

BRAUNSTONE TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES of the ANNUAL TOWNS MEETING

Held on THURSDAY 9th MAY 2024 to 7.30pm

In the Chair, Councillor Tracey Shepherd, Town Mayor.
There were 21 persons present at the meeting.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Satindra Sangha.

2. Minutes of the Towns Meeting 18th May 2023

The Minutes of the Annual Towns Meeting held on 18th May 2023 were circulated with the agenda, which was made available to all persons present, and were taken as read.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Annual Towns Meeting held on 18th May 2023 be approved and signed by the Chairperson as a correct record.

3. Town Mayor's Report 2023/24

A report had been circulated with the agenda summarising the following:

- Community Activities
- Chatty Cafes
- Programme Of Events
- Community Achievement
- Community Events
- Local Services
- NALC Star Council, Council of the Year Award 2023
- Tribute to my dear Mum and Consort
- Town Mayor's Charity – Tackling Loneliness

Councillor Tracey Shepherd, Town Mayor for 2023/2024, reported on activities during her Mayoral year:

“During my term as Town Mayor I committed to making a difference in our community – right here – right now”.

“My year saw the establishment of two Chatty Café's in the Town and the opportunity to raise £2,240, in aid of my Mayoral Charity for the year, to tackle loneliness in our community”.

“I hosted the first launch of a Chatty Café at Gilly's Sandwich Shop on 27th June and I would like to thank Carl and his staff for embracing this initiative and providing a warm welcome”.

"I opened our second Chatty Café on Thursday 7th March at the Civic Community Lounge at Braunstone Civic Centre. I particularly wish to thank Councillors Anthea Ambrose and Marion Waterton for hosting the Chatter and Natter table each Thursday lunchtime between 1pm and 2pm. I also wish to thank the operator, JAAAK Ltd, for their support".

"Together, both Chatty Cafés are providing an informal space for people to meet and talk. Loneliness literally kills causing altered brain function and depression and suicide. So, it is vitally important that we provide opportunities for those who are lonely and isolated in our community to get out of the house and chat away".

"On 1st July, I opened the first Thorpe Astley On the Beach at Thorpe Astley Park and Community Centre. The weather was just right and that brought people out from the community and from further afield. It was great to see the children having so much fun and I very much hope the Council can organise similar successful events at Thorpe Astley Park in the coming years".

"The annual Summer Fete was due to take place on 5th August at Mossdale Meadows; however, unfortunately this was cancelled due to the adverse weather".

"Nevertheless, Apple Day was held on Saturday 23rd September at Franklin Park Community Orchard. I hosted a mini Chatty Café on the day and a lady called Margaret attended the Apple Day Chatty Café on her own. A family sitting on the next table heard this and invited her to go round the stalls and activities at the event with them. They swapped phone numbers. Weeks later I saw Margaret again while out shopping. Margaret thanked me for making her day and stated she now attends Bingo with the family every Friday, which also made my day!"

"My Award's Evening was an opportunity to recognise and thank the residents that contribute to the community and who really make a difference to other people's lives".

"This year I was delighted to recognise

- Mark Jefferson, Anne Webster and Gordon Webster, for their work and commitment in taking on the management of Shakespeare Park Sports Pavilion and the hard work put in to make it a success; and
- Carl Gilbert for his work and commitment in setting up the Chatty Café at Gilly's Café and making this a huge success".

"However, the worst part of the year and with great personal sadness, my dear Mum, and Consort for my Mayoral year, was diagnosed with bladder cancer on 18th July, shortly after I became Mayor".

"My Mum passed away on 13th September after a brave battle she fought every day".

"It was one of her proudest days seeing me elected as Town Mayor and being my consort. I miss her every day".

“I was determined not to let her down nor the community and I carried on with my Mayoral duties on my own, as a tribute to my Mum, which was one of her last wishes”.

“Please watch out for symptoms of bladder cancer, which are detailed on pages 4 and 5 of my report, it is an invisible killer”.

“Please go to the doctor – don’t waste any time! It spreads so quickly”.

“I would like to thank Councillors and the community for the love, support, messages and hugs following the passing of my Mum. Mum passed away eight weeks after diagnoses, it was a moment of awful sadness and deep personal loss for all the family – I greatly appreciated the support”.

“On a positive note, it was both a privilege and an honour to accept, on behalf of the Council and the community, the NALC Star Council, Council of the Year Award 2023, at a ceremony in November at the House of Lords”.

“Braunstone Town Council is the first local council in Blaby District, Leicestershire and in the East Midlands to be awarded Star Council of the Year!”

“Thank you for choosing me to serve as the Town’s First Citizen. It has been both a privilege and an honour. I would like to take this opportunity to wish the next Town Mayor a most enjoyable and successful year”.

4. Town Council Accounts and Budgets

Councillor Nick Brown, Leader of the Council, reported on the Town Council’s financial position. The Town Council’s Accounts and Budget Report was circulated with the agenda, which was made available to all persons present, and were taken as read.

Councillor Brown reported that the financial situation in 2023/2024 was the most challenging the Council had found itself in. Councillor Brown thanked Councillors for how they approached the situation and Officers for curbing expenditure and increasing income. The risks going forward to the Council’s finances continued to be the NJC pay settlement.

5. Leader’s Report – Achievements 2023/24 and Priorities for 2024/25

A report had been circulated with the agenda, which was made available to all persons present. The Leader of the Council, Councillor Nick Brown, reported on the Town Council’s achievements during 2023/2024. A copy of the draft Annual Report for 2024, due for consideration and adoption at the Annual Council, was also circulated.

“The Town Council’s Policy & Resources Committee on 25th April 2024 finalised the draft Annual Report for 2024, a copy of which is attached as an appendix. The Annual Report summarises our achievements during the Council Year May 2023 to May 2024 and sets out our plans for the forthcoming Council year (2024/2025). The report will be received by the Annual Meeting of the Town

Council, which meets following the Annual Towns Meeting, for consideration and adoption”.

“On 29th November, Braunstone Town Council was crowned Council of the Year 2023 at the National Association of Local Councils' (NALC) Star Council Awards. This is a fantastic and well deserved achievement for the whole Council and the community. Working with our partners and the local community, we saved and enhanced our community Library, facilitated an expansion of GP services, supported our neighbours through Covid, delivered enhanced sporting, recreation and play facilities, created a vital walking and cycling link and reduced our carbon footprint by approximately 40% this year. We know that Braunstone Town and Thorpe Astley is a vibrant community and I'm delighted that what we are achieving here has been recognised nationally”.

Financial Position

“Despite our achievements, the Town Council is not immune from the financial pressures affecting public bodies and local authorities at all levels up and down the country. Residents have faced increased costs particularly since Covid and therefore, over recent years, the Council has sought to keep the Town's share of Council Tax bills as low as possible. Similarly, fees and charges have been frozen and, in some cases since Covid, have reduced to encourage hires and community activities”.

“As a result, each year the Council drew on its cash reserves with a view to replenishing these in subsequent years. Due to the ongoing economic situation, funding and inflationary pressures, it is no longer possible to draw on reserves or keep increases below 10% without running out of cash”.

“Therefore, in the first quarter of 2024, short term immediate action had to be taken to avoid services being adversely affected and the Council not being able to function. In order to replenish reserves and address the predicted cash deficit by 31st March 2024, Councillors agreed to raise £50,000 on the precept to cover the predicted cash deficit and £29,000 to replenish half the balance of funds used from the Council's savings account. As a result, a net precept requirement of £981,884 was approved. In total, this resulted in a percentage increase on the precept of 26.59% (26.53% increase to the 2023/2024 base budget); £155.80 per annum (a cash increase of £32.72 on 2023/2024) on a typical Band B and £200.31 per annum (a cash increase of £42.07 on 2023/2024) on Band D. Fees and charges rose by approximately 5% on 1st April 2024”.

“The following measures have also been implemented:

1. Reserves Policy amended to set out that the Council will maintain a revenue reserve of at least one-quarter of net expenditure; where revenue reserves fall below this level proposals will be submitted to replenish them;
2. separating capital and operational income and expenditure budgets;
3. public engagement concerning the financial position;
4. setting aside sufficient funds (into a savings account) to meet the payroll costs prior to receipt of the next tranche of the precept;
5. adjusting the monthly staff pay date;
6. identifying £30,990 of one-off savings in 2024/2025;
7. identification of on-going savings between £5,738 and £6,038 per annum;

and

8. Budget Comparisons Report to be the first substantive item on each Policy & Resources Committee agenda”.

“Going forward, these decisions will secure services and place the Council back on track to a stable financial footing”.

“Despite the current economic and financial pressures, the Town Council continues its work to protect, enhance and improve services for the residents of the Town and below is a summary of our work and achievements over the last year and our priorities for the coming year”.

Shakespeare Park – Improvement & Development

“In December 2023, the Council completed the final phase of the £1.2 million investment to improve sporting, recreation and play facilities at Shakespeare Park”.

“The refurbishment and installation of new equipment in the play area included installing Sensory Play Equipment, replacing worn equipment and installing additional equipment, an Astroturf fitness trail, and replacing the safety surfaces”.

“The improvements were provided using National Lottery Funding, other grant funding, and part of the underspend from the construction of the new Pavilion”.

“The new Pavilion and Car Park was delivered under budget by £65,443. This was part funded through borrowing and grant funding. To ensure the best deal for taxpayers, a Joint Management Association made up of Sports Clubs operating on the site and the Town Council was established a year ago. This arrangement allows for the sports clubs, with the support of the Town Council, to be fully involved in making a success of this community sporting facility and enabled the Council to access £100,000 of funding from Sport England and to reclaim 20% VAT on the build cost (over £200,000). The arrangements also mean that hirers don’t have to pay VAT on top of the hire costs”.

“Residents are able to hire the Clubroom at the Pavilion through the Town Council, who are administering the bookings on behalf of the Management Association. Initial feedback from hirers is positive and the Management Association will be happy to look at ways to make improvements as the facility settles down into regular use. The Management Association are also in discussions with a couple of potential regular hirers, to ensure the financial stability of the Pavilion facility going forward”.

“Prior to 2021 Shakespeare Park had a dilapidated Clubhouse which was not fit either for purpose or for wider use by the community, a car park which was too small for the use of the site, tennis courts with a decaying surface and play equipment over 40 years old. Our Town now has modern accessible facilities for sport, recreation, play and community use, all delivered under budget”.

Braunstone Civic Centre Improvements

“Following completion of the improvements to the Civic Centre toilets, including the installation of the brand new Changing Places facility, the internal reorganisation of the building provided an opportunity to improve the kitchen facilities”.

“A new kitchen facility was provided for the Civic Community Lounge to enable the existing bar service to be expanded to include the provision of a café service. The café opened in December offering lunches and meals, utilising the Lounge more effectively and providing a wider community social and meeting space”.

“This year the Civic Community Lounge will be operating as a Café on weekday mornings and lunchtimes and providing meals in the evenings and at weekends”.

Climate Change and the Environment

“In recent years the impact of climate change has become increasingly visible and, therefore, in 2021 the Town Council adopted a Climate Change & Environmental Strategy. The Strategy sets out a roadmap for the activities of the Town Council to become carbon neutral by 2030; for promoting and encouraging awareness and action on climate change; to move towards renewable energy sources; and to ensure the protection and enhancement of the town’s green spaces”.

“To ensure that the Council becomes carbon neutral by 2030, a Carbon Audit of the Council’s activities was commissioned, which made 11 recommendations for reducing the Council’s carbon footprint by approximately 40% by 2024. An Action Plan was developed and approved by Policy & Resources Committee in June 2022. Since then, work began a pace to deliver the recommendations and address the impact of our own activities on the climate”.

“2023 saw the completion of some of the major initiatives in the first Climate Change & Environmental Action Plan:

- **Solar Panels:** have been installed at Braunstone Civic Centre, Braunstone Town Library and Thorpe Astley Community Centre;
- an **Air Source Heat Pump** has been installed at Thorpe Astley Community Centre; and
- **Electric Vehicle Charging Points** are fully operational at both Community Centres”.

“Together these initiatives are estimated to reduce the Council’s Carbon Footprint by approximately 40%. At Thorpe Astley Community Centre, the solar panels and air source heat pump reduce the carbon footprint of the building by approximately 90%, with the electric vehicle charging points contributing towards offsetting the remaining 10%”.

“Our climate and environmental commitments are not just about the Council’s carbon footprint, they are equally about supporting our community to respond. Therefore, the Town Council has been working closely with its partners to improve cycling and walking routes in order to provide sustainable transport connections between the various communities, facilities and services in our

Town and also between the Town and the City Centre, Fosse Park, railway stations, bus stations and other surrounding retail and employment areas”.

“Phase 1 of the Improvements to Cycling and Walking Routes was delivered last summer with the widening of the footpath and installation of lighting and CCTV through Mossdale Meadows, and the connection through to Meridian Leisure. This is a significant development for the community providing better access to Meridian Leisure and Business Park for Braunstone Town residents and to the Civic Centre, Library and Mossdale Meadows for Thorpe Astley residents”.

“Phase 2 of the project, improvements to the footpath through Aylestone Meadows were completed in the autumn with works due to begin later this year on improving the boardwalk access from Kingsway to the new pathway”.

“Further phases of the project, to be delivered early in 2025, include improvements to the pathway and crossing points along Meridian Way and across Kingsway”.

Strategic Aims and Delivery Objectives 2024/2025

“In 2021, the Council reviewed its ten key priorities refining and focussing them into four strategic aims for the medium term:

1. **Protect and Enhance our Parks and Open Spaces:** to invest in and maintain high quality urban green spaces for sport, recreation and play, while enriching the natural environment.
2. **Provide Vibrant Community Facilities:** to provide vibrant, accessible and cost effective community facilities, which continue to be used by and respond to the needs of our community.
3. **Support and Connect the Local Community:** to both nurture and enhance the Town’s community life and connect our communities to reduce isolation and build community cohesion.
4. **Respond to Climate Change and champion sustainable development:** to embed climate and environmental awareness in our decision making and actions and play our part in supporting the community to do the same”.

“Each Aim is supported by specific delivery objectives, which are reviewed and developed as part of the annual review of the Council’s Business Plan and Capital Plan and the annual setting of the budget and Council Tax precept. For 2024/2025 there are 16 specific delivery objectives”.

“A summary of the delivery objectives is contained in the Annual Report and full details are set out in the Council’s Business Plan, which is available on our website and from Customer Services at Braunstone Civic Centre”.

Capital Plan

“Alongside the Council’s Business Plan, the Council approves a Capital Plan, which sets out proposed improvements to both assets and infrastructure”.

“In the coming year, priority capital projects include:

- Replacement of the glass skylight in the foyer at Braunstone Civic Centre;
- Mossdale Meadows Flood Alleviation and Drainage Improvements – works to the banks on Lubbesthorpe Brook, replacement of the culvert bridge, drainage improvements along Lubbesthorpe Bridle Path, and installation of drainage and surfacing of the car park;
- Installation of battery storage for the Solar PV Panels; and
- enhancements to Impey Close playground and Open Space”.

“A full list of the Council’s Capital Projects is available on the website and from Customer Services at Braunstone Civic Centre”.

Getting Involved

“The Council welcomes the input of the community in shaping services and initiatives. Residents can have their say on a range of service improvements, initiatives, savings and projects through consultations, which are notified in the Braunstone Life, on the Council’s website, social media and notices around the Town”.

“Residents can have their say at Council and Committee meetings through the Public Participation item on each agenda”.

“The Council also has a Citizens’ Advisory Panel, which is open to all residents to join, which meets quarterly and discusses the Business Plan, Capital Plan, initiatives and projects and receives details of consultations”.

Update Reports

“Updates on the above matters are published in a regular Leader’s report in the Braunstone Life and on the Council’s website”.

6. Termination of Meeting

The Town Mayor thanked those present for attending and with no further business the meeting closed at 7.55pm.