

Sawbridgeworth and Spellbrook

Annual Town Meeting

MINUTES of the Annual Town Meeting of Sawbridgeworth and Spellbrook held at The Council Offices, Sayesbury Manor, Bell Street, Sawbridgeworth, Herts at 7.30 p.m. on Monday 15 April 2013.

Present: Cllr Barry Hodges JP (Town Mayor) Chairman; 17 Local Government Electors for the ward of Sawbridgeworth and Spellbrook, (including 9 Town Councillors). County Cllr Roger Beeching MBE, PCSO Paul Lillie Herts Police, Eleanor Patmore H&E Observer, Town Clerk Richard Bowran, Town Projects Manager Joanne Kenny, Gill Abbott and Sue Adams.

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

13/01 Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting

Resolved – that the Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 16 April 2012 be confirmed as a correct record.

13/02 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from those minutes

13/03 Report by the Town Mayor

The Town Mayor, Cllr Barry Hodges JP, reported on the Activities of the Council in 2012/13.

It has been a privilege to serve Sawbridgeworth as mayor; last year has been one when many projects long in the pipeline have come to fruition.

- This year has been extraordinary as it has seen the town council invest nearly a million pounds in the capital infrastructure of the town.
- First of all the conversion of **The Cottage** and the building of this new council chamber, with associated offices. This is the first time the Town Council has had a permanent home, up to now we have been itinerant tenants in various parts of the town.

The project which has been completed - under budget - at a total cost of £675,000 has been funded entirely from the proceeds of the sale of the redundant allotment land at Millfields. It provides first rate facilities for the town and we hope that it will be put to full uses over years to come.

We will be welcoming our local police officers to the first floor and the East Herts Citizens advice service to the ground floor on Monday mornings.

- We have a link door to the **Hailey Centre** – and we have signed a 999 year lease on the Centre which will secure its current use for the foreseeable future. It also means that the town council takes over the responsibility for its maintenance which should show an improvement

to the exterior looks and integrity of the building.

- We promised to support the repair and refurbishment of the **Memorial Hall**, again using funds from the sale of the Millfields land. So far we have handed over £138,000 for the project and this has shown a remarkable transformation of the building and ensured that its life has been extended for the benefit of the community.
- We agreed to share the cost of refreshing and enhancing the **Vantorts play area** in partnership with the District Council. Despite some reservations it has proved to be a great success and has received many favourable comments. The Town Council's contribution was £40,000 using funds from the sale of the Millfields land.
- We planned for and executed the complete refurbishment of the **West Road play area** at a cost of £30,000 again using funds from the sale of the Millfields land. It is already proving a tremendous success and an asset to the community.
- We also contributed £25,000 to **the scouts** new headquarters
- We have managed six **Farmers Markets** throughout the year. They continue to be popular and bring people into the town on market days. We spent £8,000 on our own market gazebos and equipment which are a great improvement on the stall we previously used. For the next year we have ramped up the frequency to one market a month and this was launched with radio adverts and community activities earlier this month. We has over 1,200 visitors!
- Business Association - we initiated a new version of the Business Association, but in this format this has not taken off. Recently the town council has supported "**All About Sawbridgeworth**" – a marketing consortium of retailers and businesses, this promises to go from strength to strength
- Last year's **Christmas Lights** were bigger and better than ever, we had a street market and over 3,000 people attended the community event.
- **Sawbobus** – continues to go from strength to strength and is a well appreciated service. We carried out over 2,200 passenger journeys during the year. The routes changed slightly to reflect passenger demand. Thanks to all out sponsors. In May, with the support of the County Council we are launching **Sawbobus 2** which will start out by carrying passengers to the hospitals in Harlow and Bishops' Stortford.
- **Community Buses** – we have continued to operate the small community bus for hire by local registered groups. During the year we added another 15 seater to the hire fleet which has been greatly used. This offers really economical transport for local groups with their own drivers.
- We introduced a parking scheme in the **Bell Street car park** to allow for the first hour's parking to be free. This was an experiment for six months from August now extended to March 2014 as it has proved a

real hit with retailers and visitors alike. It does however cost the town council £22,000 a year to subsidise.

- As far as our role in **Planning** is concerned – we have given an opinion on 75 planning applications this year taking into account both the East Herts Adopted Local Plan and the Town Action Plan.
- The **Town Cemetery** development – the new extension has been grass seeded, rolled and is being prepared for future use. We have opened up a new area for use by families who prefer kerbed memorials. During the last year we hosted 52 interments at our Cemetery which is regarded as one of the best kept in the area.
- Mayor's visits – during the year I attended many functions of various types. The highlights were:
 - The Queen's Jubilee
 - Visit to Bry-sur-Marne
 - Christmas lights switch on event
 - Opening of the new Scout hut
 - Visits to schools.

TOWN ACTION PLAN – THE SIX KEY ISSUES

Elsewhere there is a review of progress against the Town Action Plan that was created in 2009. Having resolved there is no economic benefit to the town by creating a Neighbourhood Plan at an estimated cost of £40,000, we plan to create a successor Town Action Plan for 2014-18.

The Town Action Plan identified six key issues:

- Roads and Transport -
- Plan Housing Sensibly -
- Car Park Charges -
- Support for the Voluntary Sector -
- Support for Local Businesses -
- Replacement Scout Hut -

The report of the Town Council was accepted.

13/04 Report by the Town Clerk

The Town Clerk, Richard Bowran, reported on the Council's Accounts to 31 March 2012. *Attached as Appendix 1.*

The Tabled Report of the Town Clerk was accepted

13/05 The Mayor invited Reports from Town Charities:

Cllr Angela Alder, Chairman of the *Hailey Centre* reported on activities for the year.

Cllr Derek Filler, Chairman of the **Sawbridgeworth Young Peoples Recreational Centre** reported on activities for the year.

Cllr Andrew Wincott, Trustee of the **Memorial Hall** reported on activities for the year.

13/06 The Mayor invited other reports:

County Councillor Roger Beeching MBE JP– congratulated the Town on all its achievements over the past year, and especially the town clerk and his staff for making sure that so many projects for the benefit of the community have been completed.

“As county councillor I am coming to the end of my four year term as your representative on the County council for Division 24, I thought I would give you an over view of the work I have been involved in on your and the communities behalf.

To begin with the county Council work was very different from that in the other layers of Local Government and it was a steep learning curve .After the first 18 months this settled down to needing to just keep up with new processes and strategies as they arose.

I have tried to go to all Town and 5 parishes meetings, in the area I represent, to the best off my ability allowing for diary clashes. At these meetings I have generally given an update on the various initiatives coming from the County Council departments.

I have been able to distribute £40,000 in Locality Budget grants to good causes to enhance the wellbeing of the community and group benefitting from it. I estimate I have distributed 70% to 80% of these grants. I have tried to make the people receiving the grants as wide a representative as possible ranging from preschool groups to old age pensioner clubs, sports clubs to educational groups and aesthetic improvements to our communities.

The Highways Locality Budget has been in operation for a year and £90,000 is available, £60,000 of this has gone to road issues and I have prioritised and allocated as fairly and evenly as possible across my Division. The other £30,000 has been spent on minor improvements (that is cheaper) landscape issues, health and safety with signs and lining, gully cleaning, weed clearing and untidy areas. Reinforcing road markings at dangerous junctions and consultations as to what residents want in their particular areas. I have also had my casework load from residents who need help in finding their way through the bureaucracy they find themselves caught up in. This is particularly difficult in the area of health and social services where support and finance seem to be at odds sometimes. Other areas I have been involved in are schools admissions, bus routes, footpaths changes, housing problems and planning issues. There are many others but that is probably enough.

At County Hall I have served on the Education and Skills Cabinet panel, Health and Adult Care Cabinet Panel, Health Scrutiny Committee, Health Monitoring Recommendations Topic Group. I have also chaired various Scrutiny panels looking at subjects as diverse as Maternity Services in

Hospitals, Returning Servicemen, Adoption systems, safeguarding the elderly in hospitals and care Homes and quality of care at the end of life, and more. I am also a member of the Standards Committee ensuring councillors are acting in accordance with a code of conduct and ethical behaviour.

For the future I am putting myself forward for re-election, and I see the tasks to follow through are scrutiny recommendations already made, scrutiny of the new systems for health and ensuring they are of a good quality and efficient.”

District Councillor Eric Buckmaster – advised on his attendance at meetings, and that he now sat on the Health and Wellbeing Panel and the Licensing Sub Committee. He advised that progress on the District Plan was slow. He is involved with the Ageing Well programme. He said his role with EHDC was widespread in addition to his role in supporting local Sawbridgeworth issues.

District Councillor Will Mortimer – said he was on the corporate business scrutiny committee and vice-chairman of the audit committee. Min topics of the year had been Business rates relief, car park charges restructuring in Hertford and Ware and the introduction of Adele Taylor as the new Director of Finance and Support Services

PCSO Paul Lillie – reported that Sawbridgeworth will have a new Community Sergeant in PS Ricky Bartlett. East Herts has experienced a big reduction in burglaries although there was still an unacceptable level of vandalism, including the “keying” of cars, in the town. There has been the successful of two non-local males for these and the execution of a drugs warrant. There has also been work with some school children addressing speeding matters. Preparations are in hand for the May Fayre which although well policed will not have such a high profile as last year.

Mr David Stanford of Station Road said that the traffic situation in Station Road was very dangerous with cars travelling at reckless speeds.

PL responded by saying that speed enforcement vans would be deployed.

RB said he was working with Herts Highways on the speed issue and on potential blocking of the level crossing.

PL said that Operation Agrarian has been the exercise to advise motorists if the error of their ways.

13/07 Town Action Plan

Cllr Eric Buckmaster introduced the intention to create a new Town Action Plan to cover the years 2014-18 as a successor to the 2009-13 Plan which was nearing the end of its life. This new plan will revise and reflect the views and wishes of Sawbridgeworth and Spellbrook parishioners and be a mechanism to make a credible input to the District Plan.

He was looking for volunteers from parishioners who would be willing to participate and wanted there to be more parishioners than council members in the working party. Approaches would be made to people with key interests in various town matters. The Clerk will publicise the programme.

13/08 Resolutions for which written notice had been received

None had been received

13/09 Open Forum

There being no other business the meeting was closed.

The Meeting closed at 8.40pm

Signed: _____

Dated: _____

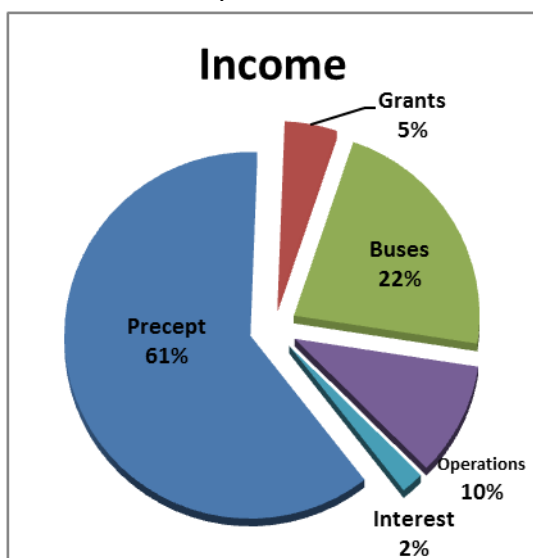
Appendix 1

CLERK'S REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 15 APRIL 2013

At the Annual Town Meeting the role of the Clerk is to report on the finances of the Council for the year just ended.

In the year 2012/13 the Town Council's Precept was £180,000, this was 61% of the Council's total income.

The Council derives other income from its operations in the town, such as the Town Cemetery, the four Allotment Gardens and the Community Bus services. Income relating to these other activities amounted to £114,274; and so the Council's total income for the year was £294,274.



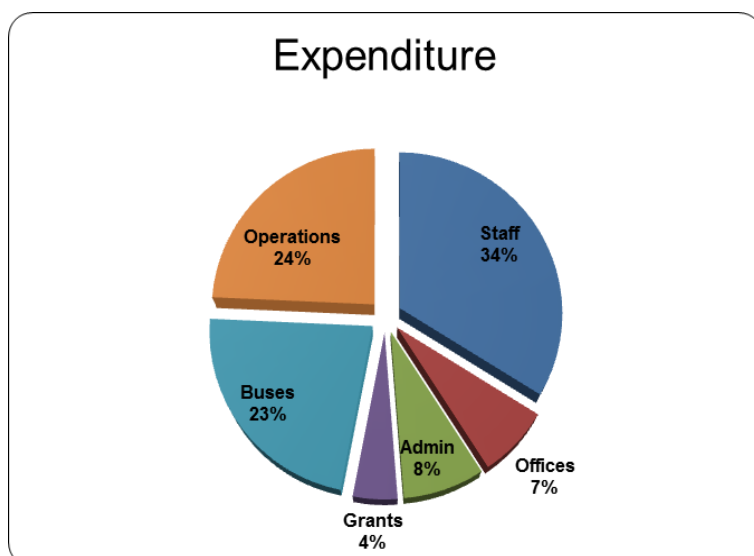
At the start of the year the Council also held in reserve the net proceeds of the sale of a parcel of land east of Millfields which amounted to £977,184. These monies were ring fenced for capital projects in 2012/13 for the benefit of the community

Our ordinary income is shown in the diagram on the left. The Council is aiming to continue to develop Operations Income to minimise the need to raise the Precept.

We have used the available resources in the way shown in the diagram on the right. We spent a total of £313,534 this year on items not including our capital projects programme.

The deficit of £19,260, mainly due to the cost of delays in moving to our new civic hub, has been met from reserves.

Staff costs amounted to 29% of this; we have two full time employees, three part time administration officers, the town ranger and two part time bus drivers. All other services are carried out by contractors.



Our operations costs were 47% of our spend, and included management of the Town Cemetery, the Allotment Gardens, the two Community Minibuses, the Sawbobus Community transport service, recreation areas, footpaths, the Town Ranger, provision and maintenance of Floral Displays and the Christmas Lights.

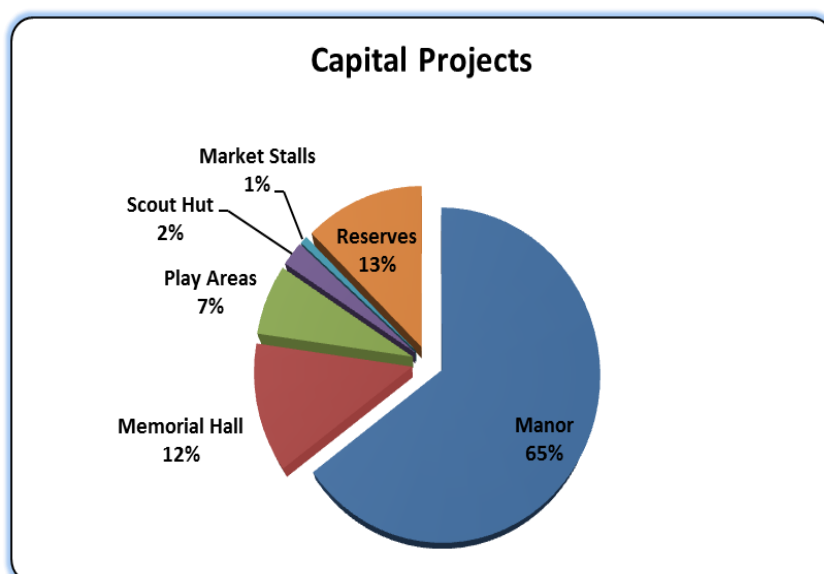
Our administration costs at 8% of the total included our responsibilities as a Consultee on planning applications and matters relating to the town, monitoring and action against the Town Action Plan, Fly Posting, Town Council Newsletters, Civic Events, Community Transport, Floral Decorations, Promoting the Town, subscriptions, insurances and other matters including meetings, committees and representation on outside bodies including liaison with the County and District Councils.

Our office costs, 7% of the total, related to our use of 49 Bell Street until January 2013. These have been ended now we have been able to give up that temporary tenancy.

During the year, the Council expanded the operation of Sawbobus, which was financed by commercial sponsorship. It planned the start of Sawbobus 2 which will provide a link to hospitals in Harlow and Bishops Stortford. It continues to manage the Farmers Market which will be expanded in 2013/14 to be a monthly market and community event. and the two Community Minibus, both of these activities are self financing although take up significant administration time.

The Town Council continues to step in to preserve services to the community when other organisations are unable to continue.

The Council made grants totalling £13,400 to five different local organisations during the year, these were the Citizens Advice Service, Bullfields Allotments Association, Sawbridgeworth and Stortford Street Pastors, the War Memorial refurbishment fund and the Memorial Hall dedication ceremony. In addition they made donations totalling £6,000 to support the activities of the Town Twinning Association, the Hailey Centre and the Young Peoples Recreation Centre.



The main capital projects for the year have been the conversion and extension of Sayesbury Manor Cottage into a new centre for the community and a permanent home for the council. We also gave substantial assistance for the repair and

development of the Memorial Hall, we redeveloped the West Road play area, and contributed to the development of the Vantorts Park play area, the new Scout HQ and new market stalls. We have some earmarked reserves for the completion of the Civic Centre and Memorial Hall projects.

For this coming year the precept has been increased marginally to £187,500. The increase will make a contribution to the estimated cost of £22,000 that will be payable to EHDC to subsidise the one free hour parking scheme. The rest of the subsidy is made up of economies and savings made elsewhere. Extra income from other operations will continue to be around £100,000, this keeping the precept to parishioners at the lowest level of any town in East Hertfordshire.