

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SOUTH MOLTON TOWN COUNCIL HELD IN THE GARDEN ROOM, THE AMORY CENTRE, SOUTH MOLTON ON TUESDAY 27TH SEPTEMBER 2022 AT 7.00PM

Present: In the Chair: Town Mayor Cllr S. Lock
 Cllr M. Bushell Cllr J. Footman
 Cllr M. Kingdon Cllr R. Herniman
 Cllr P. Henderson Cllr Mrs. C. Lock
 Cllr. M Way Cllr. D. Worden

In Attendance: Mr. A. C. Coates – Town Clerk
 Amy Somerwill- YMCA

1. **PRAYERS**

The meeting was opened in prayer by Cllr Worden

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Cllr Cornelius

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

4. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor read out a letter from the Twinning Town of Bad Bevensen expressing their sorrow at the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Councillor Worden also mentioned that the CEO of Shama expressed their sorrow too.

The Town Clerk read out an email from the owners of South Molton Swimming Pool which stated that it would be closing down with effect from Friday 30th September. Councillors agreed that an Extraordinary Council Meeting should be called within the next two weeks to discuss the closure.

5. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Town Council

26th July 2022

It was RESOLVED that these minutes be approved. Cllr Bushell abstained as he was not present at that meeting.

6. **DCC TO REPORT TO MEMBERS**

Cllr Yabsley was not present at the meeting. However Cllr Way mentioned the dangerous entrance to Mole Ridge Way from North Road as the double yellow lines have still not been put in place. The Town Clerk said he would chase this up with Devon County Council. Cllr Worden commented on the complaints he has received about loose paving slabs. It was mentioned that the only way to get DCC to repair them would be to report them and ask them to repair the surrounding slabs as well.

7. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

None.

8. **QUEEN ELIZABETH II MEMORIAL**

It was unanimously RESOLVED that the following Councillors be members of the Working Party: Cllrs Bushell, Henderson, Worden and C Lock.

Cllr Henderson left the meeting at this point.

9. **YMCA PROGRESS REPORT**

Amy Somerwill discussed the report that was presented to Councillors and there followed a question and answer session. The Councillors thanked Amy for all her hard work at the YMCA.

10. **SOUNDWAVE RADIO**

It was unanimously Resolved to accept the proposal of hosting Soundwave Radio in the old Market Office in the Town Hall for an initial period of 12 months.

11. **REPRESENTATIVES TO REPORT ON MEETINGS ATTENDED**

- a. Cllr Worden mentioned that there been a lot of vandalism of the South Molton in Bloom areas. The Town Clerk reported that all the vandalism had been reported to the Police. Cllr Lock had attended the latest Community Woodlands meeting and he reported that the erection of the fence around the pond area had been delayed slightly due to sickness. Cllr Lock thanked the Probationers for their support and Mole Valley Farmers for their generous offers of materials. He also mentioned that a new Woodland Plan was also in the process of being prepared. Cllr Footman was in the opinion that naming and shaming of the perpetrators of the vandalism was not a good idea.
- b. Cllr Worden advised the Following:
 - Firstly, there was the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the proclamation of King Charles III as our new King. Civic services have taken place throughout the District including South Molton. As Leader of NDC I have taken part in some of them. The response of the public was amazing with several South Molton people going to London to pay their respects.
 - Secondly, we have had the mini-budget or fiscal adjustment which is causing great uncertainty to the District. We all know about the tax cuts particularly to those earning over 150,000 and the removal of the cap on bankers bonuses but we are concerned about the small print. Relaxation in planning laws will result, for example, in more on shore wind applications which won't be popular with many. Incidentally we are expected Tracey Blackmore to start as our new planning manager next week. She used to work for us before going to Torridge.

- It looks probable that the Levelling Up fund will be diverted to the new created Investment zones. If so that will mean that North Devon will miss out again and the money will go to Plymouth and South Hams. The crash of the pound as a result of the tax cuts will have a big impact as the cost of fuel and everything we import e.g. food will soar. So waste and recycling will be greatly affected. We will have to make decisions about whether to hike up the cost of green waste collections or abandon them altogether as it is something we don't have to do and is already making a significant loss. Inflation and the cost of borrowing is very much on the rise. This will hit the projects we have been working on and future schemes and we are currently waiting to see the outcome of the pay negotiations for staff. As you are aware, like most other local authorities, we budgeted for a 2% increase in wages but this is going to be greatly exceeded and with the other inflationary cost pressures we are facing some tough decisions in the next few months leading up to setting our budget for the next financial year. The unions are currently balloting the staff to see if they will accept 1925 upfront payment, plus 4% plus an extra day's holiday. If they don't accept it we will have a strike on our hands. If they do the staff pay rises will add nearly a million to our budget. This is going to result in some unpopular decisions having to be made e.g. a rise in car parking charges at a time when we really wanted to help the shop keepers get back on their feet after the Covid pandemic. I know we aren't in the same league as the County Council which is taking measures to save 40 million or Cornwall which has an overspent focus of 60 million but the financial pressures on the District are extremely worrying.
- Following the last Full NDC meeting when we declared a cost of living emergency I wrote as requested to the chancellor but as yet have not had a response. Also as you know I wrote to Devon County as the Highways authority about parking on pavements and copied in our M.P. She replied, or at least her agent did on her behalf to say that she supported limited banning of parking on pavements where there is perceived to be a problem but not a general ban.
- The other concern is that of bird flu. Several dead gannets have been washed up on our shores although not in the numbers found in Cornwall and there have been some examples among poultry.

12. TOWN CLERK’S REPORT TO MEMBERS

The Town Clerk advised the following:

- The Town Hall Clock was now up and running – awaiting the precision timing device which would be installed within one month.
- The painting of the Town Hall Façade will be completed in the next couple of weeks.
- Steven Huxtable, the Estates Maintenance Officer, will be off sick for the foreseeable future. The Councillors expressed their best wishes and hoped his recovery would be swift.
- There will be an informal opening of the commencement of Devon Air Ambulance night flying on Tuesday 11th October 2022 at 5.00pm.
- The Cost of Living Crisis meeting will be held in the Town Hall on Monday 10th October 2022 at 6.00pm.
- There is a suggestion that Town Council meetings be held again in the Town Hall from March 2023, when the Zumba sessions finish. Councillors accepted this suggestion.

It was RESOLVED that pursuant to Section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, and having regard to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted that the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business by virtue of relating to legal commercially sensitive matters and/or the financial or business affairs of a person or persons other than the Council.

It was RESOLVED that the meeting return to open session

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.21pm

Chairman.....

Date.....