

## **Melksham Town Council**

### **Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting meeting held on Monday 13th March 2023**

#### **PRESENT:**

Councillor S Crundell (Town Mayor)  
Councillor S Mortimer (Deputy Town Mayor)  
Councillor P Alford  
Councillor P Aves  
Councillor J Crundell  
Councillor C Goodhind  
Councillor C Houghton

#### **IN ATTENDANCE:**

**OFFICERS:** Linda Roberts – Town Clerk

Sandy Evans – Locum  
Committee Clerk

#### **17/21 Welcome from the Town Mayor**

##### **Welcome from the Town Mayor**

The Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell welcomed members of the public and press to the Annual Town Meeting and informed those present that this was an opportunity for the Town Council to report progress made over the last year, hear from organisations that have benefitted from grants this year and give members of the public an opportunity to ask questions to Councillors, local Police and organisations present.

#### **18/21 Minutes**

The Minutes of the previous Annual Meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2022, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell.

#### **19/21 Report of the Town Mayor**

It is an honour to be before you today to reflect on the last year as a council. Our town is a vibrant and thriving place, and I am proud to represent such a dedicated and passionate group of residents. Community is the foundation upon which we build our town and the driving force behind everything that we do. Our shared commitment to community is what sets us apart and makes our town a truly special place to call home.

As a town, we have shared moments of jubilation and sorrow. The Platinum Jubilee of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was a magnificent celebration that brought together thousands of residents in the Market Place. The air was filled with the sounds of laughter and fun as fairground rides, stalls, and live music created a vibrant atmosphere. The Town Hall showcased a Royal photo exhibition, and the Red Arrows surprised us with a spectacular flyover.

But when the news of our Queen's passing reached our ears, our hearts were heavy with grief. The loss of such a remarkable monarch touched the souls of many. In the wake of her majesty's death, our community paid heartfelt tributes and sent messages of condolences to Buckingham Palace. It was a poignant moment, one that stirred our emotions and reminded us of the love and admiration we have for the Queen.

The proclamation of King Charles III was a duty that I had hoped I would never have to fulfil as Mayor, but I was proud to witness the sombre reverence and phenomenal community spirit that Melksham displayed. Let us continue to come together in times of joy and sorrow, and cherish the memories that we have shared as a town.

With this in mind, as I reflect on the past year, there is one moment that truly stands out to me - the magical evening of our Christmas lights switch-on. The town was bathed in a warm, twinkling glow, and the air was filled with the joy and excitement of the Christmas period. I am deeply grateful to Paul Weymouth and the Melksham Christmas Lights committee for their tireless dedication and hard work in creating such a spectacular display.

But the beauty of this event runs deeper than the sparkling lights and festive cheer. It is a symbol of the importance of community and the power of coming together to celebrate what truly matters. Christmas is a time of love, of giving, and of hope, and it is events like these that remind us of the goodness and magic that exists in our town.

I want to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the incredible effort that goes into making events like these possible. The Town Council and the many volunteers who give their time and energy to bring our town together are the backbone of Melksham. It takes an enormous amount of planning, coordination, and hard work to ensure that these events are a success, and we are lucky to have such dedicated and passionate individuals in our midst.

So, to our Town Council Officers, Councillors, Melksham Christmas Lights committee, and to all those volunteers numbering more than 40 who played a part in making our Christmas lights switch-on such a memorable occasion, I offer my heartfelt thanks. You have brought light and joy into our town during a dark and damp December, and for that, we are forever grateful.

Amidst the hustle and bustle of our town's events and celebrations, it is easy to overlook the critical work that goes on behind the scenes. Our town council has been diligently working to address the pressing issues of our time, including establishing an Avon Tires working group to coordinate this council's work to support our fellow

townsfolk in this difficult transition, but also to ensure the legacy of this great company is preserved for generations to come. Particular thanks are owed to Cllr Price for bringing his knowledge, enthusiasm, and experience to this effort.

More broadly, the times in which we live are a pivotal moment in our collective history, and we must act now to preserve the natural world for future generations. Britain is the most biodiversity-deficient country in Europe, and with Wiltshire being an agricultural county, it is more important than ever to ensure that our town adds to the ecological richness of the area, rather than detracting from it.

That is why our town council held its inaugural Climate Fest, where local groups came together to tackle the urgent issues of climate change and biodiversity loss. We distributed free saplings to every interested resident as part of our support for The Queen's Green Canopy, and we developed a tree planting strategy to enhance Melksham's ecological diversity.

These initiatives mark the beginning of our renewed focus on the environment, and we are committed to taking further steps to protect our natural world. The health of our planet and the diversity of our ecosystems are not just moral imperatives, but are essential for our survival and well-being. Although Melksham's contribution may be small by global standards, it is crucial that we play our part in addressing the biodiversity crisis, and by doing so, we can have a significant impact on our bit of England and perhaps beyond.

As we look to the future, let us remember that we are all stewards of the Earth, and we must work together to create a sustainable and thriving world. With the determination and dedication of our town council and community, I have myself in full confidence that we can rise to the challenges of our time and leave a positive legacy for generations to come.

This legacy must also be evident in our town's assets, which the council has been busy in improving. We have completed the long-awaited transfer of the Spiritualist Garden, which is now open to all residents to find peace and tranquillity. And we have invested in our playgrounds, with the installation of a new zipwire in King George V and a planned programme of regeneration of our town's playgrounds. Fencing around King George V park will soon be replaced, securing this vital community amenity for lawful recreation. Further, the Cricketer's Cafe will open to the public this summer following a refurbishment. This, combined with the demolition of the old maintenance shed, will vastly improve the scenery of the north of the park and make the facility far more welcoming to visitors.

Looking ahead, we will be expanding our CCTV network to ensure that areas prone to anti-social behaviour are safe for all residents, King George V playing fields will see the installation of new lighting, the footpath opposite Texaco on Sandridge road will be widened, and we will be putting our second Joint Neighbourhood Plan to the town in a referendum.

Amidst the hum of progress and the clamour of change, it is easy to lose sight of the importance of careful planning and the tireless work that goes into it. Yet, in Melksham, we know the value of such endeavours. The Melksham Joint Neighbourhood Plan is a colossal undertaking, a testament to the immense effort of our Neighbourhood Planning Team, composed of councillors and residents alike. Working alongside our neighbours, Melksham Without Parish Council, we have been busily working away on this project, for the good of the future of our town and its residents.

Their dedication has yielded an abundance of feedback from the heart of our community, with residents and local businesses alike offering their invaluable insights on how we can best shape the future of our town. The Plan is an opportunity for the people of Melksham to have a say on how developments are shaped in the future. We have received lots of feedback on infrastructure requirements, sustainable energy production, the retail offering and a Town Centre Masterplan, the protection of wild spaces, and so much more.

Neighbourhood Plans are no small feat, but they are a vital one. They provide a means for us to have a say in how our community develops, to determine the infrastructure we need, to shape the contours of our retail spaces, and to protect our wild spaces from the onslaught of development. While we may not have the power to affect the volume of house building, we have the power to shape the character of our community.

As we continue to build new homes and welcome new members to our community, it is crucial that we do so in a way that enhances the ecological diversity of our town, and that promotes community building. The Melksham Joint Neighbourhood Plan allows for community building, not merely housebuilding. Through the Plan, we have an opportunity to create a future that we can be proud of, one that reflects the voices and values of our town, and gives you, the people of Melksham, a voice that is protected in statute as to how our town grows in the coming decades.

I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to my esteemed colleagues on the council, the dedicated staff, and the selfless volunteers who work tirelessly to make Melksham a town that we can all be proud of. It is because of your unwavering commitment and hard work that we have achieved so much progress this year. We have made progress, but let us not rest on our laurels. There is much more to be done, and we must continue our efforts to build a better, more sustainable future for our town. We must work tirelessly to protect and preserve our natural environment, to create a community that is safe, welcoming, and prosperous for all.

## **20/21      Reports of Wiltshire Councillors**

Councillor P Alford

This has been another quite extraordinary year, and instead of recovering from the hangover of the pandemic we are now having to deal with the fallout of a war on Europe's mainland. The impact on fuel and food prices has compounded global inflationary pressures, itself an initial result of the pent-up demand caused by the worldwide shut down and blockage of the Suez Canal. This has battered Council business plans and spending programs and we are now seeing councils across the country debilitated by unbalanced budgets and unknown future cost savings pencilled into their forecasts. Fortunately, at Wiltshire Council we weathered the storm far better than our peers.

Wiltshire Council has, even in these tough times, managed to increase investment in Adult Social Care and a £4m investment in Melksham House, along with expansion of the housing stock. We have managed to provide support for people fleeing their homes in Ukraine and these will have a lasting legacy into the future. Working and helping to shape some of the decisions being made Melksham House, the old Christie Miller sports centre, the library, and Blue Pool sites.

I have also been Chairman of the Melksham Area Board and we have invested £60,000 in the local community.

## **21/21 Reports from Councillors/Chairs of Town Council Committees**

### **Councillor S Mortimer – Chair of Finance Administration and Performance Committee**

As Chair of the Finance group, we have been working hard on the budgets and the Council has been extremely conscious of the cost of living crisis – we have managed to have a 0% increase from Melksham Town Council on the Council Tax.

Deciding on all the grant applications keeps us busy and working with lots of Community Groups

### **Councillor P Aves – Chair of Community Development Committee**

Councillor Aves agreed with the comments of the other Councillors highlighting the Jubilee, Proclamation and Christmas lights.

We are planning another Climate Fest this year, which will be bigger and better than the first one.

The carol singing outside the Town Hall with the donkeys was wonderful. There are lots more fun things for the coming year, Easter, Coronation plans and much more.

The Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell, thanked everyone for their contributions.

## **22/21 Policing in Melksham**

## **Presentation from Sgt James Twyford – Wiltshire Police**

Sgt Twyford explained that a Community Report is done on a monthly basis, and advised that Melksham has a new officer PC Ben Coombs joining the team for a short time.

He explained that Project Zero is an initiative aimed at reducing road deaths and serious injury. Police are targeting one town at a time working with Community Speed watch teams.

Anti-Social Behaviour is being dealt with and the Housing Associations are being very helpful in this regard. Sgt Twyford made a plea to encourage people to report crime to them to enable us to act.

Councillor Aves asked about the drug problem. Sgt Twyford responded that everything is being done, but he cannot divulge any information as it is tactically sensitive. However, he advised that Melksham does not have any County Lines or drug related violence in the town.

He further reported that domestic abuse is an area the Police are always working on and advised that, officers must continue their professional development in this field to assist in such cases and secure convictions.

## **23/21 Reports from Groups who received grants during the year**

### **Grant recipients**

#### **Help Counselling – Amanda**

Thank you for the grant, we have helped 15,000 over the 40 years. We had had to close the waiting list as there is now a 16 week wait and we are helping circa 400 people per year with end-to-end support.

We have 4000 volunteer hours and the £260 grant pays for a volunteer's expenses for 6 months. We ask for a donation of £5 per session, however we will never turn anyone away who cannot afford to pay.

New trustees to join the group are always welcome.

#### **Youth Adventure Trust – Pippa**

Pippa reported that the grant enabled 6 young people to attend February half term activities. The cost of living has affected 98% of the people they see. Youth support is done as face to face, calls and Teams. There is a lot of anxiety amongst the young and it has increased following the pandemic,  
Thank you for your support.

#### **CAB – Suzanne**

CAB Wiltshire was fortunate to receive a large grant, which was unrestricted, which is incredibly helpful for us to out to use in the most needed areas.

The cost of living crisis has affected 250 families that we are supporting (600 people). Housing costs are increasing, we are seeing people with negative budgets and income not able to cover the essential costs of living.

We have been able to provide more emergency funds, energy vouchers and refer people to food banks. The number of mortgage holders had increased over the recent years and now with the increase in interest rates people needing support has now doubled.

Thank you for the continued support from the Town Council.

Whilst there isn't a drop-in centre in Melksham now, please do invite us to any events or community groups that you feel would benefit from us having a presence.

#### **Age Wiltshire - David**

David talked about a specific project called Creative Conversations. It is a great way for people who have lost confidence in social settings, suffering from isolations.

The grant from the Town Council has provided a number of groups sessions to be held in the library each week, with friendly and fun conversations with the agenda driven by the attendees. In Melksham, 30% of the population is over 60.

There is a Seniors Movie group that has between 30 to 70 people attending, it is advertised in the library.

#### **Melksham Gardeners - Barbara**

There are approximately 90 members of the group and meeting take place on the last Tuesday of the month.

Gardening is the theme, we run trips to garden centres for members and sometimes have spare seats.

In May we have a show in Melksham Assembly Hall with all things gardening, photography and baking. There is also a Children's category.

Membership is £15 per year and £1 per meeting to pay for teas and coffees.

#### **Melksham Remembers - Paul**

Paul has placed some books on the tables to show journal from WWI, there is so much history in the town and it should be celebrated.

During the pandemic, a second book was started and will be published and launched when completed.

The Town Clerk, Linda Roberts asked all the organisations send her information about their events and fund-raising activities, the Town Council would then promote them on their social media pages.

**24/21      Presentations from the following Groups who have received grants during the year**

**25/21      Reports/Presentations from Community Groups**

There were no further reports from Community Groups.

**26/21      Other Reports received since the publication the agenda**

No further reports were received.

**27/21      Open Forum/Questions from Electors**

**Cycling on Pavements**

The cycling on pavements was raised and the huge danger it is placing on pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. It was advised that all incidents should be reported to the Police; that way the number of occurrences could be tracked.

The Town Clerk, Linda Roberts advised that there is funding for additional cycleway signage and will ensure this is looked into. Social media will also be used to highlight the dangers and hopefully, along with education through the schools, we can start to see a decrease.

The preservation of the war memorial at the Cooper tire site was raised and concern about it being relocated somewhere for the future. The Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell advised that the Town Council will investigate and work with Coopers to preserve all historic memorials and artefacts.

Meeting Closed at: 9.00 pm

**Signed:** .....

**Dated:**