

PADDOCK WOOD TOWN COUNCIL
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MINUTES OF A TOWN MEETING to be held on TUESDAY 9TH AUGUST 2022 at The Winter Hall, St Andrews Church, Paddock Wood AT 7 PM.

PRESENT: Cllr Meryl Flashman, in the Chair

From Paddock Wood Town Council:
Cllr H Atkins, R Atkins, D Boyle, T. Bisdee,
S. Hamilton, R. Moon, M Ridger

From Tunbridge Wells Borough Council:
Paddock Wood Ward members – Cllrs R Atkins, M Bailey, R. Moon,
S. Wakeman
Members of TWBC Cabinet – Cllrs B. Chapelard, (Leader of the
Council) W. Fitsimmons, D. Hayward, H. Pound, N. Warne

From Kent County Council:
Cllr S. Hamilton

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs N Reay, Town Clerk, Mr C Smith, Estates Manager
100 approx. residents

APOLOGIES: Town Council: Cllr A Mackie, D. Sargison, R. Turk, C. Williams
Borough Council: Cllrs L Everitt, J Rutland

1. **CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME & INTRODUCTION**

The Chairman opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending, in particular the Cabinet members from TWBC.

The Chairman explained that the reason she had called the meeting was to discuss TWBC proposals to remove the 1-hour free parking in the Commercial Road Car parks.

The Town Council first heard about the proposals in early July and had not been consulted by the Borough Council. The Town Council strongly objected to the proposals and the chairman attended, along with PW Business Association, 3 Borough Council meetings to speak against the proposals.

Signed Chairman:

Date:

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The Chairman also outlined the background to the loss of the original 2-hour free parking in 2017 and the contribution the Town Council already makes to the car park costs

The Chairman's full statement is attached to these minutes Appendix A.

2. **TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL**

The Chairman invited representatives from TWBC Cabinet to address the meeting.

Borough Councillor Nancy Warne Cabinet Member for Rural Communities (and Deputy Leader) addressed the meeting.

She thanked the residents for attending and stated that the cabinet members were here to listen to what was said. It was important to for them to hear what works for the town and what was promised in the past. They would then take the comments back for review.

Borough Councillor David Hayward, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Transparency, then addressed the meeting. He wanted to reassure residents that transparency was important to the Borough Council.

He then explained that the new Borough Partnership which leads the Council following the local elections in May is made up of Liberal Democrats, Tunbridge Wells Alliance (TWA) and Labour councillors, and the independent councillor for Paddock Wood (East). The partnership felt that the Finances of the Council needed to be addressed as a priority. An in-year budget review was carried out including the fees and charges.

The removal of the free parking is not a "done deal." The Tunbridge Wells Agreement was not taken into consideration, and he apologised for that.

The TW Alliance is opposed to the removal of free parking and was in favour of retaining free periods of parking. There may be better ways to increase income – particularly to increase enforcement.

3. **STATEMENT FROM RICHARD BARSELY, PADDOCK WOOD BUSINESS ASSOCIATION.**

Mr Barsley recounted the recent history of the carparks – prior to 2016 there was 2 hours free parking. At that time TWBC contacted the businesses and town council to advise that they needed increase costs – not as a profit stream. PWBA produced a plan to increase income for the car parks without increasing the costs. However, the borough council also advised that a further £20,000 was required to resurface the car parks – this has still not been carried out, even though the 2nd free hour was removed.

BC has claimed that there has been no drop in usage in the car parks following the loss of the free 2nd hour.

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Two petitions have been conducted – one online and one paper. The online petition has been disallowed, as has the Southborough online petition. The paper petition has been allowed and will be considered at the October Borough Council meeting after the charges are proposed to be introduced. There are over 1500 signatures on the paper petition.

There is now an online consultation, with 5 questions. Mr Barsley urged everyone to complete the consultation.

A copy of Mr Barsleys statement is appended to the minutes (appendix B)

4. The meeting was opened to the ward councillors to comment and then the residents.

Borough Cllr M Bailey (East Ward)

Cllr Bailey thanked residents for attending and BC Hayward for his assessment of the situation.

He stated that it was the worst policy he had seen since becoming a councillor and made the following points:

- Consumer confidence was at an all-time low
- No benefit to anyone
- In March 56% were looking to reduce the amount they spend on parking
- Due to come in in October when household bills expected to rise
- There was a 27% fall in parking income when the 2-hour free parking was reduced to 1 hour
- Will not come into Town Centre
- Look for alternative free parking – either illegal parking or in residential streets
- Waitrose may have to tighten up parking policies
- Commercial providers maintain EV chargers

Cllr Bailey called on the cabinet to scrap the plans.

Borough Councillor R Moon

Cllr Moon raised the following points:

- If the borough council reserves are looked at there are over £200 m in reserves (this figure was later corrected to £20m)
- In unprecedented cost of living increase
- did not have to set emergency budget.
- No discussion on decision.
- Most of the car parks in TW have different charges – not uniform.
- 75% increase in costs in Paddock Wood
- There was no consultation as per the TW Agreement with the parishes

Cllr Moon urged the residents to make their view known

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Borough Cllr R Atkins (East Ward)

Cllr Atkins made the following points:

- He had previously objected to the loss of the 2nd free hour as a Town Councillor
- It will impact on both businesses and residents
- All four ward councillors are opposed to the charges

Cllr Atkins urged all residents to respond to the parking consultation.

County Cllr S Hamilton

CC Hamilton made the following points:

- Businesses are struggling
- Need to keep the one hour free, but should give back the two free hours
- Three things affect town's viability – car parking, online shopping and out of town centres

Cllr H Pound (Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning)

Cllr Pound agreed that the Council had made a mistake with the proposals. However, they had inherited a deficit. They were here to listen to resident concerns and open a dialogue. The council did not have much money and needed to debate on whether to increase costs or cut services.

The chairman then opened the meeting to residents' comments which were as follows:

- Very little levelling up to be seen from TWBC, Paddock Wood is treated as the poor relation
- Lack of joined up thinking
- The borough does not support its own residents
- It costs £60/year for a residents parking permit in Commercial Road – if the plans go ahead then residents will not be able to park as visitors will park on the road. They already struggle to find parking spaces 2 -3 nights a week
- Improved enforcement of parking restrictions in Commercial Road would generate income. Illegal parking is often ignored
- If the car parks are underutilised, they may become vulnerable to development
- The Town Council had in the past looked at taking over the car parks but struggled to get the necessary information and the discussions stalled.
- The Town Council has also tried to discuss taking over the Wesley Centre, but again the discussions stalled
- The Borough Council needs to be innovative
- Mrs H Atkins advised that she had brought a copy of the online petition which she had started when she first discovered the proposals. Cllr Chapelard accepted the copy of the petition.
- The elderly don't like the new machines and will go elsewhere if it is difficult to park
- Little faith in anything the borough council says

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- Residents from surrounding villages will not come to Paddock Wood if the parking is not free
- Residents, businesses, and Town Council need to be listened to
- Frustrating when the new machines do not work
- Visitors travel from a wide area to visit the shops
- Need actions not words
- People move to Paddock Wood for its location and transport
- Where will people shop when the new developments are completed
- Enforcement is not working and needs to be improved – there were strong feelings at the meeting on this matter

Cllr B Chapelard, Leader of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council addressed the meeting after listening to residents' comments.

The Tunbridge Wells Partnership had been running the council for 77 days after 24 years of the previous administration.

There was a deficit on the budget of £944K. That will increase to £2.6 m in 2023/24 if nothing is done.

The choice is to raise revenue or cut services, which no one wants to do.

Funds also need to be found to renew the waste contract, sports centre contracts and parks and gardens contracts.

He had attended the meeting to listen and would be happy to have a discussion with the town council regarding the future of the car parks. He will also look at the enforcement situation.

The Borough Partnership did not want to harm the local economy.

4. MOTIONS

The following motions were put to the meeting:

Proposed by Mr P Smith, Commercial Road,

Seconded by Mr H Atkins, Goldfinch Close

We the residents and on behalf of the businesses in Paddock Wood demand that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council re-instate the 2-hour free parking in the town, install pay as you go parking fee system and look to gain further income from effective street parking enforcement. This to be done via full discussion, sharing of figures and data with the residents, businesses, and service providers in the town.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Signed Chairman:

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Proposed by Mrs H Atkins, Goldfinch Close
Seconded by Mrs M Sinclair, Nursery Road

We demand that the borough council accept the online petition as they have accepted the paper petition.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

The chairman thanked the residents and the cabinet members for attending the meeting. She also stated that the Town Council and Business Association would like to engage with the Borough Council.

Meeting closed at 8.45 pm.

DRAFT

Signed Chairman:

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