

Midsomer Norton Annual Town Meeting

Minutes of the Midsomer Norton Annual Town Meeting held in the Town Hall, The Island, Midsomer Norton on Monday 14th May 2012 commencing at 7:00 pm.

Present: Councillor P Myers (Mayor of Midsomer Norton Town Council);
Councillor L Dunford (Deputy Mayor of Midsomer Norton Town Council);

Councillors: M Evans, B Lawrence, P Moccock, L Robertson, R Robertson (7.45pm), S Wellington

Michael Curry (Town Clerk)
Mrs C Sims (Administrative Officer)

47 Members of the Local Electorate

1. Fire Safety – Evacuation Procedure

The Town Clerk explained the fire evacuation procedure as detailed in the Agenda.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor J Lewis, Councillor S Plumley and Councillor J Slade.

3. Midsomer Norton Town Council – Report of the Mayor of the Council

The Mayor of Midsomer Norton, Councillor P Myers welcomed everyone to the first Annual Town Meeting for the people of Midsomer Norton, marking as it does the first full year of the new Midsomer Norton Town Council.

The Mayor thanked the Community Groups for attending and bringing along their displays.

The Mayor gave a brief history of the origins of Midsomer Norton Urban District Council (1895 – 1933), the beginning of the North Radstock Town Council and finally the creation of Midsomer Norton Town Council following a Governance Review in 2011.

The Mayor proceeded to address Members of the Council and Public with an overview of the last year. The key points of which were, under each of the Council's three priorities:

a. Encouraging Community

Midsomer Norton Life – Magazine for the whole community.
Community database consisting of 100 community groups.

Midsomer Norton Forum.
Grant Scheme with £14,000 distributed.
Funding for community events.
Review of community buildings and green spaces (see below).
Cultural Programme

b. Civic Pride

A new identity for the town.
Public realm: new grounds management arrangements -
Town Warden
Horticultural Contract
Grass Cutting Contract

Economic development
Addressing anti social behaviour (see below)
Role of Mayor
New twinning charter with Ambares and links with China.

c. Running a Sound Council

Recruited a Clerk in July 2011.
Sorted out West Clewes (Welton Rovers)
Granted a new lease security of tenure for Welton Rovers
Resurfaced car park for benefit of all users
Formalise the Thursday Market and allow it to grow
Moved back into Midsomer Norton Town Hall.
Created an office – signed new lease for ground floor
1st Budget is now in place for 2012/13 – 2.6% reduction

In support of the last objective, 'running a sound council', the Council adopted the following financial principles to guide its decision-making:

- a. To maintain a ratio of 33%:33%:33% between Central Services, Duties and Responsibilities and Council Determined expenditure.
- b. Only borrow money to finance a purchase of a capital asset that will generate either an offsetting increase income or reduction in expenditure; or to cover an emergency.
- c. Maintain a level of reserves in line with NALC guidance (Currently 3 months). This level of reserve being achieved over two years.
- d. The Precept should not be increased in any year above the level of (consumer price) inflation.
- e. When determining the budget consideration should be given to the opportunity cost of a decision eg in agreeing to this expenditure would it have been better using it to reduce indebtedness or to save it (and reduce the burden on the council tax payers).

4. Progress Reports on Major Projects

Reports were received from Members leading major projects initiated by the Town Council during the Municipal Year 2011/12

a. Allotments

The report from **Councillor R Robertson** – Chair of the Allotment Working Party for the year 2011/12 is appended as Appendix 1.

b. Town Survey and tackling anti-social behaviour

Reports were received from **Councillor Linda Dunford and Councillor Michael Evans** on the recent town survey, litter, and forming a Community Alcohol Partnership. These are appended as Appendix 2

c. Economic Development

The Midsomer Norton Economic Development Partnership are looking to put together a regeneration plan for the town.

At this point Cllr Myers asked Councillor Simon Wellington to outline the **Art Exhibition** being held at Midsomer Norton Town Hall.

Councillor Simon Wellington informed residents that the Art Exhibition being held in Midsomer Norton Town Hall would take place from 7.00pm Friday evening June 22nd to 4.00pm Sunday afternoon June 24th. Details of which could be found on the Town Council website or from the Town Council offices.

5. Midsomer Norton Town Council – Reports from Chairs of Town Council Committees

A report from **Councillor P Mocock** – Chair of the Planning Committee for the year 2011/12 was received - the report is given in Appendix 3.

6. Midsomer Norton Town Council – Member Attendances

Resolved: That the submitted Member Attendances be noted.

7. Any Other Business

The Mayor then invited questions and comments from members of the public.

Barry Macrae Bath & North East Somerset Ward Councillor for Midsomer Norton North, congratulated the Town Council on the positive progress that had been made in their first year. He was pleased to see the forward looking focus of the Council on improving Midsomer Norton. In taking things forward, he reminded the Council to be mindful of the work put in by their predecessors and the lessons learnt. He was very pleased with the working relationship he had with the Council, emphasising the importance of partnership working and speaking with a united voice. He entreated the Council to move ever onwards and keep up the good work.

Catherine Whybrow was delighted and thanked Midsomer Norton Town Council for continuing with its formal arrangement with Ambares & Lagrave after the decision by both Radstock Town Council and Westfield Parish Council not to continue with the twinning link.

The Mayor thanked Catherine Whybrow.

David Taylor a resident from Priory Close firstly congratulated the Town Council for doing such a fantastic job during its first year.

Mr Taylor then expressed his concern with the increasing number of vehicles parking in Priory Close, possibly resulting from the time restriction in Sainsbury's Car Park. Employees of local businesses and visitors to Somerton House Surgery were parking in potentially dangerous positions limiting access and visibility. Parents also used the Close as a convenient dropping off point for both St John's and Somervale Schools.

Mr Taylor had been advised that unless there were obstructions then very little could be done.

The Mayor suggested that Mr Taylor contact the Town Clerk to give full details of the issue, and that perhaps a meeting could be arranged with Bath & North East Somerset Council officers from the Highways Department along with Town Councillors to discuss what could be done to help solve the problem.

The Mayor thanked Mr Taylor for bringing the issue to the Council's attention.

Michael Rich (PACT (Partners & Communities Together) Chair) offered the help of PACT and suggested that Mr Taylor attend the next PACT meeting (Monday 25th June 2012) where further discussions concerning parking at Priory Close could be discussed. Mr Rich advised that double yellow lines would be subject to legal orders, therefore if more people were involved it would add 'fuel to the fire' and pressure could be applied to the local authority.

The Mayor thanked Mr Rich.

Terry Taylor asked the Town Council to help determine the ownership of the car park located at Pows Orchard, just before the main Sainsbury's car park. Mr Taylor advised that the car park had been left for use for local businesses by Wansdyke District Council.

The Mayor replied that the Chamber of Commerce had previously investigated the ownership of the car park and it was identified that the Deeds for the site were held by the Greater Manchester Pension Fund.

The Mayor concluded that with the Deeds so indicating there was nothing further that could be done.

David Shearn enquired what was the Town Council's 'thinking' in respect of the proposed Sainsbury's store in Westfield.

The Mayor replied that until the Town Council had been consulted and a Planning Application had been submitted the Council would not be in a position to pre-judge the matter. On one hand the development would certainly have a big impact on shops in both Midsomer Norton and Radstock; however, on the other hand increased competition could bring lower prices for the weekly shop that would not go amiss in these times of hardship.

The Mayor thanked Mr Shearn.

Barry Macrae commented that he recognised that Westfield deserved further facilities but the Sainsbury's decision would have far reaching consequences for the Somer Valley.

Dom Chambers (Manager Somer Valley FM) addressed Members and the Public commenting that it had been a pleasure observing the efforts of the Town Council and stating: "these guys are real 'doers'".

Mr Chambers commented about the amazing amount of work that had been done on the town, but added that more could now be done for the wider community, with younger people becoming part of the process.

Mr Chambers encouraged the Town Council to embrace the social media, and for the Town Council to improve their current website. Mr Chambers advised the Council that he had been working on a guide for a 'better website' with the hope of attracting the next generation, and which he would be happy to supply.

The Mayor thanked Mr Chambers.

Morris Down (Chairman – Welton Rovers FC) reminded the Town Council that he had stood before Members at last year's Annual Town Meeting to request a new lease for Welton Rovers. Mr Down congratulated the Town Council that a year later a new lease had been signed and that the Welton Rovers car park had also been resurfaced.

Mr Down advised Members and the Public that the Mayor had come along to the Under 16's cup final and presented medals to the players who were proud that the Mayor had been present.

Mr Down took the opportunity to thank the Town Council for the erection of the goal posts in the public play area at West Clewes which were being used constantly by members of the public.

Again Mr Down congratulated the Town Council.
The Mayor thanked Mr Down.

The Mayor advised the Public that there were tickets on sale for two events celebrating the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations taking place at Welton Rovers FC on Sunday 3rd June 2012.

The Mayor thanked Michael Curry (Town Clerk) and Carole Sims (Administrative Officer) for all their support and hard work over the past year.

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Linda Dunford commented that it had been a 'great year' and thanked the Mayor for doing such a fantastic job and giving 110% throughout the year and that he was the 'best man' for the job.

The Meeting was finished at 8:25pm

Signed:.....

Dated:.....

Appendix 1 – Item 4a Major Projects Allotments

“The Council established the working party to oversee the management of its Radstock Road allotments. There are four Councillors on the working party – Cllrs Plumley, Dunford, Myers and myself as chair”.

“Continuing the theme of engagement, one of the first recommendations the working party made was to hold a meeting with allotment holders to hear their concerns”.

“The meeting was well attended. In terms of feedback the most frequently expressed concerns were”:

- Fencing to stop deer
- The condition of the drive at the entrance
- Overgrown plots
- Fair rental basis

“In light of comments made at the meeting the Council has”:

- Had the drive at the entrance repaired
- Taken steps to install a deer-proof fence along the boundary
- Introduced a new tenancy agreement and moved to a tenancy year beginning at the 1st October to match the growing season
- Following a poll of plot-holders, moved to a rental system based on the size of a plot capping the increase for 18 months for those most adversely affected
- Established a sub-group of plot-holders to develop an allotment association that would give them much greater control of day-to-day matters and benefits like bulk buying

“At this point I would like to point out that the Council did raise the average rent for a plot from £13 to £20 to better reflect the cost of the provision. In setting the rate the Council reviewed charges of neighbouring parishes”.

“The provision of allotments is a statutory duty upon Parish and Town Councils. The Radstock Road allotments have 65 plots. Currently we have a waiting list of 17 – the person next in line when a plot becomes vacant has been on the waiting list for 2½ years. All those on the waiting list are Midsomer Norton residents”.

“The Working Party is looking for a suitable site for more allotments. It has explored possible sites for new allotments, but unfortunately none of our approaches have yet proved successful. So if anyone knows of a possible site, please get in touch”.

“When successful in our search we are keen that the additional provision should encompass plots for disabled and encourage young people”.

Appendix 2 – Item 4b Major Projects

i) Councillor Linda Dunford – Town Survey

“To get an accurate picture of the experiences and concerns of the residents’ of Midsomer Norton – focusing on anti-social behaviour”.

“One thousand hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed in clusters throughout the town to residents and businesses. Copies were also available from the Town Council office, the Library, and several other local businesses in the town. The survey was also available to complete on-line. 246 surveys were completed and returned”.

“The information from the survey was extensive and in time we hope that the majority of the issues can be addressed. We have begun by focusing on the main concern. Litter”.

ii) Councillor Michael Evans – Litter

“**Litter** was the top concern of residents. From the surveys returned 76% of people said they were affected by litter lying around”.

“Litter is unsightly and environmentally damaging. It is also symptomatic of selfish and anti-social attitudes. It fits well with the scope of a Town Council, it isn’t knife crime or drug taking. We can have an effect”.

“The TC is keen to have that effect. The first thing we did was organise deep picks, and invite the good people to participate. And they did. 3 monthly; next 1st July. We bought our own kit, for the deep cleans and for individuals to borrow”.

“We didn’t buy gloves because people preferred their own, but Bath & North East Somerset Council supply them on request for the deep cleans”.

“With these brilliant volunteers include lone pioneer Ivy Goatcher, plus the unrelenting efforts of the Bath & North East Somerset Council professionals and fairly regular use of Community Pay Back, we hope the town is already more litter free than it has been”.

“We made an inventory of bins and identified spots where more are needed”.

“It’s not just cost or taste which means we can’t have the stainless steel ones. Here they steal plastic ducks from the top of bus shelters”.

“Bath & North East Somerset Council officers agreed on the locations and were very helpful. Some parts of the cycle path are relatively inaccessible so we couldn’t put bins everywhere we would like. But the real cost of the bins is the regular collections, so it is an excellent compromise that we pay for the bins and Bath & North East Somerset Council does the collections”.

“Our predecessors regarded Bath & North East Somerset Council as the enemy. We see them as the essential partner”.

“Residents can also help by reporting areas of litter to Bath & North East Somerset Council. Bath & North East Somerset do not carry out regular litter patrols apart from through the main High Street which they do every morning, 7 days a week. But they do operate strict response times to reported litter but these can only be met if residents report the litter in the first place”.

“The Town Council has also held meetings with Bath & North East Somerset Council Enforcement Officers in a bid to highlight the need for more regular patrols within the town. Anyone caught dropping litter by the Enforcement Officers will be given an on-the-spot £75.00 fine, with no warning”.

iii) Cllr Linda Dunford - Midsomer Norton Community Alcohol Partnership (CAP)

“This issue is a complicated one. The Wine and Spirit Trade association funds a charity, their purpose is to tackle under aged drinking and also alcohol related anti-social behaviour. They have had major success throughout the country by supporting communities to form Community Alcohol Partnerships or CAP’s. CAP’s pulls together all the interested stakeholders in a community, schools, councils, police, licensed and off licence premises, other businesses, organisations and agencies in order to create closer links, to work together, share information and compliment each other’s efforts”.

“Banning alcohol is not the idea. The CAP’s aim is to encourage partnership working, and through education and enforcement, create a culture where both adults and young people drink responsibly, where young people under 18 are only able to access alcohol under responsible and informed supervision and where safe consumption limits are understood”.

“The Council is taking the necessary steps to form a CAP for Midsomer Norton. Initial feedback from the stakeholders has been incredibly encouraging and supportive of this initiative”.

“We are under no illusion that the problem will be removed completely but by working together we can make a huge impact on reducing this it, a change, I am sure we all want to see”.

“We will take steps to address the other concerns from the survey as quickly as time allows. I would like to thank the businesses and residents who took the time to complete a survey and also Somer Valley FM, the Journal and Somerset Guardian for promoting awareness of it and the Library and local businesses who kindly allowed the survey to be collected from their premises”.

Appendix 2 – Item 5 Reports from Chairs of Town Council Committees – the Planning Committee

“There are six other members of the Committee – Cllrs Linda Dunford, Brian Lawrence, Jayne Lewis, Paul Myers, Steve Plumley and John Slade. The Committee meets monthly. Together we consider planning applications on the Council’s behalf – as part of the planning process the Town Council is a statutory consultee”.

“When considering an application the Committee can support the application recommending approval; oppose the application recommending refusal; or simply not make any recommendation allowing it to be determined by B&NES Planning Officers. The Committee can also inform the planning process by commenting – this gives local colour and perspective that is lacking in the planning forms”.

“It is important to stress that when making a recommendation the Committee must take into account “relevant planning considerations”. This is a list of the main considerations”:

- The degree of compliance with all relevant Local Plan Policies.
- Traffic and highway safety issues.
- The degradation of the amenity of near neighbours, including loss of light, loss of privacy, impact on access, noise pollution and light pollution.
- The design and the materials of the proposal.
- Storm water and foul drainage.
- Crime and/or Disorder impact.

“The following issues shall **not** be taken into account”:

- Any effect on the value of the property.
- Loss of the applicant’s view over land in other ownership.
- Possible future development not included in the proposal.
- The morals or motives of the applicant.

“The Council considered 54 applications – supporting 45 (83%) and opposing 9 (17%). In 7 cases (13%) B&NES’ decision was in conflict with the Town Council’s recommendation. The Council with other Parishes as part of the Parish Liaison Meetings have lobbied for greater clarity from B&NES on instances when decisions made under delegated authority are contrary to the Parish’s view”

“We also respond to matters relating to land use, planning, and highways such as tree preservation orders and public rights of way”.

“The Planning Committee also has a more strategic dimension to its work such as responding to consultations. The Council is keen to make the most of the opportunities the Localism Act is giving communities to have a greater say on the development that takes place. Cllr Plumley and I took part in the steering group that developed B&NES’ Neighbourhood Planning Protocol”.

“We have been developing a constructive relationship with the B&NES planners in order that any dialogue we have with them is as effective as possible. There are bound to be disagreements, but by working together there will be a greater appreciation of each other’s concerns”.

“This engagement with B&NES will be important when in the coming year the development of a neighbourhood plan for Midsomer Norton. The reconstituted Midsomer Norton Forum will be conducting the initial consultation for a town plan that will, in turn, form the basis of the neighbourhood plan”.

“To conclude the Committee is always pleased to hear from members of the public and before each meeting there is a public session to enable people to ask questions, and make comments. I would also like to thank the members of the committee and officers for their support during the year”.