

Woodley Town Council

Minutes of the Annual Town Electors Meeting held at the Oakwood Centre on
Tuesday 5 March 2019 at 8 pm

Present: *Councillors S. Rahmouni (Chairman); K. Baker; T. Barker; D. Bragg; S. Brindley; M. Forrer K. Gilder; R. Horskins; J. MacNaught; D. Mills; D. Smith; D. Stares; M. Walker; P. Wicks*

Also present: *3 residents*

WTC Officers: *D. Mander; K. Murray; L. Matthews*

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Cheng, D. Fradley and B. Soane and from Mrs Shelagh Flower.

2. **MINUTES OF THE TOWN ELECTORS MEETING HELD ON 6 MARCH 2018**

It was proposed and agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 6 March 2018 be agreed and signed as a true record.

3. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

4. **ANNUAL COMMITTEE REPORTS**

4.1 **Leisure Services Committee**

Councillor Tom Barker, vice Chairman of the Leisure Services Committee, presented the Leisure Services report, as follows:

Woodford Park Leisure Centre: Sports development and activities

The following new classes and courses started during the year:

- Just Play Football
- Zumba Kids
- Legs, Bums and Tums
- Silver Circuits

The leisure centre currently ran nine children's courses and thirty-five adult classes throughout the week. Thirty-one of the adult classes were included free of charge with gym membership as part of the "group exercise timetable".

There were currently just under 600 gym members.

The centre offered "play for £1" on the 3G pitch for individuals aged sixteen years and under, which had proved very popular with local children (7128 transactions during 2018).

The centre also offered "play for £1" during school holidays for racket sports (badminton, table tennis and tennis) for families, which was also popular (688 transactions during 2018).

Woodley Sports Week: May 2018

In partnership with the local School Games Organiser the Town Council hosted the seventh Woodley Schools Sports Week. All nine local primary schools took part resulting in an estimated total of 2,400 local children taking part across the week. Highlights included the opening ceremony Dance Festival, the Paralympics Festival and the Cecil Trembath Kwik Cricket Tournament.

Woodley 10km and Junior 2.5km May 2018

The second Woodley 10km organised by Barnes Fitness was a huge success, with 516 adult runners taking part in addition to the 177 children that completed the 2.5km fun run around Woodford Park. The event raised £1,000 for the Mayor's charity, First Days.

Parkrun

Parkrun continued to be a popular weekly event on Saturday mornings, with the 5km timed free runs open to all ages and abilities. Junior Parkrun took place weekly on Sunday mornings.

Buildings

Woodford Park Leisure Centre

Remedial work to replace the damaged joist in the roof structure of the reception area was completed and the flat roof was replaced. The suspended ceiling and lighting to the reception area were also replaced. New ladies toilets were installed in the leisure centre and the gym was redecorated and new wall art installed. Following a routine inspection by Thames Water, remedial work was carried out to the water systems to ensure compliance with current regulations.

Solar panels were installed on the sports hall roof under an agreement with Reading Community Energy Society to provide fixed, reduced rate, daytime electricity with no outlay from the Council.

Woodley Pre-School

Installation of the new building to house Woodley Pre-School was completed and, following a successful Ofsted inspection the pre-school moved into their new premises in the summer.

Grounds Depot and Maintenance Workshop

Planning permission was granted for the new Grounds depot and Maintenance workshop building. Officers were currently putting together the specification for the tender documents and making arrangements for the new electricity supply and drainage.

Community Halls

The guttering was replaced at Chapel Hall and at Coronation Hall the powered shutters were repaired and asbestos removed from the roof space.

Parks and play areas

Woodford Park

- The damaged paddling pool liner was replaced and the pool reopened in May.
- A Bike Hub was installed close to the tennis courts by the My Journey initiative to provide storage for bikes to be used for local activities.
- Pathways in the Rotary Garden were resurfaced, following a donation for materials from the Rotary Club. The Rotary Club also sponsored new shrubs and a new seat for the Rotary Garden. Existing seats were renovated.
- Clearance of overgrown areas was undertaken in the Garden of Remembrance.
- New signage was installed in Woodford Park.
- Seven wild flower beds were created in the park.
- The memorial gates were refurbished.

- Information panels depicting “Woodley in World War 1” were installed adjacent to the war memorial.
- A very successful Remembrance event was held on 11 November, in conjunction with members of St John’s Church, to commemorate the centenary of the end of World War 1.

Green Flag Status

Woodford Park was awarded Green Flag status in July 2018 and was the first park in Wokingham Borough to achieve this award.

Friends of Woodford Park

The Friends of Woodford Park met regularly with a representative of the Town Council to plan their projects, report on progress and receive updates on work that the Council was undertaking in the park. Combined working by the Friends of Woodford Park and the Grounds team had greatly improved the Garden of Remembrance and the Rotary Garden. The Friends and volunteers from the Rotary Club had also planted 5,000 crocus bulbs in the park

Woodford Park Lake

The Grounds team had continued with clearance work at Woodford Park lake, including removal of a hedge on the mound at the eastern end of the lake, and they installed a retaining structure at the base of the mound using timber sleepers. A contract for silt redistribution, banks works and boardwalk was awarded to Ebsford Environmental. This work started in February and was due to be completed by the end of March to avoid the bird-nesting season.

Malone Park

A small group of travellers gained access and set up camp in August, but were moved on by the police the following day. Wokingham Borough Council, the owners of the park, installed earth mounds as a temporary measure to prevent further illegal encampments. The Town Council agreed to continue to pursue seeking to take ownership of Malone Park from Wokingham Borough Council.

Allotments

Allotments continued to be popular with people wanting to grow their own fruit and vegetables. Repairs to the roadways on the site were undertaken by a working group of allotment tenants. Council officers continued to meet regularly with representatives from the Allotment Tenants Committee.

Just Around the Corner Charity (JAC)

The Council had a service level agreement with JAC to provide outreach youth work in the town and Sam Milligan attended the Leisure Services Committee meetings to update Members on the work of JAC and he also provided regular reports.

JAC continued to run mentoring sessions in the community and at Rehoboth, their equine centre. Equine sessions were also held at Rehoboth. In addition to providing a physical presence in the community, JAC used social media to engage with young people, via twitter and Instagram.

Community Youth Partnership

The Community Youth Partnership brought together organisations working with young people, in order to pursue youth centred projects.

A conference was organised by the Partnership in 2018 to give parents and local practitioners working with young people a better understanding of the local provision available to support young people experiencing anxiety. Following on from that, the Community Youth Partnership was in the process of launching a parents’ self-help group for families dealing

with anxiety. The group would be assisted by volunteer facilitators, who had received training to support the group.

The Partnership had continued with its project to provide activities for young people at Loddon Mead and the area under the A3290 on Loddon Bridge Road. With the help of the Just Around the Corner charity (JAC) and a group of artists, the Partnership hoped to work with young people on an art project at this space and to develop a Parkour (or Freerunning) area.

4.2 **Planning Committee**

Councillor Tom Barker, Chairman of the Planning Committee, presented his report, as follows:

The Committee had considered 209 planning applications since March 2018. Members of the public either attended the Planning Committee meeting or wrote to the Town Council about 39 of the 209 applications.

The Committee also received information about planning decisions and appeals, enforcement matters, tree preservation orders and planning policy documents through the year.

Significant planning applications

- An application to demolish and rebuild Bulmershe Leisure Centre was approved.
- An application to build 4 detached houses on the site of the former Woodley Tennis Club in Silver Fox Crescent was opposed by local residents and by the Town Council and was subsequently refused. A revised application for 4 houses was made and was also refused.
- An application to build 20 dwellings on the site of the former scrapyards at Pitts Works, Colemans Moor Road, was opposed by local residents and by the Town Council, but planning permission had recently been granted.
- A 2 storey addition to Loddon Vale House was opposed by local residents and the Town Council because of concern over the loss of existing parking spaces and overlooking of the adjacent nursery play area, and planning permission was refused.
- An application to build 10 semi-detached dwellings on the site of the former Daycare Centre, Southlake Crescent had recently been submitted and the Town Council had made suggestions to improve the scheme with regard to highway safety.
- A prior approval application for the demolition of Hawkhurst House as part of the redevelopment of the Adwest Western site in Headley Road East was submitted after demolition had commenced and objections were raised by the Town Council, as there had been no consultation about the future of one of the few remaining old properties in Woodley or the redevelopment of the site as a whole, and there was concern about the lack of protection for several trees with Tree Protection Orders in place. Prior approval for the demolition was refused until further information was submitted.
- A controversial application to build 2 houses in Perimeter Road, on land to the south of Sandford Farm Cottage was refused, and an appeal against this decision had not yet been determined. A subsequent application to build one house on this land was made, and was also refused.

Highways

The Town Council continued to be represented at the Wokingham Borough Council major projects co-ordination meetings by Cllr Walker, who reported to Councillors after each meeting.

Community matters

The Committee received the following reports and updates:

- Information on the new bus service 19a/c, running from September 2018.
- Reports of meetings of the Woodley and North Earley Community Forum.

Community Speed Watch

During the past year a data logger had been purchased, which could be fixed to existing road-side posts and set to continuously monitor traffic speeds for up to 7 days. A speed camera had also been purchased for deployment by volunteers at the roadside in locations where the data logger showed that speeding was a problem. Evidence from the speed camera would be submitted to Thames Valley Police for further action. Volunteers had been recruited to help with the scheme and an initial information meeting of volunteers was held at the Oakwood Centre. A number of committee members had familiarised themselves with the operation and deployment of the equipment and would train the volunteers in the coming months.

Grants

Annual grants would continue to be given to Citizens Advice Wokingham, ARC and Keep Mobile as part of the 2019/20 Budget. The Town Council would continue to provide annual funding to ReadiBus and under a service level agreement.

Citizens Awards

Once again awards would be presented to citizens who had made a real difference in the community. This year's chosen recipients would receive their awards from the Town Mayor at a reception on Friday 29 March.

Training/briefing sessions

The Committee sent representatives to attend a briefing session on changes in Development Management by Wokingham Borough Council.

Consultations

The committee responded to the following consultations:

- From Wokingham Borough Council:
 - Review of the Statement of Gambling Principles under the Gambling Act 2005
 - Review of the Statement of Licensing Policy under the Licensing Act 2003
 - Housing Needs Analysis consultation
 - Minerals and Waste Plan consultation
 - Draft Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment consultation
 - Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places
 - Local Plan Update: Homes for the Future consultation
 - Request for occurrences of poor repair of footways, kerbsides and road signs
 - Request for information regarding problems with the grass cutting service and suggestions for improving the service
- From Royal Berkshire Fire Authority:
 - Consultation on a proposed increase in council tax
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government:
 - Consultation on the draft revised National Planning Policy Framework

Wokingham Borough Council also asked for the Town Council's comments on an application for street trading consent.

Following his presentation of the report, Councillor Barker thanked all members of the Planning Committee for the hard work they had undertaken in order to carry out the work of this very busy Committee. He also thanked the Committee Officer for the support she had given to the Committee

4.3 **Strategy and Resources Committee**

Councillor Keith Baker, Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee, made the following statement:

"First of all, I would like to thank all the staff and councillors who have been involved in the areas covered within the Strategy & Resources Committee. For those present who are not familiar with "council speak" the Strategy & Resources is often considered as the committee that not only sets the direction for the council but also holds the "purse strings" and therefore has key financial accountability.

This Committee has four main areas namely financial, staffing, marketing and the community which I will briefly cover. Further information is available which covers in more detail the full working of the committee.

From a financial perspective it has been quite a busy year. Many facilities, like the Oakwood Centre, are reaching that age where things start failing. Examples include the windows in this building have been leaking, removal of Asbestos in Coronation Hall and heating improvements in the Leisure Centre. By sound financial management by the town clerk and her team all these items of remedial work were fully covered by reserves.

The investment portfolio, put in place to pay off the loan on this building, continues to perform as anticipated despite a weak second half of 2018. It is still on track to meet the required funds in 2025/26 when the loan will be repaid.

Despite all the financial "ups and downs" we still managed to freeze again the town council tax at 2007/08 levels. Out of the three Towns in the Borough we were the only one to do that.

Many residents have commented on the fact that facilities like Woodford Park and the Leisure Centre are excellent and have improved significantly over the last 4 years. This can only be achieved by the fantastic efforts of our staff who regularly go above and beyond their normal job. However, as we continue improving things, we recognise that the existing staff can only do so much. Therefore, we are continually looking at potentially adding new staff to the team including a Communications Manager and a new Grounds person.

The addition of a Communications Manager, the first in many a year, is already bearing fruit. She is highly active on social media, publicising the Council and its activities. At the same time, she is reviewing and developing new site-specific websites to increase the exposure of facilities like the Leisure Centre and the Oakwood Centre. She is currently developing a marketing plan for the Oakwood Centre which will be the first in probably ten years.

From a community perspective, we have entered an arrangement with Reading Community Energy Society to install solar panels on the Oakwood Centre, Coronation Hall and the Leisure Centre - an illustration of the town councils desire to be eco-friendly. Centre Stage is now free to use and we are working on developing strategies to encourage better use of it. Our relationship with Woodley Business Club and the Carnival Committee continues and a new link with the University of the 3rd Age has been established to research the history of Woodley.

I will leave you with mentioning what I consider the highlight of the year which was the commemoration of the end of world war one. With estimated attendance of between two and three thousand residents it absolutely highlighted the amazing community spirit we have here in Woodley. The whole project from the refurbishment of the gates and the new panels around the memorial through to the tea and cakes afterwards was amazing and made me very proud to be a resident of this great town of ours."

The detailed report on the activities of the Strategy and Resources Committee was as follows:

Working parties and sub committees:

Investments Working Party

Members met with the Council's investment manager in November to receive an annual report on the Council's portfolio – being built up to pay the principal of the loan to build the Oakwood Centre. Over the past year, the fund had only achieved an increase of £1,629 over the previous year's portfolio value, due to turbulence in the markets from October 2018; however, the fund was still on track to meet its target in 2025/26.

The Treasury Management Strategy was considered by committee and approved at Full Council.

Catering Partnership Management Panel

Brown Bag had been running the café at the Oakwood Centre for three years and the centre team and councillors met regularly with Brown Bag to review and discuss café operations and the business and social function catering and how to jointly enhance services at the centre.

Risk Management Working Party

The working party reviewed the risk management register and strategy and these were approved in May 2018 following recommendation from the Committee.

Personnel Sub Committee

The former PR/Marketing Coordinator role was reviewed and a new part time Communications Manager post was created. This post was appointed to in June 2018.

A new Groundsperson post was also added to support the Grounds team in their work to continue the improvement of the Council's park areas and the maintenance of these to a high level.

The Council reviewed the roles and payscales of the Deputy Town Clerk and a Groundsperson post and agreed to fund an Apprentice Administrative Assistant post, which was appointed to in December 2018.

Publicity

A part time Communication Manager was appointed in June 2018 and work was continuing to increase publicity for the Council and its activities, develop social media, and to review and introduce new websites for the Council, the Oakwood Centre and Woodford Park Leisure Centre.

The Council adopted a new logo for the Mayoral regalia and changes to the existing regalia would incorporate the new design.

Financial/Licences/legal:

The Committee reviewed allotment rents and agreed an increase of 8.3% on the charges with effect from 1 January 2019. The higher than Retail Price Index increase was agreed to go part way to cover the increased rent paid to Reading Borough Council.

The Committee received an update on the actions being undertaken in preparation for the introduction of the General Data Protection Act.

The Council agreed to enter an arrangement with Reading Community Energy Society for the provision of electricity and the installation of solar panels on the roofs of the Oakwood Centre, Coronation Hall and Woodford Park Leisure Centre.

Following a recommendation by the Committee, the Council applied for, and received, a loan of £270,000 to build a new workshop, fund the works to the lake in Woodford Park, and to refurbish the foyer and install new ladies toilets at Woodford Park Leisure Centre.

The Committee recommended that the Council approve the installation of a bike hub by Wokingham Borough Council's My Journey initiative - this was agreed by Council under a licence agreement.

First payment of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was received, totalling £4,583.

Plans for the commemoration of the centenary of the end of World War 1 were overseen by the Committee - and great feedback was received from those attending the commemoration event, including the tea and cake provided afterwards in the Oakwood Centre.

Problems with the envelope of the Oakwood Centre building were investigated and a specialist company carried out dynamic leak testing of windows to identify remedial works. A sum of £20,000 was allocated from the Building and Facilities fund to pay for works associated with the water ingress and flooring issues at the centre. Further works were required to replace the hot water cylinder, which had failed.

With the flooring and water ingress issues at the Oakwood Centre, the need to remove asbestos in the roof space at Coronation Hall and heating system improvements required at the leisure centre, the Committee agreed to allocate £50,000 from the general reserve to the Building and Facilities fund to fund the costs of the works required.

The Committee agreed to waive charges for the use of the Centre Stage from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2020.

The Committee agreed to work with the University of the 3rd Age Shared Learning Project, researching the history of Woodley.

It also agreed to support Woodley Business Club by agreeing free use of the Oakwood Centre for its business festival and planning meetings during the year.

The Committee had also agreed new lease terms for an agreement with Optalis for the use of the offices at Woodford Park Leisure Centre.

The Committee also dealt with some legal matters that currently remained confidential.

Projects:

The public toilet was installed on 17 February and was expected to be up and running shortly.

The new inclusive play area in the town centre was installed by Wokingham Borough Council in Spring 2018. The play area was very popular and had been well used.

Financial:

Each meeting received a monitoring report on its budget (as did the other committees).

Internal Audit Plan

The 2017/18 internal audit report was received by the committee with any items identified either already, or in the process of being, addressed. The report of the 2018/19 year's internal audit was due to be received at the next meeting of the committee.

External Auditor

PKF Littlejohn LLP had been the Council's external auditor since 2017/18 – and gave an 'unqualified' report on the 2017/18 Annual Return and Financial Statements.

Grants

14 community groups and 5 individual athletes were awarded grants towards their costs.

2019/20 Budget

The 2019/20 Budget and precept charge was agreed at the last Council meeting on 5 February. The Band D charge would remain at £106.71 for the year.

5. **CORRESPONDENCE**

No correspondence had been received.

6. **GENERAL PARISH AFFAIRS**

No matters were raised under this item.

There being no further business the Chairman thanked everyone for coming.

The meeting closed at 8:25 pm

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