

FULL COUNCIL	30 JULY 2020	AGENDA ITEM: 6
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Report prepared by Angie Price, Town Clerk

FREEDOM OF THE TOWN

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to ask Members to give consideration to establishing a protocol for the purpose of awarding Freedom of the Town to an individual or group of distinction for services to the town of Ledbury.

Detailed Information

The historic origins of freemen or burgesses can be traced back many centuries to the former municipal corporations in the twelfth and thirteenth century. At that time, freemen enjoyed considerable privileges, including the ability to elect officers of the corporation and its Parliamentary representatives. For the municipal boroughs to appoint men of national importance was not merely an act of recognition; these individuals could possibly secure economic or political benefit.

However, major changes to the role and influence of freemen were swept away by the Municipal Corporations Act 1835. This led, among other things, to the creation of an elected local government as we know it today.

Freedoms could not be granted until the passing of the Honorary Freedom of Boroughs Act 1885 and following the major reorganisation of local government at that time, (but interestingly only from 1980 when a 'gap' in the provisions of the 1972 Act was rectified by representations made by the then MP for Chichester, Anthony Nelson MP), just 10 local Parish councils then had the standing to confer the title of honorary freeman.

In England these were the councils of Chichester, Ely, Hereford, Lichfield, Ripon, Truro, and Wells. In Wales, these were the Cities of Bangor and St David's and the Royal Town of Caernarfon.

However, with effect from 12 January 2010, all parish councils may now exercise powers to confer the title of "honorary freeman" or "honorary freewoman" upon what the legislation refers to as "persons of distinction" and those who, in the council's opinion, "have rendered eminent services to the council's area" (section 249(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1972 Act).

The admission of an honorary freeman or honorary freewoman must be given by a resolution made at a meeting of the full council that is specially convened for such

purpose. The resolution must be passed by no than less than two-thirds of the members of the council voting (Section 249(8) of the 1972 Act).

The law also requires "notice of the object of the meeting" to be given. A local council may also spend a reasonable sum as it thinks fit for the purpose of presenting what the act refers to as "an address or a casket containing an address to a person on whom it has conferred the title of honorary freeman or honorary freewoman".

It is often the practice of the Council to maintain a list of Honorary Freemen of the Town on display on a board in the Council Offices.

Criteria for Qualification

Should Ledbury Town Council agree to establishing a protocol in respect of Freedom of the Town awards, they will need to decide on the criteria for qualification. The following suggestions are often considered as part of the criteria:

- The candidate has made an outstanding contribution to the local community;
- The candidate has made achievements in their chosen sport resulting in World or Olympic titles or represented their nation at the highest level.
- The candidate has been a Town Councillor for 25-years;
- The candidate has achieved significant artistic/cultural/theatrical/scientific status on a world stage (e.g. Nobel price, Oscar etc.)

Attached is a draft Policy for Members consideration.

Recommendation

1. That Councillors agree to establishing a protocol for the awarding of Freedom of the Town to an individual or group of distinction.
2. That consideration be given to the attached draft protocol with a view to its adoption.

LEDBURY TOWN COUNCIL

FREEDOM OF THE TOWN PROTOCOL

Policy Statement

The granting of the Freedom of the Town is a symbolic presentation, which represents the highest honour a Town can bestow on an individual. The Freedom of the Town is a significant honour, demonstrating trust, loyalty, and a sense of community between a Town and an individual.

Freedom was originally an honour which could be bestowed by a Town or Parish Council upon a valued member of the community, a visiting celebrity or dignitary or a military group. Although the honour once carried entitlements on how the individual or group could either enter the Town, today it is a symbolic presentation. The original Act was a short one, consisting of only three sections, Section 1 provided that:-

"...the Council of every borough may from time to time, by the authority of not less than two thirds of their number present and voting at a meeting of the Council specially called for the purpose with notice of the object, admit to be honorary freeman of the borough persons of distinction and any persons who have rendered eminent services to the borough."

With effect from 12 January 2010, all parish councils may now exercise powers to confer the title of "honorary freeman" or "honorary freewoman" upon what the legislation refers to as "persons of distinction" and those who, in the council's opinion, "have rendered eminent services to the council's area" (section 249(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1972 Act).

Procedure & Guidance Notes

- The Council may consider applications for "Freedom of the Town" to be bestowed on individuals or groups as described above;
- The Council may on its own initiative consider bestowing "Freedom of the Town" on individuals or groups as described above;
- Councillors are to be advised of the proposal to bestow honorary freeman/woman onto said person(s) to ensure that 2/3 are in agreement prior to arrangements for the extraordinary meeting of council and reception being made.
- Nominations are to be agreed by the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Town Clerk, prior to any resolution being put before Council;
- Once agreed arrangements will be made for an extraordinary meeting of council to be held, in order to award the Honorary Freedom, followed by a reception to be held in a local venue, subject to agreement of all parties;
- The recipient will be informed of the Council's wish to bestow the honour of Freeman/woman onto them and they will be invited to attend the extraordinary meeting of council followed by the reception;
- An agenda will be sent to all Members advising them of the date and they will be advised of the venue for the reception and the costs;

A "Freedom" scroll will be ordered stating the name and purpose for which the honour is being bestowed;

- Once the resolution has been passed at the meeting the Honorary at the meeting the Honorary Freeman/woman will be bestowed on the individual and signed by the Mayor and Proper Officer.

Criteria for Qualification

When considering a nomination for the awarding of the Freedom of the Town the following should be considered:

- The candidate has made an outstanding contribution to the local community;
- The candidate has made achievements in their chosen sport resulting in World or Olympic titles or represented their nation at the highest level.
- The candidate has been a Town Councillor for 25-years;
- The candidate has achieved significant artistic/cultural/theatrical/scientific status on a world stage (e.g. Nobel prize, Oscar etc.)

At the Meeting

- Honorary freedom can only be awarded if two thirds of Councillors are present and voting at the extraordinary meeting of council;
- The Mayor will open the meeting as is the usual practice and invite councillors to consider the proposition being placed before them in respect of the awarding of the Freedom of the Town to an individual or group (the wording for this will be included on the agenda);
- A motion will be proposed that the Council formally accept the proposal with a further Councillor seconding the motion;
- The Mayor and any other Councillor may wish to say a few words about the recipient at this point;
- Following the proposal and seconding of the proposal the Mayor will request a vote by a show of hands;
- Once the proposal has been voted upon and a resolution made that the Freedom of the Town bestowed upon the individual or group in question and Scroll of Admission will be signed by the Town Mayor and the Town Clerk and officially presented to the recipient;
- Pictures will be taken following the presentation;
- An offer will be made to the recipient of the award for the Council to hold onto the scroll for the purpose or having it professionally framed on behalf of the recipient (if they so wish).

After the Meeting

- The Council's social media site will be updated;
- A press release will be sent to local press (including a photograph)

Date Adopted:

Review Date: