

MINUTES of the ANNUAL TOWN MEETING of the TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL held on TUESDAY 15th MARCH, 2022 at 6.30pm at TAVISTOCK TOWN HALL

The following were present:

Councillor A Hutton - Mayor (Chairman)

Councillors Ms L Crawford, J Ellis, Mrs M Ewings, Mrs A Johnson, Mrs U Mann (Deputy Mayor), Mrs G Parker, B Smith, H Smith, P Squire, A Venning, P Ward, P Williamson

5 members of the Public

1 member of the Press

In Attendance: Town Clerk, General Manager and Assistant to the Town Clerk

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Ms T Eperon, A Fey, A Lewis and J Moody

1. MAYOR'S REPORT

The Mayor welcomed all present and gave a brief address, notes of which are attached to these Minutes (Appendix A).

The Mayor also took the opportunity to thank the staff and his fellow Councillors for their support over the course of the Civic Year.

2. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 16th MARCH 2021

The Minutes of the above Meeting were agreed as a true copy and signed by the Mayor.

3. STATEMENT ON COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

The Chairman of the Budget & Policy Committee (Councillor H Smith) reported on the financial affairs of the Council, notes of which are attached to these Minutes (Appendix B).

4. JESSIE ANN ALFORD CHARITY

The Town Clerk gave a report on the operation of the above Charity (Appendix C).

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chairman then invited general questions from the public. A member of the public put the following questions:

Q1 – the policy/approach to who could/could not book space on the noticeboards located on the Town Hall, and whether that appropriately included commercial organisations.

A1 (Town Clerk) – reported that this matter had previously been considered by the Council after the questioner raised a related point on a prior occasion. The current position permitted advertising without discrimination against user type. Fees and Charges had just been set by the Council for the financial year 2022/23 and, accordingly, there would be opportunity to review the position in the next budget setting round as appropriate.

Q2 – Appreciation was expressed to the Mayor and Chairman of the Budget & Policy Committee for their reports and the hope expressed that there would be active involvement in the upcoming Local Government elections (2023).

A2 – the questioner was thanked for their input.

There being no more questions, the Mayor thanked everyone for coming to the Meeting.

The Meeting ended at 6.59pm.

Signed..... Dated.....
Town Mayor

MAYOR'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTORY SPEECH
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 15th MARCH 2022

Good evening ladies and gentlemen and welcome to the 2022 Annual Town Meeting, which this year we are able to return to on a face to face basis.

This Meeting is an opportunity for electors of the Parish to hear what Tavistock Town Council has been doing over the last year. There is then an opportunity for registered electors of the Parish to ask questions later in the Meeting.

I would just ask my Town Councillor colleagues present here tonight to stand up for a moment, so that you can see who we all are.

Like last year, before we start the business of the Meeting can I please invite everyone present to share a moment of reflection and give thought to those who have suffered bereavement, loss or hardship as a result of the pandemic. We also think of those in the Ukraine whose lives have been shattered by the onslaught of war. Our thoughts are with you.

Turning to home again we acknowledge all those in the health and caring professions, the organisations, community groups and good neighbours who have helped and supported those in need in our community – to all of you, your support and help will have made a huge difference to those whose lives you have touched, so thank you.

The work of your Council over the past year has been challenging as we try to return to 'business as usual' and the country moves from pandemic to endemic. The Guildhall Project finally came to fruition, following many years of hard work by Officers and Members of the Council, together with Contractors and partners, including Tavistock Heritage Trust and the National Heritage Lottery Fund. The Guildhall Complex has undergone extensive refurbishment and restoration, which has made it a fantastic building we can all be proud of. If you have yet to visit, please do, as I am sure you will be impressed with the works undertaken, and the World Heritage Site Visitor and Interpretation Centre it now houses.

Looking back over the past 12 months the work of the Council has continued to be seriously impacted by Coronavirus including:

- New ways of working and new priorities including:
 - Restrictions on service delivery whilst maintaining key services;
 - Continuing support for stakeholders;
 - Different ways of working;
 - Safety measures;
 - Cancellation of Goose Fair and the Garden Festival in 2021.

- I might add that again in the 2021 – 2022 financial year the pandemic continued to have a major impact on your Council's finances. The Chairman of the Budget & Policy Committee will outline the extensive work which has been undertaken throughout the year to enable the Council to continue to operate effectively.

- However, the financial position of the Council has now been stabilised and we are beginning the process of recruiting into vacant posts and reopening our service offer. We have started work on a Neighbourhood Development Plan for the Town and the community consultation will be out shortly, please do get involved. We also continue to conduct the routine business of the Council as a statutory consultee on matters such as planning and development.

- Looking to the next Civic Year I anticipate the organisational focus will very much be on:
 - How best we, together with partners and stakeholders, can promote and support our community and town;
 - represent the interests of the ratepayer;
 - continue to recruit staff and re-open services;
 - Support the Platinum Jubilee of HM Queen Elizabeth;
 - Identifying and deliver priority activities including maintenance of key heritage and infrastructure assets;
 - Supporting the business community, continuing to work closely with the BID Company and Chamber of Commerce;
 - assisting initiatives contributing to sustainability and the environment;
 - rebuilding finances to sustainable levels;
 - Bringing back events such as Goose Fair and the Garden Festival.

- Preparing for Local Government elections and a new Council in 2023.

In Conclusion the past year has again been a very difficult one for so many but we must now be hopeful of better times coming and your Council is committed to working for, and with, the community to that end.

Finally, at a personal level, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the community, the Officers and staff of the Council, and my fellow Councillors, who have supported me over my year as Mayor of Tavistock. It has inevitably been a different year to the one I had anticipated as Mayor, however it is one I have enjoyed nonetheless.

I very much look forward to 2022 as being a year of continued recovery and growth in our town, and one where we can return to brighter and more hopeful times.

Budget and Policy report to Annual Town Meeting 2022

Since being elected chairman of the Budget and Policy Committee in May 2021 it has been a time of dealing with the finances of the council whilst both in and coming out of restrictions of various sorts.

Tavistock Town Council is under an obligation to adopt a budget each year and that budget correlates to the relevant section of the Council Tax Bills which drop through our letter boxes each year.

As a committee we have when approaching the setting of a budget we have had to grapple with many areas of uncertainty. A major area of that uncertainty has been related to the fact that historically your Town Council has each year made extensive use of its commercial income to subsidise the services it provides to our community. Although there appears to be a case to say that things are back to normal after the Coronavirus pandemic, we are still dealing with the impacts of Coronavirus both direct and indirect.

Over the past year the Council has had to address an unprecedented level of pressure on its finances. In response to these pressures your Town Council has undertaken a wide range of measures to mitigate the effects which have included the use of our General Reserves, continual review of expenditure and operating with a reduced staffing level.

On a positive note, along with the areas previously spoken about the completion of the Tavistock Heritage Initiative and the capital works to the Guildhall Gateway Centre have provided a level of support to move in the direction of rebuilding those essential reserves. Whilst the wish is that we can improve the situation with regard to reserves there are as always uncertainties not least emergency works we have to complete which are not on our radar when we set the budget.

The Budget and Policy Committee are tasked with continual oversight of the budget but concentrated its attention on the 2022/23 budget from November last year through to January this year. Again, this year it was important when considering a budget that members were mindful of the regulations under which we operate. Principally that revenue spend can only be funded from revenue income, the use of capital receipts is solely restricted to capital works.

There are key areas this year which are much more difficult to predict than at any time previously. As it is with all of us who deal with a family budget energy costs are especially difficult to predict. The council has fixed unit cost until July 2022 but predicting what we might be able to negotiate going forward is a real challenge. We also have to factor in what we believe will be the level of inflation our goods and services will be subjected to. In January

indications from the Bank of England were that inflation, by the Consumer Price Index measure would be running at 5% but we now know that this figure has been revised and increased upwards since that time and is predicted at 7% plus.

Within the overall budget a localism budget of £20,000 has been retained. It is anticipated that the primary spend within this budget area will be to support moving forward on the creation of a Neighbourhood Development Plan and work on this continues through the Steering Group. We have included funding for community grants which benefit local organisations. A one off this financial year will be funding to support arrangements needed when the town celebrates the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. There was a request to Budget and Policy to make additional funding available in the Equipment Maintenance Budget for play equipment and this was agreed taking it to a total of £20,000.

As a committee we have had to continually review the way forward. In November 2021 it was looking like the increase in the precept for 2022/23 would need to be 6.65%. Since then, we have worked to review all avenues of income and expenditure. Adjustments have been incorporated into the final budget. The Council has always sought to keep the precept increase below the rate of inflation. Then precept which will appear on the notification from West Devon Borough will show an increase of 2.92% (equating to in the region of ten pence per week for a band D property)

Looking ahead the next financial year will be challenging. We look forward to getting staffing levels which allow services to return to pre pandemic levels. The council will not be immune to rising prices so constant review finances is a must. As I stated earlier councillors recognise that there will inevitably be emergency works that need to be undertaken in the course of the next financial year and the cost of those is uncertain. However, the Precept we have set hopefully allows for us providing the best possible service to our town and community.

CLlr Harry Smith

Chairman of Budget and Policy Committee 2021/22

Jessie Ann Alford Charity

Report for Annual Town Meeting

15th March 2022

The Town Clerk made the following report;

Jessie Anne Alford was the wife of William Charles Alford a local market keeper, Councillor and Poor Law Guardian in the 1920's.

They were members of the Plymouth Brethren community, and when Jessie died in 1947 she left £ 1,000 in trust to the local Council. A scheme was established by which the Charity was to benefit spinsters and widows aged 60 and over living in the Parish of Tavistock.

The Charity has assets of 822 income shares in the Charities Investment Fund and the value as at 31/12/2021 was £ 16, 905.58, up by £ 2, 129.55 from the previous year. The Charity receives between £ 400 and £ 450 of income each year.

The distribution of funds is made just before Christmas each year to a maximum of 8 deserving applicants selected by the Trustees. Last year we received 5 applications, the same as the previous year, with a grant of £ 85 being made to each applicant. We did have some new applicants in 2021, which was welcomed.

After this distribution a bank balance of £ 1, 524.17 has been carried forward to Christmas 2022.

We will continue to advertise the Charity as widely as possible, and whilst we did have an increase in the number of applicants last year we would be grateful if anyone here knows of anyone who would be eligible to receive a Grant, can we please ask that you encourage them to apply when the application period is advertised during November.

