

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL
HELD ON THURSDAY, 19 JANUARY 2023 FROM 7.30 PM TO 10.50 PM**

Members Present

Councillors: Caroline Smith (Mayor), Beth Rowland (Deputy Mayor), Sam Akhtar, Keith Baker, Parry Batth, Rachel Bishop-Firth, Laura Blumenthal, Shirley Boyt, Prue Bray, Rachel Burgess, Anne Chadwick, Stephen Conway, David Cornish, Gary Cowan, Andy Croy, Phil Cunnington, David Davies, Peter Dennis, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, Jim Frewin, Maria Gee, John Halsall, David Hare, Peter Harper, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Clive Jones, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, John Kaiser, Sarah Kerr, Abdul Loyes, Tahir Maher, Morag Malvern, Charles Margetts, Rebecca Margetts, Adrian Mather, Andrew Mickleburgh, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray, Alistair Neal, Jackie Rance, Ian Shenton, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Mike Smith, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane, Alison Swaddle and Shahid Younis

88. Apologies

Apologies for absence were submitted from Graham Howe and Chris Johnson.

Chris Bowring attended the meeting virtually.

89. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 November 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor subject to the following amendment.

P34 – Pauline Jorgensen point of order – inclusion of *‘an officer written response would be provided.’*

90. Declarations of Interest

A declaration of interest was submitted from

Prue Bray submitted a Personal Interest in Item 97 – Statement from Council Owned Companies - as a Non-Executive Director of Berry Brook Homes and WBC Holdings Ltd.

Stephen Conway submitted a Personal Interest in Item 97 – Statement from Council Owned Companies - as a Non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes and WBC Holdings Ltd.

David Hare submitted a Personal Interest in Item 97 – Statement from Council Owned Companies - as a Non-Executive Director of Optalis Ltd.

Clive Jones submitted a personal Interest in Item 97 – Statement from Council Owned Companies - as a Non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes and WBC Holdings Ltd.

Gregor Murray submitted a Personal Interest in Item 98.2 – Motion 495 – as a it related to the street that he lived on.

91. Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor informed Members of the nominations for the latest Mayor's Awards. These were Cianna's Smile, a charity which supported families affected by Sickle Cell in Thames Valley. The second nominee was Victoria Rowland from Age UK, who was committed to supporting dementia sufferers and their families, in Wokingham.

92. Public Question Time

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

92.1 Peter Must asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

At the meeting of the Executive on 31 March 2022 I asked the then Executive Member for Highways and Transport what was happening with the draft Borough-wide Parking Management Action Plan. Having told me about a number of projects, surveys and interim actions which would feed into the draft Plan, the Executive Member said that these would "enable a revised draft to be presented for public consultation in Autumn 2022" I cannot see this item in the Forward Plan for the Executive up to January 2023. Could you tell me what is now happening to the draft Plan?

Answer:

Thank you, Peter, for your question. Referring back to the answer given at the Council meeting in March 2022, that response provided at that time remains largely the same in that the review was suspended due to the impacts of the Covid pandemic on changed travel and parking demand.

It was advised also at that time that a pilot parking management project to assess the parking behaviour and develop solutions in Twyford, for which the majority of resident surveys had already been completed prior to Covid, had been resumed.

A public consultation on the proposals for Twyford has been undertaken which closed on the 19th December 2022, and we are now compiling all the responses to those identified measures.

In a similar way to Twyford this pilot is now being rolled out to multiple other locations, some of which include Hilltop area, Langborough Road, Stockbury Close, Crockhamwell Road, and St Pauls Estate, where informal consultation is currently being progressed. Once these and further sites are progressed and formal consultations are concluded, the outcomes will be compiled and will form the basis for a wider Borough approach.

Travel habits have changed in the past few years with car usage, parking needs and, requirements, and we feel that this approach, area based, is better way of first understanding the various parts of the Borough's parking needs, before we move to a more Borough wide approach. It is anticipated that these will be developed over

the course of the coming year.

Supplementary Question:

I am somewhat baffled that this cannot actually be merged into a plan, and quite quickly, because if you do it area by area there is nothing to apply to the whole area. You are just doing it piece by piece. Will you actually move as quickly as possible to a Plan rather than a section by section approach to this issue?

Supplementary Answer:

That will be the case. We will complete these areas that we are currently doing at the moment, and then do a Borough wide Plan.

92.2 Peter Wheat asked the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan the following question:

Question

Why have Wokingham Borough Council not been effectively implementing policy TB08, leading to a paucity of allotments, and long waiting lists, and a situation where Wokingham Borough has only approximately 52% of the Allotments it should have, under the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) guidelines.

Please see supporting evidence below:

Parish	Estimated Population	Allotment Poles	Poles Needed	Shortfall	Excess
Arborfield and Newland	3186	0	318	318	
Barkham	3761	0	376	376	
Charvil	2123	8 (est)	212	204 (rented land)	
Earley	34016	488	3401	2913	
Finchampstead	12363	365	1236	871	
Hurst	2199	135	220	85	
Remenham	547	0	54	54	
Ruscombe	1087	0	108	108	
Sonning	1744	66	174	108 (also private site Pearson Road (70 pole)	
Shinfield	15561	1395	1556	161(+170 in progress Orchard Rise)	
Swallowfield	2100	147	210	63	
Twyford	7013	915	701		214
Wargrave	4014	620	401		219

Woodley Town	39237	2571	3923	1352	
Winnersh	10870	430	1087	657	
Wokingham Town	50251	1524	5025	3501	
Wokingham Without	7221	176 (est)	722	546	

Summary:

Wokingham U.A. Population: 177500

Poles needed (under NSALG guidance / TB08) 17750

Poles identified 9216

Poles shortfall 8534

Only 52% of NSALG Guidelines!

Note: At this point in the meeting Gary Cowan requested that the question be answered by an Officer, in line with Rule 4.13.15. The Mayor indicated that the question would be answered by the Executive Member. Gary Cowan went on to apologise that Mr Wheat had been classified as a vexatious complainant.

Lindsay Ferris apologised that Mr Wheat's question had originally been disallowed.

Answer:

Firstly, Mr Wheat I want to thank you for raising this important community issue with the Council, and I do want to reassure you that the availability of allotments for residents is a subject that the Council takes very seriously.

That said I am also aware that you have already been informed in some detail of the approach the Council takes to the provision of allotments within the Borough as the Council has previously provided you with full written responses on this matter through the formal complaints process.

It is worth noting that the management of allotment sites is a matter for town and parish Councils within Wokingham Borough. I am sure that many of our town or parish Councils would be open to ideas or suggestions on how to improve their allotment provision, and I would encourage you to engage with them.

Supplementary Question:

During the ten year period between the last two censuses 22,100 new people came to live in the Borough. Following policy TV08 that would be an additional 12.02 hectares of allotments, which should have been provided. Where is this new provision?

Supplementary Answer:

I am aware that you have already been informed in some detail of the approach the Council takes to the provision of allotments within the Borough as the Council has previously provided you with a full written response on the matter through the formal process.

92.3 Sandra Spencer asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport, and Leisure the following question:

Question:

The bottle bank that was installed in Kilnsea Drive, Earley, in 2020 was positioned 22 metres away from the nearest dwelling. It was removed after only three months after complaints from residents about the noise it was generating. Can the Executive Member for the Environment, Sport and Leisure tell me how many noise complaints were received by the Council in order to get the bottle bank removed?

Answer:

Following good partnership working with Earley Town Councillors, the site at Kilnsea Drive was suggested for a bottle bank which would enable residents there to conveniently recycle their glass. The bottle bank was well used but after Environmental Health received a noise complaint from one local resident, they advised the Waste Department that the noise issue had to be addressed or potentially be served with a notice. Therefore, the Waste Department removed bottle bank.

Work is underway to locate another site in the Earley area to enable residents to have that facility.

Supplementary Question:

Many Earley residents are seriously concerned about noise pollution if the proposal for a large 3G pitch gets the go ahead at Maiden Erlegh School to be rented out 7 evenings a week and at weekends. This pitch will be just a few metres from peoples' gardens and homes. Sports England recommends a minimum of distance of 30 metres from Multi Use Games Areas. The Council would almost certainly receive numerous complaints, and there is a very real risk of it becoming an expensive and embarrassing white elephant.

At next week's Executive meeting, Officers will recommend further work on the Maiden Erlegh proposal be stopped until a review of playing pitches and potential sites for new 3G pitches in the Borough, is completed.

Would it not be sensible to rule out Maiden Erlegh completely now to avoid wasting any more time and money, and to put residents' minds at rest, as it is just too near housing, and the worry of having their quality of life ruined is causing people significant distress?

Supplementary Answer:

To rule out any point at this stage in the development of the new Borough wide Playing Pitch Strategy would be something that we cannot do, otherwise it would not be a complete, independent review, and that is what it will be, an independent review. We cannot rule out anywhere. I am not ruling in anywhere.

92.4 David Portus asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question:

The Council has recently taken to public consultation in order to help facilitate

change.

How can the local residents be sure this isn't just a ruse to push through policy decisions already formed by the governing body?

Answer:

Thank you for your question.

Local authorities have a statutory obligation to consult on a range of specific issues of local and national interest. Wokingham Borough Council is keen to exceed its statutory obligations and consult effectively with local residents, businesses and other stakeholders on issues which affect them, to ensure they are involved in the planning, implementing and monitoring of the services offered by the Council.

Consultation is an important part of the Council's decision-making principles which are set out in the Council's Constitution. Other principles include proportionality (i.e., the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome); the taking of professional advice from Officers; respecting human rights; a presumption in favour of openness; clarity of aims and desired outcomes and when decisions are taken by the Executive, details of the options which were taken into account.

Decisions need to be taken in the round, and whilst these other criteria are important, I can assure you that actively seeking out and listening to residents' and others' views is not a ruse and is at the heart of our political ethos and we will continue to promote and encourage this.

It is important that people understand that responding to a consultation is not the same as having a vote on whether something goes ahead or not. Sometimes things have to go ahead even if the majority of responses are opposed, but we will still look at whether we can make changes to what's planned to try to accommodate peoples' wishes as far as possible. The substance of the issues raised is important, not just the number of responses.

Supplementary Question:

I have taken part in two recent consultations, a survey on bin collections which precludes any discussion on maintaining weekly bin collections, and a survey on the Maiden Erlegh 3G pitch proposal, which ignored the possibility of any possible planning issues regardless of the facts, not least that the existing 3G pitch was being operated in breach of the planning conditions set by the Council.

Would the Councillor agree with me that before matters are put forward to public consultation, a thorough investigation should be made by the Council to establish all relevant facts, and not just those that support a particular view? By the way I have not seen any results from this one anywhere yet.

Supplementary Answer:

I can assure you that we try before consultations go out to consider nearly all of the options that are available, but it is only right and proper that when other issues are raised during consultations, that we consider them as well. I think we do that as a Council.

92.5 Nancy Baddoo asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:

Question:

We were informed at the Council Meeting on 17 November that for the Maiden Erlegh 3G pitch proposal, the ground will be raised by up to 1.5 m and a 4.5 m fence erected, giving a total height of up to 6 m (the equivalent of a two-storey structure), which will only be 8 m distant from many residential boundaries. How importantly does the Council view the issue of residential visual amenity, and will it be reviewed before taking this proposal further?

Answer:

When I agreed to take the previous Administration's Maiden Erlegh School proposal to the July Executive, I made clear that progress would be subject to consultation. That consultation highlighted some unsatisfactory aspects. I will therefore be presenting a report to the January Executive meeting seeking my colleagues' approval to cease any further work at Maiden Erlegh and to reassess the needs of the area as part of a new Borough wide Playing Pitch Strategy. Therefore, there is at the moment, no longer an issue at this time to be reviewed.

Supplementary Question:

Given the importance of the proximity to housing we wondered why this was omitted as a problem for the Maiden Erlegh site, in the technical appraisal of September 2022, whereas the problem was highlighted for two other sites. Does it not show that, that technical appraisal had some flaws in it?

Supplementary Answer:

Yes.

92.6 Karen Brown asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:

Question:

Wokingham Borough Council, in the proposal for the 3G pitch says:

'The growing population of Wokingham needs to be supported by a **robust** leisure offer to **enhance** wellbeing and **enrich** the lives of residents - we will help our residents keep fit and **thrive**'.

How will you help **enhance** the lives of the residents whose lives will be **blighted** by the 3G pitch especially those backing straight onto the pitch at a distance that you quoted of approximately 8 metres?

It's always good to have a visual guide, so to help out, the length of this table is approximately 6.5 metres add on another metre and a half and this is the distance from peoples' homes that is supposed to be acceptable.

Answer:

I think I would just refer you to my answer to the previous question without repeating anything that I said to that.

Supplementary Question:

Based on the pitch being used 6-10pm Monday to Friday and 9am-8pm Saturday and Sunday as we have been advised, and assuming that most people using a sports facility for football training have one session of training per week and one match per week, and if we take it that the full eleven a side match is 90 minutes, each individual will get approximately 3 hours a week benefit to their physical and mental health. Residents will get 42 hours of negative mental health impact on their lives per week. The UK Mental Health Association says that the intrusion from noise and light can lead to excess stress, possibly resulting in cardiac arrests, strokes, and depression. We have a number of over 50's living close to the proposed site, and are in the high risk group for heart attacks and strokes, according to the UK statistics. Add to that the general stress of busy working lives, and living with poor health in some cases, the cost of living crisis, and a total loss of rest and relaxation in our own homes and gardens, what assessment of balance did you use when the gain per individual player is a maximum of 3 hours per week and 42 hours of loss per individual resident per week?

Supplementary Answer:

The project is no longer proceeding at this point, so again I would refer you to my previous answer. The review that will create the new Playing Pitch Strategy which should be completed by the summer of this year will take all sorts of factors into account.

92.7 Elizabeth Newman 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:

The Council have recently publicised their efforts to battle Climate change. The Climate Emergency Action Plan includes Increased Greening Reducing Carbon Dioxide emissions. I would like to ask the Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Residents Services how the laying of a plastic football pitch over grass at Maiden Erlegh school fits with these objectives, that she is sponsoring?

Answer:

Whilst this question was asked of Sarah Kerr originally, I will answer because tackling climate change is our collective responsibility, and the question relates to my portfolio.

In view of the report to be considered at the January Executive meeting, which I have previously mentioned, I will answer your question in general terms, if I may, rather than specifically addressing Maiden Erlegh.

Almost every aspect of human activity to some degree causes environmental damage, and the use of sport pitches being no exception. On the one hand artificial playing surfaces are derived from petrochemicals and create end of life recycling difficulties, but on the other hand grass pitches require substantial chemical and mechanical input to keep them in good condition. Although grass pitches can absorb CO2 they contribute very little to biodiversity.

The fact remains that demand is too high to be met by grass pitches alone as they are not sufficiently durable for repeated or successional use particularly in winter. Consequentially while I am not 100% comfortable with artificial pitches at all, I am 100% uncomfortable with denying thousands of children and young adults, the opportunity to play sport. However, to inform our decisions going forward I have asked Officers to search for reputable sources of any comparison of the whole life environmental cost of grass versus artificial playing pitches.

Supplementary Question:

A couple of years ago the Natural History Museum published an article stating that the UK has led the world in destroying the natural environment. More recent studies state that over the last 25 years the UK population of earthworms, which are essential for biodiversity, has declined by a third in numbers, so the enlarged any plastic pitch, and any other plastic pitch will continue this trend which appears to contradict the Council's objective of protecting the environment and demonstrating sustainability to young people. Is that something which will be included in your thoughts?

Supplementary Answer:

As I indicated, I am trying to get reputable information from reputable sources on the whole life environmental cost of grass versus artificial pitches. I am not 100% comfortable with plastic, far from it, but we cannot deny the opportunity for thousands of children, and across the country the same thing, to play and participate in sport, which is incredibly valuable for their development, without some use of surfaces other than grass. I am conscious that there are improvements continuously on the artificial playing surfaces.

92.8 Peter Humphreys asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

WBC regularly publicise their attempts to track down fly-tippers but never reveal why the Highways Dept and their contractors have special exemption to deposit litter across the town. One doesn't have to travel far to see council-sponsored fly-tipping; Cantley Park is bookended with five abandoned signs for road works that were completed several months ago. The same applies to Norreys Avenue where sandbags and signs have been discarded at both ends and in the middle of the road.

Photographic evidence has been provided to all Members. You'll notice that the photos have been taken in a small part of Norreys ward, not because its special but because I came across the fly-tipping on one short walk. It is typical of the whole Borough.

It is paradoxical that whilst residents are being encouraged to recycle the Highways team are indulging in single use signs at great cost to Council Taxpayers.

These remnants of roadworks et al create trip hazards, make the town look scruffy and, they provide examples and positive encourage for residents to follow and drop their own litter also. Are you proud of this?

At this point in the meeting, it was proposed by Pauline Jorgensen that Public Questions be extended by 10 minutes to enable all questioners to put their question. This was seconded by Keith Baker.

Upon being put to the vote this was agreed.

Answer:

Thank you, Peter, for your question. This is something that we are aware of, and something that we are working to improve. Whilst the Council is the owner of the highway network within Wokingham Borough, there are many users alongside the Council's own contractors.

The Council have identified that our contractor has missed picking up signage after the works have been completed. We have brought this to the attention of the contractor and are undertaking inspections after the works are completed to check that all signage, A frames and sandbags are removed after the works have been completed.

As the highways authority through our function and network management duties, our Streetworks Inspectors will log abandoned signs, barriers and other equipment and attempt to identify their owners via work permit records. If it is an external utility company, charges for unreasonable occupation of the highway under Section 74 of the New Roads and Streetworks Act 1991 will be pursued.

It is inevitable that some abandoned equipment will not be seen by Inspectors so we encourage our residents to inform us of this via our customer service number Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm - call [0118 974 6000](tel:01189746000) so that we can investigate, to get the equipment removed and take the appropriate enforcement action.

Supplementary Question:

Most of the signs left behind are Council ones because utility companies being private organisations, they are accountable, and they do take them away. In the real world organisations normally inspect their works after they have finished to check that they have been done properly before authorising an invoice for payment. Case in point would be when a surgeon checks that all the tools used in an operation are removed from a patient before stitching up the wounds. Clearly this does not happen at the moment as contractors are able to submit invoices willy nilly in the knowledge they will be paid without any checks, so hopefully what you have just said is going to prevent this in the future. I will keep an eye on it and be back if not.

Supplementary Answer:

There are approximately 5,300 roadworks undertaken in the Borough annually. 75% of those are undertaken by the utilities, and yes they do leave their signs and equipment behind.

92.9 Jeremy Evershed asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:

Question

I would like to hear an update on the promised analysis of Football pitches provision against the Football Foundation estimate of 500 teams in the Borough as quoted in the Maiden Erlegh plastic pitch pack; bearing in mind the 4 pitches in the planning process at Hyde End Lane, plus any other on-going consultations and/or planning submissions.

Answer:

As indicated in my earlier answers we have initiated preparation of a Borough wide Playing Pitch Strategy which will look at both the summer and winter provision and is due to be delivered in summer 2023. This Playing Pitch Strategy will incorporate evidence for the new 3G Pitch plans across the Borough.

This Plan will support the Council and wider partners in determining the exact extent of any new 3G pitch development planned. It is important to state that grass pitch provisions, whether existing pitches or planned site such as Hyde End Lane, do not solve the demand issues that clubs face for safe, affordable floodlit training facilities.

Supplementary Question:

Does the Council recognise the error in their previous consultation and particularly the proximity of housing?

Supplementary Answer:

I think the analysis was not complete and the proximity of housing was not given sufficient weight in some instances, or at least was given disproportionate weight in some instances over others. That will be a factor in the Playing Pitch Strategy.

92.10 Judith Clark asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:

Question:

We recently learned that two key partner clubs - which have 33 teams between them - would use most of the training and match-day slots available at the very large 3G pitch planned for Maiden Erlegh School. In the consultation, the case for this pitch was made by stating there were 524 local teams in the area and that they needed better facilities. How will the hundreds of teams not presented with a brand new million pound plus 3G pitch feel about the lucky 33, and won't the Council be under extreme pressure to fund many more 3G pitches for the rest of them?

Answer:

I am just going to do as I did earlier and refer you to my answer to the previous question, Question number 9.

92.11 Heather Murray asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

As a resident of the Montague Park development, I have had an email from my Ward Councillor citing a number of issues and their progress or lack of it that are unrelated to the original petition presented at your September meeting. Residents of Montague Park want to know when their voices will be listened to, and the requests met that are integral for the ongoing road safety that the Councillors openly campaigned to

support. These are namely: 20mph road markings, barriers lining the school pavement and the crossing on William Heelas Way that is integral for children crossing that part of the road safely. When will these be actioned and if not, why not?

Answer:

Thank you, Heather, for your question.

At the Full Council meeting in October 2022, I highlighted to the Chamber that in accordance with the Department for Transport circular 01/2013 Setting local speed limits the Borough Council evaluate the appropriate speed limit outside Primary schools.

As a new school, The Floreat had been assessed and 20mph Advisory speed limit signs with flashing lights were installed during late October 2022 and became operational after the half-term break. This brings the school into line with most other schools in the Borough.

As for the petition, the normal process would have been for the measures to be assessed against national and local criteria and prioritised, in the same way as measures requested for other sites. However, the Shadow Executive Member submitted a related Motion at the October meeting which has yet to be considered by Full Council and we have to wait for the outcome of that before we know the appropriate next steps.

The Motion is on the agenda again for discussion tonight. I would ask you to read the comments from the Chief Finance Officer that follow it, including the fact that one of the things you ask for is contrary to national government policy.

What happens next will depend on the outcome of the Motion.

Supplementary Question:

Unfortunately, and whilst I emphasise with, and appreciate the work that you have done to look at this, I am sorry to say that I have absolutely no belief in the commitment to deliver on what is required to keep the children attending Floreat Montague Park safe on their journey to and from school each day.

There has been a Motion as you quite rightly cited, before this Council since September which would ensure the safety of our children, yet it has not been reached in any of the previous meetings of this Council, despite being on the agenda. Therefore, under Rule 4.2.25.1 Suspension, I would ask the Mayor to suspend Rules of Procedure by Motion on Notice or Without Notice, as is her right, and move Motion 495 to be debated unamended as the next order of business, as the only stipulation of doing so, namely that there be at least one half of the whole number of Members of the Council being present, has been met. I can see no logical, rational, or reasonable reason why this Motion which has been worded and asked for by residents, who I am representing this evening, cannot be debated unamended, immediately.

At this point in the meeting Gregor Murray requested in line with Rule 4.2.25.1 that the Rules of Procedure be suspended and that Motion 495 be taken as the next

item. The Mayor agreed but clarified that the Motion could be amended.

92.12 Motion 495 submitted by Charles Margetts

Council considered the following Motion, proposed by Charles Margetts, and seconded by Keith Baker.

‘Residents who live off William Heelas Way in Wokingham have raised significant concerns with me about the speed of traffic outside Floreat Montague Park Primary School. The link road between London Road and the future Southern Relief Road has a 30mph speed limit and traffic levels which will only get busier when the Southern Relief Road opens. Wokingham Borough Council believes it is of vital importance that young children can travel to school on foot or by bicycle in complete safety. To ensure children can walk and cycle safely to school Wokingham Borough Council will change the speed limit outside all primary schools to 20 mph.’

Charles Margetts commented that in September 2022 he had been contacted by a number of residents of William Heelas Way over concerns regarding access to Floreat Montague School. A petition of over 500 people had been submitted to Council. Key requests had been barriers to protect pedestrians, a permanent 20mph speed limit outside of the School, and the restoration of the painted level crossing on William Heelas Way. Only advisory 20mph signs were in place. Charles Margetts went on to inform Members of some of the near misses which had occurred outside the school. He felt that future injury was inevitable.

An amendment had been suggested that proposed that the works go into the Highways Safety Improvement Pool. Charles Margetts felt that this was insufficient and that the works would not be undertaken should this occur. He highlighted that less than 10% of schemes in this pool had been completed in the last 5 years.

It was proposed by Paul Fishwick and seconded by Alistair Neal that the Motion be amended as follows:

‘Residents who live off William Heelas Way in Wokingham have raised significant concerns with me about the speed of traffic and the lack of protection for parents and young children accessing Floreat Montague Park Primary School. The link road between London Road and the future Southern Relief Road has a 30mph speed limit and traffic levels which will only get busier when the Southern Relief Road opens. At the last Council meeting residents handed in a petition signed by over 500 people calling for a 20mph speed limit outside the school, the provision of barriers around the pavements and full reinstatement of a pedestrian crossing on William Heelas Way. Wokingham Borough Council believes it is of vital importance that young children can travel to this school on foot or by bicycle in complete safety. To ensure children can walk and cycle safely to school Wokingham Borough Council agrees to meet **put** the requests of the petition **into the highway safety improvements pool** without further delay.’

This amendment was not accepted by Charles Margetts.

Paul Fishwick commented that it was disappointing that the amendment had not been accepted as it would ensure that the requested improvements would be put

into the Highways Safety Improvements Pool. This was the process that requests of this nature had followed. He referred to a previous petition requesting a safe crossing for children attending the Holt School, and other requests. The requests requested in the Motion had not been properly assessed and compared with similar schemes in order to assess their priority. The 20mph speed limit had already been delivered. Adding the other requests to the pool would also enable additional avenues for funding and bids to be sought.

Alistair Neal added that councillors should promote road safety schemes but should not manipulate the process for the benefit of their own wards. The scheme should go into the pool to be assessed, ranked, and prioritised by Officers. If the requests had the appropriate merits, they would be prioritised.

Gregor Murray highlighted examples of dangerous driving at school times. He felt that the layout of the road allowed dangerous driving and safety measures needed to urgently be put in place. He emphasised the road safety campaign work undertaken by his wife.

Maria Gee commented that the Council had to assess all projects in line with other projects to assess priority. However, she strongly supported the measures and questioned why nothing had been undertaken previously.

Gary Cowan stated that he supported the amendment as there were a number of different schools requiring road safety improvements and there needed to be a system to assess priority. He wanted assurance that the requests would have priority.

Keith Baker stated that there was a lack of transparency in the Highways Project Plan. He was of the view that agreeing the amendment would be a dereliction of duty.

Charles Margetts questioned how many other schools had had petitions of over 500 people requesting road safety improvements. He clarified that Floreat Montague School was not in his ward and he had become involved because people had approached him after feeling that they were not getting anywhere via other routes. Charles Margetts questioned the financial information included in the Chief Finance Officer's Statement.

In accordance with Section 4.2.15.5 a recorded vote was requested on the amendment.

FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
Rachel Bishop-Firth	Sam Akhtar	
Shirley Boyt	Keith Baker	
Prue Bray	Parry Batth	
Rachel Burgess	Laura Blumenthal	
Stephen Conway	Anne Chadwick	
David Cornish	Phil Cunningham	
Gary Cowan	David Davies	

Andy Croy	Michael Firmager	
Peter Dennis	Jim Frewin	
Lindsay Ferris	John Halsall	
Paul Fishwick	Peter Harper	
Maria Gee	Pauline Helliard Symons	
David Hare	Norman Jorgensen	
Clive Jones	Pauline Jorgensen	
Sarah Kerr	John Kaiser	
Tahir Maher	Abdul Loyes	
Morag Malvern	Charles Margetts	
Adrian Mather	Rebecca Margetts	
Andrew Mickleburgh	Stuart Munro	
Alistair Neal	Gregor Murray	
Beth Rowland	Jackie Rance	
Ian Shenton	Wayne Smith	
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey	Bill Soane	
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey	Alison Swaddle	
Caroline Smith	Shahid Younis	
Mike Smith		

Upon being put to the vote this was declared to be carried. The amendment became the substantive Motion.

In accordance with Section 4.2.15.5 a recorded vote was requested on the substantive Motion.

FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
Rachel Bishop Firth	Sam Akhtar	
Laura Blumenthal	Keith Baker	
Shirley Boyt	Parry Batth	
Prue Bray		
Rachel Burgess		
Anne Chadwick		
Stephen Conway		
David Cornish		
Gary Cowan		
Andy Croy		
Phil Cunningham		
David Davis		
Peter Dennis		
Lindsay Ferris		
Michael Firmager		
Paul Fishwick		
Jim Frewin		

Maria Gee		
John Halsall		
David Hare		
Peter Harper		
Pauline Helliard Symons		
Clive Jones		
Norman Jorgensen		
Pauline Jorgensen		
John Kaiser		
Sarah Kerr		
Abdul Loyes		
Tahir Maher		
Morag Malvern		
Charles Margetts		
Rebecca Margetts		
Adrian Mather		
Andrew Mickleburgh		
Stuart Munro		
Gregor Murray		
Alistair Neal		
Jackie Rance		
Beth Rowland		
Ian Shenton		
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey		
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey		
Caroline Smith		
Mike Smith		
Wayne Smith		
Bill Soane		
Alison Swaddle		
Shahid Younis		

RESOLVED: That residents who live off William Heelas Way in Wokingham have raised significant concerns with me about the speed of traffic and the lack of protection for parents and young children accessing Floreat Montague Park Primary School. The link road between London Road and the future Southern Relief Road has a 30mph speed limit and traffic levels which will only get busier when the Southern Relief Road opens. At the last Council meeting residents handed in a petition signed by over 500 people calling for a 20 mph speed limit outside the school, the provision of barriers around the pavements and full reinstatement of a pedestrian crossing on William Heelas Way. Wokingham Borough Council believes it is of vital importance that young children can travel to this school on foot or by bicycle in complete safety. To ensure children can walk and cycle safely to school Wokingham Borough Council agrees to put the requests of the petition into the highway safety improvements pool without further delay.

93. Petitions

There were no petitions submitted.

94. Council Tax Base - 23/24

Council received a report regarding the Council Tax Base 2023/24.

It was proposed by Imogen Shepherd-DuBey and seconded by Clive Jones that the recommendations contained within the report be agreed.

Imogen Shepherd-DuBey indicated that the tax base had increased by 1.74% this year. The increase in the Council Tax premium for empty homes was highlighted. This was designed to encourage homeowners to rent or sell their empty homes to bring them back into residential use. There were some exemptions to this premium.

RESOLVED: That

the proposed Council Tax Base, for the whole area and by Parish, as set out in the report, be agreed;

a premium of 300% for Long Term Empty Properties for at least 5 years (but less than 10 years), be agreed;

a premium of 400% for Long Term Empty Properties for over 10 years, be agreed.

95. Council Tax Support Scheme - 23/24

Council received a report regarding the Council Tax Scheme 2023/24.

It was proposed by Imogen Shepherd-DuBey and seconded by Rachel Bishop-Firth that the recommendations contained within the report be agreed.

Imogen Shepherd-DuBey commented that the Council Tax support scheme was designed to support residents on the lowest incomes. It was reviewed annually and it had been agreed that an additional £100,000 would be added to next year to keep the scheme in sync with increases in Universal Credit and other benefit schemes. The scheme disregarded payments for Child Maintenance and Carers Allowance but stopped for a single person where their remaining income rose above £16,558 per year, or £23,900 for a family with two or more children. This was an increase of 10.1% on last year.

It had been agreed that an additional £250,000 would be added to the Budget next year in order to support struggling households. Imogen Shepherd-DuBey commented that she hoped to work with Officers and the cross party working group over the next year to look at the Council's current benefit provision.

RESOLVED: That the Council agrees the proposed Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24:

- 1) a local CTR scheme for 2023/24 be adopted on the same basis as the 2022/23 with a growth of £100k included in the proposed MTFP in order to maintain

support in line with Council Tax increases and to reflect increases in central government welfare payments;

- 2) that the full disregard currently allowed for War Widows and War Disability Pensions be continued from 1st April 2023 in respect of the Prescribed and Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Housing Benefit schemes;
- 3) that funds be made available to the hardship fund, known as Section 13a (S13a) scheme, for those who cannot pay their council tax liabilities;
- 4) the linkages to the broader Tackling Poverty Strategy of both the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the S13a scheme, be noted;
- 5) an additional £250k to be included in the proposed 2023/24 general fund revenue budget to provide further support above and beyond the Council Tax Relief Scheme to tackle poverty in the light of cost of living pressures, be noted.

96. Timetable of Meetings 2023/24

Council considered the timetable of meetings 2023/24.

It was proposed by Clive Jones and seconded by Stephen Conway that the timetable of meetings 2023/24 be agreed.

Clive Jones commented that he was pleased to see eight Council meetings scheduled for the next municipal year. He felt that this would allow greater opportunity to consider Motions.

RESOLVED: That the timetable of meetings 2023/24 be agreed.

97. Review of Members Allowances by the Independent Remuneration Panel

Bob Nancarrow, Chairman of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) presented the report to Council and took Members through the recommendations, which were driven by objective data analysis and independent thinking. The Panel's analysis had shown that some Members' Allowances for Wokingham Borough Council had fallen behind their Berkshire neighbours, in part due to Wokingham Borough Council not accepting increases for a number of years.

Members were informed that the total proposed increase for SRAs and the Deputy Mayor allowance was £11,245, the Basic Allowance on the indexation would be £14,418, which in total was £25,663. This equated to a rise from £3.82 per resident to £4.

Clive Jones thanked the Panel for their hard work and strong commitment. He welcomed parts of the report and agreed a review should be carried out every four years. However, the Council was dealing with a difficult financial situation and had not received a favourable Local Government settlement. With the cost of living crisis and the Council trying to address a deficit, he felt that he could not support an increase to Members Allowances at this time, but hoped that the Panel would return next year.

Clive Jones requested that separate votes be taken on recommendations 2, 3, 9, 13 and 14 (together) and 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11 and 12 (together).

Pauline Jorgensen thanked the Panel for their hard work and for meeting with her to discuss the report. Whilst she was supportive of the direction of travel she could not support any increase to allowances at this time.

Andy Croy also thanked the Panel. He commented that the Labour councillors still claimed the Basic Allowance as set in 2010 and had refused to take any increases since then. Members were accountable to residents. He went on to state that the allowance was not a salary and should not be a reason for becoming a councillor.

Keith Baker referred to increasing energy costs and the cost-of-living crisis. He went on to refer to the local removal of green caddy bags and increasing car parking charges. Keith Baker commented on the impact of backdating and stated that he could not support an increase to Members Allowances.

Stephen Conway gave his thanks to the Panel for their thorough review. The recommendations to increase allowances could not be supported given the poor financial climate. However, if the makeup of the Council wanted to diversify, consideration may need to be given to reviewing the level of allowances in the future.

RESOLVED: That Council agree that

- 1) The £500 component of the Basic Allowance for the provision of IT should continue to only be claimed by those Members who provide facilities which allow constituents and Officers to communicate with them by email, in addition to having adequate equipment and connections to allow for effective participation in virtual and hybrid meetings and the self-certification process related to this component of the basic allowance to be continued;
- 2) No one-off changes be made to any of the following SRAs: Leader of the Council, Leader of the Opposition, Deputy Executive Members, Chair of the Standards Committee, Chair of the Personnel Board, Member of the Planning Committee, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committees;
- 3) No one-off increase be made to the Mayor's Allowance;
- 4) No changes be made to the Travel and Subsistence Allowances;
- 5) No changes be made to the Dependent and Cares Allowance scheme.

98. Adoption of the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan

Council considered the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan.

It was proposed by Lindsay Ferris and seconded by Wayne Smith that the recommendations within the report be agreed.

Lindsay Ferris indicated that the Plan had been in development since 2017. There were no proposals for new mineral and waste allocation within the Borough but there were several others in the wider plan area, including six in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead area. It was noted that Brookside Business Park in Swallowfield had been removed as a preferred waste area due to flooding concerns, and the Star Works site in Knowl Hill was being safeguarded for waste issues as an existing operational waste site.

RESOLVED: That Council:

- 1) adopts the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan, (Enclosure 2), which incorporates the Main Modifications recommended by the Planning Inspectors (Enclosures 3 and 4)
- 2) agrees to make alterations to the adopted Policies Map (Enclosure 5) that are necessary to give effect to the policies of the Joint Plan;
- 3) authorises the Director of Place and Growth, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan, to agree minor amendments necessary to the Joint Plan and other supporting documents ahead of publication and publicity.

99. Member Question Time

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

99.1 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan the following question:

Question:

Are the financial implications of a planning application a planning matter?

Answer:

Financial implications of a scheme can and do form part of Planning Officers' considerations, these can include viability or the cost of mitigating the development impacts. With respect to questions over potential for costs at appeal, if officers are asked, officers can give their professional opinion on the likely outcome of an appeal including costs, however any decision needs to be based on sound planning reasons and not because appeal costs may be incurred.

Supplementary Question:

In reality I have spent many years on the Planning Committee, and what actually happens is if a Member has a view and it looks as if the decision may be going against the officer recommendation, then they quite often say that there will be costs awarded at appeal if we go to appeal and lose it. I think this guides Members in perhaps the wrong direction, and it is good to get it very clear that it is not a planning consideration, the actual costs of appeals, and that should not be referred to by officers. Perhaps with good planning reason and knowledge they can perhaps use it as a general practice. I am pleased to say that they cannot.

Supplementary Answer:

I absolutely agree with you. A planning application should be dealt with on the planning considerations.

99.2 Jim Frewin asked the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan the following question:**Question:**

Wokingham has been subjected to significant development over the past few years. The planning process provides for community amenities and planning conditions build on these amenities. Shinfield has waited for nearly 10 years to get a promised supermarket, only recently approved, and significantly varied from the original promised amenity. We also await other amenities such as sports pitches, pavilion, community focal point etc, all late and much changed from the original promises. Shinfield is not alone in this wait. I also understand that Wokingham are not meeting the planning levels for allotment provision. What are Wokingham planning doing about meeting the agreed amenity targets for our communities?

Answer:

Thank you for the question.

You are right that all the major developments we have planned for in recent years has secured new infrastructure to be designed in and delivered alongside the much-needed new homes we have been providing.

In respect to the Shinfield major development specifically, the new infrastructure delivered to date includes upgraded outdoor sports facilities at Ryeish Green, new public open spaces including allotment sites at both Three Mile Cross and Shinfield, the new Aldergrove Primary School and the Eastern Relief Road. The new Shinfield Community building has also been delivered through funding secured from the development in addition to other projects delivered by the Parish. The provision of allotments and public open space is in accordance with our policy and is either being provided as new facilities and/or through enhancements to existing facilities.

It is recognised that some elements of the planned infrastructure are still to be delivered including further allotments, cricket/sports pitches and the supermarket. These will be delivered as the development continues to progress. For example, the allotments at Orchard Rise were delayed due to soil compaction and other remedial works which needed to be put right before opening. These will open in early 2023 following final approval from the Council.

I sympathise that the delayed delivery of the supermarket at Shinfield is frustrating, but it is great news that it is now planned to come forward. My understanding is that the delay to the supermarket has primarily been caused by economic uncertainty following Covid and this resulted in a lack of commercial interest for a period.

I am pleased that the proposed supermarket is progressing and whilst slightly smaller than that originally planned, it is much closer to the original vision with the change reflecting how the retail market has changed over time.

We will continue to do all we can to hold major developments to the agreed vision, recognising that any move away should be fully explained and justified, and not done without a look of whatever as I would call it.

Supplementary Question:

The question was more whilst I used examples at Shinfield, it was wider. It was across all development across the whole of Wokingham, where we fail to deliver the amenities promised.

As a Council, along with our Town and Parish Councils, we have many obligations to our communities. These include such things as keeping areas clean and safe, simple things like keeping roads and open areas clean of rubbish and evidence of dog walkers, and street lighting to keep our residents safe. We also have obligations to deliver what we promise, and what we approve through the planning process. We may not always do this, but we can always be held, and rightly so to account. What do we do to hold developers to account where before we adopt some of these new developments? The developers are not keeping some of our residents safe. They are not keeping our streets clean, and they are not allowing the communities to flourish.

Supplementary Answer:

The Council does have a team particularly to deal with the SDL activities where they work with the developers to ensure that they do provide the services that are required. However, you do raise a very important point, and that is about the calibre of the different developers across the Borough. In fact it is one of the things that is in the new MPPF that has been issued just before Christmas, where the issue of the calibre is now being considered as an issue as to whether we can consider them to be suitable or not in future. I think that is something that is very good because it makes developers, and there a number that I could name, but I will not at the moment, that have not performed on doing things on various parts of the Borough. I might look at someone who is not very far away, who has been affected by a particular developer, and there is others in other parts that have been very laggard.

One of the things that really does give me a lot of problems, is the way that they set up these companies to charge residents up to £3,000 a year to do things, where the roads are not in a very good state. You drove me around the Shinfield area and some of the roads were in an appalling state. In fact, the central road point that you showed, actually had a car hit it about two days afterwards. Some developers are a lot worse than others, but there are some good developers, and I think we need to build on this with the developers and work harder and push them so that when they say they will develop and provide x, they provide x.

99.3 Jackie Rance asked the Executive Member for Housing the following question:

Question:

I have been helping five social housing tenants and their families at Clements Close, Spencer's Wood. They have had one chronic housing problem after another for over the year that I have been involved. Leaks, water cascading down walls, crumbling

staircases, sinks falling over, baths on crooked floors and more. The tenants are all on medication for stress. All are overcrowded. Please could the Administration tell me what is being done imminently to help the families?

Answer:

Thank you for your question, Jackie. The Housing Service has been working on the five cases, with visits to the homes in question from housing officers, surveyors, and specialist contractors to identify what needs to be done and to progress repairs. Unfortunately, as you are I am sure very well aware, some of the problems are complex and are taking time to resolve. But we are committed to supporting the residents and undertaking the repairs that are needed.

Clements Close residents more generally have been surveyed and the number of site visits or walkabouts by housing officers has been increased. A Clements Close Project Group, including Council officers, meets fortnightly to raise and pursue areas of concern.

The administration is committed to ensuring all our housing stock meets health and safety standards. That is why we are investing £8.69million in our repairs and maintenance service and testing the market to see whether additional or alternative options are available to improve the service offered to our tenants.

99.4 Laura Blumenthal asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport, and Leisure the following question:

Question:

There was a sign in the Carnival Hub saying that its cafe was going cashless from December. This doesn't seem very inclusive for a Council building for those residents who want or can only use cash. Please can you confirm if your Administration will commit to protecting the option of using cash in Council buildings?

Answer:

Neither the Council nor Places Leisure have ever had any intention of going completely cashless, so the notice that you refer to shall we say not be a model of clarity.

The Council and Places Leisure do recognise the general trend towards cashless transactions and wish to encourage them where people have the option. However, we have worked with key groups, such as CLASP and Optalis, to assure them that cash will continue to be accepted from users that are known to access the Leisure Centres that way. Cash will also be accepted from any member of the public should they choose to use this payment method, and nobody will be turned away.

Supplementary Question:

I am not entirely sure why there was not clarity with the sign then. So are you confirming that cash will be accepted as a payment option in all Council buildings?

Supplementary Answer:

I am confirming that it will be accepted in the Council buildings that come under my remit.

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

Question:

It was confirmed in Spring 2022 that this Council would introduce women's only swimming sessions in the Borough, but this has still not been launched. The request came from the Equality Forum with no communications on the delay being given to the Forum's members. Please can you give me an update on when the swimming sessions will begin?

Answer:

Your question did surprise me at first because an update was provided to the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion team during the latter part of last year, and I see that you were copied on the email.

Little has changed since then, but to summarise: the Forest School were carrying out emergency work to the pool during December, which unfortunately needed to be completed before they could replace the flooring. All being well, they should be able to start the flooring replacement during February.

It is now likely we will be looking at March or the Easter break for the introduction of women's only swimming sessions. Updates will continue to be given by the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion team.

Supplementary Question:

Yes, an update was given but actually the point I would like to make is that we set up this Equality Forum and we asked for recommendations. When they give their recommendations we go away and take so long to consider and implement them. It has been a long time. Can I just remind the Executive that what is being asked is not to build a swimming pool, it is just to have swimming classes. It is not too much to ask, so can you please commit to a date when these female only swimming classes will be provided?

Supplementary Answer:

The date is dependent on the completion of the upgrade and that has been delayed unfortunately by circumstances. It will be available as soon as that little upgrade is complete.

99.6 Keith Baker asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question

At a recent meeting with a Senior Highways Officer, the existence of a Business Case for increased parking charges was questioned. The answer was 'The business case is simply the document that went to executive – there is no further document and no further analysis'. We have repeatedly asked for copies of the Business Case with nothing being provided. If this Officer's comments are true, then it is understandable that the Executive Member could not provide it as it does not exist.

If this is true, this is a massive dereliction of duty to raise charges without any formal

justification behind the proposals. Where are the answers to these questions?

- . what is the impact of increases in a period of economic downturn?
- . what is the impact of increases on local traders?
- . what is plan B if the Council gets the changes wrong, affecting business viability?
- . Does the possible revenue benefit outweigh the likely disadvantage to the retail sector already affected by the economic downturn?

The easy answer to all these questions could be resolved instantly by publishing the Business Case. Will you publish the Business Case behind these increases? A simple yes or no answer will suffice.

Answer:

Thank you, Keith, for your question.

As was explained to you by the Officer, the business case was the document that went to the Executive. In summary, there is a forecast shortfall in income and we need to address that.

As I presented to the Executive on 22nd November 2022, we considered many areas and these included

- Taking funding from the reserves
- Closing the park and rides
- Taking funding from the revenue highways budget
- Taking funding from other service area

All of these had significant implications; therefore, the only option was income generation from existing off-street car parks as the cupboard was bare of any other funding.

Options were explored to do nothing, cover the lower end of the budget shortfall or towards the higher end. The Executive agreed with the lower increased charges with an estimated forecast of £540,000 additional income.

The calculations made were based on known ticket sales. Any forecast is an estimate, as no ticket sales are guaranteed, and any number of changes could arise which could affect income

We have considered all the points made about the potential impact, which is why the final version of the changes was different to the first version.

Car parking income is constantly monitored, so if the impact of the changes is not as anticipated, of course they will be reviewed.

Supplementary Question:

So what you are actually saying is all my questions in the question have been answered in the business case? Now if that is the case why will you not publish it? It is no good just keep on standing up here and providing answers. Publish it, publish it. Residents want to see answers to all these questions. You appear to

have them, so why will you not put it into the public domain? Publish it and be damned.

Supplementary Answer:

As I said already the Executive report is a summary of the work that we did. The calculations are based on ticket sales and there is no guarantee. I would also like to say that the Conservatives proposed in the draft MTFP, increases in car parking charges, in November 2021, with a forecast income of £500,000, but did not progress it. If they had done that then the situation may have been different now for the car parking service with a shortfall that we now face. Therefore, this Administration has had to take the very difficult decision to increase charges to cover the shortfall in income forecast. Was there a business case with what you had done previously? I think not.

99.7 Rachel Burgess asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

There have been six collisions at the Wokingham town centre junction of Rectory Road and Wiltshire Road in recent years, where cars have come off the road, crossed the pavement at speed, and crashed into the railings outside the apartments on this junction. Three of these collisions occurred in the last seven months, and two in the last two months, causing considerable damage and concern.

There are many older residents in this area, some of whom are scared to walk on the pavements outside their own front doors due to the speed of traffic and the frequency of collisions at this site. In the most recent example, residents were walking along the pavement just moments before the incident. Residents are rightly concerned for pedestrian safety and fear a serious accident, causing personal injury, will occur.

A resident petition for safety measures at this junction was presented to the Council over a year ago. What measures is the Council taking to ensure safety at this junction, in particular for the many pedestrians in this area?

Answer:

The Council is sorry to learn of collisions with private property referred to by the elected Member. Wiltshire Road is a busy A-class road carrying over 8200 vehicles daily and Police reports show one collision involving an injury to a road user, but not associated with the private property.

Average and 85%ile speeds are compliant with the speed limit. Given the high level of use and low injury collision record it is clear that the road does not have an inherent safety risk, that engineering measures would be able to address.

Whilst it is evident from resident reports that, over the past year, some drivers have failed to cope with a road layout that has been in place for decades and caused no problem to drivers previously using this road, 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. Certainly, the road layout, signs and

markings at this location are all appropriate and serve to manage traffic safely.

However, there is an ongoing assessment into the possible provision of a formal crossing facilities at this location which may present an opportunity for other changes to be made. Otherwise, incidents of excessive speed, should they be the cause, are a matter of enforcement for Thames Valley Police to consider.

Supplementary Question:

You mentioned the absence of Police evidence and other evidence regarding this area, but my understanding is that is partly because yet there has been no serious personal injury or death at that site, so my question is, what can we do now as a Council to ensure that we move away from this position where we appear to have to wait for something really awful to happen before any action is actually taken?

Supplementary Answer:

The difficulty we have is that we do not actually have the causation factor of these incidents. Unfortunately, no Highway Authority can plan for bad driver behaviour or driving under the influence of drugs, or excess alcohol, or mechanical failure. Therefore, there is little we can actually do but just monitor the site and get as much information as possible from any incidents that unfortunately occur in the future.

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

Question:

Given that the Conservatives had 99% success in winning appeals on planning applications, can you tell me how many have been lost on appeal, and the total cost to the Council of these losses, since May?

Answer:

There have been 53 appeal decisions in the 8 months since May 2022. Of those appeals, 21 were allowed, one was a split decision and 31 were dismissed. This compares to a total of 74 appeal decisions in the preceding year 1 May 2021 to 30 April 2022, when 19 were allowed, 3 were split decisions and 52 were dismissed.

Noting that there is a six-month period to lodge an appeal, plus the time taken for the Planning Inspectorate to determine the appeal, many of the appeal decisions since May 2022 were associated with applications which were determined by the Council prior to May 2022. Of the appeals allowed since May 2022, 4 were committee decisions, of which two were Committee “overturns” – those at Lord Harris Court and St Annes Drive.

For the vast majority of appeals, the appeal procedure remains one of written representation and the cost to the Council is limited to the officer time spent writing appeal statements.

5 appeals have been dealt with by public inquiry since May 2022. Of those that went to public inquiry, 4 appeals were allowed, and one was dismissed. The total costs associated with defending those appeals was around £127,000. Since May 2022, there has been one award of costs to the Council (amount under negotiation) and

one to an Appellant. By comparison, none of the appeals determined in the period May 2021 to April 2022 had followed the public inquiry procedure. However, this was due in part to Covid-19 and backlogs at the Planning Inspectorate. During this period there was 3 awards of costs to the Council and 3 to Appellants.

Supplementary Question:

During the last four years the Conservative success on all housing appeals, that is the one plus houses, not the major developments of ten or more, the Conservatives success was 77.4%, that is over three quarters. The Liberal Democrat successes are only 43%, that is under half. Several appeals since May are pending or awaiting a decision. The lack of a Local Plan is allowing developers to win these appeals, so in the light of this failure to produce a Local Plan, what are you going to do to prevent the building of the proposed additional 835 houses, which are in a threatened area of Green Gap in my ward of Wokingham Without?

Supplementary Answer:

We have an interesting situation because since we took control in May, we have continued the lobbying about the housing numbers for the Borough, and that has been more successful now because of changed circumstances. We are now at the situation where we could have around 2,500 houses less than what would have been done with the current draft Local Plan. So, we were left with a situation of either deciding to go with the current draft Local Plan, which many residents had lots of problems with, with lots of parts of the Plan, or to work and go through a set procedure. We have gone through an assessment of the larger sites. We have continued going through all the stages of going through a Local Plan over this period, and that is what we are doing. We are looking to see how we can develop. We have had a number of planning appeals and we are in the position that we are in.

100. Minutes of Committee Meetings and Ward Matters

100.1 Shirley Boyt asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport, and Leisure the following question:

Question:

Woodley Town Centre has been blighted by anti-social behaviour for many months and I have instructed residents and businesses to report incidents of anti-social behaviour to the ASB email address, assuring them that issues would be investigated promptly, and where necessary the ASB officers would contact the Police.

Unfortunately, the complainants are routinely being told by the officers to call 101 or 999 without even visiting the scene. Please could Ward councillors be provided with a record of how many complaints have been received in respect of Woodley Town Centre since the service came back in house, and what actions have been taken in response?

Answer:

It was disappointing to hear that, Shirley. I will certainly take that away and get a reply to you on the number because I would have expected a more positive response.

100.2 Parry Batth asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

If you remember Madam Mayor, I asked Councillor Paul Fishwick a question about a safe crossing for Crossfield School in my Ward, and Councillor Fishwick agreed to meet me. I was very pleased to hear that, but unfortunately he developed Covid and that meeting was cancelled. It was rescheduled and we agreed to meet at 8am at the school gates, the front school gates, with the Deputy Headteacher waiting there at 8am on the agreed date. We waited from 7:50am to 8:20am but we never saw Councillor Fishwick at all. On getting home I emailed Paul, and Paul said that he was walking up and down Shinfield Road instead of meeting me and the Head. I do not know why he did not show up to meet us. I have no idea, perhaps he can explain? Also, the safe crossing is for children crossing the road. Very important. As we have already discussed tonight, the safety of children is paramount, and there is a lot of work that has already been done by the officers for this particular remit, and that work I do not want to go to waste. I would ask Councillor Fishwick to reconsider his position because he assured me that the crossing is not necessary. Please can you revisit?

Answer:

As in my response to you I did say that I did turn up at the site. I arrived at 7:45am in the morning. I had not realised that there were two entrances to Crossfield School. I went to the first entrance because I was coming up from the Shinfield Arms roundabout, and I waited there until about 8:10am/8:15am. I then wondered up the road and then came back down again. I was then met by some employees of Crossfield School who questioned why I was stood there with a yellow jacket on, and I told them who I was and who I was waiting for. They said we will go and find out where the Headmaster is, and they came back and said yes, the Headmaster is in the Reception. So, I wondered back to the Reception, or the other entrance, and I eventually found him, and I had a discussion with him. I witnessed a few people crossing the road, but the vast majority, about 90% of the people were brought in by car, and a few people came by bus. There has been a report undertaken by the Council in February 2022, which I had a copy of, and I have read through that. The situation is no different now, then at the time of the assessment. However, it will be kept on the shelf and reviewed at a later date.

100.3 Michael Firmager asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

There is a dangerous junction on Sonning Lane and the A4 in my Ward where there have been accidents or extremely near misses. The A4 itself is an extremely fast and dangerous road. This concern was raised and shared by residents and people who use this junction. This is also used by the staff and students of Reading Bluecoats School. A possible solution is a left hand only turn from Sonning Lane on to the A4, and indeed opposite this junction from Warren Road onto the A4 would certainly help make this road safer for all road users. I am sure that there are other measures that could be used to improve road safety. I have raised this previously with officers who just want to continue to monitor this situation on an annual basis. Please can you look into this and press for action for the residents in my Ward, and

indeed anyone who uses this junction? This cannot wait for the annual review of this very fast and dangerous stretch of road.

Answer:

I will certainly take it up. Could you tell me when it was first raised? (*last year*)

100.4 David Hare asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

Most streetlights in Hawkedon work most of the time as the streetlights in Wokingham will work most of the time. There are faults which seem to take an awful long time to rectify. The WBC website suggests that there is only a 28 day investigation target. Does this mean that there is not a Service Level Agreement with a target to actually fix the faulty lights and an investigation target to actually fix the faulty lights, and if not why not, and are you going to make something happen?

Answer:

The aim is to repair the streetlights using Volker within 28 days. However, if they find that the fault is the apparatus in the ground, the electric supply, that is Scottish Southern Electric, and they are the only ones that are allowed to touch those cables. Therefore, we have to rely on their programme to get them completed. They do have target deadlines with Ofgem to actually get those targets completed, but we are reliant on them.

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

Question:

This is on behalf of a group of residents who approached me who live on the Eldridge Park Estate, which for your information is off Bell Foundry Lane. The question is when will there be the opportunity for them to take a bus from the bus stops that have been painted, kerbs prepared etc. along the NDR, because they are nowhere near an existing route?

Answer:

This is quite a difficult one because at the present time we have supported bus services for Wokingham Town and South of the M4 which are coming to the end of their contract. It has been extended to 31 March. The Executive will need to make a decision to extend those contracts for a period of time and then go back out to tender again because the tenders that came in did not meet the criteria. We are probably in a position where it is going to cost considerably more, and more money has to be found for those services, which are the priority because they are the existing ones before we then look to expand the network, which is included in the Bus Service Improvement Plan, which is also going to the Executive next week.

100.6 David Cornish asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:

Question:

The attraction of gravel by the Cemex company from Fleet Hill Farm and Manor Farm in Finchampstead has been winding down for a number of years, with promises of full restoration, public access and the creation of new public rights of way. They have yet to be delivered to the agreed standards, or in some cases not

delivered at all. Could I ask the Executive Member to ensure that all possible is being done by Council officers to ensure that Cemex fulfil their agreements and their planning and contractual obligations to the Council, and to get a commitment for when this will be completed?

Answer:

Yes you are correct the obligations of Cemex have not been met. They have not met the Memorandum of Understanding. We are aware of that. I was in conversation with the Green Infrastructure Team before Christmas about that. There seems to be some edict from the Cemex Board in, I believe, Mexico, which is holding them back, but we are in contact, and we are pressing them as hard as we can to get a resolution of that, because it is important that, that should be returned to effectively, ultimately, a nature reserve.

100.7 Rebecca Margetts asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

Residents of Finchampstead South do not feel safe walking on Sheerlands Road in Arborfield Green due to faulty streetlights. This includes children on their way home from Bohunt School. I have been told that there are multiple lighting failures due to private cabling faults and developer related issues, as others have said this evening. Could I please ask the Executive Member for Highways to expedite that matter for me? It cannot be acceptable in 2023 when active travel is encouraged that our streets are unlit and unsafe.

Answer:

By the sound of things some of these might still be in the hands of the developer, so I will see what I can do, and then I will email you what I have found out.

100.8 Pauline Jorgensen asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sports and Leisure the following question:

Question:

We have had a lot of issues in some areas of Earley with leaflets that seem to have been there for most of the year and have not been cleaned up. I am just wondering if this is a generic problem across the whole Borough or whether there is a problem with Earley in particular. I am wondering if there is a problem with the contractor because it seems to be getting worse.

Answer:

Yes, I do not have a broom big enough for Earley, that is why we are picking on you. In all honesty have they been reported, is my first question? Can you provide me with the reference numbers for the reports, and then we will follow them up, because it does seem to be a deficiency of the particular contractor.

Pauline Jorgensen clarified that she had reported them all and they would all be fixed. However, the quality control on the contractor concerned her. Unless reports were made the road was not swept.

If they have been reported they will have been noted, and there will be conversations with the contractor because I do not believe that Earley is the only place that we

have had reports from.

100.9 Andrew Mickleburgh asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

Hawkedon residents are not immune to the difficulties experienced by residents throughout the Borough resulting from the home volume of roadworks. These works are, I am sure, necessary, and usually appear to be well managed. However, I wish to ask if WBC has any leverage with regards to one particular issue that has occurred a number of times in Hawkedon? This is temporary traffic lights being left on sometimes well before any roadworks have commenced, and sometimes after they appear to have been finished, resulting in unnecessary delays and CO2 emissions from cars, with engines that are left idling. Utility companies often seem to be involved.

Answer:

As I mentioned earlier, we have approximately 5,300 roadworks across the Borough in a given year. 75% of those approximately are the utilities, and in some cases, they do turn up with traffic signals before they should do. A reasonable time is usually allowed for them to set up, and then the gang come along to start digging. However, we did have a case only last month in Winnersh when a particular utility turned up on the A329 Reading Road 24 hours before the gang turned up, and their lights were removed. We do have inspectors who go around. The vast majority of the utility works have permits, but from time to time there are emergency works, when they will just suddenly do works that are not programmed. The resource we have is limited. They cannot get around absolutely everything that is going on at the same time, so if any residents or Members do see some traffic signals that have gone up, or the works have finished and they appear to still be left there, please contact the Council and the Streetworks Team will send out one of their inspectors, who are out on the road at all times.

101. Statements by the Leader of the Council, Executive Members, and Deputy Executive Members

Prue Bray, Executive Member for Children's Services:

I have a very short statement. I would just like to inform everyone that in November Ofsted inspected the Council's Adult Education Service and the report was published on the Ofsted website on Monday this week. I am very pleased to be able to say that Ofsted rated the service as Good.

Sarah Kerr, Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services:

I want to take this opportunity to update you on the ongoing work from our Energy Team in collaboration with our Climate Emergency Team. We recognise that for both financial and environmental reasons, residents are looking more and more at what they can do to improve their homes, reducing energy consumption, and for the energy that they are using to be greener and generated on site. As you will be aware the Council is set to get a new website this summer and as part of that we are working towards having a dedicated page for energy and home improvements, where residents can find the information, they need in one place. This will include information on schemes that were operating or helping to deliver on, signposting to external available schemes and sources of financial support, energy reduction tips

and other support services.

A fabric first approach is crucial to reduce energy demand in the first instance. In our own social housing stock, following a stock audit, we have a bid for the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to make improvements to the homes that do not yet reach an EPC rating of C or above. We are encouraging other social housing landlords to apply as well. We have also got a bid in for Hug 2 which is the Home Upgrade Grant, where we can support low-income households to put in efficiency measures. We are continuing to support the roll out of the Energy Company Obligation Scheme, otherwise known as ECO. We are now in the fourth iteration of this scheme, but I should point out that it differs from ECO 3 by being substantially more restrictive, so less households will qualify, and there are additional workload requirements on us the Council for each application. Given that as a nation we need to be improving the insulation on a million homes a year until 205 in order to reach our net zero commitments, this is a backwards step and deeply frustrating. Nevertheless, we will continue to apply for available funds and support residents in any way that we can.

I have mentioned previously our Home Decarbonisation Service that we plan to launch. Through a company called Parity Projects we now have the software to bring this to life, and the Energy Team, Climate Emergency Team, and Customer Services Team, are undergoing training with the aim of going live in the Spring. We will go to full promotion of this service in the Autumn of this year, enabling residents to look at their properties and what energy reduction changes that they can make, including the return on investment. We are also looking at other financial schemes such as loan schemes or schemes that offer a reduction on renewables such as Solar Together, who we are in advanced discussions with. Over time we hope to build a plethora of options and opportunities to overcome the various barriers faced by our residents as we transition to a more sustainable future.

I am afraid that I need to finish my statement by raising an issue, and that is the issue of poor behaviour. We have been told about some instances of behaviour on the part of councillors, and I mean councillors plural, towards officers that has fallen short of the standard we would expect. I want to take this opportunity to remind you that all councillors should treat officers with respect in this Chamber and in their correspondence with them. Robust discussions are perfectly possible without descending into bullying and harassment. Please make sure that you do not cross this line. There have been relatively few complaints about councillor behaviour in this Council compared to many. We would like that to continue.

Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Executive Member for Finance:

You may have noticed that just before Christmas we received our Local Government Finance settlement grant. This grant is funded by Central Government and approved by MPs in the House of Commons. This extra money we have received for next year is £1.8million, which may sound like a big number but it amounts to only a 7% increase on the grant that we got last year, and does not go anywhere near enough to cover the additional costs of running this Council. If we follow the current course the inflation costs increase alone is predicted to be just under £9million for next year. Our Government's funding per resident is still the worst in the country, and if we were paid just the national average it would inject a staggering £30million

into our budget. I alluded to this earlier but our contributions paid by our council tax do not cover the basic needs of our residents. In this moment an average family of two adults and two children in a Band D property would need to contribute an approximate £350 per year to cover the basics of what we spend just to support their household. This is largely because our Council Tax charges are capped and we are not allowed to increase them in line with inflation, or fundamentally to just actually cover the cost of running the Council services. We are dependent on additional income from things like car parking, renting out leisure facilities, library book fines amongst many other things. We do have some property investments in the private sector, but they worry me, as anyone can look at bankrupt councils such as Slough and Thurrock to see how risky and disastrous that kind of income generation can be. However, we are where we are, and if one of our income streams fails to deliver the expected amount, then we are stuck with very few places to go to bridge the gap. As it is we are altering our services to make them more efficient. Staffing levels are falling but we are resolved to ensure that those with the most need in this Borough will continue to be supported for as long as we can, even if that means that we have to make some unpopular decisions to do so.

Clive Jones, Leader of the Council:

I am sure that all councillors will know that the Local Government Association has been undertaking a Peer Review of our Council. They visited us in November, under the previous Administration, and they returned in October 2022, under the new Administration. As with the usual practice, the assessing team comprises of a Chair from the same political party as the ruling group as the Council being looked at. So, in November 2021 the Conservative Leader of Essex County Council was the Chair. The team also comprised of two senior officers of unrelated councils, and finally an experienced person from the Local Government Association. The only change to the review team that we saw in 2022 was the Leader of Essex County Council stood aside for the Lib Dem Group Leader of Liverpool City Council, both very experienced councillors who have done a lot of work for the LGA, and continue to do so. Their independence and impartiality therefore should not be an issue. Sadly, I have seen today, a misleading Facebook post, from someone who clearly does not understand how a Peer Review works. All Members of Peer Review panels who work for the LGA are independent. If they were not, I am sure they would not be getting further roles from the LGA.

The feedback from the second visit from the independent reviewers was very good and several improvements were found. The Peer review feedback states 'the Peer Team observed that there has been a palpable and positive change at Wokingham, in tone, in style and in purpose', and thought they were encountering a Council that was very different to a year ago, which is a credit to both the work of officers and Members. They also said that the Council has clearly embraced the issues they were facing at the time of the original Peer Challenge and turned them into opportunities using the financial position and the change in political control as an impetus for change. My Executive and I, and indeed the Senior Leadership Team, believe that it is important to learn from others, and I am pleased that the Peer Review Team has seen improvements in our Council. They noted in particular that this Liberal Democrat Administration does not shy away from difficult decisions, and given the difficult national economic position, that is very important. I would urge anybody interested in how we are working to make things better for residents, to

read this report. It is encouraging that these independent assessors have found that we are going in the right direction, and have improved against their recommendations of November 2021, but we are not complacent and will continue to work with our partners for the good of all of our residents. I would like to take this public opportunity to ask the Chief Executive to convey my thanks and the thanks of the Executive and the Lib Dem Group, to all of the staff who have worked so hard for us to be able to get this very complimentary report from the Local Government Association.

102. Statement from Council Owned Companies

Clive Jones, Non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes and WBC Holdings Ltd:

WBC Holdings has formally decided to wind down Wokingham Housing Limited. This was considered by the previous Administration, so I am sure that it will not be a surprise to them. We have also decided to review whether Loddon Homes and Berry Brook Homes should be merged or not. This will be reported on probably in the new municipal year.

103. Motions

103.1 Motion 494 submitted by Gary Cowan

Council considered the following Motion, proposed by Gary Cowan, and seconded by Jim Frewin.

‘This Council sets up a working Group to review the Council’s Constitution with the aim of making it fit for the 21st century by attempting to reflect the needs of Councillors, Officers, and Residents. To achieve that aim we ask the LGA to work with us in putting into place a modern, fit for purpose, new Constitution.’

Gary Cowan commented that the Local Government Association had helped other Councils to devise new Constitutions. The Constitution had unintentionally developed inconsistencies over time. Starting from scratch would help to iron out these inconsistencies and better serve residents. He believed that councillors of all parties should be involved in the process.

RESOLVED: That this Council sets up a working Group to review the Council’s Constitution with the aim of making it fit for the 21st century by attempting to reflect the needs of Councillors, Officers, and Residents. To achieve that aim we ask the LGA to work with us in putting into place a modern, fit for purpose, new Constitution.

103.2 Motion 496 submitted by Rebecca Margetts

Council considered the following Motion, proposed by Rebecca Margetts, and seconded by Pauline Jorgensen.

‘Wokingham Borough Council congratulates the England Lionesses on their incredible achievement of becoming European Champions. Many of these women were not offered the opportunity as children to play football at school and the only reason for their success was they were prepared and able to travel great distances to pursue their dream. Wokingham Borough Council believes all children should be offered the opportunity at school to play football and calls on all primary schools in Wokingham Borough to ensure that football is offered to every child who wishes to

play.'

Rebecca Margetts highlighted that the success of the Lionesses in the summer had shone a spotlight on women's sport. It was only right that boys and girls had the same opportunities to play sport. She felt that all children should be able to play football should they wish.

Andy Croy expressed concern at the potential additional financial pressure on already very financially challenged schools. He felt that additional funding should be provided.

Gary Cowan indicated that he supported the Motion but that the focus should not just be on football. He referred to other sporting successes.

Pray Bray commented that many schools were academies and could only be encouraged to amend their sport offer to girls if necessary. She referred to the Chief Finance Officer's comments that schools could incur costs in the implementation of the Motion. Nevertheless, she felt that equal opportunities should be available. She emphasised that children should, however, not be forced to participate in any sports that they hated, and that being active was key.

Laura Blumenthal expressed surprise that any Member may have concerns regarding the Motion. She believed that it merely requested that boys and girls be offered the same opportunities in sports provision.

Jim Frewin was of the view that the Motion should be supported, and that support and signposting should be offered.

In accordance with Section 4.2.15.5 a recorded vote was requested.

FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
Sam Akhtar		Shirley Boyt
Keith Baker		Rachel Burgess
Parry Batth		Andy Croy
Rachel Bishop Firth		
Laura Blumenthal		
Prue Bray		
Rachel Burgess		
Anne Chadwick		
Stephen Conway		
David Cornish		
Gary Cowan		
Phil Cunnington		
David Davis		
Peter Dennis		
Lindsay Ferris		
Michael Firmager		
Paul Fishwick		
Jim Frewin		

Maria Gee		
John Halsall		
David Hare		
Peter Harper		
Pauline Helliard Symons		
Clive Jones		
Norman Jorgensen		
Pauline Jorgensen		
John Kaiser		
Sarah Kerr		
Abdul Loyes		
Tahir Maher		
Morag Malvern		
Charles Margetts		
Rebecca Margetts		
Adrian Mather		
Andrew Mickleburgh		
Stuart Munro		
Gregor Murray		
Alistair Neal		
Jackie Rance		
Beth Rowland		
Ian Shenton		
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey		
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey		
Caroline Smith		
Mike Smith		
Wayne Smith		
Bill Soane		
Alison Swaddle		
Shahid Younis		

RESOLVED: That Wokingham Borough Council congratulates the England Lionesses on their incredible achievement of becoming European Champions. Many of these women were not offered the opportunity as children to play football at school and the only reason for their success was they were prepared and able to travel great distances to pursue their dream. Wokingham Borough Council believes all children should be offered the opportunity at school to play football and calls on all primary schools in Wokingham Borough to ensure that football is offered to every child who wishes to play.

103.3 Motion 497 submitted by Laura Blumenthal

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.

103.4 Motion 498 submitted by Shirley Boyt

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.