

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL
HELD ON 20 MAY 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.17 PM**

Members Present

Councillors: Keith Baker (Mayor), Abdul Loyes (Deputy Mayor), Parry Batth, Prue Bray, Rachel Burgess, Lindsay Ferris, Jim Frewin, John Halsall, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Pauline Jorgensen, John Kaiser, Sarah Kerr, Morag Malvern, Charles Margetts, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Caroline Smith, Wayne Smith and Bill Soane

Members in Attendance

Councillors: Sam Akhtar, Rachel Bishop-Firth, Laura Blumenthal, Chris Bowring, Shirley Boyt, Anne Chadwick, Stephen Conway, Gary Cowan, Phil Cunningham, Carl Doran, Peter Dennis, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, Maria Gee, Guy Grandison, David Hare, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Norman Jorgensen, Tahir Maher, Rebecca Margetts, Adrian Mather, Andrew Mickleburgh, Barrie Patman, Jackie Rance, Angus Ross, Daniel Sargeant, Ian Shenton, Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey, Chris Smith, Alison Swaddle, Simon Weeks and Shahid Younis

1. MINUTE SILENCE

The Mayor asked Members to stand for a minute's silence to remember the victims of the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. ELECTION OF MAYOR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021/22

Malcolm Richards, the current Mayor, welcomed recently elected Members and thanked those Members who had left the Council. Councillor Richards thanked his daughter, who had acted as Mayoress, and the Members and Officers who had supported him throughout his year in office.

Although the number of Mayoral events had been limited due to the pandemic, Councillor Richards had enjoyed the opportunity to meet residents, community volunteers and new business leaders. The year had been extremely challenging as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the move to virtual meetings of the Council. However, these challenges had been met successfully.

The Mayor called for nominations for the office of Mayor for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

It was proposed by John Halsall and seconded by John Kaiser that Keith Baker be elected as Mayor for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

It was proposed by Lindsay Ferris and seconded by Clive Jones that Caroline Smith be elected as Mayor for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Keith Baker be elected as Mayor for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

Keith Baker made the statutory acceptance of office pursuant to Section 83 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Councillor Baker addressed the Council as follows:

“First of all, may I thank the Council for electing me to this prestigious position. Being the “first citizen” of the Borough is an amazing honour which very few councillors actually achieve and I am extremely humbled to become one of this small group.

In many respects I am quite old fashioned in that I believe being Mayor is something you earn through your contribution to public life and not simply because it is your turn. In my 15 years since I was elected by the fantastic residents of North Woodley, I have been privileged to occupy some of the most senior roles in the Council including being the Leader, Executive Member for Highways and Planning and Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

Outside the Borough Council I have also managed to squeeze in being Leader of the Town Council, Governor at Addington School and Stage Manager for Starmaker Youth Theatre Company for over a decade. In fact, my chosen charity combines two of these activities, namely special needs children and the performing arts. “Chance to Dance” is a local community interest company which is a dance school for students and families in the disabled community.

At this point I would like to publicly thank my wife Marilyn, who will become my Mayoress, who has put up with my intense activities for such a long time. She has been absolutely fantastic and I cannot thank her too much for being there and supporting me throughout.

For the last year I have been Deputy Mayor to an amazing person, Malcolm Richards. His year in office has been absolutely unique because of the impact of the pandemic and he has coped with it magnificently. He has been a pioneer on holding virtual meetings and dealt with the technical failings that were “thrown at him” and I wish him well in his retirement.

Normally the incoming Mayor would pass on a scrapbook of his year in office together with his past Chairman’s Badge at this meeting but the pandemic has provided a final twist to his year. Due to social distancing rules these two items will be given to Malcolm outside the meeting.

I would also like to thank Malcolm’s daughter Christine for acting as his Mayoress during this period.

Finally, as I take on the role of chairing this and subsequent meetings of the Full Council can I make a few comments. I said before that I am quite old fashioned and this extends to the neutrality of the Mayor. I think this is a very important point and goes to the very core of the role. I would like to enter into an informal “contract” between all councillors and myself. I will pledge to be even handed to all parties and councillors and in return I expect all councillors, regardless of any affiliation, to behave in an appropriate manner. This includes things like keeping to the accepted time limits for speeches, questions and answers. It also includes cutting out the “side” comments by councillors who are not speaking. It includes making supplementary questions real questions based on the answer given and not a speech. It includes making sure all councillors understand how a “point of personal explanation” and “point of order” is defined in our Constitution.

Over the next three months I wish to have individual meetings with the leaders of all parties to understand their views on council meetings.

So thank you all once again and let us move onto the next item on the agenda.

3. APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY MAYOR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021/22

The Mayor called for nominations for the office of Deputy Mayor for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

It was proposed by John Halsall and seconded by John Kaiser that Abdul Loyes be appointed as Deputy Mayor for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

It was proposed by Lindsay Ferris and seconded by Clive Jones that Caroline Smith be appointed as Deputy Mayor for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Abdul Loyes be appointed as Deputy Mayor for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

Abdul Loyes made the statutory acceptance of office pursuant to Section 83 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Abdul Loyes thanked the Council for appointing him to the office of Deputy Mayor which he regarded as a great honour.

4. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Jenny Cheng.

5. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 18 March 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Members declared a general personal interest relating to the proposed Housing Strategy 2020/24:

Councillor John Kaiser declared a Personal Interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd.

Councillor Lindsay Ferris declared a Personal Interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes.

Councillor Stuart Munro declared a Personal Interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd.

Councillor Wayne Smith declared a Personal Interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd.

7. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

7.1 Rio Elms asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

As the pandemic has split us apart so much socially, there hasn't been enough done to try and aid young people aged 11-17 in terms of places to go and things to do. The Council has not provided places for young people to commune independently. As a result, young people have been socialising in places that were not intended to have any number of people. This can be exemplified in the Woosehill underpass which has had several complaints from residents on social media about gatherings of young people before and during the pandemic. So, the question that I put to the Council today is; In light of the things that I have stated today what will you do to make a place for our young people to gather in Wokingham?

Answer

The pandemic has hit different people in different ways. For young people, the lockdowns have made gatherings particularly difficult. It has been impossible for us to provide places for them. In fact, we have been expressly tasked with preventing such gatherings. As we emerge from the pandemic, young people will be able to gather safely again and we provide many places for them to do so, including the skate park in Wokingham town centre, the MUGA in Finchampstead and our new parks across the Borough. Town and Parish Councils also provide facilities as well. We have a recently elected Member of the Youth Parliament who will help us advise as to what is needed for young people in the Borough.

In Children's Services, WBC delivers targeted one to one family interventions to teenagers through the Early Help provision. The Integrated Early Help Service are involved in the delivery of the Department of Education Explorers Extreme Programmes which offer participants the opportunity to engage in constructive and positive activities and develop key skills. The Council's Youth Offending Service works with teenagers who have committed criminal offences. Support is also offered to those at risk of offending. The service is also involved in delivering programmes aimed at reducing violent offending for larger groups of children in schools. So, Mr Mayor, we are a caring authority, providing a range of services for older and younger children within the Borough.

Supplementary Question

As the response refers to young people who are violent and disadvantaged, is enough being done to talk to the average young person? There are not many places to go when it is raining, or when the weather is slightly adverse. There are no places to go without being extremely wet, or in a bad mood, because of that. In the UK we do have terrible weather sometimes. So what is WBC doing to give young people places to go independently without having to go to community centres and places like that? The skate parks are a great start, but there is really nowhere to go if it starts raining.

Supplementary Answer

When it is raining, it is raining. There are cafes and restaurants available to come out of the weather. I have listed a number of facilities that we offer for young people. I will be sitting down with the Youth MP to consider what else we can offer.

7.2 Kate Benson asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Based on the amount of opposition from local residents following on from the Public Path

Creation Order notices in Jubilee Ave recently, and that the public consultation in summer 2020 was not widely known about, I would like to ask, please can you reconsider the routing of Greenway Route B through the middle of the land that runs alongside Jubilee Ave?

The local residents' opposition is clear that Section 26 of the Highways Act 1980, 'would add convenience or enjoyment to a large section of the public or local residents' cannot be demonstrated.

Please consider adjusting this section of the greenway, so as not to destroy the wildlife habitats within this wildlife corridor from Joel Park to Cantley Park. Please either widen the pavement on the northern side or adapt this section to be signage, like is planned for the Clifton Road section.

Answer

The consultation between July and September 2020 involved engagement with various stakeholders including ward members, Wokingham Town Council, user and interest groups, the Mid and West Berks Local Access Forum and other key stakeholders. So it was a wide consultation. Individual letters were sent directly to residents living near to the proposed route, highlighting the scheme and encouraging them to comment. The consultation was also published on the Council's website and advertised through local newspapers and the Council's own social media pages. Prior to this consultation, the Council also held an earlier consultation in February to May 2019. So that is two consultations.

We are currently in the process of considering all the comments that have been received during the recent statutory consultation for the path creation order and will be preparing a consultation response document addressing all of the comments raised. This will be sent to all those who have responded to the consultation. Following this, a decision will be made as to the next steps for the Greenway route.

We are aware that many of the concerns that residents have raised have been about the impact of the proposed scheme on wildlife. The Council has already commissioned and received an independent Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of the area as part of the feasibility design, which did not highlight any concerns with the scheme on the local wildlife. If the route is progressed, we would also engage the ecologists to be on site at the point of construction of the route to ensure that there is no harm done to the wildlife in the area. To ensure safety of residents and users of the Greenway we will also be installing a formal crossing point at Milton Road as part of the scheme.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for the response. It is good news to hear about the crossing as that was a danger point. My supplementary question is: by creating this path I believe that you are contradicting what WBC has pledged to do in its Climate Emergency Action Plan (January 2020). In there, the Council pledges £170k to "deliver small-scale woodland planting on Council estates in existing parks and open spaces". Yet, by creating this path, surely you are destroying the habitat and doing the exact opposite. So, how can you justify going against your own Climate policy?

Supplementary Answer

As I said, we did commission a PEA through the experts and I can assure you that there will be no trees removed and we won't be destroying anything in that way. We will be very careful. The ecological report states that as well. I beg to differ – we are not going against

the Climate Emergency Policy – we are actually supporting it. It will be a small path, 2.5m wide and we will not be destroying any of the trees.

7.3 Andy Croy asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

The Government's plan to introduce a requirement for photographic identification before allowing people to exercise their right to vote will disenfranchise Wokingham Borough residents who do not have photo ID.

Depending on the forms of ID allowed, about 8% of electors do not have photo ID. I am sure no member of this Council will wish to see voter suppression on this or scale or indeed any attempt at voter suppression. Will the Leader of the Council write to the Borough's MPs to express Council's opposition to voter suppression and to urge the MPs to speak out against these measures and to vote against the Bill when it comes before Parliament?

Answer

The Government argues that every ballot matters and that photo ID will protect voters from having their votes stolen. The Government argues that vote stealing is not a victimless crime and that this is a responsible measure to protect people's votes.

A commitment to introduce voter ID for UK Parliamentary elections in England was included in the Manifesto in December 2019. The Queen's Speech of 11 May 2021 confirmed that an Electoral Integrity Bill would be introduced in the 2021/22 session of Parliament. The details of the Bill will be published in due course. We don't know what they are, but the Government has said that a broad range of documents already in use will be accepted. For example: travel passes, proof of age standards, pass cards and photo parking permits issued as a Blue Badge. In addition, expired photo ID will be accepted as long as the photo is a good enough likeness, in a written statement on 12 May 2021.

In an update on preventing electoral fraud, the Government stated that the latest commissioned research found that 96% of respondents had suitable ID with a recognisable picture.

Voters in Northern Ireland must provide photo ID before receiving a ballot paper. Voter ID requirements were introduced after the 1983 General Election following concerns about the extent of voter fraud. There has been no evidence that ID requirements in Northern Ireland have affected turnout and allegations of "personation" (the crime of pretending to be someone else when you vote) have been eliminated.

Since 2014, the Electoral Commission has recommended that photo ID should be required in the rest of the UK. Pilots were held in England in 2018 and 2019. The Government declared them a success following their own evaluation of the pilots and committed to introducing a Voter ID scheme. The Government has stated that, overwhelmingly, the majority of people were able to vote and there is no indication that a consistent demographic was adversely affected by the use of photo ID.

Of course, we will look carefully when the details of the Bill are published to ensure that no Wokingham residents who are entitled to vote are disenfranchised. However, it would not be appropriate for the Council to oppose these proposals unless and until we have received specific concerns about them, which we have yet to receive.

Supplementary Question

It is extraordinary to compare the situation in Ireland with the sectarian issues they had. It is simply not applicable to the UK. The legislation is addressing a problem, the theft of votes, which does not exist. The aim of the legislation is to make it more difficult for people to vote. That would be the theft of votes.

Do you think that political leadership involves standing up for our democratic process regardless of the party advantage that may accrue from gerrymandering it?

Supplementary Answer

That is a very prejudicial question you have just asked, because you answer your own question. Of course the Council would be against gerrymandering. However, we can't comment on a Bill we haven't seen and, as you know, I have been very willing and capable of standing up to central Government on things that the Council disagrees with and which are not good for WBC or its residents.

8. PETITIONS

No petitions were presented.

9. MAYOR'S OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

10. RETURNING OFFICER'S REPORT ON MAY 2021 ELECTIONS

The Council considered a report from the Returning Officer, set out at Agenda pages 41 to 44, which gave details of the results of the local elections held on 6 May 2021.

The report outlined the election process, the results and the turnout for each Borough ward contested.

It was proposed by John Halsall and seconded by John Kaiser that the report of the Returning Officer be noted.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the report of the Returning Officer be noted.

11. HOUSING STRATEGY 2020 - 24

The Council considered the proposed Housing Strategy 2020/24, set out at Agenda pages 45 to 90.

John Kaiser stated that everyone should have access to good quality housing as a home was a fundamental right. No one living in the UK should be without a place to live that was safe and warm. This was especially true in a place as affluent as Wokingham.

The report stated that the Housing Strategy contained four strategic priorities:

- Address and understand our housing needs;
- Support our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options;
- Improve the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough's homes;
- Enriching people's lives.

Prue Bray stated that the four priorities were acceptable, but there was concern that the Government was not providing the necessary support to enable the delivery of the strategy.

Shirley Boyt highlighted the need to deliver affordable, one-bedroom properties in order to meet local needs.

It was proposed by John Kaiser and seconded by John Halsall that the proposed Housing Strategy 2020/24 be approved.

RESOLVED: That the proposed Housing Strategy 2020/24 be approved.

12. STATEMENTS FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, EXECUTIVE MEMBERS AND LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

Statement from John Halsall, Leader of the Council

Mr Mayor, It is great to be back here, though current circumstances are a little strange.

Please accept my apologies that it is only for a few.

The elections earlier this month saw the sad departure of several colleagues – some by design, and some as a result of our sometimes-brutal system of democracy. My sympathies and thanks go out to my former Executive colleague UllaKarin, and the former Labour Leader Andy. While losing can be a tough business, I believe that both will bounce back – indeed, we have already seen that we just cannot keep Andy away!

Thank you, Charlotte, Diane, Ken, Oliver, Emma, Ian, Richard and Malcolm, particularly Malcolm, for your many years of dedicated service.

I warmly welcome the new Members of the Council, Sam, Anne, Phil, Rebecca and Jackie on the Conservative side, and to Morag, Ian, and Pete of the opposition. It is a pleasure to see Norman and Shahid return.

The local elections were a demonstration of our residents' faith in this Conservative administration. Delivered in the past! Solid in the pandemic! Great plan for the future! Stability! Experience! Professionalism!

Our majority has stayed the same, despite the Opposition's confident predictions of No Overall Control.

I imagine the flawed but persistent public criticism of our finances was to ensure that on gaining control the opposition could disingenuously claim that magically the finances had instantaneously been fixed. Good plan. Let me assure you, there is nothing to fix! Our finances are strong, transparent and in rude health.

We won a larger share of the vote than any other party and our vote share went up!

This is not, for a moment, grounds for complacency. Our position here as Community leaders is a gift from residents. It is given on the understanding that we deliver for them. Whilst I am Leader of this Council, the Executive will strive every day to make this Borough the greatest, safest and happiest place to live, work and bring up a family.

I am delighted to see that we are now not only the healthiest local authority but also the most prosperous, having for a long time been one of the most desirable places to live. This is despite being the lowest funded. A huge testament to this administration.

This is a wonderful Borough, and we have a great future. We are fortunate to have some of the finest officers and directors led by my energetic, highly professional and innovative chief executive.

We have a huge, ambitious and detailed programme to deliver for our residents.

To paraphrase I will not make age an issue. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponents' youth and inexperience.

Many of the Executive team will continue:

- John – my very valued Deputy - Finance and Housing.
- Pauline - Highways and Transport.
- Wayne - Planning and Enforcement.
- Stuart - Business and Economic Development.
- Parry - Environment and Leisure.
- Charles - Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services.
- Gregor - Resident Services, Communications and Emissions.

Graham Howe will step up from his deputy role to become Executive Member for Children's Services.

Finally, in the new portfolio for Neighbourhoods and Communities, I have asked Bill to step onto the Executive.

For the Deputy Executive Members:

Laura - Equalities, Poverty, the Arts and Climate Change.

Shahid - Insight and Change.

Michael - Environment and Communities.

Phil - Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services.

Our priority is economic and social recovery for our Borough. Earlier this year, the Executive approved the creation of the Employment Support Hub to help people get back into work. As with Shinfield Studios, we will work with our partners to attract new job opportunities to the Borough and are confident in our ability to do so.

A key part is the delivery of infrastructure and capital investment needed by our towns and villages.

A new draft of the Local Plan will be brought forward, whilst continuing to bring housing targets down to a level that is reasonable for our Borough. We were successful in convincing the Government to scrap the proposed substantial increase in our housing numbers, and we will go on making our case to get those figures down further. Rather than just complaining about it or digging our heels in, refusing to budge, we went to the Government with strong, constructive arguments that their plans did not work. They

listened. Reasonable negotiation, delivering in the residents' interest – what any good Conservative Council should do, avoiding the pitfalls experienced by Lib Dem South Oxon.

Too many young people simply cannot afford to buy here. We cannot discard their ambitions, driving out the bright and the talented because housing is out of their reach. We will get the right housing in the right places, which means addressing the urgent need for more affordable and social housing in the Borough.

We will be building on our first steps in doing our part to tackle climate change and make our environment more friendly. We will begin the work of building solar farms in the Borough, moving towards our target of making 70% of the Borough's waste recyclable, and planting 300,000 trees.

Securing the best education for our younger generation is vital to ensuring that those from less affluent homes are not left behind as we emerge from the pandemic. We will continue to provide the best opportunities for children and young people, opening a new special educational needs school in Winnersh, and start laying the groundwork for new primary schools in Matthews Green and Arborfield.

We led the way in embracing the voluntary and health sectors over the last two years. We now wish to do the same with industry, towns and parishes and the police. We want to make sure that we continue to live in a great, safe and happy Borough. Over the course of the next year, we will withdraw from the Public Protection Partnership, bringing these services back under our control and ensuring that they work in the best interests of our residents. We will be taking action to tackle fly tipping, noise, bonfires and other environmental issues which affect the quality of life for our residents.

Anti-social behaviour, low level crime and Domestic Violence are a concern across the Borough. We will work with Matthew Barber, our excellent and experienced new Police and Crime Commissioner, on creating a co-ordinated plan for how we can clamp down on these issues – whilst looking to what more we can do to help families going through difficulties and provide activities for younger people.

We now have high standard social homes, very little homelessness and practically no rough sleepers.

Being the authority with the lowest level of deprivation, we plan to use the metrics that we must identify families and individuals who need help. Hopefully, we will be able to change lives to become independent and self-sufficient. We must have coherent programmes for poverty and equality which make us an exemplar of best practice.

This year will see the rolling out of our Congestion and Intelligent traffic Schemes coupled with a very high level of road maintenance, which should keep the Borough moving whilst minimising environmental considerations.

We will make steps in our journey of giving staff a clear sense of direction and career progression, making the council a place where they are proud to work.

This is just the start of what is to come. There is much work to be done, but I know that my team and I have the energy and resolve to do it.

To quote either Seneca or Cicero, I don't know which, who said "if it was not for the elders correcting the mistakes of the young, there would be no state".

For more than a year, our lives have been very different. The pandemic has dramatically altered our world and shattered so many people's way of life.

We are now starting to see the end. Our government's courageous and ambitious vaccination programme has prevented the deaths of thousands and offers the hope to a return to normality. We must accept that there is much work to be done to help those who have suffered get back onto their feet. We will reach out to those who are struggling.

As a community, we will ingrain the spirit which saw us helping one another – delivering food parcels, volunteering with charities, checking up on an isolating neighbour.

Despite everything that we have been through, I believe that we have an exciting future to look ahead to. This is only the beginning.

But lastly please join me again in a moment's silence for those who have died during this dreadful pandemic in Wokingham, the UK, and around the world, and those who have suffered not just the effect of the virus, but the problems which have accompanied it.

Statement from Lindsay Ferris, Leader of the Opposition

The last year has been the most difficult that many of us will have encountered in our lives. I would not only like to remember our fellow citizens who have, sadly, lost their lives to Covid-19, but to those who have been impacted, and remain so, by the pandemic.

In addition, many local people have had delayed or cancelled hospital appointments and have, tragically, passed away or are still struggling with illness. They are the unseen casualties of this pandemic, whether in Adult Social Care or helping to get much-needed food and medicine to our older people.

Many local businesses have received much needed help through grants received from the Government and those staffing the finance and other departments should also be thanked for their help. Hopefully, we are nearing the end of this pandemic, but we still have to be cautious, despite so many having had their vaccines. It is only now that we can start to look to the future and what we can expect from this Council.

We on the Lib Dem side believe that there is much to do. One area we would like to address is the culture which, unfortunately, exists within a number of areas within this Council. There are still, disappointingly, areas where the view is taken that they, the Council, can do no wrong. How some of our residents have been treated leaves me speechless. Throughout this year we will be pressing to change this viewpoint.

Finally, as the Leader of the only Group on the Council to have increased its representation, I would like to thank our three new Councillors. Fortunately, one, Morag Malvern, is with us in the Council Chamber, whilst Ian Shenton and Peter Dennis are on the Teams connection. I am confident that they will each make a valuable contribution to the work of the Council in the years to come.

13. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

13.1 Rachelle Sheperd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

What is being done about visibility problems with Reading Road residents exiting their driveways near the new relief road roundabout?

Answer

Officers have inspected the site and understand the residents' concerns with regards to the reported reduced visibility. Whilst the accesses and associated visibility splays are technically acceptable, we understand that the visibility is considered to be partially obstructed by the placement of a new lamp column. As part of the normal safety audit process, we will undertake an independent road safety audit and carry out remediation to address any identified problems.

Supplementary Question

Will you consider putting a mirror across the road from these houses like I have seen in other places with blind driveways, so they can see better around the corner, or something else that will enable them to exit safely from their driveways?

Supplementary Answer

I believe that there is a problem with mirrors, but I can assure you that we will do everything to make sure that residents can exit safely.

13.2 Tahir Maher asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

According to the Wokingham Borough Council Yearbook – 2020/2021, page 52 shows the Parishes/Town, Population, households subject to Council Tax and B and D equivalent tax.

Calculating the proposed Band D tax, as shown, the total Band D Council Tax paid by Earley households is 18% of the total (which is only bettered by 22% paid by the households in Wokingham).

Based on this large share of Council Tax contribution made by Earley Households, shouldn't they get better equivalence on roads that needs resurfacing for their residents, especially, for those roads that are near schools - specifically, those in Maiden Erlegh?

Answer

The Council does not select roads for maintenance based upon the proportion of council tax collected but on the condition of the road network across the Borough. The selection of roads to be included in the annual planned structural maintenance programme is based upon UK Pavement Management System (UKPMS) which includes annual Network Condition Surveys and our own internal design process (including site visits to check the condition survey scores and, where required, core sampling to establish the scale of intervention to be recommended). This is recognised by central Government and the wider industry through its code of practice as the national standard for a well-managed highway infrastructure. This approach ensures that the annual structural maintenance

programme is based on meeting the highest priority needs on the WBC network within the funding available.

The proportion of spend on structural maintenance each year fluctuates but in 2019/20 21% of the budget was spent in Earley. In addition to the planned structural maintenance, we also spend about £1million a year on reactive maintenance and, if there is something dangerous that comes up during the year, we will fix it regardless of the cost.

13.3 Stephen Conway asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Would the Executive Member for Highways agree that the 40 MPH speed limit on the stretch of the A321 from the A4 roundabout to the outskirts of Wargrave village should be reduced to increase the safety of pupils walking to the school?

Answer

Members will no doubt be aware of increased concerns from all residents about excessive traffic speeds during the period of COVID lockdown. I certainly got my share of emails. Members will, therefore, be pleased to learn that, in response to this, officers undertook a review of all current speed limits on A and B roads in the Borough, including the A321 Wargrave Road and, indeed the A4 Bath Road.

This exercise showed that average vehicle speeds (upon which speed limits are determined) on the section between the A4 junction and the Piggott School are compliant with the current speed limit. That said, the Council fully acknowledges that some drivers habitually exceed the speed limit and that, police enforcement is the most appropriate intervention for this issue.

Thames Valley Police are a key stakeholder in the process of changes to speed limits and without their support any proposals are challenging to progress. In this case, the good levels of compliance and the absence of a poor safety record indicate that there is not a sufficient basis upon which to make a case for a reduced speed limit to Thames Valley Police. As a key strategic A-road the potential for further engineering measures to inhibit speeds on the A321 is limited, without also impacting upon the use of this road by traffic, rather than less suitable alternative routes.

However, as part of our emerging Intelligent Traffic Strategy, officers are now able to monitor traffic speeds across the network using satellite technology to flag consistent non-compliance and will respond to any deterioration in safety or amenity should this occur on the A321 Wargrave Road.

Supplementary Question

I have to say that, as the Council wishes to encourage walking and cycling as much as possible, I think that you would agree that reducing speed limits, in sensitive areas such as this, would help to achieve a safer environment for both pedestrians and cyclists. I hope that you will undertake to actually liaise with the police on this matter to try to persuade them to support a reduction in the speed limit in this particular area.

Supplementary Answer

I will take this up with ward Members and get their views on it as well.

13.4 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

While on the most part we all support Greenways, there is a lot of concern about the proposed Jubilee Ave section in Emmbrook. The concerns are about damage to the historic trees as well the undergrowth & local wildlife. The off-road greenway being put in this location will be so short that it has very little to offer cyclists or pedestrians along this already quiet road. However, it just ends at a busy roundabout junction, with no obvious benefit. I have yet to meet a resident who thinks this section along Jubilee Ave, is a good idea and good value for money, but it feels like this is just being railroaded through.

We do not feel that the consultation for the Jubilee Ave section has been done properly. Residents are confused about what is happening and are horrified by what it might mean. The first that most knew about this was when they saw notices about a small section of bridleway, but there has been nothing that shows the full plans for this area. Residents want to ask questions. Please can we have a consultation that includes displays, full detailed designs and proper bi-directional communication? If not, why not?

Answer

A similar question was asked earlier by Kate Benson. You are right. The consultations, one in 2019 and one in 2020 and a more recent statutory consultation on the bridleway creation order for a small section of the route along Jubilee Avenue was held between 30 March and 7 May this year. This element of the route was a small part of the whole route and related solely to the Order itself rather than being a wider consultation on the Greenway proposals or of the design. This is why the plans and the notices were limited to the area that the bridleway would cover. In light of the consultation works that have already taken place, we do not intend on carrying out a further consultation. However, we will be preparing a wider response document replying to all comments and queries raised during this particular statutory consultation and in conjunction with this we will be carefully considering how to proceed with this stage of the greenways programme.

We are aware that many of the concerns that residents have raised have been about the impact of the proposed scheme on wildlife. The Council has already commissioned and received an independent Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the area as part of the feasibility design. That doesn't show any concerns for the wildlife.

To ensure safety of residents and users of the Greenway we will also be installing a formal crossing point at Milton Road as part of the scheme. So, the consultation has taken place and the notices are there.

Supplementary Question

The only consultation that I have seen was for the Greenway as a whole. This route was designated to go down Holt Lane which would have been far more acceptable than what is currently being proposed. The destruction of the woodland is unlikely to be an acceptable compromise for the residents and room for a proper cycleway on the road would be better. It is a quiet road for cycling and should be treated the same as Clifton Road with some improvements to the roundabout junction. Residents are very confused by this bridleway. Is there a better way to communicate this to the residents, such as a visual display, something that can be put up so they can ask questions?

Supplementary Answer

The visual displays are there Imogen, but I am happy that we will be producing a response document replying to all the questions that have been raised. Let's wait to see that document go out.

13.5 Sarah Kerr asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

The absence of a woodland management plan for the Council owned part of Foxhill woodland in Woosehill has been raised in both public and Members questions in the past. Whilst some progress has been made regarding engagement with the community volunteer group Friends of Foxhill, who are finally able to do some conservation works in the woodland, they are not responsible for the management or the health and safety of the woodland. There needs to be a clear management plan from this Council, similar to what Reading Borough Council have with Clayfield Copse. What is the time scale for developing and publishing the woodland management plan for Foxhill woodland?

Answer

Foxhill Woods is managed by Wokingham Borough Council as a woodland. The trees are managed in accordance with the Council's agreed tree inspection policy which places trees into different risk zones with associated frequency of monitoring activity. Woodland paths/Public Rights of Way are inspected every seven years, and general woodland is monitored on a reactive basis.

The Council also maintains it as continuous cover 'forestry' whilst at the same time protecting the trees under the "Woodland Tree Preservation Order" (This category is designed to safeguard a woodland as a whole). The continuous cover forestry approach requires that there are sufficient opportunities for the next generation of new tree seedlings to become established through periodic selective felling and via reduction in rhododendron cover.

Council officers have recently met with the Friends of Foxhill Conservation Group to determine what works are required to the site and develop a working plan which will involve stakeholders. It is expected this working plan will be completed by the autumn and the good joint working between the Council and Friends of Foxhill will continue.

Supplementary Question

A working plan versus a management plan, but you also talked about it being reactive. For proper biodiversity we need to be working proactively in woodlands. There are invasive species that need to be removed to allow native species to come through. Why are we not committing, like other woodlands and other councils, to a proper management plan?

Supplementary Answer

No issue whatsoever Sarah. I have just explained that there is a management plan. I described it in my first paragraph. We continue to work with the Friends of Foxhill. Councillor Ross is also helping you along with everything you need.

13.6 Rachel Burgess asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

The new cycleway on London Road in Wokingham is not fully segregated and for long stretches cyclists share the road with heavy traffic moving at 40 mph with just a single white painted line between them and the passing cars, lorries and buses.

Published research has shown a statistically significant increase in risk associated with an on-road cycle lane, and that such painted lines lead to vehicles passing cyclists more

closely. Back in 2019 six cycling commissioners described them as “pointless white lines on the road” and a waste of public money.

The design does not represent best practice for cycleways and due to safety concerns, a build-up of grit from the passing traffic, or the fact that the cycleway diverts from the road to the shared path and back again, it may in fact put cyclists off.

Why hasn't the Council implemented a properly segregated cycleway on the London Road?

Answer

The LCN 422 cycle route was completed in 4 phases and dates back to 2014. Until July 2020 the layout of this entire scheme along the A329 met our existing standards and recommended best practice. We need to acknowledge that there are sections where cyclists have to share with pedestrians and change from the carriageway to footway and vice versa and these are not necessarily ideal and are less likely to encourage new cyclists. Unfortunately, we had to strike a balance between the availability of road space and need for right turn areas on some sections of the road.

The final phase of the scheme is the London Road section and this was designed in 2018, with various amendments made due to ongoing consultation with stakeholders and the need to try to establish support for the scheme whilst meeting the original project objectives. Work on site commenced in Spring 2020 and so does not comply with the standards that were released a few months later. It does however meet both our design standards and national guidance from that time. Our scheme designs are always in line with best practice where reasonably practicable and, where not possible due to special constraints, will always be compliant with safety regulation and legislation.

As you will be aware the Council has now committed to meeting LTN1/20 in future projects and so any further projects, including the forthcoming Active Travel Fund scheme and all the LCWIP recommended schemes coming in future will be segregated where appropriate. We had a really good response to the LC WIP consultation, with over 3,000 responses. I am looking forward to implementing improvements to cycleways as a result of that consultation.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for your answer and your acknowledgement that the solution we have is not ideal. It is possible to put in low cost physical segregation measures such as wands, bollards or low level “orcas”. Given that you see the importance of this, when will the Council introduce low cost physical segregation measures to improve cycling on the London Road?

Supplementary Answer

I am very happy to look at this as part of the LC WIP proposals. There are a lot of cycleways in the Borough that we could do with improving. We need to look in balance to see where we can spend the money best to deliver most benefit for cyclists.

13.7 Shirley Boyt asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

In March this year, the Guardian published a report revealing a huge disparity in school exclusions, between black and mixed-race children compared to their white peers.

Research by the Runnymede Trust has shown that exclusions have a detrimental impact on children, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and with diminished life chances. The report revealed that in Wokingham had the largest disparity in the country at 12.8% meaning that black and mixed-race students at schools in the Borough are five times more likely to be excluded than white students.

According to the Guardian, WBC declined to comment on the report. What will the Council do to ensure black and mixed-race children are treated fairly in our schools?

Answer

To clarify the figures used by The Guardian were based on a national dataset detailing 445 White British pupils and 53 White and Black Caribbean pupils who had fixed exclusions from our schools in one year (2018/2019).

Since 2018 we have seen a reduction in the proportion of fixed exclusions from these ethnic groups, and whilst this is the case, we are in no way complacent about this and will continue to monitor the figures so we can assess the impact of the steps we are taking and take further actions as necessary.

We work closely with schools, staff and governors on racial equality issues, with specific actions and initiatives including:

- Examining potential personal and systemic racial bias with colleagues in Children's Services and our schools.
- The Council's Learning and Achievement Partnership is working with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC), to develop a Racial Equality action plan with schools.
- In reducing exclusions we are rolling out a Therapeutic Approach to behaviour management in schools with significant commitment from schools in the Borough to work in this way and reducing exclusions. This is a long-term programme which will take account of equity and equality, and links with a wider Pan-Berkshire approach on being Trauma Informed.
- Our Education Welfare service follows up on exclusions and have done much positive support and prevention work with schools in recent years to support reduction overall in exclusion rates.

Supplementary Question

I am grateful to hear that we are working with schools on such a difficult subject. I understand that schools are not under any legal obligation to share information about the reasons for exclusion with the local authority. Indeed, the recording of data differs considerably between schools. There is an action in the Council's Equality Plan to "collaboratively focus on racial equality in schools". The timing for this action is to begin in January 2022. Would you agree that this is not enough and that the Council should be working with our schools as a matter of urgency to standardise the recording of the data and gain agreement for that data to be shared?

Supplementary Answer

I agree that we should be working with the schools to understand what the rules and regulations are and that they are adhered to. At this point in time I do not know the precise answer to your question. I will add that, whilst all Members are listening, that we are all responsible for Corporate Parenting, which includes this sort of activity. There is an online

training course at 5pm next Wednesday and you are all invited to attend. You all share this responsibility which is part of this issue.

14. CONTINUATION OF MEETING

At this point in the meeting, 8.31pm, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12 (m), Council considered a Motion to continue the meeting beyond 9pm, up to no later than 9.30pm, to enable further business on the Agenda to be transacted. This was proposed by the Mayor and seconded by the Deputy Mayor.

Upon being put to the meeting, the Motion was declared by the Mayor to be carried.

15. POLITICAL BALANCE OF THE COUNCIL AND ALLOCATION AND APPOINTMENT TO SEATS ON COMMITTEES AND BOARDS

The Council considered a report on the political balance of the Council and the appointment to the Council's Committees and Boards, in accordance with the wishes of the Groups.

The report set out a number of recommendations which Members were asked to consider.

Rachel Burgess requested a separate vote on recommendation 5. Councillor Burgess felt that Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs should be selected by the Committees themselves at their first meeting.

Imogen Shepherd-Dubey raised a point of order under Section 4.2.13.13 of the Constitution. Councillor Shepherd-Dubey queried the appointment of Daniel Sergeant as Chairman of the Audit Committee whilst acting as a Non-Executive Director of Berry Brook Homes and Wokingham Housing Ltd. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the proposal would not create a prejudicial situation. John Kaiser subsequently confirmed that Councillor Sergeant would not continue in the Non-Executive Director roles.

It was proposed by John Halsall and seconded by John Kaiser that the recommendations in the report be agreed.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That

- 1) having reviewed the representation of the political groups on the Council, it be confirmed that it has 31 Conservative Group Members, 18 Liberal Democrat Group Members, 3 Labour Group Members, and 2 Independent Group Members;
- 2) the appointment and composition of Committees and Boards as set out in Para 2.1 be approved;
- 3) the allocation of seats on Committees and Boards be approved on the basis that, of the 91 seats (as set out in Para 3.4), 53 be allocated to the Conservative Group 30 be allocated to the Liberal Democrat Group, 5 be allocated to the Labour Group and 3 be allocated to the Independent Group;
- 4) the proposals submitted by the respective Group Leaders and that those Members be appointed to the Committees and Boards as set out in Appendix 1 be approved;

- 5) it be agreed that the second part of procedure rule 4.2.1.1r) and procedure rule 4.2.26 continue to be suspended and for the 2021/22 Municipal Year, enabling the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of those Council Committees etc, set out in Appendix 1A to be appointed as stated;
- 6) it be agreed that the principles of proportionality be applied when Members are appointed to Sub Committees, Panels or Working Groups;
- 7) the appointment of the Independent Persons to assist the work of the Standards Committee and the co-opted Parish/Town Council Representatives as set out in Appendix 1 be noted;
- 8) the elected Member representatives on the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board, as set out in Appendix 1, as nominated by the Leader of Council in accordance with Section 194 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 be noted;
- 9) Council approves any deemed absence for the purposes of Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 ('the 6 month attendance rule'), for any Member who has joined the meeting by remote means.

16. APPOINTMENTS TO PANELS/WORKING GROUPS, ETC

Members were asked to refer to a list of nominations to various Panels, Working Groups, Joint Committees and various bodies, as circulated at the meeting as Appendix 2.

Where more nominations had been received than places, individual votes were taken.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Members be appointed to the Council's Panels, Working Groups, Joint Committees and Various Bodies, as set out in Appendix 2 to the Minutes.

17. APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Members were asked to refer to a list of nominations to various Outside Bodies, as circulated at the meeting as Appendix 3.

Where more nominations had been received than places, individual votes were taken.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Members be appointed to the Outside Bodies, as set out in Appendix 3 to the Minutes.

Note:

The Mayor thanked Members for the efficient conduct of Council business.

John Halsall proposed a vote of thanks to Malcolm Richards for his work as Mayor during a very difficult year for the Borough.

The Mayor suggested that Councillor Richards be added to his Covid-19 Roll of Honour.

