplace and her efforts to run free support groups for the bereaved. She is also a Trustee of Nelsons Journey and supports many other charities and is an inspiration to everyone to try and keep positive.

On receiving her award, Anne explained she's passionate about the work she does having seen far too many funerals due to mental health. She encouraged people to become a Mental Health First Aider by visiting Rosedale's website for more information.

Lily Mills was then presented with her award as Diss' Junior Good Citizen. Her proposer, Chris Brooks and Chair of Scole Nature Trails Trust talked about Lily's positive outlook regarding change for the better, her consciousness and the lasting impression she makes on those she meets. She has committed her spare time to fundraising for Gissing children's centre, supporting vulnerable members of the community, lifeguard training, Diss Youth Councillor and recently undertaking her Duke of Edinburgh award in addition to volunteering at the Trust for four years.

The meeting concluded with cheque presentations to former Town Mayor, councillor Browne's chosen charities. Sonia chose to fundraise by way of a sponsored silence, carol concert and civic ceremony amongst other events for the Big C, Papyrus – for the prevention of young suicide and Leeway, Norfolk's largest specialist provider of domestic abuse support during her two years as Mayor. A representative from Papyrus was present to receive a cheque for £1,192.48 and spoke of the training they provide to enable people to spot the warning signs of suicide.

The meeting was declared closed at 8.07pm.

Signed as a true record - \_\_\_\_\_  
TOWN MAYOR