

WARE TOWN COUNCIL

The Annual Town Meeting of **WARE TOWN COUNCIL** was held in Fletcher's Lea, Ware on Monday 23 April 2018 at 7.30 p.m. when the following business was transacted.

PRESENT Cllrs A Curtis (Town Mayor, presiding), J Kaye, M Pope, C Reed, S Reed, M Standley & J Taylor.

ATTENDING J Rowlinson (Town Clerk); County Cllr D Andrews; H Clugston (press)
23 members of the public

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr's, P Ballam, J Belsey, D Oldridge, and R Standley.

2. **MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD ON 8 MAY 2017**

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 8 May 2017 were approved and signed by the Town Mayor as a correct record.

3. **REPORT FROM THE TOWN MAYOR FOR THE 2017/18 CIVIC YEAR ON THE WORK OF THE TOWN COUNCIL FOR THAT YEAR**

Cllr A Curtis presented a report on the work of the Town Council, copy attached

4. **REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PRIORY CHARITY FOR 2017/18**

Cllr A Curtis presented a report on the work of the Trustee, copy attached

5. **REPORT FROM COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN FOR THE 2017/18 CIVIC YEAR**

a) **Finance and Resources Committee – Cllr M Pope**

Cllr M Pope presented a report on the work of the Committee, copy attached

b) **Tourism, Leisure and Amenities Committee – Cllr S Reed (Vice Chairman)**

Cllr S Reed presented a report on the work of the Committee, copy attached

c) **Planning Committee – Cllr M Standley**

Cllr M Standley presented a report on the work of the Committee, copy attached

6. **QUESTIONS, OBSERVATIONS OR PROPOSALS AFFECTING THE TOWN**

A petition from Save Ware's Greenbelt was formally presented to the Town Council.

The petition was received by the Mayor on behalf of the Town Council.

Committee members of Ware Swimming Club asked about progress on the future of Fanshawe Pool.

Ware Town Council supported the campaign to keep the pool open. Discussions were still taking place between Chauncy School and East Herts Council.

The meeting closed at 8.15pm.

Town Mayor

A Message from the Mayor, Cllr Alexander Curtis

It has been a real honour to serve as Ware's Mayor for the past year. Our town is characterised by the fantastic array of local community groups which do so much to make Ware such a fantastic place to call home. I have greatly enjoyed working with many of these groups over the past 11 months. Giving speeches to groups like Ware Rotary, assisting with the deliver of Ware Festival and paying visits to local schools has provided me with a unique set of opportunities to promote our town and encourage civic pride within it.

Our young people are a great asset to the town, which is why I am proud to have revived the "Mayor for a Day" competition for local 11 year olds, which was last carried out almost two decades ago. Welcoming the winners to Ware Priory for a programme of activities was a highlight of this year for me. Hearing about their aspirations and ideas for this town firmly convinced me that the future of Ware is very much in safe hands. Aside from promoting the role of young people, raising funds for long-established local community group "Sad Cats" has also been a very worthwhile endeavour. As local councillors, we need to use the platform which we are provided with by electors to raise the profile of voluntary groups that tirelessly support all of the wonderful events throughout this year which make Ware so special. Helping volunteers to achieve their objectives is always a highly rewarding experience.

One of the most important aspects of being Mayor is championing Ware causes. This year, the Council and I have been absolute in our efforts to save Fanshawe Pool from closure, engaging in both public campaigning and behind-the-scenes lobbying on the issue. Similarly, I am proud to have championed local business, Ventura Wildlife, in their fight to keep open their much-valued zoological gardens at Van Hage Garden Centre. Ware Town Council continues to fight for Ware's interests as East Herts District Council seeks to adopt a District Plan. Although Ware provides one voice in the choir with regard to the formulation of this very important piece of planning policy, it is the duty of local councillors to ensure that this voice is as loud, reasoned and strong as possible. The long overdue creation of a Neighbourhood Plan for Ware CP will surely be welcomed by residents over the coming year. I hope to see as many local people contributing to the design of this document as possible.

I look forward to working with groups, including Guideposts Trust, over the coming months to help combat the social epidemic of loneliness in our town. Ware Town Council will be providing support to new schemes which I have been working on to help bring our town closer together, including consideration of regular free coffee mornings at Ware Priory. A more prominent council, present in our town and listening to local people, is something which I and other councillors are very keen to create. A council providing leadership for our town, yes; but leadership that is always informed by the needs, values and desires of local residents.

Councillor Alexander Curtis, Mayor of Ware

Priory Charity Annual Report 2017-2018

This year has been a productive and successful one for the Priory Charity. New play equipment was provided for the Priory Park; including a basket swing, cone climber, and rotating see-saw. Funding from Ware Town Council and the locality budget of Ware North County Councillor, Cllr. David Andrews was used in order to deliver this worthwhile project. Furthermore, the Rotary Club of Hertford Shires has contributed a fantastic refurbishment of the play area at Ware Priory Lido. I look forward to opening the new space next month. Improvements have been made to security at the Lido, with CCTV, increased numbers of radios, and Town Watch involvement helping to make the valued facility as safe as possible for those who use it. Moving forward, the Charity is looking to raise funds for a multi-use games area for the Priory Estate, which will hopefully prove to be well-used. Renovations of the public toilets in the Priory Grounds are also due, in order to eliminate damage caused recently by vandals to the Gentlemen's toilets. Work will also commence on improving the Grounds' watercourse in due course. We are waiting for an Environment Agency permit in order to commence work, but aside from that we are ready to go.

A number of improvements have also been made to the increasingly well-used Fletcher's Lea. Improved drainage and renewed decking have both been welcome developments. Additionally, the Priory building itself is currently experiencing some important works of maintenance. New lighting for the Council Office and Tudor Suite has been placed on order. We are now eagerly awaiting its installation. Similarly, new blinds for the conservatory will aid Ware Priory Trading's wedding and functions business, the profits from which are invested in the Priory Estate to provide further improvements to all of the amenities within it. Investments in AV equipment across the Priory Estate will increase revenues from conferences, which will benefit the Priory Estate and the town more generally in a similar way.

Cllr. Alexander Curtis
Chairman of the Priory Charity

Finance & Resources Committee Report – 23 April 2018

I have pleasure in presenting the report of the Finance & Resources Committee for the past year.

The environment in which the Council operates has continued to be difficult and we have worked hard to manage the Council's finances as responsibly as possible and to keep any increases in our precept to sub-inflation levels. Following a 1.0% increase in the precept last year, we have increased it by 3.0% this year (based on the level of precept that would apply to a Band D property). Unfortunately, due to continued challenging market conditions in the hospitality sector, together with a lack of demand for office space in the town, we again like the previous year, had a situation last year where there was a small excess of expenditure over income. This amount of c.£7,500 (compared to £5,000 the previous year) will be covered from the Council's reserves which currently stand at c. £412,000.

Those of you that have attended these meetings before, will know that the Council derives a significant part of its income from the functions that are held here in Fletcher's Lea, in the main Priory building and elsewhere on the campus. I mentioned last year that despite a recovery in the economy, the hospitality industry had continued to experience difficulties and that our activities here at the Priory were not immune to this. I am disappointed to report that this difficult background was again in evidence last year and, as a result, overall our income from these activities (primarily weddings and function income) was down against budget.

The wedding and conference markets in particular continue to be challenging. We are however beginning to see some improvements in the levels of bookings thanks to the efforts of our hard-working marketing team.

Due to our office vacancies, the Council is having to be more innovative in finding uses for its office space. We are aware that East Herts Council have set up a hot-desking facility for new small businesses in Bishops Stortford and are interested in seeing similar facilities in both Ware and Hertford. With the future of the 'My Incubator' service run by Wenta at Herts Regional College in doubt, we have had discussions with East Herts regarding the establishment of a similar facility at the Priory. While discussions are at an early stage we are hopeful that they will lead to a positive result.

Within its budget the Town Council continues to provide all of the services and events that residents of the town have come to expect such as the Lido, Ware Festival, the Food Festival, Rock in the Priory and the Community Cinema project. In addition, the Council as Trustee of the Priory Charity is responsible for the upkeep and the maintenance of the Priory building and its grounds; following the last quinquennial inspection of the building a programme of works has been established to ensure that it is maintained in the best possible condition. We are now preparing for the next such inspection.

The Town Council will also continue to provide financial support to local groups such as Ware in Bloom, Dickensian Evening and Ware Museum (including the town's Tourist Information Point) and will also continue to pay the town's contribution towards the running costs of the CCTV system.

The Council also provides *ad hoc* grants to local organisations. The recipients during the year included the Rotary Club of Hertford Shires; Hertford Rugby Club; Ware & District Photographic Society; Ware Royal British Legion; and East Herts Diversionary Activities Group.

I would like to thank the Friends of Ware Lido for their continued assistance with marketing and also with making improvements to the Lido. The Town Council's commitment to this unique and well-loved facility is well known. The costs involved with running and maintaining this facility, however, are not inconsiderable and the income that it produces is heavily dependent on the weather, which as we all know is not exactly predictable. Last year I mentioned that the previous

year's net deficit produced by the Lido was c.£27,000 (roughly where we expect it to be), due to reasonable weather during the summer. Last year, however, due to a rather indifferent summer, the figure rose to c.£49,000 (which was the primary reason for the small excess of expenditure over income during the year). We are all keeping our fingers crossed for better weather this year.

Allotments

Both of the town's allotment sites continue to thrive. I again took part in the judging of the Best Kept Allotment Competition last summer. It has been said before, but it really is getting harder each year to choose a winner as the quality of the plots just keeps getting better. I would like to thank the Allotments and Leisure Gardens Society for its hard work.

New Homes Bonus

In previous reports, I have mentioned the New Home Bonus. I am sure that many of you will know that this is a grant paid by Central Government to East Herts District Council based on the number of new homes built across the District. Unlike many authorities, East Herts District Council has decided to pass on part of this grant to Town and Parish councils to spend how they see fit. This Council has so far received a total of £420,000 in this regard and some of this has been allocated to such projects as Tudor Square, the Town's Neighborhood Plan, a contribution towards the refurbishment of our Lido and the development of a new and improved Town Council website. Grants have also been awarded to Southern Maltings Community Group, The Ware Drill Hall Association, Wodson Park, the Leaside Community Centre, Ware in Bloom and the Age UK Centre in Ware. The Council continues to look for other local projects that this grant funding could be allocated to.

With regard to thank you's, I would like to thank Jill Rowlinson and Sean Higgins and their colleagues for their hard work both in their excellent management of the Council's financial affairs and also with dealing with the ever-increasing amount of statutory change that local government is being subjected to.

I would also like to thank the members of the Finance & Resources for their commitment, their ideas and their support during the year.

And last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank the many volunteer groups, including the Friends of the Priory, that work so hard to help to make Ware such a great place to live.

TLA Chairman's Report to Annual Town Meeting 2018

Fellow Councillors, residents of Ware, I must first apologise for my absence this evening as this date unfortunately coincided with my departure on a long-arranged trip to the Holy Land.

The Tourism Leisure and Amenities Committee has continued its efforts to ensure that Ware is a pleasant and attractive place in which to live and to visit. We are reasonably satisfied that activities within the control of the Town Council and this Committee usually proceed fairly well, but, when we are in the hands of other authorities, things do not go so well.

Such is the saga of the improvements to Tudor Square. Many of you will recall that the original idea was to make modest improvements to the square to make it a friendlier more welcoming open space. To that end the Council drew up some plans and held a public exhibition. In general the public were supportive and made some helpful suggestions. Ware Town Council then applied for Planning Permission. As Tudor Square is owned by East Herts District Council they wished to determine what should be done to the Square and were not happy with our modest alterations. We then became involved with a professional designer and East Herts own Landscape Officer. The result was plans which were extremely expensive, above our budget and more than we could afford. Back to the drawing board! Eventually we had Planning Permission and satisfied all the conditions required by East Herts. In addition to this, the southern edge of the Square fronts on to West Street, which comes under Hertfordshire Highways. Once they are happy with everything, we really do hope that this year will see the commencement of the long-awaited improvements to the Square, which is, of course, the site for Dickensian Evening, Music and Motors and the Food Festival.

On a more successful note the Committee continues to promote guided tours of the town and we are extremely grateful to those volunteers who give up their time to lead these walks.

Throughout the summer months there are concerts in the Priory Grounds, or indoors if it is wet or so hot that the performers need to be protected from the sun. These concerts not only entertain the folk of Ware but visitors from a surprisingly wide area.

In 2017 a popular and successful Food Festival was held in Tudor Square on the late May Bank Holiday and one is planned for that Bank Holiday this year.

The programme of winter Talks has been reduced as attendances had fallen and we seemed to be competing for both speakers and audiences with Ware Society and Hertford and Ware Local History Society. Herts Building Preservation Trust, which owns Place House, likes to host one of our talks and I must mention the excellent one on Malting, accompanied by samples of malt. Thanks to the Trust and its Chairman, Miss Dorothy Abel Smith.

We continue to have Children's film shows during the school holidays, with a special one at Christmas. The most recent one, Paddington 2, proved extremely popular.

There are also Senior Film Shows which have built up a regular audience as well as newcomers on each occasion. We are particularly pleased to welcome a number of less able people who find Fletcher's Lea very wheelchair friendly.

The Community Forum also comes under the aegis of this Committee and those present have heard interesting speakers on living healthily with diabetes and access to mental health services. Unfortunately the Forum did not have a speaker on our pigeon problem as he cancelled after the talk was arranged. The Town Council as a whole has devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to this subject, but cannot find a solution which is legal, affordable and capable of being put into practice.

Although the Ware Festival is a Town Council event, it is run by the Festival Committee, not the Tourism, Leisure and Amenities Committee, and the annual Easter Egg Hunt and Egg Decorating Competition has fallen under its wing. These events have for many years been held on the Saturday of Easter weekend and once again over eighty children decorated eggs and an unknown number hunted for eggs in the Priory Grounds.

The Committee wishes to thank the Friends of Ware Priory, the Friends of Ware Lido and the Ware Town Partnership for all that their members do to help us to make Ware a happy town.

Phyllis Ballam

Chairman

Planning Committee Report – Annual Town Meeting Monday 23rd April 2018

Fellow Councillors, Ladies and Gentlemen. I have pleasure in presenting my report upon the work of the Ware Town Council Planning Committee for the Civic Year just ending:

During the year 2017/18, the planning committee have considered 139 applications irrespective of the new legislation which allows some household applications to go ahead under permitted development not requiring full planning permission.

The Planning Committee meet regularly to consider all applications which relate to signage on the High Street, household, business and large planning applications which include developments which could have a significant impact on our community. Our Committee does not have the power to grant or refuse applications, but only to make recommendations to East Herts District Council.

If members of the public wish to raise an objection to East Herts District Council relating to a planning application we would ask you to send us a copy of your complaint as we do not receive copies from East Herts District Council. It is most beneficial to keep us in the loop as this is important to assist us to make a recommendation. We also welcome members of the community to attend our meetings and the dates and Agendas can be found on the Ware Town Council website under planning and are also displayed on the Ware Town Council noticeboards around the Town.

Where are we now?

The Hertford Regional College Development is complete and most of the houses and flats are occupied.

Gilpin Mews is an attractive development and I am informed almost sold out

Park Road Ware: Network Homes are offering homes for private sale and shared ownership and have been available from Spring this year.

One and two bedroom apartments are now available from Network Homes for shared ownership at Gladstone Place which appears to be an attractive development on the corner of Gladstone Road and the landscaping has added to its attraction.

Snowdrop House , the new care home is up and running and Councillor Belsey and myself had the pleasure of attending the opening celebration last week.

The very large care home, Riverside Place, Paxton Way is almost completed and as the deputy Mayor, earlier this year I joined in 'the topping out ceremony' which was basically the task of driving in the last screw onto the roof.

The Southern Maltings is fast being transformed into a thriving community asset .

The District Plan:

Green belt continues to be a huge issue for many Councils and local communities across the country but primarily this is a major issue for Ware which we are facing on our own doorstep.

I understand that East Herts District Council have currently achieved a final land supply but a review of additional land availability will take place every 5 years. Therefore land which could come forward, but has not been included in the present District Plan and previously itemised in the SLAA.(Strategic Land Availability Assessment) will be reviewed once more by East Herts District Council.

There is a general presumption in favour of development and there is pressure on the local planning authority to provide sound planning reasons why planning applications should be refused. There is under provision of housing in this area and in order to make a change to a greenbelt boundary in the District Plan there have to be exceptional circumstances and housing and Employment land can be viewed as an exceptional circumstance to justify a review of the green belt boundary.

The modifications to the District Plan consultation process came to an end on the 29th March 2018 and we are awaiting the inspector's outcome and if the plan is considered sound it will come forward for adoption in due course. We are informed that the Masterplanning process will begin if and when the District Plan is finally approved which may be some time during the summer months.

On the 19th March 2018 our planning meeting had members from Thundridge and Wareside in attendance. Thundridge are well ahead with their neighbourhood plan and Wareside, I understand, will be preparing their own.

Therefore, Ware Town Council has agreed to re-convene their own Neighbourhood Plan and we will require stakeholders and members of our local community to work alongside us as their ideas, views and local knowledge will provide a very important and welcome contribution to Ware Town Council. Successful NPs will be adopted by East Herts and they will work alongside the District Plan. For example recommendations contained within a successful adopted Neighbourhood Plan will be measured against the District Plan.

Ware Town Council Planning Committee realise the gridlock which we face on a daily basis with the potential increases in development and we must strive to highlight these traffic implications to East Herts District Council. Car parking issues and infrastructure should be highlighted as a necessity within our Neighbourhood Plan and will play a significant part towards development success.

Dog fouling remains an issue in both our streets and green spaces and we urge the public to be vigilant in these areas which are being abused by some irresponsible dog owners