



Melton Mowbray Town Estate

2 Park Lane, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, LE13 0PT



MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING WEDNESDAY 30 OCTOBER 2024 ST. MARY'S PARISH CHURCH, BURTON STREET, MELTON MOWBRAY, AT 7pm

Present:

Chair:	Mr. G. Bett
Senior Townwarden & Vice-Chair:	Mrs. A. Holland
Junior Townwarden	Mr E Tindall
CEO/Bailiff:	Mr D Rees
Accountant	Mr B Wass

Feoffees: Mr. D. Whitehouse, Mr. P. Roffey, Mr. R. Sage, Mr. C. Gray, Ms A D'Angelo, Mrs. H. Misiuda, Mr. I. Neale, Mr. T. Webster, Mr D Stevens.

Residents: there were 40 residents present, including Feoffees.

1. Welcome by the Chair of the Board of Feoffees, Graham Bett

The Chairman, Mr Bett, gave a warm welcome to all.

He referred to the death earlier in the year of Feoffee Mr Keith Hallam, who had served on the board from 2017, and whose down to earth contributions were sadly missed.

Mr Bett explained that this would be the last Town Meeting that Mr Peter Roffey would attend as a Feoffee, as he had decided to retire after 32 years of service. He was first elected as Junior Town Warden in October 1992 and became Senior Townwarden two years later. Since then, he served in various roles, including times as Chair of the Board of Feoffees. Mr Bett thanked him for his dedication and huge contribution to the Town Estate and the Town.

2. Confirmation that the Church Bell has been tolled and notices posted.

The Chairman asked the Town Bailiff whether the Church bell had been tolled and the notices advertising the meeting had been posted prior to the meeting. The Town Bailiff, Mr D Rees confirmed that this was the case.

3. Apologies for absence

Mrs Jill Palmer, Mr J Southerington, Mr D Matthews.

4. Election of Feoffees: candidates' addresses & voting if required

Two nominations had been received: Mr Richard Sage and Mr Eric Tindall. As there were two places available, no ballot was necessary and the meeting approved the election of Mr Sage and Mr Tindall. The newly re-elected Feoffees were congratulated and asked to sign the Minute Book, as required.

5. Annual Report & Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2024

Mr Bett presented the annual report and accounts for the past year.

He reflected that the previous year had been an extraordinarily difficult one in which Feoffees called a halt to the Town Estate's failure to tackle, or even acknowledge, a looming financial crisis, putting at risk the very future of the parks, markets and other facilities the Charity provides for the people of the town.

He said it was pleasing to report that this year real and tangible progress towards recovery had been made. The Town Estate had turned a corner and was set along the road to better times.

Though the process had not been without pain - as feoffees, staff, tenants, partners, and customers had to face the reality of change - the Town Estate had been stabilised and the organisation modernised. Costs were being controlled, and the issue of charging other organisations for their use of our facilities was being tackled.

The efforts to modernise and stabilise the charity, while respecting its history and legacy, had included amendments to the "Scheme of Arrangement" which would result in having eight elected Feoffees, one of whom will be appointed by the Board as Townwarden.

Mr Bett explained that in February 2024 the Board took a brave and crucial decision to tackle head-on the strategic need to increase its income. It recruited a successful commercial manager, Dean Rees, as CEO & Town Bailiff.

This appointment, alongside the sale of the College site on King Street for an amount that far out-weighed earlier offers, had provided the Town Estate with the opportunity to invest in the future number, range, size and quality of financially successful events and activities in its parks and markets. The extra income from these events will support Town Estate's charitable aims and begin to meet the expectations of the people of the town.

Mr Bett felt it should be noted that, sadly, the sale of the King Street site finally ended over 400 years of the Town Estate's involvement in the provision of schools for the people of the Town.

He mentioned some specific matters from 2023/24:

Delays in removing the old café in Wilton Park had cost the Town Estate a year of trading and loss of a much-loved facility.

The contraction of the town markets is plain for all to see. However, the Town Estate had just received expert advice on new ways to develop and protect its markets, and this advice is to be considered, and acted upon, in 2025. A first glimpse of what is possible had been seen with the new Friday "Borough Market". But much more needs to follow.

Clearly there also needs to be urgent and effective action to invigorate other aspects of the town centre, so the Town Estate will be looking to work with partners, including the County Council, the Borough Council, and the BID – to achieve its vision.

Mr Bett had been encouraged when large numbers of Melton people enjoyed the Town Estate's free big screen showing in Play Park of films and the England Euro matches in the summer. Although a great success, and another glimpse into the future, he reminded the meeting that, though the Town Estate wished to provide free events for people whenever it can, they can only happen when there is significant income from other sources to subsidise them, perhaps through sponsorship or grants. But also through cross subsidy from charged events such as this week's fireworks.

But the other focus for the parks is to protect and improve them as a wonderful facility for Melton people to freely enjoy. In this respect, the "greening of Egerton Park" was another glimpse of what is possible. The Charity has been planting, and will continue to plant, more trees and shrubs to provide for interest, wildlife, and shade in the context of climate change; while of course, preserving the Cricket Club at its centre.

Mr Bett reported that, as with the markets, the Town Estate very recently completed a survey of all its trees; and feoffees will soon be considering the recommendations. He noted that, like other aspects of the organisation, this is something that has not been sufficiently carried out in the past. He warned that changes will be seen, as some older trees are lost or given "first aid". But he vowed that many, many more will be planted than are lost, with a significant increase in the number of trees being provided for future residents to enjoy.

The Chairman emphasised the Town Estate's commitment to building a Park Centre to provide improved facilities for the public – toilets, café, activity room – while providing the Chairty with income streams that are more tolerant of the weather.

He shared his pleasure at the successful launch by MOWS, of the rowing boats in Wilton Park, and he looked forward to future collaboration with MOWS for the 12-seater tour boat.

Mr Bett summarised the Town Estate's ambitions and priorities for the future:

- Continue to improve the sustainability and efficiency of the charity Why? so that it can better serve its charitable aims and the people of Melton Town.
- Improve the parks by planting hundreds of trees and shrubs, to ensure they continue to meet the changing needs of the people of Melton, in response to climate and social change
- Increase the number, extend the range, and improve the quality of activities and events provided in our parks
- Increase the number, extend the range, and improve the quality of markets run directly and indirectly by the Town Estate
- Develop proposals, including a business plan, for an attractive Park Centre in Play Close that includes a welcoming café for park users, toilets, other space for community use, and a base for the Charity

Mr Bett concluded his remarks by reminding those present that the Charity's financial problems had consequences for the staff. For example, there are too few staff being asked to do too many things. Also, as part of the modernisation process, changes that had to be made to some working arrangements had been unsettling for some. Sadly, much of what they do, can all too easily be taken for granted, yet when people criticise at the Town Estate, they forget they are talking about real people, doing their best, often in difficult circumstances.

He therefore paid a special tribute to the staff, who had kept the show on the road during difficult times, and whose efforts really are appreciated.

Mr Bett therefore moved:

- That the Annual Report & Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2024 be adopted.
- That a Vote of Thanks for Town Estate staff be given in appreciation of all their hard work this year.

Mr P Southerington [LE13 OUF] questioned why the meeting had not been advertised in the Melton Times. Mr Bett explained it had been well advertised. Mr Tindall later added that he had delivered many Notices of Meeting to a considerable number of outlets across the town. It had been

well publicised across electronic media and had been mentioned in the Melton Times and on radio.

Mr D Moss [LE13 OJJ] mentioned his participation in the Pageant of 1949. Mr Bett remarked that the Pageant was a hugely successful example of a major event that not only benefitted the community but also the Town Estate.

Mr Moss asked if a bursary could be provided for a Melton student, to reflect the longstanding link of the Town Estate to school education. Mr Bett said the Feoffees would consider the suggestion.

Mr D Moss thought not having a Junior Townwarden would remove the opportunity for a Feoffee to “learn the ropes” of being Townwarden. However, Mr Bett reminded him that, as the role of Townwarden had become purely ceremonial some time ago, there was no longer a need to ‘train’ a Feoffee for the role. The SoA however, does now include the requirement to have a Vice-Chair, a post that had not always been filled in recent years.

Mr D Moss was disappointed that there had been no opportunity for residents to make suggestions about the governance of the Town Estate. He would have preferred more feoffee meetings and sub-groups. Mr Bett disagreed; reminding the meeting that this approach had been tried and had not been successful. Having eight Feoffees would allow and encourage trustees to be actively involved and fulfil their roles and responsibilities, while ensuring the organisation operated efficiently.

Mr M Bell [LE13 ODJ] felt the changes should have been discussed by a Town Meeting.

Mr M Davies [LE13 OJS] pointed out that, though he agreed with the reduced number of Feoffees, time should have been taken to consult residents at a Town Meeting, leaving the decision to next year.

Mr P Southerington also felt the changes should have been discussed by a Town Meeting, as in the past.

Mr Bett understood the points about process, but explained that on balance, it had been felt that the need to modernise and streamline the decision-making process of the Town Estate, was sufficiently urgent to make the changes as soon as possible. However, he felt it important to review the success or otherwise of the changes going forward.

Mr D Moss was concerned at the potential increase in cyclists in parks if a cycle centre was opened in Wilton Park. Mr Bett assured him that Feoffees would give careful consideration to the question.

Mr M Bell said he had had difficulty with the Fireworks page of the Town Estate website. Mr Bett suggested raising that with the Bailiff at the end of the meeting.

Mr G Cartwright [LE13 0SF] asked about the Town Estate's Market Charter Rights. Mr Bett said they certainly existed, though there were those that perhaps wished they did not. He would be happy to meet Mr Cartwright and go through further interesting details.

Mr P Southerington reminded the meeting that some paths in the Play Close are public footpaths.

Mr Bett moved, seconded by Mrs Holland:

- That the Annual Report & Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2024 be adopted.
- That a Vote of Thanks to the Town Estate staff be given in appreciation of all their hard work this year.

This was agreed.

6. To appoint the auditors for the ensuing year.

On behalf of the Feoffees, the Chairman moved, seconded by Mr Roffey, that TC accountants be re-appointed for the ensuing year. This was agreed.

7. Minutes of the Town Meeting held on 02 October 2023

It was proposed by Mr E Tindall, seconded by Mrs A Boulding [LE13 1EA] and agreed, that the Minutes of the Town Meeting held on 02 October 2023 were an accurate record of the meeting.

8. Matters arising from the minutes and other matters residents wish to raise

There were no matters raised.

9. Close of meeting.

There being no further business, the Chairman thanked residents for their attendance and declared the meeting closed at 8:08pm.

Chair _____

Date _____

Election and Appointment of Feoffees

We the undersigned, having been elected at the Annual Town Meeting held on Wednesday 30 October 2024, hereby confirm our acceptance of the office of Feoffee and declare our willingness to act in the trust of the Melton Mowbray Town Estate.

Eric Tindall

Richard Sage