

**EPPING TOWN COUNCIL**  
**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD**  
**by ZOOM (digital meeting platform)**  
**ON THURSDAY, 25 MARCH 2021 AT 6.30PM**

**PRESENT:** Town Councillors: G Scruton (Town Mayor), M Wright (Deputy Mayor), N Avey, C Burgess, J Duffell, R Griffiths, C McCredie, H Pegrum, B Scruton, M L Whitbread, J Whitehouse

**OFFICERS:** Miss B Rumsey (Town Clerk, Epping Town Council)  
Mrs G Vallis (Planning & Events Officer, Epping Town Council)

One member of the press and 20 members of the public were present.

**492 OPENING OF THE MEETING**

The Town Clerk, Miss B Rumsey welcomed residents to the unusual online meeting via zoom. She introduced each of the Town Councillors individually on screen and mentioned there are 11 Town Councillors at the moment as Cllr I Black has resigned having left the area. The Town Clerk handed over to the Town Mayor, Cllr G Scruton who explained the format for the online meeting.

**493 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Mrs R Benjamin, Freeman of Epping.

**494 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 7<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2019**

**NOTED** that the minutes of the above meeting were submitted to an Ordinary meeting of the Town Council held on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2019 and appropriate action had been taken where necessary. The meeting approved the minutes, and the Mayor signed the minutes as a correct record.

The Mayor confirmed that there was no Annual Town Meeting in 2020 in accordance with the government coronavirus legislation.

**495 ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21**

The Annual Report for 2020/21 was received. The Town Mayor advised the meeting that any questions would be taken under agenda item 10 Open Forum.

**496 REPORT FROM THE TOWN MAYOR**

Cllr G Scruton, Town Mayor gave a report on the Town Council's main areas of work in the past two years while some PowerPoint slides were shown on the screen.

**Slide 1 – Logo**

As has already been noted there was no Annual Town Meeting last year so I will start by giving a brief report on last year. During this year in addition to its usual functions, services and facilities, which will be highlighted shortly, the Town Council were able to improve some of its services and facilities. Stonards Hill Recreational Ground and Jack Silleys Pavilion received particular attention. The pavilion has been upgraded and improved and this includes the addition of the Café which has proved to be a very popular addition to Stonards Hill. Likewise the new outdoor Gym and table tennis table have also been well received and have also proved to be very popular. The Monday Market occupied much attention, particularly from the Market working party, to ensure its continued success. A variety of measures were put in place to protect the market and make it a viable facility for the future.

The Safer Epping Group, previously the Anti-Social Behaviour working party, and initiated by Epping Town Council had excellent community representation and attendance and covered a variety of residents' concerns.

The Annual Town show was once again a resounding success. Taking place on the first Sunday of July the show was attended by record numbers of people and the weather was once again kind to us. Likewise the Christmas Market, was very well attended and as always was very popular. The Christmas tree, sponsored by the Epping Rotary Club, and the Christmas lights in general also received very favourable comments. As Town Mayor I had the pleasure of attending numerous events during the year and to meet members of the community. Thank you to everyone who extended an invitation to me, and the Mayoress, and for making us most welcome. Tinged with some sadness I also attended the funeral and remembrance service of two of our Freeman of the Town, Freddy Lymer and Denys Favre. Both will be greatly missed. Because of its excellent work the Town Council has been awarded Quality Gold Status by the Essex Association of Local Councils, demonstrating an excellence in policies, procedures and council development. At the time of the award Epping Town Council was one of only five Councils in Essex to have attained this standard. I would like to congratulate the Town Clerk, all the staff and my fellow Councillors, both past and present, for their hard work in achieving this standard.

### **Slide 2 – Responsibilities**

This year the Town Council has had a very challenging year having to adapt its services, facilities, working practices and meetings to fit in with the Covid 19 restrictions and to make changes to these as and when the restrictions have changed, often with little notice. The slide gives a summary of the Town Council's responsibilities and almost without exception these have had to be adapted to comply with restrictions.

### **Slide 3 – Town Councillors**

The next slide lists the current Town Councillors. From the Councillors point of view the most noticeable change this year was the switch to digital meetings. Just twelve months ago Council meetings had to be physical meetings but a change in legislation allowed digital meetings. This has allowed Councils to continue to meet and make decisions. Epping Town Council embraced this technology and have met digitally for the monthly Council meetings, the twice monthly Planning meetings, the twice annually Corporate Governance meetings as well as the numerous working party meetings. These digital meetings have also enabled any interested parties to more easily attend the meetings.

### **Slide 4 – Services and Functions in 2020**

During the Pandemic the Town Council has continued to run the majority of its services and functions. The Town Council manage many of the Town's recreational grounds and green spaces as well as mowing land not under the Town Council's ownership. Both Epping Hall and the Jack Silley Pavilion have been closed for bookings for much of the year in accordance with Government Lockdown restrictions.

### **Slide 5 – Jack Silley Pavilion**

On a positive note the Town Council were pleased to be able to make Jack Silley Pavilion available to the NHS as a specialist Blood Test facility away from the main hospital. During the period of closure remedial work to the floor of the pavilion was able to be carried out without disruption to hirers. The pavilion was able to be used by hirers such as the dance classes during the limited periods of non-lockdown.

### **Slide 6 – Epping Hall**

Epping Hall has been closed to visitors for much of the year but has remained a working office for those staff that could not work remotely. During the limited periods of Non-lockdown the hall was open to hirers where the activities were permitted.

### **Slide 7 – Stonards Hill**

During the past year Stonards Hill recreational ground has been an invaluable open space for residents to exercise and to meet family and friends when the restrictions have allowed. The slide shows the facilities available here. During the year the Tennis Courts were refurbished and when restrictions allow, next month, will reopen with an LTA approved booking system.

### **Slide 8 – Lower Swaines Recreational Ground**

The Town Council has assisted with the formation of Epping Playground Association to refurbish the Lower Swaines Playground. Working in partnership with the Association plans have been agreed and they are actively seeking grant funding to progress refurbishment of this play area.

#### **Slide 9/10 – Ivy Chimneys, Parklands/Frampton Road**

The Town Councils other recreational grounds and play areas have all had to be adapted to Covid 19 restrictions but largely remained open during the last year.

#### **Slide 11 – Monday Market**

The Chair of the Market working party will give a short report shortly so I will leave it to Michael to detail what has been happening with the market.

#### **Slide 12 – Bakers Lane Toilets**

The Bakers Lane Toilets have been open for most of the year but with the implementation of additional cleaning. Inevitably this has meant a significant cost increase to the Council but we considered this a necessary cost given the facility it provides to residents and visitors.

#### **Slide 13 – Allotments**

Both allotments remained open during the year giving allotment holders access to fresh air, exercise and of course their own produce.

#### **Slide 14 – Talk About Epping**

Talk about Epping has continued to be produced throughout the pandemic albeit in digital format so as to protect delivery staff and residents from the potential spread of Covid 19.

#### **Slide 15 – Christmas Tree & Lights**

Despite the high street being largely closed the Council felt strongly that the Christmas Tree and lights should be displayed as normal. Thanks again to the Rotary Club of Epping for sponsoring the Tree.

#### **Slide 16 – Christmas Market & Town Show**

No Town Show could take place this year for obvious reasons but a limited Christmas Market did take place, albeit only during the daytime.

#### **Slide 17 – Planning**

The Chair of the Planning & Neighbourhood Planning will give a report on this so I will leave it to Nigel to update you.

#### **Slide 18 – Financial Update**

Not surprisingly 2020/21 has been a tough year financially for the Council. With the closure of the Epping Hall and the Jack Silley Pavilion and the vastly reduced Monday market, income was in the region of £60,000 below forecast. Additional cleaning costs for the Public Toilets at Bakers Lane and Jack Silley has put further pressure on the finances. Despite this the projected outturn figure is expected to be only in the region of a £10,000 deficit. This is due to careful and considered spending in other areas and additional income from other areas of the Councils operations, most notably the Cemetery. Looking forward to 2021 / 22 the Town Council has had to increase its share of the Council Tax by £5.00 for a band D property. Despite best efforts this increase was necessary because at the outset we had a reduction in the tax base, the additional cost of cleaning the Public Toilets and general increase in other costs. The Town Council manage an extremely tight budget very efficiently and therefore there is very little room for cost savings.

#### **Slide 19 – Expectations for 2021**

The phased opening of Epping Hall and The Jack Silley Pavilion in accordance with the Governments roadmap is something to look forward too, as is the re-opening of the full Monday market on the 12<sup>th</sup> April. We will continue to work with the Epping Playground Association to advance the Lower Swaines recreational ground playground subject to successful funding. We will shortly unveil a Blue Plaque for Brambly Hedge creator Jill Barklem. We are also exploring improvements to Stonards Hill recreation ground skate park again subject to funding.

## **Slide 20 – Thank You**

Epping Town Councillors would like to say a big thank you to the 15 hard working members of staff employed by Epping Town Council. The staff have adapted to new ways of working in 2020, often remotely, but have kept the services and functions of the Town Council running smoothly and efficiently as restrictions have allowed. Particular thanks go to Beverley Rumsey, our Town Clerk, who has worked particularly hard managing the ever-changing restrictions.

A particular thank you to Town Supervisor and Cemetery Superintendent Bill Towers who has demonstrated excellence in his management of the cemetery during these difficult times. Thank you also to the grounds team who have assisted him throughout the year. Finally thank you to my fellow Town Councillors for all their hard work this year.

## **497 REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF PLANNING & NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING**

Cllr Nigel Avey (Chairman of the Planning & General Purposes Committee and Neighbourhood Planning Advisory Committee) gave a report on the work of those two committees.

The Town Council's Planning & General Purposes Committee acts as a consultee to the District Council in respect of any planning application which falls within the Town. It has been a great pleasure for me to continue to chair this Committee throughout the municipal year. There has been no respite from the large number of applications the Committee has reviewed this year; 164 proposals in total and we have made recommendations to the District Council in respect of those applications. A change to the planning procedure has meant that where we object to an application, we are required to attend the District Council's Planning Committee to support our objection. May I thank my Vice Chairman, councillor Barbara Scruton for appearing for the Town Council on many occasions. In making our recommendations, the Committee carefully considers planning issues which arise. We also apply our local knowledge to arrive at a decision which we believe is in the interests of the Town and its residents. During the last year, the majority of the planning applications were non-controversial which were not objected to. The unsuitable planning applications were those which were proposed to be demolished to make way for flats. There are two trends with planning applications, to convert bungalows into two-storey houses and the removal of healthy trees often for cosmetic reasons. The Committee voiced their concerns to EFDC as a planning consultee especially in its efforts to maintain the bungalows stock in the town.

I have also had the great pleasure to continue to chair the Neighbourhood Plan Committee. With the help of fellow councillors and residents who have given up their time to sit on the Committee, enormous progress has been made on the Neighbourhood Plan. The submission version of EFDC's Local Plan has been subject to examination by an Inspector and EFDC is currently dealing with issues arising as a result of that examination. However, it is likely that the Local Plan will be adopted at some point in the near future.

## **498 REPORT FROM KEY MEMBER FOR THE MARKET**

Cllr M Wright (Lead Member for the Market) gave a report on Epping Monday Market. Epping Monday Market has been a key part of Epping life for a great many years. The market is a real community event, bringing people together and attracting additional shoppers to the High Street, supporting the town's shops and businesses. Traditional markets are under increasing pressure as shopping habits have changed and technology has made it so easy to shop from the comfort of our own homes. Residents have told us that the character of Epping as a historic market town should be protected. For this reason, one of the Town Council's key priorities is protecting our historic market, as it faces ever more challenging times. The Covid-19 health situation has resulted in a much smaller market over the past year and on occasion, as lockdowns have dictated, no market at all. The town is a very different place without its shops and market and we will continue to do everything we can to support it as it rebuilds with the High Street after these difficult times. In 2020, we switched from the traditional metal market stalls to gazebos. This gave the traders more flexibility, enabled us to reduce their rent to support them in times of reduced footfall and welcome new businesses to try the market. The market, under normal circumstances, provides a wide variety of goods which, in current times, supports people shopping in the open air. As the health situation progresses to

hopefully some kind of normality, we will continue to support and boost the market when it is safe to do so. The Town Council have been successful in obtaining a grant of £1000 from the Tesco Bags of Help scheme for a market events vehicle. This will enable us to generate some added interest and hopefully footfall for the market and High Street. The absence of the market and our shops and businesses over the past year has had a huge impact on the character of the town. The Town Council will continue to analyse and adapt the operations of the market, to support its long-term vitality and presence in our town.

#### **499 VIRTUAL PRESENTATION OF TOWN AWARDS**

The Town Mayor, Cllr G Scruton introduced and announced individually the annual Town Awards.

##### **Townsperson of the Year 2020**

Epping Town Council chose Jacqui Mortimer as the Townsperson of the Year 2020 Winner for her hard work and success with the 1<sup>st</sup> Theydon Garnon Scout Group, the annual Christmas Tree Festival and the Friends of Swaines Green. Over this past year Jacqui has made PPE for Princess Alexandra Hospital, as well as setting up a collection point at her home for people to donate items to help the hospital staff. Congratulations Jacqui on this wonderful award and we look forward to presenting it to you in person, as circumstances allow.

Jacqui Mortimer attended the meeting. She said she was "so honoured" to receive the award adding: "Epping means so much to me." She thanked all the individuals and organisations which worked so hard with her to ensure the events and groups were such a success, and described the town as somewhere with a "real sense of community".

##### **Civic Award**

Lindsay House was nominated for the Civic Award as the new additions to the renovated building were sensitively blended into the old frontage and the roofing and new windows did not detract from the existing look of the building. Epping Town Council appreciated the respect shown to the character of the building and road and chose Lindsay House as the winner for the Civic Award 2020. Congratulations to the refurbishers of Lindsay House on this coveted award and we look forward to presenting it in person, as circumstances allow.

The Civic Award winner didn't attend the meeting and a photo of the building was put on the screen.

##### **Allotment Awards**

###### **Allotment Award Winner: Meadow Road: Mrs C Hassall-Kingham**

The Town Mayor presented an Allotment Award to Mrs C Hassall-Kingham from the Meadow Road site for her best kept allotment on that site. Mrs C Hassall-Kingham was awarded a certificate and cheque for £20 for work on her allotment and receives the award for a second successive year. Mrs C Hassall-Kingham attended the meeting and thanked Epping Town Council for her award.

###### **Allotment Award Winner: Lower Bury Lane: Ms L Ecclestone**

The Town Mayor presented an Allotment Award to Ms L Ecclestone from the Lower Bury Lane site for her best kept allotment on that site. Ms L Ecclestone was awarded a certificate and cheque for £20 for work on her allotment. Ms Ecclestone attended the meeting and thanked Epping Town Council for her award.

##### **Long Service Award: 35 years for Bill Towers**

Bill Towers joined Epping Town Council on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1986. He was an on-call fireman when he joined and continued this for some years. He was employed by (now Freeman of Epping) Mrs Ruth Benjamin, then Town Clerk and has now worked alongside 7 Town Clerks and 34 different Town Mayors; the Mayor at his appointment being Mrs Letitia Berry (now also a Freeman of Epping). Bill is in charge of all things outdoors; looking after Stonards Hill and Epping Town Council's five other recreation grounds, two allotment sites, five playgrounds, tennis courts, a petanque piste, outdoor gym and table tennis table. He knows pretty much every blade of grass in the town, having mowed much of it, and pretty much all the pipes underground. Bill is a qualified playground inspector and master of stripey lawns. He has been recognised by the FA for the quality of his football pitches, as a member of the Institute of Groundsmanship, and can prolong the life of most pieces of equipment

with some experienced trade secrets. Bill is also the Cemetery Superintendent at Bury Lane Cemetery and his knowledge of the cemetery is exemplary and of tutoring standard. The work at the cemetery takes extreme care and knowledge and Bill brings both to this precious place. He also ran the Monday Market for 22 years, once again adding to his knowledge of Epping High Street and what goes on in, above and below it. It takes Bill quite a while to walk through the High Street as he knows so many people in the town and our market traders are always keen to stop him for a chat. To his colleagues, Bill is a font of all knowledge and will have a solution to most problems. The Town Clerk advises: "Bill knows pretty much every blade of grass in Epping. In the six years I have been at Epping Town Council, I have asked him many questions. I don't think he has ever not found me a solution. Something that only comes with much experience." Bill's hard work, knowledge and commitment to Epping Town Council are very much appreciated and the Town Council invited Bill to choose a gift from Council to mark his milestone 35 years. Rather than something for himself, Bill chose two Ginkgo biloba (maidenhair) trees for Bury Lane Cemetery to be marked with a plaque to 'The Lost Year' (for 2020). In the true style of the gentleman, giving something back to the town, as he has done for 35 years. Congratulations Bill and here's to many more.

## **500 GRANTS AWARDED IN 2020/21**

The Town Mayor, Cllr G Scruton, said that there was only one grant awarded this year maybe because of the Lockdown situation. The Playground Association in Epping have been awarded £1,500 to further the advancement of the Lower Swaines Playground.

## **501 OPEN FORUM**

The Town Mayor invited residents to raise questions or comments in advance of the Annual Town Meeting relating to matters over which the Town Council has control or some influence. The Town Mayor said that if there were any further questions during the meeting, he asked for them to be emailed in and they would be replied to.

Question 1: I would like to raise the question re increased littering across the Town. Cllr McCredie has acknowledged the issue but the District Council seems uninterested. Coverage in the local newspaper hasn't had any impact either. Has anyone seen the 'Highway Rangers' as announced by EFDC; Two new highway rangers, who are currently in training, will be undertaking tasks such as cleaning and minor repairs to non-electrical road signs, trimming vegetation and grass cutting, clearing of footway drainage channels and litter picking from highway land. Over the past few weeks I have cleared rubbish from; Along Centre Drive, Bower Hill and Brook Road. From the pathway (and developments either side of) leading from Centre Dr to Epping Tube. Hemnell Street the wasteland next to The George & Dragon. The area behind the Bus Stop on The Plain by the Hospital. Urgent attention is needed to; TFL land either side of the Bridge (Station Road/Bower Hill). Also on TFL land alongside Sunnyside Road and Crossing Road Foot Bridge (which also needs street lighting repairs too). Remaining rubbish along the perimeter of the Centre Drive / Station path (especially on the borders of Addison Court and the alongside the old Builders Merchants. Both verges along The Plain. The verge along Brook Road all the way upto Theydon Road. As EFDC seem uninterested I am hoping the Town Council will be able to help. Looking forward to hearing your response.

Cllr C McCredie confirmed that the litter situation was bad in Epping and said that it was down to education in schools. Cllr N Avey said that as he is Cabinet Member for Waste as Epping Forest District Councillor, he should answer this question. He said that litter is a real problem in Epping and that EFDC is not disinterested, there has been a 'tsunami' of litter. He mentioned the Great British Spring Clean initiative, scheduled street cleansing and trialling the use of CCTV. Cllr Avey said that EFDC don't have the resources to a lot and act when reports are made to the District Council. He said that the District Council needs help with locally organised litter picks. Cllr Avey said that the Highway Rangers have had great success with repairing the pavements with the tree damage outside Nat West on the High Street but won't be involved in litter picking. Cllr Avey said that the land by the tube station is owned by Transport for London (TfL) so private land but the District Council's Environmental powers can ensure that they deal with litter on their own land. Cllr H Whitbread said there has been an increase in litter and she has helped to organise a litter pick in Thornwood and hoped that it would be rolled out across the borough in a Covid-19 secure way. Cllr Whitbread said

that officers are litter picking but there has been a big increase in fly tipping and also a big increase in the number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued. Cllr C McCredie said that Jacqui Mortimer has organised a recent poster competition for children to highlight the problem of litter and suggested it needs to be on the schools' curriculum. Jacqui Mortimer suggested adding more bins to Centre Drive as it is a long road and there is only one bin at Ivy Chimneys end and Station Road. Jacqui Mortimer said that generally there is a lack of public waste bins and suggested placing them at all bus stops. Cllr G Scruton agreed that there needs to be an education programme about dropping litter and people encouraged to take it home suggesting that something could go in the Talk About Epping magazine. Cllr N Avey said that as Cabinet Member at the District Council, he would look to increase the number of waste bins and recycling bins but that there is a cost involved. He agreed that there is a lack of public bins and that litter picks are a great idea. Cllr C McCredie said that the new litter bins would need to be added to the number already installed not instead of them.

Question 2: Would it be possible to improve the Christmas tree (donated by Rotary Club of Epping) lighting. The offering this Christmas was very much short of what Epping residents would expect and deserve. I go so far as to say it was most probably one of the poorer offerings in the county of Essex.

The Town Mayor, Cllr Scruton said The Rotary Club of Epping kindly paid £500 towards the purchase of the Christmas tree. The lighting itself is provided by Epping Town Council. The lights, when the tree was first dressed, looked fine. Unfortunately, someone pulled the lights from their dressing and it was difficult to get contractors back to rectify the situation. The town's Christmas lights cost approximately £9,500, as we dress 120 on the High Street shops, as well as the central Christmas tree and the five large trees on the approach into town. We are looking to award a new Christmas lights contract from this year and hope it will be a good display next year.

Question 3: Town Show Its excellent news that ETC have decided to plan for a 2021 Town Annual Show. However, the outdated disruptive and expensive Fun Fayre is considered by many NOT to add value to the Town Show. Their weeklong visit is considered too long, too noisy (5 continuous nights), attracts huge amounts of dropped litter, and drug dealing...all which has to be monitored, policed, and extra expense collecting the litter and repairing damaged football fields etc. Question 1: Can you kindly advise how much (£) will be charged to the owners of the fair and will this cover all associated costs to the Council?

Cllr B Scruton (Key Member for Events) said work is underway organising the popular Epping Town Show which is to be held on Sunday, 4<sup>th</sup> July from 12noon to 5pm at Stonards Hill Recreation Ground (Covid-19 dependent). The Town Council invites the Funfair to attend once a year to coincide with the Town Show week. The Funfair owner is asked to sign a licence before each yearly occasion coming to Epping. The funfair pays approximately £688.55 for their licence. There is some extra rubbish from the Funfair and this cost is included in the licence fee. The Town Council tries to ensure that the least disruption to residents is caused as much as possible. Residents along Tidys Lane which is the main entrance for the Funfair are notified in advance of their arrival and asked to park elsewhere (between the junction of Palmers Hill and the entrance to the recreation ground) while the Funfair arrives and exits at the start and end of that particular week and during the day of the Town Show. The Funfair staff start arriving on the Sunday and set up for the next few days on Stonards Hill Recreation Ground. The Funfair opens to the public on Thursday, Friday, Saturday evenings as well as Sunday for the Town Show (four nights to the latest time of 10pm on the Thursday, Friday, Saturday evenings and 8pm on the day of the Town Show, Sunday). The staff then start dismantling the equipment before leaving the site on Monday. The Town Council arranges for extra bins to be made available on site for the Funfair staff to use during their stay. The Town Council grounds team regularly litter picks Stonards Hill Recreation Ground including on a regular basis during the week when the Funfair is visiting the site. If there are any signs of anti-social behaviour including drug dealing, the Funfair staff would escort the individuals off the site. During the day of the Town Show, there is good support from Essex Police who attend our event and there are marshalls on site during the day to monitor the proceedings. Football pitches are repaired and maintained over the summer after the Show and any damage would likely be caused by the extensive use of the recreation ground and possibly the Show in general, rather than the funfair particularly. The Show is a community event and the funfair is part of it. Many residents have told us how much they enjoy it. It isn't possible to separate the work involved with the funfair from the work

involved in running the Town Show in general. In general/normal years, the Town Show as a whole, costs more to put on, than the income received from it.

Question 4: Qualis We believe that ETC has/had a very good rapport/communication links with EFDC. Do ETC believe that the communication and engagement with Qualis has been : - Barely Adequate (with room for improvement), Good or Excellent. ?

Cllr N Avey said that the Town Council's dealings with Qualis have been very good. He said it has to be remembered that Qualis is a wholly owned subsidiary of Epping Forest District Council. Qualis has responsibility for the developments in the town such as the new leisure centre in Cottis Lane and the St John's site.

Question 5. Have ETC supported the concerns of the residents of Baker Villas who will be affected by the overbearing high dominance and loss of amenity of the multi-floored carpark?

B Rumsey (Town Clerk) said Epping Town Council invited Bakers Villas to share their concerns regarding the Qualis developments at their planning meeting. Those concerns were shared with both EFDC planning department and Qualis. Epping Town Council then facilitated a meeting between Bakers Villas and Qualis direct. They also facilitated additional communications between the residents of Albany Court and Qualis, so they could also share any concerns.

Question 6: Stonards Hill recreation ground. We wish to praise ETC for its continued investment and upgrading of the social and exercise facilities undertaken at the Queen Elizabeth II Field (known as Stonards Park to most people haha) We have witnessed the excellent and tireless day to day work undertaken by the diligent ground staff. Have ETC considered taken on an 'Apprenticeship' ground maintenance role?

B Rumsey (Town Clerk) replied. Thank you for your kind words. The team do work extremely hard and the ground has been extremely well used and busy over the last year. Apprenticeships have been considered before, but there are many practical issues, such as insurance, the multi-tasking nature of the job and the availability of candidates. Should an apprenticeship scheme be highlighted to us, we would consider the practicalities of it.

Question 7: Road signage. For over a year there has been a confusing array of many unattractive red road signage and barriers, eg either 20mph or 30mph. Do ETC have any say or influence when and where these are placed around the town?

Cllr N Avey said that temporary signage for the speed restrictions was placed by Essex Highways as part of the Covid-19 safety measures. Epping Town Council don't have any say or influence over where they are placed around the town. Essex Highways did consult with Epping Forest District Council over the location of the signage. Cllr Avey said that further works of the pavements are planned and the removal of the orange barriers will be down to Essex Highways to make Epping a safe place. Cllr Avey said that residents will see changes shortly for example with more street furniture. Jacqui Mortimer said that there is a trip hazard outside M&S with the barriers after they fell down. Cllr Avey agreed that there was a problem there but Essex Highways will be putting something more permanent there. A resident asked if the 20 mph speed limit would be permanent rather than temporary. Cllr Avey said that the traffic is already slow in the town centre but would find out the answer to this.

Question 8: Meadow Road Allotments. During the Covid-19 Lockdowns (particularly the first one), access to the Plots was a godsend for many, often lonely, single, isolated elderly-ish allotmenters. So, again we wish to praise ETC for both its Administration and ground maintenance of the Meadow Road plot. For info, We have an interactive Facebook Group with over 50 keen plot holders who exchange tips, advice and 'damage' alerts to shed etc. We believe that ETC are willing to engage and work more collaboratively with plot holders? Would ETC wish to comment on this tonight?

B Rumsey (Town Clerk) replied Epping Town Council are happy to engage and work collaboratively with plot holders. We did meet with an allotment holder and agreed that if the allotment holders chose a representative to meet with a member of Epping Town Council staff, we could try and deal with issues as they arose. Epping Town Council have agreed to trial an annual rubbish clearance day, so allotment holders can dispose of any difficult allotment generated waste. A date is currently being arranged. Epping Town Council have looked at our allotment tenancy agreement, shortened it and compared it to the National Allotment Society agreement and decided Epping Town Council's was more succinct.

Question 9 Social Media Do you think ETC could better use the communication and influencing 'power' of Social Media than you currently do?

B Rumsey (Town Clerk) replied. Unfortunately, Councils receive a lot of unnecessary abuse on social media and there is much confusion over which Councils are responsible for what, meaning authorities often receive harsh attacks about things that they have no control over. Social media also requires a lot of attention to keep it up to date. Epping Town Council post things on Twitter to promote events and services, but it doesn't have the capacity to spend a lot of time on these channels. The Council may be able to use Instagram and this is something that will be looked into as time allows.

Question 10. Will the new toilet provision in the new multi-floored car park be owned or run by ETC or Qualis or EFDC or someone else?

Cllr G Scruton (Town Mayor) replied. This is yet to be discussed and decided. Epping Town Council will be having those discussions with Qualis whether we or EFDC operate the toilets in the coming months.

Question 11: Pavements: I would like to express my concern about the pavements in Epping High Street and surrounding roads. Some are so uneven, it makes walking hazardous for pedestrians, especially the elderly and disabled. Loose and uneven block paving, mounds of tarmac for vehicle access, and in general, very poorly maintained. Are there any plans to remedy this in the foreseeable future.

Cllr G Scruton (Town Mayor) replied. Pavements and roads are the responsibility of Essex County Council. You can report any issues via their Highways Online Reporting Tool. They also have a phone number which we can provide you with. You may also wish to contact your local County Councillor, Chris Whitbread. Cllr G Scruton invited Cllr C Whitbread, Essex County Council representative to speak. Cllr C Whitbread said that repair of pavements are not part of the Town Council's remit. He said that the Highway Rangers statutory work includes putting back pavements back properly. Cllr Whitbread requested that residents keep reporting these problems to Essex County Council.

The Town Mayor thanked everyone for attending the virtual Town Meeting. The Mayor said hopefully next year the meeting will be back to a more normal format next year.

**The Town Mayor, Cllr G Scruton closed the meeting at 7.42pm.**