**BLANDFORD FORUM TOWN COUNCIL**
**Minutes of the Annual Town Assembly**
**Held on Monday 20th April 2026 at 6pm in the Corn Exchange**

DRAFT Subject to confirmation

## PRESENT

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

## IN ATTENDANCE

Town Clerk
Operations Manager
Committee Clerk
Members of the public
Nicci Brown – Blandford Information Centre
Jade Newman – Blandford Fashion Museum
Tim Griffin – Blandford Stour Valley Band
Paula Harmon – Blandford Literary Festival
David Jardine – Blandford Walking for Health
John Tanner – TREADS
Daniel Cadisch – Citizens Advice Central Dorset
Dr Sylvia Hixson Andrews – Blandford Town Museum
Heidi Roberts & Emma Carmichael – Nourish Blandford

## IN ATTENDANCE VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Kate Robson

## 1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman of Council, Cllr Hugo Miéville welcomed Councillors and members of the public to the meeting.

## 2. APOLOGIES

Cllr L Hitchings
Cllr S Morgan
Cllr A Cross

## 3. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN ASSEMBLY HELD ON 14th APRIL 2025

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Lacey-Clarke, SECONDED by Cllr Putt and AGREED that the Minutes are APPROVED and SIGNED.

## 4. CHAIRMAN OF COUNCIL'S REPORT

The Chairman of Council, Cllr H Miéville, read his annual report for the year 2025/26.

## 5. QUESTIONS

Nicci Brown asked if there was any information available regarding the future of the public toilets at the Marsh and Ham. Cllr H Miéville explained it is something that is being discussed and more information will be available when appropriate.

## 6. PRESENTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

### TREADS – John Tanner

Over the past 12 months, Treads has continued to support vulnerable children, young people and families across the local community through a range of inclusive, preventative and wellbeing-focused projects. Despite significant challenges relating to funding, capacity and access to suitable venues, they have remained committed to responding to growing levels of need. One of their key projects during this period was *Welcome to Dorset*, which supported the integration of Ukrainian children and their families into the local community. This project helped families reduce isolation, build social connections, and access local services at a time of significant upheaval.

They have also delivered healthy cooking sessions, promoting physical wellbeing, confidence and social interaction. More recently, they secured a very small grant from ASDA, enabling them to deliver an eight-week art and craft programme designed to support individuals experiencing mental health challenges, neurodiversity and/or social anxiety. These sessions provide a safe, supportive environment where participants can express themselves creatively and build peer connections. In addition, Treads continues to deliver the *Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Club*, which provides activities and nutritious meals for children during school holidays. This programme supports families experiencing poverty and those where parents are working and unable to provide daytime supervision. For some children, this provision ensures access to at least one healthy meal a day alongside positive activities and social engagement.

Funding from the Town Council is critically important to the sustainability and credibility of Treads. Local authority support provides not only financial assistance but also stability, legitimacy and confidence to other stakeholders. Investment in Treads would enable the organisation to move beyond short-term survival and develop stable, inclusive provision that meets the growing needs of the local community. Remember effective intervention by Treads in the life of just one person, not only transforms that life and the parents/carers but also will save the taxpayers many times the grants given to Treads.

### Blandford Literary Festival – Paula Harmon

Friday 14th November kicked off with their free schools' programme which is supported by donations such as the one the Rotary gave them. They were able to put two children's authors into several primary schools where they ran interactive workshops, and an author of young adult fiction into Blandford School where they were able to engage with older students about the dangers of modern day slavery and human trafficking of girls and women. Other free events over the weekend included a family story time at the parish church, workshops on memoir writing, weaving, poetry workshop and one for children by illustrator Martin Brown.

One of their aims as a festival is to involve lesser known and emerging writers as well as better known ones, and not one of their author events was without an audience. Genres ranged from thriller to contemporary fiction, local history, architecture, travel, autobiography, romance and much more. The book and craft fair in the newly restored Corn Exchange was very popular, the music and poetry evening varied and entrancing, the creative day on Sunday, relaxing and thought provoking.

They really appreciate the Town Council's financial input, which helped towards venue hire and paying authors' fees and expenses to those authors who provided talks/workshops at Blandford schools. They also want to thank the Town Council for its enthusiasm for helping to get the word out so that we can build the festival.

**Blandford Town Museum & Blandford Environmental Trust – Sylvia Hixson-Andrews**

They have between 70 and 80 volunteers, and they are a mixture of people such as history enthusiasts and retired people.

They have been received SLA's from the council for approximately 20 years and they continue to be very grateful for this.

The archives team has increased and are carrying out some great work. The East Street Research project is very busy and will be releasing their first publication this year. The embroidery project is now complete, and they are looking for a space to display it. The next project is in conjunction with the Fashion Museum to create a dress to be ready for the 300th anniversary of the Great Fire in 2031.

The Garden is a beautiful space which can be used for many purposes, if any charities would like to use if for a fundraiser they would welcome them to use it. The town council are now offering it to people who are having civil ceremonies in the town hall to use it as a place to have photographs taken.

They will be supporting the Green Fair which will be held near the Arches by the Rier Stour in July. The archaeology group work under the museum umbrella, they raise money and using that they are enables to undertake lots of projects.

The 3D photography group has taken off this year and many of them are displayed on their touch screen technology around the museum. This enables the heritage of artefacts held by the Town Council, the Fashion Museum and other institutions in the local area are preserved.

Various family events take place throughout the year. They currently receive approximately 9,000 visitors per year and this is still growing.

**Blandford Information Centre – Nicci Brown**

Whilst the number of face-to-face visitors was fractionally down in the last year, the number of website users has risen from 4000 to nearly 5,500 in the last 12 months, with more accessing it via their mobile phones, indicating that they are perhaps in town and seeking information. Keeping it up to date in view of the number of openings and closures we have seen in recent months has been tricky for our website editor and trustee Shirley Dickinson, but we try to provide information and links to over 150 businesses and a similar number of activities and services available to the public, and it is clearly an unqualified success, both with visitors from home and overseas, and with locals. The strong Facebook presence also helps maintain the public profile. The events page provides only a selection of what is going on locally – it would be nice if more people took the trouble to let them know what they are planning, since they rely very much on scouring their websites and social media pages.

Last year they again hosted Card for Good Causes which was again well received, and local maps and walking routes, public transport information, news publications and leaflets continue to be the most popular items sold and provided in person.

They also hosted a display of the entries in the North Dorset Photo Competition organized by Visit Dorset – and sale of the town calendar featuring the Blandford entries.

Customers, particularly tourists and often residents, are always keen to purchase gifts and mementoes of their time in Blandford and Dorset, so they are always on the lookout for items from local artists and craftspeople prepared to offer us a small commission for things sold on their

behalf. They continue to source more items directly, boosting their return-on-sales revenues, which has helped put them on a sounder financial footing.

Like so many other organisations, they struggle to recruit volunteers but have been able to maintain opening hours for at least one if not two sessions on Mondays to Saturdays. New helpers offering just three hours a week or fortnight would be welcome. Thanks as always to the existing team, and particularly to the volunteer coordinator Antony Argles, who due to the current situation in the Middle East had to organise the March rota whilst on an unexpected extended holiday in Sri Lanka! The volunteer trustees are David Eidlestein (Chairman), Nicci Brown (Treasurer), and Stephen Deutsch and our BFTC rep continues to be Terry Clarkson
Despite the ongoing depressing state of the economy and the fact that they can no longer attract commission revenue from accommodation booking, the Steam Fair and other events, the BIC continues to thrive.

It would be a very different story without the ongoing support of BFTC without which they simply would cease to exist and we are truly grateful, especially as there are so many other demands on the public purse.

**Nourish Blandford – Heidi Roberts & Emma Carmichael**

Nourish explained that they appointed a new manager who takes their post later this week.
The SLA has allowed Nourish (formerly known as Blandford food back) to continue to help many people in crisis in Blandford within Nourish is the community larder and emergency food parcels . 514 emergency food parcels were given out each year for up until last year. A similar number to the previous year. Now they have the community larder they are able to help people after the emergency food parcel and offering them an opportunity to help them moving forward. 59 Christmas hampers were given out to people in crisis. this year there has been an increase in food parcels required. From January 2026 to the present day they have given out 159 emergency food parcels which is quite an increase on last year.

They also support the schools in the holidays, they send an email out to all schools in the DT11 area, they respond with a list of their most vulnerable families, those families can then visit them in those school holidays and receive food parcels (In the summer holidays they can visit twice). During Christmas they were gifted some toy vouchers, enabling 52 families to buy presents for their children. They also helped 30 families to visit Nourish and pick brand new toys that the public had donated to them. Since October they have started cookery courses to teach new skills and nurture social interaction. The café at the United Reform Church has become very popular with on average 80 people attend in a session from 10am to 2pm. They have 47 volunteers at present. It costs £600 to fill their larder and food parcels. Stock at this time of year is very low which makes the SLA even more important.

The Larder moves people from crisis to financial reliance where they provide people in crisis with basic food items and toiletries. They address trauma, budgeting support, debt relief and cookery skills. Currently they have 101 active members and in February they marked their 5000$^{th}$ shop. They aim to empower rather than enable.

**Blandford Stour Valley Band – Tim Griffin**

Thanks were given to BFTC for the financial assistance given to the band in 2025-26 during which the band undertook ten engagements for the Council. (25 total engagements for the year). The next gig for the council will be held on 8$^{th}$ May in the Corn Exchange for the Mayor's charities. During the year, the band spent over £1600 on insurance, music performance rights, new music, rehearsal venue hire and also nearly £2000 on a (used) soprano cornet.

The band has 30 members, one third being in their 70s and 80s, and none receive any payment. We are trying to attract younger members by sending small groups to schools' events for free. To cater for older members, they have tried to provide improved seating and stands to hold instruments while playing them. As well as full band engagements, they can provide small bands, ensembles and German Oompah band groups.

They would welcome discussions with the Mayor and Mayor's Assistant to decide on forthcoming events involving the band. In the last three years they have undertaken six Remembrance and Yuletide engagements outside for the Council, four of which have been wet. Better protection for the band is needed.

**Citizens Advice – Daniel Cadisch**

They remain very appreciative of the financial help from the Town Council. They used this to recruit 5 additional advisors. They helped over 400 people with debt advise and dealt with 2000 separate issues which needed 2,200 separate activities. Local volunteers carry out all this work and Daniel thanked them for their dedication. Often people come in and present one issue, the conversation develops and it often results in them helping them with multiple issues.

Disability benefits are a key piece of their work, and they continue to support them to identify what they are entitled too and help them through the application process. Debt and budgeting help is given, supporting people to get back on their feet. This ultimately helps them share their burdens and lighten their emotional and mental stress.

They remain accessible online, they have the Dorset Advise Line which is a freephone number and they provide in-person meeting space at the Parish Rooms and at the Town Council office on a Friday.

**Blandford Fashion Museum – Jade Newman**

Jade Newman is the new Operations Manager who helps with the day-to-day operations and the SLA has enabled them to appoint her.

Schools can book group visits and many children's workshops have been available.

Many Bournemouth Arts University students are involved, along with work experience students from the local area.

New displays / exhibitions and student involvement (20th Century brides and youthquake)
The SLA have enabled them to have doors and walls painted, along with lots of repairs have been carried out. Jade and the team have revamped the website and increased the social media presence. More volunteers would be welcomed.

**Blandford Walking for Health – David Jardine**

All the Health Walks are now taking part on a Tuesday. The Tuesday morning walk has continued all through the year since it started in March 2025 and they have had regular good numbers each week. They are going to start a Stroller walk for people who for many reasons wish to have a shorter walk this is going to start on Tuesday 5th May from Stour Meadows near the Mortain Bridge, starting at Noon to 12.45 pm walking in small groups, at their own pace around Stour Medows, supervised by walk Leaders. The idea is that this walk will help people who are looking to improve their mobility and Fitness. The summer evening Health Walks started on Tuesday 7th April and runs until 15th September starting at 6.15 pm from the Marsh Ham Car park (Morrisons) opposite the TIC (Tourist Information Centre). Some of the walks go of the road and may include Steep Hills, they take 60 to 90 minutes. The Blandford Health walks are looking for more walks

leaders all walk leaders are volunteers Dorset Council Health and Activity time are able to provide online Video training and some in person training. Orienteering Courses in Blandford Area 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 Car park and the goes over the river to Stour Meadow and into Blandford St Mary. The second course is around the Milldown and part of the Damory Down Housing Estate.

There is a free app which can be downloaded to your mobile phone which give you the map. You can also get paper maps from the White Cliff Surgery, Blandford information Centre and Blandford Library. Blandford Health walks have a face book page. There is also a Blandford Health walks WhatsApp group page. For more information about the health walks in Blandford Forum and in Dorset please contact Dorset Health and Activity team at dorsethealthwalks@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk or call 01425 480811 Or visit www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/dorset-health-walks.

Cllr Miéville said how encouraging these innovative ideas are and how lucky we are to have these groups and organisations in Blandford. It is clear the support BFTC gives the groups is very much needed.

The Chairman thanked all for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 8:07pm.

**SIGNED ……  DATED ……..……**