

# NORTH TAWTON ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

## THURSDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> MAY 2025

### Rugby Club, North Tawton

## Minutes

**PRESENT:** Cllr C Lee, Cllr C Burrow, Cllr S Whiteley, Cllr N Smith, Cllr M Kennedy, Cllr J Palfrey, Caroline Ellis (Town Clerk), Dr Hannah Bruni (Deputy Clerk), Cllr Casbolt (WDBC) and approximately 30 residents.

Cllr Lee, stepped in as Chair due to Cllr McKnight (Chairman) not able to attend the meeting due to work commitments, welcomed the residents to the Annual Town meeting and reminded everyone that it was a Town Meeting, not a Council Meeting and that no decisions can be taken but they can take away any issues

1. **Minutes** of the Town Meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2024 were approved, no matters arising.

### 2. **Guest speakers**

- **Eco Mojo**

Sarah Quick has been a proud resident of North Tawton for over 40 years. Upon retiring from full-time employment, she embraced a new venture by purchasing *Eco Mojo* — a Community Interest Company located in the heart of the town.

With a strong community ethos, *Eco Mojo* was founded on the principle of providing local produce and household essentials at affordable prices. The shop offers a wide range of refillable products — from spices to eco-friendly cleaning liquids — all at competitive prices. Customers will also find a thoughtfully curated selection of sustainable gifts.

Currently, Sarah and her team are actively sourcing new suppliers for bread and bakery products and are always keen to hear from the local community. She warmly invites residents to share their ideas or suggestions for new products and services they'd like to see on the shelves.

In addition to her work at *Eco Mojo*, Sarah shared the fantastic news that the North Tawton Rugby Club has successfully raised £40,000 to replace the roof of its clubhouse, with the work scheduled to begin in August. She expressed heartfelt thanks to Denbrook, West Devon Borough Council, and the S106 funding, as well as to the many individuals who generously supported the fundraising efforts.

- **WI**

The President of the Women's Institute proudly announced that the WI has been enriching communities for an incredible 110 years. Continuing that legacy, the North Tawton WI is thriving with over 70 enthusiastic members drawn from North Tawton and its surrounding villages and towns. Each month, members gather for lively meetings featuring a wide range of guest speakers who inform, entertain, and inspire. In addition to monthly talks, the group enjoys a varied calendar of activities — from delightful coach trips to destinations like Clarks Shopping Village, to outings and special events that bring members together in fun and friendship. Fundraising is an important part of their mission, and local organisations benefit directly from the group's generous efforts. At its heart, the North Tawton WI is a warm, welcoming community where lasting friendships are made, laughter is shared, and everyone aged 18 and over is encouraged to join. Whether you're new to the area or simply

looking for new connections and experiences, the North Tawton WI would love to welcome you.

- **Community Land Trust**

North Tawton CLT – set up with the main aim to provide affordable homes to rent for local residents – at 60% of market rates, but with the homes **not** subject to right to buy and therefore always belonging to the CLT, and available for those with local connections. We have a strong local connection cascade – which starts with length of time an applicant has lived in NT, then looks at family members etc. We aim to partner with a housing association to actually deliver the homes, but we will be doing the legwork to get any projects through planning. Set up in such a way that we can also do other things if they are of benefit to the town – e.g. community shop, pub, allotments etc. Run by a small board of Directors, taking advice from Middlemarch, and with a link to the housing team at West Devon DC. We are a membership organisation – which operates on the basis of purchasing shares (min £1, max unlimited), but each member only has one vote regardless of number of shares.

We want to raise awareness of three things at this point.

1. These homes will be for people with a local connection, above all else. Anyone who wishes to apply for a home in the future will need to be registered on Devon Home Choice, BUT, due to our particular structure, we will consider people in band E who would not normally get a HA property. We would encourage people to apply asap so that they are in the system. Being a member of the CLT has no bearing on whether you can apply for a home. Directors will not make decisions on who will be granted a home – that will be done by the registered provider / WDBC.
2. We are talking with local landowners who have land in North Tawton, but we are keen to talk to anyone who might have suitable land. This needs to be relatively flat (i.e. not on a steep hill), close to a road and to existing properties. We do not need to look at allocated land only as the development will be for affordable housing, therefore we can look at an exception site to provide this. If you or someone you know might have suitable land, then please ask them to get in touch.
3. If you would like to become a member, then I have some membership forms available. Applications will be discussed at our next Directors Meeting. All members must abide by our Code of Conduct and uphold our rules (the legal document that sets out who we are and how we are governed).

## **BREAK**

### **3. Council Reports**

- **Chair Annual Report** – In the absence of Cllr McKnight, Cllr Lee reported the council had been very active over the last year with many events. Your Council manages many assets from the car parks, public toilets, memorial park, play areas, the cemetery, the closed churchyard and even bus shelters.

Starting on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2024 we the celebration of the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary D-Day with a local group organising a programme of events for the Town. The Council organised a commemorative event in the park on 6<sup>th</sup> June, the actual anniversary with a flag raising, blessing from Revd David Spence and support from Year 5 children at the Primary School and cornet players from the Okehampton Silver Town band. Well over 100 people attended, which was excellent considering it was 09:00 on a working day.

Clock Tower and Lych Gate. After many delays due to weather and the need to get the right materials and approvals for work on a listed building the repairs were finally completed. Not just repairs but a full refurbishment including repointing all brickwork and

replacing all the lead flashings and an unveiling ceremony was held on the 22nd. Special thanks to Graham Flynn for his fund raising, contributing over £11,300 from generous donations from the public and a generous donation from the family of the late Jack Gregory that enabled the Lych Gate to be refurbished. Hopefully both will be good for another 137 years!

In July we unfortunately lost our Town Clerk, Melanie Bickell, who resigned for personal reasons. Mel had been with the Council for 3 years and I want to pay tribute to all she did for the Town in that time. That left us without a Clerk and for nearly 4 months your Council was run by a Locum Clerk and 6 volunteer Councillors and we found out the hard way everything a Clerk does. However in November we were fortunate enough to recruit Caroline Ellis as our new Clerk. (Stand up Caroline!) who has done sterling work bringing everything up to date. We had already decided to split the Clerk's role into 2 and have recruited Hannah Bruni (Stand up Hannah!) as our Deputy Clerk.

In August our efforts to find a better footpath to the Town for the residents of Batheway Fields paid off when Allison Homes and DCC jointly funding a greatly improved footpath from the Allison Homes development to Barton View.

When you pass the Council Office you may notice our new Town Flags and also (when we get it fixed) the new Town flag at the park. This was the result of a public competition to design the new flags. The adult category was won by Dawn ? and the Junior category by Miles, a pupil at North Tawton School.

Earlier in the year your Council decided to look at alternatives to Christmas Trees and we noted the lights displayed in Okehampton. The Contractor gave us a quote and we decided to go for strings of lights in the Square. The big switch-on was on 8 December and the Crediton Courier reported that more than 250 residents attended with a huge cheer when Sharon Shere-Massey switched the lights on. My thanks in particular to all Cllrs who took part and particularly Cllr Jen Palfrey who was the driving force behind the lights. The switch-on will become an annual event hosted by our new Town Crier Nigel Davies. Now that DCC have replaced the lighting columns in the Square with nice heritage ones and we have power on each one the plan is to expand the lighting scheme each year.

In the New Year your Council decided to increase the opportunities for local residents to talk to the Council by introducing Councillor Surgeries. The first one was held at the Community Centre on Saturday 12 April along with the Repair Café and this will become a regular feature, next one on 10<sup>th</sup> May. Of course if you want to talk to the Council, ask questions or make suggestions the Council Office is open Monday – Wednesday and we welcome personal enquiries or you can write, e-mail or telephone us with any questions. We also now live stream Council meetings on our Facebook page for the benefit of anyone who cannot attend in person. Or rather we did until a Facebook data breach but we will be back.

Finally, after years of negotiations we are nearly there on an agreed swap of land with a local resident that will increase the size of the cemetery which would otherwise be full within 5 – 7 years.

Next ceremony – VE Day 80<sup>th</sup> events Thursday May 8<sup>th</sup> organised by North Tawton Veterans and British Legion. Please have a look at the posters around the Town and we have some here and please support our Armed Forces veterans.

**Thanks:** I'd like to thank you all for coming this evening, my fellow Councillors who give up their own time as Volunteers, our Clerks for all their hard work and our regular members of the public who attend Council meetings. Members of the public are welcome to attend Council meetings and our new Councillor Surgeries.

- **Annual Finance Report**

Councillor Whiteley reported the Council was without a Clerk/RFO for over 3 months. So, when our new Clerk, Caroline Ellis took over, late last year, she was faced with sorting out invoices and payments for that period – WDBC were reminding NTTC of the deadline to set

2025-2026 precept. A case of not being eased into her job but straight into the fire. But she managed it, well done Caroline.

The 2024/25 precept was set at £146,812, a decrease on the 2023/24 precept albeit very small. This was achieved by taking £10,500 out of reserves to cushion what was then 12-15% inflation.

In theory the 2025/26 budget should have replaced that money into the reserves plus making up to £10,500 deficit in the precept 2025/26 – could have led to a £21,500 to make up for.

However, good news, we decided to forgo topping up reserves and strived through lengthy scrutiny to save the other £10,500. The end result being a 10% rise in North Tawton council tax for 2025/26 despite inflation at 2-8%. Please note, DCC increased by 5% WDBC, by 3%, fire and rescue increased by 5% and police 5%

There were additional costs to factor in. The reserve for a possible election was spent to pay for an election in 2023 which WDBC take out of the 2024/25 budget, so £4,600 has been replenished in 2025-26.

£1,500 had been set aside for the possible cost of the AGAR enquiry which costs £355 per hour. We have not received the invoice yet.

Therefore, the NTTC precept for 2025-26 was £159,617. As you can appreciate setting the budget for nearly 18 months ahead is not always easy.

It is important to note that the budget is not an exact science. It is an estimate of costs for the next financial year.

The RFO submits a monthly report to the Council on how actual money spent and the money allowed is compared.

At the end of the year it is possible that items of expenditure may go over their allocation and some under. Overspending can be made up from reserves and what is left from underspending can go into reserves. So, there is no black hole – nothing disappears!

The wooden play equipment in the park has come to the end of its days - the swing had been taken away as it had been deemed as unsafe. NTTC are planning to refurbish the park – in a phased manner or when we can afford it. The parks reserves stand at £7,621.1. Woefully inadequate. S106 money is coming from local developers, all helping towards costs.

WDBC were offering money towards projects and good causes in the parish, this was only announced weeks before the end of the last financial year. A local resilience fund. Caroline (Town Clerk) hastily managed to put in a bid for various products from local organisations including the Council, resulting in a £50,000 grant for North Tawton. This meant the Christmas Lights and other projects were fully funded. Many thanks Caroline.

### **WDBC Councillors report – Mike Casbolt**

Cllr Casbolt reported the Government was planning a large-scale programme of local government restructuring in England. It is facilitating local government reorganisation in each of the 21 two tier areas and wants to deliver the process as quickly as possible. Devon could be split into 4 or 5 areas or one whole area. We should know by the end of the year. He reported the Mill development was on-going. He thanked the North Tawton Town

Councillors for their hard work during the year and he would continue support the Town Council and their attend meetings.

### **EV charging – Cllr Noah Smith**

Cllr Smith reported they had considered fast charging points for visitors but felt it was not viable. He was still in correspondence with WDBC regarding the next 'wave' of charging points, including funding. Considering putting in EV Charging in the car park owned by the Council but not specifically for EV cars. Therefore, if there was not an available parking space, it would be available for any car driver to use. The rugby club has approached companies regarding using their car park, but they were not interested as they would have the volume of traffic required.

### **7.5 tonne weight limit – Cllr Colin Lee**

Cllr Lee reported there were persistent problem with HGV drivers coming through the town. Generally, drivers delivering to Gregorys who may not have been here before and simply follow their sat-nav.

A few years ago, we asked DCC for a weight limit, but they said NT did not meet the criteria of a weak bridge or a overhanging building. The criteria changed a couple of years ago. You now have to prove HGVs create a nuisance and there has to be a viable alternative route. That applies to us so we tried again. This time DCC are generally supportive, but they have no funds and the estimated cost would be £20,000 - £25,000. Are we prepared to pay for it (Straw poll)

DCC also said we would need to engage our own 'Design Consultant' at even more cost but have now agreed we can do the design and consultation ourselves. Your Council is pushing ahead with that.

### **Memorial Park play equipment – Cllrs Steve Whiteley and Carol Burrow**

They are in correspondence with a contractor and currently obtaining prices. Their priority was replacing the swings.

### **Public Q and A session**

A resident asked the questions regarding the new line painting in the Square. It was suggested Gregories add signage on their exit to inform drivers they cannot go left through the Town.

**Thank you all for coming. Don't forget next Thursday VE Day 80<sup>th</sup> and next Councillor Surgery Saturday May 10<sup>th</sup>.**

Meeting closed at 9.25pm