

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Town Council held at the Oakwood Centre on
Tuesday 29 September 2015 at 8 pm**

Present: Councillors D. Mills (Chairman); K. Baker; T. Barker; S. Brindley;
A. Chadwick; J.Cheng; R. Dolinski; M. Forrer; D. Fradley; B. Franklin;
K. Gilder; M. Green; J. MacNaught; S. Rahmouni; W. Soane; D. Stares;
J. Trick; M. Walker; P. Wicks

Officers present: D. Mander, Town Clerk; K. Murray, Service Support Manager;

Also present: 8 members of the public

Before the start of the meeting the Mayor presented Mr Reginald Hayward, the winner of the Garden Competition, with the Woodley Horticultural Society Memorial Cup.

A maximum of 40 minutes was set aside for members of the public to pose questions to the Council in the Town Forum, as reported in Appendix A.

33. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Dixon, Etherington, Horskins, Lay and Smith.

34. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

35. **MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 30 JUNE 2015**

The Town Mayor presented the minutes of the Council meeting held on 30 June 2015.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve the minutes of the Council meeting held on 30 June 2015 and that they be signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

36. **MINUTES OF THE URGENCY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 10 JULY 2015**

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the meeting

37. **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

37.1 **Minutes of the Plans Committee: 21 July 2015**

Councillor Barker presented the Plans Committee minutes of the meeting of 21 July 2015.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Plans Committee held on 21 July 2015.

37.2 **Minutes of the Plans Committee: 18 August 2015**

Councillor Dolinski presented the Plans Committee minutes of the meeting of 18 August 2015.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Plans Committee held on 18 August 2015.

- 37.3 **Minutes of the Leisure Services Committee: 1 September 2015**
Councillor Barker presented the Leisure Services Committee minutes of the meeting of 1 September 2015.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Leisure Services Committee held on 1 September 2015.

- 37.4 **Minutes of the Community Services Committee: 8 September 2015**
Councillor Walker presented the Community Services Committee minutes of the meeting of 8 September 2015.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Community Services Committee held on 8 September 2015.

- 37.5 **Minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee: 15 September 2015**
Councillor Baker presented the Strategy and Resources Committee minutes of the meeting of 15 September 2015.

Minute No. 9 Residents' survey

In response to a question about the availability of the survey and a concern that the online survey wouldn't be accessible to those who didn't use computers the Town Clerk explained that the usual doorstep survey was presently taking place. In addition, there was an online survey with the same questions that would be available to complete until 7 November. This would be publicised in the forthcoming Woodley Herald newsletter.

Councillor Baker added that this was the first time since the survey was introduced 15 years ago that the survey could be completed online and that he did not understand how it could be thought that people would be disenfranchised from taking part in the survey on that basis when online access had not been available in the past.

In response to other questions it was confirmed that the online survey asked for some information about the person completing it and that only one response from a computer would be accepted unless there were people sharing a computer, in which case a process to allow this had been built in by the survey administrator.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee held on 15 September 2015.

- 37.6 **Minutes of the Plans Committee: 22 September 2015**
Councillor Barker presented the Plans Committee minutes of the meeting of 22 September 2015.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Plans Committee held on 22 September 2015.

38. **AUDIT 2014/15**

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the external auditor's opinion on the audit of the 2014/15 Annual Return
- ◆ To adopt the audited Annual Return for 2014/15.

39. **MAYOR'S CHARITY**

The Mayor announced that his charity for his year of office would be DrugFAM. This charity offers assistance to young people up the age of 30 who have a drug addiction and offers help to families and friends dealing with this kind of situation. The charity had been set up by his ex-wife after their son had died as a result of addiction.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note that the Mayor's chosen charity for the 2015/16 municipal year would be DrugFAM.

40. **LEADER'S STATEMENT**

The Leader of the Council made the following statement:

"First of all may I welcome back everyone after the summer holidays. I hope you all had an enjoyable break wherever you went and are now rejuvenated for the months ahead.

There is a lot going on over the coming months with several projects on the go including the 3G pitch, the town centre redevelopment and the new toilets. There are also several other projects waiting in the wings as and when any project nears completion.

Whilst these are all one off projects with a defined end there is another vitally important one that is ongoing year after year. I refer to the budgets and it is that time of year where we all need to start thinking about what level of council tax we want our residents to pay. The pressures on all budgets is immense and whilst our Town Clerk Deborah and her team do an excellent job it is becoming increasingly difficult to balance aspirations at the same time as the books.

From time to time a "curve ball" comes at the council such as the Inn on the Park position and whether we will continue to have the grant from the Borough to offset the historical benefits tax rebate as the Borough seeks to save another £8.1M on top of the £31M it has already saved over the last 5 years.

Now let me turn to the long running saga on the new Toilet. A new petition urging the Borough to fulfil its commitment to the installation of a new toilet was handed in at the last Borough Council Meeting. I found this quite intriguing since the Borough has already fulfilled their commitment which was to provide the capital funds for the toilet. Responsibility then passed onto the Town Council for full implementation and running of any new toilet. So the petition really should have been given to the Town Council and I am sure it is on its way. I feel for those residents who signed this petition when the basic premise in the petition wording was completely incorrect.

I have asked the Town Clerk, Deborah, to review all of the main committees to check whether there should be any changes in what they "look after". It is a sign of good governance that the committee structure should be reviewed periodically

and it is probably long overdue. Obviously all proposals will be put through the appropriate decision making process when they are available.

That leads me onto my final point around staffing. By now you will know that our longstanding Leisure Services Manager, Andrew Bunn, has decided to move onto to new pastures. Andrew was retained following the changes around Bulmershe Leisure Centre. He has been a great servant to this authority and must take a lot of the credit for turning around our Leisure Services. I want to put on record our thanks to him for all his efforts and wish him well for the future.

After discussions with the Town Clerk we felt it would an opportune moment to review the existing structure and a set of proposals were reviewed and approved by the Personnel Committee recently. One of the key changes is the promotion of Kevin Murray to Deputy Town Clerk in recognition of the significant additional duties he has been carrying out for some time now. I would like to record our congratulations to him on this well deserved promotion."

41. **BULMERSHE SITE OF URBAN LANDSCAPE VALUE (SULV) JOINT WORKING PARTY**

Councillor Baker, Chairman of the Bulmershe SULV Joint Working Party explained the background to the proposals before the Council.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. FC3/15.
- ◆ That Woodley and Earley Town Councils will continue to work together to protect the Bulmershe Site of Urban Landscape Value, as defined in the current Local Plan, and will oppose any planning applications which seek to encroach on or erode the area, and will also oppose any other proposals which would impact on the area's designation as a Site of Urban Landscape Value.
- ◆ To approve the proposed amendment to the text of the terms of reference of the Bulmershe SULV Joint Working Party. *(The revised text is attached at **Appendix B.**)*
- ◆ To approve the joint statement in support of the protection of the Bulmershe SULV *(attached at **Appendix C.**)*

42. **REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES**

- a) Councillors MacNaught, Brindley, Rahmouni and Baker presented their reports on Woodley Volunteer Centre, Wokingham Citizens Advice Bureau, the Robert Palmer Almshouse Charity and the C-Salt Community Forum respectively. Councillor Gilder reported that she had been unwell over the summer and hadn't been able to attend the last meeting of Readibus.
- b) Members noted receipt of the Poor's Land Charity's audited accounts and Annual Report for 2014.
- c) **RESOLVED:**
 - ◆ To nominate Councillor Fradley to be considered for the vacancy of a town council co-opted non-voting member on the Standards Committee.

43. **TOWN MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS**

Members noted the 10 engagements that had been carried out by the Mayor since the last Council meeting on 30 June 2015.

The Deputy Town Mayor reported on the 4 engagements that she had carried out since the last Council meeting on 30 June 2015.

44. **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

No future agenda items were proposed.

Meeting closed at 9:30pm

TOWN FORUM

29 September 2015

Seven Woodley residents were present at the Town Forum.

Mr Tom Clark, a resident, asked the meeting why he had not had a response to the complaint he had sent by email on 9 September 2015 regarding a neighbourhood plan. He believed that the Council had not followed the required principles of public life or its own code of conduct or complaints procedure.

Mr Clark also raised the matter of a neighbourhood plan which the Town Council had agreed to pursue both at a Woodley Community Forum meeting and at a Council meeting. He believed the Council had not followed its code of conduct or acted with due diligence in this matter.

Councillor Baker initially suggested that Mr Clark could make take the matter to the Standards Committee at Wokingham Borough Council, which would be an independent investigation, rather than one undertaken by the Town Council itself. However, Mr Clark said that he simply would like to know why the Council hadn't followed its complaint procedure in this matter. Councillor Baker agreed that this would be looked into.

On the matter of a neighbourhood plan, Councillor Baker explained that the Council was monitoring Shinfield Parish Council's progress with its plan as this was the most advanced in the borough. The plan had been ongoing for two and a half years and had cost £60,000 so far, with half of this being funded by tax payers. The Council's position was that it would consider whether a neighbourhood plan would be appropriate. In Woodley most areas for development now had planning applications approved and in these circumstances the Council would want to review the necessity for a plan.

Mr Ian Hills, a local resident and member of Woodley and Whitegates Labour Party, said he had come to the meeting to get some questions answered about public toilets in the town centre. He explained the history of petitions in favour of town centre public toilets and said that following recent questions as to whether the funded and planned toilets should go ahead the Labour Party had collected 700 signatures to a petition supporting public toilets in the town centre during two Saturdays in the town centre and online. His concern was that the Local Loo scheme wasn't available all the time people were in the town centre and there would be more traders at the markets and greater footfall in the centre if this was provided. His questions were:

Why there was another survey being undertaken at the moment and who is conducting that survey?

How have running costs been established – the figures appear to have gone up from 10K to 14K a year – and were there any imaginative ways to reduce this cost?

What cross party support was there in devising the questionnaire?

What is the action plan for the toilets?

In response Councillor Baker provided the following information:

Market traders do have toilet facilities available at Pandilla café for their early arrival in the town centre.

The costs of the toilet have been calculated to take into account a figure to be paid to Wokingham BC for loss of parking spaces in the Crockhamwell Road car park as well as maintenance, cleaning and rates payable.

Cross party support was not an issue because the Town Council had commissioned an independent company to prepare and provide the survey. This was the same company that had carried out the Residents Survey over the past 15 years. In terms of an action plan, a site had now hopefully been established, following a tendering process a supplier to provide and install the toilet had been chosen and the Council was in a position to move forward with a planning application. However, the Council wanted to see the results of the independent statistically sound survey. If these supported a town centre public toilet this could go ahead, if not, the Town Council would not progress the project and would look at other community projects on which to spend the funds, for example on the lake in Woodford Park.

Mr Coling Lawley, a resident, said he believed there were only a few people on the 'Streetlife' online forum who opposed the toilets and that he expected a yes vote from the survey. As a follow up question Mr Lawley asked Councillor Baker to confirm that there were no plans to remove the town centre's disabled parking spaces.

Councillor Baker said he could categorically say that this would not happen and that he had campaigned strongly to ensure disabled parking spaces in Woodley. With regard to the public toilets question he explained that the old public toilets were demolished in 2009, and residents had found alternatives, either the Local Loo scheme or calling in at cafes. In response to a further question he confirmed that Bosco Lounge had been approached to be part of the Local Loo scheme but there had been no response as yet.

Mr Lawley raised the recent news that the Inn on the Park was to close. He believed this was a shame, the pub had been going for 30 years and had provided a good income to the Council. Many residents liked the pub because it felt safer than other pubs and it had done great work in raising funds for charities.

Councillor Baker confirmed that the current management company no longer wished to operate the pub and that the company advising the Council as the end of the agreement term approached had not found an alternative provider.

Mr Lawley asked that the Council to do all in its power to continue to provide the pub. The Mayor explained that the situation had only arisen two weeks ago and it seemed that there was nothing more that could be done.

Mr Andy Croy referred to the recent petition which the Woodley and Whitegates Labour Party would be presenting to the Council. He said that many residents had signed the petition on the basis of the needs of the community as a whole and that he had a concern that the questions were leading the people one way.

Councillor Baker again confirmed that this was an independent professional survey company and that the questions had been created by them and vetted by officers.

On behalf of the Council the Town Clerk then received the petition supporting the installation of public toilets in the town centre from Mr Ian Hills.

Bulmershe Site of Urban Landscape Value Joint Working Party
Terms of Reference

Reporting arrangements

The joint working party will report to Earley Town Council and Woodley Town Council.

Overall purpose

To protect the Bulmershe SULV, as currently defined in the Wokingham Borough Council MDD DPD and as shown on the attached map (Appendix A), from development.

Membership of the working party

2 members from Earley Town Council, with one named substitute.

2 members from Woodley Town Council, with one named substitute.

There will be a maximum of 4 voting members at each meeting.

The quorum will be 3 voting members.

Officers from both councils will be in attendance at all meetings

Meetings

Meetings will be arranged as necessary.

Terms of operation

To define and maintain a joint statement on reasons for the Bulmershe SULV to exist.

To review all existing policies in place to protect the Bulmershe SULV.

To propose joint submissions regarding planning policy, at the appropriate times.

To propose joint submissions regarding planning applications which have the potential to impact the Bulmershe SULV.

JOINT STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF THE PROTECTION

OF

THE BULMERSHE SITE OF URBAN LANDSCAPE VALUE

Earley and Woodley Town Councils are unanimous in the view that national and local planning policies should be used to protect and if possible enhance the status of the area of the Bulmershe Site of Urban Landscape Value (SULV). The extent of this SULV is defined in the MDD DPD. The two Town Councils have consistently striven to try to ensure that this green gap between the two settlements is maintained.

Unfortunately, the two Town Councils failed in their attempt to have a Local Green Spaces Policy, as described in National Planning Policy Framework sections 76, 78, 79 and 80, included within Wokingham Borough Council's new Local Plan (the MDD DPD) and for Bulmershe SULV to be re-designated as a Local Green Space to enhance its protection.

The two Councils have agreed this policy statement to be used as the basis for any submissions to the Local Planning Authority, and, if necessary, the Planning Inspectorate, in seeking to maintain and protect the Bulmershe Site of Urban Landscape Value.

It is demonstrated below that previous planning and development management policies have not been adequate to protect the area currently designated as the Bulmershe SULV.

The SULV policy in the previous Local Plan has been undermined. Developers have been able to argue that some development can take place within the area of the SULV and Wokingham Borough Council has accepted their argument.

The following plans, approved prior to the formal adoption of the MDD DPD, are cited as evidence of the lack of protection

- i) Addington School (ref F/2006/8099)
- ii) Goals Soccer Centre (ref F/2006/9350)
- iii) Pitts Lane Development (ref F/2010/2104, App/X0360/A/11/2148730)
- iv) Reading University Development (ref O/2012/0155)

The developments above were approved despite lying within the boundaries of the 1996-2004 Local Plan SULV policy area.

Taken collectively these applications have eroded the area through encroachment and also introduced urban paraphernalia and floodlighting at its edge. This clearly indicates that the previous SULV policies have been given little weight in the planning decisions, have demonstrably failed to protect the area designated as a SULV and harm has been caused to the landscape value and the local open space of Woodley and Earley.

It is contended that the public value attached to the land within the Bulmershe SULV is significant and that this value has been recognised by Wokingham Borough Council in past local plans and has been given stronger protection within the adopted MDD DPD.

Historically there has been a lot of local public pressure from both residents and residents' groups, such as the Association of Central Earley Residents, to recognise the value of the Bulmershe area as a green lung shared between the western edge of Woodley and the north of Earley.

The value of the Bulmershe green area has long been articulated by Earley and Woodley Town Councils and was subsequently recognised in The Wokingham District Plan 1996-2004, which established the Bulmershe area as a Site of Urban Landscape Value, drawing on policies in the Berkshire Structure Plan (1991 to 2006). Although the area of the SULV has been modified in the new MDD DPD a similar protection has been included.

General - Section 3.102 of the MDD DPD acknowledges that this area is open and undeveloped and provides an important contribution to local character and amenity.

Section 3.104 of the MDD DPD establishes that the area forms part of the setting and identity of the settlements of Earley and Woodley. The Bulmershe SULV area is an open space with features such as ponds, mature woodlands and hedgerows and has a role as both formal and informal open space. Green spaces, along with their recreational and biodiversity roles in a built-up context, should be retained or enhanced as they bring health and wellbeing to the local community. [Local Authorities have recently been made responsible for improving the health of their local population see Local authorities' public health responsibilities (England) 13 March 2014 SN06844 as part of the Health and Social Care Act 2012].

Beauty – Highwood is a fine example of mixed lowland woodland with an attractive heath land area too. The open views offered by parts of the Bulmershe SULV, within an otherwise urban landscape, offer the beauty of a semi-natural landscape that has historically been recognised as a Site of Landscape Value.

Historic Importance – Much of the area formed part of the grounds of Woodley Lodge and Bulmershe Court that has historically provided a degree of protection. Highwood contains exotic tree species, which were once part of an arboretum - a collection of trees - in the grounds of Woodley Lodge. These include giant redwoods and monkey puzzle.

Recreational Value – There are a range of formal and informal recreational uses

- i) Allotments – there are allotments at the north and south ends of the Bulmershe SULV.
- ii) Informal recreation – there are many opportunities for informal recreation within the Bulmershe SULV, such as walking, kite flying, picnicking etc.
- iii) Playing fields – there are playing fields under the management of Bulmershe College, Addington School and Reading University that are also available for public use.

Tranquillity – Within the general urbanised eastern edge of the Reading conurbation this green space offers a tranquil location for informal recreation by Woodley and Earley residents

Wildlife - Highwood is designated as a Local Nature Reserve and is entirely within the Bulmershe SULV area. A number of years ago the Bulmershe Allotment site, between Mays Lane and Bideford Close was reduced in size by Reading Borough Council. The land to the east of the site is now being actively managed by Reading Borough Council for both wildlife and amenity to allow the woodland on the edges of the site to develop, maintain a mix of scrub and grass needed by the existing fauna, keep the existing paths open and allow options for use as allotments and open space to be considered in the future.

Members of Earley Environmental Group report there are Common Lizards and Slow Worms in the heather adjacent to Highwood. Many of the more common birds nest in Highwood and maybe more notably, Sparrowhawks have nested in Highwood every year recently. Great Spotted Woodpeckers and Nuthatches have many nest sites in Highwood.

The area to the south of Highwood has been a good site for seeing Bramblings in the winter as well as other finches such as Bullfinches, Greenfinches, Goldfinches and Chaffinches. It is also home to many butterfly species such as Red Admiral, Tortoiseshell, Brimstone, Peacock, Comma, Small Blue, Holly Blue, Large, Small and Green Veined White and Purple Hairstreak. This area is also notable for many wild flowers which also make it a good place for insects.

There is value from the openness of the land as retaining the physical and psychological benefits of having open land near to where people live and the protection of the setting and identity of the communities of Earley and Woodley, by maintaining the sense of "leaving Woodley" and "entering Earley".

This statement has been produced to re-affirm the joint Town Councils' wish to ensure that there is no further erosion of the Bulmershe SULV. This will be achieved by:

- Jointly and vigorously opposing any planning applications which seek to build on any part of the SULV
- Calling upon local Borough Councillors to ensure that such applications are listed
- Ensuring that representative(s) of Woodley and Earley Town Council attend any Local Planning Authority Planning Committee Meetings at which such applications are to be discussed.
- Re-affirming to the Borough Council's Executive Member for Planning and the Local Planning Authority the joint Town Councils' opposition to any plans to encroach on the Bulmershe SULV

August 2015