

## Melksham Town Council

### Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting

On Monday 16 March 2026

PRESENT:	Councillor S Rabey	Town Mayor
	Councillor P Alford	
	Councillor P Aves	
	Councillor E Calland	
	Councillor R Cleary	
	Councillor J Crossley	
	Councillor M Drewett	
	Councillor G Elson	
	Councillor A Griffin	
	Councillor J Oatley	
	Councillor C Stokes	
	Councillor A Westbrook	
	Councillor A Whitlock	
OFFICERS	Hayley Bell	CEO/Town Clerk
	Ian Cunningham	Community Officer
	Robert Reay-Waugh	Venue Manager
	Dominic Rutterford	Communication Officer (Virtually)
	Andrew Meacham	Committee Clerk

#### **1/26 Welcome from the Town Mayor**

The Town Mayor Councillor Rabey welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **2/26 Minutes**

The minutes of 17<sup>th</sup> March 2025, having been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair and Town Mayor Councillor Rabey.

#### **3/26 The Town Mayor**

A privilege to serve as Mayor during a busy and mainly positive year. MTC focused on community life and bringing people together. MTC events create shared experiences and a strong sense of local pride. One of the Mayor's most meaningful event was Through the Night in partnership with The Mayors Chosen Charity Fear Free. Brought together people of all ages and genders with live music, creativity and a positive atmosphere to give a serious message.

VE Day marked with residents coming together to remember, recognise and reflect on the sacrifices made.

Christmas Lights Switch on was once again a highlight of the calendar with residents enjoying the festive atmosphere and supporting local businesses. Events like this are only possible because of the dedication of volunteers, performers and council staff.

Incredibly proud of the Mayoral Cadet, who has accompanied the Mayor at civic events and represents the involvement of young people in public life. The role is an important way of recognising and encouraging the contribution of young people to our community.

Mayors Reception and Civic Awards. An opportunity to celebrate the achievements of those who go above and beyond in Melksham, and to raise money for the Mayor's chosen charities, Wiltshire & Bath Air Ambulance and Fear Free. Final figures are not yet available but the event was delivered cost neutral, with a surplus on ticket sales alone. Thanks to everyone for their support.

Has valued the chance to meet so many who's commitment makes a difference to the town. Thanks to fellow councillors, officers and staff, community volunteers and residents.

"Melksham remains a town with a strong sense of community and it has been a pleasure to see that spirit reflected so clearly over the past year. Thank you to you all."

#### **4/26 Chairs of Town Council Committees**

Chairs gave their reports, interspersed with videos of community groups and grant recipients.

#### **Councillor A Westbrook, Amenities & Facilities.**

The last year has not been easy. When a new group takes over leadership of a council you are working with a budget and priorities of a different council, making the work far more challenging. There has been a lack of infrastructure and assets improvements.

Attempted to improve look of the town by use of Wiltshire Towns Programme funding from Central Government. 2023/2024 fund had not been claimed and may have been lost if not claimed. A resident came on board to write the bid, taking into account residents requests.

- Pop-up garden was popular and is due to return.
- Trees in Market Place to provide shade and much needed "greening". An irrigation system has been installed to ensure effective watering during summer.
- Town Bridge lights encountered problems but will hopefully be ready very soon.
- Cherry Blossom Walkway in KGV. Bedded in and starting to bud. Hopefully will look spectacular in a month.
- K6 telephones boxes being refurbished for installation in Market Place and consultation on use.
- Residents surveys for Play Areas and KGV. Plan to have updated majority by end of this council term.

This years Council Tax increase was not a decision taken lightly. Work such as play areas important to residents and must be properly budgeted, not from reserves.

Good to have the new Assembly Hall manager. Hope to see Assembly Hall and Blue Pool refurbished as a single unit. Earning potential and customer experience of Assembly Hall must continue to improve.

Melksham Town Council has a great group of officers who wish to deliver on priorities and I am looking forward to the next year. It will be challenging but we must be open and honest as we go forward.

#### Councillor Cleary, Finance, Governance & Performance.

Over the past year the committee has continued to oversee the Council's financial governance, organisational performance and responsible management of public funds. Works closely with council officers to monitor expenditure, review financial process and support the development of the budget.

Reviews of investment approach and operational costs give opportunities to strengthen the Council's longer term financial planning.

There have been a number of projects to maintain and improve council assets – including Town Hall, Splashpad, Town Hall Clock, Council vehicles and Town Bridge lighting.

Looking ahead the committee will continue to focus on financial governance and ensuring resources are used effectively to support services and improvements for residents.

#### The Town Mayor Councillor Rabey, Economic Development & Planning

Since last Annual Town Meeting the committee has continued to deal with a varied workload. Has met on 17 occasions and considered over 80 planning applications ensuring our view is representative on a wide range of planning affecting Melksham.

Also considered 10 new Highways and Footways Infrastructure requests, reflecting ongoing issues around local transport infrastructure.

Recently received presentations on two major proposals, Aldi and Gompels. Expecting presentation from Lidl. Such presentations help councillors better understand the scale and impact of these developments.

Has considered a request for anew bus shelter and on the back of that initiated a survey of existing bus shelters.

Also considered provisions of wayfaring signs, extinguishment of a footpath and a Free Trade presentation.

Worked closely with Melksham Without Parsh Council on the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan which has since been adopted. A significant milestone in shaping the

future of our area. Thanks to Melksham Without Parish Council and Place Studios who's collaboration has made this possible.

The committees work this year has focused on managing growth, improving infrastructure and supporting informed planning consultation in the best interests of our town.

The Town Mayor Councillor Rabey on behalf of the Deputy Town Mayor Councillor J Westbrook, Community Development

Councillor Westbrook currently on the way home from Australia and has asked Councillor Rabey to read her statement.

Proud to represent a wonderful town. Melksham has a thriving community with an outpouring of love and support in times of need. This is something we should all be incredibly proud of.

Committee took over the privilege of supporting local groups with grants. Age UK helping older people, foodbank helping vulnerable residents, Friends of Giffords Christmas Lunch and other clubs and charities doing fantastic work.

Looking forward to return of red phone boxes and asking the community for ideas. An opportunity for something creative and useful.

Melksham is known for its events. Carnival and River Festival supported by grants, events run by council team such as Proms in the Park and the VE/VJ Day 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary commemorations and events run in partnership Makers Market and Remembrance Day. Hope to build a stronger relationship with the British Legion to honour veterans.

Finally, the event that is the envy of the county, the Christmas Light Switch-On at which thousands line the streets. A team of volunteers under Paul Weymouth work for months to make it happen and do a wonderful job. Thank you for creating a spectacular display.

Upcoming events include a summer programme in the park, arts festival, other one off treats. Stay tuned!

**5/26 Unitary Councillors**

Councillor Alford, Melksham Without North & Shurnhold

Local elections held May last year led to a change in administration and consequently a change in his role.

Budget meeting resulted in a 5% increase.

The major current issue in his ward is the proposed Aldi move

Councillor Hubbard, Melksham South

Now cabinet member for Children's Services, SEND, Education and Skills.

Budget meeting. 98% of budget was not debated. No overall control on Wiltshire Council so good to see budget agreed.

Local Plan. WC being working on this for 3 years but looking unlikely to be approved.

National Government has almost doubled housing targets. Increased risk of speculative development but Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan gives some protection. WC to look at possibility of New Towns to meet targets.

Proud to have introduced free swimming programme. This is being expanded this year.

Councillor Stokes, Melksham East

Portfolio holder for SEND and Education & Skills

Focused on opportunities for young people.

White Paper recently published including support for children in primary care settings.

Government will wipe out 90% of Safety Valve Funding. Wiltshire one of the most underfunded local authorities in children's matters – 23<sup>rd</sup> from the bottom. Councillor Hubbard wished to make it clear that the safety valve funding deficit inherited was not the fault of the previous Wiltshire Council.

Melksham House School now open providing for children with social, emotional and mental health needs.

Melksham Area Board. Leading efforts to re-establish a local youth network.

Melksham East Community Centre to be built on Blackmore farm site.

Working on safer pedestrian crossings in Melksham East and safer parking for school.

Working with residents over relations with management companies.

Involved in Snarlton Farm development appeal. Now gone to Secretary of State. Good to see the collaboration regardless of ward or politics.

**6/26 Police Report**

Sgt. Chilton introduced herself and was welcomed.

## **7/26 Open Forum/Questions from Electors/Community Groups/ Grants**

### Melksham Transport Users Group

A year of great change, risk and opportunity for public transport. 700 timetables distributed and 300 via Tourist Information Centre, Town Hall and Library. Thanks to Melksham Town Council and Melksham Without Parish Council for grants towards printing costs. Thanks to graphic artist and distributors who provided their services for free. Thanks to the Mayor for support at Leekes.

MTUG have applied to GWR for funding to open an information, support and refreshment point at Melksham station.

Spoke on changes to train and bus services.

Will continue work in co-operation with local councils.

### Melksham Carnival

Would not have been able to function this year without the support of the Melksham Town Council. Work with a wide variety of groups. Booking for floats opens 1<sup>st</sup> April. Love Melksham and would love to see a Town Council float.

### Melksham Lions Club

Thanks for the grant to repair Santa's Christmas Float. Under-carriage gave way just before Melksham Carnival.

MLC president came to Melksham in 1969 and MTC formed in 1974. Only a few community groups at that time. Have watched numbers increase. Community spirit in Melksham is "something else". So many people who move to Melksham say what a lovely, lively community minded place it was and they love being here. A letter in Melksham News said you can't make a silk purse from a sow's ear. I would say that Melksham is the silk purse of Wiltshire towns.

18<sup>th</sup> July 2026 10am to 4pm MLC holding Lions teddy Bears Picnic in Forest. Fantasy Road, charity and business stalls, choir, tiny-tots rugby team. line dancing, Chuffy the Train.

The Town Mayor said she had a fantastic time fundraising with MLC over Christmas. Would recommend it to anyone with some spare time over Christmas.

### 4Youth

Approx 100 club sessions at Canberra Centre. Counselling and mental health support via TeenTalk. Thanks for funding and other support.

The Mayor thanked the 4Youth for the work they do.

Age UK Wiltshire

Thanks to Melksham Town Council and Melksham Without Parish Council for support and funding for Melksham Community Support Service. Helps people to save money, stay in their homes and connect with the community.

The Mayor thanked everyone who had attended and everyone who gave an update.

Refreshments were served.

Signed ..... Dated .....