

CHATTERIS TOWN COUNCIL
Annual Town Meeting
Minutes Dated Friday 21st April 2023

Minutes of the Chatteris Annual Town meeting held at the King Edward Centre, King Edwards Road, Chatteris, on Friday 21st April 2023.

Present: Cllr L Ashley (Mayor), Cllr A Charrier, Cllr W Haggata, Cllr F Newell and Cllr J Smith and 11 members of the public/electors.

The Mayor greeted those present but then handed over to Town Council officers to run the meeting and answer questions.

1) Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence had been received from Cllr I Benney as it was his father's 92nd birthday.

2) Financial Report

The Financial Officer presented her Financial Report (**copy attached**). The Report showed a total expenditure for the year 2022/23 of £786,817.54, as at the 31st March 2023, and total income of £387,108.86 which included a full year's precept. The general fund balance had decreased by approximately £5,926 compared to the budget that was set.

The report contained details of the 2022/23 budget, a bank reconciliation statement and a summary statement of reserves and funds balances.

The Financial Officer invited questions from the audience. She was asked if there were plans to do another town plan as money was held in an account. She explained that it was a reserve account if another town plan was needed but the money had now gone back into the general fund.

3) Report of the Year's Activities

The Clerk presented her Annual Report of the Council's activities for the year ending April 2023 (**copy attached**).

She explained it had been a busy time for the Council and its officers as they had worked to deliver the Growing Fenland project, in particular the museum and community rooms' scheme. The Clerk charted the works from purchasing 2 Park Street (thanks to funding from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority) to the ongoing conversion

works. The Clerk then gave a summary of all the work carried out by the Council and its officers, attendance figures for councillors, speakers and topics raised at meetings and the work of the officers.

4) Powerpoint Presentation

Cllr Haggata presented a Powerpoint presentation on the works to 2 Park Street.

He explained the redundant Barclays Bank building was purchased by Chatteris Town Council with funding grants from the CPCA as part of the Growing Fenland project. A condition of the grant was the requirement that the funding be used on Capital projects.

As a result, and with the opportunity to purchase the landmark building situated in a commanding and prominent position in centre of Chatteris, Chatteris Town Council decided to go ahead with the transaction and use the main part of the listed building to re-site Chatteris Museum from its present location at the council chambers.

As 2 Park Street was a listed building, conservation issues had to be observed and this had involved many hours of thought and discussion. Cllr Haggata said on the screen were photographs he had taken showing various stages of the work from when the Town Council took over after Barclays had removed all their banking area facilities to the position a few weeks ago. New floor coverings would soon be added and the building would be handed over to the Chatteris Museum volunteers in the near future.

If funding allowed the area previously occupied by the museum at 14 Church Lane would be converted into a community area and one or two flats on the upper tier. A decision would be made when all costs were considered.

The next photograph showed Chatteris Mayor Linda Ashley with the Deputy Mayor of the Combined Authority and Chris Savill, Chairman, and Reg Tibbitts, Treasurer, of the Chatteris Lights committee outside the improved frontage of the Empress swimming pool which now housed the equipment for Chatteris lights. The improvements were partly funded by a grant from CTC and a grant from the Combined Authority.

Cllr Haggata said the museum, along with the Museum of Armed Police, would enhance the area and hopefully bring more activity and interest into Chatteris. He thanked the Council's officers for all their hard work and the extra time put into the Growing Fenland project.

The final slide invited members of the public to an Open Day at 2 Park Street on the 7th May to view the works which were underway.

The Financial Officer said the proposal had originally been to provide a new home for the museum and a community room but thanks to careful planning the project would now result in the provision of not only the museum but three, possibly four, community rooms.

5) Reports from Local Clubs and Organisations

Museum: Mrs Sue Spooner, of the Management team of the Museum, gave a report. She said after an awful lot of work the packing of the museum was nearing completion and as the moving day came closer excitement was rising. Well over 11,000 museum artefacts had been catalogued and packed thanks to a team of volunteers. There were now 24 volunteers and enquiries were coming in every week from people who wanted to be involved in the next phase of the museum development. On average 300 volunteer hours were contributed every month. The museum had been delighted to get just over £97,000 in lottery funding for a project on life in Chatteris in the 1920s. This would include workshops for schools and community groups, exhibitions and training for museum volunteers on how to collect and record oral histories from people living in Chatteris. On Monday 8th May the museum would be using the old Barclays building as part of the Big Help Out to try and recruit new volunteers and formally launch the 1920s project. Information on the museum was available on social media platforms and the volunteers were looking forward to meeting the public again and making a vibrant museum with the community at its heart.

Chatteris Christmas Lights: Mr Reg Tibbitts, treasurer, said it had been an exciting and difficult year. It was now 18 months since the group had been forced to move out of their store and they were fortunate to be able to take on the store at the Empress pool at a nominal rent. The building was initially derelict both internally and externally but thanks to donations the store had been fitted out with racking and was now a much better store, with more space than previously, which meant that work could be carried out inside the store. Mr Tibbitts said the lights committee was very thankful to the Town Council officers who had arranged for grants which had contributed a significant sum towards the cost of works to improve the outlook of the building and increase its security. The Council supported the application for a roller shutter door which meant it was now possible to put a ramp up allowing for easy access, particularly important as one of the volunteers was in a wheelchair. Mr Tibbitts said donations and takings for the Christmas lights were down, as people no longer carried cash, but the whole project had only cost the lights committee about £2,000. Mr Tibbitts said he hoped those present had enjoyed the last Christmas lights display. The committee had plans for improvements but a shortage of microchips was causing a problem. The lights would go on again on the 2nd December.

Chatteris In Bloom: Mrs Sue Unwin, President of Chatteris In Bloom, gave a report. She began by saying the improvements to the Empress Pool building would make a huge difference when the In Bloom judges were shown around the town as that had been one of the grot spots. Mrs Unwin was delighted to report that the group had gained golds in both the Anglia In Bloom and Britain in Bloom competitions in 2022. Head gardener Tor had received an accolade at the In Bloom awards

Mrs Unwin explained that she had founded the group 17 years ago and in the time Ms Tina Prior had been chairman the group had gained 5 golds as she kept the volunteers on their toes. The group was now putting in more perennials, although it was difficult to find the funds, and

these would look good in the coming summer. Mrs Unwin said the group had many plans for 2023 and she was sure the displays would be spectacular. The group had been asked to change the mural in the East Park Street bus shelter and, after a competition, a new design inspired by the Coronation would shortly be installed. The group had also taken over areas formerly looked after by FDC including the Wenny Estate roundabout and the flower beds in Huntingdon Road and Station Street. She thanked the Town Council for their financial support and the support of other organisations, particularly the Christmas Lights who helped to put up the hanging baskets.

6) Questions from the Public

Cycleways: Copies of the new footpaths and cycleways map for Chatteris were available and Mr Tibbitts asked about plans to improve cycleways as the map showed an absence of cycle paths. He pointed out it was not possible to get out of Chatteris safely on a bike. Cllr Smith said Cllr Haggata had done an incredible amount of work behind the scenes in promoting travel in Chatteris but she acknowledged that cycleways were still needed. Cllr Haggata said he had represented the Town Council on the TAG transport group which looked at cycleways, footpaths, buses and other forms of transport but he admitted it was an uphill struggle to convince others on the committee about what was needed. He said he and Cllr Smith had set up an organisation called cycle routes for Chatteris and had tried to find funding for the extension of the cycleway from Ely to Sutton so it reached Chatteris. Unfortunately the footpath was not on the agenda for anybody. He admitted the wish for more cycle projects had been raised when the Growing Fenland questionnaire went out and he was hoping councillors would persist and pursue this objective; he was also hoping there would be footpath and cycleway links with the planned reservoir. The Clerk explained the idea of extending the made up surface of the Old Railway Line to Somersham to improve access for cyclists and walkers had been looked into but Somersham Parish Council would not support the idea.

20mph Limit: The Council was asked why it had not supported the idea of a 20mph speed limit in Chatteris and the Clerk had explained that the whole town would be covered by a 20mph limit not just specific roads and councillors were, therefore, not prepared to support the idea. Another member of the audience asked who would enforce the 20mph limit.

Elms Development: Another member of the public was concerned there would be problems with increased traffic as a result of the development off The Elms. She asked if speed humps had been considered, especially near the bend into Birch Avenue from St Martins Road. The Clerk said the Town Council had not supported accessing the land from The Elms because of the increased traffic and she was not sure if one of the planning conditions was to install traffic calming measures. However if there were problems the Town Council would be able to consider applying for LHI funding for a road safety scheme.

Pocket Park: A question was asked about development of the Little Acre Fen Pocket Park. Cllr Smith was pleased to explain that thanks to the extension of the made-up footpath surface there was now a circular route from Huntingdon Road along the Old Railway Line through the Pocket Park returning by West Street. Discussions were taking place on how

often the park should be cut. Cllr Smith said it was always meant to have a wild and rugged appearance. She was pleased to announce that the park was now being used by local groups including the cubs and children's literacy projects.

Friday Bus: Mrs Spooner thanked the Council for the provision of the Chatteris Runner bus on a Friday which had given her elderly father his independence and a real boost. Cllr Haggata explained how it was funded by money originally given by Tesco's. It was agreed the service needed more publicity.

Friends of Chatteris Library: Cllr Smith put out a plea for volunteers to join the Friends of Chatteris Library which helped the library service to provide extras for those using the library, including activities for children and equipment for the library. She said there was a shortage of people who could help to fund raise.

Over 70s party: Cllr Haggata praised the Christmas party for the Over 70s in the town which had been organised by the Financial Officer with the help of the Clerk and councillors. The Financial Officer said the first party was attended by about 70 people, the second by nearly 100 and another was planned for 2023. The food was organised by Housden's Caterers and entertainment included a live singer, bingo and a tombola. Cllr Haggata said it was a marvellous occasion.