

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING OF ST NEOTS**  
**HELD IN THE GUEST HALL AT THE PRIORY CENTRE, ST NEOTS**  
**ON WEDNESDAY 6 MAY 2009**

**PRESENT:** Cllr R W J Eaton, Town Mayor – in the Chair

Cllr Mrs B Arnold	Cllr D Harty
Cllr Mrs J Bird	Cllr Mrs J Hayward
Cllr Ms F Birks	Cllr Mrs L Ottolangui
Cllr B Chapman	Cllr L Roberts
Cllr Mrs D Collins	Cllr D Terry
Cllr Ms K Cooper	Cllr G Thorpe
Cllr J C Cooper-Marsh	Cllr P K Ursell
Cllr A Cummings	Cllr S Van de Kerkhove

28 members of the public and representatives of the local press were also present.

**1. MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 7 May 2008 be signed as a correct record.

**2. TOWN MAYOR'S REPORT 2008/09**

The Town Mayor presented a report on the activities of the Town Council in 2008/09 – a copy of which is appended to the signed copy of these Minutes (Appendix A).

**3. TOWN MAYOR'S PRESENTATIONS**

Presentations were made to Flt Lt David Webb, the Commanding Officer of St Neots Air Training Corps and to the Air Training Corps Cadets in recognition of their outstanding support during the Civic term 2007-2009.

**4. COUNCILLORS' STATEMENT OF ATTENDANCE 2009/10**

The Acting Town Clerk submitted a record of the attendance of Members at Council and Committee meetings for the Civic year 2008/9 – a copy of which is appended to the signed copy of these Minutes (Appendix B).

5. **PRESENTATION OF THE TOWN MAYOR'S CHARITY FUND DONATIONS**

The Town Mayor reported that his Charity Fund had raised £6,000 this year, which was to be divided between the following charities:

Marie Curie Cancer Care  
Royal Air Forces Association (St Neots)  
Riverside Theatre Company  
West Anglia Young Carers' (St Neots)

Representatives from these organisations accepted presentation cheques from the Mayor.

St Neots Boxing Club, who are also to be a beneficiary from this year's Fund – the monies will be held for 12 months to enable the Boxing Club to set the Group up.

6. **ST NEOTS HEALTHCHECK**

Steve Ingram, Head of Planning at Huntingdonshire District Council, then gave a presentation on the St Neots Healthcheck.

He explained that the Healthcheck is in essence an assessment of the current economic, social and environmental strengths and weaknesses of the town which will provide a sound basis for creating an action plan for St Neots.

Mr Ingram outlined the background to the project. The Huntingdonshire District Council Core Strategy 2009-2026 includes 2,650 new homes, 25ha of new employment land and 9000m<sup>2</sup> of new retail floor space to be located in St. Neots

A Stakeholder Partnership had been formed, including Local, District and County Councils and local retail, environmental, social, economic and leisure groups. A series of workshops had been arranged which these groups had attended.

The initial stages of the consultation identified the areas of the town most appropriate for development. Strategic growth must include a better balance in communities, ie easy access to green areas and recreational uses or existing and new housing developments but must also meet the needs of the whole community. For this reason, it is important to construct an overall masterplan beforehand to foresee future requirements.

Mr Ingram explained that, although the Core Strategy is defined until 2026, it may in fact continue until 2035. He told members that community organisations, including schools, have been included in consultations to ensure the most beneficial siting of these resources.

He said that an important element of a Healthcheck is the inclusion of sustainable energy and the requirement to provide “eco towns” for the future. St Neots is a prime candidate for this with the Power Station on the edge of the town.

For St Neots, the potential expansion area has now been found to be east of the town. Loves Farm is already there and the A428 provides a strong boundary, with nearby rail and road links giving the opportunity to integrate growth within the area. Mr Ingram said that committed landowners, including the Nuffield Trust, are keen for the community to benefit from development in this area. The development is on-going and the Healthcheck will improve on this and outline future needs.

Stages I and II of the Healthcheck are now complete and the next step is to produce an Action Plan which will be reported on at a third Stakeholder Workshop, to be held this month. Huntingdonshire District Council will then have a framework for direct strategic planning for the town.

Mr Ingram emphasised that this growth should be viewed as a positive factor as it will provide more opportunities for employment and housing, as well as improving the town’s health.

Mr Ingram then took questions from members of the public, including:

Q1) Cllr Farrer – *How much is this costing and what will we get that we have not known about for the last 20 years?*

Steve Ingram – The work is being carried out under the banner of Huntingdonshire District Council. It will only work if all those groups involved take it seriously. It costs HDC and the Town Council nothing as it is grant funded and the work is being done by specialists. It will provide a better understanding of what the community wants St Neots to become and will provide documented evidence to enable councils to apply for funding at a later date.

Q2) Mr Wilkinson – *I have lived in St Neots for 48 years. What will this do about the term-time traffic; why have two schools been located on the Cambridgeshire side of the town?*

Mr Ingram – This is a County Council issue but the traffic problem should be alleviated when the cycle bridge is completed between Eynesbury/Eaton Socon.

- Q3) Mr Wilkinson – *Development of the Paper Mill has made this problem worse. Why was this allowed?*

Mr Ingram – I understand that there were no restrictions on this site previously as it was allocated for heavy industrial use. When development took place, the same restrictions continued.

- Q4) Ann Harris – *Are there any plans for a community centre in Eynesbury?*

Mr Ingram – The growth of the area will benefit all communities as issues will be found out in advance. Consultations will take place with most local groups and organisations. Residents should feed their wishes through their Town Councillors to have their say.

- Q5) Gay Eaton – *There is always a large amount of debate when St Neots wants something. Will there be more cooperation between HDC and St Neots over land use in the future? In return for the extra housing etc, perhaps HDC should try to convince St Neots that they are willing to cooperate together?*

Steve Ingram – The Healthcheck exercise should give a better understanding of St Neots residents' needs and provide greater cooperation on the cinema.

Cllr Chapman then clarified that, although Cambs CC, HDC and the Town Council own sites in the town, 100 cinema operators had identified only one suitable site, the old Fire Station site in Huntingdon Street.

- Q6) David Gadenne – *The Core Strategy allocates 9000m<sup>2</sup> for retail space, will this be in the town centre or out of town?*

Steve Ingram – We have a commitment to provide retail opportunities within the town centre.

- Q7) Lucy Francklin – *Have you consulted with children and young peoples' organisations?*

Steve Ingram – We have consulted with existing organisations and the County Council.

Cllr Thorpe said that, with regard to retail in the town centre, as part of the Healthcheck the Town Council had asked that future sites that become available do not go to housing as they will be lost forever and that Brownfield sites should be retail only.

- Q8) Rodney Bird – *In view of what has been said, why are planning applications still being considered for retail sites within the Town Centre?*

Steve Ingram – Existing processes are still in place at present, which is why strategic planning is important to safeguard sites for the future.

- Q9) Sylvia Douglas - *What about the plans for 21 houses and 4 flats in the centre of town, reviewed at last night's Planning meeting?*

Cllr Mrs Bird introduced herself as the Chairman of the Town's Planning Committee and said that these plans had been recommended refusal of this application at last night's meeting.

- Q10) Cllr Ms Birks - *Has anything been done about the empty building next to B&Q as this could be providing jobs for the town if in use.*

Steve Ingram – This was outside his remit but the building was erected as planning permission had already been given.

- Q11) Roger Howard – *Are transport needs being discussed with other neighbouring boroughs?*

Steve Ingram – We have had more contact with Cambridgeshire at present as Bedfordshire has been undergoing structural changes. We hope to work more with them in the future.

- Q12) Cllr Van de Kerkhove – *Re the cinema site. Can the town have assurances that HDC will consider releasing other land for a cinema site?*

Steve Ingram – This is a matter for Cambs County Council and it not part of my remit.

Cllr Harty reported that it had been incorrectly stated earlier that consultation rarely took place between County and local bodies when looking at sites for community centres. It is the intention to provide community centres in all wards and Section 106

money has been made available already to help fund a centre at Loves Farm.

With regard to the old swimming pool site, Cllr Harty said that local authorities are working together on this project and that it is a real opportunity for the town. The delay recently publicised is due to the Learning Skills Council not the County Council as was stated earlier.

Q13) Mr Wilkinson – *I understand that HDC benefited very well from the arrival of Tesco's in Eynesbury. What happened to this money?*

Steve Ingram – As far as I understand, the money paid for the town square improvements and grants for other conservation areas in the town such as Paynes Brewery, have preserved the character of the town.

Cllr Barnes pointed out that Tesco's was actually in Eynesbury Hardwicke, not Eynesbury.

## **7. ST NEOTS FESTIVAL**

The meeting then received a report from the Town Centre Manager, on the plans for the proposed August Bank Holiday Festival.

Mr McCormick reported that although plans are underway for an event this year, it would take up to five years to establish a festival similar to those held in neighbouring towns.

Arrangements so far included a procession of five floats and local groups such as the majorettes, to be supplemented by floats from other towns. A number of local musicians, bands, arts and performance groups had approached the Committee and are keen to be included. A fireworks display, classic car show and aerobatic display were also being looked into.

Grants had been investigated and would possibly be available in future years, but this year they were looking at "small donations" from various bodies, rather than large sums from individual organisations.

The target cost for the event was £10,000. Sponsorship of £1,700 had already been promised as well as resources to fund staging power, lighting and sound systems.

Fund-raising will commence with a car boot sale in part of the Riverside Car Park on Sunday 24 May. If successful, a further sale is planned for late July/early August.

The Town Centre Manager reported that a number of fund-raising activities would take place over the next two months involving some of the bands taking part in the Festival. Additional funds would be raised from pitch fees.

Volunteers would be welcomed to help with marshalling, information giving and other tasks on the day. More specific details of the event will be publicised when finalised, hopefully at the end of this month.

Councillors would be updated when details had been finalised.

## **8. TOWN DEBATE**

The Acting Town Clerk reported that she had received four questions in advance, one of which she would read out as the resident had not been able to attend.

Q1) Mr Carl Jones *“What are the plans for developing the Wintringham Farm area just south of Loves Farm? Will the 6,000 homes affect the yet to be implemented changes to the Parish Boundaries?”*

Cllr Thorpe – The Wintringham Farm development south of Loves Farm and bounded by the A428 is being considered as an eco-quarter to the Town, joined to and not separate from the Town. There will be some 5,000 homes with associated retail and employment opportunities. It is essential that any such development is sustainable and does not become a large housing estate, cut off from the town. Huntingdonshire District Council planners are very aware of the situation and are drawing up a design guide for the area to ensure that this new quarter of the Town will bring shops and jobs, as well as houses and that it is linked to the Town and not an isolated outpost. However, this is some years down the road.

Wintringham Farm will be included in the Town Boundary along with Loves Farm and Eynesbury Hardwicke from April 2010.

Q2) Mr David Gadenne – “I see the Depot and Operations budget has increased by £70K from budget 2008/2009 to £205,411 in Budget 2009/10. I do understand this has to do with bringing it in house so there are budget reductions in play areas and cemetery and churchyards budgets. But if I tot all these up, there is

roughly a £90,000 increase in net expenditure. What are the reasons for this increase?

Cllr Thorpe – It is my understanding that the apparent increase is due to the transfer of wages from a general budget head to the Operations Department and rent/rates payment for the Operations Dept building at Levellers Lane (rent/rates £33,710).

Mr Gadenne confirmed that he would like a more detailed response and Cllr Harty asked that this be copied to all Town Councillors. He said that the Council had lost two senior members of staff and this had resulted in poor leadership and management of the Council during the past 12 months.

- Q3) Mr Gadenne – *“In the year 2012, the Olympics will be in London and Her Majesty the Queen will be celebrating her Diamond Jubilee. What is the Town Council planning to do for both events and what financial provisions are being made by the Town Council?”*

Cllr Thorpe – Presently, there are no plans to celebrate the 2012 Olympics or the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee. With regards to the Olympics, the Town Council has renegotiated a favourable lease arrangement with the Table Tennis Club so that they can receive a Grant from Sport England to extend their premises that would enable them to be considered as an Olympic Training Venue.

Turning to Her Majesty’s Diamond Jubilee celebrations, the budget has been set for this year and cannot be changed at this late date. There will be a full Council election in 2011 when the composition of the Council may change. Any money that the Council spends has to come from the tax payers of the Town. The Town Council remains open to suggestions for the celebration of these events and recommendations as to the source of funding. We could consider something like giving each primary school child a commemorative Crown if they are minted.

- Q4) Mr Gadenne – *“The Forward Plan was passed at the 2008 Annual Council Meeting. This set out a series of objectives, project details and a budget for the financial year ending 2011. Can you please update the meeting on where the Town Council currently stands on these objectives and future budgets?”*

Cllr Thorpe – The Forward Plan provided indicative budget figures that gave a cost indication of the likely cost of the project.

It was not as such a firm budget figure. The Budget is decided annually and the Forward Plan figures are used as a guide to the preparation of the Budget. It is up to Council at that time to decide whether or not they will fund any particular project in the light of the current situation.

The new cemetery project had to be abandoned as the landowner increased the price of the land from £100K to £250K. This made the project unaffordable so the Council instead decided to use the cemetery extension land for burials and we await approval from the Environment Agency on the use of this land.

The Eatons Community Centre is going ahead, indeed building work has commenced and we hope to occupy the building in the autumn. The County Youth Services are keen to work with us to provide youth facilities there, the Riverside Church is committed to use the Centre and we have interest in setting up a pre-school group in the purpose built area.

The Priory Centre has been allocated funding to replace the marquee linings. We are working with Huntingdonshire District Council with regards to providing a One Stop Shop in the Council Offices.

Cllr Chapman is continuing his efforts to persuade Huntingdonshire District Council to agree to a cinema on the old Fire Station site. Huntingdonshire District Council are not averse to the idea but want to see a developer come forward with a positive plan of action and a financial plan for the development.

Councillor Chapman stated that following meetings with Huntingdonshire District Council officers in March, DH Barfords had written to Huntingdonshire District Council in a further attempt to open negotiations for the Huntingdon Street site and to clarify what was required by Planning Department but no response had been received and the ball was in Huntingdonshire District Council court.

The development of the Priory Quarter is still under consideration but I do not expect any major move forward yet due to the general economic downturn.

I believe that I have covered the major projects and objectives detailed in the Forward Plan which incidentally will be updated and released soon.

Cllr Harty reiterated that the Council had lost two senior members of staff and this had resulted in poor leadership and management of the Council during the past year.

- Q5) Rodney Bird – *“What is being done to address the outstanding losses made in the Priory Centre given that we are in the process of building a new centre in Eaton Socon?”*

Cllr Thorpe reported that the Communities Centre Manager was working on a Business Plan that would reduce the deficit by £25,000 in one year. Traditionally, the Priory Centre had been run as a community venue rather than at a profit and was subsidised as such.

The meeting ended at 8.50pm.

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**CHAIRMAN**  
**06.05.09**



### **Mayoral Report 2008 – 09**

As Mayor of St Neots, it is my duty and my pleasure to present an annual report on the work of the Town Council in what has been a very busy but also challenging year. As we know, St Neots is growing and in the next decade or so the population will increase by up to one third. The big issue for us all is to provide the town with the facilities that it needs.

A Cinema for the town is actively being pursued by a small group of councillors and others chaired by Councillor Barry Chapman. They are in touch with Huntingdon District Council and Cinema Operators. This process is not a quick fix but I can assure you that we are working very hard to make this dream a reality.

The Eatons Community Centre is well underway and should be ready for use September / October this year which I know has long been a dream for many people in that part of the town and is now a dream fulfilled.

We are continuing to try and get better core youth facilities in the town. The proposed Boxing Club is proving to be more difficult to achieve mainly due to the difficulty in finding suitable premises at a reasonable cost. I am still very sure that a properly organised Youth Boxing Club in St Neots would go a long way to give the young people who just hang about on the streets somewhere to express themselves in a better environment, as of course do all the other youth organisations in St Neots (Scouts, Boys Brigade, Air Training Corp, Army Cadets, Judo Tai Kwondo to name but a few). Unfortunately, mainly due to the young people involved having gone off to university, the Youth Council has ceased to operate. However I feel that we should look into widening the remit of the Youth Council to include all youth organisations and not just the two senior schools.

A long-term project, which has not yet reached fruition, is the outdoor swimming pool. Much work has been done behind the scenes to see how we can raise sufficient funds to provide this new facility for the town. The County Council have identified the old pool site as their preferred location for the new community college. Negotiations are on-going to agree a price, however due to the unexpected downturn in the economy the new college could well be delayed.

Another challenge which still faces the Town Council is the need for burial space. It may not be the most glamorous subject but one of importance to many people in the town. Unfortunately the negotiations with the purchase of

land for a new cemetery fell through. However there is no immediate need to worry as the original land adjacent to the existing cemetery is still available.

The same applies to the provision of allotments; this is becoming an important issue for the town; with house builders and planners building properties with smaller gardens, the chance to get out in the fresh air and grow your own fruit and vegetables is becoming increasingly attractive. We have 60 allotments at the moment and a waiting list of another 50 people. We have found that some allotments are under used and/or too big for people to cope with, so we are asking owners who so wish, if we can split plots in half, therefore making more all be it smaller plots available.

I'm pleased to see new bus shelters going up in many parts of the Town; the Town Council has already provided a new shelter on Bushmead Road, Hardwick Road, Howitts Gardens and Sandfields Road completing the project. A rolling four year programme of refurbishment and renewal of all the 11 Town Council provided play areas has been started by your Council and the first three are already completed.

The Town Council continues to work hard to try to meet the other challenges which are before us. Despite having unforeseen staff changes forced upon us; the Town Council Staff have pulled together under the leadership of Helen King our acting Town Clerk.

Many of you may be unaware of the work which goes on behind the scenes by Town Council members and officers to work with, support and encourage the various youth, community and voluntary groups in our town. The Town Council supports the Youth Coffee Bar, the St Neots Museum, the Pightle Millennium Green, the Jubilee Hall in Eaton Socon and the Ascension Fair, amongst others.

Two years ago the Carnival reached its 60<sup>th</sup> and possibly its last year. Sadly the support for this wonderful community event had declined to such an extent that the Carnival Committee felt that it is no longer viable, at least in its current form. The Council stepped in and organised a fair and events, including giving some of our many youth bands a chance to show off their talents to the wider public. I believe the weekend was a reasonable success as a fill in at very short notice for the usual Carnival and my thanks go to all who worked so hard to make it happen.

As you have all probably seen in the local press, a group of people (mainly from the Carnival Court) are working hard towards reinstating the Carnival, in combination with the Riverside event this year. Please support these people.

The Town Council also provides grant aid to a wide range of organisations, including St Neots Volunteer Bureau, Citizens Advice, Dialdruglink, St Neots Players, VAMPS, Royal British Legion, Natural High and many more.

I will now move on to reporting on the Civic and ceremonial events during my mayoralty in the last 12 months. During this year there have been numerous

events and occasions which have taken place and my grateful thanks go to my Consort, Gay and to my Deputy, Councillor Alan Cummings, the Town Councillors and most of all, the people of St Neots for their support, help and encouragement throughout the last two years.

In July we had our Civic Service at St Mary's, St Neots. With the new Incumbent the Reverend Dr. Paul Andrew's guidance and support, we had a wonderful service and I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks and appreciation to Paul, the Church Council, volunteers and all the uniformed organisations that turned out for the parade. I hope Paul and his family are settled in and are enjoying living and working in St Neots.

I am also pleased to report that there have been a number of successful events held under the banner of the Mayor's charities. My chosen charities this year are Marie Curie Cancer Care, West Anglia Young Carers (St Neots), The Riverside Music Youth Section, The Royal Air Forces Association, St Neots Branch and The St Neots Boxing Club. (The donation to the Boxing Club will be held by the Council for 12 months to allow them more time to find suitable premises and register the organisation with the Charity Commission.) I am delighted to report that to date we have been able to raise a total of £6,000.00. So to all those who helped in organising events, all those who took part and for all of you who contributed your own hard-earned money, my very grateful thanks.

Throughout the year it has been my great pleasure to personally attend over 120 Civic functions.

Between myself, my Consort Gay and Councillor Alan Cummings my Deputy Mayor, the mayoral team have attended some 185 meetings, functions, events, Civic ceremonial, school and youth group visits and church services all around the county and beyond, and I would like to express my thanks to all our hosts on all those occasions for the warm welcome and hospitality which we received. I have tried to support all the various concerts, shows, plays, exhibitions and events that are held in our town and they have all been extremely memorable and enjoyable.

Whilst presenting this annual report I wish to acknowledge my thanks and appreciation all the people of our town who provide help and support to the many voluntary and uniformed organisations for all sections of the community. I can assure you that all your work is very much appreciated.

To all of my colleagues of St Neots Town Council, my sincerest thanks for all your endeavours and hard work on behalf of the residents of the town and for giving me the opportunity to serve as your Mayor. It has been an undoubted honour and privilege as well as being extremely enjoyable to serve and represent the biggest and best town in the county.

My sincerest thanks also go to the Acting Town Clerk, Helen King and all her staff for their help and their hard work throughout the year. I know that this last year has been particularly difficult for the Town Council staff and every one of

the staff has rallied round, often working over and above their required commitment.

Thank you.

This is a great town. It is also a town facing great change, growth and challenges. I am sure that the Town Council and the people of St Neots will be more than equal to that challenge.

Last but not least I would like to thank the people of St Neots for their support and encouragement during my time as Mayor.

Let St Neots flourish!

Cllr Bob Eaton  
6th May 2009

ST NEOTS TOWN COUNCIL  
RECORD OF ATTENDANCE - 7 May 2008 - 6 May 2009

NAME	Full Council Meetings (16)		Policy & Resources (3)		Planning Committee (24)		Personnel Committee (11)			Audit Committee (5)			TOTAL	
	POSSIBLE	ATTENDED	POSSIBLE	ATTENDED	POSSIBLE	ATTENDED	POSSIBLE	ATTENDED	POSSIBLE	ATTENDED	POSSIBLE	ATTENDED	ATTENDED	%
Cllr Mrs B Arnold	16	14	0	0	24	21	11	8	0	0	51	43	84%	
Cllr Mrs J Bird	16	12	0	0	24	18	11	10	0	0	51	40	78%	
Cllr Ms F Birks	16	12	0	0	11	8	0	0	0	0	27	20	74%	
Cllr A Boulton	7	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	4	50%	
Cllr B Chapman	16	14	2	0	0	0	0	0	5	4	23	18	78%	
Cllr Mrs D Collins	16	16	0	0	24	23	11	10	0	0	51	49	96%	
Cllr Mrs K Cooper	16	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	21	19	90%	
Cllr J Cooper-Marsh	16	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	21	14	67%	
Cllr A Cummings	16	16	0	0	24	21	0	0	0	0	40	37	93%	
Cllr R Eaton	16	15	0	0	0	0	11	10	0	0	27	25	93%	
Cllr D Giles	16	13	3	3	10	8	11	7	0	0	40	31	78%	
Cllr D Harty	16	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	15	94%	
Cllr Mrs J Hayward	16	16	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	18	95%	
Cllr Mrs L Ottolangui	16	11	0	0	24	15	0	0	0	0	40	28	65%	
Cllr L Roberts	16	11	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	14	74%	
Cllr D Terry	16	15	0	0	24	20	0	0	5	4	45	39	87%	
Cllr G Thorpe	16	14	3	2	0	0	11	11	0	0	30	27	90%	
Cllr P Ursell	16	11	3	0	0	0	0	0	5	1	24	12	50%	
Cllr S Van de Kerkhove	6	6	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	8	100%	
<b>Percentage</b>				<b>60%</b>		<b>81%</b>		<b>85%</b>		<b>76%</b>		<b>459</b>	<b>82%</b>	

The above is a record of attendance at formal Council meetings and does not include attendance at ad hoc working parties or Outside Bodies.

**Overall Attendance 82%**  
**Council Attendance 84%**