



## **MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD IN AYLSHAM TOWN HALL ON WEDNESDAY 19<sup>th</sup> MAY 2026, 7pm**

The meeting was chaired by Chairman of the Town Council, Kay Montandon.

The voting strength of electors in attendance was 35 (including 8 town councillors).

Also in attendance, Faye LeBon (Town Clerk)

### **1. WELCOME**

Kay Montandon welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the purpose of the Annual Town Meeting and its difference to a Town Council meeting.

### **2. MINUTES FROM THE MEETING OF 15<sup>th</sup> MAY 2025**

The minutes were accepted by the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

### **3. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

Kay Montandon read her annual report, citing a busy year for the Town Council, but supported by a full complement of councillors, all with varied skill sets of great benefit to the town.

The council has done a considerable amount of consulting during the year. This is nothing to be concerned about and is an important part of the Town Council's role in understanding the needs of the community.

The council is currently in the process of upgrading its IT systems. This is an important part of new requirements of Town and Parish councils to be able to defend against cyberattacks and keep data held on the council's systems safe. Another current project is reviewing council contracts, to ensure best value is obtained for the taxpayer.

The Events team has been very busy this year. The trademark events of the Christmas Lights switch on and the Street Party (attended by 1200-1500 and 600-800 people respectively) were once again a resounding success. The closure of Red Lion Street improved the atmosphere of the events, so will be repeated in the future. Other events included Healthy Town, Live Well for Less, the Community Fayre and the Jobs, Training and Benefits Forum. Feedback is always welcome on events,

After a successful grant application to Norfolk County Council's Love Your Market Town fund, a new Heritage Snail Trail will be launching on 1<sup>st</sup> August. The feature snail will be at the Family Learning Day on 20<sup>th</sup> June as part of the competition to name it.

Parking remains problematic in the town but the Town Council is working hard to resolve this. The council is to be gifted an area of land from the Norwich Road development and the council now has a design for a transport interchange. This is located next to a bus stop which will make travel to and from Norwich and Cromer simpler. The area is also a short walk to the town centre. The council's transport group has been doing surveys of people using the existing town car parks to see if users could be accommodated in other areas of the town.

New bus stops have been added to the town, and some existing stops have been upgraded to include shelters, some of which now have real time information to assist those using those bus stops.

The Visit Aylsham Working Group, consisting of town councillors, local business representatives and the Heritage Centre has been working hard to increase footfall to the town.

The Town Council has put a lot of work into managing its estates. Rents have not increased in recent years, despite running costs rising, and this has had to be addressed to obtain best value for the taxpayer. Forward plans are in the process of being put in place to ensure the Town Council's buildings are kept in good order. The Town Council is also responsible for the churchyard maintenance which includes the church wall, repairs for which will be going out to tender shortly.

The committees of the council are important because that is where democracy starts. All discussions about how the Town Council's money is spent are made in public with the minutes of which published on the Town Council's website.

#### **4. HOW THE TOWN COUNCIL SPENDS YOUR MONEY**

The Town Clerk gave a presentation to the meeting on how the precept is spent. This included:

- The four precepting authorities and what services they provide, and Aylsham Town Council making up less than 9% of the total council tax bill.
- The provision of community buildings in the form of the Town Hall and the Drill Hall and their upkeep. The Town Hall is grade II listed and therefore needs to be upkept sympathetically to its surroundings. The Town Council is looking at ways to improve the running costs of these buildings, which support local community groups and community banking facilities to Barclays and TSB.
- The provision of parks and open spaces. They provide opportunities for unstructured exercise and imaginative play. But they are not just a provision for the young, they are a provision for all ages to take in the fresh air and nature, to meet up with friends and enjoy walks. It's also a form of green prescribing that can help with mental wellbeing.
- The provision of a cemetery. The Town Council does not have a duty to provide a cemetery, it is something the Town Council chooses to do to support its residents. The Town Council works hard to keep this area well maintained, as an area of respect to those who have passed, and for quiet contemplation for those who wish to reflect.
- The provision of three allotment sites. Just like the parks, the allotment sites allow for residents to spend time in the fresh air and connect with nature.

- The maintenance of the closed churchyard. In support of this grade 1 community building, Aylsham Town Council has taken on responsibility for maintenance of the churchyard. The Town Council operates under the same Ecclesiastical Law as the Parochial Church Council does and in order for this function of the council to work effectively, the council works in partnership with the church. A current project is working alongside the church and Aylsham in Bloom to create a Memorial Garden in the church grounds. This garden will provide a memorial to those lost in the Covid-19 pandemic and also commemorate those of the town who helped secure votes for women.
- Provision of community events. Community events help to make Aylsham, Aylsham. They take a significant amount of planning but are worth all the time and effort for the social wellbeing of residents and for the boost they provide to local businesses. Event organisation is becoming increasingly complicated. The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 is impacting community events nationwide. Otherwise known as Martyn's Law, named in memory of Martyn Hett, who was killed in the 2017 Manchester Arena attack, the law requires public venues and events across the UK to prepare for and mitigate the threat of terrorist attacks. This has resulted in numerous local community events being cancelled, but Aylsham Town Council has risen to the challenge to support our community events and safeguard our community.
- Supporting local climate and environment projects. The Aylsham Climate Emergency Group (ACE) runs as a working group of the Town Council. This group is very proactive in supporting the important natural environment of Aylsham and beyond. They have recently obtained funding of nearly £11,000 to support green infrastructure in the town, to create a nature walk, swift streets and habitat corridors. The group is also in the process of extending its blister pack recycling programme to include stationery items and dental products.
- Managing local markets. The Town Council is responsible for running the general markets every Monday and Friday, and the Saturday Food and Craft markets. Running markets is a balance between keeping local tradition alive and supporting the local businesses in the town centre. The local businesses have the benefit of permanency, but must pay for the privilege through rents, utilities and business rates (the latter of which do not go the Town Council). The market traders pay minimal pitch fees but have the benefit of a prime spot in the town centre of Aylsham, but on a temporary basis.
- The Visit Aylsham project intends to increase footfall to the town. Attendees of the meeting were encouraged to visit the [www.visitaylsham.org](http://www.visitaylsham.org) website.

The Town Council does this around a strict framework of governance.

The cost to the average household in Aylsham of these services comes at a cost of less than £4.50 per week.

### Budget Q&A

Q: Could the council look to reduce its insurance premiums by reducing its cover for cash being held?

A: Most of the council's insurance premiums are covering high risk areas such as our vehicles, buildings and play equipment, but the council could certainly look at this.

## 5. HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO USE THE MARKET PLACE?

The Chairman explained the conflicting requests from members of the public and businesses about how the market place could be improved. These include:

- Increase to pedestrian safety
- Movement of buses away from the town centre
- More pedestrian realm
- More market place greening
- More car parking spaces

There is conflict to these requests so it is important to consult on the matter. Gordon Clarke has kindly worked up some schemes which would each accommodate some of these requests and it is important to get quantitative data on each of the schemes. It may be that none of the schemes are acceptable and the decision could be to keep the existing set up. Consultation is key to making any decision and attendees were encouraged to complete the market place consultation forms.

### Market Place Q&A

Q: Are there any plans to better manage the town car parks eg: better enforcement.

A: The Town Council does not manage any car parks. The Buttlands and Burgh Road are managed by Broadland Council the market place is Norfolk County Council highways. Signage could be improved for Burgh Road.

Comment: In European countries the market squares are filled with café tables rather than cars. It's a shame that cars are prioritised over active travel.

Comment: The need for car parking was emphasised.

Comment: The buses staying too long in the market place is problematic

Comment: The polarised views in the room show that there is no simple answer to this problem.

## 6. HOW AYLSHAM REST BY MIND HELPS PEOPLE

A presentation was given by the Aylsham REST centre, part of Norfolk and Waveney MIND. REST is a partnership project that brings together mental health support, local services and a place where everyone can feel welcome. REST stands for Recover, Eat, Support, and Talk, reflecting the different ways mental health support can be accessible. REST provides options for mental health support, which include coming to the hub to talk and just step away from the world, with no appointment needed. There is also the option for more structured support in the form of 1:1 sessions. REST also has very good connections with the library and Eves Hill, and has an art group every Wednesday.

A local volunteer and service user for REST also provided a presentation, emphasising how attending the hub provided strength when it was most needed. There is currently a campaign to make Aylsham a Mental Health friendly town and this is being backed by the local MP and Lady Dannant. 74 people are now trained as local wellbeing champions, courtesy of Broadland Council.

It was agreed that the REST centre provides an essential service for the town, and all in the meeting showed their thanks and appreciation for the two presenters and the services that REST provides.

## **7. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN UPDATE**

The Town Clerk updated the meeting on the progress of the Neighbourhood Plan review. The draft vision is:

*'That residents will have opportunities to live, work, study and play in an inclusive community that is well designed, connected and flourishing. Through good planning, the distinctive character of the market town will be respected and enhanced, whilst responding to climate change.*

*To meet the needs of residents, visitors and local parishes, it will have an appropriate mix of homes, a wide range of employment opportunities, with excellent access to public services.*

*Growth of the town will respect the landscape, biodiversity, green spaces and historic environment, with appropriate infrastructure. Aylsham will have good routes for walking and cycling within the town and beyond.'*

The Neighbourhood Plan Working group has recently been working on a Design Code which is intended to provide specific, detailed parameters for the physical development of an area. This will be broken down into 7 sections: Liveability, Climate, Nature, Movement, Built Form, Public Space and Identity.

There will be extensive consultation in various accessible formats when the draft plan has been completed.

## **8. Q&A SESSION**

No further Q&A

With no more business to transact, the meeting close at 8.20pm. Tea, coffee and biscuits were served.