

## Minutes of the Saffron Walden Annual Town Meeting 2024

**Date of meeting:** Monday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2024, 7.30pm at The Town Hall, Saffron Walden

**Present Councillors:** Cllrs Asker (Chair), Curtis, de Vries, Eke, Freeman, Gadd, Hawke-Smith, McLellan, Meloy, Porch and Reeve.

**Officers:** Lisa Courtney, Town Clerk; Georgia Arnold, Deputy Town Clerk; Kieran Chapman Office Administrator and Colette Kerr, Events and Activities Officer.

**Public:** Approximately 40 members of the public

AM 01-24	<b>Apologies for absence</b> Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Jones.
AM 02-24	<b>Minutes</b> Minutes from the meeting held on 14.03.2023 were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting and were agreed and signed by the Chairman.
AM 03-24	<b>Mayor's Annual Report</b>  The Mayor's report was noted and she passed on her thanks to SWTC officers; she congratulated the Town Clerk for achieving the Local Council Award Scheme Gold Award Status and thanked the Operations Manager for leading the refurbishment of number 5 Market Place, the former Natwest Bank.
AM 04-24	<b>Annual Reports by Chairs of Committees</b>  The committee chairs each spoke and summarised their written reports. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) Assets &amp; Services Cllr Hawke-Smith (Deputy Chair) thanked committee members and officers for their continued support. It was noted several memorable events have occurred this year including the Coronation of the King; and introduction of the 'Pop-Up Markets'. It was noted SWTC has re-opened the former Garden Rooms, now Jubilee Hub and is offering a weekly free programme in partnership with UCAN and Enterprise East CIC. He gave thanks to former Councillor Kirstie Frost, who had been the Committee Chair.</li><li>b) Finance &amp; Establishment Cllr de Vries, Chair of the F&amp;E committee, spoke further to his written report and thanked SWTC officers and congratulated the Town Clerk for completing her degree in community governance and noted SWTC has for a third year received a gold award for its HR affairs.</li><li>c) Planning &amp; Transport Cllr Hawke-Smith, Chair of the P&amp;T committee spoke further to the written report and thanked the Deputy Town Clerk and County Cllr Gadd for their continued support.</li></ul>

AM 05-24	<p><b>Community Reports</b></p> <p>Representatives of the following groups spoke and summarised their written reports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Citizen's Advice Uttlesford A representative spoke further to their written report, noting the service is increasingly busy each year and grateful for SWTC's continued support.</li> <li>b) Uttlesford community Transport Apologies were accepted and the written report was noted.</li> <li>c) Youth Outreach Project (YOP) A representative thanked the Mayor for choosing YOP as a Mayoral charity for 2023/24. It was noted YOP is in its 30<sup>th</sup> year and the service offering is increasing with support from SWTC and new volunteers.</li> <li>d) Royal British Legion Thanked SWTC for their continued support in the Remembrance Day Parade arrangements.</li> <li>e) Uttlesford Foodbank Presented and explained the number of referrals continue to increase each year.</li> <li>f) Saffron Walden Round Table Thanked SWTC for their continued officer support and free of charge hire of the common most recently for the Easter Egg trial.</li> <li>g) Saffron Walden Initiative Thanked SWTC officers for their support in running the annual dance in the square and late-night shopping events and SWTC for the awarded grants.</li> <li>h) Elmo Miniatures Apologies were accepted and the written report was noted.</li> <li>i) Musical Theatre Apologies were accepted and the written report was noted.</li> </ul>
AM 06-24	<p><b>Questions from Electors</b></p> <p>The Mayor opened questions from the public.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) A pre-submitted question from John Tennant was answered prior to the meeting in writing and further discussion was had during the meeting, as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Was the Greggs leasehold advertised locally and is it suitable for Saffron Walden? The written response already provided to Mr Tenant was summarised, noting that Greggs had originally been interested in purchasing the building and contacted SWTC's advisors with interest in leasing the building.  Some members of the public present expressed the view that Greggs could be detrimental to local cafes.</li> <li>ii. Mr Tenant asked if the lease agreement with Greggs was finalised.  The Town Mayor responded that whilst the lease was not yet signed, it was nearing conclusion.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- iii. Has or will SWTC submit a response to Essex Highways regarding the proposal to install traffic lights on Church Street?

Cllr Gadd responded and explained Essex Highways has recently questioned the feasibility of the scheme and until the full planning application of the Swards End site comes forward the traffic lights scheme will not be fully determined.

- b) Barbara Light sought clarification regarding Greggs' first interest in the former Nat West Building and details of the lease arrangements.

Ms Light was referred to the question already responded to from Mr Tenant.

- c) Martyn Everitt expressed a view that the decision to retain the Tourist Information Centre at No 1 Market Place was a good idea. He asked if staffing reductions will take place, affecting the quality and timeliness of the service.

The Mayor responded that the Town Council remains committed to the TIC service and opportunities are being taken to review and refresh the service offering. She could not provide specific advice on what that review would look like as it was still underway but noted no specific decisions have been made at this juncture.

- d) A pre-submitted question from Richard Gilyead was considered. Mr Gilyead requested details of the Council's involvement in vehicular speeding mitigation.

The Town Clerks response (already provided in writing to Mr Gilyead) was read to those present explaining SWTC frequently liaises with the Town Policing Team in requesting additional patrols. SWTC is further researching feasibility and costs in purchasing a VAS (Vehicle Activated Sign) and this matter will be progressed via the Town Council's Planning & Transport Committee.

- e) A pre-submitted from Judith Rodden was answered prior to the meeting in writing and further discussion was had during the meeting, as follows:

- i. The costs involved in the former Natwest Bank renovation and are the works completed.

The Town Clerk explained the renovations are mostly complete and SWTC officers have moved into the first floor; the three flats will be publicised for rental in the coming weeks and the ground floor will be commercially let and occupied within the coming months. Information was not readily to hand regarding specific costs to date, but these would be presented to a future June Full Council meeting (anticipated June 2024).

- f) Jim Ketteridge asked questions about the current location and storage of the table, previously kept in the Council Chamber.

The Town Mayor provided assurances that the table and chairs were currently in storage and are in a good condition.

Jim Ketteridge proposed a motion to the meeting:  
*"I propose to this annual parish meeting that the civic furniture currently in store, is restored in its rightful place in the Council Chamber"*. The motion was seconded by Andrew Ketteridge.

Jim Ketteridge confirmed the motion was not a request for, or a question for any parish poll, but was a question for this annual parish meeting for those present to discuss.

There followed a series of statements and questions from members of the public present regarding the future usage of the Council table and chairs. The Town Mayor noted that Council had previously provided a commitment it would consider the longer-term need and use of the table and chairs, referring to the Assets & Services Committee meeting on 28.03.22.

A vote was taken amongst those present, and eligible to vote:

In favour of the motion from Mr Ketteridge: 15

Against the motion: 8

Abstentions: 8

It was agreed the motion as presented would be further considered at a future Town Council meeting.

- g) A resident of Little Walden asked who their ward councillors are and when SWTC responds to planning applications does it review any previous applications on the same site.

Cllr Hawke-Smith explained Uttlesford District Council is the planning authority and SWTC does respond to applications and consider previous applications and how SWTC previously responded.

The Mayor explained she is a Little Walden and Castle Ward representative alongside Cllrs Curtis, Porch, Freeman and there is a current vacancy available. Cllr Curits has visited Little Walden in the past with the village hall committee. Cllr Curtis agreed to speak outside of this meeting with the Little Walden resident.

- h) Barbara Light asked why the precept is higher than District and County Council and what the current SWTC reserve figures are.

The Clerk advised the end of year balances are in the process of being finalised for the year and full details would be provided to Ms Light outside of this meeting, once year end was concluded.

Cllr Gadd explained precept levels for both District and County Councils are capped, which is why SWTC is higher than Uttlesford and Essex. He further noted that SWTC had historically and purposefully retained an increase at 2% per annum, when inflation was running at 10%. SWTC is committed to providing value for money to local residents, hence the rationale of reviewing areas for cost efficiencies and

	<p>opportunities to increase income. He noted that SWTC reserves and budgets are extremely well managed to allow for the long-term maintenance of its assets. Cllr Gadd further noted that the Council's reserves were largely depleted in 2015 (under a different Administration) and that since 2015, Council had been mindful of the need to set aside monies for longer term, specific projects and activities.</p> <p>i) Andrew Ketteridge expressed disappointment that the Council was unable to respond to specific financial questions at this meeting.</p> <p>The Clerk responded that it was impossible to pre-empt every question which may be asked at the annual parish meeting and in offering a more informed response, some of the more detailed questions would be responded to outside of this meeting.</p>
AM 07-24	<p><b>Closing from the Mayor</b></p> <p>The Town Mayor thanked attendees and noted that as her term of office came to a close, she had been privileged and proud in serving the local community as Mayor.</p> <p>The Mayor thanked all attendees, including those who presented and invited all to remain for light refreshments after the meeting.</p>

The Town Mayor closed the meeting at 9.30pm