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Minutes of the Annual Town Assembly held on the Wednesday 28th April 2010 at 7.00pm in the Assembly Rooms, Swaffham.

Present: Mayor Cllr D Harman (in the chair)

Councillors:- Mrs C Baker, Mr D. Butters, Mr P Darby, Mr C Gunner, Mrs T Jennison, Mrs S. Lister, Mrs S Matthews, Mr F Sharpe, Mr I Sherwood, Mrs J Skinner, Mrs P Wade, Mr D Wickerson.

Clerk:- Mr R Bishop.
Deputy Clerk:- Mrs M Meyrick
Youth Council: - Mr L Hanrahan
Iceni Partnership: - Mr T Dickens
Breckland Council:- Michelle King & Kate Haselton-Glee

Public:- 24

1. Mayor's welcome and opening remarks.

1.1. The Mayor welcomed everyone to the Annual Town Assembly Meeting.

2. Apologies for absence.

2.1. None received

3. Declarations of Interest

3.1. There were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes of Annual Town Assembly

4.1. The Minutes of the Annual Town Assembly held on Wednesday 22nd April 2009 were agreed and signed as a true record by the Chairman.

5. Community Reports:-

5.1. Police Report

There was no report given as there was no Police representation.

5.2. Plastic Bag Free Initiative – Michelle King & Kate Haselton-Glee.

Swaffham is aiming to become the first market town in Breckland to become a plastic bag-free zone. Breckland Council and Advance Swaffham are launching the bid to eliminate plastic bags with an awareness morning in the town centre. Getting rid of plastic bags is important for many aspects, it is a major international issue if you look at wildlife, but closer to home it helps with litter. Plastic bags are a complete waste as they do not degrade; therefore they build up in landfill for thousands of years.

5.3. Iceni Partnership – by the Chairman Tony Dickens.

Mr. Tony Dickens reported on the work over the past year of Iceni Partnership. The activities centre around the management of the two buildings at the Community Centre and Assembly Rooms, also the management of the business units at Eco-Tech Business Park. Mr. Dickens paid tribute to the officers Dennis Tallon as Manager and Vicky Mason as Office Administrative Support. The work within the Town Partnership Committee and with the Villages Group was highlighted. All activities throughout the year are now self funded, and is not a drain on the public purse.

5.4. Relief in Need Charity – trustees report.

The Relief in Need is a Registered Charity who meets 4 times a year, where applications are considered from residents of Swaffham who are in need, hardship or distress. The Charity would also consider paying for goods, services or facilities for applicants. During the last financial year 21 Grant Applications have been considered by the Trustees of the Charity with 17 applicants being successful. A total of £4564.48 was given in grants from April 2009 – March 2010. Application forms are available from the Town Council office for any Swaffham resident if they feel there is anything they feel they would like the Trustees to consider for them. Alternatively a request can also be made by e-mail – as there is now a direct e-mail for the Charity, reliefinneed@swaffhamtowncouncil.gov.uk

5.5. Swimming Pool Association – by Cllr Pippa Wade

I have been on the Committee of Swaffham and District Swimming Pool Association (previously known as the Steering Group) for the last 3 years now, but SPA itself was I believe, set up 13 years ago and even before that there was a group fighting for a swimming pool in Swaffham.

Although we do not yet have our pool, a lot has been done since those early days to move things in the right direction and establish Swaffham as a town which is recognised as being in need of a public pool and with an extremely strong commitment by the local residents.

When I reported to the Town Assembly this time last year we were awaiting the outcome of a feasibility study of leisure facilities carried out by Parkwood Consultancy on behalf of Breckland Council. This has now been published and as hoped it identifies Swaffham as a suitable venue for a new pool, as it sits in the centre of the area of highest unmet demand - although the report does also indicate that the case could not be fully justified until 2016.

This year has also seen the launch of the Town Plan, 'Advance Swaffham', which identifies the need for a public pool in Swaffham on the list of targets for the town.

The Town Council already owns a 2 acre plot of land which is available for the construction of a pool. And at SPA's AGM last week, Tony Abel of Abel Homes offered a possible alternative site if a proposed housing development is approved, on Brandon Road.

It will cost several million pounds to build a public swimming pool and more to run it. A source for this money is needed, which could be public, private or a combination. The 2012 Olympics will be upon us before we know it and this may be a catalyst for the provision of new sporting facilities. The Board of Directors of SPA will continue to investigate all avenues of funding and keep pushing to show that a pool is needed in the town and is a viable business proposition.

The SPA Committee have done excellent work this year with fundraising and publicity and this will continue.

You do need patience if you want a public swimming pool in Swaffham, but the need for one doesn't go away, so neither will SPA. And we are certainly a lot closer than we were when the organisation was formed all those years ago.

5.6. Swaffham Museum Ltd – report by Cllr David Wickerson

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I am pleased to be able to report on a very successful year for your Museum; which is a tourist attraction in its own right in addition to hosting the Tourist Information Centre, both of which attract much needed income to Swaffham and its retail businesses.

As reported last year, our acclaimed British Museum loan of Egyptian tomb artefacts attracted and continues to attract interest and we are currently in negotiation with the BM to exchange some of the objects to maintain the freshness and appeal of the exhibition.

The 2009 "Memories of Swaffham's War" display in Room 1 has been replaced with "Collectors and Collecting" for the 2010 season, which celebrates current and past Swaffham inhabitants passion for collecting a wide variety of objects. The display has been well received by local residents and visitors alike.

Revenue from visitor footfall, shop sales and education activity increased substantially over 2008 and we are looking forward to another very busy year in 2010.

In addition to the day to day activities we have taken part in several national initiatives to promote museums including Museums at Night, which will be repeated this year on Friday May 14th when we will open the Museum with special activities for all ages from 7.00pm to 10.00pm, Archaeology Day and National Heritage Day – Mr Morse's House. We intend to continue and increase these types of special events in 2010.

None of the above could or would have happened without the tremendous support and hard work of our dedicated band of over 50 volunteers, while not forgetting our Learning and Access Officer, Sian Hogarth, who has contributed far more hours than the 22.50 per week we are able to fund.

A vote of thanks must also be tabled to the fantastic fundraising activities of the Friends of Swaffham Museum, who's huge efforts in 2009 resulted in capital investment to improve your Museum including:

the cost of the display case for the British Museum loan, a lap top computer for the electronic cataloguing of our artefacts, an audio presentation to accompany Monique Slaven's Sporle and Palgrave collection, conservation sleeves for the Coe Poster collection and a display case for the newly conserved Town Armour. In addition we have been active in seeking grants from external agencies for both conservation projects and capital improvements. However, we face a major challenge in 2010 to secure the long term future of our Learning and Access Officer, so that we can continue to offer a broad based education and access service not just to schools but to the multigenerational community at large including migrants under the ESOL project, disadvantaged children and reminiscence visits to Swaffham care homes.

We have a Museum to be proud of and a Museum which continues to receive accolades from both visitors and colleagues in the industry alike and we look forward to welcoming you in 2010.

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Finally we pleased to announce that Sir Jeremy Bagge has agreed to become our Patron and to assist and advise us with our grant process in addition to organising our first ever stall at the Royal Norfolk Show at the end of June This will provide us with excellent exposure, particularly in the east of the county
Thank you.

5.7. Breckland Council – by Cllr. F Sharpe

Breckland now has one of the most advanced CCCTV networks, the state-of-the-art surveillance tool, designed to replace the district's dilapidated analogue video set-up is now fully operational and undergoing final testing before its official launch on 13th May. Over 60 digital camera's have been installed in Dereham, Swaffham, Watton, Thetford and Attleborough providing sharper images and more flexible coverage to drive down crime and anti-social behaviour.

5.8. Norfolk County Council – by Cllr Shirley Matthews.

Norfolk County Council have injected £2m to fix Norfolk's pot holes with an extra £2.8m possibly coming from the government to repair them, but this is not clear at present.

Norfolk County Council are looking at an ambitious blueprint to save £30m in the next 5 years by cutting staff in consumer protection services such as trading standards and environmental health, they are also looking to share waste collection services with other councils.

6. Reports of Councillors & Officers on the work of the Town Council during 2009/10.

6.1. Market Committee – report by Cllr Sheila Lister.

The Market became a self cleansing one from April last year. This means that all the market traders are responsible for removing their own waste from their pitch. The Town Council employs a contractor to carry out a litter pick in the area of the market in the afternoon as the traders are packing up. The Council agreed not to increase the rents of the market pitches last year (2009) and have done so again this year to try and help the market traders in the current economic climate.

The Market Committee arranged for the National Federation of Market Traders, 'Making Markets Matter' team to put on an event on 6th June 2009. The purpose was to try and highlight the market to Swaffham and the surrounding areas. There were a number of things going on during the day such as, Chef Demonstration, a prize vault & stall and face painting. There was an article in the Lynn News before the event and a follow up after the event. The EDP also did an article in the Watton & Swaffham Times which gave the market free advertising. It is hoped that this will become a yearly event.

The snow played havoc with the market for a number of weeks during this winter, but a big thank you to all those shoppers who braved the elements and continued to support the local market.

As a result of the 'Advance Swaffham' Town Plan a grant application was submitted to the Breckland Local Strategic Partnership Board under the banner of 'Swaffham Market Traditions' and was successful for the purpose of trying to re-establish a Farmers Market, an Auction and to help boost the existing Market. The Council have agreed to put a working party together which will include its partners from Icen Partnership and the Ecotech Centre. They would also like to include various other parties including market traders in the town to discuss and agree licensing issues relating to the 'Market Charter'.

Swaffham were fortunate enough to have an Italian market in the town in May, June and November of last year and also again this year in March so far.

We were also lucky enough to have Radio Norfolk's Graeme Barnard transmit its show 'Gardeners Question Time' live from the market on Saturday 3rd April 2010. He used a roaming microphone around the market interviewing various people. It is hoped that he will come back again sometime in the future.

If anyone wishes to have a stall on the market or has any ideas on how the market could be promoted please contact Ivor Livesey, Market Superintendent on 01760 722922 or e-mail ivor@swaffhamtowncouncil.co.uk

6.2. Open Spaces Committee – report by the Town Clerk.

The Open Spaces & Amenities Committee to give its full name meets every three months. They receive reports from working groups, officers and sub-committees taking a more strategic view of the management of our open spaces such as Recreation Ground, Cemetery, Allotments, Campingland, Churchyard, Town Centre, and Market etc. They make recommendations to full Council for policy changes and the committee allows sufficient time for a more detailed debate on important issues as they arise.

They are currently looking at a review of the Council's Committee structure. This is due partially to the emergence of the Town Partnership Committee and its working groups. The review is looking at the possibility of streamlining in order to avoid duplication.

6.3. Town Partnership Committee – report by the Chairman David Wickerson

When asked to present this report to the Town Assembly, I thought that I could do no better than to use part of the summary that I put together for our recent entry in the Pride in Norfolk Community Awards competition earlier this month.

It is hard to comprehend the level of dedication and work that resulted in the launch of our 10 year Town Plan – Advance Swaffham - in October 2009. A whole army of community volunteers came together to produce reports and surveys which resulted in the enclosed document, widely praised by external agencies and held up as an example to other market towns.

Since the first meeting of the original Town Group in February 2007, untold hours have been spent in researching, compiling, completing detailed Healthcheck Worksheets and questioning the various aspects of life in Swaffham within four thematic groups – Economy, Transport, Environment and Social/Community.

Advance Swaffham is the catalyst to drive forward projects, both large and small, which will ultimately be to the benefit to the Town and its people. Several projects have already been identified and work commenced in brightening up the Town with planters on all the main entrance roads, placing maps and information boards at strategic locations around the Town, becoming Breckland's first "Plastic Bag Free Town", with a major launch on May 29th, a new Swaffham Newsletter and improving signage to assist visitors in finding their way around town.

Now more hard graft is needed to turn other concepts and ideas into reality, including the reinvention and refurbishment of our Corn Hall, improving the town's economy, regenerating our market and reviving our Farmers Market, planning and planting a Community Orchard, improving transport links with the surrounding villages and traffic management in the town, producing Heritage and Health walks and protecting our listed buildings. All of which would not be possible without the whole community having come together to produce the required volume of preparatory work.

We are immensely proud of the way that the Town responded to the call for involvement in the Advance Swaffham project; both volunteers and officers from the Town Council and the Icen Partnership alike. It has shown that with hard work and goodwill from all parties a true partnership has evolved which will serve the Town well in the next decade.

A real example of people taking a Pride in their Community.

Finally we must record a specific vote of thanks to our departed Project Officer, Dave Bek, whose enthusiasm and expertise is and will be sorely missed. Without Dave's drive and initiatives we could not have succeeded with this task. At the same time we welcome our new Project Support Officer, Kate Francis and look forward to working with Kate to drive forward the initiatives mentioned above.

6.4. Planning Committee – report by Cllr Paul Darby

Over the past 12 months since the last report, 56 planning applications have been considered, including outline, full, development and advertising. Sometimes two or more applications together as there are many properties in the town centre needing full planning as well as listed building consent for both outside and inside changes. Swaffham Town Council makes observations on each application but the decision lies with Breckland council who are the planning authority.

5.5.a) Recreation Ground Committee – report by the Deputy Town Clerk

There are various elements of this project that is still being worked on. We were successful in obtaining grant funding for the toddler/junior play area previously which is well used now. It is really rewarding to see young people using this play area; it makes all the hard work worthwhile.

In September the Friends of the Rec. were successful in obtaining grant funding from Breckland for half of the cost of the bulbs that were planted. The Friends donated the remaining money required. The day was fantastic, we were fortunate enough to have fabulous weather. The bulbs were planted along the fence line of Cley Road and Haspalls Road. We were lucky to have a gentleman stop by and donate some bulbs that he had just taken out of his garden too, so they are there also. It was lovely to see all the children who turned up with parents and grandparents have a great time planting the bulbs that are now in full bloom. If you haven't seen them yet please go and take a look, they look gorgeous.

The Committee submitted a grant application to the Big Lottery's 'Awards for All' grant scheme for the 'Fitness For All Project' that will see outdoor gym equipment on the Rec. A total of £8160.50 has been received from them and a further £10,000 of Section 106 planning obligation money and £600 from the Friends of the Rec. The order has now been placed with the successful company and the Committee and Friends are busy organising the opening event that will take place on Saturday 5th June. It is hoped that it will be in a Fun Day theme, various local groups have been contacted to attend on the day. More information will be coming nearer the time so keep a watch out for posters.

The other areas of the project that the committee are still working on include:

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- Toilets
- Sensory Garden
- Dog Walking Area
- Multi Use Games Area
- Teenage Assault Course
- CCTV and lighting

These individual projects will take time as funding is limited but these are areas the committee are working hard to bring to fruition. If anyone would like further information relating to the above projects please contact Michelle on 01760 722922 or email michelle@swaffhamtowncouncil.gov.uk.

5.5. Twinning Civic Exchange – report by the Mayor, Cllr David Harman.

This year is Swaffham's turn to play host to our two twin towns Couhe in France and Hemmoor in Germany when a range of events will be planned during the weekend they are here. Some planning is already underway to open a new memorabilia display at Swaffham Museum dedicated to the last 42 years of the twinning partnerships.

5.6. Youth Council – report by Lewis Hanrahan

Lewis asked Amy Head to explain that both her and Sophie Willis had been picked to go to Cambodia to work as volunteers with a group of young people from this area at the New Futures orphanage in Takeo. To do this the group had to raise around £12,000 which will pay for the flights and accommodation etc. It is planned to put on a number of fundraising activities and will be taking part in one on 22nd May in Kings Lynn.

The Youth Council spent most of their time last year organising the Rock Night that took place 7th October but they also looked at various issues that relate to young people which included: -

- 'Mosquitos' which is a device that emits a high pitch sound which only young people can hear. They carried out research into the legality of this device and human rights issue.
- Image of young people – there is a national campaign to encourage the media to show the positive things that young people do rather than just reporting the negative aspects of a few.
- Rock Night.
- AGM – This took place on the 22nd June, each Youth Councillor had promoted this at their schools.
- They have recently had a presentation by the Twinning Association and will be looking at this in more detail in the future.
- Attended a training session at the Town Hall on the 2nd May which was a success.
- Conducted a competition for young people to design the Youth Council logo. The winner and runners up were presented with the prizes at the Mayor's Reception last year.

The Rock Night that was held on the 17th October and was a success. There were 5 bands that were all fantastic and there were around 60 youngsters in the audience. It would have been nice to have more but as this is the first one the Youth Council were pleased. They are planning another Rock Night on the 17th July. If anyone knows of any budding musicians who would like to play on the night please contact Michelle details are listed below.

The Youth Council took part in the Christmas Fayre that was organised by the businesses in Plowright Place on Sunday 6th December. They used this event to help promote themselves; it was a great day with lots of visitors.

They have also committed their help and part of next year's budget to the Twinning Weekend in September. They will be organising the entertainment for the Civic event on the Saturday night. They are currently trying to get the schools involved and have had a firm commitment from the Junior School which is very encouraging.

As always the Youth Council could do with more Councillors. Our current Youth Councillors are getting older so new recruits are needed. If anyone knows of anyone that would be interested please get in touch with Michelle on 01760 722922 or michelle@swaffhamtowncouncil.gov.uk.

5.8. Finance & GP Committee (including sale of surplus allotment land, public toilets, play area, TIC and the launch of our new Town Council website) – report by the Town Clerk.

Those members of the public who regularly attend our monthly Council meetings will have heard the Town Clerk report in the last three months reporting about an on-going audit. Our external auditors are a company called Mazars who are based in Southampton. Three years ago they replaced our previous external auditors the Audit Commission who were based in Plymouth. Over the past six or seven years local government accounting has gone the route of what has been referred to as the lighter touch audit. With a six page annual return being filled in similar to a tax form and reliant on a more locally based internal auditor to oversee accounting procedures and practices. The lighter touch audit was in theory meant to take up less time and therefore cost the Council Tax payer less money; this has not been proven to be the case. The changeover from the Audit Commission to Mazars is like comparing chalk with cheese; as Mazars have been far more rigorous and thorough. This was coupled with the Town Council changing their accounting system the year after Mazars took over; this again has not been a smooth transition.

The Town Council's finances have been somewhat depleted over the past three years since agreeing to sell surplus allotment land. It took 15 months to receive permission from the Secretary of State, by which time there was a global recession well underway. The Shoulder of Mutton allotments were sold last year and this is the topic of discussion with the auditor at the present time. It is how we treat the money within the accounts that concerns him, whether it is all strictly to be used as a capital receipt or whether the Council can lawfully repay advance expenditure incurred. This matter will be resolved in due course, but an earlier concern has been answered satisfactorily, with the Town Council proving that they did not at any time use Capital receipts to fund Revenue expenditure.

So the lighter touch audit continues, with the years 2007/08 and 2008/09 soon to be signed off we already have the paperwork in for 2009/10 which have to be agreed by the Council before the end of June and to the auditors by mid-July. With the exception of two weeks leave I am now on week 11 which has been time consuming, as it means your attention cannot be given to the many other issues we have to resolve in this town such as securing a better future for our public toilets. Hopefully the work that is being done now will pay off in the year to 31st March 2010 which has just finished.

FINANCE – the ALLOTMENTS and the LAND SALE

The sale of surplus allotment land will always provoke comments, good or bad, depending on which side of the fence you sit. Please contact the Town Hall if you want the up to date position on the surplus allotments.

The facts surrounding the sale of surplus allotments:

- the Town Council won't give the remaining land away or
- sell the land at a ridiculously low price
- professional advice has been sought and three reports have been considered
- one of the two sites was sold last year for £256,156
- any proposed transaction for Days Field has to be in the best interests of the town
- the proposed site for a hospital is no longer required as the future of the existing hospital is secure for the foreseeable future
- the Council are promoting Days Field to include in the Local Development Framework
- the Council are open to offers but will not actively advertise the sale until the Local Development Framework issues are resolved

THE BUDGET FOR 2009/10 & THE PRECEPT

The Town Council had its annual Budget meeting on Wednesday 2nd December 2009 to discuss the Council's budget for 2010/11. A recommendation went to the Full Council meeting on the 9th December where it was agreed that the annual Precept (Swaffham's part of the Council Tax) would be £198,000 up by £4,571 from the 2009/10 Precept of £193,428. This means that each Council tax payer will pay £80.07 per year at Band D.

The Precept is an amount of money that the Council requests from Breckland Council to collect from Council tax payers in the Town. The detail below shows how your Precept is spent. This is not the full income and expenditure of the Council, as this is just to demonstrate how your Precept is spent. A copy of the Council's budget for the 2010/11 year can be supplied if required.

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SYNOPSIS OF THE PRECEPT 2010/11

Town Hall balance of overheads i.e. Electricity, Gas, Waste Collection, Rates, Water Rates, Alarm, CCTV, Cleaning, Caretaking, Telephone, Repairs & Replacements.	£ 20,050
Grounds Maintenance/Contractors	5890
Recreation Ground Repairs	615
Street Lighting	31,092
Play Equipment Repairs	615
Outside Equipment Maintenance or Replacements	1,820
Town Clock Maintenance	505
War Memorial Electricity	454
Museum Artefacts Insurance	675
Website hosting	400
Sundry expenses	574
Tree Pollarding	955
Salaries (part) including, tax, NI and pensions	102,825
Insurance	10,260
Legal Professional Fees	660
Membership/Subscriptions	1,850
Stationary Books etc	3,555
Postage Stamps	965
Office Equipment Lease/Maintenance	4,180
Office Equipment repairs & Renewals	1,600
Councillor Training	330
Staff Training	3,100
Staff travel expenses	1,065
RBS/Scribe Account Computer Software	1,465
Audit	2,500
TOTAL PRECEPT =	193,428

The actual Income & Expenditure accounts for the year ending 31st March 2009 are as follows. Please note that the difference between the income and expenditure is met by carry forward balances i.e. earmarked reserves:-

SYNOPSIS OF THE ACCOUNTS 2008/09

INCOME	DETAILS	EXPENSES
3,168	Bank Interest	
162,552	Precept	
282,751	Capital Projects	240,686
6,595	Town Hall	24,518
314	Administration & Misc.	138,516
41,830	Market	36,425
3,763	Northwell Pool	2,249
990	Youth Council	502
4,598	Allotments	31,925
	Toilets & TIC	21,606
4,648	Cemetery & Churchyard	21,286
	Open Spaces	28,230
11,493	Amenities & Agency	37,193
365	Recreation Ground	3,765
523,068	TOTAL	586,901

7. Correspondence and questions from the floor.

There were no letters to consider.

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Mrs. Monika Reiger-Ridd asked the Town Clerk whether there would be more information from the Town Council in the newsletter in the coming months. As the public were told that they would be receiving more reports with a monthly newsletter. The Town Clerk responded by reiterating that the past three months had been difficult with the demands of the audit, but the annual report will be in the next edition and every effort would be made to give more reports from the Council as time allows.

8. Mayor's closing remarks.

The Mayor thanked everyone for attending and everyone that gave a report including the Youth Council representatives for their report.

Meeting closed – 8.45p.m.

Mayor.....