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MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL DOWNHAM MARKET TOWN MEETING
TUESDAY 3RD APRIL 2007 7.00PM IN THE TOWN HALL

Present:	The Mayor	Cllr M G Ford
	The Deputy Mayor	Cllr J W Doyle
	Town Councillors	Cllr R J R Baker
		Cllr R M Bodle
		Cllr K I Byron
		Cllr J K Fox
		Cllr P E Freeman
		Cllr J Groom
		Cllr R Leach
		Cllr Mrs S M Nunn
		Cllr S W Nunn
		Cllr C T Sampson
	Cllr P B Sharp	
	Cllr A D Stacey	
	Cllr V F Starling	
Borough Councillors	Cllr A M Lovett	
	Cllr J R Legg	
	Cllr K Mellish	
	Cllr G Wareham	
County Councillor	Cllr Mrs S Hutson	
Town Clerk	Mrs J M Markwell	
Deputy Clerk	Mrs S D Porter	
Administrator	Mrs K J Martin	
Members of Public	20	

The Mayor, Cllr Ford, opened the meeting at 7.30pm.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Evacuation procedures

The Mayor, Cllr Ford, notified those present of the emergency evacuation procedure.

3. To receive the Mayor's welcome

The Mayor welcomed the members of the public to the meeting.

4. Approval of the minutes of the last Town Meeting

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Tuesday, 2nd May 2006, had been circulated.

Proposed – Mr T Taylor

Seconded – Cllr Groom

‘That the minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Tuesday, 2nd May 2006 (pages 1828-1832) be approved.’

All in favour

The minutes were duly signed by the Mayor, Cllr Ford, as a true and accurate record.

5. Matters arising from last meeting

Concern was raised that when Hawkins has an auction sale vehicles park right up to the access to Clackclose and it is difficult for drivers to see either way, which is a danger as there are around 1,400 property's in that particular area including a school. As there is not a traffic warden in Town the police should regulate this area.

A: Inspector Gunn would investigate this.

6. To discuss Town Matters

Information regarding the income and expenditure was recorded on pie charts and had been circulated to members of the public (Appendices 1 and 2). The Chairman of the Finance & General Purpose Committee, Cllr Sampson read his report as follows:

‘The Downham Market Town Council’s precept for the past financial year (2006/07) was £198,980. This is the money that is paid in your Council Tax over the last year to enable the Council to run the Town. There were approximately 4231 houses in the town that this tax was collected from. The simple mathematics shows that each house paid £47.00 over the year or, £0.90 per week. In addition to that money we also received some income from rents from properties, market rents, some administrative services that we provide and a transfer of monies from our reserves. The two “pie charts” that you may have seen give the full details.

‘We are not a rich Council which is why we need to raise around £200,000 from the precept. By running the town I mean that we deal with, and pay for, the free car parking facilities, supply and maintain the majority of seats, litter bins, dog bins, notice boards, planters and some of the grass cutting and gardening that is done around the town. Downham Market and Downham West Joint Burial Committee currently precept the Town Council £10,000 a year so that the two grave yards and the cottage and chapels at the top of King’s Walk can be maintained properly and the main cemetery at Rouse’s Lane is correctly operated and maintained. The few buildings that are owned by the Town Council require maintenance as does the Town Clock. Insurance for these and all other activities of the Council and its employees cost approximately £24,000. This figure is likely to rise significantly in the coming years.

‘The provision of events on the Town Square and the promotion of the town in various ways including the website and local papers all cost money. We are involved in planning issues but sadly we do not have the final say in what is, or is not, allowed. A major cost this last year was the joint funding with Churches Together for two youth workers in the town which, I think all involved would agree, has been extremely successful. We run one of the more successful markets in this part of the world. While there are costs involved in running such a venture there is much needed income to be derived from it.

‘As you will all have seen administration is by far our biggest expense, but by its very nature administration is largely an “unseen” cost. During my time on the Council the amount of paperwork that has to be dealt with has increased by a phenomenal amount. Much of it comes from higher

authorities and quasi government bodies and has to be processed, whether or not it applies to us. To pre-empt one of the most commonly asked questions can I say that yes, ten years ago the Council was run by a part-time clerk but in those days there was only that amount of work involved. The work load has increased somewhat since then and is going to increase further in the coming year.

There are many things likely to happen in the next financial year that will benefit the town in many ways but there will inevitably be a cost involved, but maybe some income as well. Whoever stands here at this time next year, it may be me, it may be a new Councillor, and it will be his /her job to persuade you that your money has been well spent. I leave you with this thought; if 300 car parking spaces earned just £1.00 per day, 5 days a week, for 52 weeks of the year, that would generate £78,000 towards the cost of the running of your town. Just think what we could do with that!'

The Mayor also announced that if any member of the public wished to stand for the Town Council they would have until midday on Wednesday, 4th April 2007 to submit their nomination forms to the BCKL&WN. He advised that nomination forms were available for anyone interested.

The Mayor welcomed and introduced Chief Superintendent Stuart Gunn. Chief Sup. Gunn had provided a leaflet regarding the Safer Neighbourhood policing (Appendix 3).

Chief Sup. Gunn reported:

The introduction of Safer Neighbourhood Teams across the county addresses some of the major complaints which have been received regarding petty crime and anti-social behaviour. With these teams in place the West Norfolk Police have been very successful in reducing and dealing with the more serious crimes.

Five years ago there were 900 burglaries recorded in West Norfolk in one year and in the past year there have been 330, over a 50% reduction. The Government has put more money into the Safer Neighbourhood Teams, enabling the West Norfolk sector to have 48 extra PCSO'S (Police Community Support Officers), a further 18 PCs and 3 Sergeants. Downham Market will have a Safer Neighbourhood Team of 2 PCs, 6 PCSO'S and 1 Sergeant. Their main purpose will be visible patrols and talking to the public to see where the main areas of concern are. This will start happening in around 2 weeks time and the new PCSO'S will be introduced between now and November 2007.

The Mayor, Cllr Ford, reported that for four years the Council had been trying to gain more policing presence in Downham Market and it had finally happened.

Chief Sup. Gunn invited questions from the floor.

Q: Will the new team have the power to move cars which park illegally and park on pavements?

A: Police Officers have the power to do this but PCSO's only have restricted authority at the moment. Their main powers are dealing with ASBOs. Areas known to attract problems will be checked every day in order that the police can keep a check on them. A meeting will be held every 8 weeks which will be advertised widely and will be open to all members of the community.

Q: Is it obligatory to have 6 PCSO's? Wouldn't it be wiser to have 3 Pc's that can arrest people?

A: The Government has recently given police authorities the freedom to spend money. There are tremendous advantages to having PCSO's; they are rarely taken off duty from their neighbourhood patrol, but PCs are always on call for this. The recently appointed PC Andy Dedman can be congratulated for the work he has done since he joined Downham Market in March 2007.

The Mayor, Cllr Ford, congratulated PCSO Tracy Milburn for her community help and highlighted a particular incident when she was up against three youths and persevered with them for three hours whilst keeping her cool.

There were no further questions. The Mayor, Cllr Ford, thanked Chief Sup. Gunn for his report.

7. Questions from the floor

The Mayor, Cllr Ford, reported that the Town Council were investigating the transfer of the Town Hall from the BCKL&WN to the Town Council, subject to satisfactory Heads of Terms being agreed. One survey identified that the Town Hall was in need of repair and would cost approximately £84,000, all expenses of which to be borne by the BCKL&WN.

The current cost to run the Town Hall is £54,000; this is 'special expenses' which is added to the BCKL&WB Council tax for Downham Market ratepayers. In the 2007/2008 the special expenses for the Town Hall will rise to £63,000. It should be noted that the total figure of special expenses is £103,000 which covers not only the Town Hall but the maintenance of the War Memorial Playing Field, the Howdale, street lights and the closed churchyards. The Town Council has already pre commissioned an organisation to do a Community Audit, which will look into all community facilities in the Town and how best to utilise the space in the Town Hall. Cllr John Dobson, Leader of the BCKL&WN, who is standing down in May 2007, has worked very hard with the Town Council to make sure it listens to what the Town wants.

The Mayor, Cllr Ford, invited the residents to sign a survey indicating whether they would or would not support the transfer of the Town Hall.

Q: How much will it cost the ratepayers, as our precept has gone up 601% in the last 10 years, compared with Hunstanton which has only increased by 51.6%?

A: If the Town Hall is transferred back to the Town Council the special expenses for the Town Hall will also be transferred. However, the Town Council feels the Town Hall could be run in a more cost effective way than it is now. In 1974 the Memorial Playing Field, Howdale and the Willows were transferred to the BCKL&WN and the Town Council would also like to have these areas under its control.

Q: Cumbria were faced with similar financial burdens but with fundraising and a lot of hard work they now have a large Town Hall to be proud of which holds pantomimes and conferences etc, and Downham Market should not be afraid to pursue this.

A: This was noted.

Q: Has the planning application at the back of Lawn Boy been approved?

A: No. The application is still going through the process. The Town Council has a number of concerns and a representative from Country and Metropolitan, the developers of the site, will be speaking at the next Planning meeting on Wednesday, 4th April 2007. Public are welcome to attend.

Q: A large hoarding sign has been erected in Railway Road advertising that the development will be coming soon and to register an interest.

A: The Council staff are aware of this and have asked the BCKL&WN Planning Department to investigate whether they have permission for the sign.

Q: The BCKL&WN has suggested that the tennis courts on the Memorial Playing Field be removed because they are not utilised enough. The local hockey team has to travel to Marham and pay an annual fee. Why can't the Town have this area as a hockey pitch?

A: The Mayor, Cllr Ford, is keeping a daily schedule of the tennis courts usage in order that this information can be shown to the BCKL&WN. The Town Council does not want to see any facilities removed or transferred to the High School.

Q: Whose responsibility is the small War Memorial area on the Memorial Playing Field?

A: The BCKL&WN, and it is very well looked after. The BCKL&WN will also be replacing the seating around the big tree.

Q: Could you please elaborate on the development of the Iceland site?

A: The development should have commenced after Christmas 2006. It is understood that the Section 106 agreement has delayed this and the developers have also discovered that the site is not as big as they thought it was.

Cllr Sampson announced that he would like to find out if any of the trees in the memorial garden at the Memorial Playing Fields were planted in memory of a person or persons. The BCKL&WN would like to improve the area and do not want to dig up trees if they were planted in memory. Anyone with information should contact the Council offices.

The Mayor thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.28pm.

Chairman

Date