

Leek Town Council



Leek Town Council
15 Stockwell Street
Leek, ST13 6DH
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ANNUAL MEETING OF LEEK TOWN COUNCIL Tuesday 12th May 2026 – 7.30pm AGENDA

Present:

Mayor Cllr. Derek Hilyer	Deputy Mayor Cllr. Lyn Swindlehurst	Cllr. Keith Hoptroff
Cllr. Sue Webster	Cllr. Matt Swindlehurst	Cllr. Kate Nicholls
Cllr. Paul Powner	Cllr. Bill Cawley	Cllr. Steve Ford
18 members of the public	Staff: Victoria Johnson	Minutes: Clerk Denise Wheat

The meeting was opened by Mayor 2025-2026 Cllr. Derek Hilyer

Mayor Making Ceremony

1. Election of Town Mayor for the ensuing year:

Nomination Mayor	Proposer	Seconder
Cllr. Lyn Swindlehurst	Cllr. D Hilyer	Cllr. S Webster

Cllr. Lyn Swindlehurst was elected as Leek Town Mayor and signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office which was then countersigned by the Clerk.

Outgoing Mayor Cllr. Derek Hilyer presented the Chains of Office. The new Mayor banged the gavel.

The meeting was now chaired by the new Mayor Cllr. Lyn Swindlehurst.

The Reverend Nigel Irons said a Prayer of gratitude for the outgoing Mayor Cllr. Derek Hilyer thanking him for his commitment of service and gratitude for all he has accomplished in his term of office. He then continued with a Prayer for the new Mayor Cllr. Lyn Swindlehurst as she accepted her term of office, a prayer giving her guidance, wisdom, inspiration and strength to exercise her responsibilities in the best possible way and to take hold of the opportunities they present to serve the people of this town. May she, her Deputy elect and all other councillors be guided in their deliberations. Give them insight to make wise decisions, integrity to face the truth, courage to make difficult choices and compassion to the needs of others...

2. Mayor Cllr. Lyn Swindlehurst returned thanks for Election

“Firstly, I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the outgoing Mayor for his dedication, tenacity and generosity throughout his term of office. His enthusiasm for refining the working practices and policies of the Council has been both evident and admirable.

This work has been greatly supported by our two members of staff, who consistently go above and beyond in their roles. Their efforts ensure that we, as councillors, are able to serve our community effectively. Their commitment does not go unnoticed, and it is very much appreciated. We also welcome a new Councillor to our Council and wish him success in his role as representative for our community.

I would also like to thank my incoming Deputy and his consort for agreeing to support me during the year ahead. I must admit, it took a little persuasion—but I am truly grateful they said yes. I know they will carry out the role with dedication and good spirit.

Keith is recognised by us all for his enthusiasm, his superb knowledge of the Council's workings, and his unwavering commitment. His support and experience will be invaluable—and I am especially grateful for the guidance and humour he brings. He also knows exactly which TV programmes to watch and where to find the best value whisky... skills that may prove surprisingly useful over the year ahead.

I would also like to take a moment to thank my family and friends for their continued support and encouragement. Public service often places demands on our time, and their patience and understanding make it all possible. I am equally grateful to my fellow councillors for their support, which I value greatly, and I look forward to working alongside you in the year ahead.

Matt and I tend to come as a set, ably supported by our daughter Ruth, son-in-law Lee, and our beautiful grandsons, Elijah and Jacob. I suspect the boys, more than anyone, will be delighted to see the big necklace back in the family.

And Matt—well, he is a constant: my greatest supporter and my best friend.

People ask why we do these roles. The political side is increasingly aggressive and full of blame. The civic role is very different and full of camaraderie and celebration.

My parents bought me up to give back, think of the effect what I say and do has on others, and to be proud of where I came from. Sounds like the Mayors role is in my DNA.

Reflecting on the essence of this role, it really comes down to community spirit. It's neighbours coming together to solve problems. It's that familiar thought— "someone should do something"—followed by the realisation that we are that someone.

A strong community isn't built by one person standing at a podium. It's built by countless individuals who volunteer, support one another, and quietly make a difference every single day.

So, as I step into this role, I promise to bring commitment—even on the mornings when the coffee hasn't quite kicked in—and to do all I can to keep that community spirit alive.

Because in the end, the real strength of our community isn't found in buildings or budgets, but in the people who show up, pitch in, and stay involved... sometimes even longer than the meetings themselves.

My commitment to Leek is to engage fully with our community and to represent our town with pride wherever I go.

As Maya Angelou so beautifully said:

"I've learned that people will forget what you said,
people will forget what you did,
but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Thank you for trusting me. Let's get to work.

The Mayors grandsons fondly refer to the Chain as "the big necklace". The Mayor had intended her charity to be Home-Start Staffs Moorlands, but due to the organisation closing she is looking for another Children or young people's charity to support. The chosen charities will be announced shortly.

3. Outgoing Mayor 2025-2026, Cllr. Derek Hilyer then gave a speech in response:

Throughout my mayoral year I have been supported and encouraged by the Town Clerk, Denise Wheet, and by her deputy Victoria Johnson, and by the Lengthsman Ash Lovatt. We've all helped each other through some interesting times. And at our ceremonies we have always been able to count on the services of the Town Crier, Bill Lomas, and the Reverend Nigel Irons.

This has been a fascinating and satisfying year for me personally but also, I think, for Leek Town Council, made possible by the staff and by my colleagues, particularly in their roles as chairs or vice-chairs of committees. It has been both invigorating and convivial to work with them and with Denise and Victoria and Ash. Let us also welcome Cllr. Stephen Ford, the new representative for Leek North and wish him well for his year in office.

This has been another step in a long career that has included computer programming for the Coal Board at Cannock in the late sixties, university administration in Cardiff and London, union service for the Association of University Teachers, work in arts and regeneration charities and initiative in Lewisham, being Assistant Director of the Learning from Experience Trust, 15 years as chair/secretary/skipper of the wonderful Beatrice Charity based on the Caldon Canal, and finally (till now at least) Councillor for Leekbrook with my estimable colleague Kate Nicholls. and I am looking forward to 2026-27 as chair of Finance and War Memorials committee. I also aim to help in fitting the Council for the challenges of local government re-organisation and devolution.

Of the many events in my year a few stand out. The Centenary was a moving and significant day not least because it brought together councillors, officers, the churches, community groups and volunteers to create a

remarkable fortnight-long event, the exhibition, the art work and Monument lighting, the parade and the reception. This, the Christmas Lights, Civic Service and Remembrance Day, all showed the quality of the Council operation. Members of the community came together to show Leek at its best, how local people can produce top quality events, how volunteers give their time and expertise for the benefit of residents: the Leek Theatre Company productions, on the stage and behind the scenes; Leek Loves Books, HUG and the Days of Dance and of the Dead, among many other events; and the Moorland Scouts railway event on St George's Day where all those involved, adults and children, demonstrated why work with young people is invaluable and rewarding.

Our only regret is that my predecessor Barry Birch is not here to enjoy the day. His death robbed Leek of a great friend and champion. As his friend Lyn Swindlehurst said, times with Barry were infectious, "full of laughter, conversations, and real listening. Barry had the ear of the people, and he never took that lightly. He always did his best to address the issues raised and to stand up for those who needed a voice... Barry treated everyone the same - he was simply Barry. Happy. Supportive. Approachable."

Let's not talk now of the loss of the Big Mill except to recognise that our heritage is clearly under threat and, at least, we should identify what we have, how it can be preserved, and how it can be improved and made available to us all.

The coming year will be momentous: we need to establish Leek and the Moorlands in their proper place within the new council set-up; we need to ensure that local people, particularly the young, can benefit from a stronger and more accessible North Staffordshire, in terms of employment, culture, entertainment, education and transport; we need to defend and enhance our built heritage; and we need to demonstrate that our values are right for Leek for years to come. I am happy to hand over this responsibility as Mayor to Cllr. Lyn Swindlehurst who has amply demonstrated, at town and district level, that she is ideally suited to the task. Mayors Charity fundraising during the year has now been confirmed to have exceeded £2000, to be split between the Charities - Leek Theatre Company and North Staffordshire Headway, a charity for people with head injuries.

4. A vote of thanks to outgoing Mayor was then proposed: *All in favour*

The Mayor then presented Cllr. Hilyer with a Past Mayors badge and gave the following speech:

I feel I must say a few words about Derek, who remains my boss until Tuesday.

Anyone who has worked with Derek will know that he is a true stickler for detail — though, to be fair, he is always more than happy to share that detail with the rest of us!

He also has a wonderfully dry sense of humour. When he first asked me to be his deputy, he explained that the role would involve "dealing with his balls." I remember thinking I was fairly sure that responsibility wasn't included in the official job description!

Before politics, Derek enjoyed a varied and impressive career, and I believe that experience has greatly strengthened the way he leads and works with his team. He brings professionalism, perspective, and calm guidance to everything he does.

There have been many highlights this year, and each of us will have our own special memories. But perhaps the clearest measure of Derek's leadership was the way he guided the team, our visitors, and the wider community through the remarkable week of celebrations surrounding the rededication of our War Memorial. It was a truly spectacular occasion — one that will remain an important part of our town's history for many years to come.

On a personal note, I sincerely hope Derek will still be willing to "mark my homework" from time to time, and, as ever, improve my first attempt!

Derek is not especially fond of noise, yet he has always shown enormous patience and tolerance toward those of us who inevitably create it.

And Derek, you are a true gentleman — defined not by what you stand against, but by what you stand for.

As the quotation says: "If you have integrity, nothing else matters. If you don't have integrity, nothing else matters."

Thank you, Derek, for your leadership, your humour, your integrity, and your friendship. We wish you every happiness and success for whatever comes next.

5. Appointment of Deputy Mayor

The nomination of Cllr. Keith Hoptroff for Deputy Mayor for the ensuing year was proposed - ***All in Favour***

Nomination Deputy Mayor	Proposer	Seconded
Cllr. Keith Hoptroff	Cllr. Lyn Swindlehurst	Cllr. Kate Nicholls

Cllr. Hoptroff accepted his appointment and signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office. The Chains of Office were then presented to the Deputy Mayor by the Mayor.

The Reverend Nigel Irons apologised and left the meeting for another engagement

6. The Deputy Mayor, Cllr. Keith Hoptroff returned thanks for his appointment:

Many thanks for giving me the honour of being Deputy Mayor. Hopefully I will serve the role well and give support to our excellent Mayor Lyn and to Denise and Victoria, especially with getting the best for the Council and Town with the opportunities that may be available post LGR.

I have been in this position as Deputy before in 2002/ 2003.

Whether I make it to be Mayor depends on several things;

- Will I stand next year
- Will I get elected.
- Will the new council elect me and will I accept the role.

Time will tell, but in the meantime, I will do my best to be a credit to the Council and to Leek.

Cllr Hoptroff noted that the Town Council will need a new Chief Marshal for events!

7. New Councillor elected on 7th May , Accepted Office as a Town Councillor for Leek North Ward

Councillor Stephen Ford signed his Acceptance of Office and Declaration of Interest document

Elected Councillor	Stephen Ford	Reform UK
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The Chair welcomed Cllr. Ford and explained that the General Purposes Committee is the main Full Council committee but at all the other Committees, all members of the council have full voting rights. Cllr. Webster made a correction as on the Town Council Planning Committee the District Councillors who sit on the District Planning Committee are not allowed to vote due to a conflict of interest.

The meeting was adjourned for a 5-minute break at 8:00pm

8. Apologies for Absence: Cllr. Dee Young, Cllr. Mike Worthington and Cllr. Stephen Wales

9. Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests & Dispensations or other Disclosable Interests:

None were declared

10. The Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Town Council 13th May 2025 were confirmed as a correct record.

11. Membership of Committees

- a. **Terms of Reference for Committees: Some amendments are required.** The Council resolved to move this item to 19th May General Purposes Committee.
- b. **The composition of Committees including respective Chairs and Vice-Chairs were approved:**
All in favour

COMMITTEE	NOMINATION for CHAIR	VICE-CHAIR
General Purposes	Cllr Hoptroff	Cllr. Webster
Finance	Cllr. Hilyer	Cllr. Powner
Human Resources Management	Mayor/ Deputy Mayor	Chair of GP / HR
Human Recourses	Cllr. L. Swindlehurst	Cllr. Hilyer
Planning	Cllr. Webster	Cllr. Powner
Allotments	Cllr. Young	Cllr. Hilyer
Tourism Events and Community	Cllr. M. Swindlehurst	Cllr. Hoptroff
War Memorials	Cllr. Hilyer	Cllr. Nicholls
Environment	Cllr. Hoptroff	Cllr. M. Swindlehurst

12. Appointment of Council Representatives to Outside Bodies:

Staffs Moorlands Parish Assembly	1. Cllr. L Swindlehurst (Chair)	2. Cllr. Webster	3. Cllr. Hilyer
Staffordshire Parish Councils Assoc.	Cllr. L. Swindlehurst		
Moorlands Partnership Board	1.Cllr. Hilyer		
Neighbourhood Plan	1. Cllr. Wales	2. Cllr. Cawley	
Twinning Association	1. Cllr. Webster	2. Cllr Worthington	
Honourable Ann Joliffe Charity	1. Cllr. Wales	2. Cllr. Hilyer	3. Cllr. Nicholls
Leek Town Lands	1. Cllr. Wales	2. Cllr. Hilyer	
@21 Leek Town Centre Youth Project	Cllr. L Swindlehurst		

13. Constitution Documents: Standing Orders were approved for 2026. **All in favour**

14. Town Council Meetings: Future meeting dates for 2026-2027 were set. Ten Town Council and General Purposes' meetings held on the third Tuesday of each month. Town Council meetings are not held in August and December. **All in favour**

15. Financial Regulations: The Town Councils Financial Regulations and Risk Register were approved. **All in Favour**

16. Internal Auditor and Financial Monitoring Councillors: Appointment of Internal Auditor JDH Business Services Ltd. was noted and two Councillors; Cllr. Powner and Cllr. Hilyer were appointed to monitor monthly transactions and bank reconciliation as stated in the Risk Register.

17. Financial Mandate: Banking arrangements: The Town Council has three accounts with NatWest 1. Current Account 2. Reserve Account 3.Events (Mayors Charity) Account Current signatories: Cllr. M. Swindlehurst, Cllr. L. Swindlehurst, Cllr. Powner, Cllr. Hilyer and the Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer Mrs D Wheat. (Two signatories to authorise payments). **Cllr. K Hoptroff was nominated to be added as an additional signatory.**

18. Date of the Next Meeting:

Town Council – Tuesday 19th May 2026, 7pm at SMDC Council Chamber
General Purposes – Tuesday 19th May (following Town Council).

Meeting Ended. 8.24pm