

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL
HELD ON THURSDAY, 18 MAY 2023 FROM 7.30 PM TO 9.30 PM**

Members Present

Councillors: Beth Rowland (Mayor), Adrian Mather (Deputy Mayor), Keith Baker, Rachel Bishop-Firth, Laura Blumenthal, Prue Bray, Rachel Burgess, Anne Chadwick, Stephen Conway, David Cornish, Andy Croy, Phil Cunnington, David Davies, Peter Dennis, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, John Halsall, David Hare, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Sarah Kerr, Abdul Loyes, Morag Malvern, Charles Margetts, Rebecca Margetts, Andrew Mickleburgh, Stuart Munro, Alistair Neal, Jackie Rance, Ian Shenton, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Caroline Smith, Mike Smith, Wayne Smith and Shahid Younis

Members In Attendance Virtually

Councillors: Sam Akhtar

1. Election of Mayor

Caroline Smith the current Mayor, welcomed recently elected Members. The Mayor thanked all those who had invited her to their events over her time in Office. She highlighted some of the events that she had attended including for the Queen's Jubilee.

Caroline Smith thanked Caroline Kelly, the Mayor's Assistant, the Deputy Mayor Beth Rowland, and her consort, for their support over the year.

The Mayor called for nominations for the office of Mayor for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

It was proposed by Clive Jones and seconded by Stephen Conway that Beth Rowland be elected as Mayor for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

It was noted that the Mayor's chosen charity would be the Woodley Foodbank.

RESOLVED: That Beth Rowland be elected as Mayor for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

Beth Rowland made the statutory acceptance of office pursuant to Section 83 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Beth Rowland addressed the meeting as follows –

Thank you very much Members, for putting your faith in me as your Mayor for the year. I will carry out this position to the best of my ability. Before we go back to the agenda, I would like to embarrass Caroline Smith just once more. She has been a great example to us all on how to behave as Mayor, and I hope that I am as good as she is. I would like to thank her with a plant that she can put outside, and which I hope will bring memories to her of the year she spent as the First Citizen in

Wokingham.

2. Appointment of Deputy Mayor

The Mayor called for nominations for the office of Deputy Mayor for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

It was proposed by Clive Jones and seconded by Stephen Conway that Adrian Mather be appointed as Deputy Mayor for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

It was:

RESOLVED: That Adrian Mather be appointed as Deputy Mayor for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

Adrian Mather made the statutory acceptance of office pursuant to Section 83 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Adrian Mather thanked the Council for appointing him to the office of Deputy Mayor.

At this point in the meeting, the Reverend Jackie Case led the meeting in prayers.

3. Apologies

Apologies for absence were submitted from Gary Cowan, Peter Harper, Chris Johnson, Bill Soane and Alison Swaddle.

Sam Akhtar attended the meeting virtually.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 March 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

5. Declarations of Interest

Stephen Newton declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Item 13 Appointments to Outside Bodies, on the grounds that he was nominated to represent the Council on the Berkshire Pension Fund, and his wife was a member of the scheme.

6. Returning Officer's Report on May 2023 Elections

The Council considered a report from the Returning Officer, which gave details of the results of the local elections held on 4 May 2023.

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

It was proposed by Stephen Conway and seconded by Imogen Shepherd-Dubey 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.

7. Mayor's or Head of Paid Service Announcements

The Mayor informed Members that she had no announcements to make.

8. Statement by Councillor Clive Jones

Thank you very much Madam Mayor. Tonight, I come to the end of my time as Leader of Wokingham Borough Council. The first Liberal Democrat Council Leader in Wokingham for twenty years. It has been an honour and it has been a privilege to be the Leader of the Council, and to work with so many excellent officers, Executive Members, and fellow Councillors. I am proud that the partnership that we created last May, between Liberal Democrats, Labour and Independent Councillors, gave the Borough Council much needed financial stability and financial competence. I thank the 28 councillors who formed the partnership last year. We wanted to change the culture of the Council. We wanted a concentration on partnerships within the Council, and also with outside bodies and agencies, including town and parish councils. I think we have made a very good start on this journey.

Madam Mayor, I would like to take a few moments to thank a few of my colleagues. I am delighted to welcome four new Liberal Democrat councillors; Stephen Newton, Jordan Montgomery, Jane Ainslie and Catherine Glover. Well done all of you.

Now to my two fellow Ward councillors, David Hare and Andrew Mickleburgh, who are also very close friends. David has worked really well as our Adult Social Care lead, and Andrew has been a really good Chair of the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Thank you to both of you.

When I introduced my Executive last year, I said that there was no one better than Councillor Sarah Kerr to be the Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Residents Services. I was right of course. I usually am. Sarah has done a great job handling so many roles. Thank you very much Sarah.

Lindsay Ferris, my predecessor as Lib Dem Leader, has worked tirelessly on the Local Plan Update. Not an easy task when you have so many Secretary of States to deal with. I think so far it has been four, but thank you very much Lindsay.

Prue Bray, in my opinion, she has been the best Executive Member for Children's Services that this Council has ever had. She thoroughly understands this brief, and has with officers, worked through some very, very difficult issues. We should be proud that 96% of Year 7 children were able to be given a school of their choice recently, and the work that she and officers have done to secure Safety Valve funding has been quite exceptional. Another mess that we had to clear up after the previous administration. So, thanks Prue, a job really well done.

Paul Fishwick, he has been of the busiest Executive Members. Clearly much more on top of his brief than his predecessor, including Active Travel in his job title shows that the Lib Dems are committed to encouraging residents to walk and cycle more, which is good for their health and good for the environment. Sadly, others do not always get this, but thank you very much Paul.

Ian Shenton, he has been particularly busy with the Environment, Sport and Leisure portfolio. He has updated our Waste Strategy, which will now help us to save the

Council £1million a year. £1million that can be spent on statutory services such as Children's Services, social care, and potholes. The new Strategy will also improve recycling rates, two very important outcomes, which sadly others just do not get. Well done Ian you have done a great job. Thank you.

For years the Conservatives claimed that the Liberal Democrats would bankrupt the Council. Well, we have not, and we will not. It is just as well that we took over the finances last year, so that we could repair the damage left by the Conservatives. Under Imogen Shepherd-Dubey's stewardship, we have balanced the budget without the need to raid the General Reserves, and have done this, despite inflation raging at 10%, and energy costs more than doubling, and us finding holes in the budget left by the Conservatives. Thankfully residents no longer believe that the Conservatives are good with money. That myth has been well and truly blown, both nationally and locally. Well done, Imogen, thank you.

I could not have had a more supportive deputy than Stephen Conway, who has been responsible for Housing and also partnerships. The work that he has done to improve relationships with town and parish councils and outside bodies has been exceptional, and sadly much was needed to be done after 20 years of the Conservatives in Wokingham. I know that he is as delighted as I am, and Lindsay is, that we are delivering a new library. Thank you, Stephen, thank you very much for your support.

Tackling poverty. Inclusion and equalities could not be under a better person than Rachel Bishop-Firth. I am so pleased that I created this portfolio last year. I am delighted that we have created a £250,000 Hardship Fund to help with the cost of living crisis, but it still saddens me that there are some that oppose this. I am so pleased that we have funded free school meals during school holidays, so that children who have them during term time can have them during the school holidays. No child should be going hungry in 2023. These two policies are ones that I am personally very proud of. They set us apart from the Opposition and show the compassionate side of Liberal Democrat policies. Thank you, Rachel, thank you for everything that you have done.

I will not thank individual officers, but I will say that I have enjoyed working with them at all levels in all of the Directorates. I have appreciated the openness of our discussions. We have not always agreed but we have respected each other's positions and found solutions to issues that need to be addressed. It is really good to get such a positive peer review from the Local Government Association, which noted improvements in relationships between officers and Leaders of the Administration. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to be Leader of the Council, and I look forward to the next chapter in my political journey when I intend to concentrate on the campaign to hopefully become the first Liberal Democrat MP for Wokingham at the next General Election. The new Liberal Democrat Leader is my friend and colleague Stephen Conway. Later he will become the Leader of the Council. I know that I leave the Council leadership in extremely strong hands. Stephen and the Liberal Democrat Executive and Councillors will continue with our financially sound management of the Council and compassionate policies which will support the most vulnerable in our community, as well as providing council services that we all rely on, in a cost effective and efficient manner. Thank you to everybody

who has helped me, officers, councillors, it has all been very much appreciated. Thank you.

9. Election of Leader of Council

Following the resignation of the Leader of Council and in accordance with the governance arrangements which were adopted by Council at its meeting on 18 November 2010, the Mayor called for nominations for the Office of Leader of the Council for a four-year term (or until the Leader's Term of Office as a Councillor expires).

It was proposed by Clive Jones and seconded by Prue Bray that Stephen Conway be elected as Leader of the Council for a four-year term.

RESOLVED: That Stephen Conway be elected as Leader of the Council for a four-year term.

Stephen Conway addressed the meeting as follows –

Stephen Conway, Leader of the Council:

Thank you, Madam Mayor for introducing me as the new Leader. I am immensely grateful to Council for entrusting me with the responsibilities of the post to which I've just been elected. It's an enormous privilege to lead this Council, and I will do so to the best of my ability and seek to justify your support.

We have had many distinguished leaders of Council – none more so than my immediate predecessor, Clive Jones. I had the pleasure of serving as Clive's deputy last year and I know better than anyone that he is going to be a hard act to follow. Thank you, Clive, for your clear-sighted, calm, and courageous leadership over the last twelve months; I will strive to build on your many successes.

Clive led an impressive and effective Executive, and I am not proposing to make any changes to its composition. Clive will remain on the Executive as our lead on business and economic development. I am delighted to say that my colleague Prue Bray has consented to be my deputy; her experience and good judgement, respected across the Council, will be invaluable. The list of Executive Members and their areas of responsibility has been tabled in a paper before you. I am not going to read out names that you can read yourself.

This year will no doubt be challenging for the Council, as was the last. Inflation has not gone away; demand for our services grows, interest rates remain high, and the government has given us totally inadequate core funding. But we have at least three significant advantages to help us rise to the challenges ahead. The first of those advantages is our external partnerships. Over the past year, the Lib Dem administration devoted time and effort to improving the Council's relationships with its community partners – especially the voluntary and charitable sector, town and parish councils, business, the university, schools, and health providers. We are forging much more effective relationships with these bodies than in the past and that will help our community to weather whatever storms may hit us. This administration will continue to work to nurture and deepen these relationships, in the firm belief that we can achieve more together than we can on our own.

A second big advantage we possess is that this Council has impressive and dedicated officers, who want to make a difference and are committed to the public service. I hope all Councillors will appreciate the enormous contribution our officers make – without them we could do literally nothing.

Our third advantage is that there is a great range of experience and talent in this Council Chamber, amongst elected Councillors of all parties and of none. I would like, this is my personal ambition, to call on the expertise of all Councillors to help us tackle the challenges that lie ahead. I want all Councillors to be able to make a meaningful contribution through active participation in council committees or working parties. I also want to facilitate the work of all Councillors as ward representatives. You have all been elected as particular representatives of your wards. I want to help you in that role. If you have a particular ward matter on which you would like assistance, I will always listen and try to find a way forward when that's possible.

This administration's priorities will be financial stability; targeting what resources we can at helping those most in need; securing school places for the Borough's young people; providing support for local businesses; and playing our part in addressing the climate emergency. I hope that these priorities are shared across the Chamber. On many matters that we seek to address, there is more consensus than electioneering rhetoric and party-political point-scoring in Council meetings might suggest. There will, of course, be areas of disagreement. But let us not manufacture contention where none exists. Let us work together whenever possible. That is what our residents expect of their councillors. There is a yearning amongst the public for a more adult form of politics; let's show that we can provide it.

In the spirit of working with others beyond the Lib Dem group, I have offered the chairs of the Audit Committee and the Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the Labour Group. I have offered the Conservative group the vice-chairs of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Licensing and Appeals Committee, and the Standards Committee. The leader of the Labour group has agreed – thank you, Rachel. Subject to the Committees voting on those people being Chairs and Vice Chairs. The leader of the Conservative group has accepted the vice-chair of Standards, which is encouraging, but has declined the offer of Conservative vice-chairs for Health Overview and Scrutiny and Licensing Appeals, which strikes me as a missed opportunity. I hope Pauline will reconsider; there is still time before the first meetings of the committees. I appreciate that adjusting to opposition is never easy after a period in power, and I can imagine that it must be more difficult after twenty years of being in charge. But, believe me, constructive opposition can add value to what the Council does. Ultimately, it's more satisfying for opposition members than merely railing from the side-lines.

For my part, Madam Mayor, I will listen to the views of others, and will respect their right to take a different line. I will approach this coming year in the same way as I approached my own election in Twyford – with a positive appeal to peoples' hopes rather than a negative appeal to their fears. Fellow Councillors, we are at our best when we are positive. Whatever our differences about means, I believe that we share a common view of the ends we are seeking. All of us, surely, want to see a more prosperous, a more vibrant, and a greener Wokingham. All of us, I hope, want

a compassionate and caring Wokingham. And all of us, I hope again, want to ensure that everyone in our community is treated with respect and is given the opportunity to live a happy and fulfilled life, whatever their background or characteristics. If we do indeed share these objectives, let's work together to deliver the even better Borough that we all want to see.

Pauline Jorgensen, Leader of the Opposition:

Since our last Full Council, we have lost familiar faces and gained some new ones. I would like to thank all former councillors of all parties for their service to the Borough and their time and commitment. All ward councillors work hard for their residents and give up their evenings to attend meetings like this, often combining their role with careers and families. I would also like to welcome the new Councillors. I hope you enjoy your time on the Council. I would also personally like to thank my Shadow Executive for all their work on behalf of residents. Also finally, to thank all the residents who voted. Local elections matter. They effect vital services we all rely on, and at a time when democracy around the world is looking more fragile, it is important that we do not take hard won freedoms for granted, but instead exercise our rights. If you did not vote, then your voice could not be heard.

I would like to congratulate Adrian and Beth for becoming Mayor and Deputy, and also, I would like to congratulate Councillor Conway on becoming Leader of the Group and Leader of the Council. He is a dedicated local councillor who has served our Borough for 22 years since 1994, with a short break. In my previous dealings with him I have always found him to be fair, decent, and honest. He has spoken of wanting a better future for our Borough. I share that commitment and where we agree the Conservative Group will support and work with colleagues from other parties, and I look forward to doing so.

Wokingham Borough voters have again delivered a Council with No Overall Control. No one party has a majority. We will continue to offer a robust opposition where we disagree, as residents expect us to. I said that local elections matter, and what goes on in this Chamber matters. Debates should be heard, and the voices of residents should be heard. Last year, too often this was not the case. Twice the previous Lib/Lab administration tried to introduce constitutional change which if it had been passed would have meant that councillors kept questions would not have been heard. Petitions brought by thousands of residents have been ridiculed, consultations, and even a resolution of Council was ignored, and debates quashed. At the same time last year there was shown a worrying lack of transparency and a growing trend of being selective with the facts. Despite being repeatedly asked since last summer, the Administration is yet to publish the business case for the parking charges. Councillor Jones went to great pains to tell residents that bins would be collected weekly under their new policy, even though he knows full well that household waste and non-food recycling, which is what most people class as bins, will not be taken away every week. At the election, despite asking for residents' votes, the Liberal Democrats did not produce any manifesto or leaflets which give any indication of what they are going to do over the next year. Asking for a blank cheque? Possibly.

As a historian, Councillor Conway will know that all too well, in exchange for taxation, people expect something in return, but the record of the Liberal Democrats and the

Labour coalition partners, is that residents pay more and get less. Council tax is up, fees are up, parking charges are set to double. In exchange bins will be collected less, fewer potholes will be fixed, there will be no action on the solar farm, and our residents have been let down with no progress on achieving sustainable housing numbers, and no movement on producing a new Local Plan to protect against speculative development, something we all want to do. We will wait to see if whether the new national policy of allowing developers free rein to build on the Green Belt is adopted by our Liberal Democrat friends. At least residents can take comfort that more money is being found to promote all of the wonderful things it is doing for them, as spending on the Council's PR is up.

The Conservatives believe in putting residents at the heart of Council policies, strong finances, action on planning, working with communities, and ensuring that people are free to choose, not forced to meet the ideological whims of politicians. We will continue to put forward a positive plan for making Wokingham Borough an even better place for residents, local businesses, and future generations.

10. Public Question Time

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

10.1 Heather Howath asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question

We have been waiting for 19 month for the Winnersh Park and Ride to resume the 500 bus to Reading. A lot of money has been spent and what for may I ask?

I travel on this bus service regularly to Reading and the bus was very popular. It was the most convenient way to Reading without taking my car.

In Hurst there is a bus service which travels to Reading. However, this is an hourly service in the week and Saturday its 2 hourly. Not a direct route.

The Mere oak Park and Ride is too far away from Hurst to make it viable to use.

While the Winnersh Park and Ride was temporarily out of action, you provided a bus from the TVP. Not ideal but was temporary so ok. That stopped as you said due to lack of demand. This service was never going to be popular from our area as Winnersh one was.

What a White Elephant and waste of money the car park is unless the 500 Park and Ride Bus continues to run.

Please reinstate our number 500 Park and Ride Bus.

Answer:

Thank you, Heather, for the question.

Before starting the project to increase parking capacity at Winnersh Triangle a

business case was undertaken and independently assessed during 2017. External funding was awarded at that time on the basis that there was sufficient demand for the additional spaces and therefore the investment in the car park would prove a greater benefit to the Borough compared to the cost.

Before the Covid pandemic the 500 service was a commercial service run by Reading Buses. Post pandemic travel patterns have changed and there has been a significant decline in Park & Ride usage nationally, and although there is a recovery it has been slow. Therefore, it would be a commercial decision by Reading Buses if they wish to operate a commercial park and ride service. The Liberal Democrats inherited this project when we became the Administration last May, and it was financially sensible to complete it. The ground floor of the park and ride is now open, ahead of schedule, and this allows access for Blue Badge users and allows rail users to park closer to the station.

It can also be used for those wishing to travel into central Reading who can use the train from Winnersh Triangle or the nearby frequent Lion 4/X4 bus that operates along the A329 Reading Road.

Supplementary Question:

But the bus is a long way away from the car park isn't it and what is the top half of the car park going to be used for?

Supplementary Answer:

It is a shortish walk from the car park to the A329 Reading Road. The top part of the car park is currently closed off until demand in the lower part increases, and then we will open the top half.

10.2 Anthony Johnson asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport & Leisure the following question:

Question

During the election campaign, residents of Shinfield North expressed opposition; concerns; lack of knowledge; or support for the proposed changes to the waste collection system.

Some who opposed the changes were scornful as to the decision making process; or whether or not it would ever save any money. Others caring for babies or for adults who have to use disposable nappies - plus their neighbours - asked whether it was going to be hygienic or just stink everyone's houses out especially during a hot summer?

Concerns about the proposed changes ranged from "where are we going to put things for two weeks" or "more hard plastic - how green is that" while others talked about the negative visual impact or the practicality. As one resident put it "how's my 84 year old neighbour going to get the bin up and down all those steps?"

Support came from those who were fed up with having to clean up after the bin men had been and gone, or with their blue bags being chewed apart by foxes and cats.

Paraphrasing one question, it was tantamount to "how did WBC ever come to make such a daft decision and was it based on the biased consultation where you couldn't express the answer you wanted to" ?

But what was patently clear was that residents' views were significantly divided.

So, on behalf of all who expressed a view, what messages should all Councillors, or candidates, communicate to residents in response to their concerns?

Answer

It is regrettable that so much confusing and false information about the changes to our waste collection was deliberately circulated as a political ploy during the election campaign. Our proposal is simple: food waste will be collected every week, accompanied by recycling one week and general waste the next. The report that lays out what is going to happen and why can be seen on the Council website at item 100 on the agenda for the March Executive meeting. The relevant URL for that will be provided in the published version of this answer:

<https://wokingham.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g4261/Public%20reports%20pack%2021st-Mar-2023%2019.00%20Executive.pdf?T=10>

Our decision is robust, informed by public consultation, the input of industry experts and by the experience of the 85% of councils that already use the method we are proposing. Indeed, we will draw on their experience to take into account residents' concerns about things like the suitability of a property for a bin, the size of bin, assisted collections, and medical and large family needs. We understand that change can be difficult, but we will be adopting the mitigations proven by many others.

Finally, to answer your question directly, the messages that councillors should be communicating to the residents are:

- We cannot afford to continue with the current expensive system.
- Secondly, we need to improve our recycling rates to meet environmental targets.
- Thirdly, we must take note of impending legislative changes that will result in direct government intervention to achieve their declared and desired consistency, which will make changes to waste collection inevitable.

Supplementary Question:

Some of those opposed to the changes challenged where the money for the wheelie bins and another complete extra set of green bags for recycling, was coming from. They alleged that the facts and figures were not made clear in February's Budget papers, and also that when the Executive recommendation in March, was voted down by Full Council two days later, as provided for by WBC's Constitution in multiple places, that Full Council being reduced to that of an advisory role the following day, was not engaging stakeholder effectively, constitutionally or democratically. So please could you provide a clear, accurate and complete description that will amply demonstrate that these allegations are not factually correct?

Supplementary Answer:

I believe we have provided that in the paper that I referred to, at March Executive.

10.3 Graham Clifford asked the Executive Member for Planning & Local Plan the following question:**Question**

Hatchwood Mill has 433 houses, with approximately 1,300 residents. It was granted planning permission in 2016, by an Extraordinary Planning Committee with 53 planning conditions, thereafter, included within a binding Section 106 agreement.

7 years later, with construction over, we continue to have serious issues including.

- An unsafe central road through the estate not built to the approved plans.
- An unsafe ditch which we cannot find on any planning application.
- A flood risk to neighbouring houses due to changes that weren't communicated in advance.
- Unsafe Mown Amenity Grass areas, not cleared of construction rubble making them dangerous to play on.
- Five streetlights still not connected.
- SUDS drainage clogged with algae, bullrushes and willow.
- Thousands of dead and missing trees and plants.
- A play park that's still not built.

Developers are planning to leave site and handover to a management company, leaving residents with the ongoing maintenance responsibility.

I'd like to ask the Executive Member for Planning what action does WBC intend to take to assure the residents of Winnersh, that Developers will be held responsible for their undertakings, and that matters will be delivered in the way that WBC, as the Local Planning Authority, first agreed back in 2016?

Answer

Thank you for your question and I'm sorry that matters remain to be resolved on this site but let me assure you that our officers are continuing to work to resolve those issues that we have control over.

Matters on this site have a long and complex history and I'm very aware that some residents have not been happy with the developer during and post the construction phase for not fulfilling all of their planning and legal obligations in a timely manner.

My understanding is that many of the staff at the developers with responsibility for this site have moved on and I know it has not always been straightforward for our officers to maintain dialogue. We will be working on putting new relationships in place, we are continuing to work through the various issues that you have raised-pursuing solutions with the developer.

Various teams, including Planning, Highways, Drainage, Legal and Green Infrastructure Services within the Council have been involved in dealing with these matters. They are ongoing and will continue to be pursued until resolution.

However, it is not for us to comment on any of the private contractual relationships between the residents, developer and management company in relation to the current and future maintenance of hard and soft landscaping, estate roads and the Neighbourhood Equipped Area of Play (NEAP), etc, however the planning permission enables the principal of future maintenance of public space etc. being undertaken by a management company and we would hope that would have been made clear to any residents purchasing properties on the site, by those conveyancing solicitors acting on behalf of purchasers, when buying properties on site.

Having spoken to officers, I'm also happy to arrange for any further meetings between residents, officers and the developer, with a view to getting those issues resolved as soon as possible. If you would like me to do so, I would do. Also, if you would like me to visit the site personally to see the issues that you have raised, I am very happy to do so.

Supplementary Question:

Will you commit to bringing officers to site from Planning, Enforcement, Drainage, Development Management and Highways as quickly as possible so that they can all see first hand the state that the development is in currently, and then work with us to get it sorted as quickly as possible?

Supplementary Answer:

Simple answer yes.

10.4 Stephen Browning has asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport & Highways the following question. Due to his inability to attend the meeting the following written answer was provided:

Question

From the East side of Loddon Park Estate are two new bridges over the Old River branch of the Loddon onto an 'Island' between the Old and New branches.

There is a gravel pathway across the 'Island' up to the old Haul Bridge across the New River branch. The latter connects to Footpath 30 which runs from Sandford Lane below its Loddon Bridges up to Park Lane in Hurst.

The deck plates of the Haul Bridge are indeed rusted but the structure otherwise appears intact and is very strong, having been designed to carry HGVs. It was finally shut off at the start of the Pandemic. Can you please consider its repair and reopen for Pedestrian and Cycle traffic, to provide a safer route than Sandford Lane.

The repair could be affected by first treating the existing Deck plates to stop any further degradation. Then welding new cross beams on top of those deck plates and a new set of deck plates on the top of those bars to just support Pedestrian and Cycle Traffic. Much cheaper than trying to renovate the existing deck.

It should be possible to overcome Footpath 30 adjacent Landowner objections.

Answer

We agree that this would be a very good link for pedestrians, but unfortunately the Council does not have the ability to repair and reopen the bridge. The bridge is not owned by the Council but instead is owned by the landowners of each side of the banks of the Loddon; the agreement of each landowner is required to allow the Council to re-open the path.

This bridge is the original 'bailey' bridge built around the 1960's to facilitate gravel extraction on the site. The Council commissioned a safety inspection of the bridge in July 2021 to determine whether it was safe for use. The current condition of the bridge is such that it cannot be safely opened in its present state, and we have needed to close the bridge to prevent people trying to access across it and putting themselves in danger.

We have explored options for the repair or replacement of the bridge, and the reopening of the path link to the eastern side with the landowners but unfortunately permission for public access across the bridge was refused by the landowner on the eastern side. The landowners have also made it clear that they intend to remove the bridge.

11. Petitions

There were no petitions received.

12. Member Question Time

There were no Member questions received.

13. 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.

It was proposed by Stephen Conway and seconded by Prue Bray that the recommendations in the report be agreed.

It was noted that reference made to the Wokingham Borough Partnership, within the report, should read 'Liberal Democrat Group.'

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

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED That:

- 1) that it be noted that the representation of the political groups on the Council, as advised to the Chief Executive, is 26 Liberal Democrat Group Members, 22 Conservative Group Members and 5 Labour Group members. There is one Independent Member who is not part of a political group, and therefore cannot be included in the calculations when determining political balance;

- 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 on the basis that, of the 95 seats (as set out in Para 3.4), 47 be allocated to the Liberal Democrat Group, 39 be allocated to the Conservative Group and 9 to the Labour Group, be approved;
- 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 of the Minutes be approved;
- 5) that it be agreed that the principles of proportionality be applied when Members are appointed to Sub Committees, Panels or Working Groups and approves the proposals submitted by the respective Group Leaders, of Members to be appointed to Sub Committees, Panels or Working Groups as set out in Appendix 2 of the Minutes;
- 6) it be noted that the Constitution states that the Chair of the Standards Committee will be appointed at Annual Council and agreed that as with all other committees the Chair will be appointed at the first meeting of the Standards Committee;
- 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; 3 Agenda Item 12, 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.

Appendices 1 and 2 - Appointment to Committees and Board, Panels, Working Groups and Forums

14. 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.

Appendix 3 - Appointment to Outside Bodies

15. Standards Committee Annual report

Council considered the annual report from the Standards Committee 2022-23.

It was proposed by Morag Malvern and seconded by Imogen Shepherd-DuBey that the Annual Report from the Standards Committee 2022-23, be noted.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Report of the Standards Committee 2022-23 be noted.

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