

ANNUAL TOWNS MEETING 2009

Annual Report of the Town Council – Cllr J A G Hutchins

This is our 30th Annual Towns Meeting since inception of the Town Council in 1979.

As Chairman, my report covers the work of the Town Council in general, in addition to some of the wider issues affecting our community. In a break with tradition, this written report is submitted prior to the Annual Towns Meeting as it is an annual open meeting where any local government elector for the Town Council area is entitled to attend and take part and I very much hope local residents will take advantage of this opportunity to ask questions.

On the night, I will support my introduction with a number of photos and images from our recent newsletters and website available at www.newmiltontowncouncil.gov.uk As Mayor I have represented the Town at many events during the year and throughout the community. In this role as First Citizen of the Town, it has been a pleasure and a privilege to represent the Town Council.

Last year, my predecessor Cllr Paul Woods presented me with my Badge of Office at the Annual Meeting held on 6 May 2008 when Cllr Alan O’Sullivan was elected Deputy Mayor / Vice Chairman. One of my first duties as Town Mayor was to present certificates to the Young Person of the Year awards at the New Milton Town Partnership AGM.

On 21 May 2008, we finally secured on a 999-year lease from NFDC extra land at Fawcetts Field for use as an additional full-size football pitch and mini-football pitches for the youth of the Town and I am pleased to report that they are now ready to be played upon. At our meeting in June, I welcomed Theresa Elliott, Assistant Town Clerk and Elaine Reed, Administrator to their first meeting after taking over from Alan Gray, Deputy Town Clerk and Lesley Allcock, Secretary / PA after their many years’ long and loyal service.

At our meeting in July, we welcomed Pat Williams of the Phoenix Children’s Centre based at the Youth Club in New Milton. She gave a presentation on the role of Children’s Centres explaining that this was part of the Government’s Sure Start scheme and it offered access to integrated services for parents and their children up to the age of five. During the month, I made a recording for the blind for their 9th anniversary; delivered a talk to the Rotary Club and opened a Fun Day on the Recreation Ground which was extremely well-organised and very enjoyable. On 26 July, I opened the St Mary Magdalene Annual Church Fete.

In September, we heard that the Hampshire County Council Gypsy Liaison Officer had conducted a Needs Assessment on travellers who had taken up temporary residence at Fawcetts Field. NFDC helped progress repossession of the site, noting the travellers’ unauthorised occupation of Moore Close could have affected arrangements for the New Forest Marathon. This seems to be an annual problem, despite the increased security measures implemented.

At our September meeting, we introduced a separate item for our representative on the Town Partnership to give an update on their work. Cllr Mrs Schooling reported on the proposed mosaics designed by local schoolchildren for the Mallard Court area which members were invited to view at a display organised in the Forest Arts Centre. We also heard that the Town Partnership was seeking £15k funding from Developers Contributions' towards a Landmark Sculpture for the southern end of Station Road.

Our representative on the Citizens Advice Bureau also submitted a report prepared by David Cameron, Manager of New Milton CAB. Cllr Harris commended this report to members and asked if they would consider providing future funding to this organisation as 80% of its clients are New Milton residents. Cllr Beck, our representative on the Memorial Hall management committee reported a local benefactor was prepared to fund a feasibility study on the future of the Memorial Hall that was in a poor state of repair.

At our October meeting, I was pleased to present certificates to 7 young people who had volunteered to attend a two-day alcohol awareness course organised by Cllr Clarke who congratulated all the young people on achieving passes. They were making a considerable effort to change their behaviour and had addressed a number of issues during the course including the dangers of alcohol, its effects and the number of units of alcohol in various products.

We agreed that continued office accommodation at the Town Hall be granted for the use of the Town Development Officer for the coming year, and Cllr Mrs Schooling reported on the proposed board walk for Ballard Water Meadow. Cllr Beck reported on a meeting with the Vice Chairman of the Football Club regarding chain-link fencing around the Wessex Pitch and referred to an e-mail from HCC concerning the condition of the Memorial Hall. County Councillor Mrs Banks thought that it was positive that members of HCC were aware of New Milton's need for the Memorial Hall to be refurbished for the benefit of the community.

I had the pleasure of attending the 25th anniversary celebration at the Fernmount Centre (a day service for adults with learning disabilities) to present commemorative mugs to 22 service users who had been with the Fernmount Centre since its opening. I recommended members visit this excellent facility. In my absence, Cllr O'Sullivan, Deputy Mayor had enjoyed a very informative visit to our neighbours in Christchurch during their Civic Day.

Cllr O'Sullivan reported on a New Milton Twinning Association event he had also attended as Vice Chairman on 4 October at the Guide HQ near Ballard Lake where 14 German visitors from Buchholz had enjoyed an evening of musical entertainment with their hosts. Cllr Davies reported on a presentation from the Drugs Intelligence Officer, noting New Milton had the largest centre of drug use in the New Forest and stressed the importance of having a centre such as the Society of St James were proposing to deal with these problems.

At our November meeting, I welcomed Sgt Dave Tanner to his last meeting before retiring in December. I thanked him for his dedication to the community of New Milton and presented him with a plaque from the Town Council. The Remembrance Day ceremony on Sunday 9 November was very successful with the largest turnout yet. The Deputy Lieutenant of Hampshire, Mrs Sara Locock, JP representing the County, Cllr Paul Woods, Chairman of the District Council and Cllr John Hutchins, Town Mayor all laid wreaths at the War Memorial.

Ms Christianne Strubbe, Hampshire County Council Principal Landscape Architect gave a presentation at our meeting, explaining that the Landmark feature and mosaics for Mallard Court would provide the finishing touches to the attractive new streetscape in Station Road. Later on in the meeting, the Town Council approved the mosaic design and the concept design for the Landmark feature. It was also agreed that the Town Council precept for 2009/10 would be held at the same level as 2008/09 in the sum of £504,150, being a nil increase.

The NFDC Core Strategy Submission Document was distributed to members setting out the planning framework for New Forest District Council's communities outside of the National Park for the next twenty years. Representations regarding its soundness would be considered at the next Planning Committee meeting held on 4 December, noting that the National Park Plan Consultation Document was considered at a previous Planning Committee meeting.

At our January meeting, I welcomed Sgt Neil Chippindale who gave a report on recent police activities in New Milton, and Cat Lake from New Forest Community Media who gave a short presentation on proposals for a local community radio station. It was my sad duty to announce the recent death of Arthur Lloyd, local historian and first recipient of our Citizen of the Year award in April 2005, whose funeral was held at St Mary Magdalene on 16 January.

We received notification from local Police Inspector Julie Fry that she had been successful in applying for a post at the Hampshire Constabulary Force Control room from 5 January and her role as Safer Neighbourhood Inspector would be performed by Temporary Inspector Nick Adams until a permanent replacement was appointed. The F&GP meeting scheduled for 6 July was changed to 29 June 2009 to enable the accounts to be signed off before the end of June for the Audit Commission.

Cllr Harris reported that there will be some changes in the organisation of CAB in the district as four of the branches are in the process of amalgamating and the trustees will form a new board at the end of June 2009. Cllr Beck had received a copy letter sent to Mr Horne of the RBL from the High Commission of India thanking the Legion for information / photographs of the memorial to Indian soldiers at Barton-on-Sea. Cllr Mrs Schooling added there will be a history project undertaken by Arnewood School based on research of the Indian Memorial.

At our February meeting, I was pleased to announce that Pippa Wilson had received an MBE for Olympic sailing achievements and Sammy Miller also received an MBE for services to motorcycle heritage. Unfortunately, they were unable to attend our

Civic Dinner as both would be receiving their awards from Prince Charles at Buckingham Palace that day. I asked members to remember Norman Cracknell, President of New Milton Rugby Club who had passed away recently. He was very much involved with the Pavilion upgrade at Ashley last year.

Members' attention was drawn to comparative increases in precepts and a list of local council precepts for 2009/10 was distributed at the meeting. An overall increase of 2.5% throughout the New Forest was proposed, resulting in an average Band D rate of £1,436.61. The Band D rate for New Milton will be £1,419.70. I attended the New Milton Music Festival and hope the Council will continue to support this splendid event again next year. Together with the Town Clerk and Cllrs Woods and Beck, I attended the local Residents Association AGM.

I was pleased that both the Joint Civic Service and Mayor's Annual Dinner were well attended and had been very successful. At the Mayor's Annual Dinner held at Barton-on-Sea on Friday 27 February, I presented a cheque for £500 as my New Forest District Council local member's ward allowance to the Reverend Andrew Bailey in aid of the St Mary Magdalene Parish Church Hall refurbishment program in Church Lane, New Milton.

A combined Civic Service was held with the Chairman of New Forest District Council at the historic parish church of St Mary Magdalene on Sunday 8 March. Civic heads from Hampshire and Dorset, mayors and chairmen of towns and parishes with district and parish councilors, together with clergy of other churches in the New Milton area, joined representatives of the voluntary services, charities and members of the public in re-dedicating themselves to public service.

At the beginning of March, I was delighted to chair a second Youth Council meeting held at the Town Hall between 10 Town Councillors, 9 students and the Deputy Head Teacher of Arnewood School with the Town Clerk and recently-appointed local Police Sergeant in attendance. A range of issues was discussed including

- What can be done about empty shops to help boost the local economy
- Beach cleaning initiative in conjunction with New Forest District Council
- Proposed Trust Fund status for Arnewood School and what this would entail

At our last Town Council meeting of the municipal year at the end of March, we received an interesting and informative presentation on how English as an Additional Language (EAL) is taught at Arnewood School by their EAL Coordinator, and the Deputy Community Manager. Students learn English in conjunction with the curriculum receiving learning support in the classroom. Currently 65 students speak English as an Additional Language and a total of 95 students are from ethnic minority backgrounds speaking 18 different languages from 15 different countries.

In conclusion, it has been an honour and a pleasure to be Mayor and Chairman of the Council and I wish to thank my Councillor colleagues and Council staff for all their hard work and support throughout the past year.

F&GP Committee – Cllr D N Tungate

The Finance and General Purposes Committee has overall control of Council finance and personnel functions and makes the final recommendation to the Council regarding the annual precept.

Budget discussions began in September 2008, and in November the Committee considered items for inclusion in the 2009/10 budget with a general 3.5% inflationary increase proposed, although the Unions at that time had still not agreed the staff pay settlement for 2008/9 let alone 2009/10. Funding of the Town Development Officer was considered, and it was noted that as New Milton no longer had dedicated ACSOs this item was not budgeted for 2009/10.

In view of the worsening economic situation, it was recommended that our precept for 2009/10 be retained at 2008/09 levels and was set on 10 November at £504,150. A sum of £5k was budgeted for Youth Work within the Grant Aid Budget of £12k. We considered detached and outreach youth work at our meeting in May as we had been asked to support both types of youth workers from two different organisations. Firstly, in December 2007 we granted Action for Youth £5k towards the cost of employing a local part-time Detached Youth Worker for a period of one year. Then, in April 2008 we were asked to contribute £5k to the Café Light Project towards the funding of an Outreach Youth Worker for New Milton.

At our May meeting, Adam Clewer Pastor of New Life Church explained their Outreach Youth Worker had been very successful in engaging young people in sporting activities, especially on the Recreation Ground, which had previously been the focal point for anti-social behaviour in the Town Centre. Elaine Ramsdale explained that Action for Youth had been established as a charity and after consultation with young people in the community a need was established for a team of detached youth workers to work on the streets where young people gather. The Town Council eventually supported both.

F&GP considered and noted NFDC / NALC guidelines regarding application of the Code of Conduct to, and requirement to declare interests at, public participation periods attached to meetings of the Council or Committees and resolved to take further advice from NFDC concerning the Paragraph 12 (2) before adopting that part separately as it allows a member with a prejudicial interest in an agenda item to speak at the beginning of a meeting as would a member of the public, subject to certain caveats. If adopted, the public participation periods would be regarded as part of the formal meeting.

During the year, F&GP also reviewed Grievance Procedures to include an appropriate appeals process and introduced an Equalities & Diversity Policy for the Town Council promoting equality of opportunity and prevention of any form of discrimination before adopting a web-based model publication scheme put forward by the Information Commissioners Office. Members noted the type of information expected to be published under the Freedom of Information Act and agreed to most items appearing on our website with effect from 1 January 2009.

An annual review of our Standing Orders was undertaken as recommended by Internal Auditors and Bus Shelters and Street Market were added to the Amenities Committee Terms of Reference at Appendix A and endorsed by the Committee at its August meeting. Internal Audit also recommended annual review of risks and a full Risk Management review was carried out earlier this year using an updated Risk Assessment program to help identify and address individual risks that could affect this council.

The program covers 50 risk areas from allotment sites to websites, identifying over 300 potential risks facing town councils. Out of 37 relevant risk areas with 258 potential risks applying to this Council, only five were deemed to be of medium likelihood and impact:

- Bonfires – Risk of injury to facility users at annual fireworks
- Car Parks – Environmental risk of fly-tipping at council car parks
- Car Parks – Unauthorised access / trespass onto open spaces
- Commons – Risk of encroachment by neighbours / trespass
- Financial – Risk of inadequate maintenance provision

An Action Plan was drawn up detailing actions to be taken to reduce these risks. In regard to bonfires, organisers will in future provide a skip in which to place debris after the event. In regard to car parks / commons, further warning signs about illegal dumping and more litter / dog bins will be installed. Further steps will be taken to strengthen security and legal proceedings will be pursued against those trespassing on public open spaces. The asset maintenance / replacement budget will be reviewed.

Administration of the Grant Aid budget is the responsibility of this Committee and last year 12 grants totalling £9,712 were awarded, with one grant of £4,337 being financed from Market Income reserves. It was previously agreed that Market Income reserves should be used primarily for Youth initiatives, and I am pleased that the Café Light Project for an Outreach Youth Worker benefited from this policy.

Other grants included: CAB £2,000 (£1,000 in April 2008 and £1,000 in March 2009); Victim Support £300; Salterns Play-scheme £250; Early Years Project – Special Needs Play-scheme £250; Brendoncare Foundation Get Together Club £250; New Forest Disability Information Service £375; Royal British Legion 2008 Poppy Appeal £150; New Milton Music Festival £300; Jubilee Fund Pedal Car Grand Prix £500 (plus up to a further £500 if the event runs at a loss); Arnewood School Nepal Expedition £500.

As noted above, the F&GP remit is both wide and varied. It also has responsibility for Christmas Lights and publication of the Town Guide.

As we reach the end of this municipal year, I would like to thank all my colleagues who have served on the F&GP Committee over the last 12 months and look forward to working them during the coming year.

Amenities Committee – Cllr G C Beck

I open my report by thanking the 8 members of the Amenities Committee who have supported me as Chair person during the past year and trust the committee members will again opt to be Amenities Committee members for the ensuing year. It gives me great pleasure to report that the year ending has witnessed further initiatives to improve the Amenity facilities for the residents of New Milton.

The Amenities Committee is responsible for all our sports and amenity facilities, and the many public open spaces that we control. A total of 54 sites including:

- Additional land at Fawcetts Field for 1 full size / 2 mini pitches from April 2008
- A 47-acre common at Barton and 2 acre lake at Ballard
- Woodland north of Ballard Lake and adjoining 5 acre water meadows
- A Recreation Ground with 2 Bowling Greens and 4 Tennis Courts
- An Indoor Bowling club, Skatepark and enlarged basketball area with MUGA
- Three children's Playgrounds at Ashley, the Rec Ground and Crest Estate
- A 21 acre site at Fawcetts Field with 4 soccer pitches and two more shortly
- A 15 acre site at Ashley dedicated to rugby, with additional land coming over
- A 13 acre site at Fernhill with 2 cricket squares, with more land still available
- Five allotment sites with 3 at Ashley, plus one at Lymington Road and Becton
- All public seats plus the newer ones installed in Station Road from April 2008
- 15 Bus Shelters inherited from Hampshire County Council from April 2006
- A 5 acre site at Long Meadow, including a BMX Track
- Ashington Park woodland off Caird Avenue, near Tesco
- Old Milton Green and adjoining land known as Len's Café site

The additional land at Fawcetts Field was handed over to us on a licence from NFDC in January 2008 in order to prepare the ground for development of one full size and two mini pitches. In May 2008, we secured the land on a 999-year lease from NFDC together with £40k Developers' Contributions allocated towards the development of the new football pitches. I am pleased to report they are now ready to be played on.

We continue to work closely with the Friends of Ballard Meadow who have worked tirelessly in opening up this facility for others to enjoy but we must remember it is a Town Council asset that we must maintain and keep secure for future generations. We are merely its present custodians. While opening up the woodland area we need to ensure there is an appropriate tree management policy in place to fell and prune trees in a cost effective manner. Similarly, we need to ensure the entrances to the site off Lake Grove Road are securely maintained while the board walk is constructed.

While thanking the Friends for their all their hard work in opening up the meadow and appreciating Town Partnership input as far as the board walk is concerned, we need to ensure the area does not become urbanised with footpaths and cycle-ways but remains unspoilt for future generations to enjoy. It is after all a designated Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).

In regard to Bus Shelters, we have recently received a report from HCC / Queensbury Shelters commenting on the condition of all the bus shelters that were transferred to this council from County in 2006. Generally, they are in good repair with not too much serious damage or deterioration over the last 3 years, according to the report which makes recommendations regarding repair and replacement of various parts. This report will be considered by the Amenities Committee at its meeting on 14 April 2009.

As far as the Youth Café on the Recreation Ground is concerned, the Town Council invested £10k into this project and it should be opened for business soon after Easter. This project, overseen by Action for Youth, will provide youngsters with somewhere in New Milton they can use as a "Caff" and call their own. This group of young people, some of whom had been issued with ASBOs had turned their lives around and are trying to influence other youngsters in the town to behave and act properly. The Town Council has agreed to let them use the old disused football changing rooms at the end of the indoor bowling pavilion for this purpose. We wish them success.

At our August meeting, Cllr Alan O'Sullivan presented a report on proposed new Christmas light bulbs. The new light bulbs have a 20,000 hour lifespan and are used for 255 hours each Christmas. By using 1 watt LED replacement bulbs, the saving in electricity for our festive lighting display last Christmas amounted to over £1,300. Over a five-year period net savings would amount to £3,700 and other improvements were agreed with £6,000 from market income reserves used to progress this project which was generally well received with many appreciative comments.

During the year, some of the youth problems associated with Ashley subsided, but the Town Council were granted £27k Developers' Contributions from NFDC to provide more youth facilities in the area. What the Amenities Committee had in mind was a Multi-User Sports Area (MUSA) for both male and female, incorporating basketball hoops, football goals and other equipment. The Amenities Committee recommended a MUSA for Ashley Sports Ground but to date we have had difficulty in identifying a suitable site and are now casting our net further afield within Ashley.

Back in August, it was suggested a tractor and other equipment be purchased as existing plant was insufficient for Amenities needs with over 50 sites to maintain. In October, the Town Council purchased a new John Deere 4520 Tractor with Trimax cutter costing £23k with which to maintain and cut the grass at various public open spaces including Barton Common and Ballard Lake, both of which were previously undertaken by outside contractor. In addition to the above, the Town Council also purchased a Grass-Slasher and Tipping-Trailer in the sum of £3,700 to help with hedge-cutting. Ideally, hedge cuttings should be shredded as work progresses.

The Town Council now has permission to extend the weekly market by 15 stalls in the northern part of Station Road on Wednesdays and this it hopes to do from Easter, using Prod-Grow fresh produce stalls in conjunction with Southern Market Traders, as they do in Christchurch on Mondays. Prod-Grow have just announced their intention to hold a market on the third Saturday of each month on the pavement in Station Road north starting on Saturday 18 April and we look forward to expanding our markets for the benefit of the Town.

An area of land at Lower Ashley Road where old play equipment had been removed has been identified as a possible suitable site for additional allotment plots. We have been advised by NFDC that change of use planning permission would not be required and that the site could provide 10 half plots which will help reduce our current waiting list. Sheds would not be permitted on individual plots but would only be allowed alongside the oak trees in the south-west corner. We currently have £12,500 in earmarked reserves for this purpose.

At the end of last year, we experienced two “credit crunch” thefts of lead from the sports pavilion roof at Fawcetts Field and a pair of aluminium ramps from the Bowling-Green on the Recreation Ground, due to increases in metal prices. While both thefts were covered by insurance, and were of little intrinsic value, they caused some inconvenience and re-evaluation of security at both premises. It is indicative of the times that theft of lead is prevalent, and while only worth £100 or so to the perpetrators of the crime its replacement cost around £2.5k due mainly to scaffolding costs involved in scaling the roof in a safe manner in compliance with H&S legislation.

I mention all these matters to highlight the importance of partnership working with these various different people and agencies, all with a common view and objective of promoting and improving leisure activities and facilities in the Town. That is the true meaning and purpose of partnership working I am sure you will agree. Let us continue to work with these various partners and friends for the benefit of the whole community.

Thank you for your continued support.

Planning Committee – Cllr J R Mason

The Planning Committee meet on a fortnightly basis to comment on all planning and tree work applications in the New Milton area, on behalf of the Town Council. Issues relating to Highways, District, County and Regional plans are also considered by the Committee.

This year has seen a downturn in applications mainly due to the economic climate and change in Permitted Development Rights for householders. Planning applications from New Forest District Council totalled 183, plus 31 from the New Forest National Park Authority and 32 tree work applications. Corresponding figures for the previous year were 378, 24 and 69.

There have been several controversial applications during the year, including the Society of St James change of use to two units in Whitefield Road, an advertisement application for Subway in Station Road, and more recently the demolition of detached houses in Sea Road to make way for multiple smaller homes and a block of flats (pending determination).

The large development site on the junction of Lymington Road with Barton Court Road has changed freeholder, potentially for a new supermarket instead of a mix of retirement and affordable dwellings. An affordable housing development comprising

40 units off Danesbury Meadows was given planning permission in October 2008. This was also when new Permitted Development Rights for householders was introduced, taking many small scale developments out of the planning system.

Relations with New Forest District Council remain good, despite some inconsistencies with the validation process and some applications considered to be permitted development still being taken through the planning machine. The Committee has seen paper plans replaced by projected plans at meetings, part of District Council e-agenda. More information is now provided on their website.

Currently, a Town Design Statement is being prepared that will provide developers with a guide to the character issues for retention in the area. This will run parallel with the District Council's 'Local Distinctiveness Study' which is being piloted in New Milton. During the year, the Committee considered the following consultations:

South East Plan – Secretary of State Proposed Changes

The Committee was concerned that the Plan, which was last consulted on in 2006, still did not address the planning pressures imposed on New Milton since the designation of the National Park.

New Forest National Park Plan and Recreational Management Strategy

These highly controversial documents cited swathes of reform, including zoning and car park closure to protect sensitive areas, plus possible road pricing and strict planning rules for recreational horse keeping. Currently, meetings are being held with relevant organisations to provide solutions to the concerns raised during public consultation.

New Forest District Council LDF Core Strategy

Changes suggested include the lowering of affordable housing threshold for developers and a policy to encourage small-scale and new businesses, by providing additional managed workspace.

Representations on 'soundness' were submitted in December, highlighting the incorporation of land recently leased to the Town Council for recreational use, but was then earmarked for housing within a background paper to the document. The outcome is expected following the Examination in Public this summer.

The Planning Committee aims for consistency when considering developments for the area and attempts to give a view reflecting the majority of residents. In conclusion, I would like to thank my 8 fellow members of the Planning Committee.