PRINCES RISBOROUGH TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 18th APRIL 2023 INCLUDING THE CHAIRMAN’S REPORT HELD AT

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

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 48 members of the public were present.

Chairman’s Report

As I was preparing my chairman’s report earlier this morning it seems hard to believe that my second year of office as your Town Mayor and Chairman has almost come to an end; how time has flown!

This time last year we were just about coming out of covid restrictions, unfortunately this has been superseded by the appalling situation in Ukraine and the resulting cost of living crisis we are all facing.

I am thankful we can warmly welcome you back into our magnificent Brushwood Suite today. which in its first full year has played host to many events, including Weddings/Christenings/Conferences and many milestone birthday events. I am so pleased that the council’s vision of a versatile function suite has been met. We are delighted to be hosting our 3rd tribute act event in May and welcome the Abba Sisters. Tickets are selling fast so please do book now to avoid disappointment!!

I was also extremely proud to be part of a very successful events calendar for 2022, Cllr Alan Frost Chairman of Events and PR will speak more about this and our plans for this year a little later in his presentation.

Like every household and business in Princes Risborough the Town Council has faced significant pressure that we could not have foreseen. However, through sound financial management, led by our officers, we have been able to protect the key service that matters most to you, our residents.

The hardest decision this past year I have personally had to make was to agree with our Councillors that we had to increase your town precept by 5%. With the massive hike in energy charges, as a town council we had to accept that if we did not increase the precept then we wouldn’t be able to run all our events for you, our residents, free of charge.

Our parks continue to be well used, and it’s a pleasure to see how many local sporting organisations are using the parks on a regular basis. The Town Council manages over 22 acres of green space and maintains around 115 trees and 6000 plants for our beds and borders. As always, to continue to ensure that our town and parks look their very best, I wish to thank our dedicated Maintenance team for their commitment to the role. Councillor John Coombs will go into more depth in his town committee report later.

Your town council worked extremely close with Swish fibre last year and obtained significant funding from them to allow us to offer free entertainment at our Christmas Lights switch-on, we know how important this was last year and it made the event very inclusive. We also continue to work closely with our community partners including Buckinghamshire Unitary Council and were extremely grateful for the grants we received from them last year, we are also working with the Community Boards to improve our biodiversity and reduce our carbon emissions.

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

My special thanks must go to Councillor Josephine Biss my deputy town Mayor and vice Chairman, Josephine has accompanied me on numerous events and has also attended events when I cannot attend due to either holidays or other commitments, her bubbly character makes it a great pleasure to be around her so thankyou Josephine.

(Bunch of flowers to be presented)

I would also like to personally thank our maintenance team leader Barney Heffernan, who after 5 years with us is now taking on a new challenge early next month. We wish him and his partner Charlie well and good luck for the future, you will be missed.

I would like to add that it has been an absolute honour and privilege to serve again as your Town Mayor and Chairman over the past 12 months.

The event that I attended as your town Mayor that I will always remember the most was the reading of His Majesty King Charles the 3rd proclamation outside the Market house on Sunday the 11th of September 2022. This was a very humble occasion for not only me but our town council and you our residents as this was an important event that will show in the history books when we are all long gone.

Apart from this event I have attended numerous civic services, Rotary club events, The Ukrainian Vigil and their children’s party, local care homes and church services Christmas events, including readings at remembrance day and the Christmas carol service, accompanying our 102 year old war hero and celebratory Malcolm Clout on his charity walk last November, help raise money at the Kop hill climb by selling programmes for a few hours with our MP Greg Smith and Bucks Unitary councillor Matthew Walsh, and also had the pleasure of getting either covered in slim or buckets full of water dropped onto my head from a great height at local school fetes and lighthouse.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without the help of Jayne Mylchreest from the office. Jayne organises my diary and produces my agenda pack for our full town council meetings and I like to think of Jayne as my PA. So, thank you for supporting me these past 2 years Jayne and as a show of my appreciation please accept this bouquet of flowers from me.

The awards that I will be handing out later tonight I personally believe, along with my fellow councillors, that the recipients have made a real difference to our town, and hopefully you will all agree with our choices.

Enjoy the rest of your evening and we look forward to receiving any questions a little bit later tonight.

Greg Smith our local member of parliament has sent his apologies as every Tuesday evening parliament sit but we do have one of our Bucks Unitary councillors, Gary Hall in attendance this evening, Matthew Walsh is away in Vegas, so please feel free to go and speak to Gary Hall as well as your Town councillors when we break for refreshments, I would like to thank Kim, our centre manager, and her team for providing homemade cakes as well as the teas and coffees. The bar will also be open after the civic awards have been presented.

I will now hand over to our committee chairman to give their reports starting with Councillor Sue Coombs who is Chairman of finance.

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Councillor Josephine Biss, Chairman of Planning.

Councillor John Coombs, Chairman of Town.

Councillor Ian Parkinson, Chairman of commercial service

Councillor Alan Frost, Chairman of Events and PR

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE:

Looking forward to this year as a council we took the decision 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 2023 through to the end of March 2023 we had the following groups.

Neighbourhood plan.

Councillor Cross will briefly inform you of what they have been looking at in their task and finish group as I wasn’t a part of this group.

Stratton Memorial Garden:

This looked at the cost of the phase 2 development due to us almost running out of burial plots. This will enable our towns residents to be either buried or interned in their hometown 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. Those of you that have not paid a visit please do as these are immaculately maintained by our team.

WADES CENTRE PHASE 2 EXTENSION:

After a very successful consultation with you, our residents we are now able to move this project forward.

We have successfully obtained the planning permission and the “approval to borrow” notification has been received to fund the build, we have also appointed our preferred builders and project manager. The building work will be starting on the 10th of July 2023 and is expected to be completed by the end of February 2024.

Although more expensive than we first thought the loan repayments will still be cheaper than our current rental charges at our current home at the Princes Centre in Clifford Road, the long overdue refit of the toilets in the Wades Centre were a priority in the recent consultation we held, and I am pleased to inform you that the new toilets are included in this phase 2 build.

It also gives me great pleasure to inform you our residents that this is the first time in the history of our town council that we have secured our very own office space where all our office staff will work together and have access for you our residents to visit and speak to a member of staff face to face, rather than just on the telephone.

The next 3 task and finish groups run from April 2023 through to the end of June 2023 will be as follows.

Continuation with the Wades Centre phase 2

Continuation of the Stratton Memorial Gardens.

Solar panels for the new extension at Wades centre.

Finance Committee – Cllr S Coombs

Thank you for coming to the Annual Town meeting of Princes Risborough Town Council.

Once again this has been a trying year for the finance committee as for any organisation with fiscal responsibility.

Let me begin with the exercise to Set the Precept which is a very important part of the Town Council’s duty and which affects us all businesses and households alike.

The precept is the amount of money collected through your council tax for the Town Council to maintain the services they are responsible for. It will be collected by Buckinghamshire Council on behalf of the Town Council.

In agreeing the Precept for the coming financial year members of the Council have been mindful of the overall state of matters relating to the whole of the country and especially those relating to residents of Princes Risborough and have limited the rise to 5%.

There are some major projects which as a council we must address.

One relates to the Council Office.

Due to the success of the Princes Centre, it has become necessary for us to relocate.

Having investigated numerous options the members have decided, after public consultation, that moving to the Wades Centre is the most appropriate and cost-effective solution. This will have no implication to residents or on the agreed precept as the cost of the loan repayments will be covered by no longer paying rent for The Princes Centre.

Another essential project is the development of phase 2 of the Stratton Memorial Garden I will leave John to elaborate on that. The council are determined to maintain the tranquil atmosphere of the garden whilst providing a final resting place for loved ones.

As in previous years it has not been possible to fund all projects which have been suggested by residents and council members. We will continue to endeavour to secure grant funding where available for these.

The Town Council needs to balance its books just like any sustainable business. Whilst every effort is made to minimise any rise in the precept by constantly striving to find efficiency savings and generating alternative revenue streams, some of the increases in spending are unavoidable. The large increase in the cost of utilities affects every organisation in the country as do many other day to day items of expenditure.

Although finances are tight, we intend to continue to provide our Town with the level of service which you have rightly come to expect from your Councillors

Planning Committee – Cllr J Biss

The Planning Committee Report

As a consultee, the planning committee does not have the power to make a final decision on planning matters. We discuss and look at planning applications and decide to support, object or make a no comment to an application.

However, the county planning policy team requested the committee to identify any infrastructure issues, services, ambitions for the future, and opportunities in our town.

On the local plan, the committee prepared a response to the council's local plan on the infrastructure baseline.

The committee gave a Score of 3 (just coping) to the town's infrastructure and services. And for the year 2033, after the build, no score was given as the committee could not predict the situation.

The first application for the new expansion area from Bloor Homes for 450 homes in August and the second from Consortium Development for the Park Mill Farm Area in the autumn for 1100 homes are in progress.

The committee regularly receive an update with planning application from the county. And some of the applications have been approved or refused. On appeal is either given permission or denied.

Decisions on tree matters are referred to the arboriculturist by the committee, but we advised that where one tree is permitted to fall, the applicant should plant another tree.

All are welcome to the town planning committee meeting. Ten minutes is allowed to speak by the public. For planning notice, please go to the Princes Risborough Town Council website,

Town Committee- Cllr J Coombs

This year has been a very busy for the committee, which meets every month, with various major and minor projects coming on- line.

The committee oversees the actions of the in-house Maintenance Team, who perform many and varied tasks for the Council, such as grass cutting, building and general grounds maintenance.

It will soon be time to put in the summer bedding and we will endeavour to ensure that the beds are kept looking their best regardless of what weather we get. Because of the time-consuming task of watering it has been necessary to out-source this task to our flower providers – Window Flowers- to allow our dedicated staff to get on with our ongoing maintenance and grass cutting.

Over the past year our contractor’s team has worked extremely hard to maintain the quality of the flower beds around the town and due to the very warm summer had a hard time to ensure that the beds were sufficiently watered, and dead headed to so that they always looked at their best.

The maintenance team were also heavily involved in our Devolved Services programme, whereby we provide grass cutting and grounds maintenance to other councils and authorities which brings in a very valuable finance stream which helps to keep our in- house maintenance costs down.

To continue to provide an efficient and effective service we have invested in some new equipment that will enable the team to complete their grass cuts in a shorter time, which will then free them up for other essential work.

The committee is very appreciative of all the work that this team does over the course of the year and the high standards that they maintain in all they do.

We have both monthly and quarterly inspections of all our play equipment and as such we can deal with any maintenance/damage issues as they arise.

We have been plagued in the town recently with some antisocial behaviour including graffiti and criminal damage to our park’s equipment, one item of which was set on fire and as such severely damaged, and so we would ask anyone who sees any such behaviour or knows who has caused any damage to equipment to get in touch either with the council or with the police so that we can take the necessary action to remedy the situation.

We continue to maintain a close co-operation with Risborough Rangers Junior Football Club (RRJFC) who use our parks on a regular basis for training and we have installed ‘buildings’ on both the Earle Mitchell Ground and Wades Park for their sole use as stores for essential grounds equipment. The ‘pavilion’ on the Earle Mitchell field is in a state of disrepair and as such will be out of use until we have the time and finance available to refurbish or replace it.

The ‘Severe Weather Policy’ in relation to the operation of the Thursday Market has been used a few times in the past year whereby the market is cancelled due to high winds. The market continues to flourish, and we are constantly getting enquiries asking for either a temporary or permanent pitch.

The Town Council ensures that actions are taken to ensure that the council owned trees in the town are safe and kept in good order.

The Town Committee has also, along with the Main Town Council, produced a plan for the commencement of Phase 2 of the Stratton Memorial Garden. The requirement for Phase 2 is because we are fast running out of burial space in Phase 1.

The project is being kept as much as possible ‘in house’ to minimise cost with the maintenance team providing the work force and outside contractors utilised only where necessary.

The committee is grateful to one of our councillors who is to project manage this development.

It is hoped that this project will be completed as soon as possible as this will then mean that we will have enough burial space for ‘hopefully’ the next 40 years.

As in all years the committee strives to provide a cost effective and efficient service to the people of our town and to ensure that our town looks its best, especially when we get a major influx of visitors to the town, such as for Festival and Kop Hill.

Commercial Services Committee – Cllr I Parkinson

Firstly, I want to make clear the charges we make for this hire of the venues is to cover the cost of providing them, and it is not the intention to make a profit out of this

Our first venue is the Market Square, this provides a place for the community to come together on certain occasions during the year, in particular the Remembrance Day service, but in this last year it was also the center to mark the passing of Queen Elizabeth II. A few weeks ago, Reverend Williams here was leading an interfaith service on Good Friday there.

We also have a second venue underneath the tree of life (should have been tree of light slip of the tongue) where the first anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine without traffic issues. The town is doubly blessed to have two sites that can bring the town together and reinforce its strong sense of community and togetherness which is a big part of the town and its spirit.

We have hired out the Market square and room above it to cover the cost of these venues and provide good value because it provides more than just the obvious room for hire.

Moving on the 39 High Street or the Manor, it is obvious it has not worked out as expected. Because of commercial confidentiality it is very difficult to say anything concrete on the situation, it is a case of wait and see how things turn out. There is a break clause in a few years’ time until that point the ball is very much in the tenant’s court.

The community centre in contrast shows an example of a successful business that started up about the same time and faced similar economic and financial conditions and should be congratulated for weathering these challenging times so well

I would like to remind you of where we were with the Community Centre this time last year. We had only just opened this Brushwood centre. The rest of the building was being used to administer the third Covid vaccine shot. It is a very different picture now adays and the Covid pandemic seems an ancient memory now. This last year was always going to be one of learning and consolidation and we are in a much better place now than them.

The Brushwood Suite has held many functions and has proven to be successful. We have held two events here open to the public the Dung Beetles a Beetles tribute act and an Elvis tribute act. On Friday the 5th May we will host the Abba sisters’ tickets still available, after all there is nothing important happening the next day. The bookings in the other rooms in the Wades Centre have returned to pre-pandemic levels.

We are looking to improve the quality of the Wades Centre so will be starting working on phase 2 here this summer and autumn. Then in future years complete the process with phase 3. Phase 2 will involve developing the South East corner of the building and providing the town with a permanent self-owned town Council office, as mentioned earlier by Sue saving us the cost of rent.

It is also our intention to install solar panels on the roof of the Wades Centre, and if possible, coincide this with the phase 2, reducing the cost of this installation. Over future years this should reduce the council’s electricity bill and continue to reduce the costs of the council for the residents.

Unfortunately, this work will require that some of the rooms will be out of commission during this period, we will try to keep disruption to a minimum and we do have a wide number of alternative facilities available to replace them. But I apologise for this inconvenience in advance and hope you understand the reasons.

Events Committee – Cllr A Frost  
Cllr Frost gave a verbal report only.

Public Open Forum

Questions were raised regarding the following

The missing Stratton Road sign

State of the George and Dragon premises

High Street – number of empty premises

Update on Relief Road

5G masts

Bloor Homes development

Buckinghamshire Councillor Gary Hall gave updates on

* New Highways contractor
* pot holes
* traffic lights outside Monks Risborough school.
* Fix My Street,
* Decisions on parking on Merton Road and yellow lines on Windmill Hill
* Clarification on why an increase of 5% on precept was justified.

Presentation of Princes Risborough Citizens Awards BUSINESS OF THE YEAR GOES TO WAINWRIGHTS:

Wainwrights have been serving residents in our town since 1936, then the shop was situated next to the model railway shop that is still situated in Summerleys Road quite near the train station junction with Station Road.

A few years later needing larger premises they moved along the road to where the former Unwin’s off licence and the printers were on the corner of Station Road and Manor Park Avenue, they also lived above the premises as a family. This has now been turned into a block of 8 luxury apartments known as Midsummer place.

In 1953 they moved to their current premises in our high street, this is a grade 2 17th century listed building which is also now their head office.

Being 3 brothers, they also opened shops at Great Missenden in 1947 which closed in 2008, and Beaconsfield in 1960 which today is still a thriving business.

Unfortunately, as time has gone by the 3 brothers, Ken, Derek and Jim died between 1989 and 2013. David who had just left school in 1981 and started helping at their Beaconsfield store now runs the successful shop in our town.

David congratulations for your successful business and I am sorry that I cannot do anything about the parking on a Thursday. Just think in another 13 years Wainwrights will be celebrating 100 years of service to the residents of Princes Risborough.

GROUP OF THE YEAR AWARD GOES TO THE UKRAINE 2 CHILTERNS CHILDRENS CHARITY

It seems hard to believe that on the 24th of February 2023 I had the great honour to speak at the vigil on Duke Street gardens to announce the first anniversary of the senseless invasion from Russia on the people of Ukraine.

This charity consists of a collective community of villages within the Chiltern hills in Buckinghamshire including, Princes Risborough, Whiteleaf, Monks Risborough, Loosely Row, Lacey Green, Speen, Great Hampden, Great Missenden, North Dean, Walters Ash, Naphill, Hughenden Valley and Stoke Mandeville and is growing every week.

Their mission is to help provide a safe sanctuary to the Ukrainian people during the Russian invasion, under the governments scheme “Homes for Ukraine” As a community they hope to provide support to the host families and their Ukrainian families.

On behalf of the residents and our town council let us hope and pray that peace will soon be restored to the people of the Ukraine.

It gives me great pleasure in handing this award to Louisa Spearing on behalf of the Ukraine 2 Chilterns charity.

YOUNG CITIZEN OF THE YEAR AWARD GOES TO LAUREN PLUMRIDGE

Lauren is a year 13 student at Princes Risborough top school currently undertaking her A levels.

Lauren has been a young leader in Girlguiding for the past 3 years, encouraging young girls to attend their weekly meetings.

Lauren is also very active in the youth club at her school where she has helped with charity and fundraising events for our local Rotary club.

Whilst holding down a part time evening and weekends job she is also working towards completing her Duke of Edinburgh gold award.

You should be extremely proud of your achievements at such a young age and should be seen as a role model to other members of your school and the girl guides.

On behalf of the town council many congratulations Lauren on winning the award for the young citizen of the year.

CITIZEN OF THE YEAR DAVID WILLIAMS:

Well, where do I begin to talk about David our local Rector of St Mary’s in our town and St Peters church in Ilmer. fund raiser, charity organiser, trustee at the princes’ centre, mountain climber and so much more.

I have attended numerous events with David these past 2 years as Mayor and even served him and another 30 residents breakfast a few weeks ago, well to be honest I put the fried eggs on their plates.

You will always see David with a smile on his face and his very distinctive loud laugh means you will probably hear him before you even see him.

David arrived in our town with his lovely wife Jo and his three children about 12 years ago.

David has just finished 6 years as the area Dean of Aylesbury which included around 38 churches under his care.

David’s personal achievements include completing the 500-mile Santiago route, climbing Kilimanjaro and he has also climbed every single mountain and peak in Wales, which is almost 200.

David’s community work is also second to none.

David has been an RAF chaplain as well as a rugby chaplain and a vocations advisor.

In 2007 David and his wife visited Uganda and helped with building projects and also helped with the setting up of a home for HIV orphans. David and his wife still visit Uganda when they can and are well respected in the country.

David and Jo are celebrating their 40th wedding anniversary this year, Jo you must have the patience of a saint to have put up with him for so long.

Another milestone that David will hopefully not mind me mentioning is that it will be his 65th birthday later this year and a very well-guarded secret is that I knew what Jo was getting you for your birthday a few months ago.

As with all great men David has had a great team behind him, not only his wife and family but Kathryn his administrator, who I know has been David’s pillar in his working life.

One last thing from me is that be very careful what you wear in your garden, especially in the summer months.

The reason I say this is that David once told me that the local rector has the power to enter the gardens of every resident in his parish? I am still not sure if this is true or not!!!!!!

David many congratulations on your award tonight and I know that you will accept this on behalf of your family and friends.

The Mayor thanked the public for attending and the meeting closed at 9.05 pm