

**MARLBOROUGH TOWN COUNCIL  
FULL TOWN COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Full Town Council which was held by videoconference  
on **Monday, 20 July 2020** at 7pm

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**PRESENT:** Councillor M. Cooper Town Mayor  
Councillor B. Castle  
Councillor N. Fogg  
Councillor A. Ross  
Councillor A. Kirk Wilson  
Councillor G. Loosmore  
Councillor N. Barrett-Morton  
Councillor M. Hall  
Councillor L. Farrell  
Councillor P. Cairns  
Councillor S. Price  
Councillor A. Wilson  
Councillor D. Heath  
Councillor V. Hillier

**ALSO PRESENT:** Mrs S. Parker Town Clerk  
Mrs D. Whitehall Administrator  
Councillor S. Dobson Wiltshire Councillor – Marlborough East  
Fr J. Blacker Mayor's Chaplain  
Mr N. Goodwin Marlborough.News  
Plus 25 members of the public

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The meeting was preceded by a presentation to Rev. Dr Janneke Blokland to thank her for her service to Marlborough. She had been Mayor's Chaplain to Cllrs. Noel Barrett-Morton and Farrell and both paid tribute to her. All wished her well in her move to Sussex.

#### **PRAYERS**

Fr. John Blacker opened the meeting with prayers.

#### **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

**Mrs Hannaford-Dobson** - had visited Coopers Meadow many times recently and could not fail to notice that there was not a single duck residing there. Plenty of rats, but not a single duck or fish that she could see in the river. Previously there had been dozens of ducks in residence and she asked whether the Town Council or one of its partners had a policy of duck culling to rid Marlborough completely of its ducks. The **Mayor** thanked her for her question. He was not aware of any culling policy, but this would be investigated and the **Town Clerk** would send a written response.

**Cllr. Dobson** – was glad to see the Herbert Leaf bequest was being progressed and asked for reassurance that no legal costs to reinstate it would be taken from the bequest itself which he believed stood at around £60,000. The **Town Clerk** confirmed this was the case and that associated legal costs would be met from Town Council funds.

**Mr May** referred to various social media threads about the proposal to extend pavements in the High Street by removing the 30 minute parking bays and that the Town Council had consulted with some local businesses, but said it had not consulted residents or motorists who use the parking bays. People had been critical of the decision and other councils that tried similar schemes were facing clamour to reverse the decision. He asked Councillors to reconsider their well-intentioned, but badly conceived plan before they destroyed the High Street. The **Mayor** thanked Mr May for his views, which would be taken into consideration at item 5 of the agenda.

#### **CRIME AND DISORDER**

No officer was able to attend the meeting.

#### **QUESTIONS TO AND FROM WILTSHIRE COUNCILLORS**

**Cllr. Fogg** had been contacted by several people about large numbers of pigeons in the town and passed on their requests asking whether anything could be done about it.

**Cllr. Dobson** wanted to point out ahead of the discussion at item 5 that he and **Cllrs. James Sheppard** and **Jane Davies** (*all Wiltshire Councillors*) had voiced their opposition to Wiltshire Council's plan for pavement widening. He believed it would be incorrect to consider the recently circulated plan as a final version and was sure amendments would be forthcoming. **Cllr. Farrell** asked whether the Wiltshire Councillors present could collectively lobby for parking charges to be reduced as Marlborough's were among the highest in Wiltshire. Reducing the cost would help the town in the future as well as during the current situation. **Cllr. Dobson** said that as Wiltshire Councillors, they had been involved in organising the current free parking spaces. **Cllr. Sheppard** said they represented everyone in Marlborough and the surrounding areas and did their best to make sure all Wiltshire residents received best value and are treated as equally as possible, but that it would be difficult to have isolated pricing council wide.

78/20

#### **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from **Cllr. Dow**.

79/20

#### **DECLARATIONS**

There were no declarations of interest.

80/20

#### **MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Preshute Parish Council had decided to withdraw from the Marlborough Area Neighbourhood Plan. Whilst members of the Steering Group were disappointed that this decision has been taken, they were now working to re-designate the neighbourhood area to include Marlborough, Mildenhall and Savernake parishes. The process would continue with a formal public consultation under Regulation 14 taking place in the coming weeks. More information about this would follow soon.

81/20

#### **MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** that the minutes of the meeting of Full Town Council held 29 June 2020 were approved as a true record and signed by the Town Mayor

82/20

#### **SAFE RE-OPENING OF THE HIGH STREET**

Councillors noted the Town Clerk's report and the most recent design from Wiltshire Council for the widening of pavements in the High Street under the national Re-opening of the High Streets Safely scheme and considered commissioning promotional signage and a video.

The **Mayor** reminded everyone that the Town Council had already voted to support the national scheme and that the final decision rested with Wiltshire Council. He referred to the most recent High Street plan drawn up by Wiltshire Council (WC) that provided additional space for pedestrians to safely maintain social distancing by temporarily extending pavements using bollards. This updated design temporarily removed 42 free (30 minute) parking spaces with 46 free (30 minute) parking spaces remaining. Disabled bays remained in place. He understood it may be subject to further changes. He reminded everyone that it was temporary and could be changed, would be monitored and in place for a maximum of 12 months although it was likely that it would be removed long before that.

The Mayor was mindful that there was a lot of public interest in the scheme and with Councillors' support he suspended Standing Orders so that members of the public were able to share their views. Members of the public who took the opportunity to speak included business owners, residents and Wiltshire Councillors. All spoke passionately about the impact the loss of free short-term parking would have on their businesses. Key themes were:

- That short-stay, free parking in the High Street was crucial for many customers and therefore for local businesses. Without the convenience of free short-term parking close to shops there was a fear that customers would be lost and may not return after the temporary measures were removed. Importantly, the lead-up to Christmas was a vital period for retailers and may make the difference between continuing to trade or having to close
- The level of consultation between the Town Council and local businesses to canvass views on the scheme and whether recommendations made following meetings with traders had been taken on board by Town Councillors
- That the additional pavement space would help the hospitality sector and whether there had been an emphasis on that sector
- Whether alternatives had been considered
- Whether the temporary barriers would be a safety risk due to frequent 'rolling cars' and/or delivery vehicles and passing traffic
- The visual impact of temporary barriers on the High Street
- That the Kingsbury Street/High Street corner was a particularly dangerous area for pedestrians yet was not included in the plan at all
- Whether the Parade could be included in the plan
- Whether those businesses that had adapted to offer online shopping could now survive without it
- A need for an effective marketing campaign to help promote the town to be implemented as soon as possible – other small towns were already doing so and also if traders could be involved in creating promotional material
- Some traders in the narrow stretch of pavement with railings at the SW side of the High Street felt that with 1m+ precautions and signage provided by retailers; the situation could be managed without removing the free parking bays
- Whether the loss of the disabled bay near The Wellington Arms would be satisfactorily replaced by the space near the Library
- Lack of information about when the scheme would be implemented and that it was too slow – many businesses have been open since 15 June
- Questions about how the scheme would be monitored, by whom and how quickly it could be changed
- Whether Councillors would reconsider their decision and if further discussions could take place with WC Highways officers to amend the scheme
- A request that Wiltshire Councillors present lobby WC to reduce parking charges or provide a level of free parking elsewhere

- Whether a long term strategy to remove cars from the High Street to create a cleaner, more pleasant environment could be considered – this had been noticed as a benefit during lockdown and that some residents were happy to walk or cycle to the town centre
- Whether people parking for longer would use the extra time to browse and spend money in several businesses rather than a quick stop for one purchase
- That the very wide High Street was wide enough to support the changes.

The **Mayor** thanked everyone and reiterated the temporary nature of the changes which would be subject to continual review, that the final decision rested with WC and that there would be a standing item on every Town Council Planning Committee meeting agenda to look at this. Town Council staff were working to better promote Marlborough. The **Town Clerk** referred to the excellent signage at the approaches to other towns such as Devizes and that the Town Council would welcome input on this and other marketing opportunities.

After Standing Orders were reinstated the **Mayor** thanked everyone for the many views expressed. Councillor's discussions included:

- Sympathy with traders' concerns about the impact that the temporary loss of free short-term parking may have on their businesses and that there should be a united focus on supporting the retail and hospitality sectors
- Additional outside space was crucial for the survival of some businesses (e.g. the Food Gallery and Polly Tearooms). Sadly, some hospitality outlets had already permanently closed
- The intention of the scheme was to respond to a deep crisis across this country where over 45,000 people had died. The plan was not drawn up to do away with free parking – it was to create pavements wide enough to allow social distancing and to protect the community from a destructive disease
- The initiative was a national scheme from central government designed to make people feel reassured and safe about coming back into busy public areas by facilitating social distancing
- That the Town Council had no authority in this national scheme, which came from Transport Minister Grant Shapps who had clearly stated that the UK could not go back to how it was before the COVID19 pandemic and that the environment in town centres had to be improved
- There was a severe risk of going back into a health crisis in the winter: it was already happening in some towns
- Some councillors had been volunteers during lockdown and had been at the front line of the pandemic. They did not want the town to experience that again
- The UK should not return to congested, polluted high streets – with pollution being a key factor in the impact of those contracting the virus
- Countries that had been led by the health lobby had prevailed – e.g. Greece and Germany – getting back to business soonest. Where the business lobby led – e.g. USA, Sweden, Brazil, UK – countries had been slow to rid themselves of Coronavirus
- The plan would be monitored by all Councillors and would be a standing item on Planning Committee agendas – meetings took place approximately every 3 weeks – where its success could be discussed and changes could be recommended
- That the most recent plan provided a good compromise, retaining some short-term free parking spaces
- If Wiltshire Council was serious about helping business, it should provide some compensation for the loss of the 42 free half-hour parking spaces by providing it elsewhere so that people could still make use of quick and easy access to businesses

- Whether, with around a £50million deficit, WC would be able to offer free parking as it depended upon parking income
- Whether the parking spaces in the centre of the High Street could be made free to compensate for the loss of free spaces at the side as a good way to address the concerns about loss of footfall without people having to change their shopping habits
- That using the Town Council's allocation of free parking, while helpful, would not address the needs of shoppers or traders
- A more open negotiation with WC about how to manage free parking or achieve a reduction in parking charges would be welcome and **Cllr. Davies'** offer of help to lobby WC to help with compensatory free parking was welcomed
- That the Town Council had been unable to fund equivalent free parking provision because the cost was so high and Members felt that residents would not want to pay for it via an increase in council tax
- That the retail section of Kingsbury Street should be included in the scheme
- Whether part of the Parade could be included
- The need for clarity on timescales for implementation
- Whether the scheme could be scrapped
- Input to marketing material would be welcome, and Councillors were confident the Tourism Officer could facilitate a quick turn-around
- It was important to also consider a long-term strategy (post COVID): the UK had the second highest death rate in the world from COVID19 (though the current rate of COVID19 in Wiltshire was 1.2 per 1,000)
- Whether this was the right time to pursue an anti-car agenda
- Whether a new Retailers Forum could be set up to enable the Town Council and traders to work together

Members would welcome ongoing discussions with WC to come up with an acceptable scheme but the longer the discussion continued, the longer it would take to achieve an outcome that satisfied both key issues (community safety and supporting traders). The priority must be to create a safe high street: if there was another spike in COVID19 infections everything else would be irrelevant if the town returned to lockdown.

The **Mayor** confirmed the Town Council was committed to:

- A promotional campaign to restore confidence in shoppers returning to Marlborough and would welcome input to that
- Making sure Marlborough was as safe as it could be for its residents and visitors
- Working with traders now and in the long term, and would like to resurrect a regular Retailers Forum

**The Town Clerk** reminded Town Councillors that they had voted to support the national scheme administered by Wiltshire Council and no request to re-visit that decision had been made. The design had been drawn up by professional WC Highways officers and the Town Council had no authority over highways decisions but comments from the meeting would be passed back to Wiltshire Council and the Wiltshire Councillors present should be able to influence the final WC decision on it. She understood that Highways officers wanted to implement the plan quickly but they were also working on other similar schemes across the county. The Town Council was contacted about the scheme by WC after the Prime Minister's announcement that non-essential shops could reopen on 15 June. Even with only little time to respond, the Town Council did canvass businesses, holding 2 virtual meetings and involving a WC Councillor and WC officer in them. There had been good liaison with Wiltshire Council officers throughout this. Following this meeting comments would be immediately passed to Wiltshire Council to incorporate into any final design. This could be reviewed at the Planning Committee meeting on Monday, 27 July 2020.

Members were grateful for the offer of support from **Cllr. Davies**. They asked for support from Wiltshire Council to protect trade by providing alternative parking solutions due to the removal of 42 half-hour free spaces, whether by reducing charges or providing compensatory free short term parking in the High Street; that safety issues at the corner of Kingsbury Street opposite Patten Alley be addressed and for similar levels of support to traders in The Parade where there was no current proposal to widen pavements.

**RESOLVED:** that temporary promotional signage is erected on approach to the town (subject to relevant permissions) and short promotional videos are commissioned, with the involvement of the community and traders

The **Mayor** thanked everyone who had contributed to the meeting.

*Some members of the public left the meeting*

**83/20**

### **RETURNING TO THE NEW NORMAL**

Councillors noted a report and verbal update by the Town Clerk and considered any further recommendations following changes in government advice concerning COVID19. Points noted included:

- The office at 5 High Street was now open to the public from 10am – 2pm, Monday - Friday
- All play areas were open, sanitised and visually inspected on a daily basis
- Public toilets had been open since 30 May and were cleaned twice a day
- Bookings were now beginning to come through for the Town Hall and Community Centre
- The first socially distanced wedding ceremony took place at the Town Hall on 10 July
- Recent announcements about wedding receptions for up to 30 attendees and live performances had been made, but guidance was still awaited
- All Town Council-owned public buildings had been deep cleaned
- Though there had been savings from cancellation of Town Council-led events, there would be income losses around the much-reduced hiring of venues. The financial position would be clearer later in the year

The **Mayor** knew the Town Clerk and her staff had worked incredibly hard through the COVID crisis and asked for his thanks to be passed to all for their excellent work.

The decision to re-open public toilets on 30 May had also included a decision to increase the frequency of cleaning by the Town Council's contractor, Healthmatic, to twice a day which was incurring higher costs. Councillors considered whether to revert to one clean per day. With a desire to encourage people to come back to Marlborough, and with some queues at the toilets (many retail outlets had closed their toilets), public safety was felt to be a priority.

**RESOLVED:** to continue with twice-daily cleaning of public toilets

**84/20**

### **CO-OPTION TO THE TOWN COUNCIL**

At an Extraordinary Full Council meeting on 24 February 2020 (Min.482/19), Members noted that a letter of resignation had been received by the Town Mayor/Chairman of the Council from Councillor E Northeast (East Ward). Following this, the process of advertising the vacancy was followed with Wiltshire Council and (as formally confirmed by the Electoral Services Officer), no requests were received to hold a by-election and the Town Council was able to co-opt a new Town Councillor to represent the East Ward.

With lockdown over, the proposed process would be to advertise the vacancy widely during July and August with the co-option taking place at Full Town Council on Monday, 7 September 2020.

**RESOLVED:** (i) that the co-option should take place on Monday, 7 September 2020

**RESOLVED:** (ii) that the co-option vacancy be advertised widely as suggested

85/20

#### **MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT**

Members considered a report by the Town Clerk and recommendations to adopt a Management Agreement formalising the transfer of obligations from the Town Council as Managing Trustee of Jubilee Field, Manton, to Marlborough Town Council and so providing a legal basis for expenditure.

**RESOLVED:** to adopt the Management Agreement and that it is signed off. Also, that nil returns are lodged with the Charity Commission.

86/20

#### **OUTSIDE BODIES**

**Cllr. Kirk Wilson** thanked the **Town Clerk** for making Priory Gardens, which had been closed during lockdown, available for safely distanced tea parties to be held for those elderly residents who would normally have met at the Jubilee Centre. This was the only way they had been able to meet in person and it had been much appreciated.

**Cllr. Price** would be attending a WALC (Wiltshire Association of Local Councils) meeting in the next few days.

**Cllr. Hall** had recently been elected an independent trustee of the Merchants House, as well as a director of Merchants House Trading Ltd (the shop). This would create a vacancy for a Town Councillor trustee.

**Cllr. Cairns** had attended virtual **Transition Marlborough** Permaculture Group meetings during lockdown, with another scheduled in August.

87/20

#### **COMMITTEE MINUTES**

In accordance with para 3.1 of the Scheme of Delegation, Councillors noted the approved minutes of the **Planning Committee** held 15 June 2020.

88/20

#### **MEMBERS QUESTION TIME**

As the appointed councillor to liaise with the Richmond Fellowship **Cllr. Castle** requested that contact is regenerated with that organisation to establish their plans for the Plume of Feathers Garden. The same garden appears to be in good health and the grass is cut. The office of the Fellowship in Wagon Yard is clearly closed and no forwarding details are in evidence. The **Town Clerk** agreed to follow this up.

89/20

#### **COMMON SEAL**

Proposed by **Cllr. Castle** and seconded by **Cllr. Fogg** and

**RESOLVED:** that the Common Seal of Marlborough Town Council be affixed to all documents necessary to give effect to the decisions of the meeting

*Prior to the closed part of the meeting, the **Mayor** took the opportunity to thank those members of the public still present for taking part in the meeting. He had been happy to see so many people attending and he hoped they would continue to be involved in Town Council meetings.*

90/20

**EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED:** that under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and representatives of the press and broadcast media be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted

*All members of the press and public left the meeting*

91/20

**TOWN HALL WORKS**

Members noted a report by the Town Clerk about external works to the Town Hall and considered moving into the tendering process.

**RESOLVED:** that the tendering process for external works to the Town Hall begins via the government’s Contract Finder website as set out in the Town Council’s Financial Regulations

92/20

**TRANSFER OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE LAND TO MARLBOROUGH TOWN COUNCIL**

Members noted a report by the Town Clerk about progress towards transfer of land to the Town Council and considered the long-term cost implications of its upkeep and maintenance.

**RESOLVED:** that the agreed figures in terms of a commuted sum and questions about the Heads of Terms document are passed onto the landowners.

An Extraordinary Full Town Council meeting be held on 27 July 2020 for Councillors to discuss the next steps.

The meeting closed at 9.41 pm

Signed: ..... Date: .....

Town Mayor