

AMESBURY TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of the Meeting of the Town Council held at The Bowman Centre
on 7th November 2023 at 7.15pm

PRESENT: Cllr Dr M Devendran (Mayor), Cllr T Edwards (D Mayor), Cllr A Buchanan, Cllr R Crook, Cllr A Hagger, Cllr S Hedge, Cllr J Jaconiah, Cllr L Knight, Cllr D Kuczera, Cllr A Lord, Cllr I Mitchell, Cllr M Strange, Cllr J Swindlehurst, Cllr E Taylor and Cllr R Yuill.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Steve Milton (Locum Town Clerk)

VISITING PUBLIC: 15

| | Public Questions | ACTION |
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| | <p>The Mayor welcomed people to the meeting and invited public questions.</p> <p>A resident raised a question about the adoption of roads on Archers Gate and Kings Gate estates, the provision of speed signs and on the possible use of a speed indicator device (SID) in these areas. At the invitation of the Mayor, Cllr Yuill replied that Wiltshire Council retained the statutory responsibility for road adoptions and signage and that he had raised these issues with the Wiltshire Council's Local Highway & Footpath Improvement Group (LHFIG). Currently, the developer retained ownership and no date for the adoption was available. He had received reassurances regarding the approved signage and street marking scheme but there was currently a backlog, and this had caused a delay in implementing the works. On the provision of a SID, he advised that this was subject to a process agreed with Wiltshire Council and required a metrocount survey to be undertaken to assess the level of the problem before the SID could be deployed.</p> <p>Another resident supported the request made above and drew attention to the poor condition and restricted access along Byway 20. She pointed out the need for improved surfacing and removal of overgrown bushes and encroaching verges. At the invitation of the Mayor, Cllr Yuill replied that the landowners (the developer and Wiltshire Council) were responsible for the provision and maintenance of the byway. He undertook to raise the issue with Wiltshire Council's Local Highway & Footpath Improvement Group (LHFIG).</p> <p>A further member of the public raised the recent cancellation of the town firework display and requested that a review be undertaken by the Council and a full explanation of events provided for residents. At the request of the Mayor, The Locum Clerk replied that the Council's plans for the firework display had been approved by the Clerk prior to her departure. He was undertaking a review of the circumstances surrounding the cancellation to learn lessons for the future.</p> | |
| 1. | <p>Apologies for absence All Councillors were present.</p> | |
| 2. | <p>Minutes of the Town Council Meeting - 3rd October 2023 Resolved: That the minutes of the Council meeting held on 3rd October 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.</p> | |

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| 3. | <p>To receive declarations of interest from members None</p> | |
| 4. | <p>Positive Activities for Young People – Wessex Community Circus The Council received a presentation from Jonathan Russell of Wessex Community Circus outlining the activities and ongoing services in the town. He drew attention to incidents of anti-social behaviour and requested that the Council consider setting up a small Youth Forum to bring together councillors and key stakeholders to oversee future youth provision in Amesbury. The Mayor thanked Mr Russell for his very positive presentation and for his work with young people in the town.</p> | |
| 5. | <p>Mayor’s Report On October 5th, the Mayor had the pleasure of visiting the Amesbury Archer School. Mr. Webber, the Head Teacher, graciously guided her on a tour, highlighting the school's state-of-the-art facilities.</p> <p>With sadness, she shared the news of Father Darren, the vicar of St. Mary and St. Melor Church, was departing for another parish. The Mayor extended her heartfelt gratitude for his dedicated service to the Council and the Community. She wished him and his family all the best.</p> <p>The Mayor's Surgery will be held on November 17th from 11 AM to 12 PM and again on November 24th from 2 PM to 3 PM. In the coming months, she was planning to include evening sessions for the convenience of residents.</p> <p>The Mayor's Charity Appeal, in support of the Hoppa Bus, would host its second Bingo Afternoon on November 30th at Christ the King Church Hall, starting at 1 PM.</p> <p>She reported that the staffing panel has successfully secured Interim Clerks. Handover sessions from the former clerk, Wendy, to the new Town Clerk have been conducted to ensure a seamless transition and efficient operation of the Council.</p> <p>The Mayor reported that she had received an update from National Highways that work on the Countess Underpass is scheduled to commence in December this year.</p> <p>Finally, she reported that she was hosting a Christmas Concert on December 8th at Antrobus House. The concert would run from 10:30 AM to 12:30 PM and a second show from 2 PM to 4 PM. Members could reserve a place by emailing her.</p> | |
| 6. | <p>Clerk’s Report The Council noted the Locum Clerk’s report (previously circulated)</p> | |

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| <p>7.</p> <p>7.1</p> <p>7.2</p> <p>7.3</p> | <p>Councillors' Questions and Statements</p> <p>Cllr Edwards responded to an article in the Valley News that had been critical of his conduct, and similarly negative comments on social media. He asked councillors to refrain from having public arguments on social media as this reflected poorly on the Council and was damaging to its standing and reputation. He reassured the meeting that he took the views of residents seriously and he had never sought to offend anyone when pointing out the rules relating to public speaking at Town Council meetings,</p> <p>Cllr Edwards raised ideas for consideration during preparation of the 2024/25 Council budget including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purchase of more '20 is Plenty' signs for Kings Gate and Archers Gate estates. • Biodiversity projects and tree planting. <p>Cllr Yuill reported on progress with the community park. He also raised the recent remarks made by ex-councillor Verbinnen in the Salisbury Journal, relating to staffing issues. He considered these issues needed to be fully investigated.</p> <p>The Locum Clerk responded that he had talked to the staff and that no complaints or grievances had been submitted. He reminded Councillors that the Council had clear policies for dealing with staffing issues and that councillors should not involve themselves in such matters other than in considering recommendations following investigations undertaken by the Clerk. He further pointed out that investigating complaints about the conduct of members was the responsibility of the Wiltshire Council Monitoring Officer (MO) and again, councillors had no role in that process, other than in considering independent reports received from the MO. The Clerk emphasised the importance of councillors directing their issues through the Clerk. They should not seek to involve themselves in the operational work of the staff, and officers should not be drawn into disagreements between members of the Council. This had happened recently and must be avoided in the future to protect the wellbeing of staff and the good reputation of the Council.</p> <p>Cllr Kuczera drew attention to poor communication about the staffing levels in the office. He asked for the cancellation of the firework display to be investigated. He requested that the bunting be removed before the Remembrance Day parade. The Locum Clerk informed the Council that two members of staff had been sick on Monday and that one other member of office staff had been on annual leave. He had been in the office on Tuesday and would be in the office every day until the new Clerk took up her position on Monday 13th November. He reported that he was reviewing the cancellation of the firework display. The event plan had been approved by the Clerk and he was investigating what had gone wrong, so the Council may learn from any mistakes. The Clerk reported that he would ensure the bunting was removed before the Remembrance Day parade.</p> | |
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| 7.4 | <p>Cllr Crook asked to be invited to the next meetings of the Amenities and Projects Committees</p> | |
| 7.5 | <p>Cllr Hedge thanked the Mayor for her prompt action in securing the services of a new locum at such short notice.</p> | |
| 7.6 | <p>Cllr Knight expressed her disappointment that the parking advisory leaflets provided to the Council had not been distributed to residents of the Archers Gate estate in time for the 'day of action' on 28th October. Volunteers had been arranged and the Police and Fire Service were prepared for activities to coincide with the mailing. Cllr Yuill responded that he had some concerns about the leaflet and certain sections that were not relevant to Amesbury, but he confirmed that he had delivered the leaflets to the Clerk.</p> | |
| 7.7 | <p>Cllr Lord updated the Council on a meeting he had had with Chris Wickley of Wiltshire Council concerning a local planning application.</p> | |
| 7.8 | <p>Cllr Hagger asked why the LCC Locum Clerk had departed unexpectedly. He also asked that the streetlights at Harvard Play Park be inspected, and any damage repaired as soon as possible. The Locum Clerk responded that he was investigating the circumstances surrounding the LCC Locum's departure and that any complaints received would be taken forward through the Council's complaints or grievance procedures or referred to the Wiltshire Council Monitoring Officer as appropriate. He thanked Cllr Hagger for reporting the lighting issue at Harvard Play Park and he would investigate the matter as soon as possible.</p> | |
| 8 | <p>Police Report Police Inspector Ricky Lee was present and updated the Council on the matters set out in the Police report (previously circulated). He responded to the issue raised by Cllr Knight above and recommended that the parking campaign on Archers Gate be reorganised and he pledged the support of the blue light services. He further reported that the Police had responded to complaints about anti-social behaviour at Harvard Play Park. Officers had attended the site, identified the culprits and taken appropriate follow-up action with the families. Finally, he updated the Council on changes to the community policing model for Wiltshire. This would see the coordination of local policing being based at Bourne Hill in Salisbury</p> | |
| 9 | <p>Amenities Committee Cllr Swindlehurst gave an update on the meeting, and it was agreed to receive the minutes of the meeting held on 17th October.</p> | |
| 10 | <p>Projects Committee Cllr Hagger gave an update on the meeting, and it was agreed to receive the minutes of the meeting held on 31st October.</p> | |

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| 11 | <p>Planning Committee Cllr Yuill reported on the meeting and the planning applications considered. It was agreed to receive the minutes of the meeting held on 24th October.</p> | |
| 12 | <p>Grounds Maintenance Working Group Cllr Edwards reported that it had been agreed to recommend that Council rolls forward the existing Bawden’s contract for one further year to enable work by councillors to agree a maintenance programme for the future contract.</p> <p>Proposed: Cllr Edwards Seconded: Cllr Swindlehurst Resolved: that the recommendation of the Grounds Maintenance Working Group be approved, and the grounds maintenance contract be rolled forward for a further year.</p> | |
| 13 | <p>Appointment of Clerk Following the recruitment process undertaken by the Staffing Panel, the Council considered the appointment of Sarah Tucker to the position of Clerk to the Council.</p> <p>Proposed: The Mayor Seconded: Cllr Mitchell Resolved: that Sarah Tucker be appointed to the position of Clerk to the Council and that she be delegated the full responsibilities of Proper Officer and Responsible Finance Officer.</p> | |
| 14 | <p>CCLA Signatory</p> <p>Proposed: The Mayor Seconded: Cllr Mitchell Resolved:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) that CCLA signatory authorisation be transferred from Joanne Johnston to Sarah Tucker, in-coming Town Clerk, from 13th November 2023; and (2) that the Chair and Vice Chair of Finance Committee be approved as authorised signatories following the resignation of ex-councillor Verbinnen | |
| 15 | <p>Grant Application: Wiltshire Neighbourhood Watch Association The Council considered the Clerk’s report.</p> <p>Proposed: Cllr Swindlehurst Seconded: Cllr Hedge Resolved:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) that a grant of £470 be awarded to Wiltshire Neighbourhood Watch Association; and (2) that the Clerk be asked to review the current limit on community grants. | |

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| 16 | <p>Wiltshire Local Plan - Pre-Submission Consultation Cllr Mitchell invited members to submit any comments to him in order that he may collate the Council’s response in consultation with the Neighbourhood Planning Consultants, Troy Planning. The deadline for comments was 22nd November.</p> | |
| 17 | <p>Reports from outside bodies: Cllr Mitchell reported on the AGM of Wiltshire Association of Local Councils held on 25th October. The next executive committee meeting was to be held on 15th November. Cllr Mitchell drew attention to the training courses currently available and advised members to check out details on the WALC website.</p> | |
| 18 | <p>Revision of Standing Orders: Casting of Ballots Cllr Edwards invited the Council to consider a revision to SO 16.05 to allow for the casting of secret ballots for the election of Mayor and Deputy Mayor. The Locum Clerk informed the Council that he was unaware of any legislative changes that would permit the casting of secret ballots. He asked for the matter to be deferred in order that he may seek further advice on this proposal.</p> | |
| 19 | <p>Neighbourhood Plan update Cllr Mitchell gave a brief update and drew attention to the need for more community representatives on the Steering Group.</p> | |
| 20 | <p>Local Highways and Footpath Improvement Group The Council considered financial contributions towards the following works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town Entrance Gates £825; and • Beverley Hills Park dropped kerb £875 <p>Proposed: The Mayor Seconded: Cllr Swindlehurst Resolved: that the financial contributions listed above be approved.</p> | |
| 21 | <p>Date of next meeting: Members noted the time and date of the next meeting: 7.15pm on Tuesday 5th December 2023 at the Bowman Centre</p> <p>The Mayor closed the meeting at 9.35pm</p> | |