



FARNHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes Annual Town Meeting of Electors

Time and date

6.30pm Thursday 18 March 2021

Place

Held virtually by Zoom Webinar

Attendance:

Meeting attended by 91 members of the public.

- The Town Mayor (Cllr Pat Evans) (Chairman)
- The Deputy Mayor (Cllr Alan Earwaker)

- Cllr David Attfield
- Cllr David Beaman
- Cllr Roger Blishen
- Cllr Carole Cockburn
- Cllr Sally Dickson
- Cllr Paula Dunsmore
- Cllr Brian Edmonds
- Cllr John Scotty Fraser
- Cllr Michaela Gray
- Cllr George Hesse
- Cllr Michaela Martin
- Cllr Andy Macleod
- Cllr Mark Merryweather
- Cllr Kika Mirylees
- Cllr John Neale (Leader)
- Cllr John Ward

- Town Clerk (Iain Lynch)

- Officers (Iain McCready, Katie Knowles)

1. Welcome by the Mayor of Farnham, Cllr Pat Evans

The Town Mayor opened the meeting of electors at 6.39pm and presented a short preamble. In 2020 there was no Annual Town Meeting as the first national lock down had just occurred. This year the meeting was being held virtually by Zoom.

The Town Mayor explained this was a meeting for the electors of Farnham and was a statutory meeting held once a year. Only those who live and worked in Farnham could participate in the meeting.

The Mayor introduced the Leader, Cllr John Neale as Lead Councillor of the Finance and Strategy Working Group.

2. The Mayor of Farnham

The Mayor described the role and responsibilities of the Town Mayor giving examples of the Civic and Council functions attended during her two years in office (due to Covid) and her chosen Charities Space to Grow and Hale Community Centre.

The year had been unusual due to the pandemic. During a typical year, The Mayor hosted and attended events and represented the Town elsewhere. The Mayor was the first citizen of the Farnham, and an ambassador of the Town, promoting and upholding the character of Farnham and supporting community groups and projects. The Town Mayor Chaired the Farnham Town Council meetings.

At the beginning of the pandemic Farnham Town Council developed a partnership with Farnham Maltings, and 30 organisations to help and support the community. The Town Council hosted the coronavirus helpline for residents. The organisations that came together at the start of the pandemic continued to meet fortnightly, as 'Farnham Connect'. A fund had been set up thanks to the support of residents of Farnham had reached £50,000. A committee met regularly to allocate support and £30,000 had been allocated to date.

The Mayor outlined the different duties and responsibilities of Farnham Town Council, Waverley Borough Council and Surrey County Council.

The Mayor invited the Lead Members of the five Working Groups to present details of their activity during the year.

3. Reports from Working Groups

i) Tourism and Events Working Group

Cllr Earwaker presented a summary of events undertaken by the Tourism and Events Working Group in 2020/21.

Last year the programme of events had been significantly impacted by Covid restrictions, with 50% being postponed or cancelled. The events that took place had to be Covid safe. For example, for the Music in the Meadow event, the grass was marked out with Covid safe bubbles. For Christmas 2020, 7 beacons of light were placed in the communities of Farnham and switched on simultaneously. This was a great success and there were plans to repeat this in 2021. The Farmers' Market was thought to be the first market in the area to re-open in a covid-safe way. This resulted in visits from operators elsewhere to see how Farnham had achieved this under covid restrictions. The first West Street Craft Market took place during October Craft Month

and there were plans to repeat this during 2021. Farnham Town Council supported the Christmas shopping event in 2020, by providing buskers.

Cllr Earwaker highlighted two leaflets that the Town Council had produced supporting businesses. 'Open for business' which included information about how COVID-19 is affecting Farnham including services, transport, parking and planned events and 'We are Farnham' helped businesses achieve online purchases. This would continue when non-essential shops were permitted to open.

Cllr Earwaker thanked the contribution of the Council's sponsors Kidrapinet Solicitors and Abbeyfield Way Valley Society.

ii) Cemetery Services

Cllr Cockburn presented the work of the Cemetery and Appeals Working Group. The Town Council had four cemeteries that were all very different. Badshot Lea Cemetery was enclosed and further into the site presented a tranquil place to sit and reflect. The Cemetery was entered into Farnham in Bloom as part of a drive to raise standards and won a gold award. West Street Cemetery was the largest and was located next to the Allotments.

There had been a lot of work to improve the Garden of Reflection. Green Lane was positioned on a slope with lovely views across the Town and finally Upper Hale that was a closed cemetery when the Town Council took it over, but now had additional burial space using old pathways. The Town Council continued to improve the offer available to residents who were looking for an alternative to a burial or ashes internment. The Town Council issued memorial permits to stonemasons for new or existing memorials as well as fixing memorials of historical or architectural merit. In terms of future plans, the Town Council would continue to make the cemeteries beautiful places to visit, with bulb planting and wildflower areas and the ongoing maintenance to a high standard. Cllr Cockburn thanked the council team for the improvements to the service.

iii) Community Enhancement

Cllr Dickson outlined the work of the Community Enhancement Working Group. Much of the work was supported by the outside work team. Each year there were several competitions which in 2020 went online. One of the biggest community activities of the year would be the planting up the hanging baskets which were displayed around the Town. This year it was undertaken by the five members of the outside work team supported by volunteers, in addition to the rest of the Town including the planters in the Town Centre installed to facilitate social distancing. This year's displays were magnificent despite the challenges. The vehicles used by the outside work team are green vehicles either hydrogen or electric. The variety of outside spaces was varied. The allotments should be celebrated as they had provided a community focus and wellbeing opportunities during the lock down.

Cllr Dickson congratulated the outside team, Iain McCreedy and all the volunteers for all their hard work. Cllr Dickson thanked the all the sponsors whose contributions had made such a difference.

iv) Planning and Licensing Working Group

Cllr Edmonds outlined the work of the Planning and Licensing Working Group. The Working Group referenced several key planning policy documents when determining its comments on planning applications. The Working Group reviewed 869 applications during 2021-22, of which 467 were householder applications varying from extensions to new dwellings. Cllr Edmonds explained the role of the Planning Inspectorate.

Olive Graham referenced a building built on Lower Bourne opposite the Fox Pub which had not been built according to the planning permission. It had been built in the wrong place, to the wrong specification using the wrong materials. It was questioned how this could be allowed.

Cllr Edmonds explained planning enforcement was a Borough Council matter. Cllr Cockburn advised that this was an ongoing matter. Planning enforcement had resulted for the current planning application that gives the applicant the opportunity to put right the wrong. The process must take its course and Officers were seeking a resolution on this site. However, if the applicant did not agree with Waverley Borough Council's decision, they had the right of appeal which may delay matters further.

The Mayor explained that Farnham Town Council was not the enforcement authority as Waverley Borough Council was the Planning Authority.

v) Strategy and Finance Working Group

Cllr Neale introduced the work of the Strategy and Finance Group. The gross budget for the coming year was similar to that of the previous year. The projected income, however, had seen a reduction due to the impact of the pandemic. Over the year they had not been able to hold many of the events so the income achieved was lower than projected a year ago, with a reduction of £50,000 out of the income the Town Council was able to ordinarily generate. The small grant the Council received as a result of a change the way Council tax was calculated was gradually being reduced. As a result the Town Council would be using its own reserves to help minimise the impact of an increase in the precept, in a difficult financial year. The Leader explained how the budget was allocated to different Council activities during the year.

In terms of plans for 2021/22, over the last couple of years the Town Council had developed a good working relationship with Waverley Borough Council and Surrey County Council through, in particular, the Farnham Infrastructure Programme. The Town Council took a strong interest in activities in the Town managed by its partners, including the Town's assets such as Farnham Museum and the Library Service and parks and green spaces. It was also taking a keen interest on what was happening outside the Farnham area in Hampshire. There was a significant amount of development happening close to Farnham including plans for an incinerator at Alton.

Cllr Neale said the Farnham Infrastructure Plan was supported by all three tiers of Council. Following input from residents and businesses in Farnham through virtual Local Liaison Forums the Programme Team consulted on the Optimised Infrastructure Plan. Farnham Town Council had agreed its response to the document at a meeting of the Full Council.

The Council would continue to maintain and improve the events being held as discussed during the evening. The Council had supported businesses in the Town in their recovery and supporting the evolving Business Improvement District. The Town

Council continued to support initiatives that supported the Towns World Craft Status. The Town Council was also involved in the Brightwell's Project.

The Leader thanked the Councillors, Town Clerk and Officers for the work undertaken during a difficult year including the contribution from the residents of Farnham.

vi) Questions from residents of Farnham

- i) A resident asked for clarification in respect of the precept and whether it had in fact increased and not reduced as reported in the presentation.

The Town Clerk explained that there were exemptions for people that paid council tax. Further, because of the difficulties communities had faced, Waverley had reduced the expected collection rate to 98%. These figures were used as a multiplier of Band D equivalent properties. As a result, the net expenditure was divided by a smaller number of properties. Even though FTC had softened the impact by using £25,000 of its reserves, and reducing its overall budget, there was a small increase in the Band D total.

- ii) David Gill paid tribute to Farnham Town Council, to the Mayor for her long service, the Town Councillors, Town Clerk and all the staff who had gone above and beyond the call of duty in what had been a challenging year.
- iii) Zophia Lovell asked a question in relation to an article in Farnham Herald on a proposal for a Surrey Unitary. She asked for the Farnham Town Council view on the proposal given that Parish and Town Councils could be given more powers.

Cllr Ward commented that Surrey County Council would like a single Unitary and this would come back. Surrey planned to have 23 unelected regional networks and Town and Parish Councils powers would be reduced if this happened.

Cllr Cockburn championed Town and Parish Councils who were the heart of the community. It was where the experience and knowledge lied. The Town Council would prove its worth. Localism was the local expertise.

Cllr Neale reported FTC were proactively working on shaping the Council's role.

- iv) Louise Daborn asked as a Farnham resident and a member of the Soroptimist International, referencing a recent national event and the publicity given to whether women feel safe on streets, whether Farnham Town Council felt these were safe for women and if not, what were the plans to ensure they became so?

The Town Mayor referred to the recent high-profile event surrounding Sarah Everard. All the members of FTC felt that the streets should be safe for everybody including women but no discussion had taken place as it was so very recent.

Cllr Neale commented the three tiers of Council would want to take on board these issues in the Infrastructure Programme e.g., when walkways and cycle ways were being considered

- v) Damien Blower asked that with the Pandemic, one forgets Brexit had happened, how the Town Council was engaging with the new reality in terms of a global outlook, either in its current relationships over decades with European towns and communities and in respect of students and professionals coming to the area from some of the exciting new growing economies?

The Town Clerk commented the direct impacts were relatively small although there were some difficulties getting products needed, but it is anticipated this would be short term.

It was noted that one of the most important aspects the communities should be looking at was how to sustain the University. The Erasmus program supported the University with the students coming to the UK, and this has been replaced with the Turing scheme.

This year was the 30th Anniversary of the Twinning with Andernach in the Rhine Valley and this relationship would continue.

- vi) David Wyld asked for an update on the Brightwell's scheme.

Cllr MacLeod advised that although the Town Council was not responsible for Brightwells, it was a very important project of the Town.

Brightwells was a £100 million scheme comprised 239 flats in separate blocks and many over shops, 25 retail units, 8 restaurants, a cinema, and a large car park with additional parking for residents. In terms of an update, it started with a partnership between Waverley Borough Council and Crest Nicholson, and later became a three-way partnership with Surrey County Council. There were regular board meetings with Crest. At every meeting Crest were asked for an update. The scheme was due to open in April but due to Covid this had been put back. It was now scheduled to open in September 2021, with the cinema in December. The residential side is Crest responsibility. The early indications were that there is some interest. Marks & Spencer for the biggest retail unit, clothing company Sea Salt and Reel cinema and they were still committed to the scheme. They were looking at a luxury cinema for Farnham. In terms of retail there had been a shift to moving shopping on online and Covid had not helped by Crest were confident they would have sufficient retailers by September. Waverley Councilors were totally committed to the success of the Brightwell's scheme.

- vii) Peter Cowan commented that it was a transformational moment in Farnham's history with the development (Brightwell's) as mentioned, with Farnham Infrastructure Plan, new cycleways and footpaths and concerns about community. It was noticed information with my Council tax bill, it mentioned £1.7 million of one off funds available for Farnham. A question was asked about FTC having a target for those funds, and did this overlap with this funding pots, so could improve CCTV on cycleways and footpaths.

Cllr Neale responded the Infrastructure Programme was being funded by Surrey County Council. The programme itself would go ahead with SCC funding, but the major funding for improvements would need to come from Central Government and its agencies.

Cllr MacLeod commented that this was a very important opportunity for Farnham. The three Councils were working together for the best interest of Farnham. The road system was laid out for horse and cart and was now dominated by the car. Studies had been carried out before, but this was the first time a project had been set up with project managers and engineers to implement something. Surrey County Council have a five-year plan with £139 million allocated to this. Not all of it would come from Surrey some would come from Government.

The Town Clerk highlighted the importance of leveraging that money. For example, Waverley had funding to improve cycleways across Farnham Park, that was not sufficient, and Surrey was looking to allocate some of the funding referred to, to complete this project. A combined project on new electric charging points across the Town. Collaborated on upgrading the CCTV, picking up on Louise Daborn's question about Community Safety earlier on and there were combined bids on active travel.

viii) Carolyn Weston asked if the Brightwell's development would facilitate Farnham's demise?

Cllr Neale commented that the Town Council were determined that there was not a negative impact on the rest of the town and that businesses were supported. Crest had engaged with existing retailers to invite them to consider the Brightwells scheme which was not a supported approach.

ix) Louise Daborn asked in view of the TC response to the Farnham Optimised Infrastructure Plan, could the Town Council explain how a western bypass fits with the climate emergency the Council had also declared?

Cllr Dickson responded regarding the proposed route. More efficient roads would remove congestion in the Town Centre in addition to cars become greener.

Cllr Neale responded that there was a fine balance to be struck that took account of reducing congestion and the impact on the environment. There was no planned route for a Western bypass and a case had not been made in an economic case.

Cllr Cockburn commented the term 'western bypass' was slightly misleading now. The original route being considered previously went through biodiversity rich land that was not envisaged by supporters of a scheme now. There was a significant amount of development in Hampshire on the A325 and A31 corridor. Cllrs were looking at it as a strategic route that would take traffic from the A325 linking with the A31 up to the A287. It would be a Hampshire Road where the development was that which would benefit Wreclesham and the Coxbridge roundabout and the Town Centre.

- x) Carolyn Weston highlighted her concerns about the amount of litter on the main roads into Farnham and specifically the A31 and A325. Cllr Hesse who had previously conversed with Carolyn Weston by email on this matter considered a complete rethink was required to tackle the issue in terms of education and needed exemplars that would campaign and relate to young people. There was a local campaign project called 'Life not litter' that is. FTC had a litter picker programme as part of the community enhancement work.

Cllr Merryweather advised Waverley Borough Council was responsible for litter on A31. However, it required the cooperation of Hampshire and Surrey's County Councils to close the road.

- xi) Peter Cowen commented that CCTV was now deemed admissible in litter prosecutions. The question asked regarding of strengthening the CCTV network to enforce litter, supported by more regular emptying of existing bins in areas like the Water Meadows for example?

Cllr Ward agreed litter was a huge problem but there was no value in blaming litter on Surrey County Council or Waverley Borough Council as their responsibility. Without an effective deterrent for individuals who threw litter out of their vehicles it would continue to be a problem.

- xii) Barry Hartop commented that after a long campaign there could be a 20mph speed limit in the Town Centre. He asked Cllr Neale about the likelihood of the speed limit happening and in a way that will be enforced. Similarly, Castle Street is about to be resurfaced, he asked if this is going to be a silent surface or a standard surface.

Cllr Neale advised it was a middle or intermediate grade surface in Castle Street. County Cllr Wyatt Ramsdale advised that the 20mph zone was being proposed but had not been confirmed to date.

The Mayor thanked everyone for attending the meeting and declared the meeting closed at 9.20pm

Signed:
Town Mayor

Date: