

## **PRINCES RISBOROUGH TOWN COUNCIL**

### **MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 11<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2025 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

#### **Present**

Cllr N Rawsthorne (Chair)

Cllrs A Ball, J Biss, S Coombs, A Frost, G Hall, S Marshall, C Morgan, I Parkinson,

A Shipley, A Turner

Susanne Barter– Clerk, Kirsty Pope – Deputy Clerk, Jayne Mylchreest -Administration Officer,

Stephanie Boyle- Events and Community Manager

Sgt. Clare Farrow- Thames Valley Police

52 members of the public were present.

**No apologies were received from Cllr Cross**

#### **Chair's Report**

Welcome to this year's Annual Town Meeting (ATM), and thank you all, on behalf of everyone at the Town Council, for taking the time out this evening (Tuesday 11th March 2025) to join us for an update on the past twelve months. This is only my second ATM as a Councillor and first as Chair and Mayor so I have changed the format slightly to try and allow you all to further engage with my fellow Councillors who are sat on each of the tables with you. During the last year we have tried very hard to engage with you and to be available, whether through surveys, CrossTalk and at events, so I thought this evening should be no different so please take the opportunity to let us know what you think. Conscious that this has been the last year of this current Council, with elections due in May, we have been focussed on establishing a firm base for whoever follows, whether on finances, maintenance and upkeep of the Town, our Commercial Services or our entertainments and events, whilst still seeking to meet the expectations and feedback that you provided in our extensive consultation last year.

This annual report therefore contains reports from the Chair of each committee and provides further detail on the main work of the Town Council, for which I would wish to provide some background. The facilities and breadth of what we provide as a small Town Council has constantly amazed me over the last year, whether the fantastic events such as the Summer Festival and Christmas Lights Switch-On, the amazing community facilities we now have here at the Wades Centre, the Stratton Memorial Garden, or our historical heritage as a medieval market town (as captured in a recent episode of 'Escape to the Country') all managed by a small team of mainly part-time staff, and a hard-working maintenance team – to whom I am very grateful. The challenges of maintaining such a wide remit however has been particularly hard this year as we have sought to maintain the expected level of service that you want against a very taut financial environment, such that we have had to make some difficult decisions. This has included a refocus on our Town itself, rather than maintaining devolved services to neighbouring parishes, reducing costs where possible and looking at more sustainable planting options an increasing dependence upon the support of Councillors and volunteers to run events. It is the critical role that volunteers play in the delivery of a range of services across the community that I am particularly keen to highlight, especially as we will be taking part in the Buckinghamshire 'Best Kept Village' competition this year – where we will be asking for support from across the community.

Similarly, as the nominations for applications to run as Councillors open up next week, I would urge you to consider if this is also a role you could help fill – making a difference for the benefit of our Town. Find out more about the 2025 Elections. Thank you to Stephanie and the team for organising tonight's meeting, and we welcome your feedback and thoughts not just on this event but in all that we do, as I am sure that the incoming Council will welcome your input.

### **Councillor Sue Coombs, Chair of the Finance Committee**

Setting the Precept is a fundamental part of the Town Council's duty and responsibilities which affects all residents and businesses 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. Once again there has needed to be a great deal of heart-searching within the council in an endeavour to reach a compromise which is agreeable to as many of you as possible and within the remit set to us. After consultations held last year we have attempted to fulfil, as much as we are able, your wishes and to safeguard the things that matter to you, whilst keeping the vibrant heart of the Town and maintaining the Town to the standard you have rightly come to expect from us. Much of the increase in the Precept is due to factors beyond our control, similar to those impacting households daily—rising utility bills and reductions in income. A clear example is the Dovecote in St. Dunstan's playing field. As a listed building, we are legally obligated to maintain it. During the restoration planning, we discovered bat droppings and potentially a large number of roost features, which has added complexity and cost to the project due to the need for specialised conservation measures. You will see from the illustration (page above) the breakdown of your Council Tax bill and the relatively small amount which comes to the Town Council. At the start of these discussions, we faced a potential increase of nearly 50%. Recognising that this was unacceptable for both the Council and our community, we worked hard to reduce it. As a result, the increase has been minimised to 11.19% for each Band D residential property in the Town

Like any sustainable business, the Town Council must balance its books. We have made every effort to minimise the rise in the precept by pursuing efficiency savings and exploring alternative revenue streams. However, some cost increases are simply unavoidable. Money is very tight but we will do our best to provide the service which you have come to expect and deserve from your Town Council.

### **Councillor Josephine Biss, Chair of the Planning Committee**

The Princes Risborough Town Council Planning Committee does not have the authority to approve or reject planning applications or enforce building regulations. However, the committee can provide support, offer comments, or choose not to comment on applications submitted to the Unitary Council, which holds the decision-making power.

One of the key applications currently in progress is from Bloor Homes, proposing several hundred homes on Mill Lane as part of the town's planned expansion. This application will be presented to the Strategic Sites Planning Committee in 6 months or less. The delay has been due to ongoing discussions and amendments to finalise and secure the Section 106 (S106) development contribution agreement.

What is Section 106? Section 106 (S106) is a legally binding agreement between local authorities and developers linked to planning permissions. Also known as planning obligations, S106 agreements are designed to mitigate the impact of developments on the local community and infrastructure.

The public is welcome to attend our meetings. A 10-minute slot is available for anyone who addresses the committee on planning application matters.

You can visit the Princes Risborough Town Council website for planning notices and more details

### **Councillor Surinder Marshall, Chair of the Town Committee**

Firstly, I would like to give you an overview of what the Town Committee is responsible for. And lastly, I'll go into what the committee has done specifically over the last year. What the Town Committee looks after: Town Council owned Recreation Grounds, Parks, Play equipment, any other buildings on that property. • litter and glass clearance, dog waste collections, • grass cutting, hedges and trees work • minor repairs to infrastructure, Management of the use of the parks by third parties The Thursday Market – day to day management and development Stratton Memorial Garden - day to day management and maintenance of The town's street lighting – maintenance and repair 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. The Town Committee meets once a month and I'll now run through some of the decisions and issues from the last year.

Maintenance Team Work Our Maintenance Team is responsible for the up keep of the town, mowing grass, looking after the parks, repairing equipment where possible and all the other maintenance jobs necessary to keep everything in order. They also, set up and take down for our great town events – Farmers Markets, Summer Festival and Christmas Lights Switch on. The Maintenance Team has undergone re-ordering this year, with a reduction in the number of members down to two, Steve and

Dylan, who you will see out and about looking after our lovely town. In the past, we have undertaken work on contract for surrounding parishes, we decided that we should focus on Princes Risborough alone. This makes the team more straightforward to manage and allows us to keep Risborough at the centre of all the work we do.

Flower Beds As you will have noticed the flower beds have been sadly empty this winter in order to save money. However, we have decided that this year the town flower beds need to be brought up to date and we will be planting more perennial, drought resistant and sustainable plants, requiring less watering and which will stand over the winter. This planting will start in April and will be less expensive to look after in coming years. There will, of course, be summer bedding plants as well, which together should make a truly sophisticated and inviting display in our town centre.

The tree is unfortunately outgrowing the small garden at the end of the High Street and the next council will need to decide what to do about that. Because of the type of tree it is, pruning and re-shaping are not an option, as can be seen by the efforts that we made at the end of last year. This is a tricky problem and I suspect that there won't be a solution that everyone is happy with.

Earl Mitchell Meadow Project As a council we have a duty to be increasing the biodiversity on the land that we have responsibility for. To this end, after a positive consultation last year, we began to develop a meadow on the bank in the Earl Mitchell Playing field with a group of volunteer residents. This entails only mowing the slope three times a year and raking up the grass cutting to allow the native wildflowers to flower and set seed on the bank. This might mean that it could look a bit "scruffy" from time to time, but over a number of years will become a haven for endangered wild flowers and a great pit stop for pollinators and, if we are lucky, rare butterflies. Since it is only taking up the slope of the playing field there will still be plenty of room for football and all the other activities that happen there.

Speed Watch Our Speed Watch team, which is headed up by Cllr Alan Frost, 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 We are blessed that we have Stratton Memorial Garden as a burial place in our town. We have been doing some remedial work on beds that needed attention over the winter to bring them back to the standard expected by the town. Overall though the Garden remains a beautiful and peaceful place to sit and relax and remember with a great view of Whiteleaf. We remind residents that dogs are not allowed in the garden. Parks The parks in Risborough are a great asset and we seek to keep them in tip top condition. Risk Assessments are carried out on all the equipment in our parks to ensure that it is safe for people to use.

Play equipment As you will have noticed play equipment has been removed, this is because it has become unsafe and much of the other equipment is coming to the end of its life. We are doing our best to repair existing equipment with our maintenance budget this year. We have allocated as much money as we can in next year's budget and we are actively looking for more money to replace items – if you know of a sponsor or benefactor who could help us with this please let us know. The Dovecote in St. Dunstan's Park is in need of extensive repair. As this is a listed building and we are obliged to make repairs in keeping with its history, making it very expensive. We made temporary repairs to ensure people's safety and to protect the building and money is allocated in next year's budget to make the repairs necessary for this historic landmark.

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. 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.

Correspondence and Public Forum At each committee meeting any emails or letters that have been sent to the council that are relevant to the committee's remit are read at the meeting and councillors will discuss issues arising and decide on action. If you have a concern, please do write to the council on the council email address or by post (see last page for details). Similarly, at the beginning of each meeting there is an opportunity for members of the public to speak in the Public Forum. Applications to speak must be received by the Town Clerk no later than 5pm on the last working day preceding the meeting. Lastly, many thanks to Kirsty who clerks for this meeting and to Sue, Jayne, Kirsty and the Maintenance Team who are the ones who carry out the work.

### **Councillor Ian Parkinson, Chair of the Commercial Services Committee**

It has been a fairly humdrum, even boring year, I am afraid, unlike the previous three years when there was always something major happening both planned and unplanned. This year the big event was our tenant rebranded from a Japanese to a Bar and Grill. It is always useful to have a year of consolidation and minor amendments quietly to move forward. Therefore, at the end of this council it would seem appropriate to look back over the last four years. The Market House, is probably the single building that can epitomise Risborough. Go back two or three hundred years, despite the town being unrecognisable there is a familiar building at the end of the High Street, may it continue into the future. Each Thursday and Saturday, the space beneath the market house is used by the local country market group and a fruit and vegetable vendor, keeping its tradition as a marketplace alive. Upstairs, accessible via the iron staircase, there is a meeting room available for hire. As a listed building, any alterations should always be approached with the utmost care and consideration. Along the High Street stands the old NatWest building, purchased by the council in 2018. Since the beginning of our council term, its journey has been a rollercoaster. At the start, the building was still under development, bustling with construction work, and seven months later, The Manor opened its doors— only to close eighteen months later.

Behind the scenes, this period was filled with activity, including a few wild goose chases. The council's best approach was to remain calm and work discreetly. To outsiders, it may have seemed as if nothing was happening, but that was far from the truth. Six months later, a new tenant moved in, launching a Japanese restaurant. Even in what was considered a quiet year, the building remained a site of change. More recently, the owners decided to rebrand the restaurant into a bar and grill. We wish them success and look forward to a smooth and uneventful relationship

That brings us onto the Wades Centre, which has come a long way in the last four years. At the start of our term, we were coming out of covid, an event which had major effects on the country and individuals, and your council was not exempt from this. The Sports Hall was being used as a vaccination centre, and the Brushwood Suite had still to be opened.

Despite this inauspicious start it is surprising how quickly the novelty of the Brushwood Suite has disappeared and it has become part of the facilities. Things have been done to improve the experience as the first few months were a huge learning curve, but now it is a lot easier process to operate as our knowledge has improved. It always was the intention of this council that this room would still serve the community and not just be for private events. As well as nights like this, the Brushwood Suite has been host to many events including weddings, wakes, birthdays, tributes, conferences, community sports groups, movie previews, historical talks, training days and even a drum and bass night! Only recently, the Town Council were pleased to use this facility to host its third event for International Women's Day, with four inspirational speakers. We are open to suggestions of other community-based events that can be held here, not just musical, sporting/comedy for example.

The original part of the Community Centre continues to offer a range of facilities and venues for various uses. Two years ago, a major upgrade project began—an initiative envisioned even before the council took ownership. The work was carried out with minimal disruption to users and brought several key improvements: a renovated entrance and upgraded toilets, a permanent home for the Town Council office at the heart of the centre's main facilities, and the installation of solar panels on the roof, supported by a grant from the North West Chilterns Community Board. The later was a separate project but done at the same time to reduce costs and disruption. Over the future years it will help reduce the council's electricity bill and improve our efficiency for current and future residents. Unfortunately, with our usual sense of timing we did this in the year without sunshine, so we hope things will only get better. The upgrade has made using this building a much more pleasurable experience, and more welcoming. There are plans to continue with further developments when the

finances allow. Having the council office here has helped giving users the ability to easily contact someone during the day if there are issues or needs, or just supplying re-assurance to hirers. I think I can confidently say that over the last four years despite some unplanned events and unexpected turns, the changes to the facilities and services have been positive and we have moved forward. With a number of similar facilities on offer around the town, we will always need to innovate, regardless of this, the council will always do this, but it is always good to have this competition to prevent complacency.

### **Councillor Alan Frost, Chair of the Events and PR Committee**

As my 'reign' as Chairman of the PR/Events committee potentially comes to an end after three years due to the upcoming elections, I reflect on the achievements and challenges faced by the committee during this time. From the very start of the new council, I have had the privilege of leading PR/Events, and I am proud of what we have accomplished together. Our first event, "Welcome Back Risborough," was a crucial step in bringing the community together post-Covid. This event was a great success, setting the tone for our future initiatives. A special mention must go to two of our office members, Kirsty and Steph, whose hard work and dedication have been instrumental in making our events successful. Additionally, I extend my heartfelt thanks to my fellow councillors on the PR/Events committee, the Maintenance Team, and our loyal volunteers for their support at events

Art Trails The Easter and Halloween Art Trails were well supported by High Street shops and helped to increase footfall in the area. Princes Risborough Library kindly supported both of these events, with the Halloween trail being particularly spectacular. It was fantastic to receive such positive feedback from attendees at the Halloween Trail regarding the event and 'Haunted House' décor and to see so many in fancy dress.

Farmers Market While well received, the Farmers Market still requires increased footfall. Fortunately, the weather was kind to us, even during the last market. Vendors praised the organisation of the events. A special mention for the Educational Mobile Farm which was particularly loved by families.

D-Day 80th Anniversary The event saw excellent attendance from our residents in the Stratton Memorial Garden and we were blessed with perfect weather. The event was well supported by the RAF (Naphill) and St Mary's Church. A humorous moment occurred when background music unexpectedly played Christmas tunes whilst we waited for the beacon to be lit! Looking ahead, we are planning a VE Day event for this year.

Festival Week Another great line-up of events with the Festival Programme featuring over 80 listings, with strong support from local organisations and businesses. Festival Week saw good participation across various activities. Despite poor weather on Festival Day (Saturday), the event was still well supported.

Art in the Park Art in the Park continues to grow each year, with exceptionally high standards of artwork submitted by participants. This year's entries spanned a wide age range, from 10 to 80 years old. Due to severe weather on the viewing evening, we successfully relocated to the Wades Centre. The Brushwood Suite was filled with finalists, along with their families and friends, eagerly awaiting the announcement of the winner.

Christmas Lights Switch-On Excellent weather contributed to a massive turnout on the High Street. Vendors reported excellent sales from the evening. Special mention to Princes Risborough School, whose Band and Dance Academy provided fantastic entertainment. The lights countdown was a bit overcomplicated by yours truly but overall, it was a fantastic night enjoyed by all.

Financial Challenges Moving forward, we anticipate financial constraints, making it crucial to secure additional sponsorships for events. If any local businesses are interested in supporting our community events and projects, please do get in touch with the Town Council Offices by emailing: [towncouncil@princesrisboroughtowncouncil.gov.uk](mailto:towncouncil@princesrisboroughtowncouncil.gov.uk)

Buckinghamshire Councillor Matthew Walsh gave an update on the following:-

- Finance - budget cuts and Adult and Children's social care
- Planning reforms

Buckinghamshire Councillor Gary Hall gave an update on the following -:

- Council Tax – how it is used
- Financial position
- Housing

Buckinghamshire Councillor Alan Turner gave an update on the following:-

- Planning- housing target increase, new towns
- Finance – reserves held and in a better position than most other councils

Public Open Forum

Questions were raised regarding the following

The Rotary Club raised questions regarding

- funding for playground equipment
- The tree at Duke Street Gardens
- Brushwood Suite hire charges

A resident raised a question regarding the minutes of meetings and was advised that all the minutes of each Committee and Town Council were available to view on the Princes Risborough Town Council website or available to view by appointment in the Town Council office.

**Councillor Biss** made an address on International Women's Day.

**Mayor and Chair Cllr Rawsthorne** paid tribute to all the volunteers and then gave an update on the May elections

### **Presentation of Princes Risborough Citizens Awards**

Business of The Year was awarded to Lightfoots Solicitors

Lightfoots Solicitors established their Princes Risborough office in 2018 and have been thriving ever since. Committed to supporting the local materials and guided walks through the Conservation Area, particularly during the annual Town Festival. Dedicated to preserving Risborough's rich heritage, the Society actively shares historical insights with the community, ensuring that knowledge and memories are passed down through generations. community, they regularly sponsor events such as Santa's Grotto at the Christmas Lights Switch On and have recently served as a headline sponsor for the Summer Festival. Their team is also dedicated to charitable causes, frequently fundraising for organisations like Sands.

\*This award is determined by public vote and not influenced by the Town Council

Organisation of The Year was awarded to The Risborough Area Heritage Society

The Local History Society, established in 1987, hosts monthly indoor meetings from September to April. It organises occasional exhibitions of historical Lightfoots Solicitors established their Princes Risborough office in 2018 and have been thriving ever since. Committed to supporting the local materials and guided walks through the Conservation Area, particularly during the annual Town Festival. Dedicated to preserving Risborough's rich heritage, the Society actively shares historical insights with the community, ensuring that knowledge and memories are passed down through generations.

Citizen of The Year was posthumously awarded to the late Richard Woodward

Richard dedicated 27 years to Risborough Rangers as Chairman, shaping Risborough Rangers into the respected Step 5 club it is today. Beyond football, Richard was an active member of the community. He volunteered at St. Mary's Church, tended to his three allotments, served as Treasurer for the Allotments Society, and was a flower judge for the Oxon & Bucks Horticultural Society.

The Chair / Mayor thanked the public for attending and the meeting closed at 9.07pm