

Minutes of the **ANNUAL PARISH MEETING** of Ross-on-Wye
Held on Thursday 2nd March 2023 at 7.30PM
At the Larruperz Centre, Grammar School Close, Ross-on-Wye

1 Welcome from the Mayor of Ross-On-Wye

Councillor Ed. O'Driscoll thanked all those present for attending and welcomed them to the Annual Parish Meeting and advised everyone of some housekeeping notices.

He paid tribute to Joyce Thomas who had recently passed away, and reminded those present that she had been the first woman mayor of Ross-on-Wye.

2 Minutes of the Previous Annual Parish Meeting

To receive the minutes of the previous Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 25th April 2022.

IT WAS RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 25th April 2022 be signed as a true record of the meeting.

3 Mayor's Annual Report

Councillor O'Driscoll's report is appended to the minutes.

4 Presentations from Council's Grant Scheme recipients

Friday Lunch Club – Sarah O'Neill

The Lunch Club is held weekly at the Larruperz Centre, providing social interaction as well as a 2 course meal, treats and a weekly activity. In addition there is provision within the Group to help with shopping, running errands and generally helping out those in need. The Club has been running for 30 years, some of the members were once volunteers within the group. The current management took over the club 4 years ago and there is now a group of 20 volunteers and 40 members. There are normally 30/35 members meeting weekly, aged 65-95. Everyone is welcome to come, there are some referrals made by local GP Surgeries, CDT, and local advertising to attract people from the surrounding areas. There are weekly car driver volunteers and meals are prepared by the Larruperz staff, they are popular and well received. Public donations and funding make the activities possible, which are entirely self-funded. The fee each member pays goes to cover costs and donations are also made towards the Community Action Bus. The Town Council grant contributed towards supplementing the cost of the meals by £1.00.

St Mary's PCC – Mark Sanderson

The Town Council was thanked for the grant which has been used towards upgrading the Hedgehog Hunt by providing a leaflet with the trail to take around whilst hunting for the 14 hedgehogs within the church. The hedgehog is the town's emblem which has been incorporated into the coats of arms of many local families. The leaflet also included information on local history and a quiz. There has been a good response to the recent Facebook post to encourage people to try the Hunt during the half term holidays.

Ross Refugee Support Group – Margaret King

The Group started last May when the Ukrainians came to the UK. The Town Council grant of £750 has helped support Wednesday evening meetings where English lessons are offered. The money has gone towards textbooks, paper and pens, and providing qualified teachers for the lessons. Part of the Group's role is to help the Ukrainians integrate within the town, and a large grant of £9000 was received from Herefordshire Council would enable more social activities. So far a picnic, Christmas party, Burn's Night supper as well as a pancake evening have been organised. The funding will also be used for day trips, one to London to the Houses of Parliament, social activities are encouraged and there are some very

good musicians and people wanting to be involved with local theatres. There are gardening opportunities at Blake Gardens and a promotional video of the town planned in the summer. Many Ukrainians are now employed within the town. It was reported that people have come across under two different schemes, so it was difficult assessing how many refugees have arrived.

Ross Walkers are Welcome – Harry Britten-Austin

The main purpose of the organisation is to promote Ross as a walking destination. The last annual festival sold over 300 tickets for the programme of walks. This year a new project has been started with the Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and DEFRA to replace styles with gates to improve accessibility. 50 have been identified for replacement in the local area and they will be installed over the coming months. The Town Council funding will enable training for people to install the gates, volunteers from Enviroability and AONB are hoping to start installations at the beginning of April.

5 *Talk of the Town – Don't miss out on becoming a Town Councillor for Ross-on-Wye in May ... come along and hear why you should stand for election now ... Lynda Wilcox from the Herefordshire Association of Local Councils will explain all!*

Lynda Wilcox thanked the Council for inviting her and said this was a good example of a parish meeting, well attended, and an interesting opportunity to hear about local groups and their grant funded projects.

She said that with elections taking place on 4th May, this provided time for people to think about becoming a councillor. She offered information about the Council's schedule of meetings, and explained about a councillors' duty to attend meetings.

Questions were raised about the limited authority of the town council and the relationship with Herefordshire Council (HC), and whether a parish council can affect things which are so important to the town. It was noted that usually things are slow to come to fruition due to a lack of funding but that working in partnership with HC is going to be one means of achieving progress. There is a wide scope of opportunity for parish councils to take on additional responsibilities as this is the only tier of government which is not financially capped.

A question was asked about how many hours per week would be needed to be an effective councillor. The response given indicated that attendance at evening meetings was necessary, this would normally be about twice a month. Some councillors like to throw themselves into the role and spend a lot of time within their communities, but some have less time but have particular skills which they can bring to the Council. Sharing viewpoints is important to ensure that the best possible decisions can be made in the best interests of the community. Councillors can offer as much time as they can give.

The Code of Conduct was seen to be an important protocol showing the need to treat people with respect, and not to use a position on the Council for self-gain. The work should be seen as leaving a legacy for future generations to see.

Training for councillors is available and will be provided, a session for all councillors has already been booked post-election which will offer a synopsis of roles and responsibilities.

6 *Matters raised by Ross-on- Wye Residents*

A comment was made in connection with the poor state of the roads, and a question asked about when Kent Avenue would be done as it is an important route for people going to doctors' surgeries. In addition, Walford Road is in desperate need of resurfacing. One of the ward members responded to

explain about how the priorities have been agreed between HC and the public realm contractors. It was explained that due to the huge cuts there is less funding available and therefore the contract value was declining in spite of there being 2000 miles of road within the County.

A question was asked about the Police Station in Ross, and the local PCSO who was present advised that the police station is open and manned but there is no longer a front counter service, however people ringing the doorbell should get a response. There was a complaint that a resident has tried to ring the bell but didn't receive an answer. It was noted there might be urgent matters which take officers out and also the normal routine rounds. A question was asked about visibility and the need to be seen out, which also results in a lack of availability at the station. A comment was made about response times which need to be looked at as there have been cases where people have an urgent need which is not responded to in a timely manner. A report was made on a new initiative 'Neighbourhood Matters' – people were encouraged to sign up as the service offers updates on a whole range of policing matters which gives information on the local area.

A question was asked about what was happening at the Ryefield Centre, and a member within the voluntary sector advised that HC had approached community representatives with a view to taking on a lease for some of the space. It is anticipated that HC might be repurposing part of the building for its own uses.

A question was raised about the Broadmeadow site and whether there was an application for a Change of Use. It was noted that the current planning condition use is still in force, and it is unlikely that anything will happen quickly.

A question was asked about the Council's grant scheme and a comment about the Scouts having received funding to buy visual and audio equipment to enhance their activities.

A question was asked about whether HC is willing to make change. A response was given which confirmed the need to have a relationship of working together and the parishes supporting HC in delivering their services.

The Chair closed the meeting at 8.50 pm.

Chair.....Date.....

Mayor's Report for Ross-on-Wye Annual Parish Meeting

The last 12 months have been incredibly busy for the Town Council across all areas of responsibility, and it's important I begin this report by thanking all the team at the Corn Exchange for everything they've helped the Council achieve. It is only right and proper their hard work and patience are publicly acknowledged. On a personal note as Mayor they have kept me on the straight and narrow with good humour and understanding.

Aside from the usual activities of the Council we've had some unique challenges to navigate that have taken up considerable resources. Specifically the Jubilee celebrations in June and the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in September which all required a huge amount of work to ensure the necessary protocols were followed. I remember coming into the Corn Exchange offices at 10 in the evening just a couple of hours after the announcement that Queen had died to find the team already working to ensure books of condolence were ready for distribution and preparations for the Accession Proclamation were underway. Operation London Bridge ran smoothly in Ross-on-Wye, and I've received many compliments from various quarters around the County complimenting us on the example this Town Council has set over the last 12 months. Having said all this we are not in a position to sit on our laurels as before my Mayoral term ends we'll be having a Coronation, and I know plans are now well in hand to ensure Ross celebrates the event in style.

I think it's customary to mention key achievements from the year so I'd now like to list a few of things we've been up to as a Town Council that you may not be aware of:

Highlights from the Amenities Sub-Committee:

- 1) Work has commenced on securing funding for a new play park for North Ward as well as continued improvement to existing play parks with the climbing frame and swings installed at Rope Walk along with facilities for disabled users.
- 2) Funding has been secured for the skate park which means some much-needed improvements will happen in 2023/24.
- 3) The extension to the Buggy Route has been completed as far as Wilton Bridge.

Highlight from the Planning Sub-Committee:

- 1) Significant resurfacing projects have taken place through money secured from the Extraordinary Market Towns Fund. Additional roads and footpaths across the town will be resurfaced over the next few months.

Highlight from the Finance and Property Sub-Committee:

- 1) Final designs for Phase II of the Market House Repairs were commissioned and have been received. We have now engaged the services of an external fundraiser and we will be applying to a range of potential funders over the coming weeks. This project has taken considerable time, but the last 12 months have seen significant progress, and we are now hopeful work will be able to commence in the coming months.

Highlights from the Community Markets and Tourism Committee:

- 1) Jubilee celebrations were very successful with 17 groups receiving money for street parties as well as a major public event at the bandstand with the Pasadena Roof Orchestra. This was only made possible through lottery funding.
- 2) A new Town Map was commissioned, and new boards installed around the Town. The response to the design has been exceptionally positive.
- 3) Arts Council funding secured by our Tourism Manager meant we were able to hold the second Equinox Festival. Another funding bid has been submitted this week to support a third festival later this year.

- 4) External funding was secured to purchase new Hedgehog Christmas lights that have also been very well received. Plans are ongoing to increase the number of hedgehogs for Christmas 2023 ... watch this space!
- 5) The Bands in the Park series of concerts proved exceptionally popular, and the Proms in the Park afternoon attracted a very large crowd. These free events have definitely become something of a tradition and will continue this year.
- 6) External funding also enabled the purchase and installation of new Digital Tourist Information Points that will enable visitors to see all the many exciting things Ross has to offer.
- 7) External funding also meant we were able to extend the Museum without Walls trail with four new exhibits. I was informed today that it will now be included in the list of Herefordshire Museums included in the Museums Forum.
- 8) The Christmas Fayre was our most successful to date with 70 stall holders and the biggest crowd we've ever had for the event. Plans are well underway to build on last year and we hope to have around 100 stalls this time around.

It's been a busy year and as you can see there are lots of exciting projects in the pipeline. But these are just some of the headline achievements and the usual day to day business of the Council continues. The toilets continue to get cleaned and the bins get emptied. Once again none of this would happen without the professionalism and teamwork of the Council Staff-

Cllr Ed O'Driscoll Mayor of Ross-on-Wye
2/3/23