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**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Civic Offices
Shute End
Wokingham
RG40 1BN

E-mail: democratic.services@wokingham.gov.uk

To: All Members

COUNCIL - THURSDAY, 21ST SEPTEMBER, 2023

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 20 July 2023 were omitted from the Council agenda and are attached.

Agenda No	Item
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37.	<u>Minutes of Previous Meeting</u> (Pages 3 - 36)
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To confirm the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2023 and of the extraordinary Council meeting on 24 July 2023.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Parsonage'.

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL
HELD ON THURSDAY, 20 JULY 2023 FROM 7.30 PM TO 10.58 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, Andy Croy, Phil Cunnington, David Davies, Peter Dennis, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, Catherine Glover, Andrew Gray, David Hare, Peter Harper, Pauline Helliar-Symons, Graham Howe, Chris Johnson, Clive Jones, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Sarah Kerr, Abdul Loyes, Morag Malvern, Charles Margetts, Rebecca Margetts, Andrew Mickleburgh, Jordan Montgomery, Alistair Neal, Stephen Newton, Ian Pittock, Ian Shenton, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Tony Skuse, Caroline Smith, Mike Smith, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane, Alison Swaddle, Marie-Louise Weighill and Shahid Younis

Members In Attendance Virtually

Councillors: Stuart Munro.

16. Apologies

Apologies for absence were submitted from Gary Cowan, John Halsall and Jackie Rance.

17. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Council meeting held on 18 May 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor, subject to confirmation that Andrew Gray, Jordan Montgomery, Stephen Newton and Ian Pittock were all in attendance.

18. Declarations of Interest

Declarations of interest were submitted as follows:

Councillor Prue Bray declared a personal interest in Item 28 (Statement from Council-owned companies) as a Non-Executive Director of Berry Brook Homes, Wokingham Housing Ltd. and WBC Holdings Ltd.

Councillor Stephen Conway declared a personal interest in Item 28 (Statement from Council-owned companies) as a Non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes and WBC Holdings Ltd.

Councillor David Cornish declared a personal interest in Item 28 (Statement from Council-owned companies) as a Non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes and WBC Holdings Ltd.

Councillor David Hare declared a personal interest in Item 28 (Statement from Council-owned Companies) as a Non-Executive Director of Optalis Ltd.

Councillor Rachel Bishop-Firth declared a personal interest in Item 29 (Motion 502) as she was taking part in the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

Councillor Jane Ainslie declared a personal interest in Item 29 (Motion 502) as a

member of Wokingham Gossip Girls – Wokingham Action for Refugees.

Councillor Phil Cunnington declared a personal interest in Item 29 (Motion 502) as he was taking part in the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

19. Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor informed Members of two residents of the Borough who had been recognised in the recent King's honours list. Firstly, Councillor Prue Bray (MBE for political services, locally and nationally). Secondly, Clive Waterman – former head of Southlake Junior School (BEM for services to schools' music and charity).

Councillor Prue Bray gave details of two further residents who had been recognised in the honours list. Firstly, Emma Cantrell, CEO of the First Days Children's Charity. Secondly, Vickie Robertson, founder of Kaleidoscopic UK – the charity which supported survivors of domestic abuse.

20. Public Question Time

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Mayor invited members of the public to submit questions to the appropriate Members.

20.1 Christina Haigh asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

Since 31st March, I have twice emailed Messrs Easton, Corrigan, Searle, Chancellor and Milburn with my question, but have had no response from anyone. My question pertains to Biggs Lane, and the road safety of children crossing that road to reach Farley Hill Primary School since it relocated.

The temporary crossing that we had been using - actually better located than the new one, i.e. closer to the school and further from the Princess Marina Drive roundabout – is now gone. Its removal has led to traffic in both directions speeding up between the permanent crossing and the Langley Common Road roundabout. Parents are asking me if the former temporary crossing could be transformed into a zebra crossing, what also other traffic calming will be put into place to slow traffic on Biggs Lane? What plans are there to address this?

Biggs Lane is now a very busy road and would benefit from additional road markings and traffic calming e.g. speed bumps. The people in our area would doubtless be grateful if the dangerous "road narrowing" implemented throughout Arborfield, could be avoided. They are an accident waiting to happen and we want to keep the school community safe.

Answer

Thank you Christina for your question. I can only apologise if you have not had a response to your question from officers. As you have highlighted, a permanent crossing as required by the wider development of the Arborfield Housing growth area has been installed and the temporary one removed. The location of the temporary one was positioned where it was only for safety of users during the construction of the permanent crossing.

Much work and assessments went into the developer's planning submission for the Arborfield area along with walking and cycling routes that were developed, considered and approved by the Planning Committee. The formal crossing which

has been installed permanently has been provided by the developers in line with consents and meets the required Road Safety Audits. There are still parts of the wider development that remain under construction along with additional walking and cycling facilities.

Based on the concerns that you have raised, the Council's Traffic Management team have reviewed the speed limits within the area you have highlighted on Biggs Lane. The results highlight that the average speed observed by users are compliant with the posted speed limit, demonstrating that vehicles are adhering to the speed limit of the road and that no further intervention is required at this time. Thank you, however, for bringing this and your concerns to our attention. We will continue to monitor it.

In relation to your comments on the 'road narrowing's' introduced last year as part of the Arborfield Village Improvements scheme, associated with the delivery of the Arborfield Cross Relief Road, this scheme has been designed and delivered in line with the Department for Transport (DfT) design standards and requirements.

20.2 Paul Stevens asked the Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services the following question, which was answered by the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure:

Question:

Earlier this month, the Government clarified laws made in 2015, that taxpayers should not be charged for disposing of household waste at civic amenity sites – scrapping backdoor “tip taxes”. It has also repeatedly stated that councils should not be charging for such DIY household waste disposal. Under the proposals, household DIYers would not be charged to get rid of waste including plasterboards, bricks and bath units.

Despite this promise from the UK Government, Re3, which runs the recycling centres at Longshot Lane in Bracknell and Smallmead Road in Reading, is sticking to the charges, at least for now. As a resident living in a rural part of Wokingham I can report that fly tipping has got progressively worse since the pandemic and shows no sign of reducing. Charging for waste disposal makes no sense if it encourages fly tipping which then has to be cleared by the Council. It creates an unsightly environment which is potentially hazardous and encourages others to add to it.

Can the Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services confirm that re3 will be dropping their charges for householder disposal of DIY waste as soon as the new legislation is in place?

Answer

The re3 Councils – Bracknell Forest, Reading, and Wokingham Boroughs, have taken note of the recent announcement by the Environment Minister regarding charges for the disposal of DIY waste by householders at Recycling Centres.

We understand that new legislation will be introduced this year, allowing for free disposal of DIY waste up to two 50L rubble bags (or one bulky or fitted item no larger than the approximate size of a bathtub) and that would be at a frequency of 4 visits per household over a 4-week period.

While we await the legislative changes, we will assess their impact on the sites'

operation, make all necessary arrangements, and provide further communications to householders in due course. For now, householders who wish to deposit their DIY waste at the re3 Recycling Centres should continue to pay the agreed charges as usual.

Supplementary Question:

Are we happy that people are being charged effectively twice to dispose of their DIY waste in their rates when re3 are supposed to be taking it, and then again when they turn up at the tip?

Supplementary Answer:

I am afraid that is not correct because the DIY waste and the other things that are charged for upon delivery at the waste recycling centres are self-funding. They are not for profit. They do not make a profit and they do not make a loss. The money that re3 takes from householders delivering those things is actually paying for that specific service only.

20.3 Jim Frewin asked the Executive Member for Planning and the Local Plan the following question:

Question:

Over the past few years, successive administrations have informed residents that they are in conversation/negotiation with Government Housing Ministers with regards to Wokingham housing numbers. I realise that the revolving door situation with multiple Ministers has made these conversations difficult. My question to the Executive member for Planning will you please provide a detailed update on these conversations/negotiations including latest schedule, actions taken and actions planned.

Answer

Since May 2022, we have sought to engage with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on how the planning system should be reformed to make it fair to all parts of the country, consistent, and understandable to residents and businesses. We have written several times to several different Ministers with respect to national planning policy reforms and our letters are a matter of public record.

As you know, in December 2022 the government published proposed reforms to national planning policy. Aspects of the proposed reforms reflected our ask, such as the ability to take account of past over delivery of housing. We have cautiously welcomed the proposed reforms, but continue to lobby for further changes, such as how housing need is calculated and distributed spatially across England.

Whilst the government indicated they would respond to their proposed reforms in the Spring, the messaging is now suggesting a response in the Autumn. The delay is disappointing, and we will keep reminding the DLUHC of our views.

The Leader has, therefore, recently written once again to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up to emphasise the importance of the proposed reforms in providing clarity to for local authorities on key issues such as past over delivery in both assessing planning applications and when preparing a Local Plan. We have also

offered the opportunity to meet and discuss the issues we raise with Ministers direct, but that offer has yet to be taken up. That offer remains 'on the table'.

And finally, despite the government's delays, we are continuing to progress the Local Plan, and an updated programme will be considered at Executive next week. This proposes the publication of the Submission Plan in November this year, followed by submission to the Secretary of State in 2024, and examination in public thereafter.

Supplementary Question:

That is very interesting to hear that you are writing about national policy. The question was about Wokingham's housing numbers. The Government only sets one housing figure for each administration, this being the minimum number of builds required per year. This figure is publicly available although it does take some finding. The Government also provides a number of complex calculations to inflate this minimum number. Some administrations choose to simply use the minimum number. Wokingham chooses to apply all the additional calculations. During the Partnership period I directly asked the question of the then Leader on the minimum number. He was unaware of the minimum number. He asked the Executive Member for Planning who was also unaware. Given that lack of awareness can you please explain how and what criteria you have been using to discuss with Ministers, the housing numbers for Wokingham, not national policy?

Supplementary Answer:

My current understanding of the housing number for Wokingham Borough has changed to 795 houses per annum. Regarding those details of minimum numbers, I will give a written reply.

20.4 Emma Webster asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

On 17th June in the early hours of the morning a motorist travelling down Rectory Road went into the railings at the junction of Rectory Road and Wiltshire Road causing significant damage to the railings, which had just been repaired after the previous incident occurring at the same junction a few months prior. This is now the third incident in the last six months and seventh in the last few years. When a question was asked previously at Full Council the response given was "the absence of information about individual collisions means that it is not possible to identify factors that may have contributed to the recent spate of incidents." Unfortunately, but unsurprisingly, the motorist in this latest incident neither remained at the site of the accident, nor reported they were responsible for the damage. So, can I please ask, what measures are the Council going to take to ensure safety at this junction so that all road users go round the bend rather than through the railings?

Answer

Thank you Emma for your question. We understand your concerns about the safety of road users at this location and the need for measures to prevent further accidents.

As we had previously reported through a Council question from Councillor Burgess and correspondence with a local resident that, without information about the individual collisions, it is difficult for the Council to determine what the causes for the incidents are and, therefore, the appropriate course of action that could be taken.

Any action that we do take must be appropriate and proportionate. Introducing unnecessary changes to the layout to resolve an issue of driver error may have significant and possibly detrimental impact during other periods. Any changes we do make will be deliberate, but also done in a phased approach.

We have reviewed all the lining and signing at this location and have introduced new SLOW carriageway markings on the approaches to the junction. Since the last incident we have investigated at the location where the vehicles are coming off the road and are planning to introduce chevron signs on the fences, subject to the owner's permission. We will also be looking at the kerbing at the point where these vehicles have been leaving the road as it would appear the former driveway was not raised as part of the development. Raising these kerbs may help and we will look to resolve this as soon as possible with the landowner.

The Council is committed to ensuring the safety of all road users, and we do take this matter seriously. We will work diligently to implement appropriate measures to help try to address the recurring accidents at the junction and aim to prevent further incidents.

Supplementary Question:

If the chevrons are found not to be successful, and obviously there is a concern from the residents, not just for road users but also pedestrians particularly school children and residents from the development, and others that walk along past it, can I have your commitment that you would be prepared to meet with the residents and I to discuss further options, along with Technical Officers from your Highways Team?

Supplementary Answer:

Yes, I certainly will do.

20.5 Tony Johnson asked the Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Housing the following question:

Back in January this year, Full Council voted unanimously to change the constitution - to reform it in line with the 21st century needs, needs of the staff, the elected representatives and the residents.

Please would the new leader bring us up to date on the progress of the changes to the Constitution and any plans this administration has to consult before the changes are brought before this Council for consideration?

Answer

I am pleased to report that the project is underway to deliver a fundamental review of the Constitution. This Constitution has of course been in place a very long time and there have been various amendments and changes, but the fundamental structure has been there since we became a unitary authority. As you can imagine, this is a significant and complex task. The technical work of drafting and reviewing the Constitution will be performed by the Council's Constitution Review Working Group and the Council's Corporate Leadership Team, with advice and oversight from external experts to ensure our new Constitution reflects the latest best practice. I expect Council to receive the results of the review before the end of the municipal

year.

The Council exists to serve residents and the need to put them at the heart of how the Council operates is fundamental to this review. We welcome views from the public and our partners, and will be consulting in the autumn to ensure their views and suggestions are considered as part of the review.

Supplementary Question:

Thank you for providing a response and I look forward to the consultation. As far as changes to the Constitution are concerned, we know that they are all complicated and sometimes quite sensitive, and in May this year a number of substantive changes to the Constitution were made at the same time as the usual reshuffle due to the changes in responsibility. One of these was the removal of the provision for Executive Members to examine contracts for procurements, but was not brought to this Council. Will the new Constitution contain a provision as the current one does to ensure that all substantive changes are brought before this Council, even if it is only a matter of courtesy, please?

Supplementary Answer:

I would need to check that you are accurate in your claims about these changes. My understanding is rather different from yours. I do not want, off the top of my head, to contradict you. I need to look into this, and I will give you a written response.

21. Petitions

There were no petitions.

22. Update of Local Code of Corporate Governance

Council considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 33 to 56, which sought approval of the updated Local Code of Corporate Governance, as recommended by the Audit Committee.

The report stated that the Local Code of Corporate Governance (the Code) formed part of the Council's Constitution and was previously updated by Council in November 2020. The Code helped to ensure that the Council's business was transacted in accordance with the law and proper standards, that public money was safeguarded and that risks were managed appropriately. The Code set out how the Council met the seven principles of good governance including integrity, openness, defined outcomes, transparency and risk management.

It was proposed by Councillor Rachel Burgess and seconded by Councillor Jordan Montgomery, that the recommendation in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Local Code of Corporate Governance, as recommended by the Audit Committee at its meeting on 7 June 2023, be approved.

23. Twyford Neighbourhood Plan

Council considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 57 to 75, which gave details of the Twyford Neighbourhood Plan (the Plan).

The report stated that Twyford Parish Council had produced the Plan in order to help shape how development was managed in its area. The Plan contained a number of

policies on issues such as housing, climate change, the natural, built and historic environment, community facilities, retail centres, active travel and highways. The Plan did not allocate new land for development. It was supported by two key pieces of technical evidence, a Housing Needs Assessment and a Design Guidelines and Codes report.

The report stated that a referendum on the Plan was held on 6 July 2023. 88.5% of residents voting voted yes, that they wished the Plan to be used to help determine planning applications within the parish of Twyford. A resolution of Council was required to formally “make” (adopt) the Plan. Once made the Plan would form part of the statutory development plan for the Borough.

Councillor Charles Margetts sought clarification on how potential changes to the national Green Belt Policy may impact on the Plan. Councillor Lindsay Ferris stated that the new Local Plan would take account of all the neighbourhood plans across the Borough. Councillor Stephen Conway confirmed that the Green Belt did not impact on Twyford, it was in Hurst and Ruscombe.

It was proposed by Councillor Lindsay Ferris and seconded by Councillor Stephen Conway, that the recommendations in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED That Council:

- 1) make (adopt) the Twyford Neighbourhood Plan so that it forms part of the statutory Development Plan, pursuant to Section 38A (4) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004;
- 2) publish a Decision Statement pursuant to Regulation 19 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) (“the Regulations”) in order to give effect to the recommendation above;
- 3) delegate to the Director of Place and Growth, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan, and in agreement with the Qualifying Body, to make any spelling, grammatical, typographical or factual corrections to the Plan and supporting documents.

24. Outcome of Code of Conduct Complaint

Council considered a notification that, following a complaint, an independent investigation had concluded that Councillor John Halsall had breached three clauses of the Council’s Member Code of Conduct. The breaches related to the circulation of a letter to residents in Norreys ward prior to the May 2022 local elections.

Councillor Halsall had been asked to make a written apology to the complainant which he had done and was also receiving training on the Code of Conduct.

The Constitution required that the Code of Conduct breaches be reported to the Council. No further action was required.

It was proposed by Councillor Stephen Conway and seconded by Councillor Andy

Croy, that the recommendation set out in the Agenda be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council notes that Councillor John Halsall has been found to be in breach of the Member Code of Conduct.

25. Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board Annual Report 2022-23

Council considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 77 to 95, which presented the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board Annual Report for 2022/23.

The report highlighted progress against Health and Wellbeing Board priorities and the activities of the individual action/partnership groups.

The Annual Report demonstrated the work of the action/partnership groups and partners in implementing the Wokingham Strategy into Action, to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for residents.

It was proposed by Councillor David Hare and seconded by Councillor Morag Malvern, that the recommendation in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council note the 2022/23 Annual Report of the Chair of the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board, as agreed by the Board at its meeting on 15 June 2023.

26. Member Question Time

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Mayor invited Members to submit questions to the appropriate Members.

26.1 Rebecca Margetts asked the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan the following question:

Question:

In Liberal Democrat local election literature Councillor Pittock stated that Sainsbury's will run the supermarket and negotiations for the pub are underway in the new Arborfield Green village Centre.

In a recent social media post Councillor Pittock has stated that a legal agreement is in place with Sainsburys (a lease will follow) and discussions are being held with a publican.

The residents of Finchampstead South are delighted to hear this and have waited so long for this progress. Can you advise me of the latest updates?

Answer:

Thank you for your question.

I can confirm that officers are in discussions about the supermarket and pub site with Crest and Sainsburys. These discussions are ongoing, and we expect to see an application for the supermarket to be submitted in either late summer or early autumn with construction likely to commence in 2024.

The Council is not party to the land discussions between Crest and Sainsburys, but we are informed that negotiations with are at an advanced stage. Discussions between Crest and a pub operator are also underway.

Supplementary Question:

There is, and I have spoken with Crest myself, no legal agreement in place with Sainsburys yet. It is still ongoing. So how can residents from Arborfield Green and the Village area moving forwards, trust the Council, when misleading information is given in election material?

At this point in the meeting in line with Rule 4.2.12k, Councillor Lindsay Ferris proposed a short adjournment to enable him to speak to Councillor Pittock regarding the question. This was seconded by Councillor Prue Bray. The adjournment was agreed.

Following the adjournment Councillor Rebecca Margetts was requested to rephrase her supplementary question.

How can residents trust the Council when there has been misleading information in election literature?

Supplementary Answer:

I am quite happy to answer that one. First of all, your question indicates Councillor Pittock, was not a councillor at the time. Secondly, it is not the responsibility of the Council over election material, so I do not think it is a pertinent question.

At this point in the meeting in line with Rule 4.2.12m to suspend a particular rule of procedure Councillor Andy Croy proposed that 4.2.10.8 (Length of Question Time) be suspended to allow all Member Questions to be put. This was seconded by Councillor Rachel Burgess. Upon being put to the vote this was agreed.

26.2 Charles Margetts asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

Can you tell me if the tender to for the redevelopment of California Crossroads has been awarded by WBC to a contractor and when the work is expected to start and finish?

Answer:

Thank you, Charles, for your question. As indicated in the mail to you dated 7th June, the contract has been awarded to BQS Management and an initial meeting with the Council took place on the 13 June.

WBC and BQS will be undertaking a site visit to review the constraints and then the contractor will update their programme for us to share with businesses, Members, and residents. We hope to start construction in summer 2024 but will confirm the programme when it has been fully prepared with the contractor.

Supplementary Question:

I met yesterday with the garage, shops, vets, dentist, and restaurants at the Crossroads. They are disappointed that there has been no engagement with them

for the last 4 years, and that their petition has not been heard, to stop the scheme. Looking to the future I note your comments and what you have just said. Can you give me a firm date when Officers will engage with these businesses, take their concerns on board, and try and reassure them that now this scheme is going ahead, they will be listened to, engaged with, and concerns will be dealt with, because that is what they would like to know?

Supplementary Answer:

I will come back to you with a firm date once I have spoken with Officers because they are currently working with a contractor on this.

26.3 Pauline Helliard-Symons asked the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan the following question:

Question:

My residents would like you to make a commitment not to allow 835 additional houses in the north east corner of Wokingham Without, in the green gap between Wokingham and Bracknell. Will you make this commitment not to put this site in the new Local Plan?

Answer:

The land I believe you are referring to is situated immediately south of the planned housing within the South Wokingham Strategic Development Location (SDL). The land you refer to has been promoted by developers for consideration through the Local Plan process.

You may recall that the last administration approved a draft planning strategy for consultation – the Revised Growth Strategy Consultation, which took place at the end of 2021. Reviewing this I note that the Growth Strategy consultation suggested the land as one of the preferred options to meet the Borough’s housing need, proposing around 835 houses on it. Through this consultation, everyone has had an opportunity to comment on this option.

Looking forward, I am working with officers to look carefully at all the options for how we can best plan for our housing and development needs in ways that ensure that our new Local Plan will pass as ‘sound’ at public examination. The programme for taking forward the local plan will be discussed at Executive next week.

Clearly, I cannot pre-determine the Local Plan process, with it being essential that all councillors keep an open mind until the matter ready for discussion. I can however assure you that we will carefully consider all the views that have been expressed by residents alongside those of stakeholders and importantly, the technical evidence that must guide us to the best and most sustainable locations for new development to be located.

Supplementary Question:

I am absolutely aware that it was in the draft Local Plan, and as you will be aware, the draft is to gauge people’s reactions to what is in it, and the reaction of my local residents against this site was huge. 100% I would say. I do not know of a single person who was in favour of it.

My question is, will you come and view this site with me to see its value as a Green

Gap between Wokingham, Crowthorne and Bracknell, and to see its value as an environmentally valuable open space, as well as its potential highway dangers if there is a development there? Will you come and see it with me please?

Supplementary Answer:

Yes, give me some dates and I will come, and ask some Officers, or an Officer, to come with me, and we can have a look at the site in question.

26.4 David Davies asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:

Question:

I was delighted that this year the Council chose to promote biodiversity through Plantlife's "No Mow May" initiative, encouraging residents to let their lawns grow for a critical month in the year to help local wildlife, particularly our pollinators.

I was therefore surprised and disappointed that WBC chose to start cutting the grass in my ward in the middle of May and as a result am aware of some residents that have gone ahead and cut their own grass in frustration at this do as I say approach. Can the executive member confirm why this has happened and commit that this will not happen in future years.

Answer:

The Borough's grass continues to be cut in May as it would be impractical for the contractor to stop its operation for a month. The grass cutting cycle for most of our verges and informal open spaces can typically be longer than a month when especially allowing for weather and ground conditions, which then also allows smaller plants such as daisies and birds-foot-trefoil to flower, whilst providing a food source for bees, butterflies, and other invertebrates.

In our high use open spaces and sightlines, there is a requirement to cut the grass more often, however, we will often have designated areas of long grass which is cut annually and that helps to provide food and shelter for wildlife.

Supplementary Question:

Since the end of 'No Mow May' we have had another problem around the Borough, seemingly 'No Mow June' and 'No Mow July' as well. Residents are worried for their children and animals over ticks and overgrowth reducing visibility at junctions, despite the comments that have just been made. This administration is mowing when it should not and not when it should. What is being done to ensure that this shambles does not happen and continue again next year?

Supplementary Answer:

I disagree with the statement that it is mowing when it should not and not mowing when it should. The problems this year were almost exclusively due to the weather, particularly March being the wettest March for 102 years since records began, April being wetter than usual. Machinery was sinking into the ground, it could not be cut in a lot of places, so we got well behind. By the time the weather changed, and the grass shot up then it became harder to cut and the cuts took longer. It has been an awful job to catch up. We cannot guarantee that it will not happen next year because we do not know what the weather will be like next year.

26.5 Phil Cunnington asked the Executive Member for Active Travel,

Transport & Highways the following question:

Question:

Could the Executive Member explain how someone would park in a town centre car in the evening if they wanted to leave their car overnight until 8am the next morning, without incurring a fine?

Answer:

Thank you, Phil, for your question.

The ticket machines have a facility to prepay for your parking either by card or cash. After you have entered your vehicle registration number you will be asked to choose a payment option.

If you are using a card than at the machine you can increase the parking period by using the + symbol. As you increase the time period the expiry time and date is displayed on the screen and also shows the amount that will be charged to your card.

For cash payments at a machine, it is slightly different. You will need to insert the amount needed to cover the additional time period. For example, should you arrive at 7pm and wish to stay until 8am the next day you would need to insert £3.50, for a car park in Wokingham.

The machines when calculating the amount will take into account the evening charge of £1 and the free overnight period which extends the stay until 6am. Anyone doing this before 10pm will not need to obtain a free vend ticket for the overnight stay, but you will need to obtain a ticket if you park after 10pm.

In addition, residents are able to purchase an overnight residents permit which enables them to park for 6pm to 8am. For an annual permit this would cost £161 which is the equivalent to 44p per evening / overnight period.

Supplementary Question:

May I say thank you to the Member for his answer. It reminds me of a Monty Python sketch about moving your coat to a lower peg before lunch, after you have moved your shoes to a different cupboard. I have pictures of bleary-eyed travellers staying in the Premier Inn or wherever, making their way to the car parks in order to pay the ticket for the morning, and that is what drove this question. However, what has further driven my question and my supplementary, is the confusion for the Members in this very Chamber about how they would deal with parking in the car park in order to attend this meeting, which included many, many back and forth conversations with officers in the Council, as you will know as I think some of our Lib Dem friends were involved in them.

So, my question is can you please consider, and ask your Officers to consider, making the rules simpler and making the signage clearer, and written in plain English so that people know what is expected of them so that they do not get a fine for parking incorrectly.

Supplementary Answer:

The signs on site are in plain English. It is £1 for the evening charge in Wokingham, and that allows you to park from 6pm through to 10pm. If you want to extend your stay it allows you when you put your registration you press the button and you see the + sign come up, and it says 'additional time'. All that information is there.

26.6 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**Question:**

Could the responsible Executive Member for Children's Services update the Council on the latest plans to deliver SEND facilities within Wokingham Borough?

Answer:

Our plan of action for development of SEND facilities in the coming years includes:

- The opening of Oak Tree Special School ultimately providing a total of 150 places of which 75 will be for Wokingham children which will open in September 2023
- The expansion of Addington Special School in Autumn 2023 with 40 additional places for younger pupils in the Farley Hill site as a satellite to the main school.
- Two new special schools with funding already secured from the DfE providing at least 200 new places by 2026/27. One is for pupils with social emotional and mental health difficulties and the other for pupils with cognitive difficulties.
- Wokingham recently successfully bid for an additional £6.3m high needs capital funding from the DfE which will provide the following:
 - Re-configuring our existing services in mainstream schools to make resource bases more effective and introduce a new higher tier of support through SEND units providing around an additional 100 places by 2026.
 - new local services for post-16's with SEND with a focus on routes into employment.
- Investing in a new SEND support service and local specialist outreach services to build confidence and skills in mainstream settings, so that more children can go to their local school.

Supplementary Question:

Thank you for the answer, Prue, and for holding a meeting with the various Ward Members who had an interest in the two SEND schools for Hatch Farm. I would like to say that some Wokingham children travel a long way to Ascot and Newbury, and I have no doubt that these extra schools will make life for the parents and the children much better. It is important to recognise that no children must be left behind so I welcome these schools and I expect our residents will also.

Can I ask that we have better PR on SEND schools, using simple English to explain to our residents the need to have different schools to meet the children's needs? In the consultation ending tomorrow, can I ask that it be recognised in SEND provision that one size does not fit all, especially for the over 16's? but thank you for your explanation so far. It is very welcome and very positive.

Supplementary Answer:

The consultation you are referring to, I think, is the Home to School Transport consultation. There is no doubt at all that many of our children with Special

Educational Needs are needing to travel a long way, and having schools in the Borough will help them with shorter journeys, but also help our Home to School transport bill, which has unfortunately risen by about 90% in the last 5 years. It has gone from £3million to £5.8million, and it is ever expanding, and we cannot live with that sort of increase, and we are going to have to make changes to our Home to School Transport Policy, and consider how we can make the money stretch as far as possible. Certainly, the new provision will help children in all those ways, and I am very pleased that we are able to do it.

26.7 Keith Baker asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport & Highways the following question:

Question:

I have a copy of the original agreement between Wokingham Borough Council (WBC), Taylor Wimpy and Woodley Properties signed on the 2nd May 2012. It is quite interesting reading particular the section 7 which is all about Highways. As is normal for a large development such as this (Sandford Farm) the agreement includes developer contributions to Bus Service Enhancements which is £629,225, Travel Plan Purpose £122,326.40 and Infrastructure or other Transport Improvements £1,297,248.60. A grand total of over £2 million which should have been spent in Woodley mitigating against the impact of this large development.

It also includes a clause which says that after 10 years any unused money can be used anywhere at WBC's discretion. Well, the 10 years are now up so I would like to know how this large sum of money has been spent. So can you please provide a full breakdown of all the projects that this money was spent on.

Answer:

Thank you Keith for your question. You are correct that there are separate clauses in relation to unspent funds for the Bus Service Enhancements and Travel Plan although not quite as you have described. There is an associated deed of variation linked under planning reference 152651 that relates to an additional sum for public transport.

The 10-year deadline is from receipt of the date of funds due/received and not the date of the agreement. As many of these were paid in several instalments the 10-year expiry date varies for each instalment. The earliest date for one being September 2024 and the money has already been spent. The next to expire is in 2026 and the team have this in hand to ensure that the target date is met.

There is a table, I will not go through it all, I will summarise it.

Highlighted within the table below is an overview of the funds spent to date and together with remaining allocation.

Project Name	Total spend to date	Remaining allocation
Bader Way Phase 1,2&3	£539,656.73	£918,938.80
Hurricane Way School Crossing	£25,178.30	£0.00
My Journey - Woodley	£68,125.56	£62,242.22

Public Transport - No.19 Services	£147,000.00	£0.00
Transport corridor improvements - Shepherds Hill to TVP P&R	£24,500.00	£569,319.47
Wokingham Borough Cycle Network - Kingfisher Drive	£18,014.65	£0.00
Grand Total	£822,475.24	£1,550,500.49

This should help demonstrate that the Officers have carried out their duties and enacted the associated agreements in respect of S106 funds. The fund's total greater than the £2m as there is indexation linked to the funds and payments in line with the legal agreements.

I trust this helps answer your question.

Supplementary Question:

I look forward to seeing that table.

I recall major comments from the administration about the bus services, generally in Wokingham, but specifically in Woodley, saying that there was no money to fund that so therefore they would have to restrict the service/withdraw the service – it is all the fault of the previous administration. But clearly as you have just demonstrated, a large sum was actually available to fund the 19 service, which is a valuable question. So, can I ask you for the future, because Woodley councillors have not had any information about this expenditure that you gone through, for the future, it is quite a large sum of £1million, can I get your commitment that you or your officer will engage with councillors of Woodley to understand how that is being spent before the fact and not after the fact?

Supplementary Answer:

Yes, I can certainly do that for you.

26.8 Andrew Gray asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question

Residents in my ward feel unsafe using the junction between the B3270 and Whitley Wood Lane due to the number of accidents and near misses over the last year.

What is the Council doing to make this junction safer?

Answer

Thank you, Andrew, for your question. I understand that residents in your ward have expressed concerns about the safety of the junction between the B3270 and Whitley Wood Lane.

The Council uses a database of Personal Injury Accidents (PIA) to assess the safety of the roads in the Borough. This data is provided by the Police following any Road Traffic Collision (RTC) that resulted in an injury to anyone involved. The Council do not have records of any RTC's that have resulted in just damage only accidents.

Upon reviewing the available PIA data, it was found that this particular junction was not among the top 50 sites with the highest number of PIAs in the Borough. The

frequency of PIA collisions has reduced since the introduction of a local safety scheme in 2014 and the annual average is 1 collision per year which, given the volume of traffic using it at peak times, is classed as a low-risk location. The junction would therefore not normally be identified for further investigation or treatment.

However, the Council has taken steps to review and consider potential safety issues reported at the junction.

Recently, the Council has replaced bollards, refreshed road markings, removed some redundant signs, and realigned others to face oncoming drivers. Some trees do require trimming however these fell within the jurisdiction of Reading Council, and so we do require their assistance. A request has made to the Borough of Reading to carry out the necessary works.

Furthermore, it was determined that certain sections of fencing along the B3270 were the responsibility of National Highways. That has been reported to them as well.

Supplementary Question:

I was a bit surprised that it does not fall under one of the top ones in terms of accidents. I think it was 17 December last year, whilst there may have only been one, it was a very serious one, involving somebody being airlifted to hospital for it. Is there no consideration in the analysis of that which considers the severity of accidents as well as just the frequency?

Supplementary Answer:

Unfortunately, Personal Injury Accidents occur all over the Borough and therefore what we have to do is look at the worst locations where our accidents are occurring, which cause personal injury. The top 50 are the priority ones to be looked at, and through the Integrated Transport Funding. We then review those sites, and these are the ones that we carry out improvements to try and mitigate personal injury accidents.

26.9 Peter Harper asked the Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services the following question:

Question

With the two solar farms at Barkham unlikely to go ahead due to the lack of capacity in the local electricity transmission network, what contingency plan is there to save the 14,000 tCO₂e that form a critical part of the net zero strategy?

Answer

Thank you for your question, Peter. Firstly, can I make clear that the plan is for one solar farm at Barkham, not two, and that the Council has a climate emergency action plan that measures our progress towards carbon neutrality, not net zero, so a big difference.

The design and survey work for the solar farm project has been put on hold, not abandoned, pending the resolution of the connection issue which is a country-wide issue not exclusive to us.

There is strong evidence that the Government and the industry are aligned for, and

working towards, significant reform of the UK grid connection process in the very near future and we have been and continue to be proactive in adding our voice to what that reform should look like.

Following the creation of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, the Government's manifesto, 'Powering Up Britain' was published which sets out a goal to quintuple solar power and fully decarbonise the power system by 2035.

The Energy Networks Association (ENA) published a 3-step action plan to speed up the UK grid connection process and National Grid have published a five-point plan to speed up the current connections queue. A joint action plan between Ofgem and the Government is due this Summer on connections reform.

Ofgem identify that through the plans, it is expected that the majority of existing projects will see significant improvements in connection dates, especially those that are shovel ready such as Barkham solar farm.

The signs are therefore that significant reform to the connection process is imminent; reform that it is anticipated will impact significantly and positively upon the timely delivery of the Barkham Solar Farm project.

As you should be aware, the climate emergency action plan, even with all the measures in there, will not reach carbon neutrality by 2030. Should we have any other projects that could save equivalent levels of carbon emissions, we would rather they were in the plan and not being held in reserve. This is not a case of either/or. That being said, the lack of statutory powers and resource for local authorities to tackle the climate emergency limits our capacity and I would implore you to help lobby government to provide local government with these much needed powers and the resource that goes with it.

Supplementary Question:

I hopefully share your enthusiasm for the connection coming in earlier than we have been told, but it is still not going to be ready for summer 2024 when it was originally scheduled to be providing power, and getting revenue into the Council. So, what impact do you think is the anticipated delay going to have on the cost of producing or installing a solar farm, with high inflation at the moment, and a high increase in building costs? It is likely to be a lot more expensive than £26.8million currently in the Budget.

Supplementary Answer:

Firstly, it was always going to be connected in I think it was August 2026, I think certainly the late summer/autumn 2026, was the connection date which we had agreed in April 2022 with the District Network Operator. In terms of funding for this we obviously contracted with Bouygues. We have an agreement in our contract of the ability to have a six month break with no increased costs during that time. We are using that break currently. Bouygues have been absolutely brilliant I would like to say, in how they have worked with us, and are being very understanding. We are obviously not their only customer in this circumstance. We are not at that stage yet where we are at the end of the six month period. It is highly likely we will have a new connection date before that happens, but should that not be the case we will have

those discussions. We are discussing this at the Barkham Solar Farm Project Board, which your colleague Rebecca Margetts is on, and we have had these discussions as well as with officers, and she can verify what I have just said.

26.10 Andy Croy asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport, and Leisure the following question:

Question

Last week there was a CEM press release announcing that fewer bins will be emptied at some indeterminate point in the future.

This week we see that bins are being covered with black plastic bags.

When was the Executive Member planning on informing Residents and Members about the timings of which bins will be affected by the decision to not empty them?

Answer

Thank you, Andy. The Council is currently projecting significant financial pressures both in the current and future financial years and these must be addressed if we are to maintain the Council's statutory obligations particularly for those in most need.

The Council's MTFP highlighted savings of some £60,000 per annum in relation to the naturalisation of areas within the Borough but given the pressure of inflation it was clear that further service reductions were needed in relation to grass cutting, but also public bin collections and street cleaning.

The Council has worked hard to find a way forward with its contractors and began to implement the budget and service reductions which included the taping over of litter bins. Given the impact of these changes it is recognised that the Council began this work without the appropriate approvals and necessary supportive work in place.

Investigations and efforts by the Council have begun to remedy or mitigate the changes in service while due decision-making processes are followed. I refer to next week's Executive Committee's Q1 revenue report which sets out the next actions and timetable, including the process to consult and have appropriate scrutiny prior to the matter being considered by the Executive at its meeting in October.

Supplementary Question:

Thank you, Ian. I listened very carefully, and I do not think you answered my question. My question was when were Members going to be informed, so given that there is a consultation coming up, how can my residents or any residents of the Borough be expected to respond to that consultation if we do not know which bins are going to be binned?

Supplementary Answer:

The process got out of kilter and that is why there was incorrect timing of certain steps, and there will be information available that will allow the consultation to actually look at some of the detail that we are actually considering.

26.11 Laura Blumenthal asked the Executive Member for Equalities, Inclusion and Fighting Poverty, the following question:

Question

Residents have been asking me about the £250,000 hardship fund in Lib Dem leaflets. Please can you share how residents in crisis can apply for payments from this hardship fund?

Answer

Thank you for your question, Laura. I was a little bit surprised to get it as you are a member of the cross-party working group which looked at how this £250,000 should be spent. You also spoke against spending this money on residents in need in a previous Council meeting. However, the more publicity we can get for our residents on how they can get help in a crisis the better, and I am very happy to repeat our message here tonight.

Wokingham Borough Council and our Hardship Alliance partners have a number of well-established routes to provide grants and financial assistance directly to residents in need. These include our Local Welfare Provision Fund, the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the Household Support Fund. Details of how residents can access this help is on the Cost-of-Living Help page on the WBC website. It is also publicised in our paper publications, such as the Cost-of-Living Crisis Leaflet which was delivered to every home in the Borough.

The £250,000 Hardship Fund which I think that you are referencing here, is different. This money is an additional fund, which the Liberal Democrat administration, working closely with the officers, has allocated to fund a number of key projects. These projects will make a long-term difference to the lives of our residents, tackling and preventing the root cause of hardship. They will deliver for our residents for years to come. These projects address a number of key areas and were selected after extensive cross-party consultation with councillors, including yourself, and our Voluntary and Community Sector partners. We will be publicising the projects selected in the coming weeks, but I am happy to share tonight that they will include a community food project to help residents afford nutritious food, a pilot scheme for 'poverty proofing the school day', and funding which will help children growing up in low income families to access school uniforms and essential learning materials and to be able to participate in all aspects of school life. These projects will change the lives of many people in the Borough, and I hope that you and the Conservatives will be able to support them.

Supplementary Question:

Thank you for your answer. I understand it to be a project fund as well which is why residents pushed me on it, because they said that sadly these people are used to going for hardship funds themselves, and they said that they understood hardship funds to be a direct, discretionary payment to those in hardship, so that is why they have been misled by this wording. So, we really do need to start calling it a Project Fund because that is what it is and that is what you explained here. They cannot directly apply for it.

My question is, what consultation has this Council done with residents who are in crisis and residents who can benefit from these projects as what they want this £250,000 spent on, and I do not mean consultation with charities who are going to help spend the money, but directly with residents themselves?

Supplementary Answer:

The consultation was with us as cross party councillors, people who understand our wards and our residents the best, and with the Voluntary and Community Sector, the Hardship Alliance and with the Hardship Alliance Action Group, who provide us with a really good way of effectively contacting residents and understanding grass roots concerns so that we can understand what residents in the Borough would like the money to be spent on.

26.12 Mike Smith asked the Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Housing the following question:**Question**

The Building Safety Act 2022 that is a direct result of the Grenfell disaster, places a large number of responsibilities onto the Building Owner which cannot be off-laid by contract to others. How is WBC planning to comply with these newly defined responsibilities related to buildings that WBC own?

Answer

Thank you for your question, Mike, it does give me the opportunity to try and clarify this position and the obligations that we have under the Building Safety Act 2022. That Act introduces reforms and safeguards for building occupiers, primarily aimed at buildings over 18m tall or seven storeys or more.

It defines “higher-risk buildings” as a building in England that is at least 18 metres in height or has at least 7 storeys and, for the purpose of the part of the new regime that regulates occupied buildings, contains at least 2 residential units. The other provisions will apply only to buildings over 18m tall or seven storeys or more, except for some protection from cladding costs, which will apply to leaseholders in buildings 11m tall or five storeys or more. Wokingham Borough Council does not own or manage any residential buildings taller than these height thresholds.

We still need to be mindful of the need to comply with current legislation, regulations, and good practice. We also need to keep up with the requirements of the Building Safety Regulator, the National Regulator of Construction Products, and the New Homes Ombudsman as they take on their new responsibilities and issue guidance. The legislation is flexible so more buildings could be brought into scope over time.

Responsibilities for building safety sits across a number of Council departments, including Property, Corporate Health & Safety, Housing, Building Control and the Local Planning Authority, and are coordinated through the Corporate Landlord model.

Specific to Housing, the Housing service are currently commissioning an external expert audit of our current compliance with housing safety standards, which is due to be completed in the near future.

26.13 Abdul Loyes asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question**Question**

How has the Council assessed which bins it will remove and which need less

emptying in parks and on walking routes?

Answer

Thank you, Abdul. The main part of the question is basically the same as the answer as I gave to Councillor Croy in question 10, but I would also say that the criteria by which bins were selected, and will be reselected as it were, will be reassessed and councillors will have an opportunity to see that.

Supplementary Question

With the Executive meeting on bins and the frequency of emptying the bins moving to October, why are bins still covered in black bin liners?

Supplementary Answer

The process is ongoing to remedy that and to mitigate what has happened.

26.14 Alison Swaddle asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:

Question

Residents in my ward are very concerned that litter bins have already been removed in areas where they are well used and thus much needed. Can he tell me what consultation took place and if the list of these bins has been published?

Does he think that a press release is a satisfactory mode of information for the removal of an important service since the loss of this has an immediate impact on the neighbourhood. Woodley is fortunate to have a fantastic network of voluntary litter-pickers, but the Council should not be imposing additional work with the expectation that they will keep Woodley tidy.

Answer

Thank you, Alison. The core answer is the same as I gave to Councillor Croy. The process got out of kilter, it was out of step, and the consultation will take place and necessary steps will follow due process.

Supplementary Question:

I was intrigued to hear your answer to Councillor Loyes. It is a slow process to remove the black bins when I witnessed a van of workmen emptying bins on Spitfire Way but leaving black bags covering other bins. Please could we endeavour to have the black bags removed as soon as possible whenever one of our team is in that area?

Supplementary Answer:

Yes, we are working to do that.

27. Minutes of Committee Meetings and Ward Matters

27.1 Laura Blumenthal asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Highways and Transport the following question:

Question:

First of all, thank you, you said that you would write to Thames Water about the dangerous flooding on a roundabout in Nightingale Road in my ward, and you did, and Thames Water said that they would look at it. That was March and it is still

flooding now in July, so please could you get back in touch with them to make sure that they have actioned it and they are going to fix it?

Answer:

Thank you, Laura, for your question. I have already written to Thames Water chasing them up. They have committed to an order to do the works. We also have to remember, and I remember you said, that this problem started in 2016, and nothing happened under the previous Conservative administration. I am taking action to get this sorted. I first knew about this in December through yourself and the Mayor, Beth Rowland, and action is being taken. I have written to Thames Water twice already to get an answer. I chased them up again at the beginning of this week but they have not come back to me with any response.

27.2 Caroline Smith asked the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee the following question:

Question:

I see from the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, held on 12 June 2023 (Item 8), that Thames Water attended the meeting and gave a presentation. They were asked about a number of issues that affected us locally. This is something I am sure that our residents will be interested in. Can you please tell me about any follow-up actions that have taken place since this meeting?

Answer:

Yes, we had a very good session with Richard Aylard, Thames Water's Sustainability Director, at the Overview and Scrutiny meeting. We have sent a letter to Mr Aylard which summarises the recommendations made during the meeting. The letter was sent last week. It will be attached to the Minutes of the meeting and has been distributed to the members of the Committee.

27.3 Phil Cunnington asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Highways and Travel the following question:

Question:

A number of the residents in my ward in the new housing estates especially have moved from central and west London up to leafy Wokingham to enjoy the open spaces and fresh air, knowing that they could work hybrid and still travel into their work in London, especially since the opening of the Elizabeth Line. I asked you a question by email to which you very kindly responded, about the potential use of the Oak Avenue Park and Ride, which you responded that they were thinking about how this could be used.

Well, a number of my residents and residents of other Members here, have raised a question – is there a possibility that we could consider a business case for a small bus type service which might travel from there from the Oak Avenue car park to Twyford station to take advantage of that, especially as travelling there by car in order to get the train, there are no car parking spaces available?

Answer:

Options are being currently considered and discussions are taking place. I cannot say any more at the moment, but something will hopefully be announced in the near future.

27.4 Jordan Montgomery asked the Executive Member for Planning and the

Local Plan the following question:

Question:

Regarding Gray's Farm – now that we have confirmation that the SEND schools will not be built on the sites. Could you provide an update on the latest developments regarding the planned sports facilities for Gray's Farm?

Answer:

There is work still going on, but at the moment the proposals still are for three 3G pitches and four grass football pitches, and for a number of paddle board areas as well. So, that is what is going on and we are working with Sports England to get that through the plan. There is an overall masterplan being put together at the moment for that site, so it is being fully worked on.

27.5 Graham Howe asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Highways and Transport the following question:

Question:

It is sort on behalf of a number of us that border on the Bath Road. Our understanding is that it is within the power of the local authority to set speed limits, and there has been a number of questions over the years since I have been around about various speed limits. So, could he please give some time to us in the North and put it up his priority list because we know that being in the North, we are down on the priority list, and consult with us so that we can address these very serious residents' issues.

Answer:

There is no difference between the North, South, East or West. The whole of the Borough is a priority. Regarding speed limits, it depends on which particular section that you are talking about, and if you could email me the details, I would most appreciate it.

27.6 Andy Croy asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Highways and Transport the following question:

Question:

All of the off road car parking in Woodley Town Centre is in my ward. There has been some, I think, unfounded fear that the increase in car parking charges will impact footfall. Will the Member be able to share with us at some point in the near future, data which allows us to make a meaningful comparison about the effects of the car parking increases on footfall type data?

Answer:

It is early days at the moment since the car parking charges have changed. I am looking to put together a report based on the information from previous years and compare that with this current period, and then we can do a comparison, and I can make that available.

27.7 Shahid Younis asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:

Question:

A couple of weeks ago I was getting complaints from residents in my ward that the grass is not being cut, and has now turned to hay. Now the grass been cut, and a lot of waste has been left on the road. As a result, the drainage has been blocked and caused flooding. I am sure this is not just an issue in my ward, probably others as well, but why are we not asking the contractors when they leave a lot of waste on the

road, why are they not cleaning it?

Answer:

The grass cutting contract does not include the collection of the grass cuttings, and this contract has been in use since 2016. It is an old contract, and it has 10 years to run, so it will be 2026 before it expires. Apart from the City of Westminster and maybe a few other high profile areas, there is not a local authority in the country that has a grass cutting contract that collects the cuttings, so what are getting is an unfortunate situation where we have got much longer than normal, and they are perhaps falling into the gutter more than normal than they would have done had they been the normal length. If there are any issues about flooding, please contact us either through the online facility or you can email the relevant officers or myself. If there are any specific issues we will deal with them, but it is an issue due to the situation.

27.8 Andrew Mickleburgh asked the Executive Member for Planning and the Local Plan the following question:

Question:

I am very disappointed to see that on 11 July a planning application was lodged requesting a change in land use of horticultural land to residential garden. The land in question is part of the important green corridor in Hawkedon ward stretching along Lower Earley Way. Previously owned by WBC, it came into private ownership in 2021 via adverse possession after the owners of a neighbouring property started to maintain the land, and grew vegetables on part of that WBC land from Spring 2005. May I ask the Executive Member to investigate how many cases of loss of WBC owned land there have been in Hawkedon ward and further afield, and to provide a written response to this and measures being undertaken to monitor and prevent similar actions from occurring in future?

Answer:

Adverse possession does happen from time to time, and it is something that we are concerned about so yes, I will. I am concerned that such action has occurred and will ask the appropriate officers to establish whether there have been other instances, and also to put procedures in place to prevent further actions from occurring. Usually this happens when the Council do not do anything with a piece of land, and it is left alone for I think it is 10 years. This is something that we are losing assets as a result of.

At this point in the meeting in line with Rule 4.2.12m to suspend a particular rule of procedure, Councillor Prue Bray proposed that 4.2.10.8 (Length of Question Time) be suspended to allow all Minutes of Committee Meetings and Ward Matters questions to be put. This was seconded by Councillor Sarah Kerr. Upon being put to the vote this was agreed.

27.9 David Davies asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question:

An unusually large number of children have not got places in their first choice, Edgbarrow School, in my ward, and they are now being sent many miles away but are being refused travel support when having only put a single school preference, as allowed by the policy. Will the Executive Member confirm why these parents are

being refused support when this is clearly not parental choice within the spirit or letter of the current policy, to have their children intentionally schooled so far away and incur crippling costs as a result, and also, with the new consultation considering removing the SEN farepayer fee post 16 year olds when its own assessment showed that this is a high negative equalities impact to those with disabilities?

Answer:

I think that was two questions Madam Mayor. I will answer the first one because it comes under the rules. I cannot imagine that this Council breaks its own policy when deciding what to do with school transport. When parents apply to a school, there are four choices that they can put on their application form. If they do not use all four choices, and they just pick their nearest school, or they choose some other schools which are not their nearest schools, they will fall foul of the rule that says that they will not be entitled to school transport assistance. It is not as clear as it might be in the admissions part of the website, and we are going to try and rectify that to make it much clearer to parents, but while I feel a lot of sympathy for residents in Wokingham Without because their nearest school is Edgbarrow, there is a lot of competition, and that school is not in our Borough. It is an academy so we cannot control the admissions into that, and even if they expanded their school, there was no guarantee that residents from Wokingham Without would get their children in because of the demand from Bracknell residents. We are in a bit of a difficult situation, but I am afraid that the situation is that we correctly apply our policy, and they do not believe that we have applied our policy correctly, there is an appeal mechanism, and their appeal will be heard. I understand that there have been some appeals heard from residents in that area, some of which has presented behaviour at that appeal which has really not been acceptable. I understand that parents try to fight for the rights of their children but that has to be within reason, and we expect people to treat our officers and Members with respect. It is difficult as I said earlier in my answer to Gary, we have to make our home to school transport budget stretch. We cannot afford discretionary payments to schools outside the entitlement under the policy, and that is just how it is. If we had a lot more money, we would not have to do that.

27.10 Rachele Sheperd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:

Question:

Since the closure of Sainsburys recycling centre, which was a mini tip, there are only two bottle banks in the area to replace the Winnersh mini tip. Right now, we only have a bottle bank in Sindlesham and one up in Hurst. I was wondering are there any plans to have a multi area of recycling bins in Winnersh, actually for Wokingham, as we have to either drive to Reading or Bracknell to do recycling if it not on a recycling day?

Answer:

Unfortunately, Sainsburys do not choose to engage with re3 and we understand even that their contractor may not even recycle some of the things that they collect, which frankly if that is true, would be disgraceful. We have four bottle banks within about one mile of that Winnersh crossroads. We have Woodward Close, we have the one you mentioned in Sindlesham, there is one at Dinton Pastures, and there is one slightly over a mile away in Wharfdale Road. It would not be practical to put one on Sainsburys doorstep even if we could find a site.

27.11 Peter Harper asked the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development the following question:

Question:

Last year we had a presentation from City Fibre on the roll out of fibre broadband across the Borough. At the meeting I was assured that all roads in Finchampstead would be covered by City Fibre. I have heard from residents recently that some roads are being excluded. Can the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development, follow up with City Fibre and ensure that all roads in Finchampstead have fibre installed?

Answer:

I will certainly do that if you give me the details later on, I will follow it up.

27.12 Rebecca Margetts asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question:

The original proposal for the Sixth Form at Bohunt was announced back in March 2022, and included provision for additional Year 7 places and SEND places. I could not see that on the Executive report that is coming up next week. Can you confirm that this is still the intention of the administration?

Answer:

As you will know Rebecca, the negotiations around Bohunt have been complicated, and if you have read the Executive report which was published yesterday, there is some discussion about what finance has been allocated and what has not, and what commitment was made. I do not want to quote you the Executive decision in I think March or April 2022, without actually looking up, so I will give you a written answer to make sure that I have got the detail right.

27.13 Charles Margetts asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Highways and Transport:

Question:

St James' Road in my ward, I contacted officers about three months ago on the condition of the road, and they did agree to put it on the resurfacing programme for next year, for which I am grateful. Over the last few months, it has deteriorated significantly, and I am getting continual email and phone traffic about it. I wondered if he would be kind enough to ask the officers to revisit the site and have another look, and bring it forwards if that is possible?

Answer:

There is a very tight programme for the rest of this year. It is unlikely that we will be able to bring this forwards. It can be looked at and any safety defects repaired.

27.14 Anne Chadwick asked the Executive for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:

Question:

What will the £40,000 raised from the Airfield Museum, Mohawk Way, Woodley, car park, be spent on?

Answer:

It will be spent on the countryside parks.

At this point in the meeting in line with Rule 4.2.12m to suspend a particular rule of

procedure, Councillor David Davies proposed that 4.2.23 Statements by the Leader of the Council, Executive Members and Deputy Executive Members and 4.2.24 Statements from the Council Owned Companies be suspended to allow the Motions to be put. This was seconded by Councillor Pauline Jorgensen. Upon being put to the vote, the Motion was not approved.

28. Statements by the Leader of the Council and Executive Members

Councillor Prue Bray – Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Children’s Services

I am pleased to announce that the Council is in the process of setting up its own children’s homes in the Borough. This is part of our long-term plans for improving services and controlling costs in Children’s Services. There will be small homes for a total of around six children. In common with many authorities, we have found that the lack of available places for children nearby has led to us having to place children a long distance from the Borough, several hours away from their families, friends and support networks. Not only is this less than ideal for them, but having to rely on external provision is expensive and leaves us at the mercy of the providers, many of whom operate on a commercial basis.

Opening our own homes will give us an opportunity to provide a home for some of our more vulnerable children which is not only much closer, but where we can control the quality and the costs, which is a big win for everyone.

Councillor Stephen Conway – Leader of the Council

I want to report briefly to the Council on the two meetings of the Berkshire Leaders held since our annual Council meeting two months ago. The Berkshire Leaders meetings bring together the leaders of the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities together with their Chief Executives and supporting officers. The meetings take place monthly in different council offices. There has been a considerable turnover of elected Member personnel since the May elections. Only Reading has the same leader. The leaders at Wokingham, the Royal Borough, West Berkshire, Bracknell and Slough are all new.

I am pleased to report that, at the first meeting, Wokingham took the Chair for the Municipal Year, with the support of the other leaders. All the leaders agreed that the Mayoral model of devolution was not one that we favoured. We agreed that, if the Government decided to pursue a non-Mayoral option, we would be willing to consider that, subject to knowing the details and providing that it delivered clear benefits. We all felt that, regardless of progress of the Government’s devolution plans, greater cooperation between the six unitary authorities, or a combination of them, would be highly desirable on matters of common concern. Cooperation will sometimes take the form of joint lobbying, sometimes joint funding bids, sometimes simply working together on cross-border projects. The meeting was amicable, with none of the fractiousness of the past.

The second meeting, on Monday of this week, was no less amicable. The six leaders agreed to establish a Berkshire Prosperity Board as a vehicle for levering in external funding and in recognition of the end of Government funding for the Local Enterprise

Partnership, next year.

David Hare – Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services

I want to tell you that we are on the way to purchasing the Berkshire Care Home. This 50 bed care home will be run by the Council's own social care provider, Optalis. It is hoped that this will be concluded within the next 8 to 12 weeks, then we will have another care home. I hope that people will realise that the purchase of this care home is great news. Firstly, it is a priority that we support local vulnerable people. By running our own care homes, in partnership with Optalis, we can help to meet the demand for care as well as reducing our own costs, providing local homes for local people, ensuring that they still receive high quality care. So, we are investing to save and this is very positive, especially as the number of people needing these care homes is increasing at a fast rate.

On Monday I also attended a social care futures event in Woodley with a mix of people who use and provide services as well as parents all involved. This was about how we work with and speak with the people who use various services. The day was spent looking at the way we worked together in the past, with an "us and them" mentality and bringing this to an equality mentality where everyone, be they a service user or a service provider, is an equal partner in all transactions.

I will be honest, I find getting out of the old mentality, even though we didn't always think of us and them, is not always easy. It is about re-learning the language, about being inclusive, talking about people rather than having discriminatory terms. It is about not having special events or courses for people with problems, but rejoicing in the gloriously ordinary that we can embrace. And making sure that for all our actions there is co-production, working with people who use the service, to provide the service they want. This is, for me, an exciting culmination of all that I have worked for over 40 years. It is something that I believe is going forwards strongly.

Paul Fishwick – Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways

Rail delivery consultation. The Rail Delivery Group are currently holding a three week consultation on the closure of railway station ticket offices. The deadline for responses is 26 July 2023. There are six stations in the Borough, or very close to the boundary where residents use these stations with ticket offices. On the South Western rail network Earley, Winnersh Triangle, Winnersh and Wokingham. On the Great Western main line Twyford and, on the North Downs line, Crowthorne.

It is important to note that each train company has produced its own proposals, so there are 13 separate consultations running simultaneously rather than one national consultation. Having people comment on specific stations or, at a train company level, helps to ensure that any views or objections expressed are recorded against the appropriate consultation.

The Council is unable to hold an Individual Executive Member Decision during this short time period. I therefore urge all Members in this Chamber to submit their views on the proposals on behalf of their residents. However, please read the proposals fully before coming to a conclusion.

Thames Valley Park and Ride Site. From Sunday 23 July, the Reading Station to Heathrow Rail Air coach will now call at the Thames Valley Park and Ride site. This will be a 30 minute service. Passengers must book their tickets on the Rail-Air website. Parking payments at the site will need to be made at the car parking machines. Also, under new arrangements with the Royal Berks Hospital, the 300 bus service will operate from the Thames Valley Park and Ride site, on a 20 minute frequency to the hospital. This service is open to staff, patients and visitors. More information is available on the My Journey Wokingham website.

29. Statement from Council Owned Companies

Councillor Stephen Conway – WBC Holdings Ltd.

I am speaking as the Chair of WBC Holdings Ltd. I can report that we continue to seek to bring the Council's housing companies into closer alignment, covering common purpose boards to deliver greater coordination. We are also reviewing how best the housing companies can help the Council to deliver on its affordable and social housing aspirations. As Chair of Loddon Homes, I can report that there has been a change of personnel on the Board with Simon Dale, former interim Director of Place and Growth, becoming the new Managing Director. I look forward to working with Simon, as do my fellow directors. The Board has also been strengthened by the appointment of Nigel Bailey as a new director. Nigel will be known to many Councillors. I am sure that you will agree that his experience and expertise will be invaluable to Loddon Homes.

30. Motions

30.1 Motion 501 submitted by Charles Margetts

The Mayor announced that Motion 501 had been withdrawn by Councillor Charles Margetts as a response to the Mayor of London's consultation on the proposed ending of the one day travel card had already been submitted.

30.2 Motion 502 submitted by Caroline Smith

Council considered the following Motion, submitted by Councillor Caroline Smith and seconded by Councillor Rachel Bishop-Firth.

"Wokingham Borough is a place renowned for being welcoming and friendly and for the strength of its communities. It is a place where every resident and place matters, and this should be a part of its vision and mission.

We recognise the potential contribution of asylum seekers and refugees to our Borough, and believe that a comprehensive, co-ordinated and forward-looking approach that promotes community cohesion is the best way to ensure the welfare of people moving into the Borough.

This Council:

- a. Agrees to make Wokingham Borough a recognised 'Borough of Sanctuary', welcoming those fleeing violence and persecution in their own countries, no matter their country of origin or how they arrived in our Borough;
- b. Becomes a supporter of City of Sanctuary UK by signing their organisational pledge and making a voluntary donation of the suggested amount for an

organisation of our size of £250;

- c. Will amend its vision and mission to recognise that status;
- d. Recognises the positive contribution asylum seekers and refugees make to the social, cultural and community life of Wokingham Borough;
- e. Is committed to taking practical steps to welcome and include refugees and asylum seekers in our activities and will actively seek ways of supporting them, looking for opportunities to do so both within our existing and future budgets and through seeking additional income such as grants;
- f. Will support our communities and voluntary, community and faith groups in assisting asylum seekers and refugees wherever possible.”

Councillor Smith stated that residents of the UK were fortunate to enjoy many freedoms, freedoms which were underpinned by the Human Rights Act. The Motion aimed to reinforce the Vision of Wokingham Borough as a welcoming place for those wishing to settle here, including displaced people from Ukraine, Afghanistan and Hong Kong. Many local authorities had recognised the value of declaring Borough/City of Sanctuary status – declaring a welcoming place of safety for all.

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Croy and seconded by Councillor Marie Louise Weighill, that the Motion be amended as follows:

“Wokingham Borough is a ~~place renowned for being welcoming and friendly and for the strength of its communities. It is a place where every resident and place matters,~~ and this should be a part of ~~our~~ **its** vision and mission.

We recognise the potential contribution of asylum seekers and refugees to our Borough, and believe that a comprehensive, co-ordinated and forward-looking approach that promotes community cohesion is the best way to ensure the welfare of people moving into the Borough.

We note and regret the suffering of refugees in the Home Office sanctioned accommodation in our Borough. Their treatment is incompatible with our values and values common to humanity.

This Council:

- a. **Agrees Aspires** to make Wokingham Borough a recognised ‘Borough of Sanctuary’, welcoming those fleeing violence and persecution in their own countries, no matter their country of origin or how they arrived in our Borough;
- b. **Once all refugees in the Borough are treated fairly, will become** ~~Becomes~~ a supporter of City of Sanctuary UK by signing their organisational pledge and making a voluntary donation of the suggested amount for an organisation of our size of £250;
- c. Will amend its vision and mission to recognise **its aspiration** and **future** ~~that~~

status;

- d. Recognises the positive contribution asylum seekers and refugees make to the social, cultural and community life of Wokingham Borough;
- e. Is committed to taking practical steps to welcome and include refugees and asylum seekers in our activities and will actively seek ways of supporting them, looking for opportunities to do so both within our existing and future budgets and through seeking additional income such as grants;
- f. Will support our communities and voluntary, community and faith groups in assisting asylum seekers and refugees wherever possible.

Councillor Croy stated that he supported the broad sentiment behind the Motion. However, it was clear that a significant proportion of asylum seekers and refugees in the Borough, those in Home Office sanctioned accommodation, were not made to feel safe and welcome. The amendment aimed to ensure that the voice of those people was heard.

Councillor Caroline Smith confirmed that the proposed amendment was not acceptable.

Councillor Stephen Conway stated that, having visited the Home Office sanctioned hotel, he was aware that the treatment of the people in that facility was appalling. This issue had been raised with the Home Office and would continue to be raised. However, whilst recognising the points in the amendment, its impact would be to delay the adoption of Borough of Sanctuary indefinitely. This would dilute the positive steps set out in the Motion.

Upon being put to the vote, the Mayor announced that the amendment was not approved.

Council then voted on the original Motion. Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED that:

“Wokingham Borough is a place renowned for being welcoming and friendly and for the strength of its communities. It is a place where every resident and place matters, and this should be a part of its vision and mission.

We recognise the potential contribution of asylum seekers and refugees to our Borough, and believe that a comprehensive, co-ordinated and forward-looking approach that promotes community cohesion is the best way to ensure the welfare of people moving into the Borough.

This Council:

- a. Agrees to make Wokingham Borough a recognised ‘Borough of Sanctuary’, welcoming those fleeing violence and persecution in their own countries, no matter their country of origin or how they arrived in our Borough;
- b. Becomes a supporter of City of Sanctuary UK by signing their organisational pledge and making a voluntary donation of the suggested amount for an

organisation of our size of £250;

- c. Will amend its vision and mission to recognise that status;
- d. Recognises the positive contribution asylum seekers and refugees make to the social, cultural and community life of Wokingham Borough;
- e. Is committed to taking practical steps to welcome and include refugees and asylum seekers in our activities and will actively seek ways of supporting them, looking for opportunities to do so both within our existing and future budgets and through seeking additional income such as grants;
- f. Will support our communities and voluntary, community and faith groups in assisting asylum seekers and refugees wherever possible.”

30.3 Motion 503 submitted by Pauline Jorgensen

Council considered the following Motion, proposed by Councillor Pauline Jorgensen and seconded by Councillor Peter Harper:

“The Council will monitor and publish a report to Full Council on a quarterly basis detailing progress on business cases for all projects with costs over £1m. This report will set out the objectives and deliverables for all active projects that have been approved and are being delivered or due to be delivered, so that the public can see clearly what the full cost, capital and revenue, of any change and what benefits have been delivered. Commercially sensitive details which cannot be reasonably placed in the public domain, as decided by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council, will be made available for councillors in a Part 2 addition to the report, with the option to discuss these details with the public and press excluded, if necessary. The first report will be brought to the next Full Council meeting after this one, on Thursday 21st September 2023.”

Councillor Jorgensen stated that the current WBC process for developing, approving and monitoring business cases was neither transparent nor effective. Key decisions in the private sector would not be made without a clear business case. Local government should work to the same standards. Business cases should set out the full financial implications of a proposal together with risks and an option appraisal – including the “do nothing” option. The impact of the Motion would be demonstrated in a transparent manner if the investment of public money was achieving the outcomes promised to residents.

Councillor Imogen Shepherd-Dubey agreed that there should be a regular public review of progress against key WBC projects. However, full Council was not the appropriate place for this review to take place. If approved, the Motion would lead to regular update reports on over 30 key projects. This would add significantly to already congested Council agenda. The most appropriate place for this work would be via the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Committees. These Committees already considered updates on key projects and performance indicators.

Upon being put to the vote, the Mayor announced that the Motion had not been

approved.

30.4 Motion 504 submitted by Pauline Helliard-Symons

Due to time constraints, this Motion was not considered.

30.5 Motion 505 submitted by Norman Jorgensen

Due to time constraints, this Motion was not considered.