

Sawbridgeworth and Spellbrook

Annual Town Meeting

MINUTES of the Annual Town Meeting of Sawbridgeworth and Spellbrook held at The Council Chamber, Sayesbury Manor, Bell Street, Sawbridgeworth, Herts at 7.30 p.m. on Monday 18th March 2024.

Present: Cllr Ruth Buckmaster (Town Mayor) Chairman;
15 Local Government Electors for the Parish of Sawbridgeworth and Spellbrook, (including 8 other Town Councillors).
Town Clerk Christopher Hunt, Finance Manager Lisa Dale.

The Town Clerk welcomed those present to the Sawbridgeworth Annual Town meeting, following this, it was explained that this was not a meeting of the Town Council but of the people of Sawbridgeworth and Spellbrook.

24/01 Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting

Resolved – that the Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 3rd April 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.
[prop Cllr Angus Parsad-Wyatt sec'd Cllr Reece Smith]

24/02 Matters Arising

There was one action arising from these minutes.

***Action** – *The Mayor to write to Essex Highways regarding the condition of the road at the rail crossing on Station Road.*

***Update** *5/4/2023 Email sent to Peter Massey (Head of Highways, Essex County Council) by the Clerk and the Mayor Cllr Rattey copied in requesting a permanent road repair is made at this location. Road now repaired*

24/03 Report by the Mayor on Town Council Activities in 2022/23

The Mayor, Cllr Ruth Buckmaster mentioned several subjects and successful events such as

- River Day and the increase in attendance by members of the public and organisations.
- Fun on the Field and the dog show, run alongside the allotment horticultural show.
- Walk to School and Town Walk which was attended by several local groups and the High Sheriff of Hertfordshire Liz Green and MP Julie Marson.
- Community Connections is held at the same time as the Town Walk and was successful in support groups attending and these stalls being visited by members of the community.
- Christmas Lights was the biggest annual event in conjunction with Great St Mary's Light Festival with childrens lanterns on display.
- Light of Love organised by Isabel Hospice attracted many people who sang carols together.

- Through the year numerous civic events have been attended.
- Charities that have been supported are Guides and Youth Create.
- All younger youth clubs have been visited and leaders were thanked.
- School Council has been reintroduced and Cllr R Buckmaster will continue to support this project.

24/04 Report by the Town Clerk

The Town Clerk, Christopher Hunt, reported on the Council's Accounts to 31 March 2024.

24/05 The Mayor invited Trustee Reports from Town Charities:

Cllr Angela Alder, Chair of the **Hailey Centre** report was attached to the agenda. The recent approved application for the internal improvement was raised.

Cllr Ruth Buckmaster, Chair of the **Sawbridgeworth Young Peoples Recreational Centre** report was attached to the agenda. The recent planning application and approval was explained and the need for further funding needed to achieve this and no questions were raised.

24/06 The Mayor invited the Clerk to read out highlights from local bodies

Sargeant Andy Crow read the police report for the year which was attached to the agenda pack.

The following reports were covered by the Town Clerk and copies made available for attendees to the meeting.

309 Squadron ATC, Bowls Club, Cricket Club, Central Surgery Patients Group, Eco-Audit Working Group, Friends of Pishiobury Park, Girlguiding Sawbridgeworth and High Wych District, Great St Mary's Church, Homes for Ukraine Support Group, Local History Society, Memorial Hall, Police, Reedings Junior School, RHSO, Rotary, SECC, 1st Sawbridgeworth Scouts Group, Sports Association, Sustainable Sawbridgeworth, Tennis Club, The WI, Town Twinning Association, Travel Challenge.

24/07 Report on the Town Action Plan 2023-2027

Cllr Angus Parsad-Wyatt updated on the Action Plan for the next four years. The full action plan is publicised through the Council Website and progress monitored through quarterly meetings. Updates to date;

- Roads conditions around the town due to flooding had been addressed and were signs of success. Work was completed with Sheering Council following a cross border meeting with Councillors.
Gritting had been addressed with an increase in gritting bins and local smaller issues addressed by council staff utilising grit stocks which have now been collected.
- Town events are being developed
- Consultation with the community continues with the action plan

and social media being explored further.

- Police engagement has improved with Councillor Salvatore Pagdades now the police liaison representative.
- The Sawbridgeworth Action Plan will be used in conjunction with the East Herts Council plan to raise local issues such as planning and other improvements.

Updates followed from group representatives.

Councillor Greg Rattey, Business Champion.

- Only one shop is currently vacant in the town, business rates have remained the same for the past two years.
- A communication project with businesses is being worked on with the project manager.
- Consultation proposals for new parking restrictions have caused concerns but will be explained by Cllr E Buckmaster.
- Trade has been affected by the recent economic situation but businesses remain buoyant.

Councillor Eric Buckmaster, County Councillor.

- Parking consultations in the town were due to concerns raised by residents. He will look predominantly at reducing restrictions rather than increasing these and residents were encouraged to respond.
- In his cabinet role will be mapping out areas for nature recovery, with stakeholder engagement and develop a group which is approved by DEFRA.
- Air quality in the town will be continued to be worked on.
- Recycling centres on the borders received cross border residents utilising the facilities, reciprocal agreements with neighbouring Counties has been approved.
- Herts Waste Partnership have seen an increase in fly tipping and increasing sentencing for those involved is being progressed.
- Flooding through drain and gully clearance has shown positive results in reducing flooding. Working agreements with other bodies responsible for areas of infrastructure is being progressed.
- £10,000 of grants have been issued to 30 different local organisations.

Councillor John Rider, Roads and Footpath Champion.

- Thanked Councillor Eric Buckmaster for his work on roads and paths.
- Challenges have been made on County officers for gritting in the town. Bell Street has been recognised as a priority A road for surface treatment in poor weather conditions. The town rangers have helped during the poor weather.
- Pothole repairs and gradings have been challenged due to the dangers these have.
- Footpath repairs are seeing some positive results with repairs being completed.

Councillor Angus Parsad-Wyatt, Planning matters.

- Wrenbridge employment zone at St James's Way. The developers have gone into liquidation and no businesses have moved into the premises yet. Engagement with any business moving on to the site will be made.
- The former Barclays Bank, Knight Street. Serious concerns by local residents has been seen and this sits with East Herts Planning department. If this application is approved request has been made to have the application heard by the planning committee at East Herts allowing concerns to be voiced on behalf of local residents.

24/08 Resolutions for which written notice had been received.
None received.

24/09 Open Forum

The following questions were raised by members of the public.

Q. We have no electric vehicle charging resources?

R. Councillor R Buckmaster will be chasing this matter up as the town has been promised units for many years. Councillor Angus Parsad-Wyatt will be encouraging local businesses to fit chargers.

Q. Will the vehicles being used by businesses at Wrenbridge be electric vehicles?

R. Councillor Angus Parsad-Wyatt stated it will be difficult to understand what type of vehicle and number of movements will be made from the site until operators take up the business space.

Q. Sustainable Sawbridgeworth on behalf of residents has approached Shell, East Herts District Council and the COOP to install EV chargers with no updates so far. The reporting process to report road and footpath concerns is not consistent or user friendly. Lorries using the Sheering rat run are redirected to the main roads to stop damaging the side roads.

R. Councillor Eric Buckmaster stated that lorries using the side roads can be raised as an environmental issue and any companies regularly seen travelling through should be reported.

The reporting methods are being reviewed at County level and the online portal has been updated over several years but the feedback needs to be improved.

Q. The canal boat with the litter problem has been reported several times. What else can be completed to get it moved?

R. Clerk responded that the condition of the boat has been reported to the canals and river boats trust and the district council as well as the police. He encourages members of the community to do the same.

Q. It is fantastic to hear all the good work being completed but should groups be allowed three minutes to speak or a different way for this work to be celebrated as this meeting appears to be too formal?

R. The Clerk responded that the meeting had been reviewed and the

format changed slightly from the usual format. Councillor Ruth Buckmaster stated 3 minute updates had been tried previously and it makes the meeting too long and Bishops Stortford are trying a different format.

A video or picture presentation recorded throughout the year may be a better way to record good work and encourage people to come along to the meeting.

Q. Is it true no waiting red lines are going to be applied to the road from the distribution centre at Wrenbridge through the town along the A1184?

R. Councillor Eric Buckmaster stated he would be aware if this was proposed and he wasn't aware of this.

A member of the public thanked Councillors and staff for arranging the meeting.

There being no other questions the Mayor closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

The Annual Town Meeting closed at 9 pm