

Minutes of the **ANNUAL PARISH MEETING** of Ross-on-Wye
Held on Monday 25th April 2022 at 7.30PM
At the Larruperz Centre, Grammar School Close, Ross-on-Wye

1 Welcome from the Mayor of Ross-On-Wye

Cllr John Winder thanked all those present for attending and welcomed them to the Annual Parish Meeting. The Mayor went through some housekeeping notices.

2 Minutes of the Previous Annual Parish Meeting

To receive the minutes of the previous Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 24th May 2021.

IT WAS RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 24th May 2021 be signed as a true record of the meeting.

3 Mayor's Annual Report

Councilor Winder reported that the Council had been active over the last year and was pleased to report he felt things were getting back to normal post pandemic. He reported it was noticeable that plenty of people were visiting the town again and the Deputy Mayor and staff had been busy with the new notice boards and maps. The yarnbombing events around the town looked great, the first Equinox Festival last September had been successful, a new initiative in the Market Place to encourage buskers was being looked at, the Queen's jubilee celebration events were in hand with support for street parties through grant funding, and souvenirs for primary school children.

The Town Council had been busy coordinating work at the Rope Walk to provide more play park facilities and investigations were in hand at North Ward looking at a new play facility in that area.

Funding from Herefordshire Council (HC) in the sum of £350k had been earmarked for road resurfacing projects around Ross, as well as government funding which has been used on a number of projects including the Town & Country Trail and a proposed extension to the Buggy Route towards Wilton Bridge. The funding would also provide new Christmas Lights this year which would be unveiled in November. The Community, Markets & Tourism sub-committee had approved a hedgehog design for the new lights, being the symbol of Ross. Gloucester Rd wall had been repaired last year and works to restore the War Memorial at the Prospect had been completed in time for the Jubilee and Armed Forces events in June thanks in part to funding from the War Memorial Trust.

There had been a number of mayoral activities over the last year including 'brave the shave' last June which raised over £1800 for Enviroability. As there had not been plans to hold a civic service or formal event, a pub quiz/supper took place at the Sports Centre raising over £1500. The Mayor thanked all those who had attended and donated towards his Charity.

4 Presentations from Council's Grant Scheme recipients

Ross Sports Centre (RSC)

Tony Featherstone Chairman from RSC spoke about the grant towards the new container which had been purchased. He reported that the RSC had been flooded twice during 2019 and 2020, in addition to the pandemic and the Centre had suffered a lot of challenges since he had taken over as chair. There was a lot of damage caused with trees down after the storms along with other problems at the centre which included difficulties with the showers and toilets which needed updating. After a lot of effort their vision has been realised with the new unisex and all accessible toilets, a larger bar area, new showers, with full compliance to provide a referee suite for changing. Further funding is awaited from HC.

Every square inch of the building was utilised within the renovation plans but this left no room for storage space which caused a problem. The grant provided an answer in the form of a lockable secure container in close proximity to the building and the Town Council contribution funded 50% of the total cost and a big thank you was given to the Town Council.

Ross Tourism Association (RTA)

Caroline Utting, Chair of RTA thanked the Town Council for the grant towards their latest project. Since 2015 there had been a withdrawal by the County Council for funding for tourism, and it was gratifying to receive support for tourism from Ross Town Council (RTC). Since 2018/19 there has been a committee with a budget to spend on tourism and towards raising the profile of the town and make the visitor experience a better one. This has seen the provision of maps, trails and guides which have been part of the local offering. RTA has received several grants and the most recent one is for the redesign and print of the Ross Heritage Trail which has a map showing a series of interests around the town for people to follow. It had been in high demand and last year all the previous copies had become depleted and needed replenishing. The trail is based on the Blue Plaque Scheme which was a former mayor's project. A number of other funders have also contributed towards the up to date version which is currently going to print. RTC was thanked for the contribution which along with donations and sponsorship from others would mean that 5000 copies could be printed.

Ross Lions & Rotary

Louise Hamilton spoke about this year's pancake races which took place on 27th February, which were funded in part by RTC. The event had previously been organised by local traders, but this was a new joint venture by the Lions & Rotary, and it was expected this would become an annual event. It was a nonprofit event run by the charitable organisations as a social occasion for everyone in Ross to join in. The funding was to cover the Road Closure Notice and consumables, there was match funded provided by Lions & Rotary too. A lot of advertising was done to ensure good coverage of the event. It was open to all age groups and on the day 14 races took place with 100 entrants and approx. 300 spectators. The Deputy Mayor presented the prizes, and the afternoon was enjoyed by residents and visitors.

Ross Christmas Carnival

Brian Marshall, the Carnival Secretary/Treasurer spoke and advised that the Carnival had been taking place for over 60 years, with the aim of bringing the Christmas spirit to Ross, a procession from Brookend St to the Market House takes place where 'goody bags' are distributed to the children. The Committee comprises 4 people at present, but more are welcome and fresh ideas are always being looked for. The event costs £1500 to put on, funding is provided through support from RTC, sponsorship, donations from traders and collections. There were concerns that without more committee members it might not be able to continue, and younger people were sought to bring fresh ideas. Mr Marshall expressed his thanks for the grant funding and his gratitude to the office staff too for their help.

Ross Tennis Centre Community Interest Company (CIC)

John Pelly, a director of the CIC and a chair of the Management Committee spoke about the importance of defibrillators and his gratitude for the funding towards the cost of the purchase and installation of one at the Tennis Centre. With 225 members over a mixed age profile it was noted there is a high proportion of older members, some with cardiac problems. He expressed his view this purchase was a responsible choice to ensure there was a facility for anyone suffering from cardiac arrest. Enquiries had been made about what other defibs. were located in close proximity but there was nothing close to the Tennis Centre. Research into the types of machines was undertaken and a charity was chosen to supply one, along with providing a training and support package. It was installed in January and had already been featured on RTC's latest newsletter – it is there and thankfully so far not been used. Thanks were given to RTC for their generosity in helping to fund it.

5 Launch of 5 Year Plan

Cllr Utting reported that the idea of developing a Plan had started in 2019 under Cllr Roberts' mayorship. It was recognised this would assist with prioritising funds and ensure value for money could be delivered for the residents of Ross through the precept. There were a number of projects identified but due to Covid there had been a delay in delivering them and since then it had stalled. Towards the end of December 2021 another 'away day' had to be cancelled due to the increasing number of Covid cases and a virtual meeting took place which resulted in a range of ideas being brought forward. The

purpose would be ensuring support of the Town Council's vision of serving the people of Ross-on-Wye and its passion about ensuring it is a vibrant place for residents, businesses and visitors and to make the town a welcoming place.

To progress the strategy the projects had been broken down into 3 categories, Economy, Wellbeing and Arts & Culture.

It was noted that with the town's annual budget of approx. £550k per annum, £135k had been set aside as discretionary funds towards capital projects/events which was not part of the Council's operational costs. One of the projects identified was to refurbish the Market House, another one was supporting the provision of tables under the Market House. There was other expenditure necessary for revenue costs for staff to deliver services such as grounds maintenance. RTC recognised that council taxpayers should not be paying twice for things such as street cleansing, which HC should be providing.

The Plan sees 30 projects across a range of ideas and included putting on 3 main events, rewilding, repairs to the façade of the Corn Exchange, renovations to the Market House. Those present were invited to express their views about the proposals and were encouraged to use this opportunity by ranking in order of preference their priorities.

This was not a plan where the priorities would remain static, it was envisaged it would be reviewed every 6 months to enable the costs to be built into the budget setting.

Councillor Utting reminded those present that the last year's council tax contribution to RTC had not risen but that a 2% increase had been agreed for the coming year. The Council had not set a balanced budget and the deficit would be funded from reserves but with inflation likely to hit between 7-8% this would inevitably see increased costs, but the Council's finances were in a good position.

6 Matters raised by Ross-on-Wye Residents

A resident requested an update on the situation at Homs Road Car park as there are often not any spaces available due to its heavy use. Whilst a free car park is useful it appears to be used primarily for people going to work in Ross who leave their cars all day. There is no blue badge area – what is happening? Cllr Utting responded to the question and expressed his sadness that the Council had not shown any vision with the car parking area when it was taken over. Ideas are being sought and options looked at by one of the committees, but costs need to be carefully looked at to make sure the costs to run it are not increased by efforts to carry out enforcement measures. There is not a deadline for the project to be completed as there are currently other priorities.

A question was asked about Metcalfe Close as vehicles are causing problems accessing the Rowing Club, there is a stream of lorries and cars down the access road. Why is the gate not being kept closed – what is RTC doing? The resident asked why the cars are allowed to travel down there at such speed past Metcalfe Close creating potentially dangerous situations. Cllr Winder advised this is an on-going situation and negotiations are in hand to try and find a solution. A request was made to hurry up with discussions before a fatality happens. A plea to the resident to write to the Rowing Club was made to request that drivers to the Club take more care in reducing their speed, also to contact the Police using 101 to mention concerns about the speeding traffic and abuse from drivers.

Local efforts in Ross for Ukraine were mentioned, the success of the operation was undeniable and those involved had shown a huge degree of dedication. More donations needed to be made and information shared to ensure that everyone was reminded to keep collecting. Thanks to local resident Katie Fowler were given.

A resident spoke to express their disappointment of the news that Ross Carnival is not going ahead again this year and asked if RTC plans to fill the slot to put on an event. Cllr Lister advised that discussions have started, and a number of residents and volunteers have begun to plan a 'family fun day'. Sponsorship is sought along with crowd funding and volunteers are sought to support the event and get involved on the day. Cllr Winder advised that there is a budget line for the Summer Carnival and therefore the funds could be used to enable an event to go ahead on the Ropewalk this summer.

A trader spoken on behalf of Ross Business Association, she noted that lots of tourists are now coming into the town and appreciating the range of great independent shops. Lately remarks had been heard about the town looking shabby and dirty, and whilst it was appreciated that RTC recognises residents should not be paying twice through their rates, BBLP is not taking responsibility. RTC staff were doing a great job, but BBLP was letting the side down by allowing cigarette ends, dirt, food along with an accumulation of other detritus to be left. A question was asked as to whether a new job could be created to employ someone with a hand cart to clean up the town with the priority being the Market Place and town centre. She felt Ross was in competition with other towns in the region and Ross needed to look the part, to encourage tourists to come, and work towards bringing people into the town, but it does need to be tidy and clean. Lots of new businesses are being attracted to the town and we must make sure the town was clean. Concerns about a lack of litter bins outside pubs was raised, and a question was raised as to why business owners are not taking responsibility to clear up outside their own premises. Cllr Stark reported there were issues in the Ward and he had been identifying where the problems were, but he felt people's attitudes needed to change, in parallel to this there needed to be a campaign in town to bring about a change to behaviour and bring some pride back to the town. BBLP had seen significant funding cuts coupled with austerity and there had been no change to BBLP activities but there was no increased funding from HC to carry out this work. It was suggested that RTC promote a campaign to encourage better behaviour. Enforcement was another area which could be pushed, and the Code of Practice for Littering and Refuse specifies standards through national legislation which HC has a duty to uphold. This measure could be used to lobby HC to bring streets back to standard within a specified time frame, it was a powerful tool. People were encouraged to report problem areas to HC to ensure that action could be taken, this would build pressure to see changes. Street Litter Control Notices could be issued with businesses so that they have to take action outside their premises, pressure must be brought and this could be done through reporting complaints to HC.

Another resident drew attention to state of School Lane and the bags of rotting rubbish and rat infestations which had resulted as mountains of refuse were being left for weeks. Public awareness campaigns had already been talked about, but it had proved difficult in the past to establish who was responsible for the area. It was reported this was part of the Highways network and was within the remit of HC as part of their maintenance plan and should therefore be reported to them. It was noted that part of the problem was due to the fact there were no household bins for some of the properties, further investigations would be made and people were urged to continue reporting the problems via 'fix my street' or HC's website.

A question was asked about highways as the roads in Ross were very uneven and what was going to be done to ensure areas were identified for resurfacing.

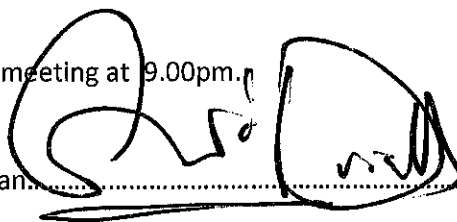
A thank you was given for those responsible for the tree planting along Long Acre.

A question about the markets was asked as to why they were so sparsely attended, a response about setting up the Markets Working Group was provided, and it was hoped that this was something which could be built up once again.

In closing the Mayor reminded those present to ensure they had their say about priorities in the 5 year plan.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 9.00pm.

Chairman.....



Date.....

2/3/22