

**SWAFFHAM TOWN COUNCIL**

Minutes of the Annual Town Assembly held on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2003 at 7.00p.m. in the Assembly Rooms, Swaffham.

Present: Mayor Cllr B. Emmerson (in the chair)

Councillors:- Mr D. Butters, Mrs P. Buxton, Mr D. Cannon, Mr P. Darby,  
Mr P. Francis, Mrs S. Matthews, Mr I. Sherwood,  
Mr J. Stockdale, Mr L. Wise.

Clerk:- Mr R. Bishop.  
Deputy Clerk:- Mrs M. Meyrick  
Clerical Assistant:- Mrs R. Noble

Iceni Partnership:- Mr T. Dickens

Public:- 28

**1. MAYOR'S WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS**

1.1. The Mayor Mr B. Emmerson welcomed everyone to the 2003 Annual Town Assembly. The Hers project has been launched by Breckland Council and Mr Andrew Gayton the Historic Buildings Officer at Breckland Council was due to give a presentation of the scheme but is unable to attend. There are Hers documents available in the Town Hall if anyone would care to have one.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.**

2.1. Cllr J. Boddy, Cllr E. Bompas, Cllr P. Ison, P.C. Partridge and Mr A. Gayton.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – for items included on the Agenda.**

3.1. There were no declarations of interest.

**4. MINUTES OF THE TOWN ASSEMBLY OF 1<sup>st</sup> May 2002**

4.1. The minutes were agreed by the Council and signed as a true record by the Mayor.

**5. REPORTS OF COUNCILLORS – on the work of the Town Council during 2002/2003**

**a) Business In Bloom. A report by Cllr B. Emmerson.**

Cllr Emmerson reported that last years Business in Bloom was very well supported and this years sponsor is again the franchise holder of MacDonalds which I thank him for his continued support and to all those that take part in the competition.

There were well over 30 entrants last year and it was very hard to judge. The judging this year will take place during July but the exact date will not be divulged so it is fair for all who enter. The Business in Bloom competition is not the only way we can help to make our town attractive, we can stop throwing litter around and reminding others not do so also.

**b) Market. Report by Cllr B. Emmerson.**

I have got to know most of the traders of Swaffham Market who up until recently would tell me of their complaints but as our market superintendent seems to have sorted out most of them and is keeping the gangways to the width they should be

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I am now getting compliments on the way our market is run. I thank the market superintendent for his work over the past year.

The Clerk and Deputy Clerk who between them open the office on the third Saturday of each month to deal with any queries that may arise. The market attracts people from all over and helps the normal traders in the town. It is a great market, imagine the town without a Saturday Market. Please support our market and by doing so support our town of Swaffham.

### **c) Swaffham Museum Ltd. Report by Cllr D. Butters.**

A new company, Swaffham Museum Ltd has been formed with representatives of the Town Council and the Friends of Swaffham Museum. It is important to realise that the Town Council is still the Custodian Trustee of the collection and all it involves. The museum is financed by a pre-determined annual grant from the Town Council plus admission money, grants and donations. There are many other ways in which the museum can obtain grants with the advice obtained from Bernie Rappensberger of the Icen Partnership.

Marion Hancock and Philip Smith are the Museum Administrators who guide the excellent team of helpers. This year's exhibition is called 'Pills and Potions' which is a record of medical treatment in Swaffham covering hospitals, doctors, dentists and opticians.

The museum is smaller this year because of the building work but in two years time it will be a larger and even more interesting place to visit. It is hoped that some of the much talked about HERs money for Swaffham can be used to improve the façade of the building to the benefit of the museum.

In the meantime we ask for your continued support not only financial or as helpers, but also as sources of information and donors of artefacts. It is with such help that the museum continues to thrive and will grow preserving the history of the town.

### **d) Town Hall & Museum Enhancement. Report by the Town Clerk.**

The plans for the first stage of the Town Hall extension are currently going through the consultation process at Breckland Council, it is hoped that planning permission and listed building consent will be granted very soon.

In the past year the Town Council have agreed a budget of £300,000, they have gone through a tendering process to appoint an architect resulting in Gerry Burns being appointed for the Town Hall project.

The Council have worked closely with Gerry Burns to develop a plan that meets all the initial requirements of a new Heritage Centre.

The funding for this project comes from part of a Public Works Loan, funded within the current Town Council budget. This is also part of the Jubilee Heritage Plan. The tendering documents for the main contract should be issued in parallel to the planning process with a view to start work on site in late May, early June.

Since the beginning for March the Icen Partnership have been accommodated in the Sampson Room at the Town Hall. This temporary arrangement has been a success that has led to a request for a more permanent home in the new

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building. The plans have recently been amended to give them a visible presence in the Town from the new Cley Road access in the Town Hall.

The Citizens Advice Bureau has also been accommodated in the Museum Library once a fortnight since the start of the year, meeting their need of an office in the Town Centre. This has been followed by a request from Age Concern for occasional office space in the new facility.

The preliminary building works have been carried out to isolate the Museum from the main work to allow the Museum to open for the current season.

The Town Council are working to a tight schedule in order to try and allow everyone to work in the existing building, providing as little disruption as possible and trying to time the bulk of the work in the existing building in a time when the Museum is closed. There is a difficult year ahead, but we all look forward to the completion of this worthwhile project to give us a diverse Heritage Centre at the town hall & Museum that Swaffham can be proud of.

### **e) Finance. Report by the Town Clerk.**

It is an understatement to say that the Town Council's finances have been under close scrutiny since my appointment just over 2 years ago. This is understandable as everything the Town Council does, impacts on the financial side of things. In those two years I have had to prepare an Audit for the previous year to my arrival. I have also had to deal with an exhaustive five yearly review conducted by the Inland Revenue and deal with the impact of extensive staff changes. At the same time trying to make in-roads into the numerous projects such as the Jubilee Heritage Plan, as a result of the money from the Brandon Road allotments. Investments, loans, budgets, building projects big and small.

The Audit Regulations have changed and they arrived in the middle of the previous financial year, applying retrospectively of course. The Freedom of Information Act was thrust upon us just before Christmas and at the start of the financial year the new ethical framework for Councillors came into force. This is the Code of Conduct and Declarations of Interest that you have read about in the local press. Three major pieces of legislation in one year to come to terms with, each impacting on the finances or financial decisions of your Town Council.

There have been changes in administration of the Museum and the Assembly Rooms. The Council have purchased the Youth & Community Centre and are currently working as an active partner within the Icen Partnership to bring about extensive refurbishment of the Assembly Rooms, rebuilding of the Community Centre and Town Centre improvements to the tune of £5 million. This is not a bad return for the £115,000 that it will have cost the Council in addition to the £44,000 purchase of the Community Centre. The Allotments are currently under review. The Market has been completely overhauled in terms of administration, resulting in an improved income.

There are also works going on at the Cemetery Chapel at present, this follows on from the removal of the overgrown hedge. There is a tree-pollarding budget for the current year. Skateboarding equipment has been secured in the past year, currently in storage. The play area at Haspalls Road has been re-vamped and now has a better fence. A new internal auditor has been appointed: Mr Brian Clements from Wroxham Avenue in Swaffham.

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Finally, I attended an event in London last month where Alun Michael MP launched the Quality Council initiative, I plan to brief the new Town Council next week, as I believe that if we are able to take more responsibility at the local level, providing it is properly funded it will help us deliver effective services in Swaffham.

**f) Planning Matters. Report by Cllr D. Butters.**

As a Town Council we are only asked for our observations regarding planning applications, Breckland District Council being the planning authority.

Planning applications (including listed building consent) dealt with since last April totalled 93, three of those were refused and eight have yet to be decided.

Our local knowledge and our consideration for the Town are often taken into account. One recent occasion when we made our voice heard loudly was when the local newspapers ran the story about the offer made of land for a possible short-stay travellers site. This opinion was conveyed to Breckland Council.

The plans in the HERs scheme draft study caused a great deal of consternation. £300,000 has been awarded and I am certain the people of Swaffham will make good use of it. The area this scheme covers has been changed since the original plan, which included the Town Hall, now the area covered is proposed to end at Cley Road in the south.

We have complained about the attempts to replace the traffic lights with roundabouts and have been in discussion with County Highways and Breckland Council regarding the parking problems in the town.

Observations we make on plans include recommendations for replacing trees that have been cut down to facilitate extensions etc. In our observations we try to limit projecting illuminated signs and other advertising signs that are not in keeping with our Conservation area requirements.

I have been concerned for a while about the problems arising from the placing of the 'Shambles' name on maps (it is currently near the Pedlar sign). This has led to confusion with planning and road traffic orders for decades. I contacted Ordnance Survey on this matter. At the moment the investigation process is well underway by the local field office.

**g) Community Centre Association. Report by Cllr J. Stockdale.**

It has been an eventful year with the Town Council purchasing the Community Centre and the land. The Association have been working with the Iceni Partnership and are waiting for the outcome of the grant application. The building is in full use and there are a wide variety of users. The Chairperson Mrs Barbara White must be congratulated for all her work. In the future there will be joint Assembly Rooms Management Group and Community Centre Association meetings.

**h) Assembly Rooms Management Group. Report by Cllr D. Butters.**

When this Council was elected in 1999 work had just been completed on the new toilets in the Assembly Rooms. Although they were not thought to be of the highest standard by many, the Council decided it could not afford to spend even more money on them at that time. The kitchen cannot be used for the preparation of food now even though it was used to feed many thousands of boys

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from the Grammar school in the not too distant past. The kitchen is no longer needed for the purpose for which it was built.

We have had problems with the large number of pigeons on the roof that has caused a problem with the gutters around the Assembly Rooms becoming blocked. A few years ago the gutters around the back of the building looked like the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. This caused water to enter the building damaging the electrical system and also causing ceiling tiles to fall. There are not so many pigeons there now, they have gone elsewhere, the gutters have been cleared and the electrical system is safe and adequate for current needs.

This last winter it has been partially redecorated and both rooms look far better now. Our new member of staff has tiled the sink area in the small room and it is a great improvement. The long-term prospects include allowing the Iceni Partnership to take on the building on a 99-year lease.

**i) Swimming Pool Association. Report by Cllr D. Cannon.**

The Swimming Pool Association has continued to attract new members throughout the past year. At the moment there are in excess of 1000 members. Since many are related to single membership for one family it is not beyond possibility that there are between 2000 and 2500 interested parties. S.P.A. are confident that this will rise once a site has been secured.

Despite some setbacks, notably the response from Parkwood Holdings (The P.F.I. successful bidder) the steering group remain resolute in their aim to provide a pool for Swaffham and preferably near the EcoTech centre to promote the energy saving ethos.

Outline planning is currently being sought on such a site. It requires change of use to leisure and is with Breckland Council for their approval. The outcome of this request will determine the next step.

The Town Council has earmarked £85,000 for the purchase of a suitable site and remains 100% behind the project.

**j) Civic Exchange. A report by Cllr B. Emmerson.**

There is no Civic Exchange this year, as the Civic Exchange between Couhe Verac, Hemmoor and Swaffham only takes place every two years. Last year was the turn of Hemmoor to host Swaffham. The Swaffham contingent was small, only 16 went but although small it was one if not the best I have been on. Twinning with Hemmoor will be 35 years old this June, The Mayor indicated that he would like to be with us on that day. Since then this has been confirmed and he with two or three others will be coming to Swaffham for that occasion. Next year will be the turn of Swaffham to host the Civic Exchange, which will take place in September; the dates are yet to be confirmed.

The Council with the Twinning Association has held a meeting and will be holding more. The purpose of these meetings is to make arrangements for the visit, as there will be around 60 guests in total. Although it was not a Civic visit the Twinning Association hosted 16 guests over the Easter weekend and the hosts and guests alike enjoyed it.

If anyone would like to find out more about the Twinning please contact me after this meeting.

**6. OTHER REPORTS:-**

**a) Police Matters.**

P.C. Partridge has been seconded to other duties and is unable to attend this evening. P.C. Partridge is greatly missed in the Town.

**b) Icen Partnership. Report by the Chairman Tony Dickens.**

The past year has been a very busy time for the Partnership and our volunteers have put in a huge amount of work. The Assembly Rooms/Community Centre project has engaged the major part of our attention. At the time of last year's Town Assembly we had just appointed Jeremy Stacey Architects to carry out a feasibility study, funded jointly by the Town Council and Breckland. Since then plans for both buildings have been produced, discussed, amended and refined throughout the year.

We have had four open days where proposals have been presented for public consultation and comment. The architects have also led five workshops, including youth workshop, with users of the buildings to enable them to influence design features, building layout and facilities to be provided.

The scope of the project was extended to include some traffic, parking and streetscape improvements from Norfolk Highways. A further consultation day was held to get feedback from the public on options such as traffic lights versus mini-roundabouts at the crossroads. Being part of this project effectively doubles the amount available for this work.

We also held a Photo Challenge competition in which members of the public were invited to take photos of what they liked and disliked about Swaffham and where they would like to see changes. Some of the suggested improvements have been incorporated into this project. All ideas have been retained for consideration in longer-term plans.

The feasibility study has been completed and our bid for funding is very close to being approved. I know many people feel the whole thing is taking a very long time and nothing seems to be happening but a lot of hard work has been involved. It is a large and complex bid but it will mean about £5.3 million coming to Swaffham. Once the funding has been achieved there will be further development workshops and public consultation leading up to the start of building work in Spring 2004.

The partnership has also been helping young people in the SK8 Mob to achieve their aim of a Skate park in Swaffham. The Town Council provided the site and purchase the equipment. The young people themselves have raised money and there have been substantial donations from Hamonds Trust, Rotary and Swaffham Lions. Funding bids are now in for the final phase of site construction and erection. Again a great deal of patience has been needed to see this project through but we should achieve a successful outcome this year.

As this is a Town Assembly I have concentrated mainly on our work in Swaffham, but other projects are being supported in some of our surrounding villages. We have also produced several newsletters; the latest is being delivered this week to 7000 homes across the Icen area.

Earlier this year we were delighted to be able to appoint a full time Project Development Officer, Bernie Rappensberger, who took up her post in March. In

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a few short weeks Bernie has become well known to a very many people involved in local community groups and activities and she is already making a substantial contribution to the work of the Partnership.

Finally I would like to acknowledge the tremendous support we have received from the Town Council and from Breckland in setting up and developing the Partnership over the last two years. In particular the expertise and professionalism of council officers has been highly valued and without their support we could not have come this far. Thanks also to all our volunteers who give freely of their time and bring a wide range of skills to our work.

The next partnership meeting is on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> May 7.30p.m. in Sporle Village Hall.

### **c) Norfolk County Council. Report by Cllr Shirley Matthews.**

The Council Tax has been increased by 15.9%. £15 million was needed from the government to stand still but we actually received £24 million. We would have got £40 million but under the Fairer Funding change implemented by John Prescott MP £16 million was taken away from Norfolk for the North and East which left us with £24 million, there is an outcry nationally about the fairer funding. All departments are being reviewed; budgets must be cut by 2%. Education will receive a lot of the money.

High School children enter at 11 years instead of 12 years as was previously which fits in with the key stages of education. There have been 2 Libraries closed, one in Norwich and one in Bradwell. The money saved from this has been redistributed throughout the County and the remaining libraries will stay open for longer periods. The Social Services budget is growing year on year. Swaffham has the highest density of 80 year olds.

The improvements on Whitsands Road that have been due since the 1980's are being started this week also housing estates are having the corners of pavements lowered for wheelchair users.

### **d) Breckland Council. Report by Cllr Ian Sherwood.**

Cllr Sherwood stated that he is thrilled by the report from Tony Dickens of the Icen Partnership. Breckland Council has been fully supportive of the Icen Partnership and there has been great involvement from all levels of the community. £77,000 is being spent on the Tourist Information Centre, which will be the only networked T.I.C. in the district. The charitable aspect of the Eco-Tech is closed but the business park is in use with £900,000 investment from Mansells, £400,000 spent on factory units, over £1 million spent on business units and there it is planned to improve the security and landscaping of the site. Business Link will be using the top floor of the Eco-Tech as from Monday. The Conference Centre will be opening its facility from next week and there is hoped to be a Cyber Café in the future.

## **7. QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR.**

The Mayor stated that the written question would be taken first:-

7.1. A letter has been received from Mr Reg Dowden – How are local people likely to benefit from the P.F.I. contract with regard to leisure facilities?

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Cllr Sherwood - The P.F.I. is in the early stages but they will be looking at Healthy Living, dance classes, going into schools but the final details are still to be worked out.

Cllr Matthews - Only 3 bids given in the whole country, ours they liked best, yet to see the benefit. Partnerships – Primary Care Trust the full details are not available yet, they haven't been finalised but hope to be the 31<sup>st</sup> July.

Cllr Buxton – Breckland is the only district council that has two primary care trusts.

Ivan Bubbear – A commendable report from the Icen Partnership. The Town Council support a swimming pool for Swaffham. The P.F.I. has been restrictive on help. The Icen Partnership has received help from Breckland Council officers but will not be able to help on leisure aspects.

Cllr Sherwood – You are able to get support from Bernie Rappensberger.

Tony Dickens – There is a wider source of help from Breckland Council officers and expertise. There is no knowledge that Icen will be denied help from Breckland.

Cllr Emmerson – The planning application for a swimming pool that is being submitted is not on Breckland owned land.

Ivan Bubbear – In 1999 Swaffham adopted the local plan, it would be helpful if leisure facilities could be mentioned in it.

Brian Clements – In the plans for the Town Hall enhancement there shows an entrance onto Cley Road. There is no pavement to service this entrance.

Cllr Emmerson – Norfolk County Council will look at this when it looks at the whole town. There will still be access to the Council offices from the London Street entrance.

Peter Harris – What encouragement is there from the Town Council for a Farmers Market in the town?

Richard Bishop – This will be discussed at the Annual Market meeting in June following research being sought by our Market Superintendent.

Ivan Bubbear – The housing development opposite Hamonds High School, there is no pedestrian crossing in place.

Richard Bishop – This will be done as the last item on the development.

Sue Polaine-Leonard – Are there any play areas scheduled to be built on the Pedlars Green housing estate, there is a sad lack of play equipment for that end of town. Make sure Cotman Housing Association do not enclose the play area, which will restrict access, on their estate.

Brian Clements – Told by headmaster that children have no right of access on the school playing field when the school is closed due to insurance costs.

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Reg Dowden – Embargo on Breckland supporting leisure facilities for 35 years, is this true?

Cllr Sherwood – Final details are not finalised so I do not know.

Cllr Matthews – This still has to be benchmarked could be for 7 years and then 5 years after that.

Dorothy Dickens – Swaffham Access Group have found Norfolk County Council helpful in implementing better access for access for the elderly and disabled around the town.

Toni Groom – Northwell Pool is unsightly and unattractive.

Cllr Darby – This has been asked to be put on the next Town Council agenda.

Mr Thompson – Concerned by 26% charged for Police Authority in the Council Tax – If we lose PC Partridge what are we paying the increase for?

Cllr Emmerson – We have been assured he will be replaced. There will be a joint meeting with Gillian Shephard MP, the Town Council and Police representatives to discuss various issues.

Dorothy Dickens – Every time a crime is reported it is like a point to getting more police for Swaffham.

Ivan Bubbear – Concern for the thought of paying for our own police, should we be paying as well as the 26% - Each person should write to the Chief Superintendent to give your views.

Cllr Darby – There is a Crime Awareness Day on the 24<sup>th</sup> May – looking for volunteers to be Special Constables

**8. MAYOR'S CLOSING REMARKS.**

8.1. The Mayor thanked everyone for attending this meeting. He thanked all those who have worked for the community, the staff of the Council who all work well together, the future looks good and all those Councillors who have supported him. The Mayor thanked the partnership for the great work they have done for the Town. The youth of the town have worked hard including the SK8 Park Mob for the future of this town.

*The meeting closed at 8.40p.m. Chairman \_\_\_\_\_*