

# HUNGERFORD TOWN COUNCIL

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**Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on  
Thursday 23rd March 2017 at 7 pm in the Corn Exchange, Hungerford  
(Approx 80 people present)**

**1. Welcome and Mayor's Report** - The Mayor welcomed the speakers. Since 2008 budgets have been tight and the Precept has been raised. Recently the Town Council has taken on the freehold of the Triangle Field, the Croft Field Activity centre lease, CCTV, the Public toilets including the associated business rates and has subsidized the H1 bus route. The next challenge is the library and relocation of the Post office which the Deputy Mayor will speak about later. Not only has HTC gained the cost of providing these services but also has the cost of their administration. The Mayor thanked the staff and councillors. The District Councillors have given their apologies.

**2. The Mayor introduced the principal of John O Gaunt School, Mr Henderson.**

**3. Mr Henderson** has been principal for 18 months. John O Gaunt is a small school and in the past had been underperforming however he has seen the enormous potential and needs to change the historical preconception. He was previously the senior deputy head at Salisbury. His ambition is to provide an outstanding educational experience for all our young people, to challenge expectations and raise aspirations and make JOG the secondary school of choice in West Berkshire'. We need residents to be proud of our school. Key priorities are to improve the quality of teaching and succeed in recruitment and retention. Financial decisions had to be made and the school is now an academy. In 2016 despite the challenges the school did very well and results were better than some larger schools in West Berkshire. This demonstrates the potential and they are looking to improve consistency.

GCSE's are changing dramatically, particularly with grading. Student recruitment is crucial and JOG is working closely with the primary school. JOG can offer small class sizes.

Although record amounts of money have gone into education there has also been a baby boom of 7.4million to 8.1 million resulting in a student number rise. Salaries and pensions are all rising. Overall there is an 8% loss in educational funding with £3 billion of cuts. All head teachers are experiencing budget pressure. 'Fairer funding' led to 2.1% loss of budget and debts over the country in education will be untenable by 2020. Hungerford needs to support JOG and be proud. We are a small town and need families moving into the area.

**QU:** There is an increase in students in the country. Are they going elsewhere? Mr Henderson – No, there are not enough young people living in Hungerford

**QU:** Judith Bunting – She is hugely impressed by JOG school. Can people afford to live here? Mr Henderson – Most of his staff come from Bristol, Reading Oxford and travel.

**QU:** What is there for year 11s with no sixth form? Mr H – JOG has an active careers department and students have an automatic right to attend St Johns, Marlborough for sixth form. They also have a choice of Park House and St Bart's, Newbury College and Swindon College. There will not be a sixth form at JOG in the near future, but expansion in conjunction with St Johns is possible in a few years for certain subjects.

**4. Ellie Dickins is Constable of Town & Manor** and 'the chairman of the charity' for the next 2 to 3 years. Trustees are elected every 3 years by the residents and manage the Town Hall, Common and Marsh. They also own John O Gaunt Pub, the Fishery and land that houses the Cricket Club and Football Club. Town & Manor donates to local causes and over the last decade has donated £100K to organisations such as the Cricket club, Youth club, Blind club, Twinning, Town Council, etc. The

money is raised by the Town & Manor charity. The new website will be up and running soon. They host events such as bat walks, marsh walks etc. Please contact Ellie or Jed for more information.

**5. Thames Valley Police**, Sgt Alan Hawkett covers the Hungerford and Lambourn Area. Closure of the existing Police station in Hungerford will take place on or around 1<sup>st</sup> June. They will move to the site at the fire station which will be a tri-service station. Hungerford will still receive the same level of service if not better. The Neighbourhood team based at Newbury will start their day in Newbury but after 15-20 mins of start of shift they will be on patrol in Hungerford. They will be able to pull on resources of other offices whilst on patrol in Hungerford. The admin will be based at Hungerford.

On Sat 8<sup>th</sup> July, they are having an open event at the tri-service station and welcome visitors.

**QU:** Will there be a front counter service? Sgt Hawkett – No but if there is a marked vehicle parked there you can pop in. He will check to see if a yellow phone is to be installed.

**QU:** Can they share a counter service with the fire station? Chief Inspector – The front counter service was used very rarely and they had few complaints when it went. Volunteers ran it for a while but didn't get the business either. They have to be realistic and the fire service would see little need for a counter service either. They can't justify it.

**QU:** Tony Lavers – What do you do if you find something you want to hand in? Chief Inspector – Take it into Newbury Station or keep it until it is claimed (unless it is criminal).

**QU:** What will be the coverage in Hungerford in police numbers? There will be no fewer officers.

**QU:** Will the response times be longer? They have shift patterns and the emergency and Neighbourhood response teams overlap. Emergency response is on 24hours a day and has always been covered from Newbury. This will not change.

**QU:** Will the police attend burglaries under £100? Every dwelling burglary gets attended. The Police are trying to get detectives to burglaries quicker. It is usually a 1hr response or if it is happening, a 15 minute response. The value of the burglary makes no difference to the response time.

**QU:** Cllr Farrell – Will the police attend shoplifting under £100 as we need to be sure we are protected? Yes they will record and investigate every crime reported. How it is investigated will be about threat, harm, opportunity and risk but they will still attend, take details and investigate.

On Sat 8<sup>th</sup> July the Police have an open day.

**6. The Minutes of the Meeting held on the 31st March 2016** - Cllr Bumbieris proposed the minutes as a true record, seconded by Cllr Small, all in favour.

## **7. Reports by Committee Chairmen**

**i) Finance & General Purposes – Cllr Bumbieris** - The current tough financial climate is leading to increases in Council tax, although for the year 2017-18 the town council precept only shows a 2.7% increase for the Town Council services. WBC is charging a 4.99% increase. The Town Council precept is a total of £269K compared to last year's £254k so a 5.7% increase but this is helped by a larger tax base bringing the increase down to 2.7%. Recently the Town Council has taken on more services from West Berks Council such as CCTV and Salt bins which WBC can't afford to run. The Public toilets cost £16k to run and the subsidizing of the bus route £3.6K. The library is a new expense this year and we are unsure whether the indicated cost to HTC will change. The Town Council allocates grants to huge amounts of organisations. 23% of the budget is Highways which includes the Christmas lights and this year we received large contributions from donors which helped immensely. We also own some of the lampposts and will be replacing 2. Money has been spent on the Croft Field and we are receiving good income from hirers. HTC pays £30k to support the leisure Centre and looks after the playgrounds. Nearly a third of the budget goes on the playgrounds, grants and Leisure Centre.

**ii) Environment & Planning – Cllr Farrell** – We invited the public to come and have their say at a recent planning meeting, and many did on Salisbury Road. Other sites are at risk of development if the Salisbury Road development goes ahead. A Neighbourhood plan would help protect us. Garden Art buildings are happening and so are many extensions to residential properties as residents are choosing to stay in Hungerford rather than move away. HTC is only a consultee but can make a difference and pass on concerns to WBC. The reason why a Neighbourhood Plan has not been put in place before is mainly due to cost. We have recently learnt it can cost less and we would like to know if the public want it. A thorough Town Plan refresh has already been adopted by WBC.

**iii) Recreation, Amenities & War Memorials – Cllr Small** showed a long list of the facilities that R&A deals with. Hungerford is lucky to have so many facilities. The committee usually meets the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of the month in the Magistrate room and all are welcome. Cllr Small referred to photos of the various facilities explaining HTC's work and responsibilities are as follows:

Triangle Field car park – recently resurfaced and much improved from a previously derelict site with mounds of earth. The Theatre Company has containers housed on the site allowing them somewhere to stock their costumes. All (excluding the Rugby Club) is run by the Triangle Field committee.

Triangle Field and Changing rooms – The main users are the Rugby club. Others such as the running club use it. They are looking for other users. Floodlights are being installed on one pitch and paid for by the RFU which will be a great facility. They are planning an open day in August with live music and a bar. HTC obtained the freehold of the premises recently fairly cheaply.

War memorial recreation ground – The ground was leased to us in 1951 for 99 years. Currently we are moving the goal posts to enable the pitch to be used. The skate park is to have a user's group to help look after it. The War memorial avenue is well maintained. The plaque in memory of the Tragedy is now placed there, in a more appropriate position. A consultation exercise was carried out to see what playground equipment is needed and a toddler slide will be installed soon. Smitham Bridge Playground - HTC own the freehold and the playground is in good condition.

Croft Field Activity Centre – This was previously run by WBC and was in a dilapidated state. HTC have since taken over the lease and made significant repairs.

St Lawrence Churchyard – It is statutory for HTC to maintain the grounds and we have recently repaired a vault grave which was unsafe. Trees require attention and metal grave surrounds need fixing. St Saviour's Cemetery – Fencing has recently been erected to screen off the skip. The cemetery is looking lovely and a sign has been placed to mark a passing place on the drive. Bridge St War Memorial – The shrubs and garden are looked after by HTC.

Marsh Lane Allotments – HTC is responsible for providing allotments by statute and is obtaining a longer lease for 5 years and hopes to rent all the plots.

**iv) Highways & Transport – Cllr Brookman** is responsible for Public Toilets, pigeon poo and dog bins amongst other topics! It has taken 3 to 4 years to get the Bridge St Pedestrian crossing in place due to road safety and design issues. The poles had to be redesigned but were not scrapped and instead have been used for Charnham St Crossing and made a huge difference. There was not enough room on the east side of the road so District Cllr Podger donated a small piece of land that allowed the crossing to be built. Footpath alterations outside the JOG school were completed last August. The footpath has been lowered and visibility improved for both traffic and pedestrians.

Direct trains from Great Bedwyn to Paddington will continue when electrification happens in 2018; with thanks to R Benyon MP, C Perry MP, Bedwyn Passenger Group, Network Rail, Great Western Railways, Hungerford Town Council and individual passengers from Hungerford and Kintbury. GWR are now providing bio-mode trains so when electric is not available diesel is used for a seamless changeover. HTC is lobbying GWR for improvements to the train station such as painting and a new shelter on the Paddington bound platform. There is a grant available but it would need 20% funding.

**v) Tourism & Economy – Cllr Crane OBE** – The committee address the recognition of Hungerford, not just as an antiques town but as the heart of the North Wessex Downs. There is not enough accommodation in Hungerford and HTC are working with visit Wiltshire for a 'Great West Way Route', which has a lot of sponsors to develop itineraries of the area. Hungerford has some amazing employers and there are 1000+ employees in Charnham Park with turnover in excess of £1million. A trade fair is happening in JOG school in Sept where you can learn about our town and economy.

**vi) Update on Salisbury Road application – Cllr Hudson** – The 119 houses have been reduced to 100 in the latest proposals by the developers. The town hall was packed when this site was last discussed. The plans are going to the Western Area Planning meeting on April 5<sup>th</sup> and there will be a site visit on 30<sup>th</sup> March at 9am. It is recommended for approval by WBC although it will have a huge impact on the AONB particularly with lighting and traffic. They are improving the roundabout at the Bear by repainting it and moving the give way sign by 1.5m and suggesting traffic be diverted around Charnham Park so they know there is a problem. They will still accept objections. The station area is likely to be developed with 8 houses from Rowlands application going to a hearing and Oakes have recently drawn plans for 32 dwellings. This offers 40 dwellings with no impact on the AONB.

**vii) Update on Library and Post office Library – Cllr Knight** – Friends of Hungerford Library, West Berks Council and the Town Council set up a working party which includes Paul James the new leader of the library at WBC. The meetings are to fine tune how we run the library in future. The way forward is to set up a charity and we are looking for trustees to help run the library as a community building via HTC. Opening hours will be extended and target for timescale is 6-9 months.

The Post Office closes on 21<sup>st</sup> April. The Post office runs 11,600 post offices across the country and is losing one post office a week. There is no statutory duty for the PO to provide. The aim is to set up a temporary solution in the form of an outreach service from Aldbourne, 3 days a week whilst a long term solution is sought. The larger retailers in town do not want to take on the Post Office. If you hold a leasehold or freehold and are interested in housing the post office in your retail premises please register your interest online. Footfall will generate revenue. Funding is available.

## **8. District Councillor's Reports – Apologies were given**

### **9. Questions and Suggestions from the floor –**

**QU:** What is to be done, pavements are filthy on the west side of the High St and weeds are growing in the Cuttings by the railway? Cllr Crane will take the rubbish issue to Veolia and will invest in some weed killer as NR is not interested in helping.

Judith Bunting expressed disappointment that the District Cllrs are not in attendance.

**QU:** Are hotels/pubs an option for the post office? Cllr Knight will follow up.

J Giggins – The litter is the responsibility of WBC. It is a shame the District Cllrs are not present. Another complaint about the litter was voiced and Hungerford is dirty compared to Australia. HTC will be holding a 'litter pick' on 2<sup>nd</sup> April at 10am meeting on Town Hall steps. Please join us.

16<sup>th</sup> June is 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Town & Manor Charity and this will be celebrated.

**QU:** R James – 2 more hotels are needed in town. We want to be assured of good value and reliability. What is being done to raise standards? Cllr Crane - An application for a hotel at Charnham Park was approved a while ago. The 3 Swans are investing in £1million of renovations and the Bear is part of a chain. J Giggins – The hotel appeal was some time ago and permission may have lapsed. The site might be put forward for planning for future housing. Cllr Crane advised works have started to allow the existing planning permission to remain.

**QU:** Is Cllr Small considering car boot sales on the Triangle Field? Yes it is being considered. All ideas are welcome.

J Kersey - CHAIN are celebrating 40 years. There will be a meeting at the RBL to celebrate and introduce the new Handibus on 5<sup>th</sup> May 7-9pm. All welcome. Thanks were given to Ted Angell for the incredible amount of work that has gone into getting the new bus.

**Cllr Benneyworth** (District Cllr for Victoria ward, Newbury) has just returned from a WBC big debate on boundary review. The proposal is Hungerford will include part of Kintbury district, overall 10 District Cllrs will be lost and saving of £80k will be made. A site meeting for the Salisbury development will take place on 30<sup>th</sup> March at 9am to see how the development will fit into the landscape. Please be there. On 5<sup>th</sup> April the application will go to WAP committee and a representative can speak for 5 minutes.

Cllr Simpson joined the Town Council a year ago and is hugely impressed by HTC and thanked all the volunteers.

**10. Announcing of Freedom Awards** – Nominations were considered by an independent committee. One announcement has already been made for Beryl Fowler who had been nominated several times and received her awarded earlier this year before she sadly passed away.

The Mayor announced the Freedom of the Town Award will go to Margaret Wilson and congratulations were given. The award will be made at a ceremony at a later date. Margaret worked as a teacher in Hungerford and as a Town Councillor for over 20 years and was responsible for Hungerford in Bloom.

HTC is seeking a new councillor to fill a vacancy left by Margaret stepping down.

**The meeting closed at 9.00pm**