



MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
29th April 2021 at 8pm
Held via zoom.

The meeting was opened by Chairman Cllr Piggott

Those present

Councillors Birch, Mills, Vas, Bell, Battersby, Mendoza, Cole, Feetham, Seffens.
Six electors of the parish

Also present, The Clerk, Office Manager and Administration Assistant.

Minutes of the previous meeting.

The May 2020 meeting was cancelled due to CoVID 19 restrictions.

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 16th May 2019 were agreed as a true record. Proposed Cllr Battersby seconded Cllr Mendoza and carried by those then present.

Ongar Town Council Annual Report

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused many issues for Ongar Town Council, as it has for business and residents. However, due to the resilience of the council staff, it has maintained, as far as possible, business as usual.

The council has recently welcomed four new Councillors to the team and their contribution will be beneficial.

The reduction in the OTC council tax was partly due to an overcharge error of 7% last year, which has been rectified this year, and because of savings made by the council, a further 7% cut was made, putting the Council Tax rate back to what it was in 2014/15.

With the proposed developments in Ongar, a Neighbourhood Plan is essential to ensure the residents have a clear voice in any development. As Ongar had no plan in place, OTC took up the challenge. Working in partnership with The Ongar Neighbourhood Plan Community Group the plan is nearing its final approval stage. Producing the plan has involved many hours of work by a dedicated team, led by Mary Dadd, and they deserve our gratitude. Unfortunately, there are too many to name individually.

The council is appalled at the lack of maintenance in Ongar and produced a document "Regenerating Ongar" to highlight this. The issues were: blocked drains, broken pavements, damaged bollards which have not been replaced with surrounding pavement poorly repaired,

damaged kerbs and verges, overgrown vegetation, pavement parking, road and footpath maintenance, street cleaning, street signs and street furniture, weed control and grass cutting. A copy was sent to EFDC and ECC and, with the assistance of our District Councillors, action is now being taken by them to address some of the issues. EFDC have now adopted several of the recommendations to improve the district.

Ongar Town Council now fully fund the purchase and planting of the High Street planters, with organisation, advice and vital support from the Ongar in Bloom team.

The Council also financially support, when the pandemic permits, the Christmas lights, the Ongar Town Festival and provides grants for local organisations.

The installation of the new equipment in Shelley Park was seriously delayed by the pandemic, but this has now been completed in time for the warmer weather.

The council is also looking to the future and considering how it can reduce its impact upon the environment, and reduce expenditure. A new cemetery will be needed in the future, and the Town Council have started to build up a reserve fund, but it is not a simple process to establish a cemetery. Firstly, suitable land for a cemetery must be identified - is it accessible, is it available for purchase? Planning permission must be obtained, then the land, and facilities prepared. This process could take between 10 and 20 years.

The council owns 121 streetlights. It is intended, over the next few years, to convert these to LED which are cheaper to run and longer lasting. Investing now will provide the pay back in later years and help to improve our environment.

Ongar Town Council want the residents of Ongar to remain updated and informed. The council now have a media service and to receive updates directly to your email inbox, register your email address at bit.ly/OTCnews-register.

To note the draft unaudited accounts.

The current accounts show the picture on 31st March 2021. As the Town Meeting must be held early this year, it was not possible to produce the final accounts so the following points must be borne in mind.

Reserves.

The current year fund of £133,025 will be reduced by transfers to earmarked reserve of £10,000 for purchase of additional grave space, £10,000 for property acquisition, £10,000 for refurbishment of the Love Lane chapel and a transfer £1,000 per year to the van EMR in anticipation of your next vehicle. The provision of £6,000 for roof repairs at the love lane office and £12,000 for repairs of the Squash Court will also be carried-forward. This will leave a fund of £84,025.

The Council requires a general reserve of about £140,000 and at year-end it stands at £99,510 but there is also an investment bond of £47,500 which is part of your general reserve even though it must appear on the asset register rather than the bank statement. To ensure that the

council holds a general reserve of £140,000 as liquid assets, an additional £41,000 will be allocated from the current year fund which means that there will be £43,000 available for new projects in the town.

Following the restructuring of the Jubilee Park Loan, the sum of £44,000 will also be added to the register as an asset due on 1st November 2043.

Precept.

The published budget is based on like-for-like expenditure but has been adjusted to correct for the £24,425 overcharge last year to give you a precept demand of (£313,965 - £24,425=) £289,540. Which works out at £106 for a band D equivalent. The income has been adjusted to reflect the renegotiation of the Community Sports Trust loan and rent.

Representatives from Ongar Groups may make individual short reports.

Mary Dadd spoke on behalf of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group to tell the meeting that they had successfully completed the mandatory public consultation in March. It was pleasing to see that the majority of responses are positive. Of the few people disagreeing with the proposals, most thought they did not go far enough. Based on this feedback, some amendments are being made and more hard evidence may also be required. The revised plan is being reviewed by the Group's Consultant. Once the amendments have been made. The plan will be returned to the Town Council who will then approve it for release to the District Council for external assessment. The Group's work has found other actions that cannot be included in the plan but would clearly be of benefit to the Town. They may be taken-forward as separate projects to improve the wellbeing of residents and make improvements to the local environment.

Dean Walton spoke on behalf of the Ongar Civic Trust to explain that it was being set-up as Charitable Incorporated Organisation which is a limited company formed for charitable purposes. The idea came from feedback from the recent but unsuccessful funding bid when it was clear that a more formal structure was needed to encourage a wider participation from the residents to deliver the key changes proposed.

Open Forum

There were no questions or comments.

Meeting closed at 8.24