

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting
held on 10th April 2025
at The Pavilion, King George V Playing Field at 7.30pm

Present

Chairman Cllr Marianne Vernon

Cllrr : R Linden, B Milne, N Gallop, M O’Leary, E Brewer, D Balding, C Roe,
D Sperring, I Ward, I Wilson, V Wilson

In attendance Deputy Town Clerk

2 Members of public

1. OPENING ADDRESS FROM COUNCILLOR MARIANNE VERNON,
CHAIRMAN OF RAYLEIGH TOWN COUNCIL.

Welcome to this, back to basics, town meeting, which has been deliberately separated out from the council’s awards ceremony by agreement of the council. This year the awards ceremony will be held in October at Fitzwimarc school. This decision is to allow residents coming to the town meeting, more time and opportunity to make their contribution.

2. SIGN THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14TH MARCH
2024.

The Chairman signed the minutes for the Annual Town Meeting held on 14th March 2024.

3. ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN.

Chairman’s Report 2024/25

The annual town meeting is a legacy from the middle ages, when local councils did not exist, all local decision making was carried out by meetings of the whole community. As such, this is not a meeting of the town council, but of the electorate of Rayleigh. An open meeting for all residents to have the opportunity attend and participate in speaking on matters of local interest.

Rayleigh Town Council itself is made up of 23 councillors and in May last year, we saw an unprecedented 13 brand new councillors elected onto the council, with me being one of them. And at the moment, of the 23 town councillors, we have 13 who serve on Rochford District Council as well as Rayleigh Town Council, and 2 who are also Essex County councillors.

Rayleigh Town **Council** meetings are open to the public with agendas published 3 days in advance of each meeting and residents are welcome to attend. These meetings have time allocated for public participation giving residents the opportunity to raise a point on any item on the agenda.

As I mentioned, many of our members also serve at Rochford District Council representing political parties. However, Town (and parish) councils should be non-political, and at the first Full Council meeting of our newly elected Town council, it was agreed to abolish the previous arrangement of pro-rata political representation on all committees, sub-committees and working groups.

I, myself, am not affiliated with any political party and I was elected to the council as such. It has subsequently been my great privilege to serve as Chair to this new council over the last year. I have officially represented the people of Rayleigh at over 40 engagements so far, including Trinity Fair, the Christmas Light Switch On and the Remembrance Parade, all of which are organised by Rayleigh Town Council.

As Chair, I chose a very local and worthwhile charity to champion – Phablife. They run the Phab Charity Shop on the High St. with the aim of providing volunteers with additional needs with training, experience, confidence and skills in the retail sector. I supported them to hold The Big Phabulous Quiz, where we raised over £2,100 and much fun was had by all!

Rayleigh Town Council also continue to hold our Wednesday market in the High St, and in December, re-introduced Saturday markets on the run up to Christmas. Now the licenses and procedures are in place, we are hoping this will be a popular addition to the High St again this coming Christmas season.

Thanks to the work of councillors, Rayleigh was accredited an Inclusive Dementia Community this year, recognising that people with dementia should be able to continue to live in the way they want to and in the community they choose.

Our council also continues to look after King George V Playing Field in trust. This Green Flag accredited, award-winning community space is able to hold events throughout the year for all to enjoy. The Global Village day and Lions Club fireworks display being popular highlights.

Rayleigh Town Council have supported 15 charitable and community groups with grants this year:

The Cedars £500,
The Calm Corner £850,

Rayleigh Community Boxing Club £500,
Rayleigh Vineyard £500,
Blind & Sight Impaired Society £850,
5th Rayleigh Scouts £650,
RRAVS £850,
Wyvern Community Transport £850,
SCAFT £850,
Bar n' Bus £850,
Lions Club of Rayleigh £850,
The Paint Box £400,
6th Rayleigh Scouts £500,
Rayleigh Brass £850,
1476 Rayleigh Air Cadets £850
2nd Rayleigh Scouts £850.

A total of £11,550 for local initiatives.

Rayleigh Town Council also continue to support Rayleigh Town Museum, in the heart of our town, by providing funding of around £15k for their building rent. Furthermore, the council have contributed around 30% of the cost of the new lighting scheme for the Sweyne Park bridlepath from community safety funds this year.

All these things are in no way an exhaustive list of what your town council has done this year, but merely some highlights. It is worth noting that Rayleigh Town Council's share of your council tax contribution is less than 2 ½ pence per pound. We look for grant funding towards projects where available. We are also grateful to the businesses who sponsor and support our events in Rayleigh, getting involved and giving back to the community.

I have been very proud and pleased, to meet, and to represent, the residents of Rayleigh during my year as Chair and I would like to offer my thanks and gratitude to the Town councillors who commit their valuable time volunteering, and also the staff who work in our office to make everything possible. I believe we all have made positive progress towards the wider community engagement and involvement we would like for the people of Rayleigh.

As you may know our Town Council motto is "In reliquom laboramus" translated "We work for the future". This is very apt because at this moment in time, there is much discussion and speculation about the changes in the structure of local government in Essex, due over the next two years, following the government issued Devolution White Paper. It remains to be seen how Town and Parish councils may be affected by the plans to reform local government, as there is little mention of them in the white paper. In the meantime, Rayleigh Town Council will be taking every opportunity with Rochford District Council and with neighbouring parishes to be prepared for possible changes and secure the best results for the electorate of Rayleigh

4. UNAUDITED ACCOUNTS FOR 2024/2025

There were no questions raised regarding the unaudited accounts.

5. QUESTIONS FROM THE MEMBERS OF THE ELECTORATE PRESENT

The following questions were raised

- Has the Town Council considered taking on the Mill Arts and Events Centre as a result of the devolution and will they be engaging in a consultation with residents.

Rayleigh Town Council and clerk have been invited to a meeting with Rochford District Council, alongside the other parishes, about the possible impact on town and parish councils from Devolution/LGA

- Climate Emergency – Can the Town Council provide an update on the work of the Climate Change Working Group. A member informed that the Town Council had obtained quotes for solar panels for the Council building.
- Future of St John Fisher Playing Field. The member of public requested a Parish Poll as at a Full Council meeting it had been noted there was a motion to hand this asset back to Rochford District Council. The Chairman stated this had been the case however this motion had been removed, and the Town Council has a budget to maintain this playing field and does not plan on handing it back to the District Council. The Chairman also informed with any matter there would be consultation with the public and that there was an item on the next Full Council meeting to agree the costs for a surveying platform.
- Publicity of this meeting was raised by the member of public. Those present were informed that the correct procedure had been followed, and that the agenda was on the website and two notice boards in the High Street. This is not a Town Council meeting it is a electorates meeting. In previous years organisations and residents had been invited to attend however this was for the Awards Ceremony held on the same evening.

The meeting closed at 7:58pm.