



**Minutes of the
FORTY EIGHTH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY
of the
BERKHAMSTED TOWN MEETING**

**Held virtually
on
THURSDAY 18 March 2021**

at 7.30 pm

PRESENT:

Council Members

Cllr G Stevens (Town Mayor)
Cllr Nigel Taylor
Cllr Nicky Woolner
Cllr Wendy Conian
Cllr Patrick Fisher
Cllr Jackie Jones
Cllr Anthony Armytage
Cllr Stephen Claughton
Cllr Paul de Hoest
Cllr Peter White
Cllr Rick Freedman

Members of the public

30

Officers

Mr T Noakes - Town Clerk (minutes)
Mrs J Harley - Deputy Town Clerk
Mrs D Beecroft – Finance and Allotment Officer

1. **Welcome from the Town Mayor, Councillor Garrick Stevens and Civic Awards.**

Cllr Stevens welcomed everyone to the virtual Town Meeting and explained that that he and the Committee chairs would talk through the slides which had been prepared for the meeting.

He was delighted to introduce Derek Simpson, President, Berkhamsted Rotary, who would be presenting the The Rotary Club of Berkhamsted Bulbourne Centenary Civic Awards (Senior) for 2021.

Mr Simpson announced the recipient of the Senior Award who this year was Joan Fisher. he paid tribute to Mrs Fisher as follows:

“**Joan Fisher** has been a resident of the Town since 1996.

She was a primary school teacher at St Thomas More School before bringing up her own children. She later worked with children with special needs and then, leaving education behind, she gained Bsc and Msc degrees in Environmental Science. Much more recently she became fully involved in voluntary work, firstly as a Trustee of the Way Inn Charity in the High Street, helping to set up the Upstairs Gallery there. She had been on the lookout for suitable premises to run classes and workshops in addition to the exhibitions. When the premises at 360 High St came up for lease the Way Inn Trust agreed to acquire the lease and Open door came into being at the beginning of 2017.

Since then, Joan and her team have steadily built up the activity level. She started with a very open mind as to what people might do. Her primary objective being to ensure that Open Door provides social and developmental opportunities for people of all backgrounds and ages. A large number of regulars ran weekly self-help classes placing a strong emphasis on community interaction. Open Door also worked with young adults, providing project work for them; they partnered with the Prince's Trust to complete good projects for Open Door, including a lot of work in the garden. They have run a volunteer programme with youngsters from Berkhamsted School coming in to help with the running of the organisation; and an apprentice programme with Astley Cooper School. A “Dementia Café” was run in conjunction with Home Instead and there have been events with the Hospice of St Francis. By the end of 2019 the place was buzzing with activity and a new Art therapy programme had just begun.

With the arrival of Covid in 2020 much of this came to a complete halt.

At that time, a friend of Joan's, Christine Delaney mounted an initiative to distribute unwanted food from closing restaurants - to people in need. This prompted Joan to consider how the kitchen at Open Door could be put to use in the pandemic. They combined resources, found a chef, Charlie, furloughed from the Olive Tree restaurant, and planned a meals delivery service. Initially food was provided by Waitrose and other stores, but as the meal service was scaled up Joan sought funding support from local government, churches, and Berkhamsted Rotary. The project of cooking and delivering hot meals to isolated people and households in need, began early in April. Meals were provided three times a week to approximately 50 people a day. Special deliveries were also made, such as cream teas on VE day. By the end of the first lock down in

September, when the chef returned to his restaurant job, 2375 meals had been delivered to very appreciative people.

The programme was restarted in November, at a reduced level, with 20 meals being delivered twice a week including a Christmas dinner. Young people on the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme also contributed baking on a weekly basis. This was maintained until the end of 2020 bringing the total of meals delivered to 2800. This was altogether an outstanding achievement which Joan would be the first to acknowledge was very much a team effort. But she must take the credit for developing the programme and steering it to its successful implementation, bringing much pleasure and comfort to people across the town who found themselves in straitened circumstances.

Joan is hopeful that when we get to the other side of the Covid pandemic, Open Door can get back again to meeting social needs for all ages, from young mums attending “baby signers” to older people who have benefitted from the gentle exercise and social contact provided through the many classes on offer.

There are many who would like to see Joan recognised for all that she has done particularly during the Covid pandemic – so I am delighted to present this award to you, Joan.”

Mrs Fisher thanked everyone who worked with her at Open Door and said it was a team effort, but she was very pleased to be presented with the award.

2. To receive apologies for absence.

None had been received.

3. To receive and confirm the minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 19 March 2020.

Cllr Paul de Hoest **proposed** and Cllr Nicky Woolner **seconded** that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2020 be **received and confirmed**. The Town Mayor will sign the minutes when possible

4. Berkhamsted and Tring Police Neighbourhood Safety Team

Sergeant Damien Hewitt joined the meeting to make a presentation to the assembly. He explained that his team who are based at the Civic Centre are operational 24-7 with 6 Police constables and 6 Community Support Officers. Berkhamsted have been assigned a dedicated PCSO who is in regular contact with the Town Council.

He advised that crime figures in Berkhamsted are down 11% from this time last year. During the pandemic they have seen an increase in neighbourhood disputes and domestic violence.

Their priorities going forward include tackling antisocial behaviour and drug use, which has been seen at the multi-storey car park. They have increased patrols and are working with DBC to manage.

At Ashridge there has been an increase in criminal damage³ caused by off-road bikes.

Across Dacorum there has been a slight increase in burglary.

Their biggest challenge has been community engagement as they have not been able to have their usual stalls, talks with schools, charity work etc., They have utilised social media to reach the community instead and it is hoped that visibility will increase with restrictions lifting.

Several members of the public raised issues with speeding in the local area, including Gravel Path and Gossoms End, which Sgt Hewitt noted.

Another queried CCTV/lighting which was due to be installed in the skate park. Sgt Hewitt will chase this up with DBC.

Cllr Garrick Stevens thanked Sgt Hewitt for his time.

5. 2020-21 Grants Awarded – Updates

The Town Clerk gave a brief update on the grants awarded in 2020-21 and spoke through some of the case studies of the awardees (attached as a separate document on the website).

A significant amount of the 2021-22 precept is budgeted for grants.

6. The Council Year 2020-21

Cllr Garrick Stevens reminded the assembly that as Town Mayor it was his duty to chair the meeting, which was an opportunity for electors of Berkhamsted to have their say.

The Covid Pandemic meant that the event had to be held virtually and he thanked those who were able to attend. He explained that since March 2020 all Council and Committee meetings had been very successfully held virtually, with good participation from residents. The current legislation to continue to hold remote meeting expires on the 6th of May 2021.

The PowerPoint presentation was displayed on screen for all attendees and Cllr Garrick Stevens highlighted the key points of the Finance and Policy Committee before handing over to Cllr Rick Freedman.

- The Council's Finance and Policy committee monitors the budget during the year and makes recommendations to Full Council regarding the level of precept for the next year. The 2021-22 precept is £294,100. A slight increase of 31 pence. This represents a Band D amount of £34.36 p/a pr 66 pence a week. The 2021/22 precept will be used to:
 - Enhance the town;
 - Support the Swan Youth Project (£30,000 for 21/22, same as in 20/21);
 - Share the cost of local PCSO support;
 - Fund climate emergency and environmental projects.

The 2021/22 budget is the biggest and most ambitious ever set by the Town Council.

It was noted that Happy Days Pre School were given a rent holiday for most of 2020 due to the pandemic.

Cllr Rick Freedman ran through the list of well-deserved grant awardees for 2020/21.

Cllr Rick Freedman handed over to Cllr Wendy Conian who is the Chair of the Transport and Environment Committee.

Since the adoption of the Town Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019, the Transport and Environment Committee have developed a number of related projects, in addition to considering day to day Transport and Environment issues.

Covid 19 has impacted the delivery of some projects.

The 2021/22 budget includes the most ambitious plan for Transport and Environment Committee project delivery in Town Council history.

Cllr Wendy Conian ran through some outstanding and delivered projects, including:

- Traffic Lights at Junction with High Street, Kings Road and Lower Kings Road: sequencing issue fixed June 2020
- Supported Local Electricity Bill in Parliament
- Working with LNWR and local firm to facilitate e-bike lease hire scheme
- Repair Café coming to Open Door – supported through funding

- EV Rapid Chargers - working with DBC/HCC and third party suppliers to get installed in Berkhamsted
- Habitat strategy group partnered with HMWT to facilitate biodiversity surveys and map local biodiversity
- Delivered new planting schemes in Greene Field Road, the Moor, Canal Fields and Castle Street embankment (to come) in partnership with Friends of Berkhamsted Station, TTB, Berkhamsted Gardeners
- Partnered with CRT to deliver habitat projects on the canal – postponed but due 2021
- Parking in Bridgewater Road: survey following new restrictions – delayed until late 2021
- Moor due for reinstatement late Spring 2021
- Air Quality Monitoring. Plans to expand air quality testing in the area delayed due to reduced traffic volumes. Pilot expected late 2021
- High Street changes to support recovery of local trade – finalising plan
- Community Bus Project. 2021/22 external consultant to investigate operating models post COVID.

Regulations govern CIL spending of which the Council has received approximately £100,000 since 2017. Projects have been formulated from public responses, the Town Council and local groups and include:

- Repaint Victorian railings opposite the Railway Station.
- Canal Fields pathway upgrade.
- Rework/update 4 main entrances to Berkhamsted.
- High Street parking changes to improve footfall.

Other plans for Transport & Environment include:

- An environmental grants scheme planned to launch in April
- Berkhamsted climate action COP26 festival
- Projects Officer to facilitate delivery of action on climate change
- Working with LNWR and local firm to facilitate e-bike lease hire scheme

Cllr Garrick Stevens, Chair of the Town Planning committee explained that the Committee meet every three weeks and, as statutory consultees, consult on planning applications in Berkhamsted. Final decision on applications is taken by Dacorum Borough Council (the planning authority). During the Council year 20/21 it considered 308 applications. The public are encouraged to send comments on applications to the Committee or

attend meetings to speak about an application relevant to them: public opinion matters.

The Town Council consulted on Dacorum's draft local plan in February 2021. The response was formulated in partnership with residents and local organisations. The planned housing numbers in the plan are excessive and would result in substantial incursions into the Green Belt

The Town Council recently supported a joint response to Cllr Williams at the Borough 12 Town and Parish Councils in Dacorum requesting the draft local plan be withdrawn as it does not reflect the need to retain Green Belt and nor does it meet the housing needs, especially for affordable or housing at social rents, in the Borough.

Cllr Garrick Stevens, Chair of the Allotment Management Team, explained that the Council owns and operates four allotment sites and would never contemplate selling off any of this land. Plots are great value at £25 per annum for ten poles. The Council is indebted to allotment representatives at each site for their hard work and dedication. They also attend the quarterly Allotment Management Team meetings with officers and councillors, to discuss issues such as waiting lists, vacancies, allotment finances and projects. In 20/21 the water supply and tanks were improved and tree work completed

Cllr Nigel Taylor, Chair of The Canal and River Partnership (CARP) explained that CARP is comprised of Town Council, Canal and River Trust , DBC, Herts & Middlesex Trust, Affinity, Environment Agency, Chiltern Chalk Streams, BCA and others. Its role is to promote and protect the Grand Union Canal and the Bulbourne chalk stream. The group has met virtually several times in 2021/21 to discuss potential projects to improve and enhance the enjoyment of our waterways. Progress of projects has been hindered by Covid but hopefully 2021 will enable the group to proceed with these.

7. Brief Open Forum - Question and Answer Session.

Residents asked the following questions/raised the following points:

- Would it be possible to strengthen parking restrictions and a camera be installed?
 - The Town Clerk will investigate
- Broadwater was bought for public use, so that football could be played on the site indefinitely. It should not be developed on.

- Requested write formally to Town Clerk for lobby of site as asset of community value
- The traffic is very busy and potentially dangerous from Kings Road to Shootersway
 - The Town Clerk will investigate
- Lack of adequate pedestrianisation on Kings Road
 - The Town Clerk will investigate
- On Kings Road, the drains do not go into the sewage system but instead the water goes into the gulleys
 - The Town Clerk will investigate
- Why can't the footpath across the boys playing field at Berhamsted School be accessed?
 - A lawyer is looking into this (as advised by the Chair of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association).
- What is the status of Entreat's planning application?
 - This is with the planning authority for decision.

Cllr Stevens thanked the assembly for attending and hoped that the 2022 annual town meeting would be able to be held in public.

The Chair of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association thanked Cllr Garrick Stevens and the Town Council and said that it was the most positive town meeting they had attended.

Cllr Garrick Stevens thanked the assembly for attending and hoped that the 2022 annual town meeting would be able to be held in public. He then closed the meeting.

8. Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 8.47 pm

Signed.....

Date.....