

MALVERN TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
held on Thursday 18 April 2024 at
Poolbrook Village Hall, Poolbrook road, Malvern

Present

Cllr Clive Hooper (Mayor, Chair)
Cllr Nick Houghton
Cllr Sean Austin
Cllr Anne Cherry
Cllr Clive Fletcher
Cllr Iain Dawson
Cllr David Watkins
Cllr Julie MacLusky

Cllr David Mead
Cllr Freya Matthews-Jones
Cllr Jude Green
Cllr Karen Newbigging
Cllr Marilyn Birks
6 members of the public
Linda Blake, Town Clerk
Louise Wall, Minute Clerk

1. MAYOR'S WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

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

He then gave a brief introduction to what the Town Council did for the benefit of members of the public at the meeting as follows:

The Town Council looked after:

- Bedding displays throughout the town
- Great Malvern Cemetery
- Rose Bank Gardens
- Allotments
- Play areas
- Sports pitches and Pavilions
- Gas lamps
- Bins
- Benches
- Bus shelters
- A number of Green and Open Spaces

It aimed to protect and improve the environment, and in 2022 adopted an environmental policy.

The Town Council also commented on planning applications in its wards.

The Town Council put on various events throughout the year, and in 2023/24 these included:

- Remembrance commemorations
- Music in the Park
- Armed Forces Day
- Christmas events
- Civic service
- Peaks Challenge

Upcoming events included the Mayor's Civic Service and the Peaks Challenge.

Annual events organised by the Town Council are for the benefit of the residents. Most raise funds for the Mayor's charity. These events normally include the Health and Wellbeing Fair, the Mayor's Peaks Challenge, Music in the Park, Armed Forces Day, The Mayor's Bonanza, Remembrance Commemorations, the Christmas Festival, and civic services and heritage days. We were not able to do the wellbeing fair or the Bonanza in the past year.

The charity supported by the Mayor this year had been St Richard's Hospice, which celebrated their 40th anniversary this year. The charity carried out important work caring for adults who could not be cured, and their families, either at home or at the hospice in Wildwood. They had community teams throughout South Worcestershire which aimed to give people quality of life for as long as possible.

It costs £12 million each year to keep the hospice running and their services were offered free of charge to the public. Whilst they received £2 million of funding from the NHS, the remainder had to be raised from donations, shops and legacies. There were 18 shops in Worcestershire, with five in Malvern, Malvern Link and Barnards Green.

2. THE MAYOR'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2023/24

The Mayor noted that in the past a detailed written annual report had been produced but this had been discontinued after 2014. He suggested that it may be worth looking at bringing this back as a reference document for inclusion on the Town's website, but noted that that would be a matter for the Council's Policy and Resources Committee to consider. In the absence of such a document, however, the Mayor noted that officers had produced a helpful Annual Round-Up 2023/24 leaflet, copies of which had been circulated to those present at the meeting.

An Annual Round-Up document for 2023/24 had been circulated prior to meeting and the Mayor reported on the main points from this document as follows:

- The entranceway bed in Rose Bank Gardens had been raised and levelled and planted with forty Precious Ruby roses.
- The community hub at Victoria Park was now nearing completion. When finished, there would be a café, meeting room for community use, public toilets and the Town Council offices.
- The pump track project at Adam Lee was ongoing, with plans including development of a wetlands area, a parking area and improvements to the existing play area.
- The skatepark consultation had finished, with many useful responses received, which would be incorporated into the final design.
- Playground refurbishments continued with Michael Crescent and Jamaica Crescent play areas having received new pieces of equipment.
- The Town's entry to Heart of England in Bloom Competition had been a success with the town receiving a gold award and being nominated for the national scheme.

- Music in the Park had been successful last summer, and another programme of music events would start in May this year.
- The Purple Lights for Pancreatic Cancer awareness month saw several of the Town Council's assets lit up in purple, such as North Malvern Clock face, the buzzards in Rose Bank Gardens and the clock on Barnards Green Bus Shelter.
- The Christmas lights switch on event in November saw over £1,100 raised in Father Christmas' grotto alone. As usual, it was a very well attended event.
- Environmental aspects of the Town Council's operations continued to be considered, with an electric vehicle now in operation, and a large tank installed at the cemetery to collect rainwater for watering of plants.
- A recent initiative was that of the Happy to Chat benches, an idea put forward by Cllr MacLusky and David Watkins. Signs were now installed on three benches, one in each of the following areas: Rose Bank Gardens, Victoria Park and Station Gardens.
- The Town Council's Grants Scheme had been a success with many local organisations and groups benefitting from a large or small grant.
- Prior to the Annual Town meeting, there had been a presentation on the twinning of Malvern with Bagnères de Bigorre in France, and Malvern also twinned with Mariánské Lázně. Twinning with Korosten in Ukraine was currently being considered.
- Town Council staff had made a good job of getting the budget to balance last year. In 2024/25, inflationary increases and costs associated with the provision of the new building at Victoria Park would increase net expenditure to £939,000, not taking into account any movements in earmarked reserves, and £828,000 taking into account movements in earmarked reserves and other funding. The precept for 2024/25 was set at £828,500, reflecting an increase of 9.4% from the precept level in 2023/24. The precept had therefore increased but only by approximately 54 pence for a Band D Household per month.
- A new Community Engagement Task and Finish Group had been set up to develop the Council's Community Engagement Strategy.
- Other things that had taken place over the past twelve months included the sale of the building at Belle Vue Terrace, where the Town Council would remain as tenants until moving into the new building at Victoria Park in mid-June.
- Malvern Hills District Council had shown a genuine wish to consult and work with the Town Council on community projects. The Mayor had met with the county councillor for highways, Mike Rouse, and he hoped worked would be carried out regarding traffic calming in the area, and the installation of zebra crossings, one linking the Splash centre to the car park.
- In his capacity as Mayor, Cllr Hooper had visited several care homes, including Avenue Care Home just before Christmas where he took part in packing bags of supplies for the homeless.

- He had also opened Elgar Court Care Home in July but returned earlier in the week to attend a 104th birthday party for a resident.

Other engagements included:

- Opening of travel agency in Malvern
- Reception for twinning arrangements
- Attending the Teachers Speech and Drama conference
- The opening of Community Action's new offices
- Function at Citizens Advice premises in Prospect View, attended by Princess Anne
- Unveiling of a plaque at the historic donkey shed
- Opening of new St Richard's charity shop
- Friends of Malvern event
- Judging of Christmas window displays
- St Richard's Hospice lunch, where over £2,000 was raised

Upcoming events would include:

- A reception for the twinning arrangement with Mariánské Lázně
- The Mayor's Civic Service
- The Mayor's Peaks Challenge

3. 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.

4. REPORTS FROM WARD REPRESENTATIVES OF COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILS

There were no reports from ward representatives of County and District Councils.

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.

Miriam Haywood had sent prior notice of the following questions and therefore responses were presented at the meeting:

1. Does the town council have a children and young people strategy? If so, what are the main goals and expected outcomes for the next 5 years.
 - The Town Council did not have responsibility for such a strategy but was keen to engage with the community and would be happy to discuss this further with Miriam Haywood.
2. How many responses were received for the skate park consultation and what are the main findings?
 - 243 responses were received and 73% of these were in favour of the suggested area for relocation of the skatepark following building of the new hub at Victoria Park. Other suggestions and comments from the consultation and survey would be considered.
3. What evidence does the town council have that another skatepark is needed or wanted?

- In both cases, local residents and groups have approached the Town Council to request these facilities and to provide evidence of support for them. It was clear from consultations held for both the skatepark and the pump track that both were wanted.
4. Will the council be considering and consulting on other possible provision instead (e.g splash pad, roller skate rink, more money on other young people services etc).
- Section 106 monies allocated for Victoria Park have to be spent on the provision of a new skatepark and for Adam Lee they have been allocated for the pump track and the expansion of the children's play area. If there was a call for a certain provision, then the Town Council could work with a focus group to put it into practice, as had happened with the basketball courts, and now with the skatepark. It was unlikely however that a splash pad would be installed due to the high cost and maintenance requirements.

Neil Morton asked the following questions regarding the new community hub:

1. What was the tendered sum for the two-storey building?
 2. What is the final cost for the single storey building that has been supplied?
 3. Why was the contract not re-tendered when the decision was made not to proceed with the two-storey building but proceed with a single storey building? He expressed the view that in his opinion this was a significant material change and therefore should have been re-tendered to ensure value for money.
 4. Why the public consultation was for a two-storey building when it was a single storey building that was built. Did this consultation meet the requirements of the Public Loan Board?
- Neil Morton then asked a further question, as to why the Town Council did not follow guidance in publishing reports and that he objected to verbal reports being included on an agenda as it did not give him the opportunity to ask questions about the content. He felt that a written report should always be submitted and put on the website.
 - The Town Clerk responded that as there had not been prior notice of these questions, and that some required a more detailed response, it would take time to gather the correct information. A response to Neil Morton would be sent once this information had been gathered and collated.

Miriam Haywood then asked how the Town Council works, in terms of governance and accountability.

- The Mayor explained that the town meeting was not a council meeting, but he was chairing the meeting on behalf of the council. At a normal council meeting councillors worked together with the Town Clerk who put together an agenda, the meeting was chaired by the Mayor and members of the public were invited to attend. It was explained that there was a structure for matters to be discussed by various committees and task and finish groups, which then were referred to Full Council for collective decision. It was explained that no one councillor could make a decision but the Chair of council or a committee could use their casting vote in the event of a tied decision.

6. **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The Mayor thanked the Town Clerk and all staff including the operations team, for all the work they did over the course of the year.

The meeting ended at 8.20 pm.

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 19 March 2025 at 7.00 pm. Venue to be arranged.

.....
(Mayor)