

# **DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL**

## **MINUTES OF THE TOWN MEETING**

**HELD ON MONDAY 25 MARCH 2024 FROM 7 pm**

Present: Councillor Liz Jones (Town Mayor) (in the Chair); Councillor Louise O’Riordan (Deputy Town Mayor); Mr P Hodson (Town Clerk and Chief Executive) and 36 electors of the Parish of Dunstable, 15 of whom were elected representatives of the Town Council.

### **1. WELCOME**

The Town Mayor welcomed electors to the 39<sup>th</sup> Dunstable Town Meeting and explained its purpose.

### **2. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Trevor Adams, Mr Andrew Selous MP, Chief Inspector Jim Goldsmith and the Police and Crime Commissioner and Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner.

### **3. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Town Meeting held on 27 March 2023 were approved as an accurate record and the Town Mayor signed the minutes as a correct record.

### **4. Presentation by Anna Bosworth from Central Bedfordshire Council about the funding and support available for local businesses through CBC.**

Anna Bosworth, Head of Investment, Employment, and Skills at Central Bedfordshire Council presented an overview of the UKSPF and in Michael Martin's absence, briefly outlined Wenta's business support initiatives with their Start-up support program for new businesses and entrepreneurs.

Chris Fox, Business Partnership Project Manager at the University of Bedfordshire, discussed avenues for businesses to access innovation and technological assistance, enhancing productivity and facilitating the adoption of novel products or services.

Justin Richardson, Chief Executive of the Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce, elaborated on their role in fostering businesses to become export-ready and venture into new markets.

Claire Banwell, representing Cranfield University, showcased how they can assist businesses in developing de-carbonisation and net zero plans, as well as supporting established businesses with growth potential through the development of business growth plans and the adoption of new or improved products or services.

These programmes provide valuable opportunities for local businesses to enhance their growth and success.

5. **Presentation from the Town Council about the Town Centre Management services available,**

Dunstable Town Council also presented the role of the Town Centre Manager and how the Town Council supports the town centre through various activities such as event management, promotion, stakeholder liaison, running of the public toilets and market as well as wide community development initiatives. Dunstable will host its very first Young Traders Market on Saturday 6 July. The Town Council is offering 16 to 30 year olds the opportunity to secure a market stall for just £10 and is providing additional support for potential traders.

6. **Brief presentation from Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce.**

Justin Richardson, Chief Executive of the Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce, further elaborated on the Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce opportunities businesses can benefit from.

7. **QUESTIONS FROM ELECTORS**

Electors were encouraged to ask questions to the panel. A number of residents raised concerns and dissatisfaction regarding the number of potholes around the town, in particular one resident expressed the severity on Oldhill and Lowther Road. One resident expressed dissatisfaction in Central Bedfordshire Council's fix my street, online portal for reporting these issues. It was advised that the same issues are being raised over many months, with no change seen to date. In response Councillors John and Kenson Gurney commented on the matters raised and the meeting agreed to request a formal response from Central Bedfordshire Council officers.

**ACTION:** Central Bedfordshire Council, Highways

A resident raised multiple concerns relating to the Town. Particular concerns included the childish behaviour displayed across social media from Councillors; the new green bin charges coming into effect; loss of free parking in town and the council tax increase. In response Councillor Jones agreed that those councillors involved in this unnecessary behaviour need to do better in responding in the correct manner on social media and that matters do need to be raised internally and not online. All concerns raised regarding Central Bedfordshire Council which were not the responsibility of the Town Council, will be forwarded along for a formal response.

**ACTION:** Central Bedfordshire Council

A resident commented that they were proud of the Town's development over the years and praised the Council on the great events which take place each year for the community to enjoy. They raised points of interest for further development which included supporting new and upcoming businesses into the Town; a wider range of stores to keep a good and inviting variety and that some older buildings are looking a bit run down. In response the Head of Community services advised that the High Street Heritage Action Zone project was aimed for local businesses to develop the front of their shops however it wasn't such an easy task to get the businesses onboard. The Town Centre Manager touched on the upcoming new young trader's markets which is aimed at young traders between the ages of 16-30 to come along for a small fee of £10 and free insurance to get the experience in business which in turn will bring further development to the Town in the future.

Councillor Tamara expressed further interest in the diversity of stores across the Town and expressed that passionate and enthusiastic businesses would play a key role in bringing diverse stores and visitors to Dunstable. In response to diversity, he explained that landlords will take what comes on offer to them not necessarily looking at what is needed in the Town.

Councillor Tamara asked how the Town Meeting was publicised. In response the Town Clerk and Chief executive explained that Dunstable Town Council did a press release and used social media platforms to publicise the event.

A resident queried the progress on the works currently happening at Priory House and expressed concerns with funding to enable the completion of works. The Head of Community Services commented on the current status and works happening, additional monies have been received from Historic England and The National Lottery to enable plans to still move forward, but that additional funding would be required to enable the project to be completed. The old doctor's surgery was mentioned due to the continuing vandalism of the building, unfortunately due to the property being on private land, this comment will be passed along to our safety and community officers.

**ACTION:** Central Bedfordshire Community Safety Officers

Resident Councillor Bater queried New Vista Homes decision to cease building new properties and questioned would this mean that the development for the old Ambulance Station on Kingway would no longer go ahead and if not, could the building works planned for the old Library area be moved to that site which will preserve more green space for our town. Councillor Kenson Gurney commented back he would like to see green space but advised that at present it is still too early to know exactly what will happen.

Resident Councillor Brennan commented on the Community Grant Scheme bidding closing last November and asked if there are plans for further funding to become available. Anna Bosworth advised although not her area, she is aware funding is currently being looked into by the team working on the UKSPF.

Resident Councillor Brennan asked about business decarbonation and weather it would be a good idea to have a connection between Dunstable Town Council due to our net zero target and the University to access the course to enable decarbonisation to happen. In response the Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised that recently Dunstable Town Council have had training from Central Bedfordshire Council on decarbonisation which is now part of the annual appraisal.

The Town Mayor thanked everyone for their attendance and participation and closed the meeting at 20:25.