

MALVERN TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
held on Tuesday 16 March 2023 at
The Coach House Theatre, Grange Road, Malvern

Present

Cllr Nick Houghton (Mayor, Chairman)
Cllr Clive Fletcher
Cllr Clive Hooper
Cllr D Mead
Cllr Cynthia Palmer
Cllr David Watkins

In attendance

L Blake – Town Clerk
L Wall – Minute Clerk
Member of the Press
15 members of the public

1. MAYOR'S WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the Annual Town meeting and thanked them for their attendance.

2. MINUTES OF ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD WEDNESDAY 23 MARCH 2022

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 23 March 2022 were approved and signed as a correct record of the proceedings.

3. THE MAYOR'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2022/23

The Mayor thanked councillors and Town Council staff for their support in his second year of office. He advised that there were copies of the report available at the meeting for people to take away, and also on the Town Council's website.

Projects and events that have taken place during 2022/23:

- The Victoria Park pavilion project was progressing with the agreed sale of Belle Vue Terrace.
- The Queen's Baton Relay came through town in July which was attended by many members of the public
- Also in July, Pride flags were flown in town and a Pride event held in Priory Park, supported by a town council grant
- The Mayor's Bonanza, held in August, was very well attended and is a popular free, family day that also raises funds for the Mayor's charity.
- The Town was successful again in the Heart of England in Bloom competition, winning gold. An important aspect of the portfolio and a part of the Town Council's environmental policy is that all planting is now peat-free
- September saw the sad loss of Queen Elizabeth II, marked by flags at half-mast and the laying of lilies on the Priory Park bandstand. The Queen will be remembered by a dedicated art installation in the bus shelter at Rosebank Gardens, with art chosen from entries into a competition.
- The bus shelter at Rosebank Gardens continues to undergo its restoration works and new cladding will last longer than previous materials

UNADOPTED

- Council agreed the installation of a new 'Malvern' sign in Rosebank Gardens
- A charity calendar sold at the end of 2022 featured guide dogs from Malvern and Ledbury Guide Dogs branch, and proved a popular fundraiser
- Commitment to the Town Council's environmental policy continues with the purchase of an electric operations vehicle in the coming weeks, and electric tools already in use by the operations team
- The Christmas lights switch on event was hugely popular, and Father Christmas was kept busy all day. The Mayor thanked Father Christmas' two alter egos who were at the meeting
- A task and finish group along with the Policy and Resources Committee have been busy reviewing Town Council policies and procedures to keep them up to date and relevant, whilst the Internal Auditor has given a clean bill of health to the council's year-end accounts
- Resurfacing the road through the cemetery
- New tarmac pathway from Sherrards Green Road to Dukes Meadow
- Refurbishment of the play area in Michael's Crescent including DDA roundabout
- Replacement of fencing and refurbishment of footpath on western boundary of Rosebank Gardens
- Entranceway bed in Rosebank Gardens raised and levelled, and planted with forty Precious Ruby roses to provide an impressive entrance to the gardens
- Gifting of land at Mill Lane now completed and a public consultation held to ask what residents would like to see there. Wildlife protection is high on people's wish list, along with the provision of a pump track for cyclists
- The Town Council demonstrated its commitment to staff by making a one-off winter allowance payment to help with cost of living

Projects and events for the near future will include:

- The Mayor's Peaks Challenge Walk on 29 April – this event has two walks of differing lengths over the tops of the hills, all walkers will receive an event t-shirt and medal on finishing with any dogs completing the walk receiving a rosette. The event has been sponsored by Hills Ford with Austin & Co sponsoring the dog rosettes
- Development of land at Mill Lane and the provision of facilities
- New building at Victoria Park
- Relocation and refurbishment of skate park in Victoria Park

The Mayor finished by thanking everyone for their support, especially the Town Clerk and Operations Manager, and their teams, without whom events would not be able to take place, and the Buzzards Running Club which had held a special event to raise funds. Fundraising for the Mayor's charity, Guide Dogs, was nearing the £10,000 target set at the beginning of the year, and would be one of the highest amounts raised in recent times. If reached, a competition will be held throughout the town to name a Guide Dog puppy.

4. REPORTS FROM WARD REPRESENTATIVES OF COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILS

Cllr Cynthia Palmer, District Councillor for Priory Ward, reminded everyone that ward boundaries have changed and therefore advised anyone intending to vote in the upcoming election in May to check the location of their polling station. It would also be necessary to take a recognised form of photo ID.

County Councillor Beverley Nielsen had submitted a written report and this would be made available on the Town Council's website.

5. OPEN FORUM

Members of the public were invited to put questions to the Mayor, Town Council and Councillors. To do this, they must be a registered elector of Malvern Town.

Mr Bob Tilley: concerned at a report in the Malvern Gazette of plans to build a new school in Malvern, at The Sunshine Centre, when the Malvern Hills College building could be available. He asked the Town Council for their support and action in ensuring the Malvern Hills College remained available for education.

- Cllr Hooper, a member of the Malvern Hills College Task Force, replied that negotiations were ongoing to save the college, and the Town Council has already expressed its support for this. Funding had been agreed by Malvern Hills District Council (MHDC), Worcestershire County Council (WCC) and The Bransford Trust, although he was bound by a confidentiality clause and could say no more than that. However, he was hopeful that some classes could commence in September. The Mayor added that it was important that people also contact MHDC and WCC to voice their concerns.
- Town Councillors were also working with The Sunshine Centre to ensure they were kept up to date with any plans.

Mr Richard Beech: had read reports that the new extension of Malvern Theatres and the £20 million levelling up fund granted to the theatres would generate an extra 300,000 visitors per year. Even accounting for some of these travelling by coach, where was everyone expected to park? This was an important aspect that needed considering.

- Cllr Cynthia Palmer, as a district Councillor, advised that Malvern Hills District Council will hold their annual meeting soon and this matter should be raised there.

Mr Peter Clement had attended the meeting to express his concerns about the proposed 'Malvern' sign in Rosebank Gardens and asked if any councillors had visited the site before making a decision.

- The Mayor explained that yes, councillors had been asked to visit. This was following the October Full Council meeting when the original notice of motion had been presented to Full Council, and agreed. At the December Full Council meeting, when council was asked to decide on the location, it had been agreed to defer the item to allow for a visit to the gardens to inspect the location proposed by the Task and Finish Group. Some councillors had then visited the gardens prior to the February meeting of Full Council at which point the Mayor had used his casting vote to agree the location of the sign. He informed the meeting that all councillors had had sight of photographs showing a mock-up of the sign in its proposed location, details of cost, materials and size.

Mr Clement added that he was concerned the peace and quiet of the gardens would be spoilt by the sign and that moving the Jenny Lind memorial next to a lamp post was disgusting. It was more important to get the landslide sorted out.

- The Mayor responded that he had written to the Jenny Lind Society to inform them that the sculpture had been moved next to the gas lamp (which observes C S Lewis) and had not received a response and therefore he presumed that they were not unhappy with the move. Acknowledging that there had been three letters in the gazette also expressing disappointment at the Jenny Lind sculpture being moved, the Mayor had received several messages of support, where people felt the sculpture was now in a more suitable and viewable place.

UNADOPTED

Mr Tom Dixon said he thought Rosebank Gardens were absolutely appalling and almost derelict, and therefore money should be spent on making them attractive, instead of installing the sign which was just a gimmick.

Mrs Katherine Barber thought it was unfortunate that she and others had only heard about the sign from an article in the Malvern Gazette and wondered why the community had not been asked. She also thought the sign would not have the effect that the council hoped it would, as no one visits Rosebank Gardens. Theatre-goers cannot walk up the hill to get to the gardens and therefore the sign would be better placed at the entrance to Malvern.

- The Mayor replied that there are many decisions the Council takes without consulting the public, such as the installation of the Buzzards and Jenny Lind sculptures in Rosebank Gardens, and putting up flags in town. This is because there are twenty councillors to represent the wards.

Mrs Barber responded that councillors do not tell the residents anything.

Mrs Annie Martin was interested in the suggestion that QR codes could be used to pass on information on the sign and other sculptures/installations, but thought placing the code right next to the sign could be counter-productive as you have to get there in the first place, therefore a code at the exit to the railway station or similar might be more useful.

- The Mayor answered that the cost of producing the QR codes on plates would be minimal and there could be several placed around town. The Council would look into this.

Cllr Clive Hooper then spoke on behalf of Councillor Cynthia Palmer and Councillor David Watkins. They were against location of the Malvern sign as proposed. Their understanding of the matter was that the task and finish group was set up to look at four elements relating to the sign: location, design, size and cost.

- The Town Clerk confirmed that there were two stages to the process, the first being Full Council agreeing the idea of the sign and a budget, followed by the creation of a task and finish group to look at the details.

Cllr Hooper went on to say that the focus in the Full Council meeting had been on the location of the sign and to his recollection there was no discussion on the design, size, and cost, and therefore he had raised a concern over the accuracy of the minutes. He was also concerned that the work to install a fountain had been delayed. He had spoken to ex-Councillor Peter Smith who was instrumental in getting the Jenny Lind sculpture installed and Mr Smith was extremely upset over the decision for it to be moved.

- The Mayor responded that members at Full Council had been asked to vote on the notice of motion presented at the October meeting, this had been followed by the Task and Finish Group holding two meetings to make a recommendation to Full Council and discussions at two further Full Council meetings, where every councillor had the chance to express an opinion, objection or comment, but none had been forthcoming.

He then read out a quotation from ex-Councillor Peter Smith:

The Mayor confirmed that two members of the Town Council could submit a written request signed by them to the Mayor, to call an extraordinary meeting. In the event of the Mayor not calling an extraordinary meeting within seven days of receiving the request, those two members could call an extraordinary meeting.

UNADOPTED

Mr Roger Sutton asked if a member of the public could propose a motion in the meeting?

The Town Clerk said this would not be allowed as it was not an item on the agenda, and would not give other residents not present at the meeting the chance to discuss the subject. It was possible, however, to propose a town poll, but the results of the poll would not overturn the council decision already made, was not binding and would cost in the region of £4,000.

Mr Chris Bassett, in his role as Executive Trustee for The Coach House Theatre, thanked Malvern Town Council for their support by way of a grant, which had helped bring the theatre back to life and provide a great facility for the town.

The Mayor thanked everyone for attending and contributing to the meeting.

6. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm.

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 20 March 2024 at 7.00 pm. Venue to be arranged.

.....
(Mayor)

DRAFT