

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Monday 8th April 2024 at 7pm

held at the Civic Centre

Councillor Phil Keeble, the Mayor of Warminster

Present:

Councillors: P Keeble, D Brett, A Cooper, A Davis, S Fraser,
S Jeffries, J Jones, J Kirkwood, P Macfarlane, B Parks, and C Robbins.

Officers: T Dommett (Town Clerk), J Halls (Deputy Town Clerk), P Clover
(Committee Clerk), Will Bradley (Communications Officer).

Public and press: 36 members of the public and one member of the press.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs Allensby and Hawker, and from Ruth Wilson from Carer Support Wiltshire and Ian Frostick from The Chapel of St Lawrence (who provided a written report subsequently).

2. Minutes from last Annual Town Meeting

The minutes of the last Annual Town Meeting held at the Civic Centre on Monday 3rd April 2023 were accepted and signed as a true record.

3. Chairman's Report

Cllr Keeble, Mayor of Warminster reported on his year in office:

The tennis courts in the Lake Pleasure Grounds have been upgraded through a joint project with the Lawn Tennis Association. The newly refurbished tennis courts and MUGA are now being well used and enjoyed. The Town Centre CCTV has also been upgraded to a digital system. Work will begin shortly to replace the Under 5s multiplay area with a similar but modern piece of equipment.

Cllr Keeble was delighted that the Lake Pleasure Grounds had once again been awarded Green Flag Status.

It was noted by Cllr Keeble that the town council had recently adopted its Climate Strategy Action Plan for 2024 – 2029. He explained that the plan sets out a series of projects and the tasks/ steps that need to be carried out to reach the goals. The council aims to lead by example and engage with partners and the community to inspire action and provide information. He also noted that the council had adopted its Community Resilience Plan in November 2023 which is designed to provide a local coordinated

response supporting statutory authorities and the emergency services in a variety of emergency situations, hopefully reducing the impact to peoples' lives. In December, the council adopted its Strategic Plan for 2024 – 2029, setting out the direction of travel for the council over the next five years. Finally, Cllr Keeble advised that the renewal and upgrading of the Neighbourhood Plan was continuing and that the final document will help to pave the way for the development of Warminster in many ways, whether planning issues, heritage, commerce, green spaces and more.

Cllr Keeble recognised the passing of Cllrs Rob Fryer and John Syme, both of whom represented Warminster Broadway, and welcomed Russell Hawker and James Kirkwood as the new councillors for Broadway ward.

Events in the town and the Lake Pleasure Grounds including Spring in the Park, the Lions Book Festival, the wonderful Carnival procession, Remembrance Day, Shop Window Competitions, and Pumpkins in the Park, were highlighted by Cllr Keeble. The record numbers of people who attended the Christmas Lights Switch On Event and newly introduced markets organised in conjunction with the Warminster Business Network were testimony to the planning involved. Cllr Keeble was keen to promote the centenary celebrations for the Lake Pleasure Grounds on 26th July 2024, with an Elton John tribute act, a Beatles tribute act, and an airborne pyrotechnic display.

Cllr Keeble stated that from a planning point of view, the council had been unanimous and used its influence against developments at Damask Way and Westbury Road.

Cllr Keeble was pleased to report that the finances of the town council remained in good shape and that, as a result, the council had been able to increase its portion of Wiltshire's council tax by a below inflation increase of 1.73% for 2024/2025, the equivalent of £3.68 for a Band D property per annum, which still allows the council to maintain and improve the services which it provides for its residents.

The Full Warminster Town Council Annual Report is available from:

<https://warminster-tc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/WTC-Annual-Report-2023-2024-April-2024-2.pdf>

4. 2023-2024 Grant Recipients

4.1 Alzheimer's Support – Julian Roberts

Julian Roberts shared a thorough overview about the impact the grant received has had explaining that it has been used to continue the funding of the Warminster Art Group. Each session runs for 1 ½ hours per week enabling participants to try a variety of activities including painting, clay, and collage. The group helps to combat social isolation. They are seeking new volunteers; if anyone is interested, please contact the group.

4.2 Bradley Road Community Garden – Jackie Herbin

Jackie Herbin explained that the community garden has been in existence for eight years and that the grant received had been used to upgrade the garden with support from Selwood Housing, Warminster Fencing and Batsford Timber. The funding has created a community project, enabling the garden to grow.

4.3 Grovelands Countryside & Wildlife Volunteers – Len Turner

Len Turner explained that 17.5 acres of land came into the ownership of Wiltshire Council six years ago and has been turned into a controlled wilderness.

The grant received from Warminster Town Council was used to fund the purchase of a mechanical lawnmower. One person is now able to mow in three hours what it took 10 people to clear before.

4.4 Open Door – Simon James

Simon James of the Chat Café gave an update on the progress and success of the Chat Cafés run by Open Door, which was set up during the pandemic to recognise the impact of social isolation and provide support for those affected by cancer and also those grieving. He thanked the councillors who had visited the Chat Café and expressed his thanks to the council for the grant which had been used to set up an evening Chat Café and a new Prostate Cancer support group.

4.5 The Walled Garden Project CIC at Knook – John and Liza Kearney

John and Liza Kearney thanked Warminster Town Council for the grant which was awarded to the CIC. The CIC provides support for children with special needs through a weekly day club and a forest school. The grant provided by the council had been used to instal gates at the garden.

4.6 Warminster & District Amateur Swimming Club – Chris Darling

Chris Darling expressed his thanks to the Town Council and to The Dewey Trust for the vital grant awarded to the club in their 50th year which was used to buy some new modern diving blocks enabling the children to compete with their peers from other clubs. The club has 140 members aged from 7 years old to 93 years old, with an amazing coach.

4.7 Warminster Action Group – Annalisa Davis

Annalisa Davis thanked Warminster Town Council for the grant received which has been used to support the creation of the WAG house. The WAG house is open three days a week from 10am to 2pm and is a totally inclusive space benefitting a huge age range - their youngest user is 22 and their oldest 99. Last month they benefitted from over seventeen days of volunteering time. The group also offers a befriending service, prescription collection and delivery, and a shopping service.

4.8 Warminster Community Choir – Marilyn Levy

Warminster Community Choir is a very small group completely funded by membership fees and donations. They rehearse and perform to raise money for local charities. Marilyn Levy expressed gratitude for the grant received from Warminster Town Council which has enabled the group to replace their PA system so that they can perform at outside events again benefitting the choir, the community, and local charities.

4.9 Warminster Flers Twinning Association – Christina Gaskell

Christina Gaskell explained that guests from Flers are being hosted by the association for a weekend at the end of April. The costs of approx. £3,600 to host and entertain the visitors have been met through fundraising and the grant received from Warminster Town Council.

4.11 Warminster Health and Wellbeing – David Reeves

David Reeves expressed gratitude for the grant from Warminster Town Council which has been used to support the informal health and wellbeing forum. The aim of the forum is to inform the community and work collaboratively with other organisations. The generous funding will be used to run a volunteer fair on 1 June 2024 to identify and promote the importance of volunteering, to quantify the value of volunteering and to set up partnership working between volunteer groups in Warminster. The forum is also hoping to hold a ½ day workshop later in the year.

5. Other Groups

5.1 The Athenaeum Centre – Jon Ellis

Jon Ellis explained that he had become chair of the Athenaeum Centre following Tony Nicklin's retirement; Tony had been chair for 25 years. The building is currently used by 120,000 people every year and costs over £4,000 per month to run. Worthwhile time has been spent on revisiting the scope and purpose of the trust – education, entertainment, and community support. The trust is presently running at a small monthly surplus but even the smallest repair eats into this. They are currently working on refurbishment of the dressing rooms and a new safety system. A scheduled maintenance plan is also being created for future development and all projects are evaluated through a sound financial plan and procurement policy. The aim is to create a vibrant, financially sustainable venue. Footfall and social media exposure are increasing. The importance of partnership working is recognised; early bird meal deals are being offered with local restaurants and local businesses can advertise on theatre tickets.

5.2 Inspire Music Festival – Mike Heaton

Mike Heaton stressed that the Inspire Music Festival could not be held without the grant from Warminster Town Council. He explained that Inspire is a miniature music festival which showcases talent in Warminster, especially young people. The grant was used to hire PA, security, and first aiders for the 2023 event which attracted more than 1,000 people.

5.3 Rights of Way Volunteers – Nigel Linge

Nigel Linge reflected that global warming is causing grass, hedgerows, and trees etc to grow more rapidly and paths to wash away more frequently than before which in turn impacts access to rights of way. Warminster has 27 miles of rights of ways. The volunteers use a mega mower to cut and maintain the rights of way at a cost of £15 per hour. The grant awarded by Warminster Town Council has been used to fund signage and for maintenance.

5.4 St Lawrence Chapel

Ian Frostick was unable to attend the meeting but provided a written report – appendix A.

5.5 Warminster Business Network – Matt Towl

Matt Towl explained that the Warminster Business Network had started a year ago, in place of the Chamber of Commerce, with the aim of supporting economic growth in Warminster. He expressed gratitude for the generous grant from Warminster Town Council's Town Development Fund which is being used to fund the new quarterly

markets in the town centre and the Civic Centre. He recognised the great working relationships that were being built with the council and the council staff to organise the markets. The aim is to create a community of businesses and drive footfall into the town through the markets. 25,000 people visited the Christmas market in a six-hour period and a further 30,000 people visited the spring market.

5.6 Warminster Carnival – Sandra Major

Sandra Major thanked Warminster Town Council for their ongoing support. Warminster is on the Wessex Grand Prix circuit of nine carnivals and was voted best carnival in 2023. The carnival costs £10,000 each year to put on; this can only be achieved through yearlong organisation and a campaign of fund raising. The committee raised over £5,000 last year.

5.7 Warminster Football Club – Rob Mcferran

Rob Mcferran, on behalf of the Football Club, thanked Warminster Town Council for the grant received. The club currently has a men's team and a women's team; the aim is to restart a youth team. The grant has been used to purchase new energy efficient floodlights which will future proof the club.

6. Forum

Councillor Keeble invited questions from the members of the public on any subject related to the town or the town council.

Questions were asked from:

- **Steve Dancey** – asked whether the council intended to promote the need for a banking hub in Warminster once Lloyds Bank closes.

Response:

The council have requested a banking hub but have been advised that the town doesn't meet the criteria for one; the council will continue to press for one. Dr Andrew Murrison, MP, has advised that a weekly facility will be offered with a physical presence and where cash can be deposited.

- **Steve Dancey** – asked whether there would be a meaningful public consultation about the disposal of Dewey House.

Response:

There has been no formal public consultation; the decision was made by the council to sell the property and invest the proceeds for the benefit of the town. The advice from estate agents is that because of the property's Grade II listing it may be more appropriate for residential use. It is not considered to be an appropriate use of council resources to develop the site.

- **Jenny Arthur** – asked about the current costs of running Dewey House.

Response:

Expenditure on Dewey House is reported to the council's Finance and Audit committee. The property is currently running at a loss, details of which will be advised.

- **Nicola Harris** - sought reassurance from the council about the future of the community orchard at Yeates Meadow and its maintenance following the death of Colin French.

Response:

Yeates Meadow was left to the National Trust by Major Yeates in perpetuity and is rented by the council. As part of the review of the Neighbourhood Plan it is proposed to designate Yeates Meadow as a local green space with enhanced protected status. The council's amenities team will carry out required maintenance work.

Ideas to commemorate Colin French's work in the meadow and the community orchard will be considered.

- **Cllr Tony Jackson** – asked whether the council had any appetite for revitalising Warminster Tennis Club.
Response:
A tennis club is planned for the park.
- **Jon Ellis** – asked for an update on number 3 High Street.
Response:
A contractor has been appointed by the owner of the building to demolish it. The demolition project will involve considerable planning: permit applications, surveys, the installation of additional scaffolding, road closures and creation of safety zones etc. Partial road closures will involve temporary traffic lights replacing the permanent traffic lights and the pedestrian crossing lights. There may also be an issue of asbestos in the building to be dealt with.
- **Nigel Linge** – asked whether the council would ask Wiltshire Council to return Warminster Common and Fore Street recreation area to maintained grass.
Response: the topic will be added to the agenda for the next meeting of Full Council.
- **Jenny Arthur** - have Warminster Town Council engaged with McDonalds over the potential issue of littering and increased traffic from the new restaurant.
Response: it is recognised that Castlemore Retail Park is privately owned and that any traffic, parking, and litter issues will, therefore, be in the gift of the owners. However, McDonalds have a stringent litter policy.

Cllr Cooper gave thanks to the groups present at the meeting and all the other groups who were working to make Warminster a better place.

In return, Len Turner thanked the councillors who gave freely of their time and the dedicated team of officers.

Cllr Keeble closed the meeting with great thanks to all organisations that had taken the time to provide an update on the spending of the grant monies received by them and the positive impact it had on the residents of Warminster.

Meeting ended: 8:33pm

Signed..... Date.....

Appendix A – St Lawrence Chapel report

On behalf of the Feoffees and Nominated Trustees of St Lawrence chapel we would like to thank the Warminster Town Council for the Community infrastructure levy grant of £30,000.

The repairs to the East Window, the Clock room floor and panelled ceiling have now been finished along with all required surveys and permissions. The only outstanding work is the recommissioning of the clock. We would hope to have this completed in the next few months.

The Chapel is a hugely important Community building situated in the centre of Town. We welcome all visitors.

Our focus this year has been to greatly increase usage, community projects and fund-raising events.

This has included: The Quarterly Street Markets, Good Friday Churches together services, Monthly Orthodox services, Friends fund raising events, Charity sales, Musical events, Heritage tours, Christmas Schools concerts and a range of other activities.

Please join us for our annual general meeting on Saturday 18th May. The Feoffees, Trustees and Friends will present an update on key projects and planned future work.

The continued support from the Town Council is greatly appreciated.