

M I N U T E S  
of the  
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

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held at the Assembly Rooms, Alton on Thursday 22nd May, 1975  
at 8 p.m.

Present: Councillor C. R. Read (Town Mayor)

Councillors M. C. Walker

L. M. Grant Ferguson

C. R. Miller

J. D. Mitton

M. Powell

C. O. G. Smith

G. D. Stratford

Mrs. H. E. West

Colonel J. P. Archer-Shee, M.C., County Councillor  
for Alton

Lt. Colonel R. M. Digby, M.B.E., Chairman of East  
Hampshire District Council

together with approximately 25 members of the public.

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8. Minutes

It was MOVED by Councillor Mitton, SECCNDED by Councillor Stratford and RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on the 16th May, 1974 be taken as read and confirmed as a correct record.

The Minutes were then signed by the Town Mayor.

9. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D. A. Boxall, Miss P. J. Bradford, A. C. Brooking, J. H. Knight, E. Morgan and Doctor M. B. Wilson.

10. Town Mayor's Address

The Town Mayor opened the meeting by welcoming the public.

He said that careful consideration had been given during the year to the various points raised at the last meeting.

Since however some of the points concerned the Hampshire County Council and the East Hampshire District Council he had invited the County Councillor for Alton to the meeting (Colonel J. P. Archer-Shee) together with Lt. Colonel R. M. Digby the Chairman of East Hampshire District Council and he welcomed both Councillors to the meeting, especially as they were "volunteers".

The Town Mayor hoped the arrangements for the meeting were better than last year and it could be seen that the suggestions made at the last meeting had been adopted.

The Council were no longer on the stage and the meeting had been arranged for 8 p.m. instead of 6 p.m.

He then gave his address which he said was both a review of the past year as well as a comment on the present year.

Last year the concern at the Town Meeting had been the high level of rates and in particular (because it was within the province of the meeting) the high local rate for the town of 5.5p in the £.

During the year expenditure had been restricted and various schemes postponed. As a result it had been possible to reduce the local rate from 5.5p to 4.1p.

Even so he knew some people would still feel the rate to be too high but it had to be kept in perspective. If the local rate were considered along with the County Council rate and the District Council rate, before taking into account any grants or subsidies, then the rate was but  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent of the total. The County Council's was 78 per cent and the District Council's  $18\frac{1}{2}$  per cent.

He was aware, as indeed was the whole Council, that some members of the public would still be disappointed.

The Rugby Club could claim the Council had promised them a second pitch. The Hockey Club could say they had no pitches at all.

The Alton Society wanted the Council to bring 25 acres of land at Windmill Hill into use as an Open Space and hirers of the Assembly Rooms would say the new scale of charges was iniquitous; equally non-users of the Assembly Rooms would say the rate charge for this service was too high.

The Alton and District Resident and Ratepayers Association would say the important thing was to cut the rates. This too was an opinion but in mentioning the Association the Town Mayor said he would like to pay tribute to the manner in which they had presented their case. They had at all times been courteous and their arguments had been ably presented.

The Town Mayor then threw the meeting open to the public.

## 11. Charges

Mr. Slone first of all remarked on the small number of the public present and only just over fifty per cent of the Councillors.

He then commented on the Council's proposal to double the charges for football pitches. On a Sunday morning the charge would be £10 and in the afternoon £2.50. There were quite a number of small boy teams in Alton between 10 and 14 years of age and he did not know how they would be able to carry on.

He asked the Council to reconsider the charges.

Councillor Read the Town Mayor answered. He said there was a vast difference between £10 for a Sunday morning pitch and £2.50 for one in the afternoon. The explanation was quite simple. The Council wished to discourage Sunday morning football. Overtime was involved and the pitches were also being overplayed. It was also an inheritance from the old days when the Council sought to avoid sport co-inciding with Church Services.

Councillor Miller said that as Chairman of the local Sports Council he had a responsibility to everyone connected with sport including those involved with various clubs. He also had a responsibility as a member of the Town Council and all the responsibilities had to be reconciled.

The maintenance of Parks and Open Spaces was no different from other heads of expenditure. It was all costing more be it wages or machinery. For this reason the charges had been reviewed.

Individuals taking part in sport had to realise that it was going to cost them money and they could not expect to be subsidised by the rest of the ratepayers in the town.

The Council was sports minded and was only too happy to try and extend its concessions in other directions.

Councillor Mitton remarked the Alton Town Council was on a loser to nothing.

Last year, he recalled, the greatest proportion of criticism had been the level of the town Rate so efforts had been made - successfully - to reduce the Rate and in order to keep everyone happy charges had been raised. But they had been raised across the board.

Mr. Grant felt the little clubs were being pushed out and with a referee's fee the charge would become £4.10 every game and it could not be expected for a child of 11 or 12 years to pay 25p every week.

Councillor Grant Ferguson expressed the view that one of the main arguments or questions was whether the Town Council should be running the playing fields at all.

He said ratepayers in Alton paid a rate to the District Council for sporting activities and paid again to the Town Council. It was no longer economic for the Town Council to take on the many acres comprising the open spaces.

It did not seem rational or logical that the Sports Centre be run by the District Council and the grass outside maintained by the Town Council - or indeed the Butts.

In his submission it would be far more economical to hand the open spaces over. It would be honest to the small clubs.

Twenty-five per cent had been allowed for inflation and we should ask where it will be in two or three years. Both in the short and long term it was wrong to hold onto this bit of influence. It was evidence that Alton now had a little Council that had lost an empire and was trying desperately to find a role.

Mr. O'Connor proposed that the charges for teams playing in youth leagues of under 18 should be reviewed by the Town Council.

Mr. Slone seconded.

Mr. Isaac felt £2.50 to be a very low figure for an adult match and that the charge could be higher for adults and lower for children.

Mr. Radford understood that children under school leaving age could qualify for the use of school pitches as an extra curriculum activity and not have to pay.

The Town Mayor said this was not so, but added that it was ludicrous that many school pitches were not available.

Colonel Archer-Shee felt the point could be pressed with the Recreation Committee of the Education Committee of the County Council.

Mr. Radford recalled that the Committee of the Youth Wing - of which he was a member - had obtained concessions.

Councillor Stratford sympathised but felt it to be the responsibility of Football who should encourage youth players by subsidies from the senior players.

Mr. Thomas endorsed Councillor Stratford's remarks. He spoke, he said, as Chairman of the Alton Rugby Club which was the only organised Rugby Club in the town carrying a young side of under 18's who obviously could not afford to pay the subscriptions.

The Club had 85 youngsters between 8 and 14 years who were now being coached and playing mini-rugby with the whole cost being borne by the senior part of the club.

They had always paid their way.

He was pleased to acknowledge publicly the assistance rendered by the Town Council regarding the Club's pavilion and the revenue was now helping enormously. They had also helped themselves with raffles, dances and other activities.

He felt, as did Councillor Stratford, that it was primarily the responsibility of the senior soccer club in the area to encourage its own grass roots.

Mr. Thomas felt £2.50 a pitch reasonable. It was something in the region of £4 in Winchester.

He expressed appreciation for the redecoration of the Finnimore Pavilion and had no grouse at the increased charges.

He did not know the politics involved in Councillor Grant's inference that the cost should be borne by another authority. Surely he felt it would be better for Parks and Open Spaces to be maintained satisfactorily by local people than to hand the functions over to an authority with much wider powers who might not maintain the areas to the local people's satisfaction.

Mr. Slone said the Rugby Club was fortunate but wondered to whom Mr. Grant could turn in running his two boys' teams.

The Town Mayor enquired of Mr. Grant if he had ever approached the Alton Town Football Club and Mr. Grant said they had sponsored his teams two years ago but this year he had bought shirts and paid the referees out of his own pocket.

It was **MOVED** by Mr. O'Connor, **SECONDED** by Mr. Slone and **CARRIED** that the charges for teams playing in youth leagues of under 18 should be reviewed by the Town Council.

## 12. Victoria Road

Mr. Pain then wondered if the Town Council could help in regard to the traffic using Victoria Road as a result of the sewerage scheme partially closing Normandy Street.

Colonel Archer-Shoe doubted if a lower speed limit than 30 m.p.h. could be introduced but promised to investigate.

## 13. Rugby

Mr. Thomas said the Rugby Club's gripe was about pitches at Anstey Park. He understood the need for economy but wondered if a pitch could be brought into use on the extension. If so the Club would help including stone picking. He elaborated at length.

Councillor Mitton remarked that constructive suggestions were always welcome.

Chawton Park Road playing fields had not been brought into use because of the criticism of the Rate level but the idea of using the

14. Allotments

Mr. Gostelow complained at the state of the fence between the Cemetery and the Allotments and the Town Mayor said the matter had been taken up with the District Council.

15. Traffic

Mrs. Harckham expressed concern at the traffic in Alton, particularly heavy lorries, and felt there should be a speed restriction along the Basingstoke Road.

Colonel Archer-Shee said the Industrial Estate was a magnet for the heavy vehicles and many signs had been erected to try and direct such traffic other than through the town.

Mr. O'Connor wondered what had happened to the Traffic Order and Colonel Archer-Shee replied that it took a long time.

It was MOVED by Mrs. Harckham, SECONDED by Mrs. Harvey and CARRIED that the Town Council ask for action to provide a one way traffic system from the bottom of Market Street to Highridge.

16. Traffic Signs

Mr. Hawkins asked for signs at the bottom of Amery Street and Vicarage Hill and the Town Mayor promised the matter would be taken up with the County Council.

17. Transfer of Functions

Mr. O'Connor returned to the finances and functions of the Town Council and supported the earlier view of Councillor Grant Ferguson that the function of Parks and Open Spaces be handed over to the District Council and instanced the proximity of the Sports Centre and the Chawton Park Road Playing Fields.

Councillor Stratford said the concepts were different. There was a greater saving in running Anstey Park and Chawton Park Road together than the Sports Centre and the playing fields.

He was of the opinion the best way was to keep these functions local. The larger authority could not give the playing fields the individual attention required.

Colonel Digby after thanking the Town Mayor for the invitation to be present recalled that prior to the operative date for the reorganisation of local government the respective Councils had met and had discussed the functions that each authority would like to carry on and could usefully carry on.

He felt time should now elapse before reconsideration. If perhaps after a few years the Town Council felt the District Council could carry out the function better than the Town Council then negotiations could be opened.

Councillor Grant Ferguson felt it to be dangerous to argue that you could have a guarantee of standards by keeping functions local. It was a fallacy.

He was keen to see Rugby extended in Alton but it increased the burden on the staff of three at Anstey Park. Add to this Windmill Hill and the Butts and he felt that rather than approach the District Council to take the functions over there should be two sets of schemes properly costed.

Councillor Mitton did not feel the bigger the better.

Mr. O'Connor felt the fact the extension to Anstey Park was unused was evidence that the Town Council could not run the parks better than the District Council.

The Town Mayor reminded the audience that if Alton transferred its functions to the District Council it might not stop at that as every Parish Council was responsible for its own playing fields.

He agreed with Colonel Digby the matter should be left in abeyance for a few years.

#### 18. Kings Pond

Mr. Dexter wondered if some priority could be given to the Kings Pond scheme.

The Town Mayor replied that it had been one of the casualties in the Council's determination to reduce the rate.

Mr. Dexter wondered if an interim scheme could at least level some of the areas so they could be put to a useful purpose.

The Town Clerk said the Council was hopeful but there was a scheme afoot by the County Council to widen Ashdell Road and it might be best if both schemes were carried out at the same time. He was hopeful the lagoons might be filled in by the end of the summer.

Colonel Archer-Shee said he had never heard of the proposal to widen Ashdell Road.

Mr. Isaac expressed the hope Kings Pond would not be turned into a vast pleasure area. It was one of the few natural and wild places left in Alton.

He felt that to fill in the lagoons and grass the areas was all that was necessary and questioned whether in these times of inflation it was wise to sit on money instead of completing Kings Pond and doing something about the playing fields.

#### 19. Police Station and Magistrates' Court

Colonel Archer-Shee then expressed the view, in answer to criticism from a member of the public regarding the building of a new Police Station and Magistrates' Court, that Alton was very fortunate in having this scheme approved.

#### 20. Finance

Councillor Grant Ferguson supported this view and felt that at the Town Council's level of local government, a rate should be raised for specific purposes and the longer it was left the more schemes would cost.

Mr. O'Connor enquired the size of the Capital Fund and said that if he understood the estimates correctly the Council had as much in the kitty as it raised from Rates.

He then said the Town Council had asked the District Council for £76,000 and they had to borrow the money which cost the District Ratepayers unnecessary expenditure.

The Town Clerk replied and expressed surprise at the way the meeting had gone. He said you could never tell. Last year the cry had been to reduce the Rate whereas this year the cry was to spend money because it was losing its value through inflation.

He felt the Council had behaved responsibly. The rate had been reduced and there was a useful balance. The idea of a Capital Fund had been shelved.

As regards the precept on the District Council this was not a matter for the Town Council alone but if the District Council wanted to achieve fairness there were other methods available. The basic trouble was inflation and he confessed he did not know the answer to money losing its value.

Councillor Stratford said someone has got to stop spending money. No business ran without reserves and last year had proved the wisdom of having balances.

Councillor Grant Ferguson expressed his disagreement. Instead he felt there should be greater planning with contingencies for inflation.

The Town Mayor observed that this debate would have been better at the time the estimates were considered.

Councillor Grant Ferguson said that when the estimates were introduced at the previous Town Meeting he had said he was wrong.

The Town Mayor said he was talking about the last Rate Estimates for which Councillor Grant Ferguson had voted in support.

Councillor Grant Ferguson said he did not but that it was typical of the way minutes were recorded.

The Town Mayor said he wished to hear no criticism of the Town Clerk at the meeting.

It was then MOVED by Councillor Grant Ferguson that when the Rate Estimates were considered the Council should estimate for specific named projects and something in the kitty besides.

Although there was no Secunder the Town Mayor put the motion to the meeting and it was LOST.

A Rugby Club member who confessed to also being a Banker, mentioned that a higher rate of interest could be obtained if the money were placed on Special, as opposed to Ordinary Deposit and the Town Clerk said this was in fact done.

Another Rugby Club member hoped the Council would liaise with the Rugby Club in regard to the extension.

#### 21. Nether Street Car Park

Mrs. Harvey asked what would happen to Nether Street Car Park when the Police Station and Magistrates' Court was built.

Colonel Digby expressed concern and said he had personally emphasised the need for extra parking at that end of Alton.

#### 22. Nursery Education

Mr. O'Connor raised the question of nursery education and asked the policy of the County Council.

Colonel Archer-Shee said he was not a member of the Education Committee but the County Council had decided to postpone the scheme for a year. It was not the children that cost the money but the buildings and teachers.

Councillor Grant Ferguson said nursery education must be introduced in certain areas as a priority and Alton was one of the areas.

Colonel Archer-Shee promised to take note.

### 23. Swimming Pool

Mrs. Roberts felt the charge at the Open Air Swimming Pool to be too high and that not everyone wanted to go to the Sports Centre. It must not be lost though it might be if something was not done.

The Town Mayor said the Town Council was opposed to lunch-time closing.

Colonel Digby said there had been difficulties with equipment and staffing. No decision had been taken on closing the Pool and he would take note of Mrs. Roberts' comments.

Mr. Slone said he was also concerned and he was pressing for an early meeting of the Management Committee to discuss both prices and season tickets. He would fight to keep the Pool open.

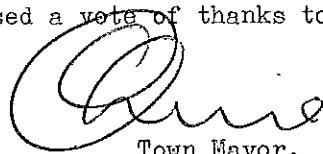
### 24. Apology

Councillor Grant Ferguson said he would like to make an apology to the Town Clerk and his staff and withdraw his remark regarding the Minutes.

### 25. Conclusion

The Town Mayor in closing the meeting thanked Colonel Archer-Shee and Lt. Colonel Digby for attending and the public for their comments which would be carefully considered.

Councillor Walker proposed a vote of thanks to the Town Mayor and this was CARRIED.



Town Mayor.  
1st April, 1976.