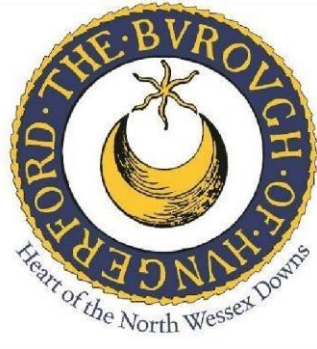


HUNGERFORD TOWN COUNCIL

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DRAFT MINUTES of the **Full Council Meeting** held on Monday 6th January 2025 at 7.00pm in the Library, Hungerford.

Present: Cllrs, Simpson, Fyfe, Keates, Winsor, Cole, Coulthurst, Reeves, Alford, Hudson, Montgomery, Carlson.

Also present: Representatives from Penny Post, the Adviser and Newbury News. Several members of the public including representatives from local businesses and the Chamber of Commerce. District Cllr Denise Gaines (DG) from West Berks Council (WBC)

In attendance: Town Clerk, (TC) and RFO.

Police report. (refer to our website for the full report). The Mayor read out the report and added she had been informed that due to a cut in funding from central government Hungerford are potentially at risk of losing our Sergeant and instead Hungerford & Downlands would be grouped with Thatcham. The Mayor requested support of the council to rally against this decision

ACTION: The Mayor will bring this concern to the attention of the MP and Police & Crime Commissioner.

FC2025001 **Note apologies for absence.** Cllrs Armstrong and Knight
Apologies also from, District Cllrs Benneyworth (DB) and Vickers (TV) from West Berks Council

FC2025002 **Declarations of interest** – None

FC2025003 **Approval of Minutes of the meeting of the Full Council of 2nd December 2024 and outcome of actions**

Proposed: Cllr Simpson

Seconded: Cllr Cole

Resolution: Minutes of the meeting of 2nd December 2024 were agreed as a true record, one abstention.

Outcome of actions:

The missing cobbles in school alley have been replaced properly and the tarmac repaired. There is a larger area of tarmac nearby that needs improving.

The Clerk has applied for a Members Bid for flower tubs in the High Street. The concerns of members of the public about the lack of visibility of the pedestrian crossing in Charnham Street have been passed onto WBC. The Clerk has fed back HTC's responses on the budget consultation. WBC have been asked if the Hungerford NDP can be added to any extraordinary agenda to be signed off rather than wait until the end of March. This will be done if possible. In the meantime, Cllr Hudson advised some more work is required to be done to the NDP following the change to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). (*It has since been confirmed this is not necessary*)

ACTION Clerk continues to chase progress with costs for cleaning High St footway.

ACTION: Clerk is making necessary amendments to policies following the dissolving of the staff committee.

FC2025004 **Receive Mayor's Report - See attached report.**

FC2025005 **Receive District Councillor's Reports** – DG advised the budget consultation has now finished, and the number of responses could have been better. The review of the NPPF (National Planning Policy

Framework) has resulted in a rise in housing targets from 495 to 1070 new homes in West Berkshire per year. The current Local Plan Review will not include the new numbers, and WBC will instead need to do a refresh of the new policy. Other policies are being put in place like C02 and flooding, which will be universal for all areas making creating local plans much more efficient. Our NDP housing numbers will remain unchanged.

DG explained: West Berks is a small unitary council so may need to join with others as part of the devolution changes however this is not likely to happen in the near future. WBC are taking in rough sleepers during the cold period. Atherton Crescent has been resurfaced and Fairfields Close is also being done. Salisbury road is to be closed for gas leak repairs and the diversion is via Marlborough. Clerk to send the closure details to send to DG as WBC need to ensure that there is sufficient signage in place to avoid lorries diverting along residential roads.

ACTION:

Marlborough TC is looking to deprioritise the route through their town. Concern was raised about the effect this would have on Hungerford. DG thinks it is very unlikely that there would be an agreed diversion on an A road.

- FC2025006** **Health & Safety – Receive any complaints or concerns.** Concern was raised on facebook that some of the main roads were not being gritted. It was confirmed this is infact incorrect as Atherton Hill and the A4 are both included on the gritting route. The gritters come from Chieveley and usually grit overnight.
- FC2025007** **Propose authorisation of payment run** (circulated along with copies of invoices) for December.
Proposed: Cllr Winser
Seconded: Cllr Carlson
Resolution: Authorise payment run of £60,134.91 for December.
- FC2025008** **Propose year to date accounts –** Refer to circulated Income/Expenditure Report.
Proposed: Cllr Winser
Seconded: Cllr Simpson
Resolution: Agree accounts up to 19th December 2024, with a positive variance of £46,561.
- FC2025009** **Receive any reports (no more than 3 minutes per report which cannot contain any proposals).**
The Finance report is attached. No other reports.
- FC20250010** **Confirm Annual Budget and Precept request for April 2025-26 following receipt of tax base.**
Proposed: Cllr Winser
Seconded: Cllr Simpson
Resolution: Agree Annual Precept request for April 2025-26 as £383,939, 4.6% increase on last year. Tax base received is 2514 equating to a Band D figure of £152.72, a 5.21% increase year on year.
- FC20250011** **Consider withdrawing Town Council’s involvement with the Town Centre Steering Group (TCSG) as it currently stands. (This item was taken after item FC2025005 due to members of the public present)** The Mayor has circulated her report to everyone. Cllr Cole commented that he disagrees with the Mayor. They both read out their reports (**please see attached both reports**)
DG has advised WBC that this proposal is being put forward and they are a bit disappointed. She added that there could be possible funding available in the future through CIL and once the Hungerford NDP is in place HTC will receive 25% of CIL money. Unfortunately she thinks it is unlikely the £3,000 funding can be passed to HTC.
A representative from the Chamber of Commerce commented that the TCSG meetings had not achieved anything and they will be withdrawing. It is positive however that the retailers now have a group within the Chamber of Commerce. They will be focussing on other issues such as council tax. A representative from the retailers confirmed that although they were supportive of some sort of town square they will be withdrawing from the TCSG.
Proposed: Cllr Simpson
Seconded: Cllr Winser

Resolution: To withdraw from the TCSG with immediate effect to focus on other projects, one objection.

The Mayor added it can be revisited when funds allow.

PART 2 Confidential

The public and press may be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that publicity might be prejudicial to the public interest as per the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960.

FC20250012 Consider acceptance of contractor's terms –

Proposed: Cllr Simpson

Seconded: Cllr Keates

Resolution: Accept 1-yr contract with Danfo for 6 monthly maintenance checks and LOLER tests and certificates, for the Changing Places Pod, at a cost of £2400.

Proposed: Cllr Fyfe

Seconded: Cllr Alford

Resolution: Accept 1-yr contract with AES to maintain the beds at the Tragedy and both War memorial gardens at an annual cost of £4,320.

Proposed: Cllr Winser

Seconded: Cllr Coulthurst

Resolution: Accept 1-yr contract with Windowflowers, provided they remain competitive when compared with other suppliers. Annual quotation for HTC hanging baskets, window boxes and watering, £4,617. Annual quotation for watering of Smarten Up Hungerford tubs £1,364.

ACTION: Clerk to obtain comparative quotes. It was noted a high standard is required for our upcoming Britain in Bloom entry.

Proposed: Cllr Carlson

Seconded: Cllr Montgomery

Resolution: Accept 1-yr contract with Hungerford Cricket Club to empty 9 litter bins at Rec twice weekly and carry out weedspraying and cutting of cotoneaster hedge, at an annual cost of £1660.

Proposed: Cllr Simpson

Seconded: Cllr Cole

Resolution: Accept a new 1-yr contract with Tactical Facilities to pressure wash all HTC owned benches at a cost of £766.50. Staining and fixing will remain the responsibility of our maintenance man. Photos should be provided before and after washing and a cleaning schedule will be provided by the office as some benches will need cleaning more often than others.

Proposed: Cllr Alford

Seconded: Cllr Reeves

Resolution: Accept a 1-yr contract with Bloom Cleaning to continue cleaning the Croft Field Centre twice a week at an annual cost of £3,081.

ACTION: Clerk will need to obtain comparative quotes for the maintenance of St Lawrences Churchyard in order to agree a 3-yr contract which would be preferable.

FC20250013 Confirm payment to employee no.14 for meeting attendance

Proposed: Cllr Winser

Seconded: Cllr Simpson

Resolution: To pay employee no.14, 6 hours overtime.

FC20250014 Review property rent and contract

Proposed: Cllr Keates

Seconded: Cllr Fyfe

Resolution: To defer responsibility to F&GP for review of the letting agent service.

Proposed: Cllr Winser

Seconded: Cllr Simpson

Resolution: Agree monthly tenancy rent of £1200 with effect from February 2025 renewal.

Meeting closed 8.25pm

Mayors report January 2025

Happy New Year. I hope you've all had a wonderful Christmas break.

As always, the mayor's calendar in December is full of Christmas celebrations.

December 1st Christmas light switch on.

Always a real highlight for the town. I would like to thank all those who contributed to the event and thank the residents for coming out to celebrate with us. A special thank you to our 'Freedom of the Town' awardees who turned on the lights and, continue to be such amazing ambassadors for Hungerford.

Hungerford Primary School Nativity Play

One of the year's highlights is to watch the year two nativity play and this year was amazing as always. I have no idea how such young children remember so many lines without scripts and speak so confidently. Well done year two. Thank you for the kind invitation. The primary school also sang beautifully at the light switch on. The naughty elves were a real highlight. Thank you elfbassadors for looking after the Mayor in the Victorian extravaganza.

Tuesday Club Christmas tea

Always a fun afternoon with the Tuesday Club at Christmas. Thank you for the invitation and for spoiling us with a lovely tea. Everybody had a wonderful time.

John O'Gaunt OAP Christmas party

Congratulations to all the year 11's who were so brilliant at hosting our community. Christmas dinner, mince pies, and bingo. Pretty perfect evening. Thank you for the invite year 11.

Council Christmas Party

This year we decided to host our own council Christmas party. Don't worry, we didn't use public money. Thanks to the JOG pub for hosting the council and for the lovely warm welcome and delicious buffet.

Chamber of Commerce Victorian Extravaganza

A wonderful evening and the weather held off. Congratulations to all those who work so hard to bring this wonderful evening back each year. The Scottish pipe band are incredible, my absolute favourite part of the evening. I love watching the faces of the children. Everyone I spoke to said they had really enjoyed the evening. Well done CofC.

Berkshire Athletics

Berkshire athletics held their event over Hungerford common and asked me to present the medals to the winners. I was delighted to be asked and had an enjoyable afternoon with the team and the athletes.

Hungerford Town Band Christmas Concert

We all had a Christmassy afternoon with the band. A huge collection of Christmas favourites, amazing solo's performances and delicious cake. Thank you, Tim, for allowing Julie, Fiona and I to play the percussion bells nearly in time with the music. Great fun.

Mayors Carol Concert

There is nothing more heartwarming than filling the church to sing Christmas carols, that's exactly what we did. I think around 200 people were present. Thank you to my civic guests and readers, who attended and stayed to enjoy the delicious nibbles produced by Stella and the church.

Chamber of Commerce Christmas party

Thank you to Karen Salmon for hosting us all and for the warm hospitality and nibbles. It was a lovely evening and a great opportunity to talk about recent town events.

Candlelight service St Lawrences

This was the last event of the year. I attended with all three headteachers and MP Lee Dillon. The whole service was held by candlelight, and I was delighted to be asked to read. It was a very special service. We were spoilt again with Stella's nibbles.

New Year Challenges

You may have seen the post from PCC Matthew Barber on the 18th of December

<https://www.thamesvalley-pcc.gov.uk/news/pcc-matthew-barber-responds-to-police-funding-settlement/>

On reading this I was very concerned about Hungerford's neighbourhood police team and what implications this could have locally.

I have now been informed (further details following) that announcements have been made, resulting in West Berkshire losing a neighbourhood Sgt, that Neighbourhood is Hungerford's, and will be a huge blow to our community. The Thatcham Sgt will now look after Hungerford & Downlands as well as Thatcham, this is a huge area to cover and will result in Hungerford getting the worst outcome. I have promised the team I will be contacting the PCC and Thames Valley to try and overturn this decision. There are further changes due to be announced. Sgt Dan Lond has made a significant contribution to Hungerford, and we've seen some real change under his leadership. I know central government funding hasn't been granted but there must be an alternative solution so that our town (furthest West) continues to be policed sufficiently. Thames valley police need to consider their staff and listen to the communities.

We have a continuing amount of drug related crimes in the town and several pockets of anti-social behaviour. The elderly residents in Redwood House have spoken to me over Christmas, they are scared, following two incidents where armed police officers were on site dealing with someone who shouldn't have been on the site. They shouldn't have to be dealing with this behaviour in their retirement years.

I understand there was a large brawl, with number of people involved at the top end of town on New Years Eve. Police officers were called to site as well as the ambulance service. This again is right outside a residential area, housing young families. Hare coursing is also on the increase and needs specialised policing teams to root them out. Hungerford understands we may not have the highest numbers of crime, but those we have are no less distressing when they occur. I think the whole town would agree, because of our location it is vital to have a neighbourhood police team here. I am convinced that having a police Sgt based as far as Thatcham will have significant detrimental impact on the town. Dan and his team will have my full support. I hope HTC will do all it can to raise awareness.

Cllr Helen Simpson
Town Mayor

FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES REPORT FOR FULL COUNCIL MEETING ON 6TH JANUARY 2025 MONTH 9 INCOME & EXPENDITURE REPORT FOR DECEMBER 2024

101 FINANCE:

Full Precept received. £744 Bank Interest received.

102 ADMINISTRATION:

Net Income over Expenditure is a £1.933 positive variance.

103 GRANTS & DONATIONS:

A £50 Grant was paid this month.

104 POOL HOUSE:

Net Income over Expenditure is a £100 positive variance.

105 CONTINGENCY:

No Expenditure this month.

106 TOURISM SUPPORT BUDGET:

No Expenditure this month.

107 ENVIRONMENT & PLANNING:

£6 Payment for Land Registry Fees.

109 HUNGERFORD 2036 PROJECT:

No Expenditure this month.

201 RECREATION & AMENITIES:

Net Income over Expenditure is an £840 positive variance.

202 WAR MEMORIAL GROUND:

Net Expenditure is a £120 negative variance this month.

203 ST SAVIOURS:

Net Income over Expenditure is a £163 positive variance.

204 CROFT FIELD:

Net Income over Expenditure is a £917 positive variance.

205 LIBRARY MAINTENANCE COSTS:

Net Expenditure is a £463 negative variance due to roof repairs of £963.

206 TRIANGLE FIELD:

Net Income over Expenditure is an £562 positive variance.

Town Centre Steering Group (TCSG) – Cllr Simpson

Following on from HTC's December full council meeting. I would like to share my thoughts on possible next steps. I have collected views, opinions, and sat with my own thoughts over the Christmas break.

HTC has held a place on WBC's TCSG for about a year, responsibilities were devolved to HTC when funding and resources from WBC were reduced. Despite our very best efforts, it has become almost impossible to move forward.

I believe we were all there to achieve something positive for Hungerford. Every group member was there because of their expertise, position or to represent an organisation. However, the TCSG has been unable to work together without disagreement. Every member protecting their own interests. This isn't a negative, however it has made it hard to agree a collective way forward without a great deal of compromise.

WBC were unable to bring enough funding to the table in-order to move the project ideas forward. At the 11th hour a sum of £3k has been found to help this process (largely due to James). Unfortunately, this sum is not enough to bring the ideas forward, leaving HTC needing to find three or four times this, to do a topographical survey, drawings and a public consultation on our ideas.

Living in the town for as long as I have, I feel residents would be more interested in the grass being cut, dog poo bins remaining, and the health and well-being of residents being a higher priority than a future ambition, which may or may not be delivered for which there is currently no funding. HTC has proved we can punch above our weight and deliver huge projects. The Croft activity centre, the skatepark, Library, HYCC, to name just a few.

As I've said this hasn't been easy for any of us, damaging long standing relationships and good working practices is not something any of us signed up for.

I will be proposing on Monday that HTC should withdraw our support and management from the TCSG with immediate effect. Instead concentrating on the many town aspirations, on-going projects, and potentially some devolution services from WBC.

I would like WBC to consider passing the £3k of available funding to Hungerford town council, so that we can continue to build the pot for future town improvements. Working from the short list of more achievable goals from the TCSG list. I believe these projects are better managed through HTC, consulting when we need to with stakeholders.

Cllr Helen Simpson
Town Mayor

Town Centre Steering Group (TCSG) Report – Cllr James Cole

Thank you, Helen.

The key things to me are that

- TCSG has been a West Berks Council committee to advise West Berks on real needs for improving Hungerford's Town Centre.
 - It was created because people of Hungerford made the effort to respond to a West Berks-inspired survey done by some West Berks-appointed consultants. There was a much higher response rate from the town than we would normally expect for such a survey
 - Some of us came to dread turning up to TCSG meetings because the meetings became so toxic. I don't propose discussing the toxicity this evening
 - TCSG is a mechanism for getting money to Hungerford, but it was started at a time when West Berks was running out of money
 - Most High Streets are dying – political parties are not the primary cause but one newspaper claims that High Street shop closures are predicted to climb by a third after the current government's tax raid. This problem is not going away.
- Apart from the lack of money nothing has actually changed from the original aims. It is my view that
- The time will come again when there is money to spend
 - There remains a responsibility to look after the wishes of the people of the town that made the effort to respond to that survey
 - The major aggravation in what the TCSG was trying to do was the so-called Town Square. It was and remains a sensible idea to improve the centre of Hungerford. Adrian Gilmour's survey actually showed that the traders are in favour of a Town Square. There will be an acceptable way to do it.
 - It is anti-democratic to ignore the wishes of the town as a result of the demands of a very small group with heavily vested interests

It comes down to “do you throw the baby out with the bathwater?”

There was always an overlap between TCSG and this council – I don’t see the overlap as a real issue and I do think the mechanism is worth retaining

I will not vote for this proposal.