

PRINCES RISBOROUGH TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 16th APRIL 2024 INCLUDING THE CHAIR'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 (Chair)

Cllrs J Biss, A Frost, G Hall, S Marshall, I Parkinson, N Rawsthorne, A Shipley, A Turner
Susanne Barter– Clerk, Kirsty Pope – Deputy Clerk, Jayne Mylchreest -Administration Officer,
Buckinghamshire Councillor Matthew Walsh

P.C. Peter Robinson Thames Valley Police

Apologies were received from Cllr Cross, Cllr Coombs and Cllr Morgan

44 members of the public were present.

No apologies were received from Cllr Rampin

P.C. Robinson Thames Valley Police gave a report on issues relating to Princes Risborough

Chair's Report

With a heavy heart I now feel that it is the right time to hand over the Mayoral chain to another worthy councillor and so this will be my last chair's report that I am now presenting. It seems hard to believe that my third and final year of office as your Town Mayor and Chair has almost come to an end; how time has flown!

This time last year I reported that we had just seen the first anniversary of the war in Ukraine, unfortunately this has been superseded by the appalling situation in Ukraine and the second anniversary has just passed.

I am thankful we can warmly welcome you back into our magnificent Brushwood Suite today. which in its second full year has played host to many events, including Weddings/Christenings/Conferences and many milestone birthday events.

I am so proud to have been a member of the town council that had the vision to build a versatile function suite, and in my opinion has been met. We are delighted to be hosting more tribute acts later in the year, details to follow.

I was also extremely proud to be part of a very successful events calendar for 2023, Cllr Alan Frost Chair 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 during our estimates meeting I have personally had to make was to agree with our Councillors that we had to increase your town precept by around 7.5%. 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.

Hopefully now that the summer is almost upon us we will start to see the benefit of our solar panels fitted above the brand new extension that houses our town clerk and her staff.

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 Surinder Marshall will go into more depth in her town committee report later.

Your town council worked extremely close with our local retailers last year and obtained significant funding from them to allow us to offer some 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, an example of this was their very generous grant towards the cost of the solar panels I mentioned.

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 my 3 years as your town Mayor and chair.

My special thanks must go to Councillor Josephine Biss my deputy town Mayor and vice Chair for the past 2 years. Josephine has accompanied me on numerous events and has also attended events when I cannot attend due to either holidays or other commitments, indeed there was 6 months of 2023 where Josephine was virtually covering me constantly due to my work commitments.

Josephine your bubbly character makes it a great pleasure to be around, so thank you Josephine for the past 2 years and good luck in next month's Mayoral elections.

As a token of my appreciation for your help and support please accept this small gift from me.
(Bunch of flowers to be presented)

I would also like to personally thank our maintenance team for their help and support during my 3 years. A lot of them have come and gone but presently both Steve Moulder, Pete Quigley and our new estates manager Mark Roberts are doing our town proud.

I would like to add that it has been an absolute honour and privilege to serve again as your Town Mayor and Chair for the past 3 years.

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's 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 walks in November 2021 and 2022, 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.

As a town Mayor and chair, you are always led by your town clerk and her team of very knowledgeable staff. So, I would like to personally thank, Sue our town clerk for all her help and support and telling me what I can and can't do, believe me as the Mayor I thought what I wanted to do I could.

Whilst I am discussing our town clerk, this week marks Sues 20-year anniversary of being our town clerk. So, Sue on behalf of every councillor and staff at the town council many congratulations and please accept these flowers to mark your 20-years in office.

Obviously apart from Sue our town clerk there are another 5 ladies employed to carry out the vast amount of work required to run such a well-oiled town council.

Kirsty, Jayne, Stephanie, Cate and Tania, please accept these flowers as a thankyou from me for the last 3 years and equally to brighten up your new office.

Of course, being the town Mayor and chair, in my opinion would have not 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, I like to think of Jayne as my PA. So, thank you for supporting me these past 3 years Jayne and as a show of my appreciation please accept this small gift from me.

As I reported during last year's annual town meeting with our looking to the future agenda, it gives me great pleasure to inform you all tonight that we have successfully completed the extension out the front of this building that is now the new home for the town council. This extension also included the long and well overdue refit of the toilets that for anybody that uses the community centre will agree that they are now a very high standard.

The phase 2 ground works at our Stratton Memorial Gardens are now completed and our thanks must go to A local contractor and his team for completing the project to a very high standard.

It would be remiss of me to not mention that our benefactor that gifted us the Stratton Memorial Garden passed away in May last year. Ann Stratton thank you for your generous donation and as a town council we will make sure that these gardens are always kept to a high standard. I would encourage any resident that hasn't yet visited the Garden to do so and spend a few quiet minutes of reflection gathering your thoughts whilst sitting on one of the benches.

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.

Greg Smith our local member of parliament has sent his apologies as every Tuesday evening parliament sit but we do have all 3 of our Bucks Unitary councillors, Gary Hall, Alan Turner and Matthew Walsh in attendance this evening, so please feel free to go and speak to them 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 which will be served during the break. Kim to show my personal appreciation please accept this orchid of which I know have a very sentimental meaning for you.

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

I will now hand over to our committee chair's to give their reports starting with Councillor Sue Coombs who is Chair of Finance.

Unfortunately, Sue has not been well for the past week so I will be presenting her report with the use of slides.

Councillor Josephine Biss, Chair of the Planning Committee

As a consultee, the planning committee does not have the power to make a final decision on planning matters. However, we try our best to promote and support planning that is always beneficial for our community.

In last year's report concerning the first application of the new expansion areas from Bloor Homes for 450 homes and the second from Consortium Development for the Park Mill farm Area for 1100 homes, I found that these are no longer applicable.

The local plan update as of today is that Bloor has applied for expansion. The first application will be presented to the Buckinghamshire Planning Committee in the Summer, consisting of a few 100 houses on Mill Lane as part of the local expansion.

Buckinghamshire Council will make opportunities for the public to make comments will be made available.

Secondly, the application for land on Longwick Road, which will consist of about 100 homes, will be available in late summer.

The New Local Plan will be available in 2027.

The public is welcome to attend our meeting; ten minutes is given to anyone who wishes to speak to us during the meeting and for planning notice, please go to the Princes Risborough Town Council Website.

Check this govt website on - New laws to speed up planning, building homes and levelling up

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-laws-to-speed-up-planning-build-homes-and-level-up>

Princes Risborough Town Councillors Gary Hall and Alan Turner and Buckinghamshire Councillor Matthew Walsh joined the meeting at 7.41pm.

Councillor Surinder Marshall, Chair of the Town Committee

Good Evening my name is Councillor Surinder Marshall and I am the Chair of the Town Committee.

Firstly, I would like to give you an overview of what the Town Committee is responsible for, then I would like to pay tribute to someone who has been very important to this committee. And lastly, I'll go into what the committee has done specifically over the last year.

What the Town Committee looks after:

- the Town's street lighting.
- public open spaces including grass cutting, trees and flower beds, war memorials, the Market House.
- general good environmental condition of the town
- all Town Council owned Recreation Grounds, Parks, Play equipment including litter and glass clearance, dog waste collections, grass cutting, hedges and trees and any other buildings within the parks ensuring that all these facilities and assets are well maintained and safe.
- Management of the use of the parks by third parties.
- The Thursday Market – day to day management and development
- Day to day management of Stratton Memorial Garden

So, you can see that the work of the Town Committee is integral to how the town looks and feels and manages some of the core activities of the Council.

Here I would like to pay tribute to Cllr John Coombes who we sadly lost in June last year. He was Chair of the Town Committee from its inception in 2012 and was instrumental in setting it up and defining the ways that it works to deliver the high quality service to the town that we all enjoy. He ran the committee in such a friendly and collaborative way, making sure that all members views were valued. He worked tirelessly for the town and he is sorely missed.

The current members of the committee are: Myself, Councillors Andy Ball, Jo Biss, Sue Coombs, Andrew Cross, Alan Frost, Gary Hall, Andy Shipley and Alan Turner. The meeting is supported by the office team, Sue Barter, the Clerk, Kirsty Pope, Deputy Clerk and Jayne Mylchreest, Administration Officer..

I will now move on to the monthly running of the Committee and the issues and achievements of the last year. I'll do this in order of the standing items on the agenda so that you can get an idea of how we work to deliver on our remit.

Correspondence:

It is very important part of council work to respond to correspondence sent in by members of the public. Letters to the town committee cover a number of topic, including requests to use the parks by third parties for activities, such as charity events and local businesses. This year there has been a lot of concern about dogs in parks and the committee has recommended that a Task and Finish group be set up to look at the situation in more detail as the issue is complex and needs careful consideration. If residents have any issues about the upkeep of the town then please write to the committee and we will try and help if we can.

Report from the Estates Manager – Mark Roberts

He keeps us abreast of all the maintenance work completed in the town during the previous month and raises any issues he needs the committee to discuss and make a decision about. We are delighted in the way that Mark has taken on the Estates Managers role, he organises the work extremely professionally and has a great eye for detail. We are very grateful for all the work he puts in.

The maintenance work is a core activity of the town council and requires investment in specialist equipment to undertake the various jobs. It has been found that key pieces, including the large mover are in need of replacement and the Committee ensured that these items are now budgeted for in the next financial year. Environmental concerns were a key consideration during the procurement decision, unfortunately, replacing the equipment with electric versions is not possible at this time, as the technology is not quite there yet. But rest assured this consideration is in the forefront of the decision making process.

Town Matters:

This item can cover any issue in the town that the council have responsibility for, except the Parks as this is covered later. Town Councillors actively keep an eye out in the town to ensure that the town remains safe and also pleasant to live in. They will bring any issues to the committee for discussion and action. We are also in active negotiation with Bucks Council about the Devolved Services Agreement – which is where we cut grass on Bucks Council's behalf. Budget cuts have made this negotiations difficult but our Clerk is working hard to ensure that our maintenance team is paid properly for the work they carry out and we are grateful that she keeps such a careful eye on the contract.

We also have a Speed Watch team, which is headed up by Cllr Alan Frost. Who regularly monitor the speed of traffic in the town, especially on the approach roads. This information is shared with the police. This group has been meeting all through the winter months come rain or shine and we are grateful for their perseverance. More people in the group would mean more monitoring could be done, so if you would like to join, please let the office or Cllr Frost know if you would like to join this happy band.

Stratton Memorial Garden

The new part of the Garden is now complete and is looking wonderful and will provide burial plots for many years to come. We also have a meadow area for the scattering of ashes. The committee is responsible for approving memorials and also recommending the rates we charge for plots in the garden, which we raised this year in line with inflation. We ensured that Risborough residents continue to have preferential rates so that the Garden focusses on provision for local people and remains affordable.

Parks

The parks in Risborough are a great asset and we seek to keep them in tip top condition and any matters relating to the parks are raised here.

Risk Assessments are carried out on all the equipment in our parks to ensure that it is safe for people to use a couple of items may have come to your attention whilst being in the parks.

the first:

some Play equipment in the King George V park, has been removed, this is because it has become unsafe. The council is currently looking at ways that we can raise money to replace items lost with more up to date and inclusive equipment.

The second:

The dovecote in St. Dunstan's Park is in need of extensive repair. As this is a listed building and repairs need to be conducted in keeping with its historic value, making it very expensive. We are making temporary repairs to ensure people's safety and to protect the building whilst we figure out how to make the more expensive restoration.

Thursday Market

The Town Committee handles overseeing the Thursday Market and earlier in the year we carried out a survey which showed that people were happy with the Market and enjoyed their experience, with people travelling in from surrounding villages to shop there. Jayne oversees the management of the

Market and deals with traders both new and old ensuring that we generate a small income from this activity, as well as providing residents with a friendly market. Thank you to Jayne.

Other Items are brought to the committee through the year: decisions on Town Planting and replacing the flag pole in Duke Street Gardens, applications for memorial benches to name a few.

I hope that this gives you a good overview of the Town Committee: what it is responsible for, how it works and what we have done over the past year.

Thank you.

Councillor Ian Parkinson, Chair of the Commercial Services Committee

Compared to where we were a year ago, we are in a much better place, so it can be said we have had a positive year.

A year ago, 39 High Street was empty although we still had a tenant, it was not very productive and did not give a good view of the High Street. In the situation we were in, our best approach was to take a stand back approach. The tenants knew the market better than us and with more useful contacts and had an incentive to find a replacement lessor. It still meant a lot of work in the background, understanding the new occupier and their ideas and plans, but also how it would fit into the community. Touch wood it has been successful so far, and hope it the start of a positive long-term partnership. At the same time the George and Dragon re-opened as well as the Florence Nightingale charity shop across the road. Something the council can not claim credit for, but the fact that the town provides the atmosphere and feel of a community that cares is a very great influence on these decisions.

This time last year we were embarking on the upgrade of the South East corner of the Wade centre. There is always some trepidation when starting any major project, regardless of how much planning and preparation has been made. Your council not only consulted the residents on this development, but also listened to what was said and made alterations to accommodate those ideas and suggestions were ever possible. Like any development project a lot of work is carried out unseen by many people which is vital to a successful outcome. This is true in this case and their efforts is greatly appreciated, and a very positive outcome would not have been possible without their time and hard work.

Now we can see the result of this which was achieved with a minimum level of disruption. The upgrade to the toilets and the entrance was something the previous owners had talked about a decade ago. We have installed them so that they are spacious, light and welcoming. Likewise, our toilets, does not make people reluctant to use them, and are places you do not want to get out of as quickly as possible. We have received positive comments on both and it is nice to know that these improvements have enhanced the experience of using the Wade Centre. After many years of the council leading a nomadic existence, recently being the tenants of the Princess Centre, but before that being based at Lincoln House on New Road. We now have a permanent home situated close to most of the council's activities with a bit more visibility and accessibility for the public. We also took advantage of this period of disruption, and availability of the scaffolding to reduce installation costs to provide solar panels on the roof of the Wades Centre to meet some of our power needs. The saving on the rent and reduction in our energy costs will continue to benefit the council and rate payers for this and future generations.

With both of these schemes these were just stages leading to further developments. In the case of the Wade Centre it is to provide a sealed walkways around the front of the building and multi-purpose disabled toilet and changing place for mothers with young children. With the panels, the eventual aim is to provide batteries to store unused solar panel generated electricity or take advantage of cheaper electric rates throughout periods of low demand. We continue to look to the future and not stand still. As a final point as I look around the Brushwood Suite, I can see a number improvements that have been made from suggestions we have received, therefore I will encourage you to continue to contact so we continue to improve your experience.

Councillor Alan Frost, Chair of the Events and PR Committee

Councillor Frost used slides and gave a verbal report.

Buckinghamshire Councillor Matthew Walsh gave an update on

- North West Chilterns Community Board funding/grants
- Buckinghamshire Council's budget

Buckinghamshire Councillor Gary Hall gave an update on

- Budget concerns/central government grants
- Roads/pavements

Buckinghamshire Councillor Alan Turner paid tribute to the late Princes Risborough Town Councillor John Coombs and an update on

- Time spent on individual residents' concerns
- Best kept Village Competition
- Risborough Expansion Plan/relief road

Public Open Forum

Questions were raised regarding the following

- Wades Centre room hire rates
- Thames Water works at Kingsmead

Presentation of Princes Risborough Citizens Awards

Business of The Year was awarded to the Three Chairs Barber and Bar with Hair 24 being highly commended.

Ryan, at 3 chairs provides the ultimate male grooming service and a first-class experience.

Ryan aims to bring the quality of the top London salons but without the price tag. Their highly skilled stylists will make sure you get the service you deserve. 3 chairs offers a bespoke service ranging from haircut, beard trim, a hot towel shave or a revitalising facial.

3 Chairs must be the only barbers where you can have a beard trim and a cocktail at the same time.

Ryan we received numerous nominations from our residents so it is my pleasure to present you with the award for business of the year. Congratulations Ryan.

24-HAIR also were awarded a business award as they received so many nominations from the local residents and were highly commended.

Young Citizen of The Year was awarded to Amelie Thomas

Amelie must be our youngest ever recipient of this award at the age of 10.

For the past 2 years Amelie has worked hard to create a unique brand, Amelies Magical Tie Dye. Amelie has sold her T-shirts, pencil cases, bags and hair accessories at various community events including school fairs and our very own town festival last summer.

In fact, Amelie I seem to recall that I am still waiting for my shirt as you had completely sold-out last summer.

Amelie has to spend her free time on the weekends leading up to the events, preparing the items, dying them, washing the dye out and finally pricing them.

This has given Amelie a huge amount of confidence in herself as I hope she doesn't mind me mentioning that she suffers from severe dyslexia. Amelie's confidence has grown through talking to the public and has worked extremely hard to overcome some of the challenges.

Learning life skills such as profit margins and the exchange of money at such a young age are vital to build their confidence for the years ahead.

Stephanie and Gavin, you should be extremely proud of your daughters' achievements at such a young age and Amelie should be seen as a role model to other members of her school.

On behalf of Princes Risborough town council many congratulations Amelie on winning the award for the young citizen of the year 2024.

Citizen of The Year was posthumously awarded to the late Councillor John Coombs

Well, where do I begin to talk about the late John Coombs

Almost 10 months have passed since the death of John at the age of just 73, and this posthumous citizen of the year award is in our opinion very fitting.

As with all great men John has had a great team behind him, not only his wife Sue but a great deal of friends.

John encouraged me to become a councillor in 2015 whilst I was delivering him one of his vast number of cruise magazines, this was a daily occurrence by the way as his passion was cruise ship holidays with his wife Sue.

John had served at our local fire station as a retained fire fighter between 1973 and 1984, and had reached the rank of group fire control officer in the control room, which was then situated in Aylesbury. John enjoyed over 30 years in the control room between 1968 until his retirement through ill health in 1999.

During my fire career as a retained fire fighter I met both John and Sue during house fires where the residents required the assistance of the fire brigade motorhome for either re housing or for just a safe place to stay.

Whilst volunteering for the Red Cross John received the badge of honour for his commitment and served over 20 years between 2003 until his death last June.

John started his career as a town councillor in 1996 and was Town Mayor and chairman from 2001 to 2003.

John's passion in the town were the parks and he was chair of the town committee from 2003 until his untimely death.

It was John that had the vision to move the maintenance of the towns parks and verges inhouse and to form our own maintenance team saving thousands of pounds.

John's passion for our parks was so intense that he was once quoted in the Bucks free press "that if Risborough Rangers football club believe they should use our parks for free every weekend to play and train for football matches that he would tarmac Wades Park and use it as a carpark"

Of course this was completely taken out of context but didn't stop around 100 angry residents descending at the next town council meeting, still I suppose it got residents to our meetings.

John did endless charity work and was heavily involved in the running of all our towns events with his beloved wife Sue.

John also held the position of chair of the Princes Risborough charities from 2001 until his death.

John was also an original trustee of the Princes Centre which is now a thriving business.

John, I considered as a very dear friend and somebody I could always talk to for advice and help when required and I miss him very much. John has left a big hole not only in the town council but also our town.

John many congratulations on your award tonight and I know that Alan Turner will accept this award on his wife Sues behalf.

Trevor Fitch gave an update on behalf of the Princes Risborough Rotary Club

The Chair / Mayor thanked the public for attending and the meeting closed at 9.21pm