

March Town Council

Minutes of the Main Meeting (formerly “**Annual Assembly**”) of
March Town Council that took place at 7.15pm in The Skoulding
Suite at March Town Hall on Monday 22 April 2024

Present	Councillor	K French G Christy	Town Mayor Deputy Mayor
	Councillors	S Court J French J Lawler M Purser	M Field T Taylor H Orbell
	Town Clerk Asst Town Clerk		S Lemmon S Taylor
	Public		0

12 Introduction

The Clerk and Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting formerly known as the “Annual Assembly”. Going forward, the meeting held at this time would be known and regarded as a regular Main Meeting, since there was no legal requirement to hold an Annual Assembly.

13 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Harris, Spencer and Woollard.

14 Police Update

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 April 2024 (together with a copy of the presentation delivered) were circulated to all councillors on 15 April 2024. Cllr Christy will attend the next meeting on 10 May 2024.

15 Minutes of Meetings

The following minutes were agreed and signed by the Mayor;

Annual Assembly - 17 April 2023
Main Meeting – 8 April 2024

16 Matters Arising from the above Minutes

Cllr J French wished to formally thank Cllr Orbell for her efforts in relation to the St George Day writing competition, and to the Mayor for her financial contribution for the prizes from the Mayors Charity Fund.

17 Report of the Town Mayor for 2023 / 2024 and the Mayor's Charity Donations

The Mayors Report was accepted by the meeting and is attached to these minutes as Appendix A (3 pages).

The Mayor had distributed donations from the Mayors Charity Account totalling £3,150.00 to causes of her choice.

The Mayor's Charity Account is attached (Appendix B – 1 page).

18 Written Report of the Town Clerk for 2023 / 2024

The written report of the Town Clerk, as previously circulated, was accepted by the meeting (see Appendix C – 4 pages).

19 Affirmation re Mayor's Allowances

The Mayor, Councillor Kim French, affirmed that the Mayoral expenses received during this year of office and totalling £3,450.00p per annum had been fully expended in the execution of her Mayoral duties.

20 Resolution to Approve the Annual Governance Statement

It was noted that the Personnel and Administrative Sub-Committee had undertaken a full review of the effectiveness of our systems of internal control on 16 January 2024. It had also fully reviewed all general risks likely to be faced by March Town Council and all procedures included within the MTC risk assessment document. All the findings were ratified by Full Council on 5 February 2024.

Members re-affirmed their approval of the procedures adopted to satisfy themselves of the effectiveness of the systems of internal control currently in place.

The Annual Governance Statement was then discussed as follows:

- a) Its contents were reviewed and completed as appropriate.
- b) It was proposed by Councillor K French and seconded by Councillor Orbell, with all in favour, that its contents were approved.

- c) The resolution to accept the Annual Governance Statement was, therefore, unanimously approved.
- d) The Clerk and Chairman duly signed and dated such Statement.

21 Resolution to Approve the Accounting Statements for 2023 / 2024

The Annual Accounting Statements for the financial year 2023 / 2024, as previously circulated, were presented to the meeting by the Responsible Financial Officer to allow full discussion by Councillors.

After such discussions, the following decisions were reached:

- a) It was proposed by Councillor J French and seconded by Councillor Christy, with all in favour, that such Accounting Statements be approved.
- b) The resolution to accept the Accounting Statements for 2023 / 2024 was, therefore, unanimously approved.
- c) The Mayor, Councillor Kim French duly signed and dated such document as necessary.

22 Planning Applications

Because of her position on the Fenland District Council Planning and Development Committee and her commitment to Paragraph 28 of the Fenland District Council Code of Conduct, Councillor J French declares a permanent personal interest and takes no part in discussions relating to planning matters.

<i>Application Number</i>	<i>Name and address of applicant, details of application, and recommendation of March Town Council</i>
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It was agreed that 2 additional planning applications would be discussed at tonight's meeting.

F/YR/23/0376/F	<p>Jamie McGarvie, Ashewell Developments, Wimblington. Change of use of agricultural land to equestrian use and the formation of an access road (part-retrospective) at Land East of The Walnuts, Flaggrass Hill Road, accessed from Creek Fen, March.</p> <p>Revised Proposals; Amended biodiversity checklist and submission of water vole assessment. Received: 8 April 2024 Reply by: 22 April 2024 *Cllr Orbell declared an interest in this item and took no part in discussions/voting.</p> <p>Recommendation; Approval - subject to all advised conditions and applicant's agreements and the robust enforcement thereof.</p>
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- F/YR24/0270/F Mr S Rutterford, 63 Elwyn Road, March.
Erect a block of 5 x industrial units and a detached industrial shed (Class B2) involving the demolition of existing buildings (part retrospective) at 38 Whittlesey Road, March.
Received: 10 April 2024
Reply by: 1 May 2024
Recommendation; Approval – subject to satisfactory surface water attenuation measures/proposals.
- F/YR24/0275/F Mr G Sharman, 9 Babble Close, March.
Change of use of existing dwelling to mixed use to include erection of a single-storey detached building for the use of a dog grooming business at 9 Babble Close, March.
Received: 12 April 2024
Reply by: 3 May 2024
Recommendation; Approval
- F/YR24/0284 Green King, Bury St Edmunds
Installation of 2 pergolas at 9 Acre Road, March.
Received: 11 April 2024
Reply by: 2 May 2024
Recommendation; Approval
- F/YR24/0292/F One Wisbech Road March Ltd, London
PR Architects Ltd, Manchester
Erect a Drive-Thru Café, automated carwash and substation with associated parking spaces and 6 EV charging points at Land North of 305 Wisbech Road, March.
Received: 17 April 2024
Reply by: 8 May 2024
Recommendation; Refusal – serious concerns regarding drainage and flooding. Lack of information addressing this.
- F/YR24/0313/F Mr & Mrs Dickerson, 103 Elwyn Road, March.
Erect a single-storey extension involving demolition of existing conservatory at 103 Elwyn Road, March.
Received: 16 April 2024
Reply by: 7 May 2024
Recommendation; Approval

F/YR24/0320/TRCA

Mrs Pauline Wright/Lloyds Banking Group
Fell 1 x Ash Tree within a conservation area at 37 West
End, March.

Received: 17 April 2024

Reply by: 8 May 2024

*Cllr Lawler declared an interest in this item and took no
part in discussions/voting.

Recommendation; Approval

F/YR24/0293/A

One Wisbech Road March Ltd, London.
Display of 8 Advertisements (2 internally illuminated
fascia signs and 6 vinyl signs) at Land North of 305
Wisbech Road.

Received: 17 April 2024

Reply by: 8 May 2024

**Recommendation: Refusal (see above recommendation
to refuse the linked main application)**

F/YR24/0296/A

Nationwide Building Society, Swindon
Display 4 signs (1 internally illuminated projecting sign, 1
internally illuminated fascia sign, 1 internally illuminated
ATM sign and 1 window vinyl) at 22 Broad Street, March.

Received: 18 April 2024

Reply by: 9 May 2024

Recommendation; Approval

23 Payments List

The Payments List, as circulated, was agreed.

The Mayor declared the meeting closed at 20:15.

Councillor Christy.....
Mayor of March

13 May 2024

Appendix A

Following Councillor Purser stepping down from Mayor in August 2023, I was asked to step in for the remainder of the term. This was mainly due to the recent election and addition of new Councillors, and having the ability to hit the ground running immediately.

Like all previous terms, it was again a privilege to be elected as the Mayor of March for the year of 2023/2024.

As in previous years, I was fortunate to be able to attend some great events in this nine-month term.

The first task in my term was organising the VIP attendees and area for the MAFF. This was another great event and very well attended by both the public and VIPs from other towns and cities.

Mid-September I attended the Civic Service for Ramsey, along with my deputy Cllr Christy. This is always a lovely town and venue to attend.

We were able to attend the Civic Service for Whittlesey at the beginning of October, and I held my first fund-raising event on Sunday 29th October, with afternoon tea at March Golf Club. A huge amount of funds were raised at this event and I very much appreciated everyone's support for the event.

Unfortunately, due to low numbers, the MTC Civic Service had to be postponed to 2024 when more attention could be given to organising the event.

Ian and I were honoured to attend Madingley's Remembrance Service at the American Cemetery on the 10th November. It was a beautiful service and surroundings.

On the morning of the 11th November, I laid a wreath on behalf of the town at St Peter's Church, where we had a small service.

On the afternoon of the 11th November, we had the honour of hosting the High Sherrif of Cambridgeshire. The Exchange Tea Parlour put on a lovely spread and we had a small gathering where Dr Bharatkumar Khetani and his wife Pritty presented a number of High Sherrif Awards.

The town also welcomed back the MTC Remembrance Parade on Sunday 12th November. It was slightly different this year due to the regeneration works in Broad Street, but it was very well attended.

Sunday 17th of December I held the Mayor's Carol Service, which again as very well attended.

Ian and I were invited to the 1220 Air Cadets Presentation evening at St Wendredas Church on the 26th January. It was lovely to see so many cadets take part in so many competitions across the county.

Generally, January was a quiet month as we were gearing up for the Mayor's Charity Ball on Friday 9th February. We had 150 attend the evening and a huge sum of money was raised for the Mayor's Charities. Thank you to all those that attended and contributed to the evening.

I held the MTC Civic Service on Sunday 3rd March at St Mary's Church. It was a lovely service headed by Rev Andrew Smith. It was pleasing to see so many visitors from outside of March attend.

Thursday 7th March I was invited to All Saints School by Cllr Hannah Orbell for World Book Day. Gosh - it was brilliant to see so many children dress up and tell the audience which books they enjoyed reading and who they were dressed as.

On Friday 8th March I had the honour of attending the International Women's Day event at Neale-Wade Community College. This was led by Rev Ruth Clay of St Wendredas Church and Karen Beckwith of the March Rotary Club. More than 150 delegates attended and it was a very inspirational day.

Saturday 23rd March, we attended the Whittlesey Charity dinner and had the pleasure of the company of some other visiting Mayors and Chairs. I understand Cllr Mayor raised a huge sum for her charities.

On Friday 5th April, Ian and I were able to visit the 1220 Air Cadets at their squadron parade evening. Here we gained a better understanding of what the cadets have been up to and the awards they have gained. We presented them with a cheque from the Mayor's Charity. They said that the funds would allow them to purchase additional IT equipment to aid their assessments and courses required, plus some new equipment too.

Saturday 13th April Ian and I attended the Godmanchester Civic Service and had a lovely time helping Cllr Rooker raise funds for his chosen charities.

Sunday 14th April Ian and I met up with the Fenland Sappers. They were off to Normandy to paint a bridge for the week on behalf of the Royal Engineers Association. I donated £500 to them from my Mayor's Charity Funds as a thank you for all of their support within the community and supporting me and Ian throughout our Mayoral years. I understand from the report, news and social media that everything went to plan and they all had an enjoyable time.

Saturday 20th April we attended, along with other Mayors and Chairs, the Huntingdon's branch of the St George's Association. It was a lovely evening and we were lucky enough to have our evening meal in the beautiful surroundings of Huntingdon Town Hall. A slightly wonky room, but lovely nonetheless!

Sunday just passed we attended the St George's Festival organised by the March Events committee. I had the honour of opening the event and announcing the winners of the Writing

Competition headed by Cllr Hannah Orbell. From my Mayoral funds I donated a sum of money to purchase the winners some gifts. I hope, with the items they received, it'll inspire the children to continue writing. Thank you to Hannah for organising this.

There are a few more weeks to go until my Mayoral term ends, and I have planned to attend a few more events, including visiting St Ives and Huntingdon.

Throughout the nine months of fund-raising, Ian and I have raised £3,150 to distribute to our chosen charities. As you can see from the schedule, they mostly consist of youth groups and local organisations.

Thank you to all those who helped with fund raising, organising and supporting Ian and I in this nine-month term.

Cllr Kim French

22nd April 2024

Appendix C

ANNUAL REPORT of The Clerk to March Town Council (2023/2024)

INTRODUCTION

This Report and the main meeting (formerly “Annual Assembly”) on Monday 22 April 2024 mark the end of the 1st year in office of the current Council.

A warm welcome to you all.

Once again, it has been a very busy year for Councillors working hard for and on behalf of the Town and people of March.

2023 was the year of the world-famous wonky Christmas tree, that put March on the map and literally became a global sensation - with yours truly even appearing on national TV and radio!

Initially, its iconic tilt received a toxic response, but, in time, people came to love it. It became a tourist attraction and gave March a much-needed economic boost since the regeneration project had taken its toll on some local businesses. I think the moral of our perfectly imperfect tree story is that none of us are perfect and we must accept and embrace that philosophy as we go through life. My sincerest thanks to the Town Council and all the committee who work tirelessly to make the magic happen in March every Christmas.

The regeneration of Broad Street began in earnest in January 2023. Pleasingly, those works are progressing well and should be complete by Autumn 2024. The fountain will be welcomed back to Broad Street in its new location adjacent to Malletts Jewellers.

I am delighted that, as part of the project, Fenland District Council had budgeted for the replacement of the town’s redundant Christmas lighting and the next festive display promises to be excitingly interactive.

Wars continue to ravage across the world and we continue to respond to combined climate and cost of living crises.

The town has, in common with so much of the UK, battled with flooding, episodes that are increasing in severity and regularity.

Town Councillors have responded valiantly to the plight of those affected and, as a group, continue to fight hard to tackle local drainage/sewerage issues particularly as part of the planning process, striving to prevent a system that is already at capacity becoming completely overwhelmed once the town is developed in accordance with the Local Plan.

COUNCIL

During May 2023, Councillor Mark Purser was elected as Mayor of March and Councillor Gary Christy as his Deputy.

Cllr Purser retired from his role as Mayor in August on grounds of ill health and was succeeded by Councillor Kim French for the remainder of the mayoral year.

At the time of this Report the political groups within the Council are as follows; Conservative 8, Independent 1, Liberal Democrat 1 and Labour 2.

The average attendance of Councillors at Main Council Meetings was 89%, calculated as follows:

S Court	13 attendances out of 13	100%
J French	13 attendances out of 13	100%
K French	13 attendances out of 13	100%
G Christy	13 attendances out of 13	100%
M Field	13 attendances out of 13	100%
J Lawler	13 attendances out of 13	100%
H Orbell	12 attendances out of 13	92%
N Spencer	12 attendances out of 13	92%
M Purser	11 attendances out of 13	85%
T Taylor	11 attendances out of 13	85%
A Woollard	11 attendances out of 13	85%
S Harris	4 attendances out of 13	31%

The low attendance on the part of Cllr Harris has been to work commitments and kick-boxing competitions both nationally and internationally. However, Cllr Harris has, and remains, a committed councillor and dedicates a significant amount of time to council business as well as always responding to community needs.

ADMINISTRATION

March Town Council still maintains an office within the Town Hall which is staffed by one full-time and one part-time employees – the Clerk and Assistant Clerk.

The office is manned (as a minimum) from 8am to 3:30pm on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays and from 8.30am to midday on Fridays.

PLANNING

A total of 135 Planning Applications received consideration during the year, a decrease of 61 applications on the previous year's total.

Approval was recommended in respect of 102 applications, 18 were the subject of comments, more information was requested in respect of 1 application.

Objections/recommendation for refusal were raised in respect of 14 applications.

DONATIONS AND GRANTS

During 2023/2024 financial year donations totalling £1770.00 were made to the following organisations;

Fenland Farmers	£ 770.00
Fenland Wildlife	£ 500.00
March Library	£ 500.00

Grants totalling £5,000.00 were made as follows;

Volunteer Centre Fenland	£ 750.00
Isle of Ely Society for the Blind	£ 250.00
East Anglian Air Ambulance	£1,000.00
FACT	£ 500.00
MAFF (March Armed Forces Fayre)	£2,500.00

In addition, generous financial support was also given to March Museum Society and Estover Playing Field 2015 CIC.

ALLOTMENTS

Since relinquishing some of its allotment sites in October 2004, the remainder are now fully occupied and a waiting list of 49 exists at the time of writing.

An Allotments “Working Group” was established in November 2023 comprising Councillor Allotment Overseers, a forum created to share information, good practise and enhance the efficient running of the allotments.

There are ongoing issues with the registration of the council’s title (upgrade from possessory to absolute) to Grandford allotment with HMLR. Matters are in the hands of the Town Council’s solicitors.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

During the year March Town Council has supported the following organisations and events;

- A. March & District Museum.
- B. March Street Pride Group (previously March in Bloom).
- C. The town centre Christmas Lights. Christmas 2023 again saw an excellent display of lights thanks to the continuing efforts of all the volunteers and fundraising.
- D. March St. Georges Fayre and Christmas Market.
- E. Band Concerts on West End Park during July and August.

- F. March Town FC Estover CIC. It is pleasing to note that since signing the 99-year lease in November 2015, exceptional progress has been made with plans to develop the site into a first-class multi-sports facility. As previously advised, the lease has been assigned to March Town United Football Club and will continue to be operated for the benefit of the community.
- G. The March Armed Forces Fayre in September, the second of its kind, was once again an enormous success. This event will take place every 2 years going forward.
- H. The March Armed Forces Air Cadets – in November 2022, the first Mayor’s Cadet was appointed. This has been a very successful and rewarding partnership.
- I. Remembrance Day service – there was no parade this year on account of the regeneration works in Broad Street. As such, the service was relocated to West End Park for a drum head service and the act of remembrance. The parade will return in November 2024.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, and continuing on a positive note, the past year has again been extremely successful with all Councillors, and the various political groups, working constructively together for the benefit of the town, in often challenging circumstances.

I wish you all the very best going forward.

Sarah Lemmon – Town Clerk

22 April 2024