

Oundle Town Council

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Oundle Town Council – Annual Town Meeting 2010

Minutes of the meeting of the Annual Town Meeting of Oundle Town Council held at 7.30pm on Thursday 29th April 2010 at the Queen Victoria Hall, Oundle.

Present:

- Councillors:** Cllrs Chapple (Mayor), Chesser, Cox, Johnson, King (Deputy Mayor), N Oakes, S Oakes, Radcliffe, Rose and Round
- Clerk:** Debra Raper
- Council Staff:** Hanneke Soans, Paul Smith, Tom Lee and Maxine Groves
- Police:** PCSO Tim Butters
- County & District Councillor:** Cllr R Reichhold
- District Councillors:** Cllr D Bateman and Cllr P Stearn
- Members of the public:** 50 registered plus further attendees (not registered)
- Apologies from the public:** Gwen Hayward and Robin Newman

The meeting commenced at 7.30pm, with refreshments having been served from 7.00pm.

Welcome

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and confirmed various housekeeping matters. Members of Oundle Town Council, members of the Council staff, the District and County Councillors and Police were introduced and the agenda confirmed. Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Cllrs Campbell and Elliot due to business commitments. Cllr Ormrod sent advanced apologies for his delayed arrival due to holiday arrangements.

Minutes of the 2009 Annual Town Meeting

The minutes of the meeting were reviewed and it was then proposed *'that the minutes of the meeting of the 2009 Annual Town Meeting are approved and accepted as an accurate record'*.

Proposed: Mr S Radcliffe **Resolved Unanimously**

Mayor's Report on 2009/10

Cllr Chapple delivered his report based on the main highlights of the year which he confirmed had started and ended with planning being a major issue. He advised that at the start of his term in office the Town Council and he had been heavily involved in responding to the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan (RNOTP) and its many modifications which resulted in the Council objecting to the plan as it had been watered down in relation to

infrastructure provision and was no longer the plan that residents had been consulted on. He confirmed that the RNOTP had subsequently been rejected by ENC. He stated that the year had finished with the large Creed Road planning application and confirmed that whilst the Town Council was only a consultee and cannot vote, they can and have lobbied and been heavily involved with discussions with both developers and planners and have also worked hard to secure s106 contributions for the benefit of the town should the application for planning permission be granted. He thanked all the Councillors for their unstinting efforts put into this as it was a necessary and time consuming process needed to achieve the results required for the town.

Moving to Councillors, Cllr Chapple made reference to the fact that last year he had used the word 'amateurs' when describing the role of Councillors but wanted to state that that was not the right word and that it should be 'volunteers' as there was no doubt about the professional standard of work and he wished to express a public and sincere thanks to them all. He also thanked the professional staff for their efforts as the job could not be done without them and advised that the opening hours at the Courthouse had now reverted to 10.00am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday and would be interested in any comments about this. Cllr Chapple stated that progress was being made in reviewing the Council's large property portfolio. He advised that this brings challenges which Cllr Rose will talk about later in the meeting when the aspirations and plans to respond to the needs of the town would be discussed.

Cllr Chapple closed his address by thanking the police for their continued ongoing co-operation and for their attendance at the Council meetings on a monthly basis and by congratulating the Oundle Museum for their wonderful work and the achievement of the 2009 Northamptonshire Museum of the Year award.

Cllr Chapple then introduced Cllr Radcliffe to address the meeting on the Council's financial performance.

Finance Observations

Cllr Radcliffe advised that summaries of the income and expenditure for 2009/10, the 2010/11 budget plus the balance sheet were available on each of the tables and that detailed information was available on request. She explained that she would be providing an overview of the financial planning cycle, the planned expenditure for 2010/11, the balance sheet and reserves and some of the future challenges the Council faces.

Cllr Radcliffe then explained the Council's financial cycle which comprised monthly management accounts being produced and reviewed, a quarterly review by the Finance Working Party, a half year review in October, an estimation of probable outcome and a budget recommendation being developed in December, agreement of the budget and precept in January and the production of year end accounts in April. She confirmed that Oundle Town Council receives no part of the Business Rates and that every £1988 required by the Council equates to a £1.00 precept request for a Band D household.

An overview of the 2010 expenditure, income and Balance Sheet and an explanation of how funds were held was provided i.e. restricted funds for open space, capital receipts, retained reserves to cover 3 months of expenditure (75K), funds for car park expenses not being met or to assist with new facilities, £4K to support next years budget, £20K for Drill Hall project, £52,820 for recreational development plans plus £25K to enable bids for projects for the town.

Cllr Radcliffe highlighted some future challenges faced by the Council such as reduced budgets for local government and the transfer of services without any accompanying budget.

Cllr Chapple thanked Cllr Radcliffe for her presentation and then introduced the next section of the meeting.

Agenda Topics Raised by Residents

Festival Funding

No one was present to raise this item.

Car Parking

Mr Bennett was invited to address the meeting to speak about car parking within the town. He advised that he was speaking from a business perspective and as a resident and that the lack of parking and the one hour restrictions were causing problems. He stated that this had got worse and would continue to worsen as a result of development within the town with no increase in parking provision and that many people would already rather go elsewhere than spend time trying to park in Oundle. He also stated that lack of parking and the issuing of parking tickets were causing problems for employees and that this was the biggest problem faced by businesses in the town. Mr Bennett handed in some paperwork with comments from residents and business owners and suggested that changes such as providing designated parking areas for businesses and employees, parking for disabled use within the town centre and raising the 1 hour parking restriction to 2 hours would help. He stated that many people have appointments that last at least 1 hour and the present parking arrangements discouraged people from using these businesses.

Cllr Chapple invited Cllr Chesser to respond to the points raised. She showed correspondence from 2004 which included consultations with the town on the parking restrictions requested and confirmed that parking restrictions were now being enforced although still some line markings still require updating to enable further enforcement. She also stated that the Council did not want to introduce pay and display as this would discourage people coming into the town.

Mr Bennett suggested that money was raised by charging local businesses for designated parking areas in specific locations out of the town centre. He also stressed that it was unfair that parking was monitored closely by parking enforcement on Thursday and Saturday when there was always less spaces due to the markets. Cllr Chesser responded by stating that there were already two long stay car parks for businesses available and through her



communications with the Association of Trade she can confirm that designated spaces is not something that has been requested. PCSO Tim Butters responded about parking enforcement stating that this was deregulated 2 years ago and the Police have requested varied rotas. He advised that he would follow this up.

A debate followed regarding the need for a business permit scheme, what would be considered a reasonable distance for employees to walk in to town and the appropriateness of various locations for employees parking, including the use of some of Oundle School's facilities and The Talbot Hotel. The Town Council was asked to approach the school and Talbot to establish if a deal could be struck as solutions needed to be found.

Concern was also expressed about the ongoing loss of parking facilities and it was suggested that the access road to the long stay car park in East Road should have double yellow lines to prevent it from being obstructed.

Cllr Bateman raised the idea of having a mini multi storey car park on the old gas works site or at the long stay car park and the introduction of a small electric bus regularly servicing the town.

Drill Hall/Leisure Facilities

Cllr King opened this debate by providing some context about the community facilities available via the Town Council and advised that the Queen Victoria Hall was now upgraded and had been brought back to its former glory although there is a cost attached to this. He also advised that Cemetery Lodge needed to be disposed off and the Chapel, only used as a store, was currently for sale after the Council had made a decision to dispose of it.

He advised that decisions with the Drill Hall were difficult and that there had been no intention to close the Hall but Health & Safety issues caused by dry and wet rot, a dilapidated roof and the heating failing constantly were the basis for the decision made to close it. He also stated that the Council had voted not to keep patching up the building or to purely refurbish the existing structure and that they were progressing two options of either carrying out a redevelopment of a new recreational facility on the same site or to dispose of the site and to build elsewhere. He confirmed that no decision had yet been made and that car parking at the site would be retained.

Various comments were received from the floor. These included a suggestion to demolish the building and make a larger car park and charge local businesses for the facility, a question as to whether ENC would support Oundle and assist with the costs of any decision and whether a replacement hall was actually required. Cllr King responded to these points by stating that infrastructure within the town as a whole and how it is best to use the assets and value they bring needs to be considered and that ENC were currently providing strategic help although funding is yet unknown as this would follow consultations and project costing, etc. He then introduced Cllr Rose who spoke about how the Council could meet the growing needs of the town, ensure best value for money and retain and maximise the unique characteristic of Oundle. He confirmed that if the Council were to sell assets to build new facilities that this would need to be done wisely and with confidence that the new facilities



would be valued and cater for all elements of the town and all ages and people. He stated that the creation of any new indoor and outdoor facilities would ensure appropriate access and parking and the right location to fulfil all needs and to maximise and leverage the huge amenity of the river with its tourism pull. He also stated that anything built must be compatible with the town's existing architecture, involve extensive consultation and that financial contributions would be sought from developers as well as from capital receipts from disposals i.e. Cemetery Lodge, Cemetery Chapel and the Drill Hall plus grant aid and other funding sources. He confirmed that the Council wished to avoid any external borrowings and would be looking at all prospective sites not just land already in the Council's ownership.

At this stage Cllr Rose invited feedback and questions from the floor which instigated numerous questions, comments and responses. These included:

Funding - A question was posed as to where the money will come from for either redevelopment or a new build elsewhere. Cllr Rose advised that this would be through the disposal of properties, funding sources and creative negotiations with developers for s106 contributions.

Location - Concerns were expressed as to why the Council wishes to move away from the Drill Hall site as it is convenient, has parking outside and was a well used building. A question was also asked as to how building on a flood plain could be a better solution and whether facilities should be moved out of town. Cllr Rose responded by saying that everyone should rest assured that any property developed would enhance the town, its facilities and would stand the test of time. He confirmed that the Council was trying to look at the town as a whole and that no decisions had yet been made about anything and that the thinking was still in its early stages.

Consultation - The request for consultation and the need for any facilities to be established via appropriate market research was voiced as there appeared to be adequate provision in the town via Just Fit and Oundle School and within a commutable distance at the leisure facilities funded by ENC at Corby and Rushden. Questions were also raised as to how the consultation would take place, how the needs would be identified and established and if the Annual Town Meeting was the start of the process.

Cllr Rose responded to these points by stating that the consultation would take all views expressed into account and that the Council wanted to find out what is needed. He confirmed that the consultation process is being kicked off but a plan had not yet been developed about how this would look but that it would be a consultative and participative process and use communication mediums such as the Oracle, meetings, questionnaires, etc. He confirmed that it would be wide reaching and engage people in debate and would involve all stakeholders within the town. Cllr King reiterated that there would be lots of communication using the website, meetings and newsletters and that all of the ideas and information would be pulled together into a design stage. He stated that the Council would hope to have something of substance to discuss around late summer. A comment was made by an attendee that consultation doesn't work as no-one takes any notice of it.



Existing Infrastructure - A member of the town asked why the Council should spend money building something when facilities that are government owed with car parking such as the schools could be used. Cllr Rose confirmed that discussions had already started with the schools and this had not been ruled out as everything was being considered.

Cllr Cox asked Cllr Rose how he saw the future of the Recreation Ground in Oundle and how this would be developed. Cllr Rose confirmed that no decision had been made on any site but that all sites were being reviewed to establish how value can be obtained and maximised.

Concern was expressed that as Oundle was a historic town the Drill Hall building should be preserved as it played its part in the town. Cllr Rose confirmed that retaining the fabric of the building would be considered but the Council had agreed not to carry out remedial work as it ultimately wastes money and the decision was to rebuild on the site or elsewhere. This prompted a question as to whether the value of the Drill Hall site land was worth more than buying elsewhere in which case the project made sense. Cllr Rose confirmed that valuations had not yet been received but it is believed that this would be the case.

A question was raised regarding the future of the Rifle Ranges and it was confirmed that these facilities would be preserved within the town. Cllr Rose then reiterated that the Council had no preconceived ideas about the future but stated that the Council had a series of buildings that have reached the end of their life and that money could be poured into reviving them without any significant improvement for the town or money could be raised from them and new facilities developed to ensure the town was equipped for the future.

Timescales -An enquiry was made into the timescales involved in this initiative. Cllr Rose advised that there were no specific timeframes but that some plans were hoped to be developed by the autumn.

This section of the meeting was then closed and Cllr Chapple introduced the next section which was focused on how to consider priorities for the town particularly in light of increased development and pressure on infrastructure.

Oundle Town Council Topics

Cllr Radcliffe gave a brief introduction to Northamptonshire County Council 'You Choose' consultation and confirmed that feedback sheets were available on the tables for people to complete. She advised that these could be sent back directly to NCC or that if they were left on the tables, that the Town Council would collate these and send them in.

Cllr Radcliffe then posed some questions on the priorities for the town that, in the future, people may have to make choices between i.e. CCTV or funding a PCSO, CCTV or the Public Conveniences or what is top of the infrastructure requirement list.

Cllr Radcliffe then handed over to Cllr Chapple who confirmed that the only way the Council can generate money is via the precept which is not capped at this level of local government. He advised that as such the Council could request what ever it liked but it has to be a balancing act. He then invited the meeting attendees to spend a few minutes to consider what they felt should be the priorities for the town and that the feedback would be taken to



inform the Council's thinking. At this point, a member of the public asked that the meeting be used to discuss burning issues within the town and not the Council's issues as it is a meeting for the town not a Town Council meeting.

Cllr Chapple clarified the feeling of the meeting and following agreement amended the agenda to move to Question Time.

Question Time

Cllr Chapple was asked if Oundle Town Council can influence planning decisions to which Cllr Chapple confirmed that, whilst the Council could not grant or refuse applications, the fact that the Creed Road planning application was deferred was evidence that the endless meetings and representations the Council had on behalf of the town do have an impact. He also confirmed that the District Councillors provide a tremendous support in this area. Cllr Stearn then spoke and advised that the decision to defer was based on several reasons, namely:

- In order that further discussions could be held with the highways authority who had expressed a questionable view that the roads and parking within the town could cope with the growth;
- That the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan (RNOTP) had not been adopted and ENC had applied to the Secretary of State for adjudication;
- That the need for infrastructure before development, including new modes of transport and consideration for cycle ways, one way systems etc. needed to be addressed and the need to think strategically and rectify this was of the utmost importance.

At this stage, Mrs Gent on behalf of Oundle Under Threat and the residents thanked Cllr Stearn for his brilliant efforts at the meeting held at ENC the previous evening which saw the Creed Road planning application deferred. She confirmed that it was gratifying to hear that the town's concerns having been taken so seriously which also showed that consultation was effective. Cllr Oakes was also thanked for his hard work and representations.

A question was then raised as to whether a mechanism can be set up to put ideas forward and enter regular dialogue with the Council and District Councillors as members of the town need to be fully included within the consultations. Cllr Chapple confirmed that anyone can attend all Town Council meetings which are held on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of every month and that there is provision for public participation at these and that the website is also an excellent means of communication. Mrs Gent responded to this by stating that they wanted a forum to enable an ongoing exchange of views and to ensure a global picture. Cllr Chapple advised that he would speak to her after the close of the meeting. Cllr Stearn stated that another public meeting can be arranged if that was required.

The issue of CCTV was then raised with a comment that it was a useful tool and that its use resulted in many convictions. Cllr Chapple asked for a quick straw poll asking 'Is it an asset to the police and town or an expensive luxury?' The results were inconclusive and a debate followed about CCTV and the benefits of this and the PCSO's who were considered



marvellous but didn't necessarily deter crime as they couldn't be in the right place at the right time.

Concern was expressed by a resident and employee of the Tourist Information Centre regarding changes imposed on them by ENC which has resulted in the loss of the previous role to one of an ENC Customer Service Centre. Cllr Chapple confirmed that the Council shares their concerns and confirms that it has challenged how ENC can promote tourism and then close the Tourist Information Centre and Public Conveniences. Cllr Stearn confirmed that tourism in this area is so important and that there is a great deal of development on hotels, the marina etc. and it is essential that we all work towards this aim; however ENC had to make painful decisions in order to achieve budgetary targets and control. Cllr Stearn was questioned as to why it is called a Customer Service Centre and not a Visitor Information Centre and was advised that there was a great deal of support in the town as people wanted to keep it.

Further concern and dissatisfaction was raised regarding ENC's decision to close the Public Conveniences and about what other cuts may be made. Cllr Stearn was asked what provision would be made for the many users of the facilities including disabled people. Cllr Stearn responded by stating that it was not the intention to close the facilities but to transfer the responsibility for these to the Town Council. Cllr Chapple stated that, to date, there has been no consultation regarding this or the cost implication and liabilities and urged ENC to keep things as they are until appropriate consultation had been conducted. Cllr Radcliffe advised that the council may be able to fulfil the contract cheaper in 2011/12 when the current contract expires but at the moment the cost would be £26,000 per annum which equates to £13 per household every year. She stated that Oundle has the largest precept as it is a small place with a lot going on so it is more expensive to live here than other places. A question was raised by the floor as to what elements the Cooperative Society pay for and the possibility of them picking up the additional costs.

A member of the public asked if the Council had a vision for Oundle for the future and what it would look like in 15 years time. Cllr Chapple stated that the new developments brought both a threat of unbridled development without the necessary infrastructure but also vibrancy, growth and opportunities to a town that is one of the finest in the country. He stated that the Town Council as custodian of that must move with the times and provide better facilities and whilst not clear about the end shape, needed to make changes to cope. He said that the Council would like to work in partnership with the District and County Councillors and local MP to develop and deliver a plan and a vision that would ensure that Oundle is the place where people want to bring up their children and their children want to be and come back to.


Cllr King stated that Oundle is the jewel in the crown and that the Council needs to thrive and create a vision that works for all. He said that whilst it is a difficult and challenging time it was also an exciting time.

Closure of Meeting

Cllr Chapple closed the meeting by extending thanks to three Councillors who had left in the past year; Cllr Crick who had moved away and Cllrs Storr and Summers who had retired due to work commitments. Particular thanks were given to former Cllr Storr for his hard work on the Queen Victoria Hall refurbishment project which had taken 10 years to bring to fruition and was now a credit to the town.

Eric Reeves offered a vote of thanks to all members of Oundle Town Council.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.49pm with thanks given to all attendees and post meeting drinks and an informal chat offered to all.

Signed:.......... Dated: 28/4/2011.....

