

ALSAGER PARISH MEETING
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD IN
ALSAGER INSTITUTE ON TUESDAY, 5 APRIL 2022

Present:

Councillor M Unett
Councillor R Fletcher
Councillor J Buckley
Councillor P Hubbard
Councillor J Smith

N Clarke (Town Clerk)

0 Members of the Press
33 Members of the public

AP1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Goodrich, J Hearne, A Helliwell, S Helliwell, D Hough, A Nayling, R Redstone, R Tyson and P Williams

AP2 Non-Attendance

The following Members did not attend and did not give their apologies - None

AP3 Minutes of the Previous Annual Parish Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting dated 5 March 2019 were referred to and it was: -

Resolved: That, the Minutes of the Meeting of the Town Council dated 5 March 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

AP4 Chairman's Annual Report 2021-22

The Chairman introduced his report and spoke of highlights during 2021-22. See Appendix 1 for the full report.

AP5 Presentation of Civic Awards

The Chairman expressed his gratitude to all the volunteers who give time to help Alsager be a vibrant community. He introduced each award and spoke about each recipient's contribution to Alsager. Recipients gave thanks for the award. See Appendix 2 for the list of recipients.

AP6 Public Participation

The following questions and comments were made:

1. A representative from Alsager Football Club spoke about the funding for the Football Club and the need for additional financial support. The representative asked about grant opportunities.
2. A resident spoke about his desire that Alsager Town Council considers how to support youngsters in the town by providing a venue for them to meet or hold activities.
3. A resident suggested a list of community clubs with their details is advertised widely to alert residents to the huge amount of voluntary clubs and societies there are on offer in Alsager.

The meeting commenced at 7:00pm and concluded at 7:45pm.

Signed by Councillor M. Unett
Chairman



Annual Report of Alsager Town Council 2021-22

In 2022 the Annual Parish Meeting will be held for the first time since 2019, cancelled for two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chairman's report

This annual report gives me the opportunity to reflect in the last twelve months and beyond. I am proud and honoured to have served as the Chairman of Alsager Town Council since last May.

As Chairman of the Council, I have attended numerous events around the Town and beyond with a rolling consort or guest. It has been brilliant to see the work of so many community groups and organisations not only in Alsager but in our neighbouring communities too. It has been particularly great to get out and see more of the town and our community after multiple Covid-19 lockdowns.

Highlights include local events such as the Alsager Garden's Association Annual Show, the welcome back event at Alsager Station (for which Alsager Station recently won a highly commended award for promoting rail at the Cheshire Best Kept Stations Awards 2022), Remembrance Sunday and many others across Alsager and in other towns. There are still many more events to take place including fundraising events and my Civic Service at Wesley Place this Sunday, 10th April at 2:30pm.

This has been a challenging time for the Town Council, emerging from the pandemic, restarting projects and services and going through a number of staff changes.

But we are moving forward in delivering for residents and have managed to achieve a lot this past year. As noted further in this report, we had a double by-election that elected Cllrs A Helliwell and R Redstone. According to NALC, the average age of a local councillor is 61 and the number of local councillors under the age of 45 is just 11%. Alsager Town Council this year does extremely well on gender balance and with two new young councillors and myself, Alsager Town Council has more and better representation for younger residents than most Town and Parish Councils in the local area and across the country.

The Town Council has re-started and embarked on many projects over the past year including a large consultation on proposals for the public realm in the Town Centre, the employment of a Town Centre Manager, a consultation and then subsequent installation of new play equipment to revitalise Hassall Rd Play Area, provided numerous vital grants to local organisations, events and funding towards two new lifesaving defibrillators, successfully helped to lobby for EMR rail services to be reinstated, successfully pushed back against the latest attempt to introduce car parking charges in the town, launched a large consultation on CIL funding, agreed to work towards White Ribbon Accreditation, agreed to offer plant based and Fairtrade food options, begun work

on tree planting to help towards our 2025 carbon neutral target, launched a generous grant pot for local groups and residents to apply for ahead of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, submitted a successful motion to CHALC on councillor behaviour and standards in public life, reported numerous local issues and much, much more.

We have also managed through much financial difficulty thanks to the pandemic to set a budget for the next financial year that continues to fund these vital projects and the services the Town Council provides along with the introduction of a new town ranger service and with minimal rise in precept – in fact still a reduction on what residents were paying in precept 2 years ago. I would like to thank all councillors, all parties and political groups for their hard work and co-operation in this endeavour and others over the past year.

I would also like to record my particular thanks to all our hardworking Town Council staff. Without their hard work and dedication, we simply would not have got through the pandemic or been able to get back on our feet again, achieve all of this and the effective running of the Town Council. I would also like to thank staff for the support they have given to me during my time as Chairman so far.

I finally want to record my thanks to the residents of Alsager, particularly our frontline workers, NHS staff, care staff, volunteers, local organisations and community groups for everything they do and everything they did during the pandemic. I am glad that I will be able to thank some of you for your hard work and dedication to Alsager at the Civic Awards to be held during the Annual Parish Meeting.

The report below details more about the Town Council, the services we provide and the Action Plan going forward.

Council meetings

In May 2021 legislation was not extended for the continuation of remote meetings and therefore in person meetings were reintroduced for Alsager Town Council. All Council meetings were relocated from Alsager Institute to Alsager Civic to allow for social distancing. Alsager Civic continues to be the venue of choice until further notice.

The Town Council

At the point of the Annual Meeting on 4 May 2021, the Town Council was made up of 6 Liberal Democrat councillors, 4 Labour councillors, 3 Conservative councillors and 1 Animal Welfare party councillor.

However, two Labour councillors resigned and at a by-election held in July 2021, the elected councillors both stood as Conservative candidates: Councillor A Helliwell and R Redstone. Councillor S Helliwell resigned as a Conservative councillor in January 2022 and now sits as an Independent councillor. The make up of the council is now 6 Liberal Democrats, 2 Labour, 4 Conservatives, 1 Animal Welfare and 1 Independent Councillor.

The Town Council has 14 Councillors representing the three wards in Alsager: East, West and Central.

EAST WARD	WEST WARD	CENTRAL WARD
Councillor D I Hough	Councillor R Fletcher	Councillor P M Hubbard
Councillor J Buckley	Councillor J Smith	Councillor J Goodrich
Councillor M Unett	Councillor P Williams	Councillor J Hearne
Councillor A Nayling	Councillor R Tyson	Councillor S Helliwell
Councillor A Helliwell		
Councillor R Redstone		

The Council has several Committees most of which meet around six times a year. In addition, all members are trustees of Alsager Institute, a charitable trust managed by the Town Council.

Councillors will vote on a new Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the council at its Annual Meeting on 24 May 2022. Unless rejected by the Council, Committee places will be filled by political proportionality for the Civic year 2022-23.

Cheshire East Council is currently considering a Community Governance review with proposals to change the parish boundary of Alsager to incorporate some of the new development at the former Twyford area and also encompass the new housing developments off Close Lane, older properties along Nursery Lane and farms and houses up to the M6 motorway. If the changes are approved by Cheshire East Council the number of town councillors will increase from 14 to 15 to reflect the changes to the total number of electorate. Elections will be held in 2023 for Alsager Town Council and Cheshire East Council.

Alsager Town Council is the most local level of government. It serves the town's 13,000 residents by providing an essential link between town residents, Cheshire East Council and other public service providers to ensure that the local views are heard and that their influence is meaningful.

The Town Council is a statutory consultee on all planning applications and key strategic planning policies.

Town Centre

The Town Council commissioned a Public Realm project to create a scheme to unify the town centre scheme to improve the town centre by a planned and coherent approach to pavements, crossings and street furniture. The final scheme was approved by the Council to go out to public consultation

Analysis of the consultation took place during the summer 2021 and the final report was taken to the town council to guide their priorities based on the residents' responses. These included repairs and enhance the pavements and road surfaces in the town centre, work with Cheshire East Council to improve the entrances to Milton Park and encourage more footfall in the town centre.

Town Centre Manager

To aid delivery of the town centre plans and aspirations, a Town Centre Manager was appointed for a short-term contract. The Manager engaged with Cheshire East Council and businesses to work on some of the outcomes of the Public Realm consultation. In addition, the Manager worked closely with Alsager Partnership to engage with the town centre businesses, schools and community groups. Sadly, the contract ended in March 2022 due to the financial constraints of the town council.

Hassall Road Play Area

Following public consultation held by Alsager Town Council, members of the council worked with Cheshire East Council and ANSA to upgrade the play area. The first phase was completed in early 2021.

Upon completion the town council considered a second phase to further enhance the area with additional swings, paths and inclusive access gate using town council funds. This has been completed by ANSA and it is pleasing the play area is enjoyed by a broad cross section of the community.

A donation from a disbanded local group, ARAG, will be used to plant spring bulbs in the area under the trees.

Community Engagement

The Town Council offers a period of public participation at the start of its meetings to which any local resident can come along to comment or raise a local issue.

The Town Council submits information printed in the Alsager in Focus magazine which is circulated to every household and business in the town bi-monthly.

Our website is continually developing in providing the community with Town Council information. There is an opportunity to sign up for an update service on news items directly to an email account. A Town Council Facebook page and Twitter feed provide information and links to the community.

Financial Information

Funding from the Precept

A larger proportion of the Town Council's money comes from a precept which is added to the Council Tax levy by the Principal Authority, Cheshire East Council. In 2020-21 the precept was £417,952 which represents £81.48 per annum, per Band D equivalent household. The total year

expenditure to the Town Council for the year was budgeted at £538,591 with the balance funded from Town Council capital and general reserves.

The final year end accounts for 2021-22 will be approved by the Town Council in June and will be published on the Town Council website www.alsagertowncouncil.gov.uk

The impact of Covid-19 on the Town Council finances will once again be severe with the closure of Alsager Civic and reduced Alsager market for a large proportion of the year.

Alsager Town Council grant funding

The Town Council regularly supports local voluntary and community groups by awarding grants. These grants cover a wide range of activities run locally by groups and benefitting the residents of Alsager and amount to approximately £16,000.

Some of those supported include:

Alsager Community Support Centre	£2,000
Alsager Friends of Christie	£1,050
Alsager Community Trust	£2,000
Alsager Gardens Association	£400
Alsager and District Girl Guides	£500
Alsager Institute Bowling Club	£1,644
Rotary Club of Alsager Charities Market	£300
Alsager Round Table	Purchase and management of new Christmas lights £10,400

Fairtrade Fortnight continue to be well supported and engage with the community of Alsager young and old. Our thanks also go to the "In Bloom" group for their work in enhancing the Town with the colourful floral displays and planting. Both groups receive funding from the Town Council to support their activities.

What Services does the Town Council contribute towards:

1. **CCTV.** The Town Council contributes towards the CCTV provision in Alsager which is managed by Cheshire East Council. Quarterly reports are received from CEC who confirm their effectiveness by working with the police to provide real time information. The town council has resolved to use some Community Infrastructure Levy to fund additional cameras. Work is underway with the CCTV Manager and the police to ascertain and gain approval for locations.
2. **Alsager Allotments.** The Town Council provide four allotment sites which are managed by the Alsager Gardens Association. The allotments are valued by the community in meeting the needs of both young and old. The Alsager Gardens Association have a management plan in place to improve each site to provide inclusive allotments for disabled, general infrastructure improvements and new initiatives.

The sites are located at:

- Cedar Avenue
- Lawton Road at Percy James Close
- Coronation Avenue
- Talke Road

3. **The Wednesday Outdoor Market** which operates from Fairview Car Park continues to provide a key service to the residents of Alsager and comprises of a mix of up to eight stalls. The Facilities Manager has worked hard over the past year to increase the offering at the market and advertises widely through social media to encourage better footfall. Traders are enjoying the benefit of this.
4. The Public Conveniences sited along Crewe Road comprising of male, female and disabled toilets are provided by the Town Council at an annual cost of approximately £15,000. The Town Council considers the facilities a key service to the visiting and local community, however, a review will take place over the next twelve months to consider options as the long-standing contractor has retired from managing the conveniences.
5. **Alsager Civic.** Since the transfer of Alsager Civic from Cheshire East Council in 2013, the Town Council has worked hard to upgrade the fabric and facilities at Alsager Civic to become a thriving community venue. As the Town Council supports a large amount of community use at Alsager Civic for a proportion of available hire, financially the Civic is running at a small operating loss. Over the past six years the loss has reduced year on year to ensure it provides good value for the residents of Alsager. Unfortunately, Covid-19 has had a severe impact for Alsager Civic with reduced confidence and the impact of the rise of Omicron over the 2021-22 winter. It is hoped that business will bounce back over the summer months.
6. **Alsager Institute.** The Town Council is body corporate of Alsager Institute with each council member being a trustee. The Alsager Institute is a registered charity which operates a hall and bowling green from its site at Green Drive. The Institute is run completely separately from the town council but is managed by the town council officers. Trustee meetings take place to manage the charity and its accounts are submitted to the Charity Commission each year.

Action Plan for 2022-23

The Town Council considered its priorities at a meeting in early September 2021. They resolved to work the following:

- Transfer of 3 Lawton Road to the Town Council.
- Transfer of green area and land surrounding 3 Lawton Road and Alsager Civic to the Town Council.
- Transfer of Cedar Avenue informal parking area to the Town Council and improvements to the open space adjacent to the parking area (approved see Min Ref TC19/254 using CIL money).
- Improvements to skatepark at Milton Park.
- Enhancement of CCTV provision in Alsager (CIL money).

- Enhancement of public signage, town maps in the Town Centre.
- Environmental improvements throughout the town including planting and open spaces.
- Improvements to the town centre arising from the Public Realm Consultation and Neighbourhood Plan.
- Transfer of CEC open space e.g., informal car parks at Sandbach Road South (approved Min Ref TC21/52) and Station Road to the Town Council.
- Capital work at Alsager Civic – reconfiguration of internal spaces including bar area, /kitchen and front desk.
- Capital improvements to the allotments.

In addition, the council pledge:

- To continue to exercise its power of influence on matters best serving the communities of Alsager.
- To work with the community on delivery of the adopted Alsager Neighbourhood Plan.
- To continue to build on the success of Alsager Civic following its refurbishment in its service delivery to the community of Alsager and its deficit management.
- To consider the viability and challenges faced by the Wednesday Market.
- To continue to work with Alsager Partnership in its service to the local community and economy and to regularly monitor the Service Level Agreement.
- To continue to explore with Cheshire East Council, the transfer of the office premises to the Town Council.
- To enable the provision of local burial space for the community of Alsager.
- To maintain the General Power of Competence of Local Councils, Quality Council status and to continue to develop the Town Council's work as the first tier of local government and community leader for Alsager.

5 April 2022

Michael Unett
Chairman

Nicola Clarke
Town Clerk



ALSAGER CIVIC AWARDS 2022

COMMUNITY CIVIC AWARD

This award recognises individuals, or community voluntary groups, who have made a positive contribution to Alsager.

2 Awards: Pride in Alsager.
 Amanda Lovett – Alsager Welcomes Refugees.

SPORTING & LEISURE CIVIC AWARD

This award recognises a group or individual's sporting or leisure achievement(s) for Alsager. This could be playing, organising or contributing to local sporting or sporting development. This award may be presented to an individual or group who have represented Alsager at a local, national or international level.

Awarded to Alsager Football Club (AFC).

ENVIRONMENT CIVIC AWARD

This award recognises an individual or group who have made a significant positive contribution to the conservation or protection of the environment in and around Alsager.

Awarded to The Land Trust Green Angels.

INDEPENDENT BUSINESS AWARD

This award recognises an independent business in Alsager whose presence has had a positive impact on the local community. This could be a business that has created local jobs, invested in the town or provided an outstanding contribution to community life.

Awarded to Phoenix Hair and Beauty.

PRIDE OF ALSAGER CIVIC AWARD

This award recognises a member of the community or a group who has gone above and beyond to improve their local neighbourhood or area.

Awarded to Mrs Sylvia Dyke.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

This award recognises an individual's continued commitment to Alsager and its community over an extended period of time, ideally over 10 years.

Awarded to Mrs Christine Bates and Mrs Ann Hughes.

COVID-19 SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD

This award recognises an individual or group who has made a significant or outstanding contribution to our community and in helping others through the Coronavirus Pandemic and lockdowns.

Awarded to The Thirteen Club.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD – SERVICE TO ALSAGER

Awarded to Mr Nigel Rowbottom.

DRAFT