

Minutes of the ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
held on **Tuesday 29th April 2014 at 7.00pm in The Institute,**
Yonder Street, Ottery St Mary

Present: Mayor Councillor Dobson
Councillors Giles, Holmes, Lewis, Thurgood (Town Ward) Bailey (from 8pm)
Talbot, (West Hill Ward) J Harding, L Harding (Tipton St John
Ward) Hansford (North Ward) together with the Clerk, Press and
55 members of the public
Apologies: Councillors Mitchell, Watmore (West Hill Ward), District Councillor Cox and
District & County Councillor Wright

1. WELCOME BY THE MAYOR – COUNCILLOR GLYN DOBSON

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked the Town Councillors present to introduce themselves.

2. TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON 23RD APRIL 2013

The Minutes were approved and they were signed by the Mayor.

3. THE FUTURE OF OTTERY’S COMMUNITY HOSPITAL - A PRESENTATION

Graham Ward (retired Doctor) had spoken to last year’s meeting and said that there was still nothing confirmed about Ottery Hospital. He stated that his observations of what is a complex issue are based on his knowledge in the community and his service on several committees. The delivery of medicine from GPs and Hospitals has changed enormously in 20 years, particularly because of the use of modern technology. The need for community beds has reduced enormously. The NHS in Devon is grossly overspent and money saving is essential. Staffing issues: bigger units provide nursing staff with more variety and greater career opportunities.

Organisation of the NHS:

- a. Commissioners: these are the GPs for whom this is a new role.
- b. Providers: these are the bigger hospitals and to some extent community hospitals.

The Commissioners in this part of Devon have 5 options:

- 1. Do nothing
- 2. League of Friends to make funding provision
- 3. Beds in Ottery Hospital could be expanded to take those in Honiton Hospital
- 4. Beds in Honiton Hospital could be expanded to take those in Ottery Hospital
- 5. Close both Ottery and Honiton Hospitals

It has been promised that no Hospitals will close but the debate is what will go on in them.

There are discussions ongoing in various groups and Cllr Pang and Cllr Thurgood are involved in these.

Graham Ward concluded by giving good news that by living in Ottery your life expectancy is 83.3 years compared with the average for Devon of 81.6 years.

4. REPORT FROM DEVON & CORNWALL POLICE

PCSO Maria Clapp gave the Police report for the area covering Ottery St Mary town, West Hill, Tipton St John & Alington.

“Recorded crime for last year stood at 218 compared with 195 for this year. Last year there was a slight increase in figures, which we reported as far less than one a day. This year has improved even more for the area that we cover.

Mayor’s initials:

Please visualise the area I am talking about, also the affluence of the area. We do live in a very low crime area and should be very pleased, although we still want to make the area a perfect place.

Violent offences have decreased from 52 to 34. Burglary (house/outbuildings) has decreased from 30 to 24. Vehicle offences have decreased from 24 to 18. Shoplifting decreased from 12 to 8. Criminal damage decreased from 37 to 32. Other theft/ not in home, bikes/phones etc increased from 44 to 51. Overall we have a crime reduction of 11.7%

As usual, most detected crime comes from recorded assaults where the victim invariably knows the assailant, or by police generated crimes including drunk and disqualified drivers, public order offences, such as being drunk & disorderly, and being found in possession of drugs.

Police plans are well underway for our local events this year which includes Pixie day and Tar Barrels.

Our plans are as noted in the local paper: that response officers are going to be based at our station, which can only be even better for the town and surrounding area.

PC Dave Smith is retiring on Thursday 1st May and it is over a year ago that PC Thomas retired and became a PCSO in Sidmouth.”

5. “CITIZEN OF THE YEAR 2014” PRESENTATION

The Mayor announced that the “Citizen of the Year 2014” is John Gaffney. He received the greatest number of votes from the public and was nominated for his untiring work for the town through the production of the “Ottery Gazette”. The Mayor presented John with a commemorative shield.

6. REVIEW OF THE YEAR BY THE MAYOR

Mayor Cllr Glyn Dobson gave the following Report.

MAY 2013

At the Annual Meeting I was again honoured to be elected Mayor of Ottery St Mary for the 7th time with Councillor Ian Holmes, my Deputy alongside Councillor Paul Lewis the Councillor with special responsibility for Finance and Councillor Carter as Planning Chairman with Councillor Holmes as Vice Chairman of Planning.

JUNE 2013

It was this month a Working Party was formed for a Street Market in Mill Street, Ottery St Mary. Sadly this had to close due to parking issues but now I am glad to say many of you will now be acquainted with the fact that the Street Market will re-open once again on Friday 2nd May at 8.30am. It is hoped that many of you will support this and my thanks go to Councillor John Harding who has been co-ordinating this project from the start. We wish the traders every success. It was this month that construction work commenced at The Old Convent which many of you will see is still ongoing, I am assured the first home should be occupied by June but we wait with baited breath!

JULY 2013

The July meeting opened with the resignation of Councillor Claire Wright from the West Hill Ward. This was due to her increased workload as a Devon County Council Councillor and also as an EDDC Councillor. She sat on this Council for 4 years and we are grateful for her valuable input. It was in this month I organised the Coronation Ball which was a huge success and well attended. To recognise this year’s Diamond Jubilee of the Coronation a new Town Clock was installed in the Square. This was paid for by using some of the Section 106 monies given for the town.

AUGUST 2013

The Council met to consider Flood Prevention and Preparedness in the Parish after the serious flooding in the past in the Parish. In the autumn the council with other agencies held a public flood preparedness awareness event which was well attended. Cllr Martin Thurgood has now taken a lead on this as part of the exercise to produce an Emergency Plan.

Mayor’s initials:

It was during this month that there was electricity connection on the council's building of a Sports Pavilion at the Land on Strawberry Lane. Councillors Hansford and J. Harding have been instrumental at this land in strimming grass and clearance for which I am grateful. I am pleased to report that I am hopeful Sporting Organisations and Clubs will soon be able to use and enjoy this Sports Pavilion.

SEPTEMBER 2013

This month we held our full Council meeting at the Tipton St John Community Hall. As a Council we welcome the fact of being able to hire a hall in the 3 villages to enable local residents to attend more easily. This month I and three other Councillors (Pang, Giles and Cllr J Harding) attended a meeting with the Community Council of Devon to discuss whether the council wanted to draw up a Neighbourhood Plan. However a Parish Plan was still favoured as it was felt the opportunity had passed for drawing up a Neighbourhood Plan as all the developments had been passed.

This was also the second year to take part in the Parishes Together Fund. This is the 2nd year that Devon County Council has provided £1 per elector and EDDC 10 pence per elector for Parishes Working Together to come up with a project. I am pleased to say after many meetings with the surrounding parishes of Talaton, Aylesbeare and Buckerell the following projects have been successful: The CAB "Manage Your Money" Training Programme in each participating Parish, The Ottery Food Bank, Ottery & Parishes Computer Club and the Ottery Help Scheme, all very worthwhile projects. I am also pleased to announce the funding will be available again this year.

OCTOBER 2013

This month it was agreed to support the Citizens Advice Bureau from the precept. The CAB sessions, held at our council offices on a Tuesday from 1.15pm-3.45pm have proved very successful. It was also agreed this month that a Festival Week in Ottery would be held from the 15th – 20th July. A lot of hard work has gone into this and my thanks to Cllrs Talbot, and Holmes and also to Phyllis for their input and hard work in this project. I hope you will all enjoy and support this event.

NOVEMBER 2013

Sadly this month Devon County Council commenced with cuts to the Youth Services in Ottery St Mary. There has been much discussion and consultation regarding this during the year but it seems cuts from central government will result in the youth services diminishing which is very sad for our young people. This month we were given the opportunity to invite the Highways Engineer Mr Mike Brown to hold a "Surgery" every 2 months at the Council Office. This has proved very successful as it gives the opportunity for residents to speak directly about concerns. I know from our logs in the office there have been many ongoing complaints about the state of the roads regarding potholes in particular! The office has tried its hardest to push for works to be completed as quickly as possible. The next surgery Mike Brown will be holding is on Thursday 8th May from 10am – 12 midday if any of you would like to come up and see him please note this date.

A new "Welcome to Ottery" signage incorporating a Planter was erected this month. These were jointly funded by the Rotary Club from money raised during the Queens Diamond Jubilee celebrations and Sainsbury's Section 106 money.

DECEMBER 2013

The Meeting in December saw a Presentation by Dr Kerr from the Coleridge Medical Centre regarding the future of our hospital. I am sure we all sincerely hope our Hospital remains open so it can provide the excellent service it does. There have been meetings at the Hospital since organised by Councillor Elli Pang regarding the future of our Ottery St Mary Hospital.

This month we welcomed a new Councillor for the West Hill Ward – Councillor Jessica Bailey which brings our members up to full quota on the council. Councillor Jessica Bailey was appointed the Young People's Champion.

JANUARY 2014

The January meeting saw a presentation from Hospiscare regarding their new Day Care Centre planned in Honiton: a very worthwhile cause which has our full support.

Mayor's initials:

This month consideration was given for EDDC to hold a weekly Revenue and Benefits Advice Surgery for a trial period; this has since taken place on a Wednesday for 2 hours (1.30-3.15pm) at the council offices. This has also proved very popular and it has been agreed to continue this for a further three months.

There has been some delay on the Pavilion being used at Strawberry Lane due to snagging works that required to be completed. I am happy to report though that a Grant of £3,000 has been received from Sport England for the purchase of grass cutting equipment.

FEBRUARY 2014

February as usual was a quiet month. The safety mirrors at the top of Tip Hill and Winters Lane were vandalised and the mirrors stolen. These Mirrors were paid for by the Council after concerns by residents concerning the safety at these junctions. They have now been replaced.

Residents have raised concerns about the safety of the road between Butts Road and Otter Nurseries. The Council are at the very early stages of exploring the possibility of a pavement alongside the road and had the first meeting this month.

MARCH 2014

At the March meeting there was a Presentation regarding the future of the Tipton St John Primary School and the difficulties they face being on a flood plain. It is hoped a new school site will be identified combined with the infant school and a playing field.

We are as a council concerned about the lack of toilet provision in our town. I can tell you that we are going to proceed with an application to EDDC for transfer of some land on the Land of Canaan for public toilets. This last Saturday (26th April) the Council held a “Have Your Say” morning where matters such as Toilet provision, the future of our Allotments and the Market resuming in Mill Street were important issues residents brought to our attention.

APRIL 2014

At this month’s meeting we had a Presentation from an EDDC officer regarding the Feniton Flood Scheme where it is hoped 60 properties would be helped by the scheme though Gosford Road residents are concerned about its impact on them. An update has been requested for the June meeting on this scheme. Concerns were raised at this meeting on the possible closure of the Library in Ottery.”

7. REPORT FROM CLLR JOHN HARDING PARISH PATHS PARTNERSHIP (P3) CO-ORDINATOR

Cllr John Harding gave his report as P3 Co-ordinator:

“I normally start by explaining the Parish Paths Partnership but this year I am assuming you all know, however if you need details see me afterwards.

2013 was an exciting year for walking if you liked rain, wind, fallen trees, fantastic views and quagmires to name a few of the issues we encountered last year. This did involve us in a mountain of work repairing the footpaths but in general the overall state of the footpaths in our Parish is still excellent.

There are some that do not meet that exacting standard however and work is ongoing to improve them: firstly FP 24 which runs down the western side of the River Otter from Ottery St Mary to Tipton St John. Just past the cricket field a new bridge was erected to cross a small tributary which led into the River Otter. The location of the bridge has been questioned by some walkers but unfortunately it was the only position we could negotiate with the landowner. Last year with all the rain a huge quagmire developed on the southern end. We will sort that out this year as we have the finance and the design, what's missing is permission from the landowner.

This brings me nicely to the other key footpath for walkers down the River Otter Footpath 46. I wonder how many of you have looked at the southern site where the footpath ended. If you had you would have seen that if we had had access we would have ourselves closed the footpath as the erosion on the eastern bank has been excessive over the last twelve months. However the River is itself trying to help us by developing a new flow closer to the western bank. A small waterfall has started so there is hope, but it will not be immediate.

Mayor’s initials:

Talking of redirecting flow is an issue that will see increasing activity over the coming months. Those that walk down the Otter may have seen that erosion due to river water flow is beginning to erode the railway line route and this could have serious impact for us. Together with the Environment Agency and Devon County Public Rights of Way some work will begin later this year to deflect the flow of water. This is done naturally with fallen trees but they never seem to fall in the right place but we can use the concept with stone goyles.

Another area we have been involved with is talking to the Kings School about footpaths and trees. A group of pupils would be interested in planting some trees so if you know an area that could be improved by some tree planting and where we could obtain landowner permission please let me know.

P3 has also been working closely with “Walkers Are Welcome” which is an organisation that promotes the walking experience. Last year we attended the Annual Conference in Swaffam which allowed us to compare and contrast the footpaths in the area. It also allowed us to learn some new ideas on fundraising and invasive species problems.

Although not a specific P3 issue I am personally very interested in helping eradicate Himalayan Balsam from the tributaries of the River Otter. During the next few months this plant will take over many road edges and river banks. If you see it can you please pull it up? The root structure is very shallow so it is very simple to pull and you can leave it where it is pulled. However if you leave it and the plant seeds next year each plant can produce one hundred seeds and they seem to have an extremely high regrowth rate. If you do not feel able to pull please contact me or the council. We need to plot the areas where this weed exists.

I also need help if you see problems on footpaths, missing rails, holes in footpaths or trees fallen down across footpaths. If you do see them again please call the council office. One such call we had last year was to a huge tree that had been blown over. Fortunately not over the footpath but the hole this enormous tree left obstructed the footpath and took two of us a whole day to fill - good exercise some say.

Another problem we have begun to see is some of our footpaths being used as racing tracks. This is absolutely forbidden and if you see or hear about it please let us know. The damage they cause to the footpaths and to signage is tremendous and costs us a lot to fix and money spent on fixing these issues is money lost on improving our other footpaths.

As most of you are aware the majority of our finance comes from Devon County Council Public Rights of Way and through this speech I would like to say thank you for your help. However this source of funding is seeing more and more squeezing so we will need to look for other sources of long term funding. Sources of funds to improve our footpaths do exist and it will be one of my challenges for the coming years to access these sources.

We are certainly luckier than many groups as we have volunteers who are trained and qualified in the use of chainsaws and brush-cutters. You may see us out there keeping the footpaths in the condition they are but you, the walkers are equally important. If you see a problem as I have said before please tell us as we cannot be everywhere. My group of walking wardens do a fantastic job keeping me advised of what needs sorting or fixing but it really is up to you to help us.

So finally may I through this note thank all my walking wardens. Devon County Council Public Rights of Way Group and Ottery Town Council for all the efforts you have put into the footpaths over the last twelve months. Enjoy yourself and if you see any problems call the office.”

8. REPORT FROM CLLR CARTER, CHAIRMAN OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Cllr Carter, Chairman of the Council’s Planning Committee gave his Report:

“The Planning Committee has met in this last year 26 times for our meetings. There have been numerous planning applications and a particularly large turnout of residents who naturally have concerns about such major housing developments which will undoubtedly have an impact on our community.

Mayor’s initials:

We have received 11 major applications altogether. However it's usual for these major applications to come back various times with amendments or additional information. Some of course go to Appeal.

Many of you will be acquainted with some of the larger developments in this last year from April 2013 such as:- Redrow Homes at Butts Road, OSM, Land South of Otter Close -Devonshire Homes Tipton St John, Land north of Eastfield - West Hill, Town Mill Regeneration – OSM, The Old Manse OSM.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the ward members for their help during the year with all the different planning applications and planning issues. Special thanks to the Deputy Town Clerk and Town Clerk for all their work with Planning, to Vice Chairman Cllr Homes for uploading and displaying all the plans at our meetings and Mayor Glyn Dobson along with Cllr Holmes for site visits to get the view first hand.

I would like to say how engaging it has been with you all, the members of the public at our meetings. Large applications lead to lots of debate. I am always looking to hear both sides of the application. Sometimes, we find residents find it difficult to hear the other side, if they are just against something.

I was asked at one of our meetings, how we could have a more, open and balanced view on planning matters going out to the public, so everyone is well informed of planning issues. The answer is very much down to us, the Town Council along with our 4 District Councillors on how we put this information out into the public domain.

With a more even and balanced approach to both sides of the debate being given out and not just the highlights that someone may have chosen from the debate, members of the public would have a clear picture of the Councils planning procedures. With everyone working together in providing this information we could move forward knowing all our fairly and fully debated views will be available for the public's consideration on all planning issues.

As with previous years if there is a major application in one of the villages we do always try hard to hire a hall as this enables the residents to attend a lot more easily.

There have been 208 Planning Applications in this last year. This is a substantial increase on previous years.

Planning Applications vary from Full applications to Major, Change of Use, Reserved Matters, Advertising, Listed Building Consents and many Tree Plans that we receive.

Decisions from East Devon District Council we received in this last year were 178 in total. Out of this number 27 Decisions disagreed with us or were withdrawn.”

9. REPORT BY CLLR JO TALBOT ON BEHALF OF THE TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE MANAGER

Cllr Talbot read Phyllis Baxter's report as she has gone to Ireland on holiday.

“She wanted to say a big Thank You to the Town Council for their continued support in funding the Information Centre that is intended to benefit both visitors to the town as well for all our local residents.

We carry a large range of printed material on the local area and further afield and have computer access to both visitor attractions and to a number of facilities connected with local matters. We also sell tickets to both National Express coach travel, services such as Otter Rotters and for many local events ranging from the Devon County Show, Axe Vale Festival, concerts at The Parish Church to local dances, pantomimes, shows and functions in and around East Devon.

What can we say about last summer?: lovely sunny days that we all enjoyed. Our beautiful and welcoming town once again attracted many visitors from far and wide to visit, from as far as Australia, South Africa, the United States, and most of our European neighbours.

They tell me how much they love the surrounding countryside, the town and the welcome they receive. They come to visit the Parish Church, see where Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born, to walk along the River Otter, and just enjoy the town, cafes, tea rooms, public inns, and the local independent shops we have.

There were wonderful events in Ottery last year- with a couple of new ones!

Mayor's initials:

On a beautiful sunny morning in August a large crowd gathered at Sainsbury’s Car Park, for the arrival of The ‘Spirit of the Alpes’ chapter of Harley Davidson from France. A great sight when they roared into town, causing wild excitement among the other motorcyclists from around the area. This was a great treat for the town and our thanks go to Glyn (Dobson) for arranging this event. Maybe they will come back again.

The Food and Families Festival took place once again with a marquee in Sainsbury’s car park and market stalls in Mill Street. With glorious weather it proved a roaring success and brought a lot of new people into the town. The one event I really enjoyed was the Fish Dancing and I believe we are having it again this year.

Also we saw the French Market in town and a Continental Market for 3 days. We have been asked if they are coming back but so far have had no confirmation to our e-mails.

We enjoyed the Coronation Ball organised by the Town Council at The Tumbling Weir Hotel. Other events throughout the year were Concerts at The Parish Church, May Fair at Cadhay, Mid Summer Madness with Rotary at The Football Club, Barclays Bank celebrating its 150th Anniversary, Pixie Day, “Beautiful Days” at Escot, Art Exhibition at the Institute, The New Otterians Summer Show at The Kings School, Carnival Fun Day on the Land of Canaan, Photographic Exhibition at The Parish Church, Tar Barrels, Christmas Tree Festival, and Ottery Christmas Festive Fun Day.

We also had an Ottery Calendar Photo Competition that proved very successful with over 30 entries with the prize for the front cover won by Tony Evens who received a 7” Tablet that was kindly donated by Ottery Office & Computer Shop.

This year is once again a busy time for Ottery town with a new Ottery Festival from Tuesday 15th July to Sunday 20th July with the Town Council backing. So far planned is a week of local walks organised by the Ottery Walkers, a Fun Day on the Land of Canaan on Sunday 20th in the afternoon, with Classic Cars and Stalls, ending with Jazz at The Tumbling Weir Hotel.

Many more events are planned during the week, and it is hoped that all the shops get involved and show what we are as a town – as some visitors said to me your town is alive – with all you have going on – where they live in another part of the country they certainly do not have events like us – enjoy what we have to offer with our shops, cafes, public houses, as a town.

Finally good news: the Street Market is back now in the centre of town (Mill Street) on the first Friday of each month organised by Ottery Town Council.

Do call in as we will have new Bus timetables coming in and we have now prepared a detailed list of all events going on in Ottery.”

10. REPORT REGARDING OTTERY IN BLOOM

Roy Wright read a Report from “Ottery in Bloom”:

“Ottery in Bloom (OIB) is currently run by a small committee together with additional helpers in summer. Planters which are located at Butts Road, Silver Street, the Nat West Bank forecourt, Esso Garage, Canaan Way and St Saviours Bridge are maintained by OIB with the support of sponsors and waterers without whom we would find it difficult to continue. We work closely with the Town Council in planting and maintaining their newly located tubs in Silver Street, Butts Road, Sidmouth Road and Chineway Road. Ottery in Bloom and Town Council liaise on planting of beds on roadside verges in Ottery.

Thanks are due to many local individuals and organisations as without their support we would not exist. Apologies if I have missed anyone from this list.

- to the TOWN COUNCIL for the Council Tax precept which covered the cost of the plants, compost, and two new barrels replaced this year at the top of Silver Street. 2013-14 was the first time that support came from the precept which resulted in added administrative work. We are pleased that it has reverted to a direct grant for 2014-15.
- to SPONSORS Rotary Club of Otter Valley, Inner Wheel and Lions Clubs, Otter Nurseries (bridge planters) Ottery St Mary Garden Club, West Hill Garden Club and Redrow

Mayor’s initials:

- to WATERERS , again Rotary, Inner Wheel and Lions Clubs, Ottery WI, Ottery Gazette, West Hill Garden Club and OtterHayes Trust together with a number of individuals.
- for ASSISTANCE WITH PLANTING to Guides and Brownies and to Scouts who painted some of the stands last year.

You will have noticed that more of the sites have been planted with spring flowers or bulbs this year. Some of the planter stands need replacing. We have been fortunate to have two new planters supplied by Redrow, the developers of the new housing at Butts Road, and these will be sited on the Nat West Bank forecourt.

We are always ready to welcome offers of assistance with planting or with watering and any new ideas to enhance the Town.”

11. REPORT FROM THE ALLOTMENT GARDEN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Carl Richmond, Chairman of the Allotment Management Committee gave a Report:

“ You could say that last year the weather dominated everything. During April we were all moaning about how relentlessly cold, wet and windy it was. No seeds were coming up and we were leaving it late to plant things out thinking stuff would just rot in the ground. Then there was a change for the better, a dry spell and something of a heatwave. The plants loved it and it was surprising how they caught up. The dry spell brought its problems however. We were all watering rather a lot; so much so that we ran up a rather large water bill. South West Water asked the Council if there was a leak. Cllr Holmes and the Mayor went to check the meter. There wasn’t a leak – it was us watering like mad.

All in all it turned out to be a good year for growing most things and judging by the number of enthusiastic gardeners I think a lot of people agree that it’s a very worthwhile thing to do. You know there are no chemicals in the things you grow and also veg. does seem to be dear these days too, which is another benefit; but the main thing is it tastes so much better.

There have been quite a few “old timers” who have left this year, however lots of new people have taken up plots and it is good to see young people taking an interest. At the moment there are about 6 plots vacant and no waiting list so now is your chance to have a go if you have been thinking of growing your own.

I would like to finish by saying how sorry we were to hear about the death of Paul Kiddle. I’m sure a lot of you remember him for the wonderful dahlias he grew and exhibited all around the south west. He had an allotment from about 1985. I had to pass his plot to get to mine and now I wish I’d taken some photos of them when they were all in bloom: the colours were fantastic.

It just remains for me now to thank everyone who has helped in running the allotments: all the members of the Allotment Committee, Councillors Ian Holmes, George Hansford and the Mayor and of course Judith and Su in the Office.”

12. FINANCIAL REPORT 2013-2014 INCLUDING PRESENTATION OF GRANTS

Cllr Paul Lewis (Councillor with special responsibility for Finance) gave a report:

“Last year I reported a fairly quiet year financially, but that did not last long! This year again we held the precept at the same level for the third year running.

Our income has been over budget this year thanks yet again to the acquisition of the Convent which is generating income way in excess of its running costs. We have a fantastic asset in this building and can only hope that the ongoing works around it are soon completed to enable the whole area to thrive once more.

Our total income for the year amounted to £229,086 although this was inflated by the grants we received towards the building of the new sports pavilion at Strawberry Lane. However without this our income was still over budget for the year.

This year our major expenditure has been again running the council and the Tourist Information Centre. We spent over £15,000 improving the Environment around the Parish and some £68,725 on the Strawberry Lane improvements. This expenditure came in below budget and was delivered on time.

Mayor’s initials:

Over the course of the year the Council made a small loss of £5748 which was entirely anticipated and well within our capability. The Council for a number of years has run at a profit and of course Councils are meant to spend what they receive on improving the lives of residents in their area. As the Strawberry Lane area develops I am sure this will benefit many people in the parish.

The Town Council finances remain very healthy and robust.

I am pleased that this year again we are in a position to award a number of grants to various organisations in the Parish. The award of these grants is considered a great length by the Finance and General Purposes Committee and the Full Council and there are always groups disappointed by the outcome. These are not easy decisions but this year I am pleased that we can award grants to following groups.” Grants were presented by the Mayor to representatives of the following organisations: *Ottery St Mary United Reformed Church, Vision.OM, Tipton St John Residents’ Association, Ottery St Mary Carnival, Pixie Day (OSM Joint Guide & Scout Committee), Ottery St Mary Twinning Association, Ottery in Bloom, Ottery St Mary Men’s Forum, Tipton St John Community Hall – Centenary Celebrations, Tipton St John Community Hall – Computer Group, Tipton Times, Ottery Community Theatre, Ottregians Over 60s Club and Coleridge Memorial Project.*

13. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Q. Philip Algar referred to the Full Council meeting of 2nd December 2013 and the East Devon District Council’s (EDDC’s) Monitoring Officer’s recommendations and asked when Cllr Roger Giles would receive an apology and when the training would be started.

A. The Mayor stated that the Monitoring Officer had not said that Cllr Giles had not done anything wrong. The issue was that if an item was confidential, it should remain confidential. Training for the Clerk and Deputy Clerk has already commenced. Following the May Council meeting when Chairmen and Vice Chairmen are elected then training will be undertaken. The Council held a meeting in the previous week to discuss the Monitoring Officer’s recommendations which Cllr Giles did not attend so the final recommendation could not be decided on. It was recognised at the meeting that mistakes had been made by the Council.

Q. Sid Burnage stated that he was pleased to hear of progress with a plan for a pavement to Otter Nurseries but requested that 3 slabs be provided for people to get off the bus onto a level area.

A. The Mayor said that this will be investigated.

Q. Sid Burnage described broken paving slabs on the pavement on Butts Hill. He stated that a residents’ car park is needed to reduce traffic and parking problems which will increase once the new housing off Butts Road is fully occupied.

A. The Mayor suggested that he attend the County Council’s Highways Surgery at the Convent on Thursday 8th May to report the pavement concerns and that the Council will support his requests. He pointed out that the Council did not support the Redrow planning application.

Q. A resident of Coleridge Road/King’s Avenue spoke of a Planning application for the Pump House site on Chineway Road. He understood that the Council cannot comment as it has yet to consider the application but asked that his comments be noted on highway safety, flooding and privacy issues which he outlined. He also commented on the poor state of the EDDC Planning website from which it was impossible to download information.

A. The Mayor stated that the Council’s Planning Committee would be considering the application at its meeting on the following Tuesday.

Q. A resident asked why the toilets on Hind Street were knocked down in the Sainsbury’s development.

A. The Mayor stated that he agreed that keeping them would have been ideal and that he had since asked Sainsbury’s for land to erect toilets.

Q. Philip Algar asked that it be publicised that the toilets in Sainsbury’s are for public use.

A. The Mayor responded that the Council had erected a finger post sign pointing to the public toilets in Sainsbury’s.

Mayor’s initials:

Q. Josefina Gori, a Spanish tutor who holds classes at the Council Offices spoke of the hard work undertaken by the Council and that the Cllr Giles affair had brought a shadow over the good job the Council has done for several years. She thanked the Council for the opportunity to hold classes which then benefits the town through shopping and eating locally.

A. The Mayor thanked her for her comments.

Q. Angela Glanville stated that at the planning application stage for Sainsbury's, Cllr Pang had tried to encourage external access to the toilets. She felt that more pressure could have been made for this.

A. The Mayor stated that EDDC had made the decision.

Q. Philip Algar stated that asking for transparency in Council matters was not denying the work done by the Council.

A. The Mayor stated that if something was spoken of in confidence that is where it should stay. If that confidence had not been broken then none of the subsequent events would have happened.

Q. Philip Algar asked why the matter was dealt with in public.

A. The Mayor stated that it was not known until during the December meeting who had broken the confidence.

Q. A resident asked why the Council needs to meet with Developers in private.

A. The Mayor stated that advice from the Monitoring Officer encourages it. He stated that Cllr Giles had met developers in private.

Cllr Giles responded by stating that he does not consider it appropriate to meet developers in private although the Town Council is entitled to do so. He stated that his attendance at a meeting with developers on the Town Mills application was because a Planning Officer had requested it and was present.

Q. Jenni Carpenter asked what is the need for meeting developers in private and why it cannot be open.

A. The Mayor responded that once the planning application is received then all will be in the public domain.

Q. A resident of Tipton St John expressed concern that the Parish is missing a vision/master plan for planning in the area. He stated that he believes a Neighbourhood Plan would solve a lot of issues and urged the Council to consider it despite the cost involved.

A. The Mayor thanked him for his observation.

Q. A resident asked the Town Council to consider allowing the public to attend meetings with developers to have representatives from the community.

A. The Mayor stated that the Council encourages the public to attend planning committee meetings and that developers may not want the public to be present.

Q. Cllr Lewis read out a statement: "I, like most Councillors sat here at the table tonight, watched in astonishment as events developed in November and December last year within the Council itself. In my mind and those of many others, in the cold light of day errors were made on both sides of that debate. However since then the monitoring officer at EDDC has issued her decision, vindicating no one and certainly not exonerating any Councillor, although some believe this to be the case.

The effect has been to destroy Trust in other Councillors, and the Mayor and Deputy Mayor now have a huge task on their hands to rebuild this trust. The flagrant disrespect of the Council by some Councillors not attending meetings to discuss the sequence of events and the outcome of the investigation has further destroyed this trust.

This has never been reported in the Press and what has written about some Councillors in various forums has been untrue, disrespectful and hurtful to them. They are not paid, they do not belong to political parties and they do put in huge hours for the benefit of their communities. You do not do this task for the thanks you get, as you can never please all of the people all of the time, but respect for other's views is paramount.

Mayor's initials:

In view of all of this it is with regret that I have decided to resign following tonight's meeting. The events since November have been a distraction to my not insignificant day job, but I did want to see it through as to leave before now would in my view have been wrong."

A. The Mayor stated that he was very sorry to hear this statement of resignation.

Q. Cllr Thurgood, in relation to private meetings with developers stated that the Council had now adopted a Policy (on its website), making it more open than any in the country. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) gives guidance to Planning Authorities (the Town Council is not a Planning Authority) that they should meet developers prior to application. If a developer requests it then they have to meet. The Freedom of Information Commissioner has concluded that such meetings are rightly and properly held in confidence. As soon as a planning application is received then notes from the meeting should be made public. The Town Council's Policy states that it will publicise the notes after a meeting unless anything is commercially sensitive.

14. MAYOR'S CLOSING REMARKS

The Mayor thanked everyone for attending and invited them to stay on to talk with Councillors over a cup of tea or coffee.

The Mayor closed the meeting at 8.55p.m.