



GILLINGHAM TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Minutes of the **Annual Town Council Meeting** held on **Wednesday 27th April 2016** at **7.30 p.m.** in the **Civic Hall, Town Hall, School Road, Gillingham.**

Present: Cllr D Walsh (Mayor)
Cllr B Von Clemens (Deputy Mayor)
Cllr Ms A Baker, Cllr Mrs A Beckely,
Cllr R Evill, Cllr M Gould,
Cllr P Harris, Cllr Mrs Su Hunt
Cllr S Joyce, Cllr D Milsted
Cllr Miss N Purkis, Cllr Mrs V Potheary
Cllr Mrs B Ridout and Cllr Ms Donna Toye.

Also Present: Seven members of the public were present.

In Attendance: Town Clerk, Assistant Town Clerk,
and the Planning Committee Clerk.

Apologies: Cllr A Frith, Cllr D Griffin and Cllr R Monksummers

1. To approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on Wednesday 29th April 2015.

Proposed by Cllr Mrs Hunt and seconded by Cllr Mrs Potheary that the minutes of the last meeting held on the 29th April 2015 were received, approved and adopted as a correct record of that meeting.

2. Questions. There were no questions.

3. To receive the charity account of Reads Charity for FY 2015-16.

The Town Clerk presented the accounts on behalf of the Reads Charity as follows:

The William Read Charity was founded by a will in 1798. The original aim was to provide a loaf of bread for the poor in the parish of Gillingham. Over the years further monies have been bequeathed to the charity and two smaller charities added to the original. The Francis Duroe charity supported apprenticeships. The charity is now administered by Farnfield and Nicholls and a committee selected from across the community.

Money is only allocated to people in the parish of Gillingham or Milton-On-Stour and under normal circumstances they must have lived in Gillingham for at least five years.

The accounts for the period 1st March 2015 to 29th February 2016 show a balance of £18,807.24. Only the interest accrued on this amount can be spent. To seek assistance from the Charity contact the Town Council or write direct to the Trustees of Reads Charity c/o Farnfield and Nicholls.

Annual Town Meeting – 27th April 2016 (continued):

4. To receive reports from the following local organisations:

(a) Wyvern Credit Union – Cllr David Milsted

Cllr Milsted gave a verbal report, summarised below:

It was reported last year that the First Dorset Credit would be expanding into Somerset and merge with the Camelot credit union, based in Yeovil. This merger has now taken place with the formation of the Wyvern Credit Union.

A credit union is a savings and loan co-operative, owned by its members (investors) who make an investment of £1 or more. Co-operative banking has a long history going back to the early Quakers in the 17th century, and is a worldwide movement. It is a very popular form of banking in Ireland with 80% of the population using a co-operative bank and 40% in Canada; it is less popular in the UK with only 3% choosing to use this style of banking for savings and loans – but the numbers in the UK are growing.

The purpose of a credit union is to encourage saving and to offer low cost loans on amounts from £50 to £7,500 to its savers. Interest is worked out on a monthly basis, on the diminishing balance rather than the whole loan and there is no penalty for paying a loan back early. A credit union is sometimes able to offer loans to people who may not be able to get credit from their high street bank. Credit unions are a lifeline for people who would otherwise be at risk from doorstep lenders, ‘pay-day’ lenders, and loan sharks. A decision on granting a loan is made by trained loans officers and not just based on a credit score. Credit unions are not allowed to pay interest on savings but instead pay an annual dividend to investors, when it is possible to do so. Unfortunately, in recent years, it has not been possible to pay annual dividends due to the economic climate but as the economy improves a dividend payment may once again be possible. Interest of 1.5% is allowed on junior (under 18) savings accounts.

The Credit Union started in Dorchester in 1999 and a service point was opened in the Methodist Church in Gillingham in 2007. It is now located in the Community Office opposite the Waitrose café, operating on Wednesdays from 12 to 2pm and on Saturdays from 10am to 12. Wyvern Credit Union is authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and regulated by both the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and the Prudential Regulation Authority. Following the merger of the credit unions First Dorset and Camelot, there are now 22 branches across Dorset and Somerset and it is hoped that a service point will soon be established in Wincanton. Service points are staffed by volunteers and often located in facilities that are free of charge to use (such as the Community Office in Gillingham which belongs to the Town Council).

Wyvern Credit Union underwrites the Wheels to Work Scheme which enables people to purchase a scooter to get to college or work and in Gillingham it currently has four corporate members: 2 x Chamber of Commerce, Sturminster Cheese Festival and Gillingham Car Link Scheme. There are currently 2,500 members across Dorset, with £1.2 million on deposit; about £475,000 is out on loan.

(b) Town Meadow Group

Mr Robert Setchell, Chairman of the Town Meadow Group, was unable to attend the meeting. Mr Bob Messer, Treasurer of the Group, gave a verbal summary on the work of the Town Meadow Group as follows:

Annual Town Meeting – 27th April 2016 (continued):

4. To receive reports from the following local organisations (continued):

The Town Meadow Group (TMG) is a financially independent group who manages the Town Meadow, their committee is elected by Friends of the Meadow to whom they submit accounts and receive management recommendations. The Town Meadow is leased from Hall and Woodhouse to Gillingham Town Council for twenty five years.

This year the TMG has planted extra bulbs, wired up the climbing roses, kept some river views open, planted two cherry trees, installed two large planters with compost and plants, erected two notice boards, installed one bench and has fifth bench ready for installation. It has installed new gates by Chans to stop joy riders squeezing through to drive round on the grass. We organised a Town Fete and after consultation with stall holders decided to hold it every two years. This event owes a lot to the Gillingham Army Cadets who helped us greatly. Town Council staff have been a great support to the TMG.

This year we have had small donations, held two quizzes in 2015 and one in 2016 which earned £635, which was slightly below average. The Friends of the Town Meadow brings a little funding but the main income has been for the 'pop up' Hidden Pizza soon to be joined by South Street Kitchen in holding regular evenings in the Summer with food and music. We will have to seek grants from various sources to complete our plans.

In 2016 we will host Gillingham in Gear, a music weekend to celebrate the schools five hundred years as well as the Carnival and Christmas events.

Future plans include providing a water supply to the site, painting the railings along the High Street black, putting railings round Chans car park, restoring the collapsed dry stone wall (former Tudor News/Netplay back garden). We are investigating the cost of lights along the path and whether that is possible in the conservation area. We are getting advice on how to treat the surface to improve drainage and grass growth.

Many people lean over the Waitrose footbridge, look at daffodils and say '**They** have done a good job haven't **they**'. There is no they, it is us, the people of Gillingham. The committee, the businesses that support us, the weeders, planters, stone sorters, quiz and raffle ticket sellers, raffle prize donors, concrete mixers and strimmers. Perhaps the best was when the congregation of St Mary's turned out after service to mark world environment day by working on the meadow.

I would like to conclude by saying that the Community Resource Worker, Sarah Reeves, has been a tremendous help to the TMG as she has been to many community organisations and starting groups in town. It would be a great loss if that position were to disappear.

The Mayor thanked Mr Messer for his report and added that he hears nothing but fantastic comments about the improvements to the Town Meadow.

(c) Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan Group (GNPG)

The Town Clerk informed the meeting that the Chairman of Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan Group, Mr David Beaton, was unable to attend the meeting due to a prior commitment. The latest GNPG newsletter was tabled at the meeting.

Cllr Ms Baker informed the meeting that the consultation will commence from 16th May to 10th July.

The Mayor thanked Cllr Ms Baker, Cllr Gould, Cllr Mrs Hunt and Cllr Mrs Potheary for all their hard work in association with others to produce a draft Neighbourhood Plan for Gillingham.

Annual Town Meeting – 27th April 2016 (continued):

5. To receive the annual reports of the Committee Chairmen:

(a) General Purposes – Cllr David Milsted

Cllr Milsted presented the following report on behalf of the General Purposes Committee:

The General Purposes Committee is the workhorse of the Council. It oversees all the work the Town Council does around the town and in Milton-On-Stour by our 'outdoor' staff, and all the property in Council ownership, including the cemetery, the public toilets, all the play areas and public open spaces, the allotments and planted areas, and the Town Hall itself. In addition, it acts as a liaison between the Town Council and the County Highways Department for all local traffic-related issues. In order to undertake this large workload efficiently, the Committee has a number of Working Parties, each with a Lead Member. These meet regularly or as required, and give written reports with recommendations for action. This means that discussions at committee meetings do not go on for too long – 45 minutes is the optimal time for a General Purposes meeting. When recommendations require spending from the Council's budget, the committee's reports are sent to the Policy and Resources Committee for approval.

REPORTS FROM WORKING PARTIES

Allotments and Burial Provision (Lead Member Cllr Rupert Evill): This year eight internments of cremated remains took place at Gillingham Town Cemetery and twenty one burials; an increase when compared to the past couple of years. An application for a faculty was submitted to Salisbury Diocese and permission was granted for the removal of paths and hard standing and for topple testing of memorials. The work to remove the paths and the hard-standing area in the Cemetery has been completed and the areas have been re-seeded. Plot numbers will be allocated to the four new areas and will be available for use within the next year. These additional areas mean that the cemetery can provide burial spaces for approximately another 7 years.

The working party recommended that the preferred option for future burial land is still land off of Stour Meadows (Policy GH22); and this was agreed by Full Council.

The town council grounds-staff have started topple testing memorials in the cemetery; the work is on-going.

It was agreed that there is a need for a freestanding noticeboard at Gillingham Cemetery and a notice board will be purchased within the next financial year.

The Town Council work in partnership with the Gillingham Allotment Association and a member of the association has been co-opted onto the working party. Permission was granted for a community allotment storage building to be erected in at Cemetery Road Allotment Gardens for use by the Association. It was agreed that tenancy agreements would be paid each January rather than each April in order to allow sufficient time for allotments to be reallocated prior to the growing season. This will take effect from January 2017. Seven plots have been reallocated at Cemetery Road and seven plots have been reallocated at Park Farm during the past 12 months. The past three years has seen a decline in the number of people wishing to be added to the waiting list for an allotment. Many tenants have taken an allotment for a short time and have been unable to make the necessary commitment; therefore we have seen an increase in the number of allotments being re-allocated part way through the season. In November 2013 there were 73 people on the waiting list. As of 1st April 2016 the number of people on the waiting list is 24. Of these 24 people, 14 of them have declined an allotment at Park Farm.

Annual Town Meeting – 27th April 2016 (continued):

5. To receive the annual reports of the Committee Chairmen (continued):

The Play Area Working Party was dissolved at the end of last year and amalgamated into the Estate Management Working Party (formerly known as the Land Management Working Party).

The Estate Management Working Party is an extremely busy working party and meets every month. Lead Member, Cllr Steve Joyce, stepped down from this role just before Christmas and Cllr Barry Von Clemens has been Acting Lead Member since.

A Tree Condition Survey and Risk Management Plan was completed by a qualified arboriculturalist in April 2015. Fortunately, there were only two trees identified as 'high risk' and the work was carried out promptly. The majority of work was identified as 'moderate' to 'low risk'. A specification of tree work to be undertaken was drawn up and tenders sent to four local arboriculture contractors for completion. A contract was awarded in March 2016 and the work is currently being undertaken. The survey report also recommended that key staff were trained in basic tree identification and inspection and this has been arranged for April 2016.

The style and design of site signage for the larger areas of public open space was agreed and the signs will be installed during 2016.

Himalayan Balsam was cleared from the River Lodden not far from the road bridge at Shaftesbury Road. This work was carried out by our grounds staff at the end of August but it would have been preferable if this work had been done earlier in the year before the seed heads had ripened. The working party will ensure the work is done much earlier in 2016 and will involve volunteers under the supervision of Dorset Wildlife Trust.

To protect trees, which are being used as temporary goal ends, steel goal ends have been ordered for Gyllas Green and Church View and will be installed when ground conditions permit, hopefully in April 2016.

Tree planting was agreed for Upper Lodden Meadow (King John Road) to mark the 500 anniversary of Gillingham School. A planting ceremony took place in April 2016 with members of the school community, local residents and members of the Town Council present.

The public open space to the rear of Horsefields will now be known as Shires Gate (as it is near the boundary of WiltSHIRE and DorsetSHIRE). The transfer of public open space to the rear of Cherryfields and Swallowfields was also completed earlier in the year and this area of land will now be known as Shreen Meadow (as its boundary is with Shreen Water).

The location of additional rustic seating was agreed and these will be made in house by Town Council staff, as soon as suitable wood can be sourced.

The portacabin pavilion at Hardings Lane was removed from site last summer as it had been vandalised and is no longer required.

A summer bedding and planting scheme was devised and has been generously sponsored by local businesses. The bedding for Summer 2016 will be themed to celebrate HM Queen's 90th Birthday and the 500th anniversary of Gillingham School.

A number of pieces of play equipment have been repaired in house over the year. Marlott Road play area has been recognised as an area for future refurbishment and money has been ear-marked in the precept to eventually refurbish this play area within a five to seven year time plan.

Annual Town Meeting – 27th April 2016 (continued):

5. To receive the annual reports of the Committee Chairmen (continued):

Members of the public have commented on the improvements to the planted areas of the town and also appreciate the Town Council undertaking the maintenance of grass verge cutting on behalf of the county council.

The long awaited refurbishment of the bus shelter was agreed this year with work being carried out by an outside contractor in April 2016. Some of the bus shelter includes the original stone wall near the Town Bridge once painted by John Constable, RA.

Protection of a small public open space at Chaffinch Chase has resulted in the expense of installing knee high rail fence. Parking spaces on this estate are at a premium and small green spaces are being used for car parking which will, in time, destroy the overall appearance of the housing estate.

With the help of the Community Resource Worker funding was obtained for an additional outdoor gym facility at the rear of Lodden View and was installed in April 2016. A tarred footpath was provided at Jubilee Fields to link with the public open space at the rear of Yarlbury Wood Way using S106 developer contributions and the work completed in March 2016.

A public seating policy and a tree planting policy have been written and adopted by Full Council in March 2016.

Festive Lighting (Lead Member Cllr Barry Von Clemens): Once again the festive lighting working party and Town Council staff managed to deliver another great event for the town. New things were included to improve on the previous year's event, which overall proved a great success. Changes were made to the schools competition and each school was asked to enter one large lantern for the parade, which was judged by the Mayor on the evening and the winning school being presented with the schools trophy. The stage was relocated to the meadow next to the tree. The parade included characters from the Walt Disney film, Frozen, who were later available for photographs with the children. Santa arrived in a horse drawn carriage and was accompanied by a vintage a steam engine.

The event benefitted a great deal from financial support from local companies and Coles Fun Fair. Sponsorship totalled in excess of £1,500. It was possible to provide a new festive lighting display at Newbury, courtesy of Dextra Lighting. This rather wonderful display was made in-house by our very skilled grounds staff.

It was lovely to receive so many positive comments following the event and plans are no under way for the Annual Christmas Parade 2016.

Future Workshop Provision (Lead Member Cllr David Milsted) has met with officers and Town Council staff and trustees of RiversMeet, including the General Manager. It has been agreed in principle that the Town Council can site its new depot on land adjacent to RiversMeet on the football club side that has already been prepared with foundations and on-site utilities.

A new Sports Hall for RiversMeet can be sited to the front of the existing sports hall, on recreation land previously identified as being potentially suitable for the depot. The Town Council would, in that event, make a series of annual payments to RiversMeet to cover the costs of the foundation and utilities work for the Sports Hall, given that RiversMeet would be donating the work already done on what would then be the depot site. Both projects are dependent on Planning Permission and funding.

Annual Town Meeting – 27th April 2016 (continued):

5. To receive the annual reports of the Committee Chairmen (continued):

High Street Facilities (Lead Member Cllr David Milsted): It has been agreed by Council that the public conveniences in the High Street car park are not sustainable, given the constantly recurring vandalism damage and low usage of the facilities. However, it is intended to retain one multi-access toilet unit for public use in whatever is then made of the building.

The Working Party is working with the Town Team Heritage Action Group and the Community Resource Worker, and meetings have been held with Historic England, Gillingham Local History Society, the Blackmore Vale Tourism Company, the NDDC Conservation Manager, and the Big Lottery to explore options for the development of the building and the Town Centre Conservation Area in which it is situated.

Options being pursued include a 'Constable Visitor Centre' and a Community Office, similar to that at Chantry Fields to be used as a meeting place for local groups and a 'hot desk' work space for officers of the Tri-Council Partnership and DCC after the NDDC offices at Nordon have been disposed of. All those taking part in the project are agreed that the desired outcome is an enhanced and enlivened Town Centre and Conservation Area, an attractive and useful public facility, and a multi-access toilet unit for public use.

Traffic Management (Lead Member: Cllr Mrs Belinda Ridout) meets on a monthly basis and has had a busy year working with the community, local schools, organisations and businesses, covering Gillingham and the immediate surrounds. The issues can be broadly grouped into the following, but overlap each other in most cases:

- Pedestrian safety
- Traffic congestion/traffic flow
- Speeding
- On-road parking/pavement parking
- Parking restrictions
- Highway signage
- Traffic signalling

As a consequence, 12 requests for traffic regulation were put forward to Dorset Highways between May 15 and April 16, as a result of investigation, evidence gathering and consultation with members of the public. Traffic Regulation Order requests put forward in previous years are currently being processed by Highways relating to: New Road, Wyke Road, School Road and Bay Road. There has been a considerable reorganisation of staff within Dorset Highways and it was proving difficult to contact people for a while but the appointment of Roger Bell as Community Highways Officer for Gillingham (only a small part of his area) has proven to be very successful. Roger attends the monthly working party meetings, offering his expertise and advice, providing a very valuable link between our work with the community and Highways.

The support of the local PCSO's (Police Community Support Officers) is very much welcomed and appreciated at the monthly meetings, contributing invaluable local knowledge to discussion and highlighting concerns which can be taken forward through the Traffic Management agenda.

The Working Party has shown on-going support for community led safety campaigns and has not delayed in acting upon concerns brought to its attention, which has included requests for school patrol crossings and pedestrian crossings. One particular achievement this Spring has been the installation of a 'refuge' crossing on the B3092, north of the Peacemarsch roundabout. This not only provides a safer crossing point for pedestrians, particularly school children attending Milton-on-Stour Primary School, but is an extension of the traffic calming associated with the roundabout.

Annual Town Meeting – 27th April 2016 (continued):

5. To receive the annual reports of the Committee Chairmen (continued):

The Speed Indicator Device (SID) continues to be deployed on a rota basis across the town: Bay Road, Wyke Road, Peacemarsh, Shaftesbury Road and New Road. Vehicle data is regularly downloaded from the device which gives details of where, when and what time speeding occurs. Sharing this information with the Police enables a joined-up approach to tackling speeding.

(b) Planning Committee – Cllr Barry Von Clemens

Cllr Von Clemens presented the following report on behalf of the Development Management Recommendations Committee:

This year the Planning Committee has undergone a few changes. The first of these was to agree to change the name of the committee name from Development Management Recommendations Committee to simply Planning Committee with the hopeful result that the public could more clearly identify the committee's role. At the beginning of the council year the committee had a full complement of 11 members, but due to commitments one of the members had to stand down leaving 10 members. The committee decided that for the council year May 2015 to May 2016 it would recommend that the committee members be reduced to 10 in total. The committee also recommended that as the Ham Ward did not have a councillor to represent its interests that the other ward councillors on the committee were asked to carry out this role for the council year 2015-16.

At the start of the financial year 2016-17 the Planning Committee went paperless with all planning applications now being viewed on line. This has been greatly helped with the installation of a new projector and screen in the Jubilee Room, which has helped enormously with the presentation of planning applications. All applications are now available for the public to view on-line at the town hall via a new touch screen computer located at the reception desk and from the comfort of your own home via the Dorsetforyou website. This paperless system has reduced the amount of time taken up with photocopying planning applications and reduced photocopying costs. The Planning Committee Clerk is now available to offer training and advice to all on how to view the plans on-line. This has made it possible to ensure that all committee members are able to fully access the planning applications.

This year, as always, a large number of planning applications have been considered, with the committee having made recommendations on over 120 planning applications over the past 12 months. The applications have been varied and include: new dwellings; extensions; agricultural buildings; mobile homes; changes to solar farms; work to listed buildings; applications for advertisement consent; agricultural workers dwellings; and applications for changes of use and conversions of agricultural buildings into dwellings. The committee has also been consulted on the Draft Waste Plan for Dorset; the proposed main modifications of the North Dorset Local Plan (Part 1); the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) charging schedule; and the proposed Neighbourhood Plan document for Gillingham. The past year has seen a good standard of applications, with creative and innovative proposals being submitted. The committee continues to enjoy a good working relationship with planning officers at North Dorset District Council and Dorset County Council.

The committee was consulted on the appeal for the proposed development of land south of Le Neubourg Way. The council were supported by a large number of local residents who made representations during the appeal hearing and the committee welcomed the Planning Inspector's decision to dismiss the appeal.

Annual Town Meeting – 27th April 2016 (continued):

5. To receive the annual reports of the Committee Chairmen (continued):

Along with looking at planning applications, the committee has also made site visits to a number of applications where it was considered necessary to help with the decision making process. All members make individual visits to sites as part of their preparations for committee to ensure that they have a full knowledge of all aspects of the applications prior to the meeting.

Not all the applications for consideration are for bricks and mortar, some are for tree works. At the beginning of the council year, the Planning Committee welcomed a new Tree Warden, Cllr Ms Anna Baker, who has guided the committee through a number of tree works applications including trees at Brewery Lane and Stirling Stables which resulted in Tree Protection Orders being issued. I would like to thank Cllr Ms Baker for all her hard work during the past year.

We continue to have a very good working relationship with the tree officers at North Dorset District Council who have been invaluable in getting TPOs placed on trees that were considered to be of value to the community and its local landscape. Great effort is made to weigh the needs of local residents with the need to preserve trees. We hope that we have achieved a good balance while still being able to boast that our townscape has a good, healthy and well balanced tree population.

The Conservation Area Working Party, under lead member Cllr Mrs Hunt, along with members of the planning committee, representatives from the Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan Group and Local History Society, continues with its great work on the proposal to extend the Gillingham Conservation Area and upgrade Colesbrook and Bay to conservation areas. This group has done a lot of very good work on these projects and is still working hard to complete this important work. Thanks must go to Cllr Mrs Hunt and all those involved for the huge amount of work that they have done on this project to date.

The committee also deals with footpath matters and liaises with Gillingham's Rights of Way Liaison Officer. This year the committee was happy to welcome Mrs Sheila Messer to this role. Thanks must go to Mrs Messer who has given a great deal of valuable information and time to the committee this year and has kept us fully briefed on the excellent work being carried out by the 'Walkers are Welcome Group'. This group of volunteers has produced new Walking Guides, designed maps, cleared footpaths and helped install new finger posts as well as taking on the task of upgrading many stiles to gates. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mrs Messer and all the volunteers for their excellent work this year and wish them well in their continued work on our footpath network.

Finally, I would like to thank my Deputy Chair Cllr Dennis Griffin for all his help and support over the past year, Cllr Alan Frith for operating all the projector equipment during the committees meetings, all the committee members for all the work that they do in preparing for our meetings and, of course, to the Planning Committee Clerk, Mrs Julie Hawkins, for the huge amount of work she does both at committee and also behind the scenes.

(c) Policy and Resources – Cllr Mrs Su Hunt

Cllr Mrs Hunt presented the following report on behalf of the Policy and Resources Committee:

The main role of the Policy and Resources Committee is to manage the council's activities and finances throughout the year and to make sure that they are carried out within budget. The council year begins on 1st April and ends on the 31st March. The precept for this financial year 2016/17 has been set at £648,610.53. This equates to £150.54 per month for a Band D property – an increase of 1.34 pence per month and 8.60% on last year's precept.

Annual Town Meeting – 27th April 2016 (continued):

5. To receive the annual reports of the Committee Chairmen (continued):

This increase is mainly due to the cost of maintenance of our public open spaces, planted areas, play areas, Hardings Park, the Garden of Remembrance and the Town Cemetery.

Over the winter months the grounds staff are busy servicing machinery, refurbishing fencing and public seating, erecting all the Christmas trees in the High Street and other festive decorations along with the work that is necessary to ensure that the annual Christmas Parade is a success. In the summer months the grounds staff are busy grass cutting which also includes the cutting of grassed verges which is carried out on behalf of Dorset County Council under a Service Level Agreement (SLA). A small income of £3,900 is received for the grass verge cutting but in real terms the cost is much higher but is a necessary expense to maintain the Town's tidy appearance which is valued by residents. This year saw the start of a summer bedding project to celebrate the 90th birthday of HR Queen Elizabeth and the 500th anniversary of Gillingham School. This project has been supported by many businesses in the town and has enabled the purchase of a poly tunnel and many plug plants. The larger areas of public open space are maintained in partnership with Dorset Countryside at a cost of £28,500 per annum. All these areas will be brought up to a standard to match that required to achieve Green Flag accreditation.

To increase the capacity of the town's cemetery, funding of £3,150 was agreed to provide additional burial space. A Faculty was obtained from the Salisbury Diocese to lay down insecure headstones and the erection of a fence to screen the spoil heap. These works have enhanced the overall appearance of the cemetery.

The Policy and Resources Committee approves monthly payments to suppliers, oversees quarterly income and expenditure, the internal audit, service level agreements, insurance, risk assessments, health and safety policies and the management plans for play areas and public open spaces. Within the precept there is provision to award annual grants to local charities and organisations. All applicants must complete an application form, submit annual accounts and provide a brief account of why a grant is required. Applications are then scrutinised before an award is made. This year £50,792 was paid out to local organisations which included the Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance, Gillingham Imperial Silver Band, the local car-link scheme, North Dorset Rugby Club, Gillingham Town Football Club and Gillingham Carnival Committee. The Town Council continues to support RiversMeet leisure centre and awarded a £15,000 revenue support grant.

Projects achieved this year using external funding included the provision of a second outdoor gym at Lower Lodden Meadow, which was funded largely by the Clinical Commissioning Group and Spectrum Housing Association. The small shortfall was made by a grant from our County Councillor, Cllr David Walsh. Using monies from section 106 developer contributions it was possible to provide an extension path from the open space area at the rear of Yarlbury Wood Way. Projects that have been entirely financed by the Town Council include: a multi-use games area style goal complete with tarred surface for the Gyllas Green off Downsview Drive and a 'teenzone' goal end for the designated playing space at Church View. Projects that have been agreed for the coming year include site signage for public open spaces and play areas, provision for rustic seats and picnic tables to be located at agreed locations on the larger public open spaces.

The Hardings Park project commenced in the spring of this year despite a large bid to The Big Lottery – Reaching Communities Fund being unsuccessful. However, an application to Dorset Legacy – Inspired by 2012 for £15,000 was successful along with a bid to One Stop Carrier Bag Levy for £1,000. Work to install seventeen pieces of play equipment, suitable for toddlers through to teenagers with a high percentage accessible by those with disabilities, commenced in April and will be completed by May. Planning permission has been applied for the proposed concrete skate park but will only go ahead if an application for a Public

Annual Town Meeting – 27th April 2016 (continued):

5. To receive the annual reports of the Committee Chairmen (continued):

Works Loan of £127,000 is successful. The planned multi use games area will be installed after the skate park has been completed. The project is currently on target and should be completed by the autumn.

The Policy and Resources Committee reviews and set new council policies. The Town Council supports, in principle, economic growth for the Town and has worked with Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan Group. A Tree Condition Survey and Risk Management Plan have been completed and the required tree works are currently being undertaken. A Tree Planting and Donation Policy and a Public Seating Policy have been adopted to ensure that there is long term consistency when enhancing the town. An Equality and Diversity Policy was also adopted this year.

A great deal of this work could not be achieved without the hard work and continued support of the all the staff and I would like to give my sincere thanks to the Town Clerk, Assistant Town Clerk and the Works Manager for all their help and guidance.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the Policy and Resources Committee and especially my Deputy Chairman, Cllr Mrs Val Potheary for all their hard work and continued support.

6. To receive a report from the Town Mayor on his year in office.

The Mayor, Cllr Walsh, presented the following report:

I have thought very hard about this evening and what format my report would take. Yes, we have taken photographs of all civic occasions everywhere we went but all that showed was that I am not very photogenic, in fact my face always seems to be doing things that it shouldn't the instant the shutter was pressed. Or is it because every time we Mayors stopped over the last year, someone offered cake and I do so hate to offend, consequently as I went through the year the photographic format changed, there was more of me and less of the landscape. I will let you decide but basically I didn't think that anyone apart from my parents would appreciate 50 photographs of me, Not even Belinda. We have photographs and memories of a wonderful year which Belinda and I will treasure. It is a huge honour to be the Mayor of Gillingham and to be its ambassador travelling the length and breadth of Dorset, seeing things through doors that would otherwise remain closed to those not holding such a position and the personal invitations that it attracts.

So I am going to give a verbal report on my thoughts and experiences being a "newbie" first time Mayor, which may help future first time mayors. Many of my predecessors have held this office on more than one occasion and I now know what the attraction is but it wasn't until recently that I understood the wise words told me from one of our ex Mayors. She said: "One year is not long enough!" and in a way it isn't because firstly, it takes you a year to understand what being Mayor is all about and secondly, seeing as you travel all the things that you would like to replicate in your own area, well, there isn't the time, as we know, the organisation of such events is so resource intensive that plans have to literally be made a year in advance.

The first thing that hit me very quickly was the commitment, we: all of us are used to public life but being Mayor takes it to a new level. On one glorious Saturday I had been working in the garden and it was realised that we needed something from the shop, so thinking nothing of it I went straight down to Waitrose, the nearest available to purchase what I think was milk. It doesn't matter anyway but it was midday and the shop was packed and as I walked round numerous people said "Hello Mr Mayor". Well, I was distraught, having been in the garden I was wearing shall we say, "garden clothes" and at that point I felt quite ashamed, which

Annual Town Meeting – 27th April 2016 (continued):

6. To receive a report from the Town Mayor on his year in office (continued):

would come as quite a shock to those who knew me during my years as an artist when I didn't give it a second thought going into a supermarket in my slippers.

When you are Mayor you represent the Town of Gillingham at all times not just on civic occasions but 24/7. After that lesson learnt, people would ask "where are you going? You look very smart". I learnt a valuable lesson and I would have hated to let anyone down or diminish the position that I was temporarily holding almost looking after.

During the Weymouth Civic Day, their deputy Mayor said that he was taking next year off work, that being his Mayoral Year so that he could dedicate all of his time to it. His wife; who he had obviously forgotten to discuss this point with, shall we say, quickly became very unhappy. She told us that she had been looking forward to taking early retirement that year. That was another lesson, though being Mayor is an individual position, sometimes very isolated, it does necessitate great teamwork from many people, secretary and staff, who have my heartfelt thanks.

At every event there were two of us Mayor and consort. A consort is not a piece of "Bling" to match the beautiful chain; it too is a very important position and has much responsibility to go with it. I have been very lucky to have Belinda by my side all the way and I would like to thank her for all her support and for calming me down when I was at 30,000ft and climbing due to the traffic hold ups on the way to Portland, Bridport, Weymouth, Dorchester, in fact all over Dorset, wherever there was a road, which always made me stress that we were going to be late. Actually we never were, if anything we were early but that didn't matter because one lesson that I didn't learn, no matter how many times Belinda tried to teach me, was to "Go With The Flow" well that is not in my make-up and as ex-military the letters P...P...P...P....P...P have more relevance.

You Know Prior Planning Prevents..... Next year's Mayor of Weymouth though was right, it is a full time job and my only regret is that I did not have more time to dedicate to the role. It is true, as I was told by Jill at the start, you do as much as you want to, or can fit in. I can tell you all quite openly that at times I found it hard, being Town, District and County Councillor and Mayor on top, was sometimes a bridge too far: David how you did it I don't know; you are a better man than I.

I wanted to attend all events around the county as well as those in Gillingham and I do not regret putting our town above others, even if there was the promise of cake. It did mean that I had to send apologies to some and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Barry for supporting me as Deputy Mayor and for filling in whenever I couldn't. A necessary apprenticeship served and I know that he will make a good Mayor.

It was always a learning curve a pretty vertical one at times and each Mayor must make the role their own. There was always support from Jill, Sylv, Clare and Julie and from all the staff who helped on so many occasions, Stop! Hang on a minute ... At that point of absolute total blinkered concentration writing this the phone rang and I actually answered it

"Hello"

"David ...you're late," It was Julie

"No I'm not it's just after 4. Oh NO! Bleep, bleep, bleep, bleep. I am so sorry..... I am so sorry."

Actually it was 20 past 6 and I was meant to be at Lyn and Herbie Light's house at 10 past 6 with flowers for their Golden Wedding anniversary. Not to worry I went straight to the Buffalo where they were having a celebratory meal with family and friends and when I entered, luckily they were both facing away so I was able to just stand behind them, Lyn obviously being very religious: turned round saw me and exclaimed "Oh God!"

Annual Town Meeting – 27th April 2016 (continued):

6. To receive a report from the Town Mayor on his year in office (continued):

This does illustrate what I said earlier about how important Mayoress's and Consorts are, they are not secretaries but very supportive partners, Belinda was working that day, had she not been, we would have been on time.

Back to where we were? Or is this where we were; where we are? At the heart of the community doing the things, sometimes, little things that mean so much within the community, in our town. During my year Belinda and I helped or rather startled, three couples into celebrating landmark anniversaries and it was wonderful to do so because that is what a community does.

When I started my year I said rather grandly that I was going to try and bring the community closer together, I might even have used such pretentious words as Community Cohesion. Such words being empty in Gillingham. I was made to reassess my views on Community after the Paris terrorist attacks on Friday 13th November.

Bear with me: I rang up the vicar and asked Peter if I could attend church in my capacity as Mayor to light a candle; to which he said of course I was welcome and that there was a Baptism taking place today, which I am not sure I really heard, if I did it hadn't sunk in. As Mayor of Gillingham I went to church with consort, Belinda by my side and we lit candles and prayed for those killed, injured and for their relatives and friends. The church was full and it was a very thought provoking service led by Eve Peglar, not only in word but in content because the service was in fact, a triple baptism. Belinda and I went with thoughts of violence and death and left with thoughts of new life and hope for the three new members of Our Community, Rokas, Viktorija and Rosie who we wished: "Health, Wisdom and Love". During the actual baptism service, the children were welcomed into the Church Community: hold on to that thought, because I did until later that week when, I went to the reopening of Brazier Brothers Funeral Directors where, also in attendance was the retired Bishop of Bath and Wells. I raised with him, over cake, as you do what I have just said that those baptised were welcomed into the Church community as opposed to "THE Community", he said thoughtfully; "Oh yes", possibly wasn't the time or the place for a debate on religion. It has however stayed with me ever since. Some of you are probably ahead of me at this point because what I learned with regards to Gillingham and its community is that our town, rather than being made up of a community. is made up of different communities and within them, there is cohesion, and now experiencing what it actually means, stops it being pretentious.

Going back to the church, a lady we know asked "What brings the Mayor to Church?" and I told her, but then I overanalysed her words; what had she meant? Did the Mayor need, bringing to church? Should he be there anyway? That made me question my role again. Mayor is a non-political, non-religious role but it is a role that represents the town and the community. Some Mayors that I have met over the year, go to their church every weekend they are free, wearing chains, some even have their own seat, more like thrones. That again is down to the individual and their town. I asked the vicar what was expected of me? Who helpfully replied, that it was up to me whether I attended church and whether I wore the Mayoral Chains. When I have been able to attend I did but doubted myself; until Easter that is, when I joined members of the community walking with the cross from the Barn Surgery to the Church, stopping along the way for thoughts, prayers and Hymns. I was doubting my actions more than ever at this time, by wearing the chain was I being ostentatious on such a day, didn't the cross have to be the centre of attention not that I was seeking to be? A gentleman, who I did not know, came up to me and he could obviously see that my back was bad because he said "Thank you for coming out to represent the community even though I can see you are in a lot of pain." At that point the doubt left me, never to return. It doesn't mean that all Mayors should do all of these things. NO! More that whatever you do should be for the right reason and that is down to every individual. There is no right or wrong way, there is only the respect for your position, the town and its community.

Annual Town Meeting – 27th April 2016 (continued):

6. To receive a report from the Town Mayor on his year in office (continued):

It matters hugely how the people of Gillingham view their Mayor and I hope that I have not let them down because I love this town, which is why I endeavoured to get to as many functions, events that I could. Some that I wasn't even invited to... always to hear the same t, "David, thank you so much for coming but we thought you would have been too busy". I was never too busy to show my support for our town and its community; we went to many AGMs, opened school fetes, church fetes, the first Town Meadow Fete, spring fayres Jumble Sales and the artisan's shop and believe me; many, many more. At the Town Meadow Fete, I spent the day in the stocks and Belinda took her turn as well, though I don't think she got as wet as I did, in my three piece suit; I told you I had learnt that lesson. I started the Rotary Club cycle ride in aid of Prostate cancer, opened the Walkers Are Welcome Festival, presented prizes and certificates for the Libraries Summer Reading Challenge and supported such worthwhile community groups as our branch of ReadEasy, presenting a certificate to their first successful student of which there will be many more to follow I am sure. Tomorrow I have the honour of meeting Air Marshal Dusty Miller, at a dinner for the local branch of the Royal Air Force Association where he will present the branch Chairman with an award. On Saturday I am opening the newly amalgamated Arts and Crafts Market at the Methodist Hall between 10am and 1.30, please come and support us as I raffle a donated very large bear in aid of Macmillan Cancer support. Sunday we are taking off, because it is Belinda's birthday and she deserves spoiling. Another month of events still await us.

People always say how much our high street needs regenerating, well this year we might have lost the NatWest but we gained a butchers, a takeover of the Copy Shop which I had never seen so busy and the opening of Poppins café/restaurant, in itself a vibrant regeneration. When I opened it I felt that I had been transported into another world but what was music to my ears, was that the director of Poppins, knew of the proposed development in Gillingham and coming here was a calculated decision. Let us hope many more will follow.

I was helped in many ways over the last year; I think I have learnt more about myself that at any other time. It is quite a gear change and at the start, it embarrassed me the way people treated me differently, those I have known looked at me differently They would say what do we call you, and I would say 'I am still David; but I wasn't and more importantly people didn't want me to be David, they wanted me to be the Mayor, because they wanted the title and the raised position that went with their town having a Mayor. Whilst struggling with this one day, a dear friend Annie Milsted said at one of our Craft Markets "it was ok being one of the people but those people still needed a position to look up to," so without pushing pomp and ceremony or treading on the, odd serf, I think I kept the position intact. David can come back on the 24th May and hopefully in a better mood. I must apologise to you all staff, councillors, friends and family because at times I was bad tempered and stressed and when I wasn't, I was asleep.

Like many of you, I don't want to do anything that I cannot do to the best of my ability and what stressed me was that I could have done it better and would have liked to but I am not in the position to take a year off work. I wish that I could have and dedicated the whole year to just being Mayor but that would have meant ignoring other important roles that we all have supporting the town wearing other hats. All of us though, public servants as we are, have to deal with life and what it throws at us. In October Belinda and I had to deal with the death of a very close dear friend, he was family and in January my Father suffered a stroke, thankfully on the mend, everyone; friends we did not know we had, gave Belinda and I support but what was at one point the best year of my life became one of the worst years of our lives. By not being able to attend functions due to such life changing moments, at times I felt that I had failed our town but I remembered; from the moment I became a councillor I remember the line "Family Comes First but I saw it that, once I signed up to the life we have, the people of "Gillingham become our extended family. Balancing everything is difficult because we don't ever want to let people down.

Annual Town Meeting – 27th April 2016 (continued):

6. To receive a report from the Town Mayor on his year in office (continued):

I was saying before Julie's telephone call interrupted us, about the support from the staff, not just within the town hall but also our ground staff. Everyone did so much and mostly behind the scenes for one of the proudest days of my life, our Civic Day and the Riffles excising their freedom of Gillingham which we had previously bestowed upon them, Jill did so much to pull that together. Starting the year before. I will thank all our staff at the optimum time.

I won't forget all the effort that the ground staff put into giving Gillingham a Great Christmas once again, culminating in our Festive Lighting Parade where I had the honour of delivering a Christmas speech. Some people even heard it, others were luckier.

There was much to be done though, Stages don't set themselves up and though chairs have legs, they will not walk, they must be carried.

Mayor is so busy working in the present that one doesn't always realise the impact things will have on the future, the trees we planted to mark the 500th year of the School will stand proud and tall for hundreds of years but the cherry on the cake, a symbolic one not a calorific cake, of my year has been digging the first sod for the Hardings Park Project which has taken such a lot of pulling together but will have a huge impact for our town and once again councillors and our Staff have achieved so much. We are incredibly lucky to have such a dedicated workforce.

What do I wish that I had done differently? Lots but we haven't got time for that. One thing I would have added is a Thanksgiving Service to our year as a lot of other areas do on top of their Carol Services. Not because of religion or wanting to give Jill more work but rather, raising money, such events are great fund raisers.

Our Civic Carol Service was such a memorable event for it was an honour giving the welcome address. The visiting dignitaries were shocked by the attendance, as our wonderful church was nearly full to bursting. During the service we raised £418.85 which was donated to the charity MOSAIC, a Dorset wide charity offering a pathway of support to bereaved children, young people and their families.

I thank you all for your support over the last year and I can assure you that I will continue to work with and for our communities. I can achieve this through the new role that I have at the County Council, Chairman of People and Communities, an umbrella covering Young People, Families and Adult Care. Though when David pointed out, that I was now responsible for everyone's health in the County, I realised this will come with many sleepless nights. I should get Christmas Day off though, which means I will be able to attend Gillingham's Christmas Lunch again, that was another very special memory that I will always carry with me along with the new friends that I have made. Thank you Councillors for bestowing upon me the honour of being the Mayor of Gillingham.

I have on piece of advice to our next Mayor. Barry, Have a Great Year, Don't Stress About It, Don't Over Analyse It; Just ENJOY IT but most importantly, don't blink, cause you'll miss it.

7. To receive Public Questions.

Question 1: Does the council bank with an ethical bank?

Response: The Town Clerk informed those present that the Town Council has banked with the local branch of Lloyds Bank for many years and keeps its savings in the National Saving and Investment Account. Other banking solutions have been investigated but the Town Council requires a bank that can move funds freely from one account to another without constraints or penalties. The Council is not a savings bank; the money raised in the precept is for spending as per the annual precept budget.

Annual Town Meeting – 27th April 2016 (continued):

7. To receive Public Questions (continued):

It would not be possible to bank with a credit union as it cannot provide the necessary banking facilities required by a business.

Question 2: Does the council cut the grass verges at the appropriate time to avoid destroying wild plants.

Reponses: Cllr Milsted informed those present that the Town Council commences grass cutting in April through to October. Where bulbs have been planted these areas are left uncut until the leaves have died back. Grass is kept short near the highway but some areas, especially on the larger public open spaces, the grass is left uncut so that the long grass can provide a habitat for wildlife as well as, over a period of time, enabling wild plants and flowers to become established.

Closure. The meeting closed at 8.50pm.