

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 13 JANUARY 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.19 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Keith Baker, Shirley Boyt, Paul Fishwick, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Abdul Loyes and Pauline Helliard-Symons (Substitute)

Executive Member Present

Councillor: John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing)

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Malcolm Richards

Officers Present

Nigel Bailey (Interim Assistant Director - Housing & Place Commissioning), Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Corporate Services)) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

44. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Ken Miall. Pauline Helliard-Symons attended the meeting as a substitute.

45. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25 November 2019 and the Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting of the Committee held on 6 January 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

With regards to agenda page 7, Clive Jones asked for an update on how income would be generated from the enhancement of Cantley Park. Graham Ebers, Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Corporate Services) stated that income would be derived from increased patronage of the pitched, an additional 3G pitch, the new café and numerous arts and culture events. The Football Foundation Grant had not yet been secured however officers remained optimistic and expectant of the grant bid to be successful.

46. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

47. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

48. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

49. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Committee received and reviewed a report, set out in agenda pages 9 to 18, and 2 supplementary agenda packs, which detailed the proposed capital programme for 2020-23.

John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing) and Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive – Director of Corporate Services) attended to meeting to answer Member queries.

John Kaiser stated that this was the final package of budgetary proposals, and included the proposed capital programme for 2020-23. John added that these proposals were intended to provide capital projects and investments in infrastructure across the Borough, and was designed from the ground up to deliver for the needs of the residents.

For the purposes of clarity, the published agenda shall be referred to as document one, the supplementary agenda containing the detailed sheets shall be referred to as document two, and the supplementary agenda containing the detailed highways sheets shall be referred to as document three.

During the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points and queries:

- Relating to document three page 4 (SCAPE) and document two page 9 (Managing Congestion and Pollution), was the SCAPE investment included within or in addition to the Managing Congestion and Pollution proposals? Officer response – The SCAPE proposals were in addition to the proposals for managing congestion and pollution, with the latter wholly focussing on managing congestion and pollution within the Borough.
- Relating to document one page 17, were these proposals referring to building new relief roads? Officer response – These proposals were about managing existing relief roads and ensuring that congestion and pollution issues were dealt with. In future, these breakdowns would be reworded to make it clear that these were not proposals to develop new relief roads.
- Relating to document two page 6, what was the current state of the Gorse Ride regeneration? Executive Member response – Members and officers would be liaising with the Parish Council regarding proposals to increase the pace of delivery of the project.
- Relating to document three page 4, were the payments for the Shinfield Eastern Relief Road to be made via S106 contributions? Officer response – Yes, these payments would come from S106 funding and were honouring the agreed payment arrangements for this scheme.
- Relating to document two page 8, had a business case for the proposed Coppid Beech Park & Ride been developed? Executive Member and Officer response – Not as yet, however developer funding had been received for this specific purpose. Once a business case had been written, it would then be presented to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) who would carefully analyse the case and contribute funding accordingly should they agree with the business case.
- Relating to document two page 6, would the feasibility study for developing a new crematorium include a carbon study? Executive Member response – This would be included within various assessments and investigations to be carried out by specialists when examining and formulating proposals. Should the crematorium be built, it would service the Borough's needs and provide an income for the Council. The proposed crematorium would be built to the highest standards and could include an arboretum.

- What were some of the increases capital expenditure within Children's Services going towards? Officer response – Examples of expenditure were to improve existing facilities and to create new facilities to cater for an increase in service demand (provision of this was statutory). Overall, this was a modest spending proposal within this area over three years.
- Relating to document one page 17, were these figures related to new roads or existing roads? Officer response – These roads were all tied into the SDLs, and the capital expenditure was residual payments according to the agreed terms.
- Were WBC planning on building new houses next to relief roads? Executive Member response – WBC were committed to not place Council developments next to relief roads. However, when new roads opened up developers usually tried to make new sustainability arguments to support planning applications, which the draft Local Plan was looking to address.
- Relating to document three page 5, could more detail be given regarding the proposed spend on the Toutley Depot? Executive Member and Officer response – This proposed spend involved replacing the existing aging depot with new modern facilities four WBC's four contractors. This would include parking, office space and other associated infrastructure. There was some doubt that this project would cost the amount of money specified and this would be closely monitored.
- Relating to document two page 5, could more detail be provided with regards to the proposed spending on road improvements? Officer response – These improvements would mainly focus on the key A-roads within the borough, and would provide items such as crash barriers.
- Relating to document two page 8, had the Winnersh Triangle Pathway expenditure from £500k last financial year? Response received after the meeting from Officers – It was not certain that this was previously shown as £500K, although the business case was only approved formally in June so WBC may have originally only allocated £500k (which is the WBC contribution) until the LEP money was confirmed to cover the full amount.
- Relating to document two page 11, why was there no mention of funding for the proposed new SEND school? Officer response – The SEND investment programme was in addition to funding the Addington expansion. There were plans for a new potential shared SEND school with Reading, however this was still at a considerable work in progress stage. Should the project go ahead, the expectancy would be that the DfE would fund the project.
- Relating to document two page 8, what were the significant funds relating to renewable energy infrastructure projects to be used for? Executive Member and Officer response – WBC were looking to build state of the art solar farms and connect them directly to the power grid. There was approximately 360 acres of potential land available within the Borough. Officers were investigating what would be the optimal sized farm to generate and store energy and a report was being worked on. Two of the potential sites would have a capacity of 30 Megawatt and 20 Megawatt power respectively.

- Relating to document three page 3, could more information be provided regarding the highways carriageways structural maintenance proposals? Officer response – This was part of a continual programme of key asset management and maintenance. An annual maintenance programme was produced which listed the priority order of highways requiring maintenance within the Borough. Should this funding not be sufficient, the Executive Member stated that the reserves could be used in order to meet the needs of the residents. In addition, document three page 5 outlined the Wokingham highways investment strategy, which proposed a higher level of investment that ever before focussing on early prevention and a better experience for road users.
- Relating to document three page 3, which bridges were proposed to be strengthened? Officer response – The Earley footbridge was one of the bridges proposed to be enhanced.
- Relating to document 2 page 17, what did WBC do with their laptops at the end of their 4 year usage? Response received after the meeting from Officers - WBC have a contract in place with a company called Charterhouse Muller to dispose of our laptops and other IT equipment when they reach the end of its usable life. Charterhouse Muller ensure that all equipment is wiped and disposed of ethically to ensure the Councils data and security is not compromised. This is important to ensure we remain within GDPR and PSN regulations. Where obsolete equipment still has a value this is deducted from Charterhouse Muller's disposal charge.
- Relating to document two page 9, was the proposed funding for waste recycling schemes to be used for new and replacement bins? Executive Member response – Yes, this was the intention.
- Was the capital programme expenditure likely to remain the same or change? Officer response – WBC had a good track record of spending within their capital programme. The figures at present were a best estimate, and could change subject to the formal tendering processes.
- Relating to document two page 9, could more detail be provided with regards to the proposed energy reduction project? Response received after the meeting from Officers - The measures WBC will look to do incorporates some 45 different measures but to give a general indication of such measures, this will include LED lighting replacements, loft / cavity wall insulation, draughtproofing, controls upgrades, heating system replacements / upgrades, renewable energy generation equipment / technologies and some double / triple glazing.
- Had any calculations been done to ascertain Wokingham's current carbon emission levels and what reduction the proposed capital schemes would have? Executive Member response – The capital proposals were the start of a long term programme to reduce carbon emissions within the Borough. There was a limit to what WBC could do, and much of the task would come down persuading businesses to lower their carbon footprint.
- Were climate emergency budgets likely to change? Officer response – The proposed budget relating to tackling the climate emergency were likely to change in future as we moved towards tackling carbon emissions within the Borough. The proposed spending

was the beginning of an ambitious set of schemes aimed at tackling the climate emergency within the Borough.

- Relating to document two page 15, why had the proposed Arborfield swimming pool been pushed back? Executive Member response – It was assessed as too ambitious to run this scheme alongside other major leisure schemes and therefore it was proposed to carry the scheme out in 2022/23.
- Relating to document two page 8, was any of the proposed funding for South Wokingham railway crossing intended for use at the Star Lane crossing, after 1800 houses had been built in the nearby area? Response received after the meeting from Officers - The Council has no plans to undertake works on Star Lane Crossing (Easthampstead Road). Any works to this crossing will be undertaken by National Rail as part of the works they have discussed with us in association with their Feltham Re-Signaling project. The works if undertaken would include the delivery of a renewed fully automated replacement level crossing facility. There are currently no plans for bridges or tunnels.
- Relating to document two page 6, what was the expected return from the property investment strategy? Executive Member response – The expected return was two percent per annum.
- Were there any plans for ground extension of the Earley burial ground? Executive Member response – Services were welcome to put forward supplementary budgets for consideration. There were no current plans for these works.
- Relating to document two page 7, what specifically were the proposals for the Denmark Street environmental improvements? Response received after the meeting from Officers – This was the extension of the Market Place public realm works into the wider town. It was anticipated that the design work 'only' would be worked up this coming year. No delivery of the projects are expected until after the SWDR and NWDR are completed as there was not an appetite for further roadworks and potential congestion within the town following, the combined delivery of regeneration and Market Street, which caused some negative feedback during construction. The SWDR and NWDR will provide some resilience to the highway network, enabling delivery of projects like this to be delivered with less impact to road users as alternative routes through the town would be available.
- What funding was being received from the LEP for associated projects? Officer response – The most significant contributions from the LEP would be towards the Winnersh Park & Ride (£2.8m) and the Coppid Beech Park & Ride (£2.4m).
- Relating to document two page 6, how many additional pitches would the proposed £1.5m secure, and would we abide by the Government's 20 pitch per site limit? Executive Member response – The Inspector will need to be convinced that WBC have an adequate supply of pitches in order to show our commitment. Any site allocation needed to be done properly whilst meeting the Borough's needs.
- Relating to document two pages 7 and 15, what were the proposed significant capital sums being put towards at Carnival Pool to be used for? Officer response – The £10m sum was for development of the sports hall, and the £30m sum was for the development of the library and residential units.

- Were the proposed capital sums to tackle the climate emergency enough to ensure the Borough was carbon neutral by 2030? Executive Member response – The sums allocated would address the initial climate emergency action plan. The action plan would be developed over the coming years, which could involve further capital investment. The initial investment was an unprecedented commitment towards tackling climate change, standing at approximately £60m.
- Relating to document two page 15, what were the enhancements proposed to be made at Cantley Park? Officer response – This would involve drainage works, a 3G pitch, a new café, new changing room and enhancements to car parking.
- Relating to document two page 11, which schools would benefit from the basic needs funding? Officer response – This would provide new school spaces at primary schools such as Aldergrove and Matthewsgreen, there was no specific needs for secondary school places, 300 additional 6th form places, 50 previously agreed SEND places at Addington and there was a hope of 75 SEND spaces at a joint school with Reading.
- Relating to document two page 12, what were the proposed 6th form expansions? Executive Member and Officer response – This was primarily to meet our commitment to build Bohunt. There was a growing need for 6th form places in the Borough and some of these funds would be used to improve existing facilities.
- Relating to document two page 11, was the new children’s care home going to be a small development? Officer response – The proposed development would be a small care home for small cohorts of children who were of the most need. A feasibility study was proposed to be undertaken in 2020/21.
- Relating to document two page 13, how many residents would the proposed dementia home be able to accommodate? Officer response – The home was projected to accommodate around 60 service users. WBC had a relatively low percentage of local authority care places in use (around 10%), and this proposal was to try to alleviate growing pressures within the Borough.

The Chairman and the Committee thanked all Executive Members, Deputy Executive Members, Directors, Assistant Directors and Officers that had enabled this budget scrutiny process to take place. Particular thanks were given to John Kaiser and Graham Ebers for their attendance at each of the budget scrutiny sessions, and for their thorough and frank answers throughout the process.

John Kaiser and Graham Ebers thanked the Committee for their hard work throughout the year, and added that this process had helped the overall budget setting process.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Graham Ebers and John Kaiser be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The Chairman present a report to the Executive and full Council, outlining the process undertaken by the Committee and the key areas that the Committee will overview going forwards;

- 3) The Committee continue to monitor the key items, particularly the large spends that would have the greatest impact on residents, throughout their implementation;
- 4) The budget scrutiny process be continued in the next municipal year.

50. BOROUGH DESIGN GUIDE UPDATE

The Committee received and reviewed a report, set out in agenda pages 19 to 22, which gave an update on the progress of the creation of the new Borough Design Guide and other key planning documents which had been the focus of the team.

Nigel Bailey, Interim Assistant Director - Housing & Place Commissioning, stated that the draft Local Plan update had been the key area of focus for the team. Resultantly, there was no current timetable for the new Borough Design Guide and significant work was unlikely to begin until late 2020 at the earliest. Nigel stated that he was happy to keep the Committee updated with developments, including when a provisional timetable was set.

During the ensuing discussions Members raised the following points and queries:

- Until the new draft Local Plan was formally adopted, were Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) required to use the existing 2012 Local Plan? Officer response – Yes, until any new Local Plan was formally adopted WBC would use the existing Local Plan.
- How long was it estimated to take for the new Borough Design Guide to be created? Officer response – The creation of a new Borough Design Guide was a considerable piece of work which would likely take the next couple of years to complete. The team may have to consider bringing in extra capacity in order to carry out the creation of the new Borough Design Guide. Officers needed to look at the risks of not having a new Borough Design Guide, however the 2012 version was still fit for purpose for all that it could do with a refresh.
- Were Officers considering a refreshed Borough Design Guide, or a full overhaul which would take considerably more time? Officer response – Officers needed to assess the National Design Guide and then gauge the views of Members as to their preference. There was currently a capacity issue within the team due to the considerable amount of work required to formulate the draft Local Plan Update. The Chairman asked that after an initial view in the summer, an update return to the Committee in autumn 2020 with a view to gauge Member preference.
- Was there capacity within the team to gather Member opinion regarding their preferred approach to reviewing the Borough Design Guide over the coming months? Officer response – Whilst there was no capacity to move forward with any substantial work until the draft Local Plan was submitted, there was some potential to engage in some light opinion gathering from Members.
- Had Officers considered liaising with the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement regarding setting up Member working groups, including capitalising on the knowledge of current and former Planning Committee Members? Officer response – Working groups and other forms of Member engagement would all be utilised throughout the Borough Design Guide creation process.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Nigel Bailey be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The Committee be kept up to date with the formation of any provisional timetable relating to the new Borough Design Guide;
- 3) An update be returned to the Committee in autumn 2020 after an initial view on the Borough Design Guide from Officers over the summer;
- 4) Officers investigate conducting some light opinion gathering from Members with regards to their preferred direction for the new Borough Design Guide.

51. BURIAL CAPACITY UPDATE

The Committee received and reviewed a report, set out in agenda pages 23 to 28, which gave an update on the current burial plot provision within the Borough.

Nigel Bailey, Interim Assistant Director - Housing & Place Commissioning, stated that within the last week Officers had agreed to collate information from other burial ground providers within the Borough as Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) did not currently have an overview of overall burial space provision within the Borough. WBC had looked to expand their own sites, however they had encountered water table issues within areas such as Ruscombe. WBC were investigating the creation of an in-Borough crematorium, however this was at an initial concept stage and required further research. Muslim burial plots were almost at capacity within WBC sites and Officers would engage in talks in the coming weeks to look at options to address this.

During the ensuing discussions Members raised the following points and queries:

- What sites had been initially identified to address the Muslim burial plot shortages within the Borough? Officer response – There was potential to create some additional Muslim burial plots at the Shinfield burial site. There were currently 3 Muslim burial plots available, and a further two had been used last year. Suitable plots needed to be identified in areas where the water table was suitable.
- Were there a shortage of Jewish burial plots within the Borough? Officer response – Jewish burial plots were not identified as an issue within the Borough.
- Were Officers considering meeting other burial site providers within the Borough to discuss current provision? Officer response – Yes, discussions would be had with regards to current capacity and any potential for expansion.
- Had Officers considered looking at creative methods of expansion, for example stacked tombs or re-using of old graves? Officer response – Officers would look into a variety of options for expansion and would gauge Member opinions on their findings.
- Would the proposed crematorium address burial plot provision issues? Officer response – The proposed crematorium was envisaged to provide a variety of eco-friendly cremation and burial options to serve the Borough's needs.
- The Chairman and Committee saw this issue as very important and time critical, and suggested setting up a task and finish group to look into the issue in more depth. The

Chairman asked that an update return to the Committee in March 2020 after the initial discussions with other burial providers had begun and a better idea of overall burial plot provision had been realised.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Nigel Bailey be thanked for attending the Committee;
- 2) An update be taken to the Committee in March 2020 after the initial discussions with other burial providers had begun and a better idea of overall burial plot provision had been realised;
- 3) The Committee consider setting up a task and finish group focusing on burial ground capacity within the Borough to investigate means of addressing this issue;
- 4) Officers investigate options of burial plot expansion within the Borough.