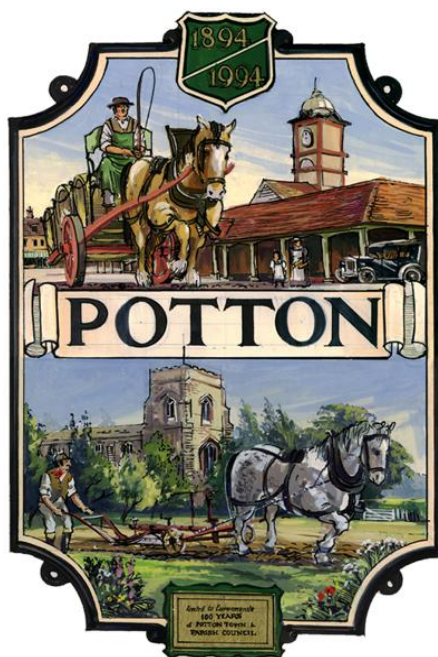


# Potton Town Council



## Freedom of the Town Policy

Jonathan Whitehurst  
Town Clerk

Adopted: April 2025

Review date: April 2026

## **1 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 The position regarding the appointment of honorary freemen and honorary freewomen is as a result of changes in local government legislation, linked to the potential desire of Potton Town Council to introduce such a scheme of bestowing such awards.
- 1.2 Before the municipal reforms of 1835, there was a class of persons known as "freemen" in old corporate boroughs, enjoying special rights in the corporate property. The right to be admitted a freeman rested upon the custom of the borough, varied by the terms of its charter and, in certain cases, by local statutory provision. Generally the admission of a freeman, as distinct from the conferment of the honour of an honorary freedom, might be acquired, inter alia, by marriage, birth or employment to an existing freeman. The effect of successive reforms of local government law has been to continue the custom of maintaining a roll of freemen and regulating admission to it. Pursuant to section 248 of the Local Government Act 1972 Act (the 1972 Act) as amended by section 27 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act,) the admission of freemen (as opposed to admitting honorary freemen and honorary freewomen) of a pre-1974 municipal borough is approved by the chairman of the district council of the district in which the former borough lies.
- 1.3 After local government reorganisation in 1974, a number of local authorities were given the power to admit honorary aldermen and freemen pursuant to section 249 of the 1972 Act. However, that power was not extended to parish councils in England or community councils in Wales.
- 1.4 Prior to January 2010 only 10 local councils had the standing to confer the title of honorary freeman; seven in England (the councils of the cathedral cities of Chichester, Ely, Hereford, Lichfield, Ripon, Truro and Wells) and 3 in Wales (the councils of the cities of Bangor and St David's and the Royal Town of Caernarfon).

## **2 DETAILED CONSIDERATION**

- 2.1 On the 12th January 2010 the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 amended the provisions of the 1972 Act to enable all local councils to confer honorary titles. By virtue of section 249 (5)-(10) of the 1972 Act as amended, all local councils may exercise powers to confer the title of "honorary freeman" or "honorary freewoman," to persons of distinction and those who in the council's opinion have rendered eminent service to the council's area.
- 2.2 Section 249(8) of the 1972 Act as amended provides that the admission of an honorary freeman or honorary freewoman must be by resolution made at a meeting of the full council specially convened for such purpose and passed by no less than two-thirds of the members of the council. Section 249(8) also requires "notice of the object of the meeting" to be given. This confirms the need for the agenda with the public notice and summons to members in respect of the council meeting to itemise a motion to confer the title of honorary freeman or honorary freewoman.

- 2.3 Section 249(9) of the 1972 Act as amended provides that a local council may spend a reasonable sum as it thinks fit for the purpose of presenting an address or a casket containing an address to a person on whom it has conferred the title of honorary freeman or honorary freewoman.
- 2.4 Prior to the changes in the law, as set out above, some local councils, who want to honour local residents' notable service to their town or community or who achieved national fame, conferred the titles "honorary citizen" or "honorary townsman" or "honorary burgess". Given the express powers given by the 2009 Act to admit "honorary freemen" and "honorary freewomen" it will no longer be necessary or even possible for local councils to confer other titles.

## **2.5 CRITERIA**

Should the council decide to agree to a policy of appointing honorary freemen, then a set of criteria will be required.

For the purposes of this policy the word "Town" refers to the Parish of Potton as being the defined area.

## **2.6 ELIGIBILITY**

- 2.6.1 Individuals from all walks of life and all sections of the community who have made a difference to the Parish of Potton are eligible to be nominated as honorary freemen/freewomen.
- 2.6.2 In keeping with the special nature of the award it shall be strictly limited to those who have given a minimum of 20 years of substantial service to the community of Potton and who have demonstrated "service above self". The 20 years of service to the community does not have to be concurrent.
- 2.6.3 The honour will be awarded for the individual's lifetime and not as a hereditary award.
- The award is meritorious and therefore the maximum number of freemen at any one time is not restricted.
- 2.6.4 It would be expected that the nominee will have given extensive and distinguished service to the community that goes beyond local government i.e. service to other organisations, voluntary and community groups, in a largely voluntary capacity.
- 2.6.5 The nominee must have made an outstanding contribution to the Town such as the nominee's contribution can be seen to stand above the contributions made by most other people.
- 2.6.6 Nominations for current serving members will only be considered where their contribution outside of the Town Council is notable.
- 2.6.7 Submitted nominations, if accepted, will be considered and awarded posthumously if the person nominated passes away.

## **2.7 NOMINATION CRITERIA**

The following should be taken into account when consideration is given to granting the honour of honorary freeman of the Parish of Potton.

- 2.7.1 Preference should be given to a person who performs in a voluntary capacity, but this should not preclude the honour being awarded to a person whose dedication and contribution is significantly above that expected from their occupation.
- 2.7.2 The contribution to the welfare of the community must involve a significant contribution of the person's time in serving members of the community for the improvement of their welfare or the promotion, achievement and/or delivery of community services in which a real personal role and contribution is made, and the contribution must be so outstanding in that it can be seen to stand above the contributions of most other persons.

## **2.8 NOMINATION PROCEDURES**

- 2.8.1 Nominations can be made by any person who has links with Potton.
- 2.8.2 Nominations can be submitted between May and October in each calendar year by completing the nomination form and emailing it to the Town Clerk.
- 2.8.3 The submission should outline the voluntary service provided by the individual to the community and any other examples of community spirit to justify the honour.
- 2.8.4 Nominations should be considered at a Special Meeting of the Town Council in January each calendar year, so that the awards can be presented at the Annual Civic event in that calendar year.
- 2.8.5 If elected members are in agreement that the nominee should be made an honorary freeman of the town then the nominations shall then be put before the council and a formal vote taken, again in confidence.
- 2.8.6 No less than two-thirds of the members of the council who vote on it must agree the nomination.
- 2.8.7 All nominations of honorary freeman are treated in the strictest of confidence. The nominee should not be informed that they have been nominated as it is not fair to raise expectations in case they are not met. It is imperative that submissions are not discussed with any other persons. Any disclosure will make the application invalid.

## **2.9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

- 2.9.1 An acknowledgement will be sent upon receipt of the nomination form. Correspondence will not be entered into on the merits of a particular nomination whilst it is under consideration.

- 2.9.2 All Councillors will be invited to discuss nominations received for the honorary freeman. The Council may request further information from the proposer if required.
- 2.9.3 The awards for each year will be presented at an individual ceremony and this will normally be at an Annual Civic event in that calendar year.

## **2.10 ENTITLEMENTS**

- 2.10.1 Any person declared an honorary freeman of the Town may designate themselves "honorary freeman of the Town of Potton".
- 2.10.2 The recipient will be awarded a civic token in the form of a certificate to commemorate receiving the award.
- 2.10.3 Any honorary freeman of the Town shall be:
- Invited to all subsequent civic events and functions.

## **2.11 RESCINDMENT**

- 2.11.1 Where an individual awarded the Freeman status has abused the honour, a nomination for the rescindment of the award should follow the same process as a nomination of a candidate.

<b>POTTON TOWN COUNCIL</b>			
<b>FREEDOM OF THE TOWN NOMINATION</b>			
Nominator's details:			
Name:		Date:	
Address:		Tel:	
		Post code:	
Email:			
<b>SECTION A</b>			
<b>NOMINATION OF AN INDIVIDUAL AS HONORARY FREEMAN OF THE TOWN</b>			
Name & address of individual			
In what category are you nominating them (charity/voluntary/former councillor etc?)			
Please state category and dates when they served:			
Are you related to the person you are nominating?			
In what capacity are you nominating them?			
How long have you known the individual?			
<b>SECTION B</b> – This section must be completed with as much detail as possible.			
Please explain why you are making your nomination ( <i>please continue on separate piece of paper if required.</i> )			