BLANDFORD FORUM TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of the Annual Town Assembly
Held on Monday 14th April 2025 at 6pm in Woodhouse Gardens Pavilion

DRAFT
Subject to confirmation

PRESENT

Cllr N Lacey-Clarke – Chairman of Council
Cllr H Miéville – Vice Chairman of Council
Cllr S Hitchings
Cllr R Holmes
Cllr C Stevens
Cllr B Quayle
Cllr A Cross
Cllr S Chapman
Cllr T Clarkson
Cllr Y Miéville
Cllr M Putt
Cllr G Del-Pinto
Cllr S Morgan
Cllr J Robinson

IN ATTENDANCE

Town Clerk
Committee Clerk
Operations Manager
Members of the public

Libby Lloyd – Treads
Dr Sylvia Hixson Andrews – Blandford Town Museum/Blandford Environmental Trust
Nicci Brown – Blandford Information Centre
Sophie Burditt – Blandford Food Bank/Nourish Blandford
Katie Godman-Sinclair – Blandford Fashion Museum
Daniel Cadisch – Citizens Advice Central Dorset
Fin Brennan – Blandford Literary Festival
Tom Griffin – Blandford Stour Valley Band
David Jardine – Blandford Health Walks
Elaine Lofthouse – Blandford Embroidery Group

IN ATTENDANCE ONLINE VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

No one in attendance

1. APOLOGIES

Cllr L Hitchings

2. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN ASSEMBLY HELD ON 15th APRIL 2024

It was PROPOSED by Cllr R Holmes, SECONDED by Cllr H Miéville and AGREED that the Minutes are APPROVED and SIGNED.

3. CHAIRMAN OF COUNCIL'S REPORT

The Chairman of Council, Cllr Lacey-Clarke, read his annual report for the year 2024/25.

4. QUESTIONS

Martin Ansell submitted the following question prior to the meeting;
As a taxi driver I am concerned as to how I will be able to get customers to their destination if an area is pedestrianised. There are many people who have disabilities and need to get as close as possible to the door.
Cllr Lacey-Clarke responded by saying that only the spaces between HSBC, Stuart Pearce's butchers and Reeves are intended to be taken away if the proposed changes go ahead. There will still be parking and drop off points for disabled people adjacent and opposite to that area.

4. QUESTIONS Cont…

Martin's second question was as follows;
Regarding the closure of Lloyds bank, I believe this will greatly impact on the survival of the town. Thousands of people do not use the internet and will frankly be very worried. Is there to be a hub and if so where? The Day Centre in Fairfield Bungalows could be a good choice as there excellent facilities.
Cllr Lacey-Clarke responded by saying that the council has been informed the post office will continue to have banking services. If we are seen as having a lack of access to cash we will be more likely to have a hub implemented, but Nationwide has a cash machine. He is working with his fellow Dorset Council Cllr Byron Quayle and the local MP to fight for a banking hub.

Chris Robertson raised a concern regarding the Market Area Enhancement project and expressed that there is a feeling in the impacted zone that businesses and residents have not been consulted and that the final decision has been made, why were they not consulted?
There have been various forms of consultation for many years. The proposed trial for the area to be semi-pedestrianised was dictated by Dorset Council and no official decision has been made or will be made until the end of the trial period. We will continue to discuss with businesses and residents whilst this trial period is in place.

Roger Carter asked if a banking hub will happen anytime soon?
Because we already have options in town we are technically not in need. However, Lloyds have said they would be interested in looking at having an interim service from the library.

Richard James asked if there will there a survey taking into consideration the potential archaeology underground in relation to the Market Place enhancement proposed changes.
There won't be any permanent change to the structure to the town. Before any full changes are made the Dorset Council will carry out any relevant surveys.

Richard James is concerned about the level of vandalism in the town. He feels there should be more CCTV cameras around the town.
When it comes to perceived anti-social behaviour it must be reported as a crime to the police in order for it to show in local crime figures, the more it is reported the more it shows on statistics and allows us to lobby for more funding and more police presence in town. We have an extensive CCTV network which the town council has a budget for, however the police have to request it in the first instance.

A resident that lives in the small housing estate being built off of Dorchester Hill, Blandford St Mary, asked for the hedge to be cut due to the lack of visibility for pedestrians.
Cllr Lacey-Clarke explained that this was in a different parish to Blandford Forum and the Town Clerk will put the resident in touch with Dorset Council Cllr Barrie Cooper and the Parish Clerk who would be her point of contact for that area.

5. PRESENTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

TREADS

John Tanner said that they run bi-weekly clubs for young people with disabilities, HAF project provides holiday activities and nutritious meals during the school holidays. The weekly group sessions have helped with mental health challenges and helps breakdown barriers and build self-esteem. The anti-bullying workshops have equipped young people to combat bullying and develop emotional resilience. Support for young refugees and migrants have played a crucial role in helping create integration into our community. Treads have continued to respond to new challenges that arise. The closure of the youth centre was very sad for the community and treads have organised meetings in order to continue to respond to new initiatives for our community and responding whatever is need for the young people of Blandford.

5. PRESENTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

TREADS (cont.)

John thanked BFTC for the grant and said that along with support from the Town Council they can continue to help for the coming years initiatives and they are very thankful.

Nourish Blandford

Sophie Burditt is now driving Nourish forward. The Community Larder has been running for over a year and is growing. They try to build resilience to help sustain people in the long-run and help them learn to use their money well. The community café in the middle is a real hub of activity and she encouraged people to visit to see it in action. They are keen to have plenty of people there to offer advice and have agencies acting as a drop-in service.

Blandford Stour Valley Band

Tim Griffin would like to say a big thank you to BFTC for the funding. As part of the service level agreement they agree to fulfil 10 performances over the year, they managed 7 or 8 this year bearing in mind they usually do more in the Corn Exchange. They have done some work with the museum this year providing a recording of a historical performance.

The band is not cheap to run due to instruments, cleaning of the instruments and maintaining them, insurance, and the cost of the rights to play music has increased considerably. Fortunately, new instruments have been purchased by players themselves, but this is not sustainable.

The band has 34 members, 50% of the band are senior citizens and the age of the players is an issue. The worry is that in 20 years' time if no younger members join the band will cease to exist. One member is a teacher in the area and they intend to contact the Blandford schools to see what they can do to introduce the children to the instruments and encourage them to join them with the intent to develop an interest in joining them as players in the future.

Blandford Fashion Museum

Katie Godman-Sinclair said they are very grateful for the Service Level Agreement received from BFTC. They have been in receipt of it since 2015. They close from December to mid-February each year. The main exhibition at present is power dressing, along with a Laura Ashley display, and a 1930s wedding display. In November they had a poppy dress on display which was made in 1919 and worn by a war widow with an original silk poppy sewn onto it, they thanked the Royal British Legion who loaned them a wreath for the display.

The Dorchester Museum has loaned some pieces for their exhibitions this year which is a great accolade. They are also taking part in a project alongside Salisbury Museum and Southampton art gallery getting young people to curate exhibitions to be on display in February 2026.

They have had 10 work experience students from various schools in the area and have places filling up for the coming year. Monthly craft workshops for families are booked in keeping prices at £3 per ticket so it is as affordable as possible. Monthly talks continue with discounts for students and seniors. They have been able to do some maintenance works upstairs which looks good.

The lottery grant they received last year has helped pay for consultants to give them advice on projects for the future such as how they can improve the building to make it more accessible.

Next year will be the 30th anniversary, one project they have lined up is recreating the oldest dress in the museum from the 1730s and have them displayed together and there will be lots of events surrounding it.

Blandford Town Museum & Blandford Environmental Trust

Sylvia Hixson Andrews began by demonstrating how the new NaviLens technology that has recently been installed works. It is being used in various landmark museums across the globe and is a huge kudos for them. It is the first time it has been used in the UK and they are very proud of this.

The 3D photography project with the fashion museum has been very successful and was paid for by the funds given by BFTC. They have a new group named Blandford Forum Gardeners which will be for all people interested in gardening. They are participating in the 200 years anniversary of having railway in the UK and have been asked to get involved in demonstrating events surrounding this. They have 80 volunteers this year, 5 people working on archives and a research group of 17 people looking at different projects. Projects include the carers group events, the green fair and sustainability group colourful QR codes that can be detected at up to three metres, and in low-light conditions.

Sylvia said that the museum would welcome other groups to use their space for fundraising. They explained that they are very active in the community and people attend because they are interested in something so if they can try to facilitate an interest they will.

Sylvia thanked the Town Council for the support it has given them over the year as well as William Williams that owns the area that the town museum stands on and they have shown support to help with storage issues that are required.

Blandford Information Centre

Nicci reported that thousands of people visit the centre every year and a similar number of people that access the website. They were pleased to be asked to sell charity Christmas cards and will do so again this year. They provide walking maps, public bus and coach tours information. The majority is provided free of charge. The customers, particularly tourists, are often keen to purchase gifts and mementos so they are always on the lookout for local crafts and arts people to sell their work at the centre.

Next month they will have the North Dorset photography competition exhibition displayed in the centre as well as other venues such as the Town Museum and Woodhouse Gardens pavilion. Nicci said every 2nd Sunday there is a heritage walk led by John Scott, which is proving very popular.

Thanks to their volunteers they are open six days a week with volunteers being asked to cover 2-3 hour shifts every fortnight. More volunteers are always welcome.

Nicci thanked the council for its ongoing support.

Citizens Advice

Daniel thanked BFTC for supporting their team in Blandford. The money has supported the volunteers and paid towards room hire to facilitate them.

They make sure that immediate needs are taken care of for people but also to help them find their way and move such as helping them to claim benefits. During this last year £427,923 of benefits were found in additional income to Blandford residents through the help of Blandford's Citizens advice.

A resident came to see them because they had been told their benefits were about to change. This person was in employment, had been on the same benefits for 20 years and had issues with reading and writing. Citizens Advice did a benefit check, made sure they linked up with housing and council tax support, and found they were missing out on £64.00 per week in benefits. The resident called them their guardian angels.

5. PRESENTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Citizens Advice Cont…

They continue their work with the household support fund with the Dorset Council. They will be campaigning where policies are wrong, access to cash and the results of the cuts to disability benefits that are happening, and they will be campaigning against these.

They now have a freephone number and are doing more digital work. They work with Nourish Blandford and there has been a 36% increase in work around food security and charitable support.

Daniel finished by thanking BFTC for all the support and to Cllr Terry Clarkson for his ongoing help.

Blandford Literary Festival

Fin thanked the council for the grant that helped facilitate author talks, a Ukrainian choir performance in the church and to go into 3 schools to conduct talks, as well as talks in the library.

The Festival is run entirely by volunteers to spread the power of words and try to cultivate a thriving literacy community. They feel very supported by the town, the museums and the churches.

They would like to do more events throughout the year and involve business, draw the community in and create partnerships in the town. They will be going into schools again this year and would welcome anyone interested to get involved.

Blandford Walking for Health

Blandford Health walks is part of Dorset Health Walks in North & West Dorset and is a community activity run by volunteers.

The summer Tuesday evening walks will run from April to September starting from the Marsh & Ham Car Park at 6.15 pm and are very well supported. For 2025 these walks will start on Tuesday 15 April 2025 until Tuesday 9 September. This is a more challenging walk of between 75 to 90 minutes, some of the routes do go off road and include some nearby hills as well.

On Tuesday 18th March they started a morning walk (to replace the Wednesday Walks) and is so far well attended. This starts at the Black Cactus Café in Greyhound Yard opposite Morrison at 10am, and this walk lasts up to an hour.

On Fridays there is a Nordic walk. This is walking with poles and the meeting time and location is advised on Thursday by the leader. David advised that to join this walk people should contact Bronwen.

Orienteering is an activity that people can do on their own or in groups, there are now 2 courses in Blandford Forum and Blandford St Mary. One of the courses starts at the Marsh Ham and then goes over the river Stour to Stour Meadow and into Blandford St Mary. The second course is round the Milldown and part of the Damory Down Housing Estate.

There is a free app which can be downloaded to your mobile phone which will give you the map. You can also borrow a paper map from the White Cliff Surgery, Blandford Information Centre and Blandford Library. There is a Facebook page and there is also a Blandford Health Walks WhatsApp group page which has been started in April 2024.

Blandford Town Museum Embroidery Group

Elaine Lofthouse and Melanie Wild thanked BFTC for the free use of the Community Room for their meetings, without it they wouldn't have been able to complete their incredible embroidery work.

5. PRESENTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Blandford Town Museum Embroidery Group (cont.)

When Melanie moved to the town 8 years ago she had an interest in embroidery and history and wanted to being the two things together and encapsulate the medieval history of the town. They showed the amazing embroidery work which captures women in history, the attendees of the meeting were very impressed. The number of members has increased this year and many that are involved had never embroidered before. They are keen to work with the Fashion Museum in the forthcoming year.

Cllr Lacey-Clarke said how encouraging these innovative ideas are and how lucky we are to have these groups in Blandford and it is clear the support BFTC gives the groups is very much needed.

6. Update on the Market Area Enhancement Project

Cllr Colin Stevens explained that 10 years ago the Town Council took on the responsibility from North Dorset District Council (NDDC) for the street markets. In 2019 they started a group to think about how to enhance the market area with the help of a £70,000 grant from NDDC.

The pandemic effected the progress for 2 years. In 2023 Dorset Council proposed that they pedestrianised part of the market area. They decided it would be best to use the left of the market area to pedestrianise. A survey was carried out to every house in the town with over 200 replies, 76% agreed in favour for it and copies of this survey are available.

The Town Council has opted for a trial period to see how this works and to see whether this will be a permanent fixture.

In January 2025 the paperwork was submitted to Dorset Council and we are still waiting for the outcome. They would like this to be operational as soon as possible so that a 12-month period can begin.

The Chairman thanked all for their attendance and remarked on what a wonderful town we live and work in with so many incredible local groups and organisations.

The meeting closed at 8:09pm.

SIGNED ……. DATED ……..……