

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL
HELD ON THURSDAY, 24 MARCH 2022 FROM 7.30 PM TO 10.33 PM**

Members Present

Councillors: Keith Baker (Mayor), Abdul Loyes (Deputy Mayor), Sam Akhtar, Parry Batth, Rachel Bishop-Firth, Laura Blumenthal, Chris Bowring, Prue Bray, Jenny Cheng, Rachel Burgess, Anne Chadwick, Stephen Conway, Phil Cunnington, Peter Dennis, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, John Halsall, Jim Frewin, Maria Gee, Guy Grandison, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, John Kaiser, Tahir Maher, Morag Malvern, Charles Margetts, Rebecca Margetts, Andrew Mickleburgh, Gregor Murray, Barrie Patman, Jackie Rance, Angus Ross, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Caroline Smith, Bill Soane, Alison Swaddle, Simon Weeks and Shahid Younis

Members In Attendance Virtually

Councillors: Gary Cowan, David Hare, Sarah Kerr, Ian Shenton, and Wayne Smith.

111. Minute's Silence

Father Stan Gibzinski led the Council in a one minutes silence for all those affected by the war in Ukraine.

112. Apologies

Apologies for absence were submitted from Shirley Boyt, Adrian Mather, Stuart Munro and Daniel Sargeant.

113. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 February 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the inclusion of Gary Cowan, Carl Doran, Simon Weeks and Graham Howe being marked as having attended the meeting virtually.

114. Declarations of Interest

The following Members declared a general personal interest relating to items on the Agenda:

Councillor John Halsall declared a personal interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of Optalis Holdings.

Councillor Charles Margetts declared a personal interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of Optalis.

Councillor Norman Jorgensen declared a personal interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes.

Councillor John Kaiser declared a personal interest on the grounds that he was a

Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd.

Councillor Shahid Younis declared a personal interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes

The following Members declared a personal interest relating to items on the Agenda:

Councillor Maria Gee declared a personal interest in relation to Agenda item 103 Ukraine on the grounds that she had applied to host Ukrainian refugees.

Councillor Rachel Bishop Firth declared a personal interest in relation to Agenda item 103 Ukraine on the grounds that she had applied to host Ukrainian refugees.

Councillor Paul Fishwick declared a personal interest in relation to Agenda item 103 Ukraine, on the grounds that he had applied to host Ukrainian refugees.

Councillor Phil Cunnington declared a personal interest in relation to Agenda item 103 Ukraine on the grounds that he had applied to host a Ukrainian family.

115. Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor informed Members that it was the last meeting of the municipal year. He thanked those Members who were retiring for their hard work and wished those standing for election, good luck.

John Halsall, Clive Jones, and Stephen Conway paid tribute to a number of Members who were not restanding for election.

The Mayor that in accordance with Rule 4.2.2.2a) the order of business would be varied, and the Ukraine item taken following a minute's silence.

116. Public Question Time

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

116.1 Suzy Pfizer asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question, which was answered by the Leader of the Council. Due to her inability to attend the following written answer was provided:

Question

I refer you to your recent statement in which you said "Green spaces are a vital part of that because of the role they play in maintaining people's physical and emotional wellbeing. They offer valuable opportunities for exercise, socialising and spending time outside in nature, which can significantly reduce stress". The users of Laurel Park already know this, especially during Covid!! There is a children's play area in the Park; the children won't be in the open fresh air, they will instead be breathing in emissions from the increase in cars using the pitch.

Do you stand by that statement, and will you therefore be objecting to the installation of a 3G pitch at Laurel Park a conservation area and wildlife reserve?

Answer

Given that there are a plethora of questions on Laurel Park, I propose to take them all myself as Leader of the Council.

Thank you, Suzy, for your question.

I share your enthusiasm for Laurel Park and believe that it should be protected.

I refer you to my letter written to residents who are around Laurel Park stating, "A review of a 3G pitch at Laurel Park indicates that this site is not suitable and therefore will not be progressed by this administration." This letter has been widely distributed in Facebook.

I am sure that you are aware that every blade of grass, tree or field in the Borough which is lost through development or neglect is a tragedy for me.

We will be examining in detail after the election the results of the Local Plan Update Consultation and as a consequence of residents' feedback we will published and acted upon in the Autumn.

I believe that Laurel Park should be a designated green space; it is now proposed in the Local Plan Update Consultation. I will do all I can to ensure that it is.

I know that an election is upon us when numerous false flag campaigns are started.

The most notable one is Pinewood where the Council has no intention of building any houses and is stated as such in the Local Plan Update Consultation. This has been clarified on numerous occasions and yet there has been a campaign against doing something which was never proposed that we would.

On the other hand, I would like to commend Peter Harper. who has organised a petition with 1,200 signatures, mobilised local members and encouraged residents to reply to the Local Plan Update Consultation on the Rook's Nest Farm. I am sure that this will, when appraised, give a clear indication to the opposition and local sentiment for development on this site and be very influential in any new proposal put forward.

116.2 AI Neal asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question, which was answered by the Leader of the Council

Question

Your letter to residents dated 26th February states the Executive has made no formal decision on the site of the proposed 3G pitch in the Lower Earley area.

How can this statement be reconciled with the facts that on the 24th June, the Council's Executive approved expenditure of £300k on this project; and that on page

103 of the Medium Term Financial Plan presented to Council on the 9th February this figure appears to have doubled to £600,000 with “3G Pitch at Laurel Park” explicitly recorded?

Answer

Thank you for your question, Al.

I believe that you are aspiring to be a Lib Dem Borough Councillor and are an Earley Town councillor.

In order for any project like this to be considered it needs to be included in the Medium Term Financial Plan. This an essential and necessary precondition. Thereafter, it will need elaboration into a business plan, a planning application will be required and various consultations with residents and other interested parties. Only when all these steps have been concluded satisfactorily authorisation will be given to proceed.

The MTPF capital figure for 22/23 of £600,000 is in addition to £300,000 in the current year. Of a £900,000 scheme, £500,000 of that cost will be funded from the Football Foundation – leaving Wokingham Borough Council to fund the balance, initially estimated at £400,000. In fact, our latest cost estimates suggest a total project cost of £800,000.

Supplementary Question:

I am just appearing here as an Earley resident actually and in no other capacity. The cancellation, has there been anything minuted that we can refer to, to show that this project has been cancelled? I have only heard that a letter has been put out on Facebook, there is nothing in a formal Council meeting, is there?

Supplementary Answer

In my years as a Councillor, I have never seen Councillors both Borough and Town behave as badly as I have seen them do on this issue. The public have a right to be angry.

The Opposition promoted a 3G pitch in Laurel Park based on “if Wokingham Town have one Earley should as well”. Without properly consulting residents, the Town Council or fellow borough councillors, the Opposition leader ploughed on clandestinely or so it appears. When it was clear that this was likely to be unpopular the active promotion appears to have become fervent opposition and the Borough Council was at fault.

Officers quite rightly responded to the enthusiasm on the assumption that they reflected a common view. Officers were totally bemused to find that the support for the project expressed previously was now outright opposition. This is not only taking the residents for fools but also wasting officer time and wreaking havoc on outside relationships, which the Borough needs.

116.3 Mike Smith asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question, which was answered by the Leader of the

Council. Due to his inability to attend the following written answer was provided

Question

In the Berks and Bucks Football Foundation web based report, entitled - Local Football Facility Plan - Wokingham (but not dated), it has, as a 5th of 20 priorities, a recommendation for a 3G pitch in the Earley area with the statement that “A preferred site is to be confirmed, multiple potential options exist such as Laurel Park and Chalfont Park.”

In the Minutes of the Executive Meeting of the 25th June 2021, under Agenda item 9 - Implementing the Leisure Strategy – sub-item 3, it was explicitly Resolved to allocate £300,000 funding for a 3G pitch at Laurel Park (page 19 in Minutes). And the Medium Range Financial Forecast approved at the last Council meeting allocates £600,000 of capital to Laurel Park 3G Pitch on page 103.

How did WBC’s Leisure Services get from a simple suggestion as one of multiple options with no needs analysis, residential consultation, value for money assessment or other justification in a third-party report to the explicit designation of £600,000 for a new 3G pitch at Laurel Park in budget allocations?

Answer

Mike, thank you for your question.

I believe that you are a Liberal Democrat candidate for the local elections and an Earley Town Councillor.

The answer is very simple. It was the enthusiasm displayed by the Leader of Earley town Council, Clive Jones to have a 3G pitch located in Laurel Park. He was actively promoting it.

On 8th December 2020 the day after the Cantley Park 3G pitch was announced Clive Jones wrote to the Borough Council:

“ NEW FUNDING TO REVAMP CANTLEY PARK’S FACILITIES

Hi,

This is very good news.

How are discussions going with them about Laurel Park? It would be great to have something similar there.

Can we have an update chat?

Best wishes,

Clive”

Several meetings were subsequently held with Clive Jones or ETC; two in January 2021; one in March 2021; one in August 2021. Unsurprisingly Officers assumed that the Leader of Earley Town Council was speaking on behalf of Earley Town Council and also the residents and that the Leader of the Lib Dem Group was speaking on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Borough Councillors.

I was amazed to find Councillor Jones write that Earley Town Council had never discussed this proposal which was confirmed by the Earley Town Mayor. Maybe the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Candidate for Wokingham, the Leader of the LibDem Group at Wokingham Borough Council and the Leader of Earley Town Council are three independent people who do not confer with one another?

Mike, this is election season, but it is not an excuse for false flag episodes or electoral stunts particularly at this moment when residents need to have confidence in the Council.

It is similar to the claim that the Local Plan Update Consultation proposes provision for 16,000 new homes over the next twenty years. It is a lie. The period is 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2038. First of all, the number should be 15,513 of which 3,900 are already built and a further 8900 are either permitted, adopted allocations or windfalls) The plan actually assumes a total of 3,910 new homes a figure significantly different from 16,000.

For the 3G pitch, the Borough Council has not made a decision as to where to locate it and even whether a suitable site exists; so that there is nothing to oppose.

I am in agreement with the residents that Laurel Park is not suitable and whilst I head the administration, I will be strongly against a 3G pitch in Laurel Park. When the 3G pitch options analysis is considered by executive in the summer, I will be voting against the Laurel Park site. Indeed, I will be promoting Laurel Park as a designated green space to protect it ad infinitum.

116.4 Daniel Hinton asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

Since the GP at Burma Hills has retired and local residents are being redirected to the Wokingham medical centre, I understand there is talk and promises but at the moment no firm plans to restore GP services at this practice. I am very concerned about this and have a petition to draw attention to this which has picked up support. I noted the update from the CCG but the date has passed with no GP still in Burma Hills.

Certain Councillors have commented on Facebook that this and the petition was scaremongering and not correct. What is the truth in regards to Burma Hills and is there any update?

Answer

I share your concern about the situation at Burma Hills. This arose because the CCG allowed the Primary Care Network to remove the face-to-face GP service with no public consultation at all. This is simply not acceptable. When we complained to the CCG in February, we were given a firm assurance that face to face services would resume at this practice as soon as the vaccination clinic they were running ended. We went back to the CCG last week and have received a commitment that the full range of primary care medical services, which means face-to-face GP

services, will restart in April. It is the responsibility of the practice to communicate to local residents.

We will continue to watch this situation and apply pressure to ensure this service is fully restored. Therefore, to my mind, your petition is very appropriate as it represents the just concerns of the 2,000 people on the roll at Burma Hills who had their face-to-face GP service withdrawn with no notice. I can't really give you a sensible explanation for the social media comments that have been made around this issue.

We see the withdrawal of a face-to-face GP service effecting 2,000 residents as a serious problem. We see our role as to raise resident issues and obtain a resolution from the CCG. Councillor Kerr commented that on social media that the practice was never closing and this story was scaremongering. This was factually wrong. Imagine how you would feel if you were one of the 2,000 people on the roll at Burma Hills who had their face-to-face GP service withdrawn with no notice and were told this issue was not real. The bottom line is that people can say what they like. I can assure you that we will remain committed to focusing on the issues our residents face and demanding solutions to their concerns.

Supplementary Question:

What does this say about the approach of the CCG towards GP practices in central Wokingham? We have had this issue at Burma Hills and continued issues at Wokingham Medical Centre, and who is responsible for these problems?

Supplementary Answer:

GP services are commissioned by the CCG and WBC has no direct control over them, therefore the direct answer to your question is that the CCG are responsible for all GPs. However, this does not mean we will stand by and ignore problems. I share your concerns about the performance of GPs in central Wokingham. We in Wokingham are fortunate to have some very good GPs delivering great services. However, the Wokingham Medical Centre, as I have commented here before, is ranked in the bottom 5% in England, and now we have this serious issue at Burma Hills. We have been calling on the CCG for many months to do something about this and have raised this with our local MPs. We have now raised this issue with the ICS, and I have a meeting next week with its head, Dr James Kent, to take this further. We will not rest on this until I get a response. I would share with you the issue with Burma Hills did raise an interesting response at first from the CCG. In initial discussion with our officers, a senior CCG representative said something along the lines of 'Why are Wokingham always complaining about GPs? GPs in Wokingham are generally good', which is true. He then went on to say that 'GPs in Reading are not very good but Reading never complain.' Now my message to the CCG on this is simple, we are not Reading, and we will continue to praise good GP performance where it happens, but also to call out poor performance, and to demand solutions as we know that this really matters to all of our residents.

116.5 Judith Clark asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question, which was answered by the Leader of the Council:

Question

Please could the Council tell us whether the 3G “upgrade” contemplated for the Maiden Erlegh School pitch means transforming some of the existing playing field into a new 3G football pitch(es), with floodlights, 7 days a week and evening use up to 10:00pm and providing relevant extra parking, as was the case for Laurel Park?

Answer

Thank you for your question. I believe you are a Cutbush Town Councillor together with Clive Jones. *(it was clarified that this was not the case)*

Firstly, there was no “as was the case for Laurel park”. As I wrote in my letter “Given the number of public questions raised on this matter at the last full Council meeting, I wanted to write to you to reinforce the responses provided. Wokingham Borough Council listens to all our residents and your instructions.

The Executive has made no formal decision on the site of the proposed 3G pitch in the Lower Earley area or indeed if there is a suitable site. This will be made after consideration of an options analysis at a future Executive meeting, after a full consultation with residents. Laurel Park was simply the initial site put forward by the Berks and Bucks Football Association. A review of a 3G pitch at Laurel Park indicates that this site is not suitable and therefore will not be progressed by this administration. Other sites have now emerged. A possibility is upgrading current facilities at Maiden Erlegh school or using facilities in Bearwood as an alternative. If these are not feasible, then maybe there is no suitable site in Lower Earley.

Supplementary Question

If Maiden Erlegh School were chosen, given that it is an academy, how would the use of the new pitch be regulated, because I understand academies are not under the control of the Council? Already floodlights are Maiden Erlegh School in the evenings sometimes continue to provide enough light for residents not to have to use their bathroom lights, because the lights are not turned off as they ought to be.

Supplementary Answer

We have facilities that we share with schools, and provide to schools, so there is a facility to have an agreement, but as I say this discussion is completely premature, because there is no such plan existing, it is only an option to explore with Maiden Erlegh School, if they are interested.

116.6 Anna Morris asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**Question**

I live in Avalon Road, about five minutes on foot from Maiden Erlegh School. I am concerned over the proposed upgrade to Maiden Erlegh School pitches to include a 3G pitch. This would have serious implications for residents of my area with regard to noise, traffic congestion, parking, light pollution from the floodlights and so a heavy impact on the environment.

Which residents do you propose to consult, given the small number of residents who were directly consulted over the Laurel Park proposal?

Answer

Thank you very much Anna.

Any consideration of any site will be after a business case, planning application and a full consultation. As I said before there may not be a suitable site in Earley. Obviously, we hope there will be as there is an urgent need for football pitches.

Supplementary Question:

You have not really answered the question which was who would be consulting with exactly over the proposed pitch?

Supplementary Answer:

Well, there are a number of stakeholders and obviously the residents are one of them, and you would be consulted. No, I do not know the particular area of consultation. That would be worked out with officers at the time, but Earley Town Council would be very influential, as would be the Borough Town Councillors in Earley.

116.7 Beth Rowland asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

The consultation on the Woodley to Reading Cycleway has caused the Council to have to go back to the drawing board. What lessons has the Council learnt about managing change from this exercise and what will it do differently to carry residents with it on its plan to get more people walking and cycling?

Answer

The purpose of the consultation was to introduce the designs to residents and other stakeholders to get their feedback, and boy did we get some feedback. We knew that the scheme was ambitious and wanted to gauge public opinion on such a transformational scheme.

The project was funded by the Department for Transport's (DfT) Active Travel Fund, and they will only fund schemes which comply with their cycle design guidance. The design was intended to demonstrate to DfT that we are trying to deliver to the highest standard of cycleways for pedestrians and cyclists.

The feedback means that we need to make changes to some elements of the scheme. We will be working with stakeholders, including the town councils before we launch a new consultation later in the year.

We appreciate that in hindsight it would have been better for Officers to engage stakeholders ahead of the public consultation and this is something we will be doing

for the next iteration of the scheme.

Supplementary Question:

Given that the cheerleader for the Opposition, the Mayor of the Borough, to the cycleway scheme, was another Conservative party councillor, can we the residents of this town, be confident that the ruling party is united around the plan to get more people walking and cycling?

Supplementary Answer:

I am pretty sure you can.

117. Petitions

The following Member presented a petition in relation to the matter indicated. The Mayor's decision as to the action to be taken is set out against the petition.

Rachel Burgess	Rachel Burgess presented a petition with 187 signatures asking for the installation of a pedestrian crossing on Warren House Road near the new Mulberry View development. <i>To be forwarded to the Executive Member for Highways and Transport</i>
Andrew Mickleburgh	Andrew Mickleburgh presented a petition of 380 signatures against a 3G pitch at Laurel Park. <i>To be forwarded to the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure</i>

118. Ukraine

The Council received a report regarding Ukraine as set out in pages 55 to 58 of the agenda.

Keith Baker proposed that in accordance with Rule 4.2.12(n), Rule (4.2.13.1) be suspended for this item, and that Rule (4.2.2.1) also be suspended to extend the time limit for debate to one hour. This was seconded by Abdul Loyes.

On being put to the vote this was carried.

It was proposed by Keith Baker and seconded by Abdul Loyes that the recommendations within the report be approved.

Mick Pollek from the Reading Ukrainian Community Centre was invited to say a few words. He commented that in times of need friends helped each other and Wokingham Borough Council had provided a lot of help to the Ukrainian community. A fantastic response had been received to the request for donations and a facility had been made available in Winnersh to help sort donations. Mick Pollek stated that

Ukraine's history was littered by pain and suffering. He was grateful for the work that the Council was undertaking and offered for people to contact himself or his colleague at the Reading Refugee Support Group. Mick Pollek outlined the experiences of a refugee family and commented that refugees would be very grateful for support but would need to live their own lives.

A large number of Members expressed their strong support for and solidarity with the Ukrainian people.

Members welcomed the action that would be taken to support Ukrainian families and residents' desire to provide support, such as offering to house refugees. It was also acknowledged that it was important to continue to support refugees from other areas such as Syria and Afghanistan. A number of Members outlined some of the terrible experiences that refugees had experienced.

Some of the support that would be made available to Ukrainian families coming to the area, was outlined, including the provision of a support worker, direct access to charity support and a frequently asked question information sheet in Ukrainian. Children's Services were preparing to accept Ukrainian children and considering how best to support them.

Work would be undertaken with health partners to address any health issues and healthcare packs in Ukrainian were being prepared. Each refugee would be experiencing trauma which they would react differently to. Mental health support was likely to be at the forefront of the response.

Council was informed that the Fire Service had provided equipment and fire appliances to Ukraine.

RESOLVED: That Council

- 1) condemns the violations of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine;
- 2) pledges its support of, and solidarity with, the people of Ukraine and will welcome those seeking sanctuary here;
- 3) notes the immediate response of the Council and the longer term actions planned.

119. Council Plan Refresh 2022/23

The Council considered the Council Plan Refresh 2022/23 as set out in agenda pages 59 to 98.

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

John Halsall outlined the record of achievement against the Council Plan. The need to respond to Covid was a key focus in 2020/21. Immediate action had been taken to set up robust, enhanced financial monitoring, following the start of the pandemic.

Despite the impact of Covid, the Council had been able to deliver on its savings targets. John Halsall highlighted that occupation levels in the Town continued to be on target. He also referred to successes such as the launch of Kooth and an increase in spending to provide domestic abuse support, the delivery of the Bulmershe Leisure Centre and the development of several schools.

John Kaiser stated that plans needed to be realistic, ambitious and deliver what residents really wanted. They needed to be living documents, so he welcomed the refresh of the Council Plan.

Sarah Kerr highlighted some areas of positive work such as the Compass Team, the expansion of the Virtual School, and the local response to the pandemic. However, she felt that the Council did not always work with the community sufficiently, and that the Plan refresh was a glossy brochure which did not resemble residents' life experiences. She was of the view that the commitments were not always met. The Council Plan had been presented to Overview and Scrutiny the day before its consideration allowing little input and the refresh had not been scrutinised.

Jim Frewin requested that in the next refresh there be a greater focus on quality, affordable, sustainable homes which were fit for the future. This was a particular issue in his ward.

Rachel Burgess expressed concern regarding a number of areas of the Plan, including climate emergency and community engagement on this issue. She also expressed concern regarding road safety, equality and diversity, the levels of affordable housing and green space.

Phil Cunnington felt the Plan to be positive.

RESOLVED That Council:

- 1) notes the slight change in articulation of the strategic priorities as proposed;
- 2) agrees the proposed changes to the Council Plan and updates to strategic themes as summarised within this report and set out in Appendix 1;
- 3) adopts the Annual Review for 2020/21 as contained in Appendix 2 and highlights for 2021/22 as contained in Appendix 3.

120. Gorse Ride Regeneration Project Changes to Delivery Model

Council considered a report regarding the Gorse Ride Regeneration Project Changes to Delivery Model as set out in agenda pages 99 to 106.

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

John Kaiser advised that the first phase had successfully been built and the second was now beginning. There had been some changes, including the way in which it was funded and the inclusion of more affordable homes and more social homes.

In the last 5 years 1691 affordable homes had been built in the Borough, of which 789 had been for social rent. 746 people had presented as homeless this year to the Council, an unprecedented outcome of Covid and the economy. John Kaiser went on to state that when the Council sought affordable homes developers would be asked to make 70% of these social rent.

Prue Bray indicated that the Liberal Democrats supported the item. However, she expressed concern around the change to the delivery model. She commented that the change had been coming for some time, yet there had been no mention of the possibility of the £37.5million extra Housing Revenue Account borrowing in the Treasury Management Strategy or the Capital Management Strategy presented at the Budget meeting.

Rachel Burgess expressed a number of concerns. She commented that many more council houses were required and questioned why the scheme was as costly as it was. She also did not support the delegation of authority to the Director.

John Kaiser indicated that the change in the delivery of model has not been fully finalised at the time the Budget was set. It was noted that the proposal had been discussed with the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel.

RESOLVED: That Council

- 1) approves that the development of homes within the Gorse Ride regeneration will be transferred to the Housing Revenue Account. 99 - 106 (With market sale element in the general fund);
- 2) approves the expenditure budget up to the total cost of the scheme of £105,601,534 funded through a combination of HRA borrowing, capital receipts, developer contributions and right to buy receipts. (Further information provided in the report);
- 3) gives delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Finance, to approve the use of additional Affordable Housing s106 commuted sums as a contingency against cost and funding variations such as any future design changes and/or fluctuations in costs and values of up to 15% of the cost of the scheme in the event of any other financial impacts;
- 4) agrees that any appropriation of land between the HRA and general fund required to deliver the scheme will be delegated to the Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Finance.

121. Delivering the Gorse Ride Regeneration Project - Procurement of Construction Works and Services

Council received a report regarding the delivery of the Gorse Ride Regeneration Project – procurement of construction works and services, as set out in agenda

pages 107 to 126.

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

John Kaiser confirmed that the report sought permission to let the contract.

Rebecca Margetts stated that as a ward member for Gorse Ride she was proud of the flagship project and all the Council had achieved.

Prue Bray commented that she supported the project but not the recommendations within the report. It was a huge project but the papers had only been circulated a week previously and given that she had not been involved previous discussions, it was difficult to be sure that the procurement business case was sound and that all the assumptions were valid. In addition, the project was being delivered in phases and for each phase there were three parts to the procurement; site enabling works, consultancy and construction. Only the construction procurement was over the Executive financial sign off limits and was taken to Full Council.

RESOLVED: that Council

- 1) approves the procurement business case of the construction works and services as relevant to Gorse Ride Regeneration project;
- 2) gives delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets and Director of Place and Growth to approve the awarding and execution of the construction works and services as relevant to Gorse Ride Regeneration within the funding envelope and the over-arching business case as presented to the Executive on 17th February 2022.

122. Electoral Review - Phase 1 Submission

Council received a report regarding the Electoral Review – Phase 1 submission, as set out in agenda pages 127 to 152.

It was proposed by Angus Ross and seconded by Clive Jones that the recommendation in the report be agreed.

Angus Ross advised that this was Phase 1 of the ward review process. The Working Group had met twice and proposed that the Council should remain at 54 councillors. An increase would take Wokingham above its near neighbours and a decrease would give the highest elector per councillor, locally.

RESOLVED: That Council agrees the phase 1 submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (as set out in Appendix A to the report) on the preferred number of Councillors of 54, as recommended by the Electoral Review Working Group at its meeting of 8 March 2022.

123. Recruitment and Appointment of Directors and Assistant Directors

(Permanent and Interim)

Council considered a report regarding the recruitment and appointment of Directors and Assistant Directors (Permanent and Interim) as set out in agenda pages 153 to 158.

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

John Halsall commented that whilst it was desirable to continue to have permanent staff as the norm, for various reasons, the use of temporary or interim staff was becoming more common. Changes were therefore proposed to the appointment process of permanent and interim Director and Assistant Directors.

Rachel Bishop-Firth stated that the appointment of key people was vital. She had been disappointed that the inclusion of the Leader of the Opposition as a consultee in the appointment process had not been agreed. She pointed out that the Leader of the Council and the Chairman of the Personnel Board were the same person.

RESOLVED That Council agrees:

- 1) to the changes to the appointment processes for Directors and Assistant Directors, as set out in the report;
- 2) that changes to the appointment processes for Directors and Assistant Directors will not apply to any recruitment process that has already started.

124. Independent Member of Audit Committee

Council received a report regarding the appointment of an Independent Member of the Audit Committee, as set out in agenda pages 159 to 168.

It was proposed by Shahid Younis and seconded by Angus Ross that the recommendations within the report be agreed.

Shahid Younis explained that the rationale for appointing an Independent member to the Audit Committee was to provide knowledge and expertise to the Committee, to reinforce the political neutrality and independence of the Committee, and to maintain continuity of the Committee membership where membership was impacted by the electoral cycle.

RESOLVED That Council agrees that:

- 1) an Independent member is co-opted on to the Audit Committee on a non-voting basis and the Constitution is updated accordingly to reflect this;
- 2) the independent member role profile, as set out in the report, is approved;
- 3) the appointment of the independent member is delegated to the Audit Committee;

- 4) the process for selecting and recommending an appropriate candidate is delegated to the Assistant Director Governance in consultation with the Chair of the Audit Committee.

125. Annual Report from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees 2021/22

Council considered the Annual report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out in agenda pages 166 to 188.

It was proposed by Pauline Helliar-Symons and seconded by Alison Swaddle that the report be noted.

Pauline Helliar-Symons advised that it had been a busy year and that the Committees had worked extremely hard.

RESOLVED: That the report from the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee be noted.

126. Reports from Members Appointed to Outside Bodies

Council considered the reports from Members appointed to Outside Bodies as set out in agenda pages 189 to 228.

It was proposed by Gregor Murray and seconded by Chris Bowring that the Outside Body reports be noted.

Gregor Murray highlighted the importance of the Council's involvement with the Outside Bodies.

RESOLVED: That the reports from Members appointed to Outside Bodies be noted.

127. Member Question Time

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

127.1 Sam Akhtar asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question which was answered by the Leader of the Council:

Question

Over thirty trees have been felled on Council owned land in Charvil by a resident towards the end of last year. The resident in question is claiming they had permission from the Council to fell these trees, however they do not have any proof of the permission granted. In light of the climate crisis and recent tree planting initiatives, can the Council advise what they are doing to rectify the situation and prevent other residents from believing that it is acceptable to do the same?

Answer

The land you refer to was transferred from the Council, via lease agreement, to Charvil Parish Council in 2016. Consequently, it is Charvil Parish Council's responsibility to take further action against the resident who felled the trees. This kind of activity is viewed as criminal damage and it is the responsibility of Charvil Parish Council to decide on further action and to engage with the Police, who have the powers to progress the matter and any possible prosecution.

I understand that the WBC Tree Officers and Legal Team are engaging with Charvil Parish Council on the matter and will continue to provide support and advice on enforcement and replanting measures.

This type of activity on third party land is not common, however, Officers are considering how we can engage with communities to discourage such activity and promote additional planting through the emerging WBC Tree Strategy. We are also working with Charvil Parish Council on opportunities for tree planting in this location and other locations across Charvil.

127.2 Andrew Mickleburgh asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**Question**

Would you consider it good practice for all Borough Councillors representing the affected wards to be copied into 'mass circulation' letters or emails sent under Wokingham Borough Council letterhead, such as the letter from you regarding the 3G pitch proposals at Laurel Park, dated the 26th February?

Answer

I would like to remind you that embedded within our Constitution are the Nolan Principles. We are required to show Honesty, Leadership, Openness, Accountability, Objectivity, Integrity, and Selflessness. There is ample opportunity for all Members, Town and Parish councils and residents to question a decision or proposal; this can be simply by giving me, the Executive Member, Chief Executive or a Director a call. This Administration is here for one purpose alone and that is to serve the residents. By being open and transparent hopefully if we have got it wrong it will come to light and we can get it right.

The recent debate over the Laurel Park has regrettably shown us wanting. There is ample evidence that the proposal to site a 3G pitch at Laurel Park was in the public domain in and before March 2021, when it was advertised in the Executive Forward Plan. The proposal was first promoted by Councillor Jones in December 2020 followed up by many other discussions, which he and officers had. There were no Member or public questions on this proposal until February 2022, when residents en masse questioned the Council. It was never raised in Overview and Scrutiny nor whilst the budget was being scrutinised. The Executive's proposal to include it in the budget proposals and explore was not called in. Indeed, there is ample evidence that Earley Town Council enthusiastically supported the decision until very recently when they found that local residents were against. I understand that conversations

were being held to improve the pavilion to accommodate this 3G pitch in September 2021.

Supplementary Question:

Thank for you acknowledging that the Council has been found wanting on this particular matter. The answer that you have given is not the one you gave me during the meeting residents at Laurel Park. There you told me that it was not necessary for me, a Ward Member that would be affected by these proposals to receive your letter, because it was all over social media. For so many reasons this is not the way that this Council should be communicating, but my supplementary question is how many times have Conservative councillors deliberately not been forwarded important correspondence from yourself that directly effected their wards? A simple numerical answer would suffice.

Supplementary Answer:

The requirement for Honesty and Integrity means that false flag initiatives designed to put the Administration into disrepute does nothing to enhance the reputation of this Council.

On 8 December the day after Cantley Park was announced Clive Jones wrote to the Borough Council:

“ NEW FUNDING TO REVAMP CANTLEY PARK’S FACILITIES

Hi,

This is very good news.

How are discussions going with them about Laurel Park? It would be great to have something similar there.

Can we have an update chat?

The discussions with the Borough Council and Councillor Jones went on throughout 2020/21. The fact that you did not know about it is really not a matter for me.

The false flag initiatives which are currently being raised - We will not have borrowings of £750million (our current net borrowings are closer to £170million with realisable assets well over £1billion. To keep on repeating £750million is untrue and does not make it true. Council documents do not support your contention. To keep repeating information which is untrue does not make it.

To negate a saving circulated by our Monitoring Officer and calculated by our statutory financial officer of £1million plus per annum and for all-out elections does you and the Council a disservice.

127.3 David Hare asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question which was answered by the Leader of the Council:

Question

How involved in the decision recently made to discount Laurel Park from consideration for a 3G pitch were you? You were very strong on the apparent fact

that this was an F.A. choice, but were overridden as John Halsall and Pauline Jorgensen reacted to an overwhelming wave of local resistance, the FA seeming to have no consideration in this.

Answer

I am answering on behalf of the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure, who echoes my sentiments. I was intimately involved. We are only here to serve the residents and their view is the determinant. Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

I take my responsibility as the Leader of the council very seriously. As President Truman said, "The buck stops here". When I see something which is clearly wrong, I am prepared to say so and correct this. Officers never are left to take the can. Officers should never be asked to do something that I am not prepared to do. If you are in a leadership role, you must lead. The Council only works if those leading it are clear in their direction. In this case what was being proposed was clearly wrong. As a Liberal Democrat you take a different view "The Liberal Democrat manual says, "As a Liberal Democrat Councillor, you are not there to defend the Council (even when we run the Council)". You take no responsibility. It's always someone else's fault, coupled with continuous bouts of virtue signalling to hide your inadequacies.

Supplementary Question:

I was going to ask about consultation because that is something which I do not think happened at Laurel Park, and obviously needs to happen before other agreements are made concerning this 3G pitch. When is the Council going to consult with local people before a planning application, so that they know the local people's views about this subject?

Supplementary Answer:

This is absolute nonsense, and you know it is nonsense. There is no planning application that has been submitted or prepared. No business case has been submitted or prepared. At the moment what was being done was a successful application in principle, not confirmed, of a grant, to put a 3G pitch in Earley because of a recognition of need for football pitches. All the Earley Members have done is managed to sink the proposal and done it very well and virtual signal. The petition was absolute nonsense Dr Mickleburgh. You rode on the back of a letter that I had already written.

127.4 Stephen Conway asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question, which was answered by the Leader of the Council:

Question

I think we can agree that significant parts of the Borough are at risk of flooding.

Can you assure me that the Council's draft Local Plan includes robust measures to project as accurately as possible future flood risk and is not over-reliant on Environment Agency mapping of existing and historic flood zones?

I ask because both run-off from current development and the increased incidence of heavy rainfall events associated with climate change suggest that there will be a significant expansion of the areas at risk of flooding over the local plan period.

Answer

National planning guidance on accounting for flood risk has been followed in progressing the local plan, as I think you know. Our draft planning policy on flood risk contained within the Draft Plan Consultation (2020) requires consideration of climate change and that flood risk both within and outside an application site is not worsened by development.

We have prepared a Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2020) to consider the land that has been promoted across the Borough, as well as a Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2021) for the masterplanned site at Hall Farm / Loddon Valley. Moving forward, a Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment is required to consider and inform all the proposed allocations.

Turning briefly to climate change, our work has applied the Environment Agency climate change allowances, specific to the Wokingham Loddon catchment, when modelling flood risk occurs. Climate change allowances are predictions of anticipated change for peak river flow and peak rainfall intensity and are required to be considered in flood modelling works to ensure increased infrastructure resilience to future flooding. Site specific flood risk assessments for individual development sites are also required to consider these climate change allowances and developers must design drainage systems and flood mitigation to cater for current surface water and fluvial flood risk, as well as predicted future rainfall.

At each stage we have engaged, and will continue to engage, the Environment Agency and the Council's specialist flooding and drainage team.

I am sure you have a supplementary but whatever it is will have to be a written answer because I hardly understand the words, I have read myself.

Supplementary Question:

I thought that might be the case John and I am glad that you admitted that, because I have to say that I am afraid it did not fill me with enormous confidence. It did not fill me with enormous confidence because I am sure you, if not already aware, will become aware that the Environment Agency has commented on the new draft Local Plan. It has submitted its comments on 1st March. In its submission the Agency expresses concern about some of the sites, quite serious concern, including Hall Farm. It states in relation to numerous sites identified as suitable for development in the draft Local Plan, and I am now quoting the Environment Agency's comments, forgive me for the double negative it is theirs not mine; 'we are not satisfied that the proposals will not increase the risk of flooding on or off the site.' This is the Environment Agency telling you that they are not satisfied that you have built in proper safeguards. This is the Environment Agency telling you that they do not believe that some of these sites are suitable for development. Their overall comment is that they disagree with the viability of the plan. Would you like to respond to the Agency's concern?

Supplementary Answer:

I am sure that what you have read out has been a concern that the Agency has written in, and I am sure that is part of the process of having a Local Plan Update consultation. There is absolutely no point in having a consultation unless you expect people to give you a reaction to what you propose. I am sure that will be taken into account and responded to in the next consultation, which would be the Reg 19 consultation or another Reg 18 consultation if there is sufficient push back against the current Local Plan Update consultation.

127.5 Sarah Kerr asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:**Question**

We are all aware of the sharp increase in energy bills that are having a huge detrimental effect on our communities. The debate we're seeing played out in the media focuses on the sourcing of our energy, but very little is being said about reducing the demand for energy in the first place.

People are requiring more gas and electricity to heat and power their homes, at a greater cost to them, than they would have needed if the national green homes grant scheme hadn't been a failure and if this government hadn't scrapped the zero carbon homes policy in 2016.

I do appreciate that this Council is helping to deliver the green home local authority delivery scheme and the ECO scheme which helps households to insulate better. These schemes are focused on low income and vulnerable households, with the vast majority of households not qualifying. This energy crisis is really going to bite for a lot of people who do not qualify for these schemes, and people are going to be looking for support and guidance at this challenging time. What is this Council going to do to facilitate this?

Answer

There is no one solution for rising energy costs. As a result, we need multiple alternatives to engage and support our residents. The hugely successful Eco and Eco Flex Help to Heat scheme remain open, and continue to support families to keep down their home heating costs. The Council has partnered with the South East Energy Hub and an organisation called Warm Works to deliver a new scheme that offers energy saving home improvements including double glazing, not only to low-income households, but also to homes with a D to G energy rating. Around 1,300 homes have been already contacted directly offering them access to this energy and money saving programme.

Through our Property Strategy we are working with the Hardship Alliance to develop a range of support for those who are facing fuel poverty. We are working with Age UK Berkshire to identify, reach and support older people, who are struggling to heat their homes. We are working along with the Hardship Alliance, along with our Voluntary Community Sector, along with our other partners, to promote energy saving measures and grants available to those who are struggling to meet rising energy costs.

We also know that other organisations such as schools are seeing the impact of rising fuel costs eating into their limited discretionary budget, so we are continuing to roll out and seek to accelerate our Solar in Schools Programme in partnership with organisations such as In Range and the Community Energy Fund. Yesterday the Chancellor announced the doubling of the Household Support Fund, which is administered by Councils, along with a raft of measures to help us deal with recent increases to our cost of living; this includes the 5p fuel duty reduction, an increase in national income tax and insurance earning threshold and the 0% vat rating on energy saving materials. This comes on top of the recent rebate received by those in the A to D council tax bands. We are exploring multiple opportunities with external partners that will help address challenges of retro fitting and reducing energy demand.

Supplementary Question:

There is a lot of stuff there that is for low income funded households. Warm Works was the one I think you mentioned which may be for others, and I would like to find out some more please. I would like to hope that there is more than just that because there are a lot of people that do not qualify for a lot of the schemes. I also wanted to ask further in my supplementary, we have seen a lot from one of the Wokingham MPs, John Redwood, who is repeatedly making calls for the UK to construct new oil and gas fields to reduce its dependency on Russia and Russian gas, despite the fact that renewables have substantially shorter construction times as well as helping the UK achieve its net zero target. Do you Councillor Murray agree with me that the government's focus should be on facilitating and enabling increased renewable energy generation and not giving the green light to more fossil fuels?

Supplementary Answer:

I cannot speak on behalf of John Redwood. He speaks on behalf of himself, and you can read his blog on a daily basis to find out what he thinks on any given issue. My own personal opinion and I have expressed this on numerous occasions in this Council and through our actions, we are doing all we can to increase the amount of renewable energy generated within our community. We are putting solar panels on schools. We are taking actions in order to help residents reduce the amount of energy in their homes and to reduce their energy bills as a result of it. If you have any additional ideas of things, we could be doing in order to generate more renewable energy in our community I welcome them. If you have any additional suggestions of more that we could be doing to help our residents reduce their energy bills, and reduce the amount of energy they are using at the same time, I welcome them as well. Please contact me directly and if we can put it into place, we will action it.

128. Continuation of the meeting

At this point in the meeting, 10.13pm, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12 (m), the Council considered a Motion to continue the meeting beyond 10.30pm for a maximum of 30 minutes to enable further business on the Agenda to be transacted. The Motion was proposed by Prue Bray and seconded by Stephen Conway.

Upon being put to the vote, the Motion was declared by the Mayor to be lost.

128.1 Paul Fishwick asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

The Woodley to Reading cycle route was awarded funding from the DfT under the Active Travel 2 tranche. As this scheme has been delayed beyond the original deadline date, will the Executive Member guarantee that the DfT funding will not be lost?

Answer

I could give you the short answer or the long answer. The short answer is yes. The slightly lower answer is, we have had a very good meeting with the DfT this week. They have not only agreed that the £575,000 grant can be extended further, they have given us some helpful suggestions as to how we might improve the route, and finally they have also, I am very delighted to announce, given us an extra £2.95million towards segregated cycleways compliant with LTN 1 20 in the Borough, which I am very pleased about. They are obviously convinced that we are trying to do the right thing for cycling and the right thing for walking and the right thing for transport, and they are putting their money where their mouth is.

Supplementary Question:

Thank you for that. It would appear therefore that Grant Shapps has told Rishi Sunak that the Active Travel Funding has already been committed as many authorities in England have received a letter this week on Tuesday, just before the Budget. So, this additional funding which has come in for Wokingham is very much welcome. My question is what is the definitive timetable for the delivery of this and the remainder of the Woodley to Reading scheme, and how will you be making the case to residents who were opposed to the original scheme?

Supplementary Answer:

I am very pleased with the amount of money that we have been given for this. We have been given considerably more than quite a lot of other councils. It is very important to get the design of these things right. We will listen to residents and their views. We will talk to the Town Council, and we will talk to local Members. We are very keen to get a cycleway. It is very difficult to do cycleways. I think you yourself recognise that more or less anywhere you try to put a cycleway, which is segregated on a road, somebody will object to it, so it is very difficult to find the right route, but we will work on that with residents and local councillors. In the end we will work as long as we need to work to get something that people will actually use. There is no point in imposing a cycleway or anything else on people if they are not going to use and they do not want it, so we are going to work very hard with this money that the Government has given us to make sure we provide a really good cycleway for the residents of Wokingham Borough.

128.2 Caroline Smith asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

Please could clarify which of these statements is correct:

In the Executive Meeting of the 24th of June, you are minuted as being... 'pleased to see the proposal for a 3G pitch at Laurel Park'

A letter from Wokingham Borough Council to a small number of residents talking of '... looking into the feasibility of installing a flood-lit, all-weather pitch towards the end of 2022'

A Facebook post-dated 5th February in which you wrote...'the proposal is in a very early conceptual stage'.

Answer

As this is not a highways question or a transport question it is wrongly directed to the Member for Highway and Transport.

Thank you for your question, Caroline. I would guess that all the statements are true:

As a Council we are delighted that we have received Football Foundation support. We recognise the need for football pitches in the Borough and in particular in Earley. However, we do recognise that there are problems with Laurel Park and the discussions on Laurel Park from the Executive Member for Highways was particular to if they could sort highways problems, because there is a traffic problem there already.

The proposal is at a very early stage and if we can find a suitable site, then we have budgeted the capital spend and in principle have grant support, but that grant support, I now understand, is only for Earley, so lots of thinking caps on.

Supplementary Question:

It was just to clarify that last statement, you said that budget was for Earley only, was that clear?

Supplementary Answer:

Yes indeed.

128.3 Peter Dennis asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

In August 2020 the Borough Council submitted a bid for Active Travel Phase 2 funding, claiming to have undertaken "a robust scheme prioritisation process" leading to 2 alternative options. £576,650 was granted in November 2020 but the Council decided to spend this on an entirely new scheme in Woodley. Inevitably, this took longer than originally envisages and after a rushed consultation process, the scheme and the associated funding are on hold indefinitely.

The wider network plan for walking and cycling – the LCWIP – was to be developed for public consultation starting in June 2021. It is now March 2022 and there is no

forecast for when this consultation will start. The first part of this – an LCWIP for Wokingham Town – was completed and presented to the Executive Member for Highways and Transport in 2020, but never published.

The Low Carbon Transport Plan which was commissioned by the Council in 2019 has yet to be seen. And projects such as the A327 cycleway and replacement rail crossings to make walking and cycling easier have all slipped. Does the Council acknowledge the urgency of these issues, and can they commit, tonight or in a written response, to a schedule for when each of these issues will be resolved?

Answer

Thank you for your question, Peter. I think I have partly answered some of it in the answer to Paul.

Your recollection of it is not the same as my recollection. The original plans were for three different routes for cycleways. One was in Wokingham, one was along the A4 and either down towards Thames Valley Park or along under the roundabout and into Reading, and the third was a line drawn through Woodley. These were all taken to public consultation. We got a lot of responses, and the one that was most popular was the line that was drawn through Woodley. That was then developed into a more detailed scheme which was the one that was put out for consultation around about Christmas last year. That obviously got a lot of feedback, which suggests that the residents were very unhappy with the one way section on the way into the precinct, by Waitrose at that end. So, we are going to have to take that away and look at alternative routes to see if we can find something that meets the LTN 1 20 requirements and also meets support from the residents. I cannot put a timetable on that because I will not do anything unless the residents are in support of it, and that is what I am here for. I am not here to impose cycleways on people who do not want it, and I am not here to propose routes that people do not want. We are consulting. We have consulted twice now. We have had two different sets of answers and we will continue to work through them.

As far as the question about the Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan for Wokingham, I actually intervened on that and said there is no point in a Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan for Wokingham Town, because people do not actually cycle within towns, they cycle on routes, so we need to do a wider view of all the key routes. They went back to the drawing board and not only looked at the Walking and Infrastructure Plan, which is in Wokingham Town itself, but also how people use it to travel through the Borough as a whole. That is why we have not done anything with the Plan that was originally published for Wokingham, because there is a real danger of if you do not look at the routes, you improve a whole load of cycleways but you do not improve enough cycleways for people to get on the routes that they want to travel on.

Supplementary question

I would be interested to see what you do with the rest of the Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan stuff. One of the things that is apparent is the amount of money that it is going to cost. I wholeheartedly welcome the extra funding that you are going to receive from the Government, however that does leave a gap with the funding as we go on. So, you have got it down to £33million to be spent to complete

50% of the Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan by 2030, and then you are going to do about £3million a year, reducing to £2 million in 2024, so you are still to have a gap. How is the Council going fund that?

Supplementary answer

Some of the funding will come from developers as part of the developments that are being done. Some of it will come from more grant funding. The Officers have already proven themselves very good at getting grant funding from the DfT, and we are going to continue with that process. I do not foresee a gap, but I do foresee that it is 5 year funding and we do not have all the grants in place yet.

128.4 Clive Jones asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question, which was answered by the Leader of the Council:

Question

The letter from the Leader of the Council to residents dated 26th February states: "A review of a pitch at Laurel Park indicates that this site is not suitable and will not therefore be progressed by this administration." Can a copy of this review please be made public to include clear details of the process by which it was conducted, factors considered and when this review started and ended?

Answer

As you are referring to a letter of mine then it is appropriate that I answer the question.

Thank you, Clive for the question.

This must be your darkest hour. You clearly promoted the project to build a 3G pitch in Laurel Park, but you must have done so clandestinely without discussing it with your colleagues in Earley Town Council nor in Wokingham Borough Council. Why you should do this I cannot fathom. It appears, that you certainly did not take the residents into your confidence whose views are not opaque. They are very clear that they value Laurel Park as the amenity it is now.

Once you understood that the proposal would be unpopular you clearly positioned yourself to be against it, but you seem to not understand the Borough Council processes. A full consultation had not taken place but would be necessary. You know that; I know that. You know that a decision has not been taken; why are you trying to pretend that it has. You know that planning permission has not been granted. It has not been sought. You know that consultation will have to occur prior to any application. Why are you trying to mislead the public? You have ambitions to be a Member of Parliament for the Borough. Should the public trust you when clearly on local issues you are not straightforward or honest?

Supplementary Question

It is not a supplementary, I would just like an answer to my question Councillor Halsall. My question was, "a review of a pitch review of a pitch at Laurel Park indicates that this site is not suitable and will not therefore be progressed by this

administration.” Can a copy of this review please be made public to include clear details of the process by which it was conducted, factors considered and when this review started and ended? Could you answer that question without any other unnecessary comments?

Supplementary Answer

Can you tell me who you discussed a 3G pitch at Laurel Park before you promoted it with WBC officers? Can a copy of this review please be made public to include clear details of the process by which it was conducted, factors considered and when this review started and ended? Was this discussed with Earley Town Council Members and if so when and who? Was this discussed with Earley Borough Councillors and if so when and who? When you changed your mind and decided to oppose what you had previously promoted. Can a copy of this review please be made public to include clear details of the process by which it was conducted, factors considered and when this review started and ended? Was this discussed with Earley Town Council Members and if so when and who? Was this discussed with Earley Borough Councillors and if so when and who?

128.5 Prue Bray asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

I understand that residents in the Borough have signed up to host Ukrainian refugees, and the first families are expected to arrive in the near future. Unlike previous refugee schemes where the Council has had direct involvement and has been informed about the arrival of refugees, in this instance, the scheme is reliant on individuals and the hosts will need help accessing Council services. Can you please explain what the process is for getting refugee children into school, and for ensuring children’s social services can provide help where necessary, and give the contact details that host families should use?

Answer

I would like to answer that Councillor Bray and I hope that it is a subject that we can unify ourselves around like we did at the beginning of the meeting.

Children’s Services are working alongside other directorates as part of the Council’s response to the situation and preparing for the imminent arrival of families from the Ukraine. I can tell you the number of children that we can foresee coming down the pipeline that we had on the books as of yesterday lunchtime was 30, but I had a phone call at 2 o’clock today from one of my residents who has privately got families in to the Wargrave area, and that is ten families. I do not know exactly how many children yet, but it is somewhere between 18 and 22. If this is going on all around our parishes then we are in for quite a time.

Direct information on the English education system will be included alongside central contact information for the Borough in-year school’s admissions service. The Headteachers have been briefed via the weekly leadership drop in, and actually it is going to be increased beyond the weekly.

The Admissions team for school age pupils are working with pupil place planning officers and schools to review capacity, like I alluded to earlier. Early Years advice and guidance is also signposted in the information and a central helpline, but the key information has already been given by my colleague on Communications, everybody will be assigned their own support officer as and when we know about them, so I ask all of you, let us know.

129. Minutes of Committee Meetings and Ward Matters

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.

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

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.

131. Statement from Council Owned Companies

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.

132. Motions

132.1 Motion 474 submitted by Rachel Burgess

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.

132.2 Motion 475 submitted by Clive Jones

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.

132.3 Motion 476 submitted by Gregor Murray

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.

132.4 Motion 477 submitted by Guy Grandison

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.

132.5 Motion 478 submitted by Paul Fishwick

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.