

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL
HELD ON MONDAY, 24 JULY 2023 FROM 7.30 PM TO 8.30 PM**

Members Present

Councillors: Beth Rowland (Mayor), Adrian Mather (Deputy Mayor), Jane Ainslie, Sam Akhtar, Keith Baker, Rachel Bishop-Firth, Laura Blumenthal, Prue Bray, Rachel Burgess, Anne Chadwick, Stephen Conway, David Cornish, Gary Cowan, Andy Croy, David Davies, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, Catherine Glover, Andrew Gray, John Halsall, David Hare, Peter Harper, Pauline Helliar-Symons, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Abdul Loyes, Charles Margetts, Rebecca Margetts, Andrew Mickleburgh, Jordan Montgomery, Stuart Munro, Alistair Neal, Stephen Newton, Ian Pittock, Ian Shenton, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Tony Skuse, Caroline Smith, Mike Smith, Wayne Smith, Alison Swaddle, Marie-Louise Weighill and Shahid Younis

Members In Attendance Virtually

Councillors: Phil Cunnington

31. Apologies

Apologies for absence were submitted from Peter Dennis, Chris Johnson, Sarah Kerr, Morag Malvern, Jackie Rance and Bill Soane.

Phil Cunnington attended the meeting online.

32. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

33. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

34. Appointment of Honorary Alderman

Council considered the report which recommended the appointment of former Councillor Angus Ross as an Honorary Alderman, as set out in the Agenda.

It was proposed by Pauline Jorgensen and seconded by Stephen Conway that the recommendation contained within the report be agreed.

Pauline Jorgensen:

I am delighted to nominate Angus Ross as an Honorary Alderman. Angus has a long and distinguished service as a councillor. He first joined the Council in 1990, and in that time, he served in almost every position on the authority.

In addition to a long period as Chairman of the Planning Committee, where his encyclopaedic knowledge of planning rules and guidance was very useful. He was a member of the Executive for several years. Most importantly he served as the last Chairman of the old Wokingham District, and the first Mayor of the new Wokingham Borough. Alongside this he was a member of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority for 22 years and acted as the Borough Council's Armed Forces Champion. Throughout

his long service Angus was a committed councillor for Wokingham Without ward, acting as a real champion for the local community. He was at the forefront of walking groups in the area, particularly helping children get to school. He worked hard to stand up for his residents on planning issues and played a key role in developing the last Borough Planning Guidance. As Executive Member for the Environment he championed trees and rural areas, including an active role in the Veteran Trees Association. He also started work putting in place the Borough's Leisure Strategy. He set up and established the Friends of Heathlake, a very active local volunteer group.

Angus' time on the Fire Authority saw him as lead Member for Assets. He helped secure new fire engines for the Borough, and spearheaded getting a new fire station in Wokingham, in Crowthorne, and in Theale, and was a leading light in establishing the Thames Valley Fire Control Service. Following 20 years' service in the RAF between 1958 and 1978 as a Canberra Bomber pilot, flying instructor, and latterly as a staff officer, Angus dedicated more than three decades of his life to public service as a councillor, during which time he has helped foster many positive changes in the Borough.

During his time as a councillor, he demonstrated an overwhelming commitment to the Borough and its residents. His contribution has been exemplary, demonstrated through his work as Executive Member, his service on committees and outside bodies, his membership of the Fire Authority, his role as Armed Forces Champion, and his time as Chairman and Mayor, where he acted as a superb ambassador for the Borough, both for local residents and the rest of the county. Since stepping down he has remained active, most recently opening the refurbished memorial to RAF Training Command in Shinfield. For his remarkable life of public service, both in the Borough and before, I would like to propose that Angus Ross is appointed to the rank of Honorary Alderman, the highest honour the Borough Council can bestow on a former councillor.

Beth Rowland:

I would just like to briefly speak about Angus, who I have of course know for many years in this Chamber and without. Angus is a gentleman, he always has been, and he always will be, and I thank him for that because the behaviour of a gentleman is always fair and honest. Yes, he gets cross and yes, he gets angry, but he is always a gentleman.

That is not what I actually wanted to say. A few weeks ago, when we had our summer, it was one very hot day, and we were opening the RAF Memorial that Angus had been involved in. Pauline and Norman were there and a few other members of the public. It was a jolly hot day. We stood under the shelter as much as we could, but we spoke to each other as colleagues for quite a long time, which was a pleasure. When we got to the formal part of the ceremony, one of the ladies there, and I am not going to say one of the elderly ladies because she was probably younger than me, felt very faint. She in fact did faint, and she was standing by my walker, and we used that to support her. It was very clear for a while that the best place for her would be home, and Angus took command there, and she did not live very far away. He helped use my walker to help carry her home. That was the act of a gentleman. That was the act of someone who cared, and that was the act of

someone who was willing to put himself forward to serve members of the public, and that was a selfless act because it was hot and Angus like me, is getting older. So, for all of the people there, most of whom were younger than us, that was sacrifice, and that is what Angus is about. I would like to say thank you, and thank you to Pauline and Norman as well, who helped with that on that very hot day, to take that lady home where she could be better served.

Andy Croy:

I am disappointed that this meeting has gone ahead, and I am disappointed with the report. The report says the cost of the items to be purchased will be met from the Mayor and Democratic Services budget. The report does not state the cost of this meeting. I guess the point of mentioning the Democratic Services budget was to try and put some distance between the total cost of this evening and the huge budgetary pressure in areas such as Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Home to School Transport, and emptying the bins to name but a few. Residents expect and deserve every penny of their Council Tax to be spent on delivering basic services well. If the Borough cannot deliver basic services to the standard reasonably expected by residents, the Council loses the moral authority to ask, to demand, that residents forego care services. Let us remind ourselves, every £1,000 spent this evening is £1,000 not available in the reserves at the end of the year, and every £1,000 not in the reserves at the end of the year, is £1,000 less for future spending on vital services.

But I have a confession to make. The Alderman Protocol was adopted in May 2016. This was my first meeting of the council. Looking back at the video, I can see that I voted for the adoption of the protocol. Looking back at the Minutes of the same meeting I can see that when the dust had settled on all of the appointments to outside bodies and committees, I came away with a grand total of one, the WBC representative to Age Concern. This poor harvest was to be repeated at Annual Council the following year. The fact is unless one is a member of a ruling group, one is never going to amass the years of eminent service that would warrant nomination for this type of role. It is also highly unlikely, unless one is very skilful, in one's choice of ward, the pool of the recipients of this award, are very small indeed. Had I in my first meeting of the Council appreciated this more clearly, I do not think that I would have voted for the role. After the current review of the Constitution, I will not be supporting the continuation of the role.

Clearly the amounts this evening are not huge, but I suspect not a single resident cares about tonight's meeting, but leadership involves taking the right decisions even when people are not looking. Leadership involves taking the right decisions even when others do not know that you have taken that decision, and leadership sometimes involves not doing the things that we would like to do. I am sure the vote tonight will have the necessary two thirds majority, but this meeting should never have been initiated and this meeting should never have been supported, and we will not be complicit in it.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey:

I have known Angus for quite a while. First as my in laws' neighbour, and then as a Borough Councillor. He has always been knowledgeable and a good man. I may not have always agreed with him and his politics, but I respected him, and he would

never utter absolute nonsense or try and prevaricate to push an issue. He was on the Fire Authority for 22 years. He also decided to build, he did not personally build them, but he was on the committee that decided to build the tri service emergency services in Hungerford, Crowthorne and Theale. He has also been an integral member of the Armed Forces Veteran Hub and the Armed Forces Member Honorary Champion. He is just an example of what a gentleman should be and is.

Pauline Helliard Symons:

I am very happy to support this resolution. I would have seconded the Motion, but I was beaten to it, although that is perhaps appropriate because a long while ago, I tried to persuade councillors to create the post of Honorary Alderman. I cannot remember if it was while I was Chairman of the District Council, or when I was Mayor, but at that time they were not minded to do so. So, I was absolutely delighted when Keith Baker succeeded, because there is no one that deserves it more than Angus Ross.

Speaking in favour of this is one of the pleasantest jobs I have done on this Council. I have known Angus better I think than any other Councillor past or present, since I was already a councillor when Angus was elected 32 years ago and was his fellow ward councillor for all that time. He became a councillor at a dark, mid-winter by-election in Wokingham Without, where only a few dozen people turned out to vote, but it could not have been a better result. As my fellow ward councillor, he was exemplary. I have seen his commitment and how hard he worked in all areas, how much of a team worker he was with successive Wokingham Without councillors, and how very well respected he was by the residents, who he always did his very best to engage with and help. His knowledge of planning was second to none. There was very genuine sadness from our local residents when they learned that he was stepping down from the Council.

Others will talk more about the huge work that he has done for the Borough, but I will mention his superb competence as the Chairman of the Planning Committee for many years, and as Chairman and then as Mayor. He was well respected and liked here as well, I believe from people of all parties. He was invariably polite and courteous, always calm, and rational, and he spoke sense. This was the same for his 22 years on the Fire Authority where he spearheaded some superb work. Among many other of his leading roles, he worked with Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Fire Services to integrate the Thames Valley Control Centre where 999 calls are taken, and chaired the Assets Committee for several years, where he saw through the modernisation of Hungerford Fire Station, and the building of two brand new fire stations in Crowthorne and Theale, integrating them with all the Police and Ambulance Services. He was also on the Panel which also appointed some of the best Chief Fire Officers Berkshire has ever had. The Fire Service was equally sorry to see him go and in recognition of his work, awarded him a silver fireman's axe.

As his fellow councillor, I have missed Angus and his wisdom, but I am delighted that he has agreed to accept this award for all his hard work and commitment to this Council.

Clive Jones:

Good evening, Angus, it is lovely to see you, and lovely to see your family here as well. I must not forget to say good evening to former Councillors David Sleight, David Lee, and up there Malcolm Richards. It is a pleasure to be supporting this well-deserved honour that the Council is bestowing on you tonight. Serving residents and the Council for 32 years is an incredible achievement and doing so with charm, clarity and courtesy is something that is not achieved by everybody. You have actually achieved that, and Angus, as the Mayor said, you are a true gentleman.

Shortly, after I joined the Council in 2016, I was appointed as the Opposition Spokesperson for the Environment. You were the Executive Member for the Environment. This led to many exchanges between the two of us, that were always conducted as I have said, with courtesy and respect. Angus always gave proper, factual replies, which is as a contrast to some of the replies from some of his colleagues at the time, which were often peppered with politics rather than facts.

Outside of the Chamber I have met Angus several times when he was collecting funds for the Thames Valley Air Ambulance that he supported, and continues to support now. Again, he would be unfailingly courteous and pleasant, and when I remarked to his charity colleagues that Angus was a councillor you could respect and work with even though you were from a different political persuasion, he certainly could not be described as tribal, they were often surprised that two councillors from different parties could be respectful to each other. Tonight, shows that, that can definitely happen. When Angus stood down at the 2022 elections, it was clear that his wise experience and his counsel would be missed by his Group. Stephen and I considered nominating you Angus to be an Alderman but decided to give your own Group a few months to do this, and we were very pleased that they have done so. We whole heartedly support your nomination. I, and I know the rest of the Group, wish you much happiness and good health in your retirement, and although you have moved out of the Borough, I am sure you will continue your affection and concern for the Borough residents that you have served for so long. Angus, you are exactly the right kind of former councillor who should be an Alderman of the Borough.

Laura Blumenthal:

Angus, you have been an exemplary role model and public servant to the residents of this Borough. I remember when I first joined this Council in my early twenties, baby of the Council, feeling pretty bewildered, you were an excellent mentor, always patient, a great sounding board, wise, and then, as now, respected across this Chamber. I remember thinking then, as I do still today, if I could be half as good a councillor as Angus Ross, I would be pretty excellent. You are an inspiration Mr Ross, thank you so much for the service that you have given our residents and it is very well deserved, you being an Honorary Alderman.

Shahid Younis:

Fellow councillors, today it is a special day. We gather here to appoint Angus Ross as Honorary Alderman. By conferring this title, we acknowledge the eminent service he has rendered to the Council and the residents of Wokingham Borough. Angus was one of the longest, if not the longest as Pauline has told me that she is the

longest serving, councillors serving Wokingham Borough Council for over 32 years. He held various prominent portfolios amongst others – Executive Member of Planning, Chairman of numerous scrutiny committees, Mayor of the Borough, and serving on the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority for over 22 years. We have all observed that throughout his tenure Angus demonstrated unwavering dedication, commitment, and a deep sense of service for our town and the residents of Wokingham Borough. He has consistently put the needs of others before his own, making a profound difference in the lives of many individuals, young and old, leaving behind a legacy of compassion, empathy, and inclusivity.

Angus, I have personally known you for the past 12 years, thank you for your support, advice, and mentorship. As elected councillors I would like to believe that we are here due to our strong commitment to public service, a passion for our communities, and putting the needs of the communities above our personal interests. This is not easy. It requires personal and family sacrifice and giving up our most precious asset we all have, which is our time. Angus, your dedication, and commitment has not gone unnoticed. In conclusion, I would like to say thank you to Angus. You exemplify the true spirit of altruism and civic responsibility. We are not only celebrating your past achievements but also draw inspiration from your journey. Your passion and dedication remind all of us that each one of holds to make a positive difference in our communities. As Mahatma Ghandi reminds us, the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others. I hope that you will all vote tonight, and join me in congratulating Angus, and thanking our newest Honorary Alderman for the outstanding service and commitment. Together, let us help build a better Borough that is a great place to live, to grow, and to do business in. A Borough that thrives on compassion, unity, and progress.

David Cornish:

As one of the new Members of the Council, the year of my election coincided with Angus deciding to step down, and therefore I have never shared a time with him in this Chamber, and indeed I cannot claim to know him as well as many people here, but I wished to speak tonight because I know Angus more by reputation than in person, and in his case a reputation amongst those who were not his political bed fellows but who held a sincere respect to his contribution to the residents of this Borough. When I first became involved in local politics many people, I met were happy to share their views of political activists of other parties, and it is fair to say that not all of those observations focused solely on the positive, but I never heard anyone say a bad word about Angus. The most frequent comment from those of a different political persuasion was that ‘his heart is in the right place’, or ‘he is one of the old-fashioned ones’, ‘decent enough chap’. Praise indeed, from those on the other side of the bench. I generally found that the longer a person had been involved in local matters, the greater the respect they had for Angus.

Angus, when I first had contact with you doing something on behalf of Finchampstead Parish Council some years ago you were usually, in fact always, the first to answer a message, and were always helpful in doing so when it would be far more easy to bat it off and leave it to someone else. In the time since when we have met and spoken you have been unfailingly courteous and pleasant, but I must say, and wholly unintentionally also leaving me with a slightly uncomfortable sensation that I really need to keep my standards up. In times steeped in political polemic your

behaviour and style set an example to us all. I may say in particular that your social media profile gives a lesson to too many people in this Chamber.

I will close by sharing a memory of a wet and windy weekend in I think it was my first campaign in the Borough, it was a weekend morning, many years back, and we bumped into each other each delivering campaign leaflets on our own, somewhere in the backend of Evendons ward. It was a foul morning and to me the sensible thing to do was share out each other's leaflets between us, get the job done, go home and dry out. So, I started across the road with that in mind, but I then hesitated and retreated, uncertain of the response that I would get, and perhaps breaking some protocol, committing some ghastly political faux pas. Angus, I never want to know what you might have said had I actually asked as I am still young and naive and I do not want my illusions shattered, but I think it speaks volumes of you and your reputation that I even considered the idea, and I can think of few others who can inspire the thought of trusting and respecting a political opponent in that way. It would have been an honour to have worked alongside you in this Chamber, but I am delighted to support your nomination as Alderman.

Keith Baker:

We have heard quite a few praises really to Angus, and you are probably going to hear more, so I thought I would take this opportunity to look at it from a different angle, to highlight to new Members like David, what you have to do to qualify for such an accolade. I was very privileged and proud when I was Leader in 2016, to be the person promoting the creation of Aldermen of Wokingham Borough Council, and getting it implemented. It is a very elite club to belong to, with only one other retired councillor ever to have been awarded the title of Honorary Alderman, and I refer to the legendary Bob Wyatt, who is unfortunately no longer with us.

So, what do you have to do to be nominated as an Honorary Alderman? Well, one of the first things is that you have to have had at least 20 years continuous period as a councillor, and you are retired. Very few councillors reach this milestone, and for those that do it is not automatic that they will become an Honorary Alderman. This award is not just a case of waiting to pass that 20 year trigger point, it is much more than that. Another criterion is what have you actually done in those 20 years? Well, I hope you will all agree that Angus has satisfied those requirements in an exceptional way serving on the Council and as Council representative on Outside Bodies. There is one role that Angus is absolutely unique with no one able to repeat that performance. It was Angus as Chairman of this Council who brilliantly steered this Council from a District to a Borough Council. It ultimately required the Queen to grant permission to do just that, which she did, and on the wall over there you can see the document granting us that change. One of the key changes to this was the Chairman of the Council was converted to the Mayor of the Council. Needless, to say there was only one person who deserved the right to be our very first Mayor. Angus was not only the first councillor to be our Mayor, he was also the first to be both Chairman and Mayor.

And so, we reach that final hurdle – this is universal acceptance of the current Councillors through the vote tonight to agree to award the title of Honorary Alderman to Angus. As with the whole process, a high hurdle of acceptance was required, with at least two thirds of those present voting to agree. So, you need to have at least 20

years as a councillor, you have to have demonstrated dedicated service and made significant contributions to both the Council and its residents, and thirdly you simply need to be liked by two thirds of those present. So, I hope that you will all agree that Angus Ross has significantly satisfied all the required criteria for an Honorary Alderman, and you all vote to demonstrate your personal acknowledgement of what he has done.

Jordan Montgomery:

When I first stood for election six years ago, I was up against Angus. I was a young man then. Many in this Chamber might argue that I am still a young man now. I understandably found this to be a slightly daunting event, knocking on the doors of strangers, and putting my face and name through letter boxes. I was bleach blonde in my hair then, so fortunately it is not so embarrassing anymore. However, what may have caused me the most worry was that I would not only have to meet my opponent, one with 25 years of experience in the Council business at that point, but who I would have to remain standing beside for at least a couple of hours outside of the polling station. Again, this was an entirely new experience for me. I feared that there may have been some resentment towards this university student attempting to challenge this seasoned councillor. At that time Angus had spent more time in the RAF than I had been alive on this planet. Angus welcomed me warmly and my fears were entirely unfounded. He greeted me without a hint of animosity and for the next two hours these were passed by with friendly chats on a variety of topics – his time in the forces, national politics, Brexit. He expressed genuine interest in my studies and the contents of my degree. In short, unlike the adversarial scenes I had seen within the House of Commons or on social media, Angus had taught me that even those from rival parties could be civil to one another and even jovial. I could not have asked for a better introduction to electoral politics.

In the years following I discovered that my impression of Angus was not unique. In fact, it was difficult to find anyone who had a bad thing to say about him, even amongst those residents of Wokingham Without who did not vote for him or agree with his politics, nonetheless had a great deal of respect for him. When I joined the Parish Council the sentiment amongst Members there was the same. He was considered a hardworking, considerate councillor, and above all else a gentleman. So, on behalf of the residents and Wokingham Without Parish Council, thank you, and I will be honoured to support tonight's vote.

Stephen Conway:

One of the problems of reserving your right on an occasion like this is that there is not much left to say that has not been said already. What I did want to do before I made the main points that I wanted to make was just briefly allude to the Labour Party's position on this, and I completely understand their concerns about the concept of an Honorary Alderman, but I am sure even the Labour Group would agree that this tonight is less about a matter of principle and more about a person, and it is on the person that I really want us to focus our attention.

I have known Angus since the mid 90s when I first joined the Council, and I served with him on the Planning Committee over many, many years. I greatly admired his measured assessment of complex applications and his deft guidance of the Committee towards sound, defensible decisions. The Committee often did not

realise it was being deftly guided, but it was, that was the deftness. The qualities he brought to the Planning Committee were evident in all aspects of his work on the Council – a clear and logical mind, an ability to get to the heart of the matter and an unfailing courtesy in dealing with those who held different views. To be sure Angus could be combative. I was on the receiving end of his sharp tongue on a few occasions, but he never made the mistake of seeing opponents as enemies to be done down at every opportunity. The phrase ‘a true gentleman,’ we have heard it mentioned quite a few times this evening, I have to say usually it is overused and extended perhaps beyond its natural boundaries, but I can think of no one to whom this phrase could better apply than to Angus.

Angus was highly regarded by the electorate of his ward. I know this not just because Pauline and Jordan have told me, I know it from my own personal experience. I spent some time in the recent election helping our excellent candidate Jordan Montgomery, now elected. In my doorstep conversations, even with Jordan’s supporters, I heard countless times, what a good and conscientious ward councillor Angus was. All these qualities Madam Mayor and the length of Angus’ service to the Borough, make him a very suitable candidate for an Honorary Alderman. Indeed, I can think of nobody more worthy of this recognition.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Council, in sincere appreciation of the distinguished public service rendered by him to the Borough of Wokingham does hereby admit Mr Angus Ross to be an Honorary Alderman of the Borough of Wokingham in recognition of his untiring service over a period of 32 years to the people of the Borough and particularly to those of the Wokingham Without Ward; on Committees of the Council, including as an Executive Member, to local organisations including the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority, and in the offices of Chairman and Mayor.

Following the resolution Alderman Ross addressed the Council as follows:

Madam Mayor, Councillors, Officers, and Guests, this is an honour, and I am privileged to be afforded this recognition. Thank you for the kind words that have been expressed this evening from all sides of the Council, which makes it especially gratifying to me. I am not quite sure I recognise myself at times. All you have said now puts an onus on me not to repeat too many things, and if I hesitate it is because I do not want to repeat too much.

As has been mentioned before this honorary position was first granted in 2016 to our late, great friend and prominent councillor and advocate for so many groups, Bob Wyatt. There are many others who have given a lot to this Council, and to the residents and businesses of our Borough. I do consider that I am representing those other past councillors, who have given so much to the community. Personally, I hope more councillors will be recognised for their contributions in the future, and this seems to me a very appropriate way to identify and to reward them publicly.

I do thank you all for attending this meeting within all your busy diaries and also for giving me the opportunity to address you. In my retirement I still remember very clearly the call on councillors’ time to fully meet the commitment of being an elected

community representative. This evening is an extra call on your time, and I am indebted to you for making it, and that is all of you. Of course, one of the delights of being an ex-councillor is that one is freer to say what one really thinks. I believe now, perhaps even more than when I was a councillor, that getting the balance of firstly one's responsibilities to one's ward residents and businesses, secondly the Borough's residents and businesses and lastly the political party imperatives, can be testing, and this has been referred to earlier this evening. At this local level I still believe that the last, the party-political part can sometimes get in the way of serving the best interests of the Borough. At times in the past, I recall situations where the councillors have not acted together as a joined-up Council, in issues where fundamentally the great majority of councillors individually supported that issue. This is perhaps easy to say now from the sidelines, but nevertheless I have always considered joint party working does not come to the fore easily enough, rather there is a tendency to try and get a particular party's policy to seem solely to be theirs. I remember a time when cross party officer supported working parties were convened, and these always led to better agreed outcomes, but perhaps it is not for me to lecture you now, and I will resist and restrict my rant to that one area.

May I now indulge myself to reflect on those 32 years that so many of you have referred to, and especially representing Wokingham Without. I suppose you can say now without Angus. So often that word 'without' was thrown at us by my ward residents over their local feelings. As has been said I was elected in 1990. It was the first of eleven elections, amusingly once unopposed. Did I have the largest or smallest majority, who knows? Actually, eleven is the number of Chief Executives I have seen in this Chamber. I have been privileged to represent the residents of Wokingham Without, and I enjoyed various ways to make and keep contact with the residents, schools, and organisations, including the quarterly Crowthorne Eye Magazine delivered to all homes in what might be termed Greater Crowthorne, the Bracknell and Wokingham parts, on a non-party basis. It was a good way to get and stay locally involved, Crowthorne being more joined by community then split by separate councils.

You heard that I had the privilege of being elected the Chairman in 2006, and just after getting my chain around my neck, I managed to get the Council to bring a Motion and to agree a Motion to petition the Queen for Wokingham to achieve Borough status. The scroll granting this, as has been referred to, is on the wall, and the previous chain is there. A small party from here collected it from the House of Lords Post Room, where we eventually found it unattended in a corner, the Post Room staff being totally unaware what the cardboard scroll containing the tube was. We went with a photographer, one Stewart Turkington, here tonight, still here. I hate to think how many pictures you have taken for me over the years Stewart, but you do a great job. So, there I was the first Borough Mayor, the whole process was at nil cost to the Council as I had worked with the officer team to get contributions from many businesses in the Borough, for the scroll, the new regalia as worn by the Mayor today, the oak tree planted outside this building and the celebration function held at the Oracle PLC as their contribution. The event was attended by the Lord Lieutenant and many dignitaries from the parishes, towns, Borough, and county. The then Leader was a reluctant supporter of this change of status and blocked any expenditure, including on adapting any signs on the Borough's, roads, parks etc from District to Borough. This I see is yet to be fully achieved over the last 16 years. I

can live in hope.

You heard that it has been my fortune to have had various involvements in the Council over the years. The last was to help improve the awareness of our Armed Forces, and our responsibilities to those in the Borough who are serving, their families and the many veterans. We established the appointment of an Armed Forces Champion amongst councillors each year, and I was pleased to take that role. I do urge the Council to continue to work towards best practice and its policies to the Armed Forces Covenant, which was adopted in 2013, and you all refocused in 2022.

As has been said my longest involvement was in planning, an absorbing area, but you will quickly find that you will never satisfy all the people all the time. Charing meetings for a large number of public attending that were very vocally opposed to the item being debated was an interesting challenge. I was the Executive Member for Planning for some years, the then new 2010 Local Plan was bedded in, together with adopting a number of supplementary planning guidance and the revised Borough Design Guide. I believe that all are now under a long-awaited review. I initiated two planning design award schemes in 1993 and 2007, which at that time highlighted good development. Whilst design is sometimes controversial and subjective, I have found that attention to it does lead to much better development, and this in turn can lead to better communities with all the social and environmental benefits that, that brings.

I then had five years as Executive Member for the Environment, and much of that has been referred to. It was a very enjoyable time for me, and I believe a successful period for the Council when we developed plans and financed the now completed leisure centres, established self-funding expansion for facilities, at our great Council country parks, and developed the new ongoing Greenways, rights of way, and tree programmes, and one little programme I still enjoy seeing the benefits of, is the introduction of wildflowers into our verges and ancillary green spaces. With this portfolio I was keen to support Sport and Leisure with work on diversity and inclusion, getting more active and also supporting those recovering from serious medical conditions. Long may the Council's support continue, working with the Sport Council, where I continue involvement. I must add that I do appreciate that in all these areas, much more progress has been made in the intervening 6 years since I have stepped away from that role. I worked on the policies and budgets for each of these areas with many committed and hard-working officers, who then implemented what we can see around the Borough today. I want to place on record my thanks to the many officers I worked with to achieve all that we did in all of these areas over the years. They did the work.

A major involvement was, as referred to, my time on the Fire Authority, where I worked with an incredibly focused and dedicated team of officers, and as you have heard I was involved with Fire Control, the new fire stations including the one in Wokingham, which now gives the town and the area 24/7 cover. Again, with the Armed Forces links. To me our county's Fire Service was an exemplar in joint officer and Member working.

I left the Council last year with few regrets after 32 years as it was high time a

younger person came in with new energy, ideas, and different experience to draw on. Keep it up David, my successor. I am delighted that my family have come here today, and of course Christine no longer has to have mealtimes dictated by Council anymore. Also, may I thank the former councillors supporting me here tonight, ex Councillors David Lee, who gave me opportunities when he was Leader, this was after my time of Mayor, when I genuinely thought that my Council involvement had effectively ended, and also David Sleight, who was a very hard working and dedicated colleague. Of course, my other ward colleague who has been referred to, Pauline Helliard Symons is still with you and has been a councillor even longer than I was. So, may I thank my many Borough councillor colleagues for their support over all these years, and the residents of Wokingham Without for keeping electing me, and for the many opportunities I have been offered in the Council which has led to your unexpected but humbling recognition today. Nowadays I can view the Borough from our home, a full 600 yards from the Borough boundary, with our views from our apartment in Henley, to see the wooded vistas of the independent republic of Remenham, this is how I referred to it to the last leader John Halsall.

In drawing my speech to a close now, I must apologise to everyone for causing a delay in this ceremony as the first agreed date coincided with a close family member's funeral in Scotland. I appreciate the efforts of Democratic Services, Priya, and Madeleine, had to undergo to get this evening to happen. I will of course as Honorary Alderman plan to keep a close link with you the Council, and the community as detailed in the role description of this appointment. Thank you, Madam Mayor, for this occasion which I will always remember as a humbling but rewarding and memorable mark of my association with the Council. Thank you, friends, and councillors, and of course your predecessors, and may the Council continue to be, what I saw as one of the strongest, highly innovative and sound councils in the country. Good fortune to you all.