



Oundle Town Council

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Oundle Town Council – Annual Town Meeting 2014

Minutes of the meeting of the Annual Town Meeting of Oundle Town Council held at 7.30pm on Thursday 24th April 2014 at the Queen Victoria Hall, Oundle.

Present:

Councillors:	Cllrs Chapple, Clarke, Elliot, Fraser, King, N Oakes, S Oakes, Radcliffe and Stagg.
Clerk:	Debra Harper
Council Staff:	Trish Baker, Hanneke Soans, Paul Smith and Paula Prince.
Visitors:	Markus Honningfort (Mayor of Haren, Germany) and Reinhard Elpermann (Twinning Chairman)
Police:	Sgt Andy Hunt and PC Paul Mitchinson
County Councillor:	Cllr H Smith
District Councillors:	Cllrs R Reichhold, P Stearn and J Vowles
NCC Highways:	Sarah Barnwell
Members of the public:	70
Apologies from Councillors:	Cllr Ann Fitzgerald and Cllr Val Chesser.

Welcome and Mayor's Introduction

The meeting was opened by Cllr S Oakes who provided an overview of housekeeping matters. Cllr Fraser, Mayor, then welcomed everyone to the 2014 Annual Town Meeting. A special welcome was given to Markus Honningfort (Mayor of Haren, Germany) and Reinhard Elpermann (Twinning Chairman) who were in attendance at the meeting.

An introduction to all Councillors, District Councillors and staff was provided and an overview of the agenda given, with an apology for a delayed arrival of County Councillor Heather Smith offered.

Minutes of the 2013 Annual Town Meeting

The minutes of the meeting were reviewed and it was then proposed *'that the minutes of the meeting of the 2013 Annual Town Meeting are approved and accepted as an accurate record'*.

Proposed: Mr S Radcliffe **Seconded:** Mrs C Sherwin **Resolved Unanimously**

Oundle Town Council Reports

Mayor's Report

Cllr Fraser advised that he had only been in post for 3 months and was enjoying the role. He spoke about the talents in the town noting in particular the concert held last night at the Oundle Festival of Music & Drama concert.

The Council vision was covered with highlights of the past year noted. The aims for 2014/15 were confirmed as being to deliver the Neighbourhood Plan and Fletton House, to revamp The Courthouse, deliver more markets and to continue to improve the services of the Council. In addition, some aspirations were confirmed as well as the draft statement of intent for 2014/15 (details of this are located within the Powerpoint presentation).

Cllr Fraser concluded by advising that questions would be taken from the floor after each presentation. At this time a question was posed from the floor regarding recycling and parking as follows:

Recycling.

Cllr Fraser was asked if the Town Council would be re-opening the recycling facilities in the town, to which he advised that this could be considered if the electorate felt it important.

Parking

Cllr Fraser was asked where the additional parking he had mentioned in his report would be located and what was happening to the long stay car park on East Road. Cllr Fraser advised that the car park had been secured for 15 years on a lease arrangement and locations for additional parking needed to be investigated.

Finance Report

Cllr Chapple advised the meeting that the role of the Council was to balance finances with needs such as recycling and parking. He confirmed that decisions made by the District Council had caused the Town Council to make difficult decisions about what services to take into its control. He advised that cost savings had been made on some of these services but it had led to a precept increase of 8.59% against a 0% increase from East Northamptonshire Council.

Cllr Chapple stated that the budget is always a difficult process as control on expenditure is always of high importance but that the Council does not compromise on quality or delivery. He confirmed that the Council had created the Town Centre Manager role to develop the town and had also built up reserves through disposals which will be used for the refurbishment of Fletton House, the most ambitious project carried out to date. Cllr Chapple confirmed that in making the decision to refurbish Fletton House, it was agreed that no borrowing would be made to enable the project.

Cllr Chapple concluded by stating that the precept increase was justified and year on year costs have been managed. He also noted that the central government Council Tax Support Grant had not been passed from the District Council to the Town Council this year, resulting in further budgetary pressure at a local level. Questions from the floor were then taken as follows:

Precept increase

It was noted that there had been a nearly 100% increase in the precept over the past 6 years and a question was asked as to how this compared to other towns. Cllr Chapple responded by stating that Oundle Town Council provides many more facilities and services than many other Town Councils and that there really was no other comparable town on which to make this analysis.

Loans

Cllr Chapple was asked if all the loans the Council have had are now repaid. He responded by confirming that these were ongoing as the loan for The Courthouse was taken in 1999 for 20 years and the loan for the Queen Victoria Hall was for a 50 year term from 2009.

Fletton House

A question was posed as to what impact the running costs of Fletton House would have. Cllr Chapple advised that the Council was trying to ensure that the operating costs are manageable with very little subsidy through improved rental of all buildings.

Estate Management Report

Cllr King provided an overview of the areas managed by the Council and confirmed that the Drill Hall had been sold as it had passed its economic life and the Council wanted to provide better facilities. He advised that a capital receipt of £428,000 had been achieved from this and that this together with the funds for the Cemetery Lodge and the Cemetery Chapel which is in the process of being sold for £175,000 would be used for the refurbishment of Fletton House. Cllr King confirmed that this would be a £750,000 project with the intention of work starting in July 2014 and being completed by February 2015.

Cllr King confirmed that following the relocation to Fletton House of some services, The Courthouse will become a Heritage and Business Centre with the museum in situ and commercial rents for the remainder of the space. Cllr King thanked Hanneke Soans for her work on the Council's estate and market and Tim and John and Kevin for their excellent work on all the Council's properties and open spaces. Following this questions from the floor were taken:

Churchyard

A request was made that an assurance would be given that the Council would request the diocese to cut all the ivy back from its' property. Cllr King confirmed that this would be done.

Cllr King was then asked when Oundle Town Council would take control back from the Green Group and manage the area of the Churchyard that was currently managed as a wild area and that this had not been demographically agreed. Cllr King confirmed that the Council received a request in May 2012 for an area of the churchyard to be managed on this basis and that this had been agreed. He also confirmed that the question about how this area should be managed would be posed within the Neighbourhood Plan in order that the electorate could consider this.

Fletton House

A statement was made that contact should be made for local builders, painters etc. to volunteer to refurbish Fletton House so that this could be done at low cost. Cllr King advised that a project of this scale could not be completed in such a way but that where possible local businesses will be used.

Oundle 2020/Neighbourhood Planning Report

Roger Sturman provided an overview of the purpose of a Neighbourhood Plan and an update on progress with the development of the plan for Oundle. The objectives, time-line for delivery and process were confirmed with the following content noted: Business, Education and Employment; Connectivity, Green Spaces, Housing, Parking, Sporting, Recreational and Community Facilities, Tourism, Town Centre and Retail.

The presentation was concluded by Roger Sturman asking for new members to help this process, advising that with the Town Council confirming its delivery in 2014/15, there was now added impetus and importance of the work being carried out. Following the presentation, questions were taken:

Status of the Plan

Concern was expressed that the Plan would not be put into practice by the District Council. Roger Sturman confirmed that the Neighbourhood Plan would become adopted and a statutory document that would have to be considered in any decision made.

Land development

A question was asked about housing growth, land development and if non-allocated sites could be built on. Roger Sturman confirmed that the Neighbourhood Plan would focus on solutions post 2021 to prevent additional un-agreed development.

Other Authorities Reports/Updates

Police

Sgt Andy Hunt advised that crime figures were up by 4% year on year but that the long term results show a reduction of over 60% in crime over the last 5 years. He confirmed that the stated aim of the Police and Crime Commissioner was for Northamptonshire to be the safest place in England. This statement was supported by various actions including a 40% reduction in violent crime, having a more visible police force and the safest roads. Sgt Hunt outlined the local priorities and action plan confirming that they want to ensure Oundle remains a safe and pleasant place to live and work and that activities such as the camera safety vehicle, Speedwatch scheme, Streetwatch scheme and the recruitment of Special Constables and Parish Constables would all help to achieve this. Questions from the floor were raised as follows:

Community Speedwatch

When will these schemes be introduced? Sgt Hunt advised that 6 volunteers were needed to make this viable and that as soon as there were enough people this could commence.

Night-time Speeding

It was noted that this had become an issue in the town again within the last month. Sgt Hunt confirmed that they were aware of this and that action was being taken.

CCTV

A question was asked as to whether CCTV was of value within Oundle. It was confirmed that this was a very valuable asset which was used well and that it was considered money well spent.

County Councillor

Cllr Heather Smith introduced herself confirming that she had been elected in May last year to look after Oundle and 22 villages, confirming that it had been a busy time. She then provided an update as follows:

Roads: Cllr Smith confirmed that issues with potholes were worse than ever across the country and that central government recognises the extent of problem and has released additional funding to try and rectify the situation. She advised that highway maintenance work on St Osyth's Lane was now on the priority list and encouraged everyone to report faults.

Street Lights: Cllr Smith advised that a programme to replace the street lights with improved white lighting would commence in May 2014. She stated that NCC would be working in consultation with the Town Council in the installation programme which should alleviate complaints about darkness due to the switch-off programme. A question was posed from the floor as to the benefits of the new LED lighting as it seemed that it was causing problems where it had been installed elsewhere. Cllr Smith stated that she was unaware of any issues and that 40% had already been changed in Northamptonshire but that she would investigate this.

Women's Tour: Cllr Smith confirmed that this was an international event which will inevitably bring some disruption to the town but would also bring huge publicity, tourism and excitement with it. She paid tribute to the welcome this had been given by the town and the people and stated that it was a credit to Oundle.

Empowerment Allowance: Cllr Smith advised that she had provided a contribution of £2000 towards the works within the Market Place and the Women's Tour.

Education: Confirmation was given that the consultation about the change from a 3 tier system to a 2 tier system had now concluded and that a change had been agreed in principle with plans being published next month. Cllr Smith advised that whilst the system had worked in the past, the schools were now in the bottom 30% of the country for exam results and significant investment was needed to attract quality teaching. A question was asked as to why Thrapston could not have a secondary school as this would help minimise traffic movements. Cllr Smith advised that this had been looked at and confirmed that reduced bus journeys would be beneficial however there was a concern about having a facility for 4-16 year olds as educational results for schools not going to 18 are generally not so good but that no decision had yet been made on this.

Flooding in Warren Bridge: Cllr Smith advised that investigations had taken place to establish the cause of problems with flooding at Warren Bridge and that the weaknesses were now known.

South Bridge: An update on the situation with South Bridge was given and confirmation provided that agreement had now been reached with English Heritage that repair works could be carried out. Cllr Smith confirmed that the bridge would need to be closed for 2/3 days for exploratory work with the intention being that following this the work could commence and the Bridge be re-opened by the end of the summer, although weight restrictions would apply.

Barnwell Country Park: Cllr Smith advised that work was being done to make Barnwell Country Park more appealing to visit by the conversion of the Kingfisher Lodge to a cafe and more facilities for children being installed. She recognised that some people did not like to pay the car parking charge but stated that it was a small price to pay for such a valuable facility.

Cllr Smith concluded her report by thanking everyone for their confidence and stating that it was a pleasure to represent the town.

Transition Oundle

Camilla Sherwin commenced her presentation by asking for a vote of thanks to all the people who give their time voluntarily for the benefit of the town. She then provided an overview of the work of Transition Oundle, advising that copies of the Annual Report were available. Camilla Sherwin advised that some of the work being done included a successful recent Earth hour during which time non-essential power was turned off, work on safe

cycling which considered both infrastructure and traffic flows and work and lifestyle matters such as the Community Garden and Oundle Time Trade. She also confirmed that Transition Oundle were helping with the forthcoming Women's Tour and were helping with the development of the Neighbourhood Plan. The presentation was concluded with a plea for everyone to help and get engaged to help set high standards and future proof the town.

Twinning

Cllr Elliot provided an update on the twinning relationship with Andrésy and Noourt, confirming that 33 people from Noourt were coming to Oundle in May as a result of organisation by the Twinning Association. Cllr Elliot confirmed that the relationship with Andrésy was now managed by the Town Council and in addition to this there was the friendship with Nongoma developed in 2012 which was currently providing food for 80 children as a direct result of Oundle residents.

Cllr Elliot then explained that there was an 3 way relationship of twinning between Andrésy, Haren and Miedzyrzecz in Poland and that Oundle was being asked to be in this triangle, hence the visit by Markus Honningfort and Reinhard Elpermann. He concluded by confirming that twinning enabled not only great visits and fantastic fun but also provides an opportunity to look outwards at what is happening elsewhere. A brief video of a recent twinning visit was then shown.

Pre-Submitted Question & Answers

Following the presentations, Cllr Fraser addressed the following pre-submitted questions:

Precept

There has been an 8%+ increase in the precept in this years Council Tax. Why has the Council needed to increase it by so much? What is the money to be used for? How can it be justified when the Council is sitting on significant cash reserves?

Cllr Fraser confirmed that this had been explained within the report given by Cllr Chapple.

Recycling Facility

What actions are the Council taking to provide a 'bring to' re-cycling facility?

Cllr Fraser advised that the previous facilities were provided by East Northamptonshire Council and that Oundle Town Council will look into providing this service for the town.

Pavements and Road Surfaces

What action are the Council taking to improve the pavements and road surfaces?

Cllr Fraser stated that the damage to pavements was mostly created by vehicles parking on the pavements and that they needed to be dissuaded from doing this by more active management. Cllr Radcliffe stated that these were Highway matters but that the staff at the Town Council constantly took action to log and report faults to ensure rectification of problems.

Council Priorities

What does the Council see as its 4 key priorities for the coming year (2014/15) that will make a positive impact on the town?

Cllr Fraser confirmed that the Council's priorities were to decrease speeds within the town, work on community safety issues, help the community to be self governing, improve the promotion of the town and to deliver a Neighbourhood Plan and the refurbishment of Fletton House.

Safer Cycle Routes

I wish to cycle my 5 and 7 year old sons to school each day. What are you doing to make this safe as at present the road is certainly not? I understand you are working with Transition Oundle but nothing seems to be happening?

Cllr Fraser advised that a 20mph zone had been introduced and that this will be extended. He also stated that cycle lanes were being considered in conjunction with Transition Oundle but other alternatives need to be looked at as these were very expensive options. Cllr Fraser confirmed that more cycle parking was being provided and that cycle safety was of high importance.

Question & Answers from the Meeting

Following an invitation from Cllr Fraser, the following questions were posed:

What will be the legacy left from the Women's Tour?

Cllr Fraser confirmed that one of the principle decisions in having the Tour is the legacy that is left making cycling more prominent in Northamptonshire and the town.

Where is the update from the Oundle District Association of Trade & Commerce noted on the agenda?

Cllr Fraser stated that he had asked for a report but it had not been received and was therefore not included. Alan Smith from the ODATC advised that he was unaware of such a request.

Does the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) generate much income and add much to house prices?

Cllr Fraser advised that the CIL contributions were an important aspect of planning replacing s106 contributions. He confirmed that they are designed to be a direct community benefit paid to District Councils from developers with 25% of the contribution being passed to the Parish/Town. He advised that he was unsure of the cost this made to each new home but advised that if a Neighbourhood Plan was in place the contribution to the town was 25% but only 15% if a Neighbourhood Plan does not exist.

Following the questions a note of thanks was given to Oundle Police for the excellent flow of information to the Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators. David Wood also made a request for stewards to help with car park management for the Women's Tour on the 6th and 7th May.

Summary & Close

Cllr Fraser closed the meeting by thanking everyone for their attendance and for all the work done to make Oundle a special place.

There being no further business the meeting was closed.

Signed:.....

Dated:.....