

Minutes of the Frome Annual Town Meeting at Frome Town Hall Wednesday 5 April 2017

In the Chair: Toby Eliot, Mayor of Frome

In attendance:

Approx. members of the public: 70

Frome Town Councillors: Richard Ackroyd, Kate Bielby, Jean Boulton, Colin Cobb, Toby Eliot, Sheila Gore, Peter Macfadyen, Al O’Kane and Nick White

Frome Town Council officers: Paul Wynne (Town Clerk), Peter Wheelhouse (Economic Development and Regeneration Manager), Kate Hellard (Community Projects Officer), Laura Flaherty (Democratic Services Administrator)

Minutes

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 April 2016 were signed by the Chair as a true record of the meeting.

The meeting started: 7.06pm and Toby welcomed everyone to the very first meeting at Frome Town Hall.

Summary

Toby gave a summary of his year as Mayor of Frome. He said that his year has been an honour, privilege and a joy.

He highlighted some of the stand out events he had had attended as Mayor including the Christmas service at Wells Cathedral where Frome College choir were outstanding. He thanked those groups that had invited him to an event. He said he had been taken out of his comfort zone; most memorably by the ‘Walk a mile in her shoes’ event to help put an end to violence against women, running the Frome 10k and raising £500 for the Gateway Club, as well as the Firewalk in aid of SOS Africa and Fair Frome.

During his year as Mayor, Toby explained that he focused on representing the town and on encouraging and enabling more participative democratic decision making. Toby said that he felt there was a crisis of engagement in democracy and that was why he was championing Participatory Budgeting. For example, at Council meetings he trialled greater participation through organised debate and actively sort feedback.

Toby said he had written 51 columns and 16,000 words for the Mayor's column in the Frome Standard. He accepted that many of these were political and made no apologies for this. He said his ultimate goal was for people to be prompted into thought or debate.

Toby said he had enjoyed his time as Mayor and that he had valued the work of Rebecca Krzyzosiak, Mayor's Secretary, which allowed him to do so much.

Toby concluded that it was remarkable what a passionate town Frome is.

Civic awards

Toby awarded Civic awards to three people he felt stood out for their work in the community.

The first was awarded to Rupert Kirkham, Director at Frome FM. Toby explained that Rupert made sure all of Frome were included. Rupert said he was extremely honoured as an individual but accepted the award on behalf of all at Frome FM who give so much. He said he hoped to heal some of the divides in the town, share solutions and problems with the people around us. He thanked his wife and family who gave him the opportunity to pursue community radio.

Toby presented the second award to Jane Norris, Chair of the Royal British Legion Frome Branch. Toby said he first met Jane at the Town Crier competition. Jane chaired the RBL, as well as designing and co ordinating the Remembrance service in Frome which was growing in numbers and popularity. She was also a key part of the team which relocated the statue of Charlie Robbins to a prominent place at the Memorial Theatre. Jane said the award had come as a surprise but was for the organisation she represented. She said the RBL was not just about remembrance but helping those still alive to live.

The final award was for Griff Daniels, who passed away at the end of last year. Toby first met Griff when they both worked for the youth offending service in Wiltshire. He said he got to know Griff as a lynchpin of the live music scene in Frome. He was known for amateur dramatics and charity work. Toby said Frome was poorer without him but can celebrate his work nearly every night. The award was accepted by his wife and daughter who said he would have been humbled, happy and quite surprised. They both said they were proud of him and the work he did.

Toby introduced three presentations from officers of FTC on current projects.

Neighbourhood Plan and Saxonvale

Peter Wheelhouse, Economic Development and Regeneration Manger, explained that in October the Frome Neighbourhood Plan had been approved. Since then the policies had been adopted by MDC. The impact of the plan could be seen when the former Western Vinyl site planning application for housing had been refused. There was now an opportunity to work

with developer to bring forward a mixed use development. Community housing was now being enabled, FTC had acquired an option to purchase 2 acres of land at Little Keyford in order to address the issue of affordable housing.

As a landowner at Saxonvale, FTC were bringing forward a development and were currently seeking a joint venture partner. A more comprehensive development across the whole site had been investigated and was very difficult to achieve. As a result, with the current demand for workspace in the town, FTC were exploring whether the FTC land could be used to bring this type of development forward.

Crowdfunder

Kat Hellard, Community Projects Officer, explained that FTC had introduced a new approach to grants by introducing Crowdfunder. Successful organisations had been Loops disco, NCT breastfeeding café, floodlights at the Football Club and funding for a YMCA Routes café worker. Kate explained that £25k had been allocated from the budget to support organisations through Crowdfunder. She said they would like to encourage more small local projects to start campaigns as well as small businesses and start ups. She noted that support can be offered to those unsure of how to get started.

Business breakfast

Peter Wheelhouse explained that FTC wanted to support small businesses to become financially sustainable and also to support them in being green. The business breakfasts had been running for 18 months and were very energising and good fun. Topics covered were practical and helpful. Breakfasts were held across a variety of venues and different businesses and organisations were visited.

Questions

Matt Sims asked what expertise does FTC or be willing to get to improve public engagement? Toby Eliot explained that FTC has consulted experts on a range of projects, recently Participatory Budgeting. He also said FTC would welcome Matt's insights.

Debbie Miles expressed her concern about how dangerous cycling in Frome had become and was there anything could do to help. Tricia Golinski sympathised with Debbie's concerns as a fellow cyclist. Tricia noted that when the Market Place remodelling is underway it will include introducing a zomph zone through the centre as well as change in road surface. This will visually encourage drivers to reduce their speed through the centre. There will also be more crossings that will give pedestrians and cyclists priority over vehicles. Frome Town Council is also actively promoting alternative forms of transport most specifically walking and cycling.

A member of the public expressed concern about the way in which FTC and MDC work together. He felt the derelict allotments at Broadway should be protected from development.

He also expressed concern over buses leaving their engines running when idle in the town centre. He also noted that there was no information to let you know when the next bus was due. Peter Wheelhouse explained that the air pollution was monitored in the town centre and showed that it was getting close to the legal limit. As part of the Market Place remodelling project it was hoped that the bus shelters would be renewed and conversations were being held with the bus companies to have digital timetables.

With regards to the allotments at Broadway it was a decision for MDC as the landowner. In previous conversations FTC have expressed a desire not to see the land used for residential development.

Gill Fone expressed her concern that the railings were to be removed on Cork Street as part of the Market Place remodelling project. She asked that the panels with the images of St Aldhelm are retained. Peter Wheelhouse explained he was aware of this and was investigating the possibility of retaining the images.

A member of the group Fair Housing for Frome explained that they were holding their first meeting on 29 April and would be launching a series of meetings to discuss the housing crisis in Frome. They explained Frome had seen the third highest housing price increases in the county and the cost of rent was rising, leaving some people homeless.

A member of the public thanked FTC and MDC for keeping the town centre clean. He asked who was responsible for the cleanliness of the rest of Frome? Toby Eliot said that FTC share the frustration of other areas of the town not being kept clean and it was a responsibility of MDC. FTC were in constant communication with MDC to ensure improvements were made.

A member of the public asked where would the cars go that will no longer be able to park in the Market Place. Peter Wheelhouse explained that removing the car park area around the Boyle Cross was part of the project aiming to improve public safety and that there were numerous car parks very close to the Market Place. The aim was to change driver behaviour by introducing a 20 mph zone. The proposal was yet to go out for consultation.

Charles Wood thanked FTC for their support of Active and In Touch. He announced that they had become a registered charity that day. He also thanked Toby for making them the beneficiaries of the proceeds that would be raised from the upcoming Mayor's Bash.

Toby thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Meeting closed: 8.24pm