

## COWES TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Twenty sixth Annual Town Meeting held in Northwood House, Cowes on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> May, 2009 at 7.00 p.m., convened under the provision of section 99 and schedule 12 of the Local Government Act, 1972.

Present: Councillor Wells (Town Mayor) (Chairman)  
Councillors Banks, Birch, Jones, McGregor, Matthews, Mazillius, Sanderson,  
Thwaites and ten other members of the public.

### **156. PRESENTATION – COWES ONE SCHOOL PATHFINDER LEARNING CENTRE**

The Town Mayor introduced and welcomed Janet Newton, the I.W. Council Project Director for Schools Re-organisation who had attended to report on the Council's Cowes One School Pathfinder Learning Centre.

Janet stated that this was a very large project for a school that would accommodate 1650 pupils aged 11 to 19; the I.W. Council had been going through a 'Competitive Dialogue Process' and on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> had received two bids for the new school. The school could be up to 15,000 sq. metres in size; throughout the dialogue process which began back in February, they had held a series of 'Design User Group' meetings with the two bidders and both had worked on a brief that reflected the Trusts Education Vision for the new Cowes Secondary School. The Council would be procuring the building, they would award the contract and oversee the hand-over of the building on completion; at that stage the building would effectively pass into the ownership of the Trust who would use it for the delivery of education for pupils in Cowes and the surrounding area and also as a community resource. She had to ensure that the I.W. Council obtained the best possible value for money and a building that would meet the educational needs of the pupils and meet the aspirations of the Trustees in terms of the wider education vision.

The two bids received were both very different but both reflected that vision of the Trust; a representative of the Trust had participated in the Design User Group meetings to ensure that the Trusts views had been represented. The evaluation process had already started; the award of the contract to the successful bidder would be made in mid June and a planning application submitted mid July. Each of the bidders would be making a presentation at Cowes High School on 20<sup>th</sup> May when they would set out how their design of the building would meet the Trusts vision; representatives of the interim Governing body and the Trustees would be present. A further information sharing evening would be held on 25<sup>th</sup> May for the wider community; details would be given regarding the location of the building on the site, development timescales, how existing playing fields would be used, access points and impact on locals in terms of transport. A second event would be held in July when full details would be provided by the successful bidder. The new school would be available for the Trust in the Spring of 2012 and would be operational for the start of the 2012 academic year.

An advertisement had already been placed for a new Principle for the school; they were also working closely with the Interim Governing Body and the Trustees in developing the exact curriculum offer and a structure in terms of staffing.

Following a number of questions that were then put to Janet Newton, the Town Mayor thanked her for attending to update the meeting on this exiting and important project for the Island.

**A short break for coffee was taken at this point.**

### **157. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Giffard, Peacey-Wilcox, Walters and Wilcox.

## **158. MINUTES**

### **RESOLVED**

That the Minutes of the twenty fifth Annual Town Meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2009 be taken as read, approved as correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **159. REPORT OF THE BUSINESS OF THE TOWN COUNCIL**

Councillor Wells (Town Mayor) submitted a report of the business of the Town Council during the past year as follows:

I was elected to the role of Mayor for my second term at the Annual meeting of Cowes Town Council on the 16<sup>th</sup> June 2009. I superseded my colleague Cllr Geoff Banks who had served for the previous two years and I took the opportunity to thank him for his many years of service to the Town Council and his dedication in office. At that meeting I also welcomed new members to the Town Council, Cllrs Roger Mazillius, Vanessa Slade and David Walters. The Council then elected Cllr Rebecca McGregor as the Deputy Mayor setting a new precedent for Cowes of a father/daughter partnership since Rebecca is my daughter! As is usual at the Annual meeting, Councillors were then appointed to the positions on committees and as representatives of the Town Council on a number of outside bodies.

At the meeting in June last year the Town Clerk reported that the Town Council had been successful in securing a £50,000 grant to install an adventure playground in Northwood Recreation Ground. The funding was dependant on keeping to a tight timescale and Cllr McGregor as Chair of the Town Improvements Committee took a lead on the project development and the work to secure further outside funding to enhance the project.

The July meeting of the Town Council saw a presentation from Capt McIntosh, Cowes Harbourmaster who spoke about the role of the Harbour Commission in particular the statutory part they play as the Harbour Authority of the Trust Port that is Cowes. He spoke about the future plans of the Commission in evolving their Strategic Plan, which would include the building of the outer breakwater to provide shelter for the port.

The Town Council organised the Cowes in Bloom 2009 competition and during July members of the Council toured their wards in order to be able to nominate persons whose gardens were felt to enhance the neighbourhood. Prizes were awarded and were presented in August at the Mayor's reception at the end of Cowes Week.

Northwood House came into the Council's discussions at the July meeting when a new Trustee nomination to the Northwood House Trust from the Town Council was discussed. Cllr Ann Thwaites agreed to take the role and continued to develop this position then taking over as Chairman of the Trust a few months later. It was also agreed that we should seek quotations for a revamp of the Town Council website which has now been undertaken and we now have an active site albeit still requiring further development.

Cowes became a No Cold Calling Zone and packs were distributed in the late summer to all residents in the area covered by the zone.

The Town Improvements Sub Committee continued to develop plans for a basket ball court to be sited alongside the existing Skatepark in Northwood Recreation Ground. Authorisation was given in July to proceed with revised plans to take into account the results of local consultation, in particular the siting of floodlighting.

Cowes Week saw the usual influx into the town of both competing yachtsmen and visitors. There was concern that this year could have been different since it was the first year that there had been no title sponsor for the event. As it unfolded the week turned out to be very successful with a good programme of onshore interest to compliment the organised sailing events of the week, including the Red Arrows display. As your Mayor I attended a number of events during the week

including a lunchtime meeting with the Duke of Edinburgh on board the Galatea for his short stay in Cowes during the week.

Regular attendance by members of the Safer Neighbourhood Team at the Cowes Town Council meetings has been welcomed by members. Regular monthly updates have been given and it is encouraging to note that the statistics indicate that Cowes is a very safe place to live and crime figures are reducing. As an example of this Sgt Julie Cox reported at the September meeting of the Council that the overall crime during Cowes Week had reduced from the previous year by 8.75% which had itself been 27% down on the previous year.

During the late summer concern had been raised about the state of the stone Lions on Cowes Esplanade. Authorisation was put in hand to obtain costings for repair work to be done and the Town Council resolved to commit a sum of money towards the overall cost.

The Car Park in St Mary's Road was closed in part for a period of time for Southern Water to carry out their works for the Flood Protection Scheme. The Town Council helped to negotiate with Southern Water and the residents of Medina Gardens for use of some of their land for essential storage during the work at the car park. This meant that a section of the car park remained open for the whole period. Most of the work as of today has been completed but there is still a corner of the car park sectioned off as the work is being completed at the opposite end. The Town Council agreed to support the preparation of a Town Plan and subsequently the detailed work for this plan has been taken up by the Isle of Wight Society with some public meetings that have been supported by the Town Council.

Later in the month of September the Town Council met to interview a number of candidates for co-option to the Cowes Medina Ward. Cllr Grahame Deacon was appointed as a result of the interviews and joined the Council for his first meeting in October 2009.

Over the course of the year a number of grants were paid to various diverse organisations where funding had been applied for and it had met the criteria set out by the Town Council to enable it to give financial support. The Town Council advertises on a regular basis that grants are available for the benefit of local organisations.

An update on the Adventure Playground project by the Deputy Mayor at the November meeting of the Council, confirmed that a further £10,000 grant from the Youth Opportunities Fund had been secured for the project. This was to be added to the £50k grant already obtained and ensured that the project would be fully enabled to proceed although at the time the grant was made the Council had not completed the tendering process so could not assess whether extra equipment could be included. This project is now nearing completion now after some delays due to the bad weather in the winter. An opening ceremony will be planned for later this summer.

Cowes Town Council members attended the Remembrance Day service in Northwood Park at which I laid a wreath on behalf of the Council and the townsfolk of Cowes. It was the highest attended Remembrance Day service that I can remember perhaps reflecting the ongoing conflicts around the world. A subsequent service took place in St Mary's Church which was well attended and in which Councillors took part and a march past on the Parade.

One of the recurring issues raised by the people of Cowes is that of the future of Northwood House. A special meeting of the Town Council was called by me during December to discuss the role of the Town Council in the future discussions about the House. The Town Council do nominate a Councillor to sit on the Trust but apart from that have historically had little further involvement and the House and grounds are the responsibility of the Northwood House Trust working with the IW Council. Discussions with the IW Council indicated that they, as Custodian Trustee, want to get to a position that put in proper place the management and future decision making and indicated that they felt there was a role for the Town Council to play. The meeting of the Town Council in December decided to set up a sub-committee to report back to the Council on the implications of it taking on the role of Custodian Trustee from the IW Council. That work is still ongoing since there are complicated legal and operational issues surrounding the future of the House.

The December meeting of the full Council received a presentation from a member of the IW Council Licensing team to inform the Council of the 'Over 21 Alcohol Scheme' which is an initiative whereby local shops will only sell alcohol to anyone over the age of 21 on Fridays and Saturdays from 6pm until closing time. Councillors asked a number of questions and supported the scheme which aims to cut down on instances of anti-social behaviour.

The Town Council organised the Lights of Love Carol Service in The Cut in Cowes prior to Christmas which was well attended and some members of the Council then 'went on tour' visiting the pubs and clubs to sing carols and collect for the Earl Mountbatten Hospice. An overall total of £1266 was raised on the evening including a generous donation of £300 from the Cowes Business Association.

The New Year saw the Council meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> January almost a week later than the previously agreed date, due to the severe weather early in the month. Inevitably there was discussion around the deterioration of the roads as a result of the bad weather and it was reported that the IW Council had already incurred extra costs of £174k for gritting and de-icing the roads. It was also agreed at that meeting that the Town Council would contribute a further £4199 from the Town Improvements budget towards the cost of the Adventure Playground – there being a shortfall against the quoted figure from the contractor.

We also received details of a Flood Planning workshop for Cowes and a number of Councillors were co-opted to serve on a committee to develop a Flood Plan for the Town. This has subsequently been produced and is available for the public. I am grateful to Cllr David Walters for the work he has done in preparing this report.

In February a presentation to the Council was made by Estelle Thomas from the Rural Community Council in which she outlined to Councillors how their newly appointed Voluntary Support Teams could help voluntary and community groups across the Island.

At that meeting Councillors stood in silence in memory of former IW Councillor John Effemey who had recently passed away. Members were reminded of the years of service that Cllr Effemey had given to the community of Cowes in addition to his more recent role when he was Chairman of the IW Council.

The Town Council was pleased to receive a letter from the Ethical Standards Committee, which monitors the role of Councillors and local Councils and the way they conduct their business, in which it praised Cowes Town Council for the way it conducted its meetings. A member of the committee had recently attended a meeting and was suitably impressed!

An update on the CCTV project for the Town of Cowes was given at our March meeting. Over a number of previous years, in response to many requests from the public and with the full support of the local Police, the Town Council had put aside money for the installation of CCTV through the High Street in Cowes. Working with the Community and Safety Services Team at the IW Council, final agreement had been reached to give the go ahead to proceed with the installation. Simon Denness, the Operations Manager attended the meeting to give an update and answer questions. There was particular concern about the siting and size of a repeater mast at the bottom of Terminus Road. Discussions have since been ongoing about this and it has been agreed that once the system is up and running further consideration regarding this matter will be given. It is generally agreed that the installation of CCTV in the Town will benefit the residents and assist the Police force in catching those intent on criminal activities in the Town.

Cycle routes through the town continue to exercise your Council. We have been working with the IW Council's cycling officer to seek ways of reducing conflict between different user groups of the streets and footways of Cowes. This is ongoing and we are hoping for some sensible solutions which will be published through leafleting and signage through the Town.

The Town Plan was discussed and Councillors were encouraged to attend the meeting the day after the Cowes Town Council meeting arranged by the Cowes Branch of the Isle of Wight Society who are playing a leading role in promoting this.

It is the intention of the Town Council to employ an Assistant Town Clerk. The workload for Town and Parish Councils has increased enormously over the past few years in the drive to give

more accountability to local people about local affairs. This has put a great strain on our hardworking Town Clerk Roger Hendey, who gives an outstanding service to the Council and the people of the Town. As more and more projects require the obtaining of outside funding from a huge potential number of sources, it was felt that a part time assistant to the Clerk could probably fund much of his salary through seeking grant applications and increase the ability of the Council to do more for the townspeople.

We were deeply saddened as a Council by the untimely death at Easter time of one of our most popular and hard working members, the late Grahame Deacon. We all miss his input and his cheerful manner that couldn't fail to touch those he worked with. We remember him with great affection.

The April meeting of the Town Council was the last of the municipal; year and we are now into a new year as from the 1<sup>st</sup> May. I would like to finish this report by thanking my fellow councillors for all their hard work, remembering that they all give their time on a completely voluntary basis. I would particularly like to single out my Deputy Mayor who has worked extremely hard and sets an example to us older 'long in the tooth' members. Thank you Rebecca.

And finally to say again how much we appreciate the work of the Town Clerk and all that he puts in to make this Council work.

#### **160. ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH, 2010**

Copies of the accounts for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2010 were circulated at the Meeting.

#### **RESOLVED**

That the accounts be received and noted.

#### **161. ANNUAL SUMMARY – SAFER NEIGHBOURHOOD TEAM**

PC Mark O'Sullivan firstly stated that the Cowes Safer Neighbourhood unit remained fully staffed even though PC Justin Pringle was covering in the short term for the sickness of the Beat Officer in East Cowes; he continued to keep 'up to speed' on developments on his beat in Cowes.

The other development for the Unit was force issued BlackBerry's which Officers carried on their beats and which they continued to use to good effect; police office based applications were installed on the BlackBerry's which allowed officers to access emails and other computer tasks while on the beat resulting in less time being spent in police stations.

Neighbourhood Watch schemes continued to grow in the area and these schemes together with Shopwatch and Pubwatch groups were important and crucial drivers in reducing crime locally. One of the most recent Safer Neighbourhood projects involved a partnership working with the Cowes Autism Support Group; some of the work completed to date involved lowering the fear of the police amongst young persons affected by autism in the Cowes area. In addition, parents of children who attended the group identified through street mapping that the fear of bullying was their top priority; as a result of partnership working with the support group and staff at Thompson House they had managed to produce a series of skills workshops for parents of children affected by autism to lower this fear and reduce the risk of bullying.

Finally, PC O'Sullivan reported that crime continued to fall in the Cowes area, this was as a result of partnership working.

Councillor Wells thanked the Safer Neighbourhood team on behalf of the Town Council for their continued dedication to ensure that Cowes was a very safe place to live.

## 162. ANNUAL SUMMARY – I.W. COUNCIL

Councillor Fuller submitted a written report which principally concentrated on issues that had affected residents in his Ward – Cowes West and Gurnard; it referred to the following:

- That he had been selected to join and was a regular speaker at the I.W. Council's Planning Committee. He was keen to work with the Town Council, the Cowes Branch of the I.W. Society and local residents on a Cowes Town Plan
- That he had supported School Re-organisation. He was a Governor at Cowes High and was strengthening his links with other schools in the area
- That he had seconded a proposal to ensure the I.W. Council supported lower ferry fares and he was committed to seeing bus fares reduced particularly for under 18's. He had undertaken a consultation which provided evidence to save the Service 32 bus from cutbacks and had requested a change in the route for the Service 30 to call at Charles Road; this service was safe until at least September. He supported the Roads PFI award and had successfully campaigned for new pavement in Park Road and a pavement in Baring Road linking Park Road to Crossfield Avenue which had been included in the 2010/11 Capital Programme. The Programme also included safe crossing points for Cowes Primary School and a pavement in Baring Road linking Pine Tree Close and Egypt Hill.
- That he had worked with Trading Standards regarding No Cold Calling initiatives and with the Safer Neighbourhoods Team on anti-social behaviour
- That he continued to offer support to the Northwood House Trustees and had made himself available to assist the I.W. Community Club with their request for funding for the essential re-roofing of the club
- That he had voted against the current I.W. Council budget and had supported an 'Alternative that would have protected parking permits, environmental concessions and some adult care provision
- That he had issued regular monthly reports and regularly attended all meetings of Cowes Town Council

Councillor Mazillius referred to the following:

- The present scheme for free bus passes cost the I.W. Council £3.9m per year whilst the government financial settlement for the current year was only for £1.8m; the Council Tax payers on the Island were subsidising the scheme by funding the shortfall. The I.W. Council were, through the Local Government Association, going to lobby the new government on this issue
- That the I.W. Council had placed the issue of Councillor allowances into the hands of an independent Review Body; it had been agreed at full Council that the outcome of the Review would be accepted in full
- That it was important that all Members were diligent in their attendance at meetings; in 12 years he had never missed a meeting of the full Council
- That during the year he had been Chair of the Audit Committee, Chair of the Pension Fund Committee and a member of the Adult and Community Service Scrutiny Panel and the Children and Young Persons and School Re-organisation Scrutiny Panel; he had attended every meeting of those committees. He had now been promoted to the Cabinet with responsibility for Adult and Social care Services.

The Town Mayor thanked the two I.W. Councillors for their reports and for the support they had given to the Town Council during the year.

## 163. QUESTIONS FROM THE MEETING

Councillor Thwaites was given the opportunity to update the meeting on the work of the Northwood House Charitable Trust. She reported that she became Chairman of the Trust in March; she could also report that two new Trustees had been appointed to the Board bringing their total complement to seven and that they also benefited from the experience of various advisors. The role of the Trustees was to act at all times in the best interests of the Trust – to make best use of the assets and to spend all income generated to maintain the House and grounds.

The I.W. Council had announced some months previously that it no longer wished to occupy space and manage the House so the Trustees had been working with them to organise the separation; recently the Town Council had stepped in to investigate ways in which it could assist in this effort. The process has been slow and time consuming and receiving satisfactory answers to Trustee questions had not always been achieved. However, the I.W. Council decided unilaterally on its chosen and different way forward and on 30<sup>th</sup> April wrote to outline severance details. At such short notice the Trustees were not in a position to take over as required by the Council and had informed them accordingly.

One aspect that would be addressed was the Park Road and Ward Avenue car parks which had been operated by the I.W. Council. These car parks could provide a more significant source of income for the Trust and they now planned to invite tenders to operate them. There were also other areas that they could work to increase or generate income for the benefit of the Trust which they would be addressing. The Trust had been told that a lack of disabled toilet facilities was part of the reason that the I.W. Council had decided recently that it could no longer take bookings from the public. Such events were a potential earner for the Trust and although they were not in a position to take over the organisation and running of such events at such short notice and in the short term, they very much wished to see the House in use as soon as practical. Time spent on negotiations with the I.W. Council had meant that they had been unable to make significant progress in identifying potential partners with plans which could assist with the running and repair costs on the house and grounds. However there were several expressions of interest that had been received and these would be activated as soon as possible.

Councillor Thwaites referred to the very enjoyable St. George's Day celebrations in Northwood Park and finally she wished to thank the Town Council and her colleagues on the Trust for their interest and effort.

Councillor Jones questioned whether the I.W. Councillors had been aware of the letter that had been sent under delegated powers to The Chairman of the Trustees by an Officer of the Council. Councillor Mazillius stated that as far back as 2002 there was a huge groundswell of local interest in taking over the running of Northwood House from the Council and the Trust Deed was varied to give the management of the House to Management Trustees. This proved to be too much of a task for well intentioned amateurs and it was still the situation today. The I.W. Council had taken a decision that the situation should be brought to a head; because of financial pressures they had jettisoned the financial burden that they believed Northwood House could impose upon them. The responsible Cabinet member had taken a delegated decision; he was disappointed that he had not picked up that decision. He was certain that the I.W. Council would withdraw from their management responsibilities for the Estate but that they would maintain some residue of assistance from Officer to the Trustees.

Councillor Mazillius accepted that the issue could have been managed more sensitively; he was meeting on another matter, the responsible Cabinet member and he would ask that together with the Director of Resources they meet with the Chairman of the Trust as soon as possible.

Finally, the following questions and observations were made:

a). That some appalling developments in Cowes had been approved by the Planning Authority despite receiving objections from the Town Council; would the Town Council continue to

forward very strong comments against some of the proposals and fight vigorously for what they believe is right for the town.

Councillor Wells stated that the Planning authority and the Town Council were more and more in tune over recent development proposals. However, on appeal several I.W. Council decisions had been overturned by Planning Inspectors from the mainland who have refused to take advice from local planners despite their very limited perception of local issues.

Councillor Banks concluded by stating that development at many of the high profile sites was inevitable; the Town Council would endeavour to ensure that the scale of development was appropriate and that any development was sympathetic to the surrounding area.

The following question and observations were made:

**Q: Were there any developments with the War Memorial project and why was a bouncy castle during the St. George's Day events and cars during Cowes Week positioned on War Memorial land?**

A: The Town Mayor stated that the War Memorial project had been taken up by the Cowes Community Partnership; they now wished to transfer responsibility for the management of the project to the Town Council. The Town Council had 'ring fenced' £4,700 and the Community Partnership had obtained grant funding of approximately £960 although a shortfall of £5,500 remained. The Town Council was very keen to bring the War memorial project to a successful conclusion and to this end an agenda item had been included for the Council's next Town Improvement Committee.

In respect of use of the War Memorial land, the Town Council would ask the Trustees to exclude this area at any similar future events in the park.

(The proceedings terminated at 8.53p.m.)

**CHAIRMAN**