

PRINCES RISBOROUGH TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 12th APRIL 2022 INCLUDING THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT THE BRUSHWOOD SUITE, WADES CENTRE, PRINCES RISBOROUGH AT 7.15PM

Welcome and Introductions by the Town Mayor and apologies for absence

The following councillors were present:

Cllr A Ball (Chairman)

Cllrs G Hall, S Coombs, J Coombs, I Parkinson, J Biss, J Rampin, C Campbell, A Shipley, A Frost

Susanne Barter– Clerk, Kirsty Pope – Deputy Clerk, Stephanie Boyle – Events & Communications Assistant, Cate Holloway – Administration Support Officer, Tania Campbell – Bookings Officer

Apologies were received from Cllrs A Turner, S Marshall, M Roberts

36 members of the public were present.

Bucks County Councillor M Walsh

Chairman's Report

As I was sat preparing my Chairman's report last week it suddenly dawned on me that my year of office as your Town Mayor and Chairman has almost come to an end; how time has flown!

I am thankful we can warmly welcome you into the Brushwood Suite today and gather together on this occasion, quite a difference compared to this time last year, where we were limited to meeting in groups of six outdoors. Although restrictions have now been lifted, the virus is still ever present so please do be cautious and sensible when socialising.

Over the last twelve months of office your Town Council have still managed to achieve a great deal despite ongoing restrictions, from our brilliant Welcome Back event late last summer in Wades Park to our Christmas Lights event, with a handful of Farmers Markets in between!

Other notable accomplishments within our Town include the successful opening of the Manor Bar at 39 High Street which has certainly brightened up Risborough's nightlife and the opening of the "The Crew Cafe" at Wades Park which has proven very popular with our residents. Both of these organisations provide the Town Council with a healthy monthly rental income of which is invested back into our Town through various projects and initiatives. I had the pleasure of, along with your former Town Mayor and Chairman Matthew Walsh, officially opening the Brushwood Suite a mere two weeks ago. This wonderful facility also opened late last year and has since hosted weddings, parties, and more recently the Dung Beatles and a Sca group lined up for early May.

This financial year has proven extremely difficult for each resident with the cost of living fast out-pacing the increase we see in our monthly pay packets, our Town Council has too seen massive hikes in its outgoings. Despite this difficult financial situation we all find ourselves in, the town council has still managed to achieve the high level of services our residents have come to expect.

The hardest decision I have personally had to put to our Councillors as your Town Mayor and Chairman was to accept that we could not justify spending £49,000 of taxpayer money on funding the free weekend parking for both Buckinghamshire Council Car Parks in our town.

For the past two years your Town Council has received grants from the former Wycombe District Council and your Unitary Council, Buckinghamshire Council. These dedicated grants covered the cost requested by Buckinghamshire Council for free weekend parking. Sadly, we were unable to secure such grants this financial year and did not feel right in increasing the precept for such a luxury in such turbulent times.

Later this year we have three more Farmers Markets scheduled, Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, our Summer Festival, the Christmas Light Switch On, and so much more in between.

I would like to take a moment to thank you, our residents, Councillors, maintenance team and our very knowledgeable team within the office for all your help and support during the last 12 months.

Finally, I would like to add that it has been an absolute honour and privilege to serve as your Town Mayor and Chairman over the past year.

Looking to the Future:

Looking forward to this year as a council we made the decision late last year to introduce 3 task and finish working groups with an end goal to be achieved in each group, each group will run for a maximum time of 3 months.

January through to end of March we had the following groups.

- Environmental and climate change that over saw the planting of the 4 new trees in our King George the 5th Park.
- Stratton Memorial garden, that looked at the cost of the phase 2 due to us almost running out of burial plots. This will enable our towns residents to be either buried or interned in their home town for at least the next 30 years. This will be funded by CIL money which is the payment the town council receive from developers when all the new properties are built as per the local plan. Normally councils receive 15% of funding but during negotiations 4 years ago your town council successfully negotiated a 25% funding share on the proviso that we would continue to take sole responsibility for the burial and cremations in our town.
- Wades centre extension to house our office staff, maintenance team and a Changing Places toilet, our current lease at the Princes Centre will cease at the end of 2023. We are currently in the process of preparing a planning application to Bucks Council.

The next 3 task and finish groups run from April through to the end of June and are.

- Changing places funding opportunities at the Wades centre extension. This is a changing facility for disabled residents and visitors to our town that will give them the comfort and equipment needed.
- Looking at the costings for our devolved services agreement with Bucks Unitary Council.
- Queens green Jubilee Tree planting in and around our town.

All 3 of these task and finish working groups will need to be rubber stamped through a consultation exercise with you our residents, due to the costs involved.

Finance Committee

Cllr Sue Coombs, chair of the Committee gave the following report.

The Committee oversees all the expenditure for the council ensures that the finances remain within the bounds of the budget agreed by councillors at the estimates meeting and that funds are legally and appropriately spent. The budgetary requirements for the year 2021/22 were fully met even with all the problems relating to covid.

Setting the precept is a very important part of the Town Council's duty and responsibilities which affects us all. The Precept is the amount of money collected through your council tax to maintain the services for which we are responsible. It is collected by Buckinghamshire Council on behalf of the Town Council.

In view of the current financial situation, after many hours of discussion, it has been necessary to leave some of the important projects which councillors would have liked to have undertaken this year for another year, unless alternative funding can be found. We felt that it would be inappropriate at this time to raise the precept by an excessive amount, especially as many residents must tighten their belts, and there are more effects still to come.

The council needs to balance its books in the same way as any sustainable business. Every effort is made to minimise any rise in the precept by constantly striving to find efficiency savings and generating alternative revenue streams, but some increases in spending are unavoidable..

We had to reduce the amounts used to run the annual Town Festival and Christmas Lights events which means extra work for our staff, councillors, and a reliance on the goodwill of volunteers.

Another example is the ending of weekend free car parking.

In previous years this was funded by grants that are no longer available to us. The precept would have needed to be increased by a further £45,000 an overall increase of 15.28% to be able to provide this benefit which we could not justifiably pass on to our residents.

Although finances are tight, we will strive to provide the level of service to which the town is accustomed.

Planning Committee

Cllr Josephine Biss, chair of the Committee gave the following report.

Princes Risborough Town Council Planning Committee meets on the first Tuesday of every month to look at and discuss the planning applications that have come in via Bucks Council. At the Committee meetings, we discuss and look at the plans and decide to either support, object, or offer no comment to an application, bearing in mind that the planning department at Bucks Council makes the final decision.

The current issue in our town is the recent planning application by Persimmon Homes to build up to 1100 homes on land along Longwick Road; this is part of the local plan where up to 2500 new homes will be built by 2031. It is just a planning application, and Bucks Council has yet to decide to accept the plans. There are over 100 pages in the planning, and it takes time to digest it all and reach a consensus.

This then brings into question the three years for the relief road from Summerleys Road through to Picts Lane as these new properties, if agreed upon, will need a relief road to access these unique properties.

For planning application notice, please go to Princes Risborough Town Council Website.

Town Committee

Cllr John Coombs, chair of the committee gave the following report.

During the unprecedented period of the pandemic the council ensured that all the tasks that needed to be done were completed. The maintenance team have ensured that all the buildings, playing fields and recreation grounds have been kept in good order and have dealt with repairs as and when they were required thus ensuring that the town always looks its best, or at least the parts of the town that this council has influence over.

It is pleasing to note that during this time there have been no reports of play equipment needing any repairs due to damage and the care taken in their maintenance.

As usual the committee continued to support outside not for profit organisations with the loan of council owned equipment and has thus helped in raising much needed funds for local groups.

The local Thursday Market, which comes under the purview of this committee, has again blossomed as the year progressed and we still receive requests for stalls, although sometimes we are unable to grant such as when all the pitches are taken. We do review the Market monthly and will continue to do what we can to try to increase the footfall every Thursday. You may have seen stilt walkers and the like in the Market on the last few Thursdays to provide a bit of entertainment for those attending the market.

It has become apparent that there is now very little available space for burials in the Stratton Memorial Garden and so the committee has discussed the implementation of Phase Two, which will open up more land for the purpose of burial. At present we believe that there is sufficient space for the continuation of the interment of ashes in Phase One.

Regarding the Stratton Memorial Garden, we continue to receive requests for the placing of Memorial Benches in the burial ground but we no longer have the space to accommodate them and so we do offer alternative locations around the town where we know benches are required or ask donors to wait until Phase Two is completed.

During the period of this council members have been instrumental in introducing a plan to vastly increase the numbers of trees in the town both as a council initiative and as part of the Queen's Green Canopy for the Platinum Jubilee and the first 4 trees were planted in the King George Vth Recreation Ground earlier this year. We hope that this is the start of an initiative that will be taken up by the public.

The Town Committee will continue, during the life of this Council, to ensure that our high standards of maintenance are continued and although funds are very limited this next year, we will always endeavour to obtain value for money for any projects that are agreed either in committee or in Council.

Commercial Services Committee

Cllr I Parkinson, chair of the committee gave the following report.

The Committee wants to encourage use of the Market House, ideal for meetings and training courses. It fills a gap in the town's availability of small venues at reasonable rates.

After a period as a building site the premises at 39 High Street have now been finished and let to Aylesbury Bar Company and this is proving to be a popular venue with residents.

The Wades Centre has been used as a vaccination centre over the past year but we have been able to reopen some of the rooms to hirers as the year has progressed.

The Brushwood Suite opened for bookings and a manager has been appointed to coordinate events and private celebrations.

Events Committee

Cllr Alan Frost, chair of the committee gave the following report.

The first event organized by the committee was the June Farmers Market that was well attended and ran smoothly on the KGV, thanks to the work of the Council staff and officers. The Rotary Club again provided a team of volunteers to assist with the event which is greatly appreciated.

In Wades Park a new event for children aged 4 – 12 called Play around the Parishes took place in August and it was agreed to participate in this event another time due to its popularity with parents and children alike. This was quickly followed by The Welcome Back Risborough event in September.

This was very well attended and provided an opportunity for local singers and dancers to display their talents ably supported by the PTA's Youth Club. We estimated that around 800 people attended on the day.

Art in the Park continues to attract high quality artists to enter the competition that is growing in popularity each year.

Another Farmers Market was held in September on the KGV that was again well attended with a good range of stalls in good weather conditions.

To celebrate Halloween we arranged a Trail through the High Street with traders for children to follow and dressed the Market House in spooky decorations to add to the atmosphere.

This was particularly welcome during the lockdown in operation at the time.

In December we ran the Christmas Lights Switch on, including a Christmas market and Santa's grotto. The Wishing Tree beside Horns Lane car park was decorated by local schools.

Public Open Forum

Questions were raised regarding the following

- The Town Council's plans for the next three years.
- The poor state of pavements in Berryfield Road
- Toilets in Horns Lane car park
- E-scooter trial
- Free parking at weekends
- Local policing availability
- Recycling centre in Bledlow

Thanks were expressed for the support volunteers had given to the community during the Covid pandemic. The Town Council was thanked for its support for a number of initiatives helping the needing in the community.

Presentation to Major Grant Recipients

Presentation of Princes Risborough Citizens Awards

The Mayor thanked the public for attending and the meeting closed at 8.45 pm