



FARNHAM TOWN COUNCIL

A

Minutes Council

Time and date

6.00 pm on Thursday 14th December, 2023

Place

Council Chamber - Farnham Town Hall

Councillors

Councillor Alan Earwaker (Mayor)
Councillor David Beaman
Councillor Mat Brown
Councillor Sally Dickson
Councillor Tony Fairclough
Councillor George Hesse
Councillor Chris Jackman
Councillor Andrew Laughton
Councillor Michaela Martin
Councillor Brodie Mauluka
Councillor Mark Merryweather
Councillor George Murray
Councillor John Ward
Councillor Graham White
Councillor Tim Woodhouse

Apologies for absence

Kika Mirylees

Officers Present:

Iain Lynch, Town Clerk, Iain McCready, Business and Facilities Manager.

There were 2 members of the public and 1 member of the press in attendance.

Prior to the meeting, prayers were led by Revd Jane Walker, Vicar of the benefice of Frensham.

C77/22 Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Mirylees.

C78/22 Disclosures of Interest

There were no disclosures of interest.

C79/22 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26th October were agreed as a correct record.

C80/22 Questions and Statements by the Public

Barbara Rogers of Castle Street said that the state of the streets were appalling. She had personally swept leaves and cleaned litter in Castle Street but the state of cleanliness should be to a reasonable standard.

In response, the Mayor thanked her for what she did to keep Farnham looking good. He advised that the street cleaning was a matter for Waverley Borough Council and Farnham Town Council would take it up with the Borough Council.

C81/22 Town Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor introduced his announcements by noting it had been a very busy time for the community as well as for Farnham Town Council and he had been privileged be part of some key local community events.

These included:

- Being part of the judging panel for the Surrey Artist of the Year hosted by the New Ashgate Gallery and won by Lucy Nicholls for her amazing paper sculptures.
- The main remembrance service in November with over 350 people in the parade from Castle Street and well over 1000 people at the war memorial.
- The 220th Venison Dinner which included using the Byworth Cup for the Loyal Toast on the 400th anniversary of it being donated to the town by John Byworth.
- A full events programme, with the Christmas Lights Switch-on, the Civic Christmas carol Service with the Farnham Youth Choir, and the Christmas Market all ably arranged by the FTC team.

The Mayor advised that he had been delighted to join FTC contractors, Landform Consultants, to receive the British Association of Landscape Industries Association Principal Award for the repurposing of the Hale Chapels into the Hale Chapels Garden. This was an outstanding achievement for Farnham.

The Mayor concluded his announcements by wishing all councillors, staff and volunteers a very happy Christmas.

C82/22 Questions by Members

There were no Questions by Members.

C83/22 Working Group Notes

A) Environment

I Cllr Brown reported that the Environment meeting in November had been very fruitful and had included a presentation by Ben McCallan of Surrey County Council. He had offered to work with Farnham Town Council to put its proposed Climate Action Plan alongside Surrey County Council's.

Cllr Brown reported that Libby Ralph of the Farnham Biodiversity Partnership had provided an update of its work, and particularly actions to support beaver and water vole habitats. The group had worked with FTC in creating a new wildlife area in Gostrey Meadow behind the old Bowls Pavilion. This had included a 'dead hedge' bee and bug hotels and a hibernaculum. A native hedge was also planned and raised beds for pollinator-friendly planting opportunities. This was an important green corridor in the town centre.

There had been a discussion on supporting the purchase of water ranger kits for volunteers to test water quality.

- 2 In terms of open spaces, Council noted the likely need for planning permission for the new 'Another Brick in the Wall' sculpture and agreed to support the community group with an application.

It was RESOLVED unanimously that Farnham Town Council submit a planning application in conjunction with Keppel Nowson to renew the current position of installing sculptures within the park.

- 3 Council noted the current position with Council allotments noting that renewals had recently been issued. It was noted these were still in paper form and suggested that consideration be given to future renewals being done electronically. It was agreed to increase the fees from October 2024. It was also noted that there was uncertainty over the ownership of the access to the six bells site and agreed it would be helpful if this were formally registered.

It was RESOLVED unanimously to:

- i) **Apply to register the access land to Six Bells Allotment for better management of the site.**
- ii) **Increase the cost of a single plot by £5:00 to £67.50 from October 2024.**

- 4 Council noted the outcome of a recent cemetery headstone application.

B) Strategy & Resources

Cllr White introduced the notes of the Strategy & Resources Working Group held on 5th December.

I Strategy Workshop.

Cllr White said that the workshop led by facilitator David Carden had worked well and one of the outcomes was the inclusion of £90,000 in the draft budget for additional support for Younger People activities in the coming financial year. There would be further consideration on whether the resources should be used to underpin and strengthen existing community groups providing services for young people or whether Farnham Town Council should create a new role to co-ordinate other organisations services or provide direct delivery of youth work. It was agreed that the costs and risks of direct delivery would need to be carefully considered with a preference to strengthen existing organisation such as Hale Community Centre, 40 Degreez and the Wrecclisham Community Centre where there could be an early impact.

Council noted matters progressed since the Workshop, on climate issues, a planned review of the website, and a meeting with residents' groups and others on the Neighbourhood Plan update, town centre cleansing arrangements (considered by WBC to be difficult to extract from the wider contract), and the potential of future assets transfers with initial priority for these being:

1. Borelli Walk (after Brightwells is completed but excluding responsibility for the bridges),
2. The Brightwells green space (although this may be sought by the County Council)
3. Morley Road Recreation Ground (given its links to the allotments).

Council reaffirmed that none of the existing activities of the Council were to be stopped.

- i) **It was RESOLVED unanimously that the important focus in the short to medium term would be:**
Farnham Infrastructure Programme; Younger people; climate and sustainability; Neighbourhood Plan update; the impact of Brightwells; relationship with principal authorities given the financial pressures facing them; synergy with the emerging Business Improvement District; and consolidating and strengthening Farnham's position as a World Craft Town as part of the local economy.

It was noted that the next steps would be to create a five year business plan in conjunction with the facilitator with clear objectives, outcomes and resourcing. The existing vision was endorsed.

- ii) **It was resolved unanimously that the Council's vision be:**
Farnham Town Council strives to be the influential and effective voice for Farnham bringing together the views of all organisations working for the good of the town and enhancing the well-being of all the community.

Farnham Town Council aims to be an efficient and effective organisation providing high-quality, sustainable services and facilities for the residents and businesses of Farnham whilst addressing the climate challenge, with a strong and respected voice representing Farnham's best interests".

2 **Dates and length of meetings**

Cllr White advised that after discussion with each Working Group and Lead Member there were some proposed adjustments to meeting times with the intent of balancing the needs of those who were employed and to avoid conflict with other meetings.

- iii) **It was resolved *nem con* that times for main meetings be as follows:**
- **Council 6pm**
 - **Community Working Group 10am**
 - **Environment Working Group 4.30pm**
 - **Strategy & Resources 2pm on Tuesdays.**
 - **Planning & Licensing 9.30 on Mondays**
 - **Task Groups to fit with membership with a preference for late afternoons.**

3 **Contracts and assets**

Council noted the report on contracts and assets and that a meeting with Ridgeway School was planned for 11th January, to which all councillors were invited, to

receive an update on plans for Gostrey Meadow. Council noted that it appeared the South Street Club appeared to have gone into liquidation and the future of the building was uncertain. It was also noted that the Government's Community Ownership Fund allowed investment in buildings owned by town and parish councils and for the purchase of assets that may be lost for the community.

- iv) **It was resolved unanimously that Officers investigate whether:**
- 1) **The Community Ownership Fund was suitable for Farnham projects;**
 - 2) **There were transfer of ownership opportunities from Waverley or Surrey, whether land or buildings;**
 - 3) **There were beneficial options, in discussion with the liquidators, for retaining the South Street Club building as a community asset.**

4 **Farnham Infrastructure Programme**

Cllr Beaman reported that he had taken on board comments from Councillors and the draft report at Annex I would form the basis for comments of the FTC position on the consultation draft design at the Farnham Infrastructure Programme Board on 15th.

Council discussed the various elements and had continuing concern over the impact of the right hand turn at the bottom of Castle Street both during construction phase and after with the potential to increase queuing in Downing Street. The idea of the bus stop outside the Queen's head being in a layby rather than in main traffic was important to avoid issues.

Other comments from the Working group agreed were that Park Row should have access for residents only but the restriction be lifted for events when Castle Street is closed; seating and bike racks should be placed between the street trees especially in the Borough and Downing Street to minimise additional clutter; the mini-roundabout at Bear Lane and High Park Road could be removed; the roadway in Castle Street north of Long garden Walk could be used for additional parking rather than wider footways.

Cllr Ward said he had been told putting the cycle route through Farnham Park would not solve the problem as an alternate to High Park Road, but he was not convinced. He had been told for many years that an HGV ban was not legal or enforceable but one has now been introduced. In terms of the negative impact of new kerbs in Castle Street on events, the Council should continue to fight against them. Similarly, he felt the crossing at Longbridge should be pushed for. Cllr Hesse agreed especially given the recent accidents, and since the Town Council was proposing changes that would result in savings, these could be used to fund the crossing. Cllr White said a crossing by the railway station was also required.

Council also agreed that mitigation of the effect of the works should have high priority in both North and South Farnham. Cllr Martin advised that the county councillors were seeking for the rear of Woolmead to be two way during the works to minimise disruption.

After further discussion,

- v) **It was RESOLVED unanimously that an amended response including comments set out below and agreed at Council be endorsed:**
- **The provision of a cycleway along High Park Road is not supported (Nem con with one abstention)**

- There was no need to widen the pavement on the west side of Woolmead Road from the Royal Deer Junction to its junction with Bear Lane (*Nem con* with three abstentions)
- Widening the pavement outside Castleton Dentists was not required and should be retained to provide parking spaces for residents to partially offset the loss of parking spaces elsewhere on Castle Street (*Nem con*)
- The delivery bay proposed to be located adjacent to the two disabled parking spaces should be moved to avoid any conflict with deliveries taking place outside hospitality venues (*Nem con* with four abstentions)
- Should the taxi rank be moved to its proposed new location the ironstone would need to be strengthened by bonding with resin (*nem con*).

5 Reports of Task Groups

Cllr Martin reported that the Infrastructure Planning Group had received a good presentation by Elaine Martin (SCC) on the design of the Town Centre Scheme which formed the background to the comments agreed at Council. There had also been a good meeting with community groups on 23rd November at the start of the Neighbourhood Plan update. Andrew Longley (WBC) had given an interesting presentation on preparing the new Waverley Local Plan. There would be a joint call for sites with information shared for the Neighbourhood Plan and Local Plan. FTC next steps would be to begin looking at where infrastructure could be improved to support development.

Cllr Beaman advised that Waverley had been successful in defending the challenge against Local Plan Part 2 but the expected protection of Neighbourhood Plans to 5 years was still awaiting the Government's announcement.

There was concern that two appeals have now been approved where the Inspector had said Neighbourhood Plans were permissive despite being part of the Borough Development Plan. If a principal were established that neighbourhood plan site allocations are only permissive, then land allocation is meaningless.

After being proposed by Cllr Ward, seconded by Cllr Martin :

- vi) **It was RESOLVED unanimously that the matter of the 'permissive' interpretation be raised with the Secretary of State, Michael Gove and the Planning Inspectorate having taken advice from Steve Tilbury (FTC Planning advisor) and Locality.**

6 Consultations

Council welcomed the consultation the Traffic Camera Enforcement to help with the management of HGVs.

- vii) **It was RESOLVED unanimously that the proposed penalty for HGVs that flouted the restrictions was too low and should be the maximum allowed under the legislation.**

Council noted the details of infrastructure for the proposed solar panels in the Upper Hart Car Park were awaited but

- viii) **It was RESOLVED unanimously to congratulate WBC on the initiative and welcome the concept of solar panel power generation in appropriate**

locations such as the Upper Hart Car Park and seeks further details of the electrical infrastructure.

Council considered the consultation by SCC on amendments to waiting and parking restrictions and agreed individual councillors should respond directly on details in their own wards by the 4th January. In terms of the on-street parking charges Council expressed concern to ensure that the previous agreement for ringfencing income from Farnham to be spent in Farnham was not lost.

- ix) **It was RESOLVED unanimously that the FTC response included the need for the ringfencing and reinvestment of income back into Farnham improvements as was the original agreement for the introduction of on-street charging in the town.**

6 Town Clerk Update

Council noted that the Pay Agreement for 2023/24 had been agreed between The National Joint Council for Local Government Services including employer and union representatives and was being implemented in the December payroll in accordance with the scheme of delegation.

Cllr Dickson arrived at 7.25

C84/22 Budget 2024-25

Cllr White introduced the budget report from Strategy & Resources. It had been carefully considered by the Working Group along with detailed notes for specific lines of the budget to explain changes.

Council noted the draft budget had been drawn up based on a review of expenditure in 2023/24 and on the 2022/23 outturn and also in a context of continuing economic pressures and high inflation. It also takes into account evolving priorities of the new administration elected in May 2023 and the Strategy Workshop held on November 4th. The aim was to create a budget that delivered the aspirations of Council and the needs of the community but without increasing the precept level to a point that would leave a surplus at the end of the year.

Inflation had been running at a 40 year high and was not expected to return to its target rate until 2024. In drawing up the FTC budget, and mindful of the impact on residents, this was a cautious budget and with inflation provision kept low. A prudent approach for potential sponsorship and income from activities has been taken based on experience in 2023-24 but with an increase of some elements. Investment income with rising bank rates had been increased with the expectation that they would continue at a higher level. The potential impact of pressures on the budgets of principal authorities and the increasing likelihood that there may be a need to further top up or take on services such as street cleansing and litter collection to meet the aspirations of the local community was unknown and would need to be absorbed. It was hoped that there may be some contribution from the new Business Improvement District for matters such as CCTV to promote community safety, and the Christmas lights renewal but no assumptions had been made.

Council noted the addition of £90,000 to underpin and deliver much need support for younger people and that the budget included reallocated funding for a part time Democratic Service Officer and fundraiser/project officer to provide capacity to draw down additional external resources for projects being progressed by FTC. The environmental and community initiatives allocation had been maintained.

In discussion, Cllr Woodhouse asked that consideration be given to reducing print and making more publications online where possible.

Overall, Council agreed it was a good budget well put together and noted that how it would be funded in terms of precept level, fees and charges, or use of any reserves would be agreed at the January meeting.

It was RESOLVED Unanimously that Council set the 2024/25 budget at £1,806,950.

C85/22 Planning and Licensing Applications

Council received the Notes of the Planning and Licensing Consultative Group meetings held on 30th October, 13th November, 27th November, and 11th December at Appendices E, F, G and H of its agenda.

Cllr Beaman advised that Cala Homes had a short consultation planned for the latest Coxbridge proposals, and suggested the display boards be available at the Town Hall to enable a longer period for people to see what was proposed.

Concern was expressed by Council over the Thames Water response since they now said they have sewerage capacity for 320 homes which was a concern given their track record. On a proposal by Cllr Beaman, seconded by Cllr Murray, **it was RESOLVED *nem con* that Thames Water be asked to provide reassurance on the capacity of the their sewerage infrastructure.**

C86/22 Actions taken under the Scheme of Delegation

The Town Clerk advised that an insurance claim had been received on land taken over from WBC that related to an incident when it was under WBC ownership. This was being dealt with.

C87/22 Reports from Other Councils

1. Cllr Martin reported on the Your Fund Surrey allocation for each County Councillor. There was £50,000 to be spent by March 2025.
2. Council recorded its best wishes to Cllr Peter Clark who was stepping down as Deputy Leader of Waverley Borough Council for health reasons.
3. Congratulations were given to Cllr Fairclough on becoming Deputy Leader at Waverley Borough Council and on Cllr Murray on being appointed to the Waverley Executive.

C88/22 Reports from Outside Bodies

1. Cllr Beaman reported that the Wey Valley Community Rail Partnership was inviting bids for project funding by 31st December.
2. Cllr Hesse reported on the recent Farnborough Airport Consultative Committee and circulated a note of the points arising. There was concern expressed that Farnborough Airport was not fulfilling its role or legislative requirements. There had been a huge number of complaints over the proposed expansion of the airport.

C89/22 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was agreed as 6pm on 25th January 2024.

The Mayor closed the meeting at 8.08pm

Chairman

Date