



GILLINGHAM TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Minutes of the **Annual Town Council Meeting** held on **Wednesday 25th April 2018** at **7.30 p.m.** in the **Jubilee Room** at the Town Hall, School Road, Gillingham.

Present: Cllr Mrs B Ridout (Mayor),
Cllr Mrs S Hunt (Deputy Mayor),
Cllr Mrs A Beckley, Cllr Mrs S Cullingford,
Cllr R Evill, Cllr A Frith,
Cllr P Harris, Cllr M Hill,
Cllr Mrs V Potheary, Cllr Miss N Purkis,
Cllr J Robinson, Cllr Von Clemens
and Cllr D Walsh.

Also Present: 15 members of the public were present initially; some left during the meeting.

Press: There was one member of the Press present.

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

Apologies: Cllr M Gould, Cllr S Joyce, Cllr R Monksummers
and Cllr Mrs D Toye.

Prior to the start of the meeting the Mayor presented a cheque for £1,744.91 to Mrs Edna Norris and Mrs Valerie Flower of the North Dorset Multiple Sclerosis Society. The money had been raised by Cllr Mrs Ridout during her Mayoral Year.

Mrs Norris, Chairman of the North Dorset Branch of the Multiple Sclerosis Society, was extremely grateful and delighted to receive the cheque and gave a short summary of their fundraising efforts and what the money is spent on.

The Mayor launched the Gillingham Town Council Youth Volunteer Scheme, agreed by the Full Council on the 25th February 2018 and invited Cllr Von Clemens to present information packs to the young people present. Cllr Von Clemens already has many young people keen to sign up to the youth volunteer scheme.

Cllr Von Clemens informed the meeting that nine young people have been invited to Buckingham Palace to receive their Duke of Edinburgh Gold Awards on the 24th May 2018.

Annual Town Meeting – 25th April 2018 (continued):

1. To approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on Wednesday 24th April 2017.

Proposed by Cllr Von Clemens seconded by Cllr Frith that the minutes of the last meeting held on the 24th April 2017 were received, approved and adopted as a correct record of that meeting. The vote was unanimous. The Chairman duly signed the minutes. **RESOLVED.**

2. Questions. There were no questions.

3. To receive the Charity of William Read Accounts for the FY 2017/18.

Cllr Harris 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 Dirooe charity supported apprenticeships. The charity is now administered by Farnfields 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.

This year a total of 50 vouchers valued at £20 each were issued to those in need for spending in local shops at Christmas. An emergency grant of £340 was issued to a local resident to cover removal expenses when relocating elsewhere in the Town.

Reads Charity is not administered by the Town Council. Cllr Paul Harris and Cllr Mrs Su Hunt are members of the Board of Trustees, who administer the charity.

Proposed by Cllr Harris and seconded by Cllr Mrs Hunt that the Charity of William Read Accounts for FY 2017/18 were received as a correct record for FY 2017/18. The vote was unanimous. **RESOLVED.**

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

(a) General Purposes Committee – Cllr Barry Von Clemens

The General Purposes Committee is, to quote one of my predecessors: ‘the workhorse of the Council’. It oversees all the work that is carried out by the Town Council’s grounds staff throughout the Parish of Gillingham; maintaining town council property, including the cemetery, the cemetery chapel, the old mortuary, public toilets, play areas, public open spaces, allotments, planted areas, the community office and the Town Hall. In addition, it acts as a liaison between the Town Council and the DCC Highways for all local road and traffic related issues. To undertake this large workload efficiently, the committee has many working parties, each with a Lead Member. These meet regularly or as required, and give written reports with recommendations for action. Their membership may include members of the public and specialist advisers, which means that matters can be fully researched and discussed before recommendations are put before the General Purposes Committee. For funding and policy decisions, the recommendations are forwarded to the Policy and Resources Committee.

Following the adoption of the Pollinator Action Plan in May 2017 a logo was designed and approved. The logo is used where trial wildflower areas are being developed and to promote awareness of the importance of our pollinators. Working with the Parochial Church Council of the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, part of the closed churchyard is to become a wildflower lawn. This is part of our wider project to introduce wildflower planting in the town and on our public open spaces.

Local councils have been encouraged to plant more trees under the Woodland Trust’s ‘Tree Charter’ and the independent global initiative ‘One Tree Per Child’. The latter project is to encourage every child

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to plant a tree during their time at school. The Town Council has planted a total of 80 trees on its public open spaces, as follows:

- 3 no. dwarf apple trees were planted, to enhance a small green area at Chaffinch Chase on the Ham Farm housing estate.
- 2 no. flowering ornamental cherry trees will be planted shortly at Gyllas Way to replace two trees that were felled as they had outgrown their location.
- 1 no. flowering ornamental cherry tree has been planted at Hine Close to enhance a green area.
- 20 no. Common Oak trees were planted, with the assistance of volunteers at Lower Lodden, to extend the avenue of trees from Upper Lodden.
- 30 no. Poplar trees were planted, with the assistance of volunteers, at Ham Farm to enhance and irrigate the area.
- 24 no. Elm trees were planted on the recreation ground known as Hardings Park by the pupils of Hedgehog Class at Gillingham Primary School. Every child who helped got a sticker on the day and a certificate presented by the Mayor at a school assembly.

As part of the Town Council's continued commitment to many of the volunteer groups that work hard to make our town a better place to live, a logo was designed - 'Gillingham Love Where You Live' - to promote their good work. The logo is available to any volunteer group, individual or initiative that promotes town pride. It has already been used by the Gillingham Litter Picking Group and the volunteer footpath wardens. It will also be used to promote the 10 no. garden/planted areas in the town that have been entered in the South West in Bloom 'It's Your Neighbourhood 2018' competition and the Town Council's entry in the South West in Bloom Pennant Award and Pride in Parks Award.

The committee was asked to consider upgrading the entrance signage to the town as part of a developing initiative to improve the town's image. After much discussion, it was concluded that this project is very important and deserves support. Attractive signage will present a positive town image and may influence potential investment that is so vital for long term sustainability. The project will go before the committee again when considering the precept for FY 2019/20. Meanwhile, the possibility of sourcing external funding to finance this project is being researched.

As a local authority, it is our duty to raise awareness of issues that affect us all, including the natural environment. The mass release of balloons and sky lanterns often used in celebratory events is a potential threat to farm animals and wildlife and considered as littering under the Environmental Protection Act 2005. The committee recommended that a Balloons and Sky Lantern Release Policy was agreed to prohibit the release of balloons and sky lanterns on town-council owned land and to raise awareness of the potential harm by including the policy under the town council's letting agreements and asking other organisations in the town to do the same. This policy is similar to other policies already adopted at locally and nationally and will play an important role in the protection of our natural environment.

Over the past year the committee has responded to complaints regarding dog fouling. This highly anti-social behaviour is very difficult to tackle despite having many bins around the town. Rather than purchasing yet another bin, it was decided to promote responsible dog ownership instead. A set of 'We're Watching You' posters, designed by Keep Britain Tidy, was purchased and this very direct campaign was launched locally in November 2017 and welcomed by responsible dog owners whose reputation is being tarnished by those who neglect to clean up after their dogs and spoil the enjoyment of our public areas for others. North Dorset District Council did not renew the contract with SDK to provide a dog warden beyond March 2018. Instead the new Dorset Councils Partnership will employ an additional dog warden to cover North Dorset.

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The Town Council continues to financially support the CCTV system in the town and its effectiveness is reviewed annually in liaison with Dorset Police. There is a maintenance contract in place and the older cameras are gradually being replaced with more advanced technology.

The contract for highway, pavement and kerb cleansing is in its second year. The work carried out last year was reviewed and, on the advice of the DCC Community Highways Officer, gully emptying at Ecccliffe has been removed from the contract and will now revert to DCC Highways. The contract has been amended accordingly and will now cover gully emptying in the High Street instead.

Rendezvous Gillingham - the outreach youth work project - commenced in September 2017 and has proved successful in reaching young people who do not wish to engage with any formal youth activity or programme. Over the past eight months it is very evident that this work needs to continue despite funding only being available until August 2018. The committee will need to decide how to resolve this during the next council year.

During the year we began to look at the possibility of installing a free town Wi Fi system in the High Street. This was planned to be funded through an EU grant and the running cost to be covered through advertising revenue streams. Unfortunately, with the ongoing developments in internet technology, the arrival of 4G and 5G on its way and with further investigation, it was recommended that the Town Council did not pursue this project any further.

As previously mentioned, the General Purposes Committee has several working parties and I will present these reports as follows:

Allotments and Burial Provision Working Party (Lead Member, Cllr Rupert Evill)

a) Cemetery Matters

The Allotment and Burials Working Party consists of five councillors; two members of staff and a representative from the Gillingham Allotment Association. The Working Party deal with all cemetery matters and oversee the allotment gardens at Cemetery Road and Park Farm.

Sensitivity and care is a high priority when dealing with cemetery matters and the working party held two site visits to the cemetery last year to discuss how the cemetery can be improved.

In May 2017, the Town Council adopted a Pollinator Action Plan and it was decided to introduce a wildflower area in the cemetery. It will take a few years to see the full benefits but so far positive feedback has been received.

The interior of the cemetery chapel was refurbished during the year and a contractor was employed to repair the roof of the south west elevation and the ridge tiles.

The rubbish bins have been replaced with bins that are more in keeping with the surroundings.

Laurel hedging has been planted along the boundary between the cemetery and Hyde Road. In addition, Laurel hedging has been planted in the area adjacent to the main path in the cemetery, to screen the spoil heap.

Cemetery memorial testing has been carried out by qualified members of staff. In March this year, the procedure was reviewed and modified.

The wording of the cemetery rules and regulations were changed to state “that no glass is permitted in the cemetery and will be removed by the Town Council” and the Town Council agreed to a recommendation for a change to the cemetery fees.

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Work on the butterfly and bee garden continues. During the spring, additional snowdrops were planted in the garden of remembrance and in the cemetery. Cyclamen and Lily of the Valley have been planted in shady spots in the cemetery.

Since the beginning of April 2017, there have been 16 no. burials and 4 no. interments of ashes at cemetery.

b) Allotment Matters

In May and September, the council held site visits to the allotment gardens and were impressed by the high standard of plots. Commendation letters were sent to three tenants of Park Farm allotments.

In September, it was agreed that the fees for both allotment sites should remain the same.

The Working Party is in regular contact with Gillingham Allotment Association and receives many requests and comments. This year the council has agreed to a request to install an additional tap at the Cemetery Road allotments and has employed a contractor to carry out tree works.

The Town Council continues to provide tenants with information and advice on general care of their allotments to discourage rodents and this year has seen a decrease in reported problems.

The working party has also considered a request from the allotment association to upgrade the access track at the Cemetery Road allotments. The working party has decided that consideration should be given to an amendment to the allotment rules and regulations, to prevent vehicles (including those belonging to GTC) from using the track between 1st November and 31st March, a final decision on this will be made in June 2018.

The past few years has seen a decline in the number of people wishing to be added to the waiting list for an allotment. In November 2013, there were 73 people on the waiting list, currently there are just 16.

Estate Management Working Party (Lead Member, Cllr Barry Von Clemens)

The Estate Management Working Party was dissolved in the previous council year but was reinstated in August 2017 when it became apparent that regular councillor input was required to maintain effective management of the public open spaces. The new working party has a smaller membership comprising of Cllr Von Clemens, Cllr Mrs Ridout, Cllr Mrs Hunt, the Works Manager and Deputy Town Clerk. Mr Bob Messer, Chairman of Gillingham Action for Nature (GANG) is also invited to attend.

This is a very busy and productive working party; regular meetings are held along with site visits, which this year included a visit to the workshop to learn more about the equipment that is required to undertake all the grounds maintenance duties.

It is with great pride that I can report that all our public open spaces are well managed and a credit to our grounds team. The decision to maintain all our open spaces using our skilled workforce from April 2017 has proved a success. Green Flag status was awarded for the second year running to our public open spaces at Jubilee Fields, Rolls Bridge, King Edmund Green and Hawthorne Avenue and it was agreed that the public open spaces at Upper Lodden, Lower Lodden and Ham Farm would be prepared for Green Flag judging for the first time in 2018.

Management plans for the larger open spaces are now complete and are revised annually. Dorset Wildlife Trust is employed to produce Biodiversity Action Plans for our Green Flag sites and will be asked to survey Shires Gate and Shreen Meadow in 2018/19. Areas for trial wildflower meadows were agreed and these areas will be rotovated prior to planting wildflower seeds and plug plants in April 2018. New 'wooden' style litter bins were purchased for our open spaces that are more in keeping with the surroundings and will look smarter.

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The Town Council continues to work in partnership with Gillingham Action for Nature Group (GANG) to improve the public open spaces at Shires Gate and Shreen Meadow. GANG have generously provided much of the funds to carry out improvement works and have some very exciting projects planned for 2018. These sites have improved significantly and could be entered for Green Flag in 2019.

Work continues in partnership with Dorset Wildlife Trust and the Bourton Action for Nature Group to reduce the amount of Himalayan Balsam in the upper reaches of the River Stour. The rivers Shreen and Lodden will be monitored for Himalayan Balsam in 2018 but more volunteers are needed.

A new site interpretation panel has been designed and installed at Rolls Bridge. More interpretation panels are planned as well as better promotion of our open spaces on the Town Council's web site.

Tops Nursery, based at Peacemarsh, were granted a letting agreement to use Shreen Meadow as a Forest School. This has proved a very popular activity with the children, which the Mayor witnessed for herself when she was invited to join the children for a session in the late autumn.

A compact tractor and cutting deck was purchased this year and further large machinery for FY 2018/19 was agreed. Additional machinery is required following increased grass cutting on our open spaces and highway grassed verges. It is also necessary to replace existing machinery when it becomes too costly to repair.

The public open space off Fern Brook Road was transferred to the Town Council earlier in 2017. The site was brought up to an adoptable standard by the housing developer prior to transfer; however, post transfer the Town Council enhanced the area further by the purchase of two wooden seats and a 'Teenzone' goal end to complement the existing play facility. Wildflower plug plants were planted on the 'banked up' area to improve its appearance in the spring and summer months and to increase the biodiversity of the site.

After what seemed like a long winter, it was pleasing to see the appearance of 800 daffodils that were planted by volunteers along Gyllas Way in the autumn. The crocus bulbs donated by The Rotary Club and planted along Le Neuburg Way also provided a splash of spring colour. Further volunteer bulb planting events will be organised for this coming autumn to brighten up other green areas in our town.

Festive Lighting Working Party (Lead Member, Cllr Belinda Ridout)

The Festive Lighting Working Party worked hard to deliver yet another successful and well supported Festive Light Parade. The theme was 'A Christmas Story'. The increasing size of the parade was a safety concern and so it was decided to only invite the primary schools and children's nurseries to take part in the lantern competition and parade down the High Street. All four primary schools and two nurseries took part. 'Trigger the Train' proved very popular and seven children were invited to ride in the carriage as the Mayor's treat. Local children's nurseries, Gillingham 2nd Brownies/Rainbows and Hipp!!Bones were invited to make weatherproof Christmas decorations to adorn the oak tree in the High Street. The Anonymous Travelling Market was located in the car park and the main event took place on the Town Meadow. Gillingham Primary School Choir performed Christmas songs in front of the Christmas tree, along with the Community Choir, Kiera Batchelor and the Town Band playing carols. Coles Funfair provided children's activities. A road closure was in place as in previous years and grateful thanks to all the first aiders and the carnival marshalls who attended.

A portable stage was hired at a very reasonable cost and Town Council staff made the necessary safety adjustments. Janet Swiss, Nick Baker and the Mayor of Shaftesbury were invited to judge the Christmas window competition, won by Gillingham Suite and Bed Centre. All the local primary schools were invited to take part in the Mayor's Christmas card competition, won by a member of Hipp!!Bones.

The event benefitted from financial support from local companies: Kingsmere Surfacing and Dorset Hire Service who jointly sponsored 'Trigger' the train, We Do Vans sponsored the radio advert, Coles Fun Fair donated £200 towards the Town Meadow Christmas tree and Mr Reynolds donated £150

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towards a spiral Christmas tree. The large Christmas tree was supplied by Orchard Park Garden Centre. We started the year with a small balance from the previous year and with very generous sponsorship and reduced expenditure, the balance carried forward to next year is slightly larger.

The decision to only include primary schools and nurseries in the parade was not well received by other youth groups who had previously taken part. Therefore, going forward, a new format for the event has been agreed, following consultation with all four primary schools. The event will now start earlier at 5pm, with all the activity concentrated on the Town Meadow and a substantially reduced lantern parade, inviting only one representative from each school, nursery and youth group in the town.

All members of the working party are thanked for their commitment throughout the year to help organise one of the town's most popular events.

Future Work Depot Provision Working Party (Lead Member, Cllr Paul Harris)

Planning permission for the future works depot was given in July 2017. In March 2018, the final agreement to use the footings to the rear of the RiversMeet leisure centre to build the works depot was signed between Gillingham Town Council (GTC), the Gillingham Community and Leisure Trust Limited (GCLT) and the Board of Trustees of the Three Rivers Partnership (3RP). The Town Council owned land to the south of the RiversMeet leisure centre building on the recreation ground will be made available for GCLT to build a sports hall/community facility, subject to planning permission. This land exchange is permanent. Six companies were approached to determine their interest in providing a design and build plan based on the current planning permission. Five companies responded positively. An architect will be appointed to oversee the project and the tendering process. It is hoped this work will commence in autumn 2018.

High Street Facilities Working Party (Lead Member, Cllr Mrs Donna Toye)

Planning permission has been granted and the Restrictive Covenant Indemnity Policy has been dealt with. The district council has agreed a variation to the Right of Way over the High Street car park and the additional restrictive covenant for alternative use that was part of the transfer clause no. 15 dated March 2010. The lease between Gillingham Town Council and the Windrose Trust is now being finalised.

Town Seating & Planted Areas Working Party (Lead Member, Cllr Mrs Belinda Ridout)

The Town Seating and Planted Areas Working Party has worked closely with the District Council's Conservation Department and the Tree and Landscape Officer, DCC Highways and DCC Bridge Department, local history and heritage groups. Working in accordance with an Appraisal Document drawn up by the Gillingham Conservation Area Working Party, a scheme of works was agreed and actioned to improve and enhance the planted areas to the front of the High Street car park and the area adjacent to the Town Bridge, in a manner appropriate to their historic value. Following Conservation and Tree Officer recommendation, specifications were put together and tenders sought for each project.

A recommendation for Tegula-Aqua (brindle) replacement paving with grey edging bricks, was agreed for the area around the oak tree, adjacent to the Town Bridge. This was completed in the autumn of 2017. The old flagstones could not be reused and were sold. The square soil area around the base of the tree was kept in accordance with instruction of the District Tree Officer. Cement based mortar was removed both sides of the north-west boundary wall and repointed in lime mortar. Replacement capping slabs were bedded on ready to receive a future 'time-line'. The yellow grit bin was relocated in the car park and the round planter removed. The out of date tourist information board has yet to be removed. A feature bench will be installed. It is desired that the bench should depict the town's association with John Constable and Sixth Form students at Gillingham School have been approached to submit designs for the Town Council to consider.

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Under the direction of the Conservation Department and Gillingham History Society, it was agreed to conserve the historic boundary of the old rectory, Rawson Court, as depicted in Constable's painting of the Town Bridge and to refurbish the long bed adjacent to the High Street bus shelter in its current form. Unfortunately, capping slabs to match the existing Rawson Court wall could not be found. This work was completed in August 2017 with additional natural stone having to be sourced at extra cost because of the poor state of the existing stone.

The 'D' shaped flower bed at the entrance to the High Street car park was rebuilt in the spring of 2018 using natural stone and the existing granite coping stones, replacing the pre-cast stone at the rear with natural stone.

These works complement the refurbishment of the High Street bus shelter carried out in 2016.

Other projects of the Working Party included:

- The repainting of the railings (in black) to the Grade II listed Town Bridge over Shreen Water, dated 'County Bridge 1800'. This work was completed by Town Council staff under strict instruction from the District Conservation Officer and the DCC Bridge Department. The old cycle racks were straightened before being painted black.
- The replacement of the GTC owned and maintained seat next to the parish church gate with an anti-vandal 'KC' bench seat in black steel, in keeping with the Conservation Area, was possible with a £500 grant awarded by Southern Co-op, through their 'Love your Neighbourhood' local funding scheme.
- The replacement of the bin outside the parish church gate with a Heritage style, Covent Garden cast iron litter bin, in keeping with the Conservation Area.
- The replacement of the deteriorating flag pole to the rear of the 'D' shaped flower bed, with a 6m high glass-fibre white pole with gold coloured finial, hinged base and internal rope.
- In keeping with other 'heritage' style furniture around the town, it was agreed to replace the white uPVC Town Council notice board to the front of Rawson Court with a 'Fusilier' black metal notice board, similar to that in town cemetery and to relocate to the front of the Town Bridge car park, adjacent to the end of the cycle rack, allowing plenty of room for access to and from the car park.
- In May 2017, SSE Lighting advised the Town Council on phase 2 of replacement street lighting in the lower High Street and The Square. Following a site meeting in July 2017, it was agreed to request the replacement of an additional 7 no. street lighting columns and 1 no. wall bracket in Heritage style column and lantern, in keeping with the Conservation Area. This work will take place post April 2018.

I wish to thank all the members of the working party, the committee clerk and the Works Manager.

Traffic Management Working Party (Lead Member: Cllr Mrs Belinda Ridout)

The Traffic Management Working Party meets on a regular basis and has had a busy year working with the community, local schools, organisations and businesses, covering Gillingham and the immediate surrounds and members are thanked for their hard work and commitment over the last year. Traffic 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
- Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO)

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- Highway signage
- Traffic signalling

The Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) requests put forward in previous years for New Road, Wyke Road, School Road and Bay Road are still on DCC Highways's 'approved list', which now contains some 200+ schemes, countywide, which are taken in priority order. The schemes put forward for Gillingham do not currently rank as 'high priority'. Therefore, it has been necessary for the working party to work with DCC Highways, Parking Services, Wiltshire and Dorset Fire and Rescue and Dorset Police to explore all possible alternative solutions before putting in a TRO request.

The DCC Community Highways Officer for Gillingham, Roger Bell, attends every working party meeting, offering his expertise and advice, providing a very valuable link between our work with the community and DCC Highways.

The support of the local PCSO's (Police Community Support Officer) is very much welcomed and appreciated; contributing invaluable local knowledge to discussion and highlighting concerns which can be taken forward through the Traffic Management agenda. Working in liaison with PCSO's and the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service, has highlighted areas where hindrance to emergency access could cause danger to life and the necessary action has been taken to rectify where possible, working with land owners and advising residents.

The working party has shown on-going support for community led safety campaigns. Gillingham Town Council approved, in principle, financial support for the TRO request from residents at Milton-on-Stour for, following a successful petition to DCC Highways in early 2017, to make improvements to pedestrian safety and traffic calming in the village.

The Speed Indicator Device (SID) continues to be deployed on a 6-week rota across the town: Wyke Road, Peacemars, Shaftesbury Road and New Road, as well as the fixed SID at Bay Road. Speeding concerns are taken seriously and reported to the Police. Requests to DCC Highways for traffic calming measures are made by the Town Council but they must be backed up by evidence. When several requests were received for Bay Road, it prompted the Town Council to fund a speed survey, which was conducted in February this year. The results were not significant enough to act upon through a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) but will be useful data for any future traffic calming request.

Public concern about inappropriate and dangerous parking is a common theme and action is taken where appropriate, working with Dorset Police, Parking Services and DCC Highways, but often there is no easy solution. The pedestrian footway scheme proposed by DCC Highways between Lydfords Lane and Clarendon Close will be completed in this year's Capital Projects Programme. Vehicles parking in bus stops has been an ongoing issue and, in liaison with Waitrose, the new bus operator, South West Coaches and Parking Services, the aim is to educate drivers that it is illegal and causes danger to bus users.

Working with local businesses and organisations to improve and resolve ongoing problems has been successful. A meeting to discuss parking concerns on Hardings Lane was attended by representatives of Gillingham School, Gillingham Town Football Club, RiversMeet leisure centre, Town Council and DCC Highways, which resulted in an awareness of each other's problems and concerns and a combined effort to come up with proposals to ease parking problems. A 'keep clear' yellow grid will be installed by DCC Highways to facilitate the safe movement of school buses along Hardings Lane. Similarly, parking and access problems on Buckingham Road were partly resolved by working with local business - Chester Jefferies and DCC Highways, with the installation of a 'keep clear' yellow grid.

A request made to DCC Highways back in July 2016 to improve pedestrian safety at the Station Road/Le Neubourg Way junction has now come to fruition with works underway at this moment. This involves the continuation of the signalized pedestrian phase across Station Road (ASDA side) with push button control. Works will also improve the right turn phase into Station Road, and extension of the green time

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on the approach to the signals from Station Road, will allow easier access for vehicles turning right from ASDA.

Inclement weather has caused significant deterioration of the roads in and around Gillingham and pot hole and blocked gully complaints have escalated. These are reported through 'Gillingham Direct' and followed up by Traffic Management should any problems persist. A programme of surface top-dressing took place during last year with Phase 2 to follow this year. Concerns regarding the quality of the top-dressing have been made to DCC Highways, who will be investigating and taking remedial action where necessary. Wyke Road is currently being resurfaced this week in the first phase of this work.

All public concerns and requests to the Working Party are discussed and wherever possible, recommendations are made to the General Proposes Committee for action. Explanations for decisions made are always communicated back to the originator, whether positive or negative, and it is made clear that any recommendation approved by Gillingham Town Council is still subject to DCC Highways approval.

Finally, thank you to the members of the General Purposes Committee for all their hard work.

(b) Planning Committee – Cllr David Walsh

Gillingham Town Council Planning Committee consists of eleven town councillors. Meetings are held twice a month and often attract members of the public. Town Councillors who are not members of the committee and consequently not entitled to vote, often attend planning committee meetings to represent the views of residents and speak on their behalf. North Dorset District Council are the Local Planning Authority and decide if an application should be granted or refused and this must be in line with national and local policy. Gillingham Town Council are consultees and are asked to comment and make recommendations based upon Local Knowledge on applications within the ward boundary. These comments are considered by the District Council Case Officer before a decision is made and if the application goes before the District Council's Planning Committee a member of the Towns' can attend to represent the views of our committee and clarify any points.

Gillingham Town Council Planning Committee lead the way in Dorset as one of the first town councils to go completely paperless, with all planning applications being viewed online and presented to meetings via a projector and screen. This method has resulted in a cost saving to the council as it is no longer necessary to print hard copies of plans. The committee has been asked to consider 108 planning applications over the past 12 months, which is slightly less than in previous years.

In July 2017, North Dorset District Council announced that they no longer had the five-year housing and supply that is essential in controlling planning applications that are not in line with the adopted plan. The district council slipped to a housing land supply of 3.42 years. This was because of a very low rate of housing development and slower progress than anticipated on developments allocated in the local plan, including the major development site south of Gillingham, which has taken ten years to go from initial discussion to actually putting in Planning applications. Believe it or not on strategic sites of this scale that is the average time frame. We have petitioned Government because allowances should be made for areas delivering Strategic Site Allocations and this has received support from all other members of the Town and Country Planning Associations "New Communities Groups". Because of the reduced supply, the council has had to apply the national 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' which allows more speculative Planning Permissions to be given, though whether that means more development will take place (?). We do not find ourselves powerless in ensuring that Gillingham gets the right development in the right places it is just, more difficult as we need to have regard for the National Planning Policy Framework and we must use the ultimate test which is: "do the adverse impacts of a proposal significantly and demonstrably outweigh its benefits." If they do not, the presumption (the golden thread) is: permission be granted: if they do then they will be refused.

Members of the Town Council Planning Committee have had to consider all applications, and this has meant that occasionally the committee have had to consider proposed development not identified in the

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current adopted local plan. The applications considered by the committee over the past twelve months have been varied and include: new dwellings; extensions; agricultural buildings; work to listed buildings; applications for advertisement consent; applications for changes of use; and applications for larger developments south of the town. The past twelve months has seen a good standard of applications, with creative and innovative proposals being submitted. The committee has also been consulted on the Draft of the Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Waste Plan and the North Dorset Local Plan Review Issues and Options Consultation.

At the beginning of this year two major applications for parts of Gillingham's Southern Extension were submitted and considered favourably by the town council. These applications are included within the Local Plan and have been developed and designed by the local Community through 6 years of Public Consultations and Workshops. The applications consisted of 961 dwellings on land west of Shaftesbury Road and 634 dwellings on land at Park Farm. These major applications also included proposals for a new local centre providing retail; community health and leisure uses; new and enhanced pedestrian / cycle routes; public open spaces; car parking; the extension of St Mary the Virgin Primary School; a new Primary School at Park Farm; sports pitches with floodlighting; and play facilities. At the same time, an application was submitted for the extension of Gillingham Sewage Treatment Works, which will service the Southern Extension to provide additional plant and equipment required to treat the increased volume of wastewater, and installation of phosphorous removal plant.

It has been reassuring to see that businesses also wish to invest in our town and applications have been submitted which will enhance the town and provide additional business and retail opportunities. Lloyds Bank was granted permission to create an additional retail unit on the High Street and an application has been submitted for a development to include shops, restaurants, cafes and takeaways at Harwood Retail Centre in Station Road. These applications have to be carefully considered and issues such as parking, access and highway matters are carefully looked at by the County Council Highways Authority before the District Council can issue a decision.

Applications are also carefully considered by other consultees such as the District Tree and Landscape Officer, Environmental Health, the Environment Agency, Sports England, Historic England and Natural England.

During the past twelve months, the committee has made a number of site visits and thanks must go to Cllr Monksummers for rescuing the committee on one occasion from an overly enthusiastic goose.

The committee are fortunate to have the support of a volunteer Tree Warden, Mr Ben Drew, who has guided the committee through many applications and I wish to thank Ben for all his support and advice during the past year.

The committee also deals with footpath matters and liaises with Gillingham's Rights of Way Liaison Officer, Mrs Sheila Messer. Thanks, must go to Mrs Messer who gives a great deal of valuable information and time to the committee and keeps us fully briefed on the excellent work being carried out by the 'Walkers are Welcome Group'. I wish to take this opportunity to thank Sheila and all the volunteers for their excellent work on the footpath network in and around Gillingham.

The Conservation Area Working Party, under lead member Cllr Mrs Hunt, consists of five members of the planning committee, the Committee Clerk Mrs Hawkins, and representatives from the Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan Group and Local History Society. For the past four years the working party has collated information, held consultations and worked on the production of an appraisal document for Colesbrook, with the aim of achieving conservation area status. On Monday 18th September 2017, the working party submitted evidence to the Cabinet at North Dorset District Council for consideration. Following a lengthy and complicated procedure, Colesbrook was granted Conservation Area status in September 2017. In October 2017, the working party secured funding towards the production of an appraisal document for Gillingham, with the aim of extending the existing conservation area in the town. The working party are working with a Heritage Consultant and under the guidance of the Dorset

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Councils Partnership Conservation Team. I wish to take the opportunity to thank all the members of the working party for their hard work, dedication and persistence.

Finally, I would like to thank my Deputy Chairman Cllr Mrs Val Potheary who has covered for me in my absence. Cllr Mrs Potheary has provided a great deal of help and support to me over the past year and shared her Planning experience and know-how with newer members. We are extremely grateful to her. I also wish to thank Cllr Alan Frith for operating all our IT equipment during committee meetings, the Planning Committee Clerk, because we are very fortunate to have our own Planning Minister in the form of Julie Hawkins who puts in so much work outside of what should possibly be expected of her.

A simple thank you to the members of the Planning Committee would not suffice for all the work they do in preparing for our meetings because as has been eluded to: in Planning the goalposts have moved continually over the last year, so whether a new member of the committee or an experienced one it has been an almost vertical learning curve just to keep abreast of all the changes. With the consultation on the new draft National Planning Policy Framework consisting of 5 publications including planning guidance's and reference to Government White Papers, further consultations on the Community Infrastructure Levy and more; the landscape will continue to change. There will be more Town and Parish Planning Training arranged by the Dorset Council's Partnerships and I will be holding in house training also for committee members. Don't worry it will be discussions round a table with tea and biscuits not a lecture with a blackboard.

In closing I would like to state that whether it be Parish, Town, District, County, Unitary, Regional or National... there is nothing more important to any community than "planning" because in definition we are planning the future of our town for generations to come and the weight of the responsibility to "get it right" is immense we cannot revisit our decision 6 months later. And so, with that in mind I give my heartfelt thanks to all the members of the Planning Committee for their dedication and commitment.

(c) Policy and Resources Committee– Cllr Mrs Su Hunt

The Policy and Resources Committee manages the council's activities and finances throughout the year and ensures that they are carried out within budget. 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 scrutinised before an award is made. This year £24,639.52 was awarded to local groups and organisations with a further £10,000 to the Citizen Advice Bureau and £5,000 to the Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance.

A new Works Depot is required as the current lease will expire in two years' time. It will be more cost effective in the long term to build and own new premises rather than to continue with a lease at a cost of approximately £20,000 per annum. To achieve this project savings will need to be made. Members carefully considered the grant awards for FY 2018/19 and monies earmarked for burial land and play area up-grades in the current precept were reallocated to the Works Depot project and additional monies included within the FY 2018/19. The precept for the FY 2018/19 has been set at £818,488.53; an increase 7.5% on last year's precept.

With the award of a grant from SSE it has been possible to provide three external defibrillator sets each with its own heated unlocked cabinet under a four-year Memorandum of Understanding with the South-Western Ambulance Service. The defibrillators have been located at the Town Hall, the Fire Station at Peacemarsh and the Electric Centre at Ham.

The Town Council has financed the enhancement and refurbishment of the area adjacent to the Town Bridge, the Long Bed and 'D' bed at the entrance of the High Street Car Park. In September 2018, a

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technical survey of the heating system at the Town Hall was required as the existing boiler had not passed its annual service. It was resolved that two new commercial boilers and an upgrade of the wet distribution and control system should be agreed at a cost of £22,728. The southern elevation and the ridge tiles on the cemetery chapel roof have been repaired. It was necessary to move 21 one grave stones in the Garden of Remembrance so that repairs to a boundary wall could be made. The grave stones have been relocated within the Garden of Remembrance.

As a new Unitary Council will be in place in May 2019 the Town Council will continue to work with the District and County Council to enable some of their services to be carried out under Service Level Agreements with the Town Council so that standards can be maintained. In addition to the verge cutting agreement with Dorset Highways, the Town Council has now agreed to carry out specific gully emptying and road sweeping work twice a year in areas prone to flooding. In response to many complaints about the number of weeds in the pavements, highway and pavement cleansing will be undertaken along the main route through Gillingham and the Town Centre. This may prove more successful than the use of weed killer previously undertaken by DCC Highways but no longer included in highway maintenance.

The Policy and Resources Committee continue to review and set new council policies. The Town Council joined forces with environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy in a bid to reduce dog fouling in and around the town by introducing the ‘We’re Watching You’ campaign.

A Balloon and Sky Lantern Release policy was agreed following global and national concerns about the increased use of balloons and lanterns at celebration and fundraising events. The release of balloons and sky lanterns is potentially harmful to wildlife and the environment. It is also a source of littering.

A great deal of this work could not be achieved without the hard work and continued support of 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 Paul Harris, for all their hard work and continued support.

5. To receive a report and presentation from the Town Mayor, Cllr Mrs Belinda Ridout, on her year in office.

Well, where did this year go? David said it would go quickly and it has! I cannot believe I am a month from handing over the mayoral chains to my fellow councillor, Mrs Su Hunt.

As you know, my year hasn’t gone completely smoothly. Family death, family illness, national tragedy, (tragically I must hold the record for the number of minute silences) and even links to Russian spy poisoning. Unfortunately, in my year, we also said ‘goodbye to Dave Wathen, Town Crier for 30 years, who was sadly missed at my Civic Day earlier today.

The Mayoral role is a dual role, one as the Chairman of the Council and one as an Ambassador for Gillingham. Concentrating firstly on the former. I have had the greatest pleasure of being the Chairman of Gillingham Town Council, which has the primary responsibility of looking after our town. This involves a huge amount of work, which must not be under-estimated. The General Purposes, Planning, Staff and Salaries and Policy and Resources Committees are the workhorses of the Council. There are always issues and projects to be progressed to keep one step ahead. You have heard the reports by the Chairs of each Committee and the Working Parties that report to their respective Committee, particularly to the General Purposes Committee, which bear testament to the extremely hard work and dedication that goes into their respective responsibilities. Councillors, I thank each one of you for your hard work and dedication throughout the year. I would like to thank all the Town Council staff, including the grounds staff, for their support, professionalism and excellence in delivering the day to day business of the council, resolving issues as they arise, but also in delivering many major projects, to name but a few: the new football ground, High Street enhancement projects, completion of Hardings Park, the Works

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Depot Project, floral displays, Green Flag Award. The list is endless. It all takes hours of preparation and work.

At the end of my Mayoral year, it is very exciting to know that a very important document, Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan, worked on tirelessly by volunteers from the community with the help and support of the Town Council, approved under independent examination with minor modifications, is about to become part of the Local Plan for North Dorset, subject to a Referendum which has been set for 12th July. On behalf of the Town Council I thank everyone involved with the drafting of the plan, an amazing piece of work that will stand this town in good stead for the future.

I am pleased to announce that after successfully achieving ‘Quality Status’ on 16th February 2010, this Town Council has recently applied for the replacement scheme - Local Council Quality Gold Award. This is the highest accolade a town council can achieve and I thank the Town Clerk for her hard work in putting the application together.

Being Mayor, I can say that this Council has continued to do an excellent job in looking after the town, working in partnership with local groups such as Gillingham Action for Nature Group and the Town Meadow Group. This year (2017/18) has seen this Council moving from strength to strength; constantly striving to be one step ahead, pioneering in its thinking and working to achieve excellence. Obviously, there is a cost to everything but not without due diligence and careful consideration as to the best way forward for Gillingham’s inhabitants, not just in the immediate future, but long term, which makes this council so respected by their professionalism.

With the achievements in quality status, this Council is at the highest standard going forward at a time when local government is changing, to enable it to be ready for the inevitable changes that the fast approaching Dorset Unitary (and associated Boundary Review) will bring for parish and town councils as from 1st April 2019.

Sylvia Dobie, our Town Clerk, has been involved with the Town Council for 30 years, becoming Town Clerk in 2004. As councillors, we wanted to show our appreciation of her dedication and commitment to the town and we secretly entered her into The National Association of Local Councils, Clerk of the Year Award. We were delighted that Sylvia was one of three finalists in the whole of the country, being presented with a runner up certificate at a ceremony in Milton Keynes the end of last year. Sylvia announced that she wished to retire from the Council this year, when a suitable replacement had been appointed. On behalf of the Council I thank Sylvia for her commitment to Gillingham Town Council and when the time comes, wish her all the very best and much enjoyment in her retirement. Although knowing Sylvia, she will keep herself busy!

As I said earlier, the Mayor is a dual role. In my capacity as Ambassador for Gillingham, you also instantly become a member of the so called ‘*Chain-gang*’, made up of Mayors, chairmen and dignitaries from across Dorset and beyond.

I said at the Civic Carol Service that I can honestly say that this year has been, in HM the Queen’s words back in 1992, *annus horribilis*, within my personal life; however, in stark contrast, my Mayoral year has been, *annus mirabilis*, a wonderful year!

Community involvement has been very important to myself and David this past year. In my Mayor Making speech, I referred to how we can use our ‘Hearts, Hands and Heads’ to enrich the community in which we live and this has been evident wherever we have turned. The community (individuals, community groups, youth groups, schools and children’s nurseries) have been encouraged to ‘Love Where You Live’, supporting the Town Council’s ‘Pollinator Friendly’ initiative, through invitation to plant trees, Spring bulbs, cleaning up their neighbourhood and litter picking. We have planted 77 trees: 30 Oak, 20 Poplar and 24 Elm plus the additional planting of saplings at Jubilee fields, including an Oak from Great Windsor Park, provided by the Woodland Trust for Jubilee Wood in 2012. We have also plug-planted our Open Spaces with wild-flowers and the churchyard at St Mary’s to complement the ‘bug church’. The Town Council grounds staff have been amazing and very supportive with all this extra work on top of their very heavy work schedule.

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The new Gillingham Litterpick Group has been launched only this month. Business have been encouraged to sponsor the Town Council's floral initiative and community groups have been encouraged to take part in 'It's Your Neighbourhood Awards', which the Town Council and Friends of Gillingham Station received awards for last year. In addition, this year the town council is entering SW in Bloom's Pennant Award and our two Green Flag sites, entered for the Parks and Places Award. This will put Gillingham on the map.

I have worn out two pairs of wellies during the year, I didn't get to wear waders but I am sure there will be an opportunity sometime in the future!

Over the year, I have met some amazing individuals with past service to their country, met incredible young people who have done some amazing things, made awards, received awards on behalf of the Town Council, engaged with local schools and children's nurseries, been invited to many community groups and local charities, AGM's and presentation evenings, witnessing first-hand the good work that goes on in this town. Dementia Friends events have been particularly memorable. Gillingham is so rich in community spirit and good will with the support of local organisations such as our very own Gillingham Town Band, Scouts and Carnival Committee.

I have made surprise visits to deliver flowers and good wishes to couples and individuals on important anniversaries and 100th birthdays. An amazing opportunity to be part of such special moments.

The Festive Light Parade and Civic Carol Service were highlights of my year, involving children from local schools, nurseries and youth groups, particularly Gillingham Primary School Choir, who sang songs written especially for the events by local composer, Francesca Murray Mattei. It was an amazing time, and memories I shall treasure forever, particularly the tea party after Christmas for the entrants of the Mayor's Christmas Story when actress, Pippa Haywood, came along to read their stories. The Christmas Lunch for the community in the Methodist Hall was also a very memorable and emotional occasion and I even found myself getting carried away, trying to conduct the singing!

I have been out and about to towns all over Dorset and beyond by invitation of Mayor's and chairmen of other districts; the 'chain-gang'. It has been a fantastic experience and an incredible opportunity to represent Gillingham, with the help and support of my consorts.

Today was Gillingham's turn to host, Gillingham's Civic Day. *Bad* timing with two major events in one day you might think? Well, I am still standing and buzzing!! A proud day. We began with a very interesting talk by Sam Woodcock exploring John Constable's connection with Gillingham, followed by some incredible singing and poetry by 40 Key Stage Two pupils from the Gillingham Primary School Choir. We then boarded the Red London Bus to Langham church followed by lunch at the Rugby Club with a short talk by Chairman, Steve Keates. After lunch, a very interesting tour of Neals Yard Remedies with 'goodie bags' to take away. We had to abandon the planned walk through Jubilee Fields and Rolls Bridge due to 'April Showers', which were rather heavy at times. We finished the day with tea at Mirus 55, (Café Newt) and a talk by owner, Mike Russell de Clifford. Something for everyone and an opportunity to show off 'my' town to the visiting 'Chain-gang', including the High Sherriff. We had a great day.

Now, thankyou:

I thank the North-Dorset Branch of Multiple Sclerosis for helping me to organise fund raising events for the Mayor's charity and for today's raffle which raised £130.

I thank St Mary's church for donating the collection from the Civic Carol Service and Patronal Festival service to Multiple Sclerosis and Prostate Cancer and the Rev'd Eve Pegler in particular for all her help and support throughout the year, particularly with organizing the Mayor's Christmas Story Competition. That was great fun, as was helping to build the 'bug church'!

I thank the Deputy Mayor, Mrs Su Hunt for all her support and stepping in just at the start of my year when I couldn't attend Full Council or civic duties owing to personal circumstances. I thank my

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Consorts: David, Wendy and Anne for accompanying me across Dorset and beyond, helping me to fulfill the ambassador role.

It is sad now I am coming to the end of my year, but I can honestly say that I have had the most incredible experience as Mayor and I thank you, my fellow councillors, most sincerely for all your support and for bestowing upon me the honour of being the Mayor of Gillingham. It has meant a great deal to me. I thank the Town Clerk and Mrs Jill Ezzard, the Mayor's Secretary, for keeping me organised and on track (particularly for today, my Civic Day) and all the staff for their support, help and advice over the past year, particularly when I was floundering with personal problems.

Now, I have a short power point presentation, with highlights of my Mayoral year. I have got up to all manner of crazy things but would add, all in the name of duty! I hope that you will enjoy seeing them as much as I enjoyed attending them.

Cllr Von Clemens proposed a vote of thanks to the Mayor for all her hard work over the year. A round of applause followed.

6. To receive public questions.

Q1: Ms Karen Harris commented that she was hugely impressed with the amount of work that the Town Council had completed over the past year. Ms Harris queried the grass cutting schedule for the town.

A: Cllr Von Clemens replied that the grass verges are cut 10 times a year. This is more than specified in the Service Level Agreement with Dorset Highways. This routine is preferred as the amount of grass debris is not so noticeable when the grass is shorter and preferred by many residents. The grass is cut less frequently on the open spaces; the larger areas are only cut once a year and the grass removed to promote wildflowers.

Q2: Ms Karen Harris commented on the use of plastic water cups by the water cooler in the Town Council offices.

A: The Town Clerk replied that the supply of plastic cups are part of the water cooler contract but nevertheless she would investigate whether it is possible to exchange plastic cups for another type of cup that would be less harmful to the environment.

Q3: Mrs Edna Norris congratulated the Mayor on completion of her term of office. The Mayor has been "wonderful".

A: The Mayor thanked Mrs Norris for her kind comment.

Q4: Mrs Mandy Greenwood commented that she was really encouraged by all the projects that the Town Council has achieved. Mrs Greenwood asked whether the Town Council could help with the decline of the High Street.

A: Cllr Mrs Cullingford was asked to reply as she had recently been elected as Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce. The Town Council has no influence on the High Street or indeed how much the landlords charge for rent. The Chamber of Commerce and others are very enthusiastic about rejuvenating the High Street and are currently considering various options on how this could be achieved.

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Q5: Mrs Karen Harris commented that she was dismayed to hear of the proposal to install a pavement between Lydfords Lane and Clarendon Close. This will not resolve traffic problems in this area. Whose idea was it in the first place?

A: Cllr Mrs Ridout replied that the issue of pedestrian safety had arisen from concerns received by the Town Council's Traffic Management Working Party from residents. The concerns were passed to DCC Highways to resolve. The proposed safety scheme has been designed by DCC Highways and will be funded from monies used to provide safer routes for pedestrians.

Q6: Mr Light reiterated his comments that he had made at the General Purposes meeting held on the 3rd April, minute no. 284(g) regarding the proposal to install a pavement between Lydfords Lane and Clarendon Close. Mr Light considered the project an "utter waste of money".

A: Cllr Mrs Ridout suggested that residents make their concerns known direct to DCC Highways. The footpath works have not started yet.

Closure. The meeting closed at 9.18pm.