

LEADERS STATEMENT

*Cllr Keith Baker
7th February 2023*

I apologise I am not here to deliver this in person but unfortunately circumstances have conspired against me such that I cannot attend. I thank Madam Mayor for reading this out on my behalf.

So welcome to the final Full Council Meeting of this group of councillors. In May we will have a new set of councillors who I expect will be a mixture of existing and brand new councillors running this council. Several of you here tonight may well not be part of that new council for a variety of reasons. On behalf of the residents of Woodley and the Town Council can I thank all of you for the work you have put in over the last 4 years. Being a councillor is not an easy task and does take a time commitment. Thank you.

Those 4 years have been quite difficult punctured with several good times. Financially officers have been brilliant coping with significant drops in income during the pandemic years and then driving income back up over recent years. We are ending a period with healthy reserves being in excess of £1 million. Additionally at the same time we have banked over £2 million in a secure investment ready for paying off the loan on the Oakwood Centre in 2025. The town council tax has only increased by 2.85% over the period 2019 to now, the best of any town council in Wokingham Borough.

We have also recognised the importance of our voluntary organisations with a 22% increase in grants over the 4 years. Our grant to the Town Centre Management Initiative (now Partnership) has almost doubled in that period.

The Town Council capital program although suspended during the peak of the pandemic, was restarted with some significant projects being completed. These include a new Grounds Depot in Woodford Park, Refurbishment of parts of the Leisure Centre; complete regeneration of the Lakes with new play area in Woodford Park and refurbishment of the Theatre in the Oakwood Centre.

These are only some of the things that this council has been doing over the last 4 years. There is a lot more but time prohibits further details.

Woodley Town Council remains the best Council in Wokingham Borough serving the residents of Woodley well. I am sure the new council in May will continue the great work the current administration has carried out over these previous 4 years.