

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**COUNCIL  
MINUTES**

Date: Monday, 2 December 2024

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

**Present:** Councillors: Jim Brown (Mayor), Nazmin Chowdhury (Deputy Mayor), Myla Arceno, Julie Ashley-Wren, Sandra Barr, Philip Bibby CC, Stephen Booth, Robert Boyle, Leanne Brady, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Kamal Choudhury, Forhad Chowdhury, Akin Elekolusi, Alistair Gordon, Lynda Guy, Jackie Hollywell, Coleen Houlihan, Lin Martin-Haugh, Conor McGrath, Andy McGuinness, Sarah Mead, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Tom Plater, Ceara Roopchand, Loraine Rossati, Simon Speller, Jeannette Thomas, Carolina Veres, Anne Wells, Nigel Williams, Jade Woods and Tom Wren

**Start / End** Start Time: 7.00pm  
**Time:** End Time: 8.00pm

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Richard Henry CC, Mason Humberstone and Ellie Plater CC.

There were no declarations of interest.

**2 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular Michael Downing, and his wife Aideen.

The Mayor then spoke of the recent very sad and unexpected passing of Councillor Graham Snell. Graham had been a Stevenage Borough Councillor for over 25 years mostly in the Manor Ward. The Mayor said that he was shocked and saddened about the news of Graham's passing and that it would have impacted upon all who knew him.

The Mayor then thanked Graham's daughter Louise and her wife Dawn for attending the meeting. His thoughts were with Louise, Dawn and all of Graham's family and friends at this difficult time.

Councillor Jeannette Thomas, Deputy Leader of the Council advised that she had known Graham for many years since she first stood for the Council. He was a lovely, kind and thoughtful man who was a great community councillor. He was known by virtually everyone in the areas of the town he worked in both as a councillor and also due to his retail career. Her thoughts and sympathies were with

Louise, Dawn and the rest of his family as well as all of his Lib Dem colleagues.

Councillor Stephen Booth, Leader of the Opposition and the Lib Dem Group spoke of when he heard of the terrible news that he had lost his friend, colleague and party member. He would miss his gentle challenge and sense of humour. He was always ready to give helpful guidance when called upon and was just about to complete his third year as the Chairman of the Party branch. He took care of his community in a calm and thoughtful way. Stephen mentioned the sad passing of Graham's wife Heather and also spoke of the joyful news that he had become Grandfather to triplet girls. Graham would be very sorely missed.

Councillor Phil Bibby advised that Graham was a community councillor first and foremost, someone you could have a good conversation with and that he was one of the good guys. His condolences were sent to his family and friends.

Councillor Robin Parker said that his friend Graham was always ready, willing and available to help anyone, with a cheerful manner and a thorough, caring approach. Graham was someone who did not have a bad word to say about anyone and no one had a bad word to say about him. He was greatly shocked and saddened by Graham's passing which had had a devastating impact on everyone that knew him and he would never forget him. His thoughts at this time were with all of Graham's family and friends.

Councillor Barr spoke of Graham as a friend and neighbour in the St Nicholas Ward and that she was blessed and lucky to know him.

Councillor Speller spoke of Graham as an excellent back bench scrutineer and a valued member of the Planning and Development Committee. He had a lovely sense of humour who did everything with great courtesy.

Councillor McGuinness thanked Councillor Downing for allowing the tributes to Graham to go ahead on his celebratory evening and also his Labour Party colleagues for their heartfelt messages about Graham. He spoke of his good friend Graham's wise and compassionate way he went about his life. He played down his own achievements being a good team player and was one of the rocks on which the Lib Dem party was built on.

A number of other Members spoke in tribute to Councillor Snell following which the Council stood to observe a minute's silence.

### 3 **ALDERMAN MICHAEL DOWNING**

The Chamber was reminded that at a Special meeting of the Council on 16 October 2024, a resolution was agreed that the Council should confer the title of Alderman on former Councillor Michael Downing.

The Mayor expressed his delight at being able to award Michael with this honour. He paid tribute to Michael's wife Aideen for her constant companionship.

The Mayor spoke of Michael's valuable work over many years on the Council

particularly in relation to public health.

Councillor Jeannette Thomas, Deputy Leader of the Council spoke of Michael's calm and intelligent service to the Town and as a friend and colleague. She then read a tribute to Michael from former Councillors Mrs Joan and John Lloyd.

Councillor Stephen Booth, Leader of the Opposition advised that he was relieved to see Michael when he returned to the Council in 2019. Michael's careful and cogent deliberations in his council work reflected his demeanour in his professional life as a social science lecturer. The award of Honorary Alderman was truly deserved and he was sure that Michael would continue to be a good and effective representative of Stevenage Borough Council.

A number of other Members spoke in tribute to Michael and all referred to his calmness, thoughtfulness, intelligence, commitment and being a measured speaker at Council meetings. Councillor Parris thanked Michael for all that he had taught her particularly in her current role as the current Chair of the Planning and Development Committee.

A number of guests from the public gallery including Baroness Dr Sharon Taylor OBE, Kevin Bonavia MP, Father Michael Doherty from St Hilda's Church and Michael's son Brendan.

Baroness Taylor spoke of her long connection with Michael since he had replaced Alderman David Kissane as a Symonds Green Councillor. She referred to Michael's intellect which had not stopped him canvassing and carrying out a considerable workload during election campaigns. She also referred to Michael's contribution as a County Councillor particularly in the field of adult care services and serving on mental health tribunals.

Kevin Bonavia said that calmness and wisdom had been a central theme of the tributes to Michael and referred to his campaigning and his partnership with his wife Aileen. He thanked Michael for his service to the Town.

Father Michael spoke about Michael as a man of great faith and he informed the Chamber that he was proud to be a part of the celebration.

Brendan spoke of the family's pride in Michael and his outstanding service to Stevenage and its residents.

A framed scroll was then presented to Michael Downing.

Michael Downing thanked everyone for their comments and advised that he was proud to be a part of a team of dedicated people working for the Town and its residents.

## **CHAIR**