PETERSFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Petersfield, on 22nd June 2015 at 6.30 pm

PRESENT: Cllr G Watkinson (Chairman), Cllr Mrs H Ayer, Cllr J Deane, Cllr P Humphries & Cllr J Matthews.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Mr N Hitch (Town Clerk), Mrs Michelle Snow (Locum Minute Taker). *No members of the Public or Press were present.*

F 0141 **CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

The Chairman had no comments.

F 0142 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Strawbridge.

F 0143 **GRANTING OF DISPENSATION UNDER SECTION 33 OF THE LOCALISM ACT**

No requests for dispensation had been received.

F 0144 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest made.
Cllr Watkinson declared a personal interest in agenda item 7 due to a connection with Mr Charnock-Wilson.

F 0145 **PUBLIC REPRESENTATION**

No representation to speak had been received.

F 0146 **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

RESOLVED **that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 26th May 2015 be approved and signed by the Chairman.**

F 0147 **FINANCIAL RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMITTEES**

Public Halls meeting held on 8th June 2015

The installation of solar panels on the roof of The Avenue Pavilion was discussed at the Public Halls Committee meeting on the 8th of June when the recommendation to install solar panels with a caveat regarding installation was made. Since this meeting the Town Clerk had received a third quote from the company Spirit Solar, which was discussed. It was noted that a grant

maybe available and funds from the Unallocated Capital Receipts Reserve could be spent on the project.

Following the discussion on whether the quotation provided represented value for money for the Council, it was:

RECOMMENDED: **to accept the quote provided by Spirit Solar for the supply and installation of Solar Panels on the roof of the Avenue Pavilion at the cost of £6,040. The system approved is a 4KW system, however this could be reduced to approximately 3.75KW if subsequent technical advice indicates that a 4KW system would require the buildings electricity supply to be upgraded. The funds from the Unallocated Capital Receipts Reserves are to be used to part fund the solar panels.**

F 0148 **TOWN CLERK'S FINANCIAL REPORT**

Members received and noted the Finance Report dated 12th June 2015 from the Town Clerk, a copy of which is attached to these Minutes at Appendix A.

F 0149 **BANK RECONCILIATION**

Members received and noted the latest bank reconciliation, together with balance sheet details, a copy of which is attached to these Minutes at Appendix B.

F 0150 **THE TOWN COUNCIL AND HEATH CHARITY ACCOUNTS YEAR ENDING 31ST OF MARCH 2016.**

Members received and considered the letter from Mr Alan Harland FCA. The Town Clerk advised that the costs were within budget.

RESOLVED **to employ the services of Mr Alan Harland for the preparation of the Petersfield Town Council accounts at the cost of £300 per day, for a maximum of 5 days and Examination of Heath Charity accounts at the cost of £260 for the year ending 31st of March 2016.**

F 0151 **INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT YEAR ENDING 31ST OF MARCH 2015**

The Town Clerk read through each of the matters noted by the Internal Auditor. It was also noted that the Internal Auditor made the following comments regarding contracts "The way the approval of contracts is handled in the minutes is exemplary."

The Internal Auditors comments regarding control areas, issues and recommended actions were then discussed with the following outcomes:

RESOLVED **that the comments below regarding the internal auditors report are agreed and approved.**

Payment Listing – Comments noted
General Power of Competence – Agreed, already actioned
Bank Statements – Agreed, already actioned
Staff Mileage Rate - Agreed to keep the current mileage rate.
Grants – Agreed to make clear when the S137 or GPC is used.
Register of members interests – A reminder will be sent out each month regarding any changes. Full checks are completed annually at the Annual Meeting of the Town Council in May.
Earmarked reserves – The Council's projects are to be presented to the Finance and General Purposes Committee for minute approval so that the reserves can be held in Earmarked Reserves.
Fixed Asset Register – Agreed to check the asset register as and when required.
Risk Assessment – Comments noted.
Mayor's account – The current system safeguards the Mayors good name and no changes are required.
Wages and salaries – Comments noted.
The Heath Charity – The Internal Auditor and Accountant are to agree on a suitable resolution. Comments noted.
Accounts presentation – No future issues due to software changes.

F 0152 ANNUAL CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

The members discussed the dissolution of the Association of Petersfield Businesses and the Christmas event held during the Christmas light switch on.

RECOMMENDATION **that Petersfield Town Council will continue to provide the Christmas lights and is willing to work with whoever wishes to organise an appropriate event.**

F 0153 CONSIDERATION OF THE DRAFT RESPONSE TO THE DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

After discussion it was agreed to recommend the draft response to full council.

RECOMMENDATION **that the draft response to a consultation regarding the extension of the remit of the Local Government Ombudsman to larger Parish and Town Councils be approved.**

F 0154 CONSULTATION BY HAMPSHIRE ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS REGARDING MEMBERSHIP OF NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

After discussion it was agreed that the recommendation in the report to stay affiliated to NALC is to be recommended to full council.

RECOMMENDATION **that the Town Council wishes the Hampshire Association of Local Council's to remain affiliated to the National Association of Local Councils.**

F 0155 THE ANNUAL REPORT

The members received and noted the Town council's Annual report. (See attached Appendix C). It was noted that any information that Councillors wish to include in the Newsletters should be handed to the office staff.

F 0156 EMERGENCY ORDERS

The Town Clerk reported that he had approved the following emergency orders and they required the committee's approval. It was noted that the Heath Boardwalk repairs are a temporary repair until full refurbishment.

RESOLVED **that £175.00 be approved for the repairs and overhaul of the pumps in Love Lane Pavilion. That £450.00 be approved for the repair to the Heath Boardwalk. That £750.00 be approved for the repair to the trip hazard on the brickwork between the Heath Boardwalk and metal railings.**

F 0157 FINANCIAL STRATEGY DOCUMENT

The Town Clerk presented the draft Financial Strategy to the committee.

RESOLVED **that the Financial Strategy be adopted with the following amendments to Item 6 which is to read 'To maintain the level of revenue reserves at no less than 3 months gross expenditure' and to Item 9 to reflect the need to maintain and improve quality. The amended document is attached to these minutes as Appendix C.**

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 7.58p.m.

Appendix A

FINANCE REPORT

As with the Clerk's Report to Council, this report is not an item of debate, but seeks to inform councillors of all matters financial, including income and expenditure against budget, the level of balances held, proposed movements of deposits, future plans as well as seasonal issues, such as the Audit and Budget setting processes. If councillors consider a matter included in the report is in need of debate, the subject can be added to a future meeting's agenda for this purpose. I will always endeavour to answer any questions raised from the content of the report, but please bear in mind that if further investigation is necessary, answers will need to be given outside the meeting.

Bank Accounts

	£	Rate	
Lloyds Current Account	250.00		
Lloyds 30 Day Account	91,817.95	0.05%	
Cambridge & Counties 30 Day Account	788,146.71	1.5%	
Public Sector Deposit Fund	70,361.84	varies	
Local Authorities Property Fund	110,000.00	varies	39,428 units
Total	**1,060,576.50**		
Town Mayor's Charity Account	2.18		

Lloyds Bank Deposits with Moody's is A1 with ratings 'under review' but for a possible upgrade. A further investment of £10,000 has been made into the Local Authorities Property Fund purchasing an additional 3,374 units at a price of £2.96 each. Notice has been given to withdraw a further £60,000 from the Cambridge & Counties bank account.

Finance & General Purposes Committee

	£	Budget	% Budget
Income	2,885	14,000	20.61
Expenditure	46,957	277,340	16.93

Income figures budgeted is primarily bank interest and includes the quarterly interest payment from the Local Authorities Property Fund. Expenditure year to date is often greater than expected at this stage of the year as reported last month. It includes Perennial grants made to the Petersfield Museum (full annual payment) and Petersfield Open Air Swimming Pool (half year payment) plus various annual subscriptions. It is broadly where I would expect it to be at this time of the year with no budget area giving cause for concern.

Public Halls Committee

	£	Budget	% Budget
Income	27,706	200,675	13.81
Expenditure	25,672	234,854	10.93

Income for the Festival Hall will be quieter than normal because of the redecoration that has just been completed. The Festival Hall complex year to date income is 12.1% (2014: 13.4%) and Avenue Pavilion income is at 13.1% (2014:12.8%). In the last financial year the Festival Hall complex just fell short of its budget whereas the Avenue Pavilion exceeded it. Close monitoring of income levels will continue and any serious concerns reported. Expenditure is well below expected levels for the time of year. The janitorial and cleaning budget is overspent for the time of year because of the need to provide supplies to the Heath toilets due to the delay in obtaining a contractor to undertake this work for us. Conversely though it means the relevant Grounds budget is underspent so a virement between the two budgets could be approved at a later date in the year if required.

Grounds Committee

	£	Budget	% Budget
Income	13,938	61,310	22.73
Expenditure	21,841	250,020	8.74

Income always looks strong this time of year because it reflects the charge of quarterly rents. Expenditure is low as it reflects a lack of spending on the cleaning contract for the Heath Toilets, lower than expected expenditure for contracted grounds maintenance and payment of wages for one plus a part-time worker rather than the planned two full time staff.

Overall

	£	Budget	% Budget
Income	44,529	275,985	16.13
Expenditure	94,470	762,214	12.39

If everything was on track the year to date figures would show a 16.67% spend. Income is where I would expect it to be after two months of the financial year especially with the Festival Hall being redecorated and expenditure is lower than expected. Last year at this stage, income was at 19.82% and expenditure 14.72%. Providing exact comparisons for the individual committee's is tricky at the moment because last year the whole accounts structure was altered and it took a few months to iron out some of the mis-posts. More meaningful comparisons should be possible later in the year.

This report aims to provide an overall summary of the position of the Council financially with any significant anomalies or variances being reported for your attention and potentially, action. It also demonstrates that councillors are fulfilling their role in monitoring the Council's finances and ensuring that good governance is being followed.

Neil Hitch
Town Clerk & Responsible Finance Officer 12th June 2015

Appendix B

Petersfield Town Council

Bank - Cash and Investment Reconciliation as at 8 June 2015

			Account Description	Balance	
Bank Statement Balances					
1			Lloyds Saving Account	121,856.68	
1			Lloyds Current Account	250.00	
2			Cambridge & Counties	788,146.71	
3			Public Sector Deposit Fund	70,361.84	
4			Clydesdale Bank	0.00	
5			Petty Cash	315.00	
6			Local Auth Property Fund	0.00	
					980,930.23
Other Bank & Cash Balances					
			Cash Book Suspense	0.00	
					0.00
					980,930.23
Unpresented Payments					
1	12/05/2015	015591		20.00	
1	19/05/2015	809526		2,108.11	
1	19/05/2015	809528		387.56	
1	19/05/2015	809530		889.34	
1	19/05/2015	809547		33.70	
1	22/05/2015	015603		180.00	
1	22/05/2015	015609		124.96	
1	22/05/2015	015610		60.00	
1	26/05/2015	015630		75.00	
1	26/05/2015	015631		250.00	
1	26/05/2015	015632		250.00	
1	27/05/2015	015614		99.94	
1	27/05/2015	015615		120.00	
1	27/05/2015	015616		37.24	
1	27/05/2015	015617		150.72	
1	27/05/2015	015618		36.00	
1	27/05/2015	015620		120.41	
1	27/05/2015	015621		99.60	
1	27/05/2015	015622		4,093.98	
1	27/05/2015	015623		28.76	
1	27/05/2015	015624		539.90	
1	27/05/2015	015625		424.93	
1	27/05/2015	015626		268.80	
1	27/05/2015	015627		387.20	
1	27/05/2015	015628		618.00	
1	27/05/2015	015629		642.00	
1	29/05/2015	015635		99.46	
1	16/02/2015	015428		250.00	
1	02/03/2015	015460		250.00	
1	17/03/2015	015470		60.00	
					12,705.61
					968,224.62

Petersfield Town Council

Bank - Cash and Investment Reconciliation as at 8 June 2015

		Account Description	Balance	
Receipts not on Bank Statement				
0	08/06/2015	All Receipts Cleared	0.00	
				0.00
				968,224.62
Closing Balance				
All Cash & Bank Accounts				
		Current Bank A/c		109,401.07
		C & C Bank A/c		788,146.71
		Clydesdale Bank A/c		0.00
		Public Sector Fund A/c		70,361.84
		Petty Cash		315.00
		Local Auth Property Fund		0.00
		Other Bank & Cash Balances		0.00
		Total Bank & Cash Balances		**968,224.62**

Appendix C

PETERSFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT

March 2015

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Date of publication: 22nd June 2015

1.0 Town Mayor's Report

There are more than 10,000 parish and town councils in the UK, focusing just as we do, entirely on our local community. And the number is rising.

I will kick off with three small examples of work undertaken by the Town Council this year to enhance our town and I wonder how many of you knew that the TC was behind them.

Firstly, we arranged to have the war memorial steam-cleaned, at no cost to the precept but with grant funding from our two County Councillors, for which we are very grateful. Hampshire County Council (HCC) yesterday confirmed to me that they will in the coming months, in direct response to our approach to them, be similarly cleaning the large stone plinth underneath William III in the Square. What a terrifically positive impact that will have.

Secondly, the railings in the Square in front of the church. They are owned by HCC – and they have for years been sitting there quite badly damaged and quietly rusting away. Again with no burden on our precept, we persuaded HCC to come and repair them– which they were happy to do but with 42 parishes in East Hants and so many other priorities, this job had just been lost in the mists of time. We arranged for a team of young offenders with community service orders to spend several weekends chipping away at all the rust and sanding away the many layers of paint then repainting them once more – they look fantastic. As a direct result of that very successful and low cost project the District Council and HCC are going to similarly arrange to have all the other railings done too.

Thirdly at quite a large cost this time but I do hope you agree that it was money well spent – the Town Council selected and entirely funded, as it does every year, the Christmas lighting display which runs from the end of the High Street through the Square and along Chapel St to the far end of Lavant Street. I think they added greatly to the festive atmosphere and brought people into the town.

I know I can speak for all of my colleagues when I say that we all stood for the Town Council not to change the world, we don't have the power to make the big decisions– we joined to make a positive contribution to life in the town. We are 12 in number, 2 for each of the 6 wards, we are all entirely voluntary, no allowances of any kind are paid at this level.

I and all my colleagues have worked very hard over this year, indeed over the last four years, to make a contribution for the greater good. I'd like thank all of them for that hard work and also for their support of me over the last 12 months, particularly in that respect the Deputy Mayor Lesley Farrow.

Staff costs are an area that has come in for much criticism in the past and we have taken very serious steps in recent years to reduce our overheads. Of course our staff costs are about to rise once more – I have referred to the Festival Hall - and as we bring much grounds maintenance in house – the latter of course will be offset by immediate reductions in our grounds maintenance contract costs. This benefit will be felt more and more as time goes on. It will also allow us to provide an efficient responsive service, service to residents of course being what it's all about.

We have a staff panel of 3-4 Councillors chaired by Cllr Bill Organ. Bill will be known to many

as a specialist employment adviser at the CAB of many years' standing and we are very fortunate to have his level of knowledge and expertise in-house. It is worth noting that although Councillors set the pay increases for staff, these are really set at national level and our staff have also had the less than cost of living increases that have applied across the public sector.

Following the reductions in staff numbers last year, not all of which were planned, other staff have done their best to cover the gaps where possible and I thank them all for their valiant efforts in this direction. There have also been changes in personal circumstances and hours. This year there will be an additional net increase of less than half a full time equivalent post.

The staff panel has worked very hard on devising the optimum employment regime at the Town Council. To anyone who might think this looks like an attempt to increase your council tax bills, they are also our Council Tax bills and we have scrutinised these changes very carefully. We believe they will make for a more effective and more efficient Town Council.

I would like to thank all our staff for everything they do, and the outstanding service they provide. It is invidious I think really to draw attention to any one individual in this context but I am going to anyway- because over the course of this year especially I have really come to appreciate just what an impressive job is performed on a daily basis by our clerk Neil Hitch. I am not going to flatter him too much and embarrass him by going on but Neil we are very lucky to have you. Thank you for everything you do.

As Mayor I have made about 100 visits over the year to all sorts of awards ceremonies, shop and office openings, opened exhibitions, been to clubs and society AGMs, I've visited charitable organisations, and attended sporting events. I got to help with the washing up at the Christmas Lunch that the 1st P/f Scouts put on for more than 60 pensioners in the town. I wrote and gave a speech in Waitrose car park in German to welcome the town twinners from Warendorf. I have met so many people over the year and leant about the unsung work that they do. There is really an amazing community spirit in this town.

I represented the town at a packed civic service last summer in Winchester Cathedral to mark the centenary of the start of the 1WW, there have been other services here in town of course. May 8th marks the 70th anniversary of VE Day and it will be one of my final duties as Mayor to lay a wreath at the war memorial that day.

The Town Council arranges the Annual Remembrance Day Service and Parade. That is the result of many many meetings beforehand with representatives of all the uniformed organisations who takes part, and we host a buffet lunch for them all afterwards in the Festival Hall, to which everyone is welcome – but which is especially popular with the large number of soldiers of the REME battalion who come from Bordon every year. They have provided a strong serving military presence at our town parade on that day for over 60 years. It is matter of much regret that with their relocation to Wiltshire it may not be possible for this to continue.

Finally as Mayor I have the opportunity to choose a charity and raise money for it over the civic year. I chose Artscape, which we will hear a little more about in a moment. I am very grateful to several local businesses and organisations and individuals for their support. My main fund raising event for Artscape – was the charity Concert – it was a joint venture with the Petersfield Lions, less than 2 weeks ago. It was a wonderful evening, the very powerful moving headline act

was the Portsmouth Military Wives Choir, supported by other Military Wives from much further afield. It was an absolute pleasure to work with the Petersfield Lions, espec their President this year, former Town Councillor and former Mayor, Paul Molloy

So, this evening I have an initial cheque that it is my great pleasure to hand to Mandie Saw, Director of Artscape. The concert took place less than two weeks ago and all the receipts are not yet banked, and all the exact costs not yet known, so this amount will rise but thus far the amount I have raised over the year for Artscape comes to just over £5700.00

Cllr Sue Harwood

2.0 Finance & General Purposes Committee Chairman's Report

This Committee is charged with the responsibility for ensuring that the finances of the Council are in good order, are managed efficiently and effectively, and that expenditure provides good value for money for the people of Petersfield and has been chaired for the last 2 years by retired accountant Allan Tarver.

So, the annual hot potato; the precept. We resolved upon an increase in precept for 2015/16 of £10,500, just under 2%. That's an increase of £1.96 per year on a band D property. There is a grant which is paid out by central government currently passed on by EHDC to parish and town councils to make up the shortfall that has arisen in all our precepts as a result of a change in the way Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit are paid. Authorities around the country are not obliged to pass this on, and many don't – the District Council has done to date but there are no guarantees that they will continue to do so. In Petersfield's case, (because of the number of welfare benefit recipients) the shortfall in the tax base as a result of those external changes amounts to just over £35,000. Rather than risk that sudden shortfall we believe it is sensible to build up a reserve in anticipation of that income being withdrawn or reduced. We did this last year when the government first announced this change and we've done it this year. Even then, at this rate of increase, it will take over 3 years to build up a 1 year buffer

Such action gives us the benefit of knowing that should that grant be withdrawn or reduced we will not need to cut back on the £1000s in community grants and donations that we will award this year. In addition to the contributions we make to multiple small local groups we also make more substantial annual grants to the Petersfield Open Air Pool our local CAB and as of this year the Petersfield Museum. We also made a significant contribution to the production costs of the excellent Petersfield Book, produced by the Petersfield Society..

Our budget for this year includes significant capital expenditure projects without destabilizing our very solid reserves. This year additional money has been set aside with a view to either refurbishing or replacing the public loos on the Heath behind the Plump Duck.

Through careful financial management then over the past 4 years I am proud that we leave this council on a strong financial footing going forward.

Cllr Sue Harwood

2.1 Summary of Town Council Accounts year ending 31st March 2015

The information required by the Audit Commission as a statement of the Council's accounts is as follows:

		31 March 14	31 March 15
		£	£
1	Balances brought forward	589,204	705,017
2	Annual Precept (+)	507,614	524,516
3	Total other receipts (+)	343,984	320,975
4	Staff costs (-)	236,688	199,910
5	Loan interest or capital payments (-)	nil	nil
6	Total other payments (-)	499,097	646,412
7	Balances carried forward	705,017	704,186
8	Total cash	739,379	745,799
9	Total fixed assets	6,267,841	6,418,589
10	Total borrowings	nil	nil

The above figures are subject to Audit at this time.

More detail within these figures can be outlined as follows:

	31 March 15
Precept	524,516
Local Council Tax Support Grant	35,124
Interest and investment income	14,645
Property rentals and service charge income	89,839
Public Halls letting income	121,378
Net Capital Receipts	0
Donations from controlled charities	47,495
Sundry income	12,493
Total Income	**845,490**
General Administration	186,195
Grants and support for community organizations	33,235
Capital Expenditure	28,713
Grounds Operational Expenditure	207,489
Public Halls Operational Expenditure	222,038
Christmas Lights	19,324
Neighbourhood Plan	39,351
Other expenditure	9,975
Local Authorities Property Fund Investment	100,000
Total Expenditure	**846,320**
Figures for The Heath Charity are as follows:	
Rents Receivable	41,309
Grant of leisure licenses on the Heath Pond	4,878
Sundry Income	308
Other Grants and donations	0
Total Income	**46,495**

Grant to Petersfield Town Council	46,495
Total Expenditure	**46,495**

All grounds maintenance and other costs associated with maintaining The Heath are incurred by the Town Council under its powers to maintain public open space and included within its accounts. The Accounts for The Heath Charity are submitted to the Charity Commission annually and have been independently examined.

3.0 Grounds Committee Report

The Grounds Committee is comprised of 6 members, and has been chaired in the last year by Cllr Lesley Farrow. The Town Council has a significant asset portfolio to look after, both property and land; we have a lot of land - the Heath, the sports pitches at Love Lane and Penns Place, most but not of the children's play areas and the larger recreation grounds at Woods Meadow, Borough Hill and Bell Hill and the allotments up at Tilmore. All these and quite a few others fall under the remit of our Grounds Committee.

We are always on the lookout to add to our landholdings of green open spaces wherever it might be possible. We see ourselves as custodians of all this land for future generations and we have created a formal policy to this end. It's not easy to acquire land for this purpose as one may imagine even in that rare situation when there is a willingness to hand it over to us. I am of course referring to North Meadow, for which the Council offered to take over all responsibility back in Sept 2013. The Clerk and I in particular have worked very hard this year, we have secured the willing agreement of all the residents of Merritts Meadow. The National Park has been very helpful and has funded an initial project setting out a vision of how it might be managed. If it were within our remit then I hope the land transfer would have happened already but of course it isn't, frustratingly and so we must go at the pace of others. Neil Hitch and I attended a meeting on Monday, with the National Park and the District Council which was very constructive. I am confident that this transfer will happen in the coming months.

The Grounds Committee necessarily takes the view that we hold the land for the use and enjoyment of all the people of Petersfield. This has meant that we can't please all of the people all of the time. We have recently been accused of decimating the Heath. Petersfield Heath is one of the very few areas of natural Heathland in the country. The Town Council maintain it as such and this has led to the clearing that has been taking place recently. Unmaintained, heathland returns to scrubland and ultimately to woodland. Bushes grow, saplings become trees and the flora and fauna peculiar to heathland will diminish. We are responsible for the Health and Safety of all who visit and we thought it essential to get rid of rotting trunks and pools of stagnant water. There has been an upsurge in the rat population, especially around the Sussex Road car park. The source of that problem has been identified and is being dealt with. The undergrowth will revive. That was the thinking behind work recently carried out. Of course we work with the Friends of Petersfield Heath and meet together regularly and of course we are in contact with the National Park, and we are working with Park Rangers to set a new management plan for the future. But the long term policy is unchanged – to restore the Heath to the way it used to be.

If you don't like the way things are being done then the wonderful thing about democracy is that you can get involved. On which note I would like to thank the Friends of Petersfield Heath who

work so fantastically hard on our behalf and to pay tribute to their outgoing Chairman John Pike, who is stepping down this year. PTC has much reason to be grateful to him for his wisdom knowledge and experience and for the absolute dedication he has applied to that role over many years.

For a long time now, the Grounds committee has been concerned about the high cost of maintaining all our open space and has this year as a result has completely restructured the way things will work in the future. The largest areas of grass will still be cut by contractors but most of the other jobs will be done by a new in house team. It has been the case that over the last few years a lot has been spent on contractors brought in to do the extra jobs, essential but not part of the Grounds Maintenance Contract. This is set to change. The recruitment process is underway and we envisage significant cost savings going forward. Of course we also envisage a more pro-active more effective service as a result– the service to residents being what counts.

4.0 Public Halls Committee Report

The Public Halls Committee consists of 6 members – chaired this year by Councillor James Deane. They oversee the Festival Hall the Avenue Pavilion and the Love Lane Pavilion. All 3 have been very well used this year. A major ongoing expense for the Town Council which can be underestimated I think, is the high cost of maintaining our buildings, particularly this one and keeping them fit for purpose in the 21st century. For example several old air conditioning units in the offices no longer comply with EC legislation so provision has had to be made in the budget to replace them, in the heavy winter rains there has been some water ingress around some window frames, the coping stones on the roof need repointing. The other buildings too of course require significant care and maintenance throughout most years. The Avenue Pavilion will soon be redecorated externally and some damaged windows replaced.

The Festival Hall is about to be redecorated and the huge old red stage curtains will be replaced – an extra dressing room will be created, a safety rail is to be installed at the front of the stage. There is always an ongoing capital investment programme to ensure that the venue can keep up with the increasingly technically demanding needs of the theatrical groups in particular and other arts organisations from near and further afield now who use our impressive facilities.

I think it is quite astonishing just how much goes on, all over the town actually, but on the stage next door in particular. We have such a rich depth and variety of cultural entertainment on offer every month (much of which it's been my great pleasure to attend as Mayor this year).

There are many reasons for this vibrant scene - not the least the energy dynamism imagination enthusiasm and raw talent of all those people who bring these things to life but in addition to this and to the quality of the facilities that we offer, I'd like to mention two other factors.

One is our staff - the Festival Hall manager Jon Tucker and his assistant Geoff Culbertson. They work so hard behind the scenes, always with a willing patient helpful constructive attitude, nothing is too much trouble for them – this is something that all the user groups comment on every year.

Many of you attended the fund raising charity concert which it was my huge pleasure to arrange two weeks ago with the Petersfield Lions. Afterwards I cycled over here on the Sunday morning

about 10 am thinking that Geoff (for he was the one on duty that w/end) would have opened up by then so I could do some clearing up before the Winton Players moved in ahead of their brilliant performance of Daisy Pulls it Off last week. But Geoff, had been and gone - he had arrived at 7am that Sunday am, checked and cleared up every area and single-handedly stacked away against the back wall all the heavy duty wooden tiered seating. That's par for the course for these two. By the time I arrived, the floor was already covered with a tarpaulin and the Winton Players stage equipment was filling it up rapidly. Seems there's never a quiet moment.

I would like to thank them both too for their patience while we as a Council look at how we best provide staff cover for the increasing numbers of daytime and evening events in the Festival Hall. We hope that some modifications of roles and a slight increase of staff costs will remedy this – for which I make no apology – it is part of our duty to provide a first class entertainment facility for Petersfield.

I said two factors because there is another group, without whom I think many of our theatrical and musical groups which give so very much would not be able to keep going and our town would be *so* much the poorer. I am referring of course to the Green A team. The Green A team is a charity operating on an entirely voluntary basis – they undertake the lighting and sound management, and a great deal else besides, of a high proportion of almost everything that is put on here. All the excellent work that they do so willingly and professionally is delivered for a peppercorn contribution towards their costs. We are very, very fortunate to have them here in Petersfield.
Green A team committee members regularly attend our Public Halls meetings and users' meetings and share their expertise for which we have on many occasions had reason to be very grateful. I witnessed their professionalism first hand at that charity concert –led from the front by their Chairman Michael Finch, they were so helpful in the weeks beforehand, liaising directly with all the performers in order to establish and meet their technical requirements, reminding us of many considerations that we hadn't thought of and then stage managing the evening quite brilliantly. They left very late that night and yet they were straight back here on Sunday morning to help the Winton Players. In the days following that concert, every group of performers commented on what a joy it was to work with them. It certainly was, thank you.

Before moving on, an enormous thank you also to Sue Besant (who unfortunately can't be here this evening) who so ably runs the team of volunteers who manage our increasingly successful monthly film evenings and afternoons. Last month we sold more tickets for The Imitation Game than we have ever sold for a single film in the 5 years since the films started on the initiative of then Town Councillor Hilary Ayer. Happily for me that was the mayor's charity film and raffle night. Again last night the auditorium was packed for Mr Turner – next month's film is going the same way. So the £10,000 investment in the screening facilities two years ago has really paid off. Many people who are hard of hearing also tell us that our modern hearing loop system, installed at no small expense at about the same time, means they can enjoy films and plays again in a way they haven't been able to for years.

5.0 Planning Committee Report

The Planning Committee consists of all of all councilors except the Town Mayor and was chaired by Julie Dickinson. It meets every 3 weeks throughout the year in order to keep abreast of all planning applications. There were roughly 230 in the last 12 months.

We take this role seriously – thinking through how applications might affect the town for good or ill. We are very grateful to the Petersfield Society for their advice on how planning applications may alter the appearance and history of older buildings in the town and within the Conservation Area in particular. The planning authority will always remain the South Downs National Park and we are merely a statutory consultee – we offer an opinion, we can't make the decision.

But times are changing - the work of the Planning Committee will we hope and expect in the future very much be guided by, and the interests of residents very much be strengthened by the emerging Petersfield Neighbourhood Plan. These are exciting times for Parish and Town Councils. Eric Pickles described the sector as 'Localism's magic wand'.
One hugely significant aspect of the increasing powers heading our way, of which Petersfield Town Council has taken full advantage, is the power to create a Neighbourhood Plan. It's a very powerful document

Our Plan remains one of the first in the country to get to this stage. I would like in passing to pay tribute to Councillor Peter Marshall for being, along with our very forward-thinking Clerk, certainly the first Town Councillor to recognise the vital need to embark on this process back in 2011. It's taken three years of hard work by a team of 12 volunteer residents 3 Town Councillors, 1 District Councillor and 3 officers. Although the process has been legally owned and managed by the Town Council it is very much led by residents who came forward to help. They have consulted for 2 years, held 18 public events and exhibitions (1000 people attended the one in May 2014), there have been over 24000 unique visits to the plan's dedicated website.

The resultant draft plan is one of the most complex in the country, it will be the first in the SDNP. The draft was approved by the Town Council late last year, it then completed a 6 week consultation with the SDNPA. An independent examiner has now been appointed. He will assess whether it meets basic legal requirements, and will consider all the representations made upon it. There will be a public hearing early this summer. And all being well a community referendum will take place in September. If it passes that referendum then it becomes a statutory part of the area development plan.

Should the plan not pass the referendum with a yes vote, then it would be at best a lost opportunity for our town, at worst a turning point. It's been a vigorous and fair 3 year process to develop an ambitious and robust plan. Realistically, it is unlikely that any of those who have devoted so much time and energy to it would not be eager to start again. And in fact there's no second chance, it would be too late and we would be exposed to developers taking advantage of the very lack of one.

The Plan is about much more than land for new homes but let's consider just that aspect for a moment. A no vote in the referendum is not a no to more housing, it's quite the opposite. Even though we are in a National Park, there is great pressure to build in our town. It has now been decreed that a minimum of 700 homes will be built in Petersfield in the next 15 years. There is no opting out. They are coming. You might think developers will wish to build them as cheaply as possible, so to mass-produced designs, in as great a density as they can, because let's not kid ourselves that their views will coincide with those of all of us who live and work here and want the very best for our town. The Neighbourhood Plan is our protection against high density housing where developers would like it to be – and it is about much more than this too, it's about

land for jobs, protecting our natural environment and connecting and enhancing our existing infrastructure and community.

6.0 List of Councillors and contact details

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Deputy Town Mayor: **Mrs Lesley Farrow**
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Finance & General Purposes Committee Chairman: **Allan Tarver**
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Public Halls Committee Chairman: **James Deane**
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Planning Committee Chairman: **Ms Julie Dickinson**
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7.0 List of officers plus staff and contact details

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Receptionist:	Ginnie Rutter reception@petersfield-tc.gov.uk
Festival Hall Manager:	Jon Tucker festival@petersfield-tc.gov.uk
Festival Hall Managers Assistant:	Geoff Culbertson AsstFH@petersfield-tc.gov.uk
Avenue Pavilion Caretaker:	Peter Grienke
Groundsman:	Allister Wood

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Appendix D

TOWN PETERSFIELD COUNCIL

FINANCIAL STRATEGY

1. To maintain a balanced budget.

2. To manage the expenditure of capital and revenue to ensure the most beneficial use of Town Council funds for the good of the community.

3. To maintain a charging structure that takes account of ability to pay whilst reflecting the Town Council's responsibility to optimise its assets.

4. To continually review assets e.g. land, property and investments to ensure the optimum return.

5. To ensure that financial investments are to be placed with institutions regulated by the Financial Services Authority or the Central European Bank.

6. To maintain the level of revenue reserves at no less than 3 months gross expenditure.

7. To maintain the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery by means of a realistic budget process.

8. To ensure that spending levels are both affordable and sustainable, whilst ensuring that service delivery is not compromised.

9. To aim to keep the annual precept as low as possible, whilst ensuring that quality standards are maintained or improved and the Council's ability to meet known commitments for the future is not compromised.

10. To establish a robust system of internal controls and procedures that will eliminate, as far as is possible, the potential for misappropriation of funds by any person.

11. Seek to make investments in facilities owned and managed by the Council that will maximise the revenue of the Council.

Reviewed 22nd June 2015 (F 0157 refers).