

PADDOCK WOOD TOWN COUNCIL
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MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING held on Wednesday 5th April 2023 at the Paddock Wood Community Centre, Maidstone Road, Paddock Wood at 7p.m.

PRESENT: Cllr M Flashman, in the Chair
Cllrs D Boyle, M Ridger, D. Sargison, R. Turk

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs N Reay, Town Clerk,
Mr C Smith Estates Manager,
Borough Cllr M Bailey
51 residents

1. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME AND REPORT

Paddock Wood Town Council aims to provide residents with a high standard of service, and I want to take this opportunity to update you on a number key achievements and set out some challenges and opportunities for the year ahead.

This has been my busiest year as Chairman of Paddock Wood Town Council with many things going on which have required the involvement of the Town Council.

Town Council members, along with our consultant, continued to attend the hearings relevant to Paddock Wood about the draft local plan being held until the summer of 2022. Since then, we have continued to follow developments with the Inspector asking that some of the draft local plan policies be revisited. This may reduce the amount of housing being placed in Paddock Wood due to concerns about building on the flood plain. The downside is that there will be less money to spend on infrastructure projects.

Alongside this the Town Council has been taking forward its own Neighbourhood Plan and more detail on this can be found in the annual report. I should like to take the opportunity to thank all the members of the steering group who spent so much of their own time pulling together the draft Neighbourhood Plan. Without their support Paddock Wood Town Council would not have been able to produce this document. We look forward to the referendum which will take place in the Autumn.

Last summer Tunbridge Wells Borough Council announced that Paddock Wood would be losing its one-hour free parking. Along with our Borough Cllrs, County Councillor, and the Business Association the town council successfully fought a campaign which resulted in the retention of the one hour's free parking in our two car parks. Unfortunately, this is likely to only be a short term victory with TWBC likely to renew their attempts once the elections have taken place in May.

Signed Chairman:

Date:

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During the course of the last year the Boundary Commission has undertaken a review of the TWBC electoral and boundary arrangements to make sure they are fair. Their review included two rounds of public consultation and their final recommendations are due in May 2023. It is expected that Paddock Wood will in future only have 3 Borough Councillors and that part of Paddock Wood will be combined with Capel and Pembury to form a new ward. The Town Council along with all but one of the other rural parishes fought hard but it appears unsuccessfully to prevent this and other changes happening.

Recently, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council voted to declare the Wesley Centre surplus to requirements in their latest Asset Management Plan. This was despite strong local opposition which was extremely disappointing. At this time the future of the Wesley Centre is uncertain. On a positive note, I was very excited to be handed the keys of the new Paddock Wood Community Centre at the beginning of March. The next challenge is to prepare the centre for opening. I must thank all those members of the working party who have and continue to support this work.

We continue to be fortunate with both our office staff and our estates staff. Our thanks go to them all.

I would also like to thank all the Town Councillors for their contributions over the past year. We are all unpaid volunteers who give up our own time in order to represent our community. Our powers are limited but we aim to work with and influence the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Kent County Council whenever we can. In May 2023 elections will be held to elect a new town council. After 20 years of being a town councillor and five years as Chairman I have very sadly, due to my husband's ill health, made the decision not to seek re-election this year.

If you require any further information regarding matters affecting Paddock Wood, please do get in touch with us via the Town Council office or the Town Council website. You can also follow the Council on Facebook and Twitter.

2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a) The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on the 11th May 2022 were signed and approved.
- b) The minutes of the Town Meeting held on the 9th August 2022 were signed and APPROVED.

3. **HERITAGE PADDOCK WOOD**

Representatives from Heritage Paddock Wood addressed the meeting and gave a very interesting talk on the development of railways and education in Paddock Wood.

The talk was accompanied by old photographs which the group holds in its archives.

The group is based in the Wesley Centre which was built in 1888 and is the oldest public building remaining in Paddock Wood.

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As had been previously mentioned the future of the centre was uncertain, but Heritage Paddock Wood advised that they aspired to turn the Wesley Centre into an arts and cultural centre as a satellite to the Amelia Centre in Tunbridge Wells. A questionnaire was available for residents to complete.

The Group can be followed on their Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/heritagepaddockwood/?locale=en_GB

The Chairman thanked the group for their presentation.

4. **COMMUNITY GRANTS**

The following local groups who have received grants from the Town Council in the financial year 2022/23.

Paddock Wood Community Advice Centre £12,000

The Town Council was thanked for its generous support of the Advice Centre. Over the last 12 months the centre had worked 5000 volunteer hours and seen 927 clients.

Of that number 361 were Paddock Wood residents and volunteers had had 7500 contact with clients.

The main issues that volunteers dealt with were:

- Welfare benefits
- Debt
- Consumer issues
- Domestic abuse
- Housing shortages

The centre also helped with benefit appeals and had been successful in 9 out of 11 cases. They also support clients in accessing services as many are now online and difficult to access for some.

The Centre's total expenditure for the year was £40,000.

The Chairman thanked the centre for the work and support they gave to residents.

Bereko

The meeting was given update on the work of the Bereko Committee accompanied by a series of photographs and videos

Paddock Wood Lights Up £500

The following written report was read out to the meeting.

Paddock Wood Lights Up would like to thank PWTC for supporting our event since 2017.

Each year we have been awarded the £500 grant and this has helped us to fund every successful event, as well as contributing to a savings fund which we have spent in 2022 on new technology to enable the streetlight decorations to be switched on at the

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same time as the Christmas tree lights following feedback received from the public at the events.

Paddock Wood Lights Up is a highlight in the social calendar for the town each year with over 3,000 people attending on the last Sunday in November. The event is organised and run by a committee of volunteers who raise over £10,000 each year to make the event happen.

The event is free for everyone to attend and we provide live music and entertainment plus we subsidise activities for the children and Father Christmas' grotto to make it an inclusive community event for all ages.

We are always on the lookout for volunteers to marshal at the event, so if you are free on the last Sunday in November, please get in touch!

Tunbridge Wells Samaritans - £250

A written report was read out to the meeting

The grant generously provided by the council will go towards the running costs of the branch and the alteration works starting shortly to provide a training room. It may help if I explain how Samaritans operate. Samaritans are a national charity and operate through 201 individual branches, all of which run themselves and this is done entirely by volunteers. We do not receive government funding or financial assistance from the central charity, and have to raise our own funds. We are fortunate to own our own building (this was gifted to us many years ago) but we have to find the running costs ourselves. Our branch has 120 listening volunteers and the branch is open every day and night of the week, 365 days a year. Callers can contact us when many other agencies are not available, eg. throughout the night, in the evening, at weekends, on bank holidays (including Christmas Day). Our branch took 43,000 calls last year; providing support by phone (a national free phone number), email, webchat and face to face. We also provide talks to schools and community groups on mental well-being, and we provide support at railway stations and schools should it be needed following a suicide. The annual expenditure for our branch last year was £47,000, and we expect our costs to be similar this year.

We are very grateful for the council's support.

Paddock Wood and District Lions - £500

A written report was read out to the meeting.

In the 2022 financial year, PWTC very kindly provided Paddock Wood & District Lions Club with a grant of £500 towards the running costs of the 'Rockin in the Rec' free entry community music event held on 9th July. The principal costs related to Entertainments, P.A. system, first aid cover, hire of toilets and skip.

The event was very successful, as we were fortunate with the weather for once, and with covid in retreat the public had confidence to attend in large numbers. We are hoping that the event will be equally successful this year, and we acknowledge with thanks PWTC's approval of a grant towards this year's Carnival & Fete.

Grants were also given to 11th Tonbridge Scouts and Baby Umbrella.

5. The chairman invited comments and questions from members of the public
The follows issues were raised:

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- The state of the footpath past the Burrows. It had been reported to KCC but no action had been taken. The resident was advised to contact County Councillor Hamilton to see if she could help.
- The council tax increases – the council was thanked for the detailed information on its website. But further information on the following budgets was requested –
 - Increase on Christmas lights budget – this included the costs of the contract with Gala lights who supplied the lights. However, the increases was due to the necessity for the Town Council to pay for the stress testing of the columns which was due this year.
 - Increase on cemetery costs – installation of a drainage system to try to alleviate historical flooding and the parking spaces
 - Increase in loan repayments – this was to cover the loan for the community centre over 50 years. This had taken out before the significant rise in interest rates.

The clerk advised that if the resident wished to contact the town council office then more details could be given on all these matters
- Was it a nursery or a pre-school which had been built – it would be down to the provider to determine the exact usage but it could be either
- The drainage on the corner of Putlands Field, this had not improved – part of the problem was the granting of planning permission for additional development in this area which decreased the natural drainage. The town council had objected to the developments.
- Litter and graffiti could further bins be installed in Old Kent Road and Maidstone Road – this could be discussed by the Estates Committee when the new council is in place. They could also consider whether to arrange further litter picks. With regards to the new community centre CCTV was in place to protect the building.
- Why is there a delay in opening the community centre? The chairman detailed all the processes & tasks which needed to be completed before the centre could be opened. It was also explained that the council was waiting for a substantial VAT return. The Centre directors had appointed a manager who would be starting shortly.
- Would there be an AV system in place – the wiring was in place and it was hoped that in time there would be
- Will it be affordable for residents to hire – now that the new manager was in place the pricing structure would be worked on. It was intended to keep the pricing as low as possible
- Pinch point on Church Road – this had been removed but signage was still in place and not other improvements had been made. This was a matter for the planning authority as the pinch point had been built as part of the Burrows Development. The Clerk would speak to Borough Councillor Atkins who had been involved previously with this.
- When were the improvements to the Badsell Road Junction going to take place? This was a matter for KCC – but the council understands that there are problems with flooding on the junction which need sorting out

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- Concern was expressed by several residents about speeding in Paddock Wood and that there was a need for calming. This is something that could be included in the Highways Improvement Plan.
- Could the Town Council ask for additional no littering signs in the town centre
- Can the Memorial Field car park be opened yet? This was on the Town Council agenda for the April meeting.
- Was the council tax increase of 41% a one off? The chairman advised that was the intention.
- Was there going to be a café opened in the Community Centre? The directors were currently looking at the feasibility of having a commercial café whilst allowing hirers use of the kitchen.
- Some general comments regarding the community centre project were made as follows:
 - ❖ Poor communication which allowed rumours to circulate
 - ❖ Some of the issues which had been explained should have been taken into account.
 - ❖ Residents felt left in the dark.

It was pointed out that the directors and town councillors were all volunteers who gave up their own time to do the work.

The Chairman closed the meeting by saying that whilst the council had planned ahead as much as possible there were some things which could not be planned for. However, she was convinced that the new centre would be an asset for the town. Paddock Wood had waited a long time for a community centre.

Residents were thanked for attending and invited to take a look around the new centre.

The meeting closed at 8.40 pm

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