



LANGPORT TOWN COUNCIL

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FOR LANGPORT

HELD ON

TUESDAY 25 APRIL 2017

IN

THE STUCKEY ROOM, GREAT BOW WHARF

STARTING AT

6.30PM

There were 35 members of the public present and the Town Clerk, David Mears.

The Chairman of Langport Town Council, Cllr Janet Seaton opened the meeting.

1. Minutes of the last Annual Assembly – 26 April 2016.

The minutes were taken as read, and it was proposed and seconded that they were a true and accurate record.

2. Chairman's report on the activities of the Town Council over the past year.

Welcome everyone. It's a legal requirement to hold a meeting of all parishioners once a year and we value this as a more informal opportunity for residents to have their say about what should happen in Langport, and for the Council to listen.

You can of course contact a Councillor or the Town Clerk at any time – our details are on our website, Langport.life; on the Town Hall noticeboard, and in the Library. All our Committee, Council and Trust meetings are open to the public and have a public question time slot at the beginning where you can raise local issues. We also hold a Councillors' surgery in the Town Hall on the last Saturday of every month (except December), where Councillors from Huish Episcopi also attend.

The rest of this report is divided into three parts. I'll give you the highlights, the low lights and the headlights – some of things that are coming towards us.

The Highlights

This year we finally took ownership of Cocklemoor. Along with it – at no extra charge – came the 'weed ramp' and car park at Huish Bridge. This enabled us to move forward with the River Project, which you will hear about a little later.

Extending the Christmas lights down the whole of Bow Street and North Street proved a great success, and also putting lights on the Library. The Business Group paid for new lights for the Island trees, and we thank them for that. We auctioned off the old reindeer, who are now enjoying a well-earned rest

Town Clerk – David Mears MILCM

somewhere in Greylake. New reindeer were commissioned from Serena de la Hey, the willow sculptor, and our Project officer was able to get grant funding to cover the whole cost.

We conducted a survey on what people thought of the public toilets. Most respondents wanted them to stay free of charge, but we are planning to install a donation box if people would like to show their appreciation. This has worked well in other places to raise money.

We installed an electric car charging point in the Cocklemoor Car Park which we hope will encourage owners of electric vehicles to visit Langport. The Council is paying the costs for the first 6 months, but we will review it after that.

We commissioned a review of our staff and services to check whether we were making the best use of our resources in the running of the Council and the Trust. The consultants concluded: "Overall we found the Council to be well managed and well organised, if under-resourced." They made a number of recommendations for improvement, including the appointment of an Administrative Officer and a Toilet Attendant, instead of a second Caretaker, and these posts have just been filled.

Finally, we started Lorry Watch to try to reduce the number of HGVs coming through the town. In consultation with Somerset Highways, we reviewed the permit system for lorries over 7.5 tonnes that do have a need to come through Langport. This cut the number of permits issued by nearly 50%. After lengthy discussions with the police we then began to record HGVs over the 7.5 tonnes weight restriction, and offending companies will be warned. This will be a continuing campaign, so if anyone would like to volunteer, please let us know.

The Lowlights

We have not yet managed to get a defibrillator installed in the town. However, we have taken over responsibility for the redundant telephone box at the end of The Avenue, and the plan is to move it to a central location and to install a defibrillator in it. Watch this space.

The skate park at the Langport & Huish Memorial Field was found to be unsafe and has had to be removed. We are now planning and getting funding for a replacement facility.

We have been working with SSVCA to improve the Links Community Transport service, and to reduce the cost to passengers. Although our discussions are positive, they are taking a very long time, and we have still not managed to come to a conclusion.

Recently we lost Kelways as a tenant in the Undercroft. This means that we are again looking for a tenant to lease the space.

Now, the Headlights

You will hear in a moment about the three main projects that the Town Council is working on, but there are a number of other initiatives that should come to fruition in the coming months.

We have pledged £3,000 towards a feasibility study for the proposed new railway station between Langport and Somerton. If the rest of the funding can be found from other contributors, the study will determine whether the station goes ahead

A strong recommendation from the Review was that we should pursue as a matter of priority "a closer administrative or working relationship with Huish Episcopi Parish Council in the form of a Grouped Council arrangement or possibly a merger of the two councils." Both Councils have agreed to investigate how a Grouped Parishes Scheme might work and to report back in due course.

Councillors from both Councils are working on a proposal to install a bus shelter outside Travis Perkins.

Finally, we have agreed with the owners of The Dolphin to take over responsibility for the dolphin sculpture. We propose to have it restored and to move it to a more central location where it can be properly appreciated as a historic town artefact.

The Chairman took questions from members of the public. A member of the public questioned the Council's ambitions and plans and where the funding was coming from as the Council has one of the highest Band D precepts in England. The Chairman responded and stated that the Council and Town Trust have increased income generation and have made significant savings and that we are actively seeking grant funding and partnership working to ease financial pressures.

A member of the public raised concerns with recent road works in Bow Street where tarmac and rubble were 'swept' into the drains. The Town Clerk will report this to County Highways.

A member of the public asked for a cycle rack in Whatley Car Park – there is already one and the Council will look at better signage or relocation.

3. Reports from groups who have received Council grants.

a. Forget me not Memory Café

Adrienne Holmes provided an overview of the work and activities of the Memory Café and its importance. The Council's funding of £250 was used to purchase various new and improved games and activities.

b. Senior Citizens Group

Greg Cooper provided an overview of the work and activities the group provide for its 72 members. The grant of £500 assisted with their coach trips and Christmas Meal. The group also assisted with a fundraising event for Macmillan Cancer.

c. Scouts

James Benson provided an overview of the work and activities of the local Scouts, which has over 100 young people. The grant of £1,000 assisted with refurbishment work on the scout hut. With free help from parents and local tradesman, the savings made to the original cost allowed the scout group to improve the car park as well. The Scouts have helped with various events within the area, such as fundraising events for other organisations and with litter picking etc.

d. Youth Club

Annie Shillabeer and Lisa Newby provided an overview of the work and activities of the Youth Club. The Youth Club have every week between 35 and 50 young people attending. The Youth Club is a member of the foodbank scheme and this helps to support youth club member's families. The Council's grant of £3,500 allowed the Youth Club to expand and provide more sessions in addition to the regular Tuesday club. The Youth Club has now been granted charitable status.

4. Reports on current Council projects

a. Memorial Field Changing Rooms & Skate Park (Cllr Angela Clarke)

The old skate park had to be removed due to being condemned in two safety inspections, but there is committed funding from S106 monies and the Council's Project Officer is seeking further grant funding.

Plans have been drawn up on various options for new changing rooms which will be an extension to the Social Club building which will provide overall improvements to the facilities. An option will be chosen soon and a full planning application will then be submitted. Funding is coming from S106 monies.

In response to a public question, Cllr Clarke confirmed that improvements will also be made to the children's play area when funding becomes available.

b. Town Hall Refurbishment (Cllr Anne Michell)

Langport Town Hall is a Grade II listed building built in 1733 and is currently owned by Langport Town Trust. In October 2016, it was decided that a Steering Group be set up to work with the Project Officer on behalf of the Town Trust to deliver a renovated Town Hall that will meet the needs of the Town Council and the wider community.

The project has been divided into two parts:

Phase 1: to oversee the delivery of a feasibility study into the condition of the building, the options available and a quantity survey with costings.

Phase 2: will be the presentation of the various surveys to the full Town Council and Town Trust and the implementation of their decisions.

To date, contractors have been appointed to carry out the Options Appraisal and the Condition Survey of the building. A grant of £3000 has been received from the Architectural Heritage Fund; £1000 has been received from South Somerset District Council and £5000 from the Town Trust.

A meeting has been held with the Options Appraisal contractor and work has commenced with the data collection for their report.

Progress is being made, but we have to fit in with the availability of the specialists because of the recommendations made by our funders in the AHF and the Heritage Lottery Fund as to who we employ.

Once we know where we stand and what our options are, then we will be in a position to give a presentation to key stakeholders and the wider community. This will take time. In response to questions from the public, Cllr Michell confirmed that the vision for the Town Hall was to keep it available for community use as well as having some lettable space, and also that the refurbishment of the Town Clock formed part of the overall refurbishment project.

c. Langport River Project (Cllr Ian Macnab)

The Langport River Group has submitted a bid for European funding to put pontoon landing stages at various points on the river, and to repair the slipway at Huish bridge. The project will also reclassify the river as non-tidal, which makes regulations simpler for users. The Groups' Expression of Interest has been accepted and they will now prepare a full application. In response to questions about controlling activity on the river, the issue of a River Authority has yet to be resolved by the Group.

5. Open Forum – anyone can ask a question or make a comment

A member of the Transition Group said that group was celebrating their 10th birthday. Questions were then asked on what the Council's position is on the NatWest closure announcement. The Chairman informed the public that she, the Town Clerk and the Chair of LABG have had a positive meeting and have an ongoing dialogue with the local CEO. The Council is disappointed at the closure but is working in a professional manner with NatWest to ensure that we still have banking facilities available to the community rather than a simple closure and no banking services or banking support at all within the Town. Members of the public felt that they should organise their own campaign and lobby the current MP.

Julia Gadd provided an update and overview on the Dementia Friendly Scheme and the next training day will be advertised in due course.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 7.43pm.