

COWES TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Twenty seventh Annual Town Meeting held in the Community Hall, Northwood House, Cowes on Wednesday 20th April, 2011 at 7.00 p.m., convened under the provision of section 99 and schedule 12 of the Local Government Act, 1972.

Present: Councillor Wells (Town Mayor) (Chairman)
Councillors Banks, Birch, Brown, Jones, McGregor, Matthews, Thwaites,
Walters, Sgt. Sizer, PCSO Oatley and three other members of the public.

164. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hammond, Mazillius, Peacey-Wilcox, Wilcox and I.W. Councillor Brown.

165. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the twenty sixth Annual Town Meeting held on 19th May, 2010 be taken as read, approved as correct record and signed by the Chairman.

166. REPORT OF THE BUSINESS OF THE TOWN COUNCIL

Councillor Wells (Town Mayor) submitted a report of the business of the Town Council during the past year as follows:

This past municipal year has seen some major changes in the work of Cowes Town Council as it has taken on a number of new responsibilities and seen some major projects come to fruition. It has been a turbulent year with some large financial restrictions in the public sector and Councillors have had to take some difficult decisions to try and minimise the impact that these financial cuts have on the Town. Without wishing to be over self congratulatory, I would like to pay tribute to my colleagues for working together in a very professional manner in some difficult circumstances, which have often been in the past year against a background of hostility and criticism.

We have seen some Councillors move on - for valid reasons - and other have newly joined us in the year past. That brings new blood into the team and I believe that we have a strong Council that we have a right to be, at least a little, proud of.

During the year a number of major projects have exercised the minds of the Councillors. The Adventure Playground in Northwood Recreation Park (named 'Big Park – Little Park' as a result of a competition run in the local Primary Schools), came to fruition after a great deal of work; particularly on the part of the Chair of Town Improvements Committee and the Committee members. It has been a much admired and well used facility and was almost fully funded with external grants meaning that there was very little burden on the local ratepayers. Alongside the ever popular Skate Park, another Town Council project, we can be proud of what we have enabled in seeing this project finally come to fulfilment.

The Town Council took over a project from the Community Partnership to record the names of those who lost their lives during the Great Wars from Cowes on the War Memorial standing in Northwood Park. That project was completed during the past year much to the appreciation of many members of the public whose ancestors were among those names that are now recorded at the War Memorial. We were pleased that the contractors were able to complete the work in time for the Remembrance Day Service last November, which was a fitting occasion for the Rev Richard Emblin to perform an act of blessing at the memorial as the people of our Town stood in remembrance. The enhancement works at the War Memorial was subsequently entered into, and won the Sybil Bodycomb award for small projects 2010 organised by the Isle of Wight Society.

At the July meeting of Cowes Town Council, Councillors agreed to make a financial contribution towards the costs of the Cowes Week Fireworks display. This is one of those 'not easy' decisions to make but it was felt on balance that the event of the Firework night at the end of Cowes Week is a tradition that the people of Cowes would not like to lose. It also brings in considerable revenue to the Town boosting the local economy.

The CCTV system for which the Town Council had been putting aside funding for a number of years, went live in the past year. Although there have been complaints about the siting and size of the repeater mast in Terminus Road, the project has in every other respect been an unqualified success. I know that our colleagues in the Safer Neighbourhood Team have found this investment to be very worthwhile and it has helped considerably in the fighting of crime and apprehension of those responsible for criminal behaviour in the centre of the Town. My thanks to Cllr Wilcox who lead the way latterly in getting this project to the point of fulfilment.

More recently with massive cuts from central government, the IW Council has been looking at the spend on the Library Service across the Island. In its original proposals, Cowes Library was to be cut down to being open just one day a week from the previous five days. This caused a huge reaction in the community against such a drastic cutting of the service and the Town Council took the initiative, with the support of some of the local protestors, to set up an action group to work with the IW Council Library Service to try and achieve a better local outcome.

The result of this is a pulling back from the original proposal by the IW Council and an agreement to provide extra funding for available hours from staff. The action group, chaired by the Deputy Mayor agreed a schedule of opening hours with the Library Service which saw the Library remaining open for Mondays, Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from the 4th April. The action group are continuing to meet, with a strong enabling involvement from the Town Council, to discuss how it might be able to assist in the way forward for Cowes Library and to co-ordinate the people who have volunteered to be part of a future service.

Members of the Town Council have also been meeting with Southern Vectis Bus Company to explore ways in which a community bus service running around Cowes in a circuitous route encompassing Briary Court to the Floating Bridge taking in the Crossfield Estate, the Doctor's surgery and the main bus terminus point at the Co-op store etc. This service would run in off peak daytime hours with buses provided by Southern Vectis and volunteer drivers, names of which are currently being gathered by this Town Council. This could become an invaluable service for the Town, similar in style to the Sail Bus service that has been run in previous Cowes Weeks.

A further potential victim of the cutbacks in central government funding was the Public Toilets in Northwood Recreation Ground (adjacent to the adventure playground and the skate park). This toilet block was seen by the IW Council as being one that was surplus to their requirements or one that could be run by another organisation. The Town Council has agreed to take over the running of these Toilets and has signed a Tenancy at Will agreement with the IW Council which enables a quick handover of the facility until the legal leases are sorted out. The toilets re-opened after the winter closing period on the 11th April, in time for the Easter holidays. Once again this is a new area of work for the Town Council as localism begins to bite in our community.

Ongoing work is continuing with the restoration of 'The Cut' – the link street from the High Street to Cross Street where the Toilets are situated. This project has been on the agenda for a long period of time and the Town Council has been gathering funding from various sources to enable this rather scruffy part of Cowes to be rejuvenated. Plans for the work have been approved by the Planning Authority and there is an immediate first part of the project involving the repair of the back wall and the painting of a new mural to commemorate the Island Games. This is being organised with young volunteers through the local schools and will be completed in time for the Island Games, the closing ceremony of

which is taking place in Cowes. This will be the first part of this project to renew this area and hopefully in the coming municipal year we will be able to complete the full project. Another large project which has involved some considerable work by the Town Improvements Committee is the proposal to install a Basketball Court adjacent to the Skate Park in Northwood Recreation Ground. Some £28,500 worth of external grant funding has been gathered towards this project and the intention was to have started the works by now. Unfortunately, just at this moment the project is stalled since the final quotes just in for the complete installation have exceeded the budget figure originally given by some £10-15,000. We are working on this at present seeking some further grants and looking carefully at the specification. We very much hope that we will be able to resolve this since it would be an unhappy situation if we were unable to proceed and had to hand back such a large amount of grant funding.

The future of Northwood House and the surrounding Parkland has been a matter of considerable concern to members of the Council. Over the course of the past year there have been some major developments and some clarity as to the way forward for the Northwood House Trust as the IW Council have finally disengaged from the managing role that they had maintained for a long number of years. The Council is pleased to note the work of the Northwood House Trust as it has taken on the role of the managing Trustees and has carried out some excellent cleaning up and tidying of the House with a view to marketing the House to raise future income. There is however, some concern, reflected from the community about the Trust's future intentions regarding the Parkland. The Council is currently discussing its response to the Public Consultation exercise launched by the Trust last month. The Town Council has in the meantime agreed to fund the emptying of litter/dog bins in the Park for 12 months after which time it will review its ongoing commitment.

Other matters, events and people that we had to deal with through the year included, in no particular order:

The resignation of Cllr Vanessa Slade who needed more time to devote to family matters. We had appreciated Vanessa's input into the work of the Council during her time with us. We also saw later in the year Cllr Joss Giffard standing down. His wife had serious health issues and he made the decision to move from Cowes to a smaller and more manageable property on the other side of the Island. Again we had greatly valued Joss's commitment and work for the Council.

To take their places, we welcomed Cllr Stuart Ellis and just very recently Cllr Linda Brown. We are pleased to have them join the team and I am sure that as they get their feet under the table as it were, they too will add their support to the overall work of the Council. The Council has been instrumental in providing/enabling new benches to be installed in the Town. One was placed outside the Baileys shop in the High Street and another, paid for by Mrs Beth Effemey in remembrance of her late husband former Cllr John Effemey. We are very grateful to Mrs Effemey for her generosity.

The Council received a presentation from the Environment Agency Incident Team Leader in October talking about the Flood Plan for Cowes. My colleague Cllr Walters worked with the Agency to put together an excellent Flood Plan leaflet that has subsequently been delivered to all premises in the Cowes flood plain. This was an excellent piece of work and we are grateful to Cllr Walters for his commitment to this.

During the year we welcomed Sgt Mike Sizer who replaced Sgt Julie Cocks in managing the Cowes Safer Neighbourhoods team. We are very grateful for the commitment that Sgt Sizer and his team make to keep the Council fully informed about crime and safety issues in Cowes. It has been really pleasing to see that under the new leadership the Safer

Neighbourhoods Team continue to see crime levels reduced and maintain strong links into the community.

This year has also seen the Town Council's admin team grow with the appointment of the new Assistant Town Clerk, Jane Randall. We have all welcomed Jane and the input she has had since joining us in October – not least the Town Clerk Roger Hendey who, more than most of us, knows how much Jane has added to the operation of the Council. Roger's ill health has meant that he has been away from the office for some weeks but we are really glad to note his progress and to see him coming back to full strength. Fortunately we had made the appointment in time for Jane to continue, with the limited hours for which she was contracted, to take over the reins. She was certainly dropped in at the deep end and we are grateful for all that she has done to keep the wheels turning.

In addition to a new Assistant Town Clerk, the Town Council took over new offices. We are now fully installed in offices in Baring Chambers in Denmark Road where we are able to conduct the business of the Council in a more efficient and accessible manner. We are also able to hold almost all of our committee meetings at the offices thus saving on premises rental. My grateful thanks go to Cllrs Birch and Matthews for their hard physical work in helping to set up the new offices.

Planning issues as ever have been constant throughout the year and the committee has been well lead by Cllr Jones – sometimes not an easy process. Planning issues can be very contentious and it is often not fully appreciated by members of the public the constraints under planning law that bind councillors to certain decision making. Thanks to Cllr Jones in leading the committee through the year and to Cllr Birch who has arranged a visual display of plans to be accessed and shown on the large screen monitor in the Council's office.

The Town Council has continued to make grants to a number of organisations in the Town through the year. Cllr Birch has led the finance committee in their deliberations and decision making which again is not always an easy process. The precept for the year 2011/12 was set at the same level as the previous year with no increase. It was a difficult decision to make bearing in mind that there is continuing pressure on the Town Council to take on new responsibilities. On balance it was felt we should not make an increase because of the difficult economic circumstances that many of our residents find themselves in.

And finally.... I will be stepping down as your Mayor and Chairman next month having served my two year term. It has been a privilege and an honour to serve the Town Council and the Town in this way and I am particularly grateful to my colleagues for their unstinting hard work and the time they all give freely for the good of our Town. As I said at the start of this report, I believe we have a strong Council which does some excellent work. I understand that we have a good reputation from those we have to deal with i.e. the IW Council and others and I believe that reputation is deserved. I am sure that you will want me to express our thanks too to the Town Clerk and his Assistant for the hard work they put in to keep things smoothly running and especially as that workload has greatly increased through the year.

167. ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH, 2010

Copies of the accounts for the year ended 31st March, 2011 were circulated at the Meeting.

RESOLVED

That the accounts be received and noted.

168. ANNUAL SUMMARY – SAFER NEIGHBOURHOOD TEAM

Sgt. Sizer reported that the Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) continued to forge links with the community it served and this year saw the introduction of a Local Action Group (LAG) in Cowes – the group comprises people who live, work, represent or were educated in the town.

The LAG has met three times to date and has each time set 3 priorities for the SNT. The priorities had encompassed a wide variety of subjects ranging from youth facilities to dog fouling. The SNT were also engaged in a 12 month programme of 'street mapping' in order to gauge concerns of the wider community. The current priorities included youth activities, dog fouling between Love Lane and Seaview Road and speeding in Pallance Road. Crime statistics were made available on a monthly basis; headline groups were identified and levels of reported incidents were measured against previous year's figures. Unfortunately, in Cowes and in common with the rest of the Island, there had been a general upward trend in reported crime. This was obviously unwelcome but in reality last year had been an exceptional

Year; current figures had merely returned to 2008 levels.

The crime detection rates in Cowes currently stands at about 30%; although a good rate the SNT were working tirelessly to improve that figure. The recently installed CCTV system in the town had proven invaluable and had been well worth the money invested in it by the Town Council.

The SNT were stringently implementing new laws relating to underage drinking – any young person under 18 found in possession of alcohol in public would face arrest if it was a third occasion within a twelve month period. Regular requests had been made to their partners in Trading Standards to test licensed premises where it was suspected alcohol was being obtained by youngsters or by proxy for youngsters. The SNT regularly visit public houses to conduct licensing checks; he expected his team to enter premises on a Friday and Saturday night to show to licensees and their clientele their premises are public places and that patrols don't stop at the door.

They would continue to target drug dealers and a number of operations to target this crime had been planned.

The SNT had also conducted joint investigations with the UK Border Agency, the RSPCA and Dog Wardens in the town. They would continue to engage with numerous other partner, community and business groups – neighbourhood watch, pubwatch, shopwatch and a multi ethnic women's group as well as all of the local councils; they were grateful to those in the community who gave up their personal time in such engagements.

He was aware that recent changes imposed on the SNT in Cowes and its police station had not been popular; no final decision had been taken regarding the long term future of the police station.

Finally, Sgt. Sizer stated that many crimes could be easily prevented; burglaries and theft from motor vehicles often occurred when premises and vehicles were left unlocked. He had brought a variety of basic crime prevention equipment (locks, alarms etc.) to the meeting which he offered to those present.

A number of questions were put to Sgt. Sizer following which the Town Mayor thanked him and his team for their continued support of the Town Council and the community; it was greatly appreciated.

169. ANNUAL SUMMARY – I.W. COUNCIL

Councillor Mazillius had submitted a written report which was read to the meeting as follows:

The past year has seen the Isle of Wight Council having to respond to the largest reduction in government funding in modern times. This equated to the need to find spending reductions for the current year of around £16m with further reductions for 2012/13 of £8m in addition of course to carrying forward the £16m less expenditure from 2011/12.

To further concentrate the Council's mind on strict budgetary controls, if the Council kept any increase in the rate of Council Tax to 2.5% or less, the government would make a payment equivalent to that increase, thus ensuring there was no increase in Council Tax for the present year. I am pleased to report that this has been achieved.

However, the I.W. Council has had to address these financial issues in several ways including reviewing the size of our workforce and the way we deliver services and indeed the variety of

those services. To achieve a balanced budget, these difficult decisions have had to be fully addressed including a workforce reduction of senior management and below, changes to library and public conveniences provision and local Wightbus services as well as changes to funding adult social care.

Much of this has been achieved or is in the process of being achieved, in partnership with Parish and Town Councils. I am pleased that Cowes Town Council has fully engaged in this process. This has meant a focus on the provision of these local services which I am sure will result in an improvement in service provision with more or complete local control.

In the meantime, the Council continues with its flagship PFI highway programme, recently given further government approval delivering up to just under £500m in cash terms of highway infrastructure improvements over a 25 year build and maintenance programme expected to commence in 2013.

In addition, the Cowes One School Pathfinder project is now well into its building programme, delivering the most modern educational facility on the Island.

Finally, to achieve substantial six figure annual revenue savings, the Council is leaving satellite accommodation, much of it rented, to move some 350 staff into County Hall. The costs of this will be achieved by selling off surplus property owned by the Council and vacated as part of the move into County Hall and of course the on-going revenue savings from those vacated premises. The building programme including improved customer service areas and publicly accessed Committee Rooms and disabled access has commenced and is expected to be complete by the middle of next year.

All these measures mean the I.W Council will in future be costing Council Tax payers less to run with even further financial savings being required by central government during 2013/14 and 2014/15.

Councillor Fuller stated that he had attended all of the Town and Parish meetings in his ward; he would carry on attending as many meetings as possible as they were important to him.

He also submitted a written report which principally concentrated on issues that had affected residents in his Ward – Cowes West and Gurnard on a month by month basis.

It also referred to Planning and Transport matters and an independent perspective regarding the I.W. Council budget.

Councillor Fuller detailed the many meetings attended, surgeries held, home visits made and correspondence and phone calls he had dealt with in connection with his work as an I.W. Councillor.

He also gave details of his Councillors allowance and his expenses for the year and also details of the numerous committees and other bodies on which he served.

Finally, he outlined his aspirations for the coming year.

The Town Mayor expressed his gratitude to all the I.W. Councillors for their reports and for the support they had given to the Town Council during the year.

170. QUESTIONS FROM THE MEETING

The following question and observations were made:

A member of the public wished to thank the Town Council for the support they had given to local bowlers throughout the year – grants had been made to the Plessey Bowls Club and also to the Cowes Bowls Clubs in Northwood Park. He stated that despite the normally held view that bowls was ‘an old people’s game’, many youngsters participated and locally we had young boys and girls who played for England at under 25 years of age level.

Councillor Thwaites was given the opportunity to update the meeting on the work of the Northwood House Charitable Trust. She stated that the House and Park were given in completely separate ways – the Park was given for the use of local people and the Trustees

had no wish to alter that; indeed, it was their intention to improve the park and not reduce its amenity value in any way.

Work on the Estate continued; the Trustees had considered combining dog and normal litter into single bins to reduce numbers but at this stage had decided against that move. The tennis courts were open and the toilets were due to open later in the week for the coming season and tree works would be commencing shortly. Bowls would start at the weekend and Councillor Thwaites had been invited to bowl the first wood!!!

The Carnival Committee would be organising a 'Picnic in the Park' on 29th May; events like this were exactly what the Trustees wished to encourage and to that end were considering designating an area within the park as 'dog free' for the benefit of those wishing to have picnics etc.

Councillor Thwaites finally reported that the Trustees would be holding an open day at Northwood House on 15th May; this would provide an opportunity for local residents to see the enormous amount of work that had been undertaken, primarily by volunteers and for the Trust to officially thank those volunteers for their efforts.

Q. The Park was given as an open space for use by the people of Cowes; the I.W. Council fund parks and open spaces so why can't the Trust draw upon those funds?

A. The Trust had requested funding on that basis without success; it was a complicated legal situation but the I.W. Council view was that it was a park in the hands of a Charitable Trust and not their responsibility.

Councillor Fuller undertook to ask the question directly to the I.W. Council and he would circulate their response.

(The proceedings terminated at 8.17p.m.)

CHAIRMAN