

Woodley Town Council

Minutes of the Annual Town Electors Meeting held at the Oakwood Centre on
Tuesday 3 March 2020 at 8 pm

Present: *Councillors K. Gilder (Chairman); N. Al-Sanjari; K. Baker; D. Bragg; S. Brindley; A. Chadwick; J. Cheng; A. Heap; C. Jewell; J. MacNaught; D. Mills; S. Rahmouni; B. Rowland; R. Skegg; B. Soane; P. Wicks*

Also present: *4 residents*

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

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M. Doyle, M. Forrer, M. Nagra and A. Swaddle .

2. **MINUTES OF THE TOWN ELECTORS MEETING HELD ON 5 MARCH 2019**

It was proposed and agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 5 March 2019 be agreed and signed as a true record.

3. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

In reply to a question about the Town Council's endeavours to seek to take ownership of Malone Park from Wokingham Borough Council, the Town Clerk informed the meeting that the Borough Council had agreed to sell Malone Park to Woodley Town Council and the legal work was proceeding.

4. **ANNUAL COMMITTEE REPORTS**

4.1 **Leisure Services Committee**

Councillor David Bragg, 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:

- Body Conditioning
- Aerobics
- Pilates

The leisure centre currently ran seven children's courses and forty 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 750 gym members.

The centre offered "play for £2" on the 3G pitch for individuals aged eighteen years and under, which had proved very popular with local children (6372 transactions during 2019).

The centre also offered "play for £1" during school holidays for racket sports (badminton, table tennis and tennis) for families, which was also popular (975 transactions during 2019).

Woodley Sports Week: May 2019

In partnership with the local School Games Organiser the Town Council hosted the eighth 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 April 2019

The third Woodley 10km organised by Barnes Fitness was a huge success, with 635 adult runners taking part. In addition, 75 children completed the 2.5km fun run around Woodford Park. The event raised £1,000 for the Mayor's charity (2018-19), The Multiple Sclerosis Society, Reading, Wokingham & Districts.

Christmas Charity Open Day December 2019

The first charity Christmas open day welcomed the public to use the Centre's facilities for a small fee. All monies taken were donated to the Mayor's charity (2019-20), Prostate Cancer UK, and the day raised over £800.

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

The Function Room and Committee Rooms were decorated. New multi-coloured chairs and tables were bought for children's parties and other activities.

The former ladies toilets were turned into the back office to the newly refurbished reception desk and a new floor was laid in the foyer. The former duty staff office was also decorated and the IT system upgraded.

An electrical survey was carried out and an upgrade of the system is planned for the future.

Woodley Pre-School

The Grounds Maintenance team installed a knee rail fence in front of the Woodley Pre-School's building to stop cars encroaching on the entrance area and the space along the front of the building.

Grounds Depot and Maintenance Workshop

Problems with getting electricity to the Grounds depot made it necessary to revise the arrangements needed to house the Grounds and Maintenance teams at the depot area and further work was currently being carried out to establish a workable solution.

Community Halls

At Coronation Hall, new toilets, a new suspended ceiling and LED lights were installed and the whole hall was redecorated. The water storage tanks were removed at both Coronation and Chapel Halls in order to reduce the likelihood of Legionella.

Parks and play areas

Woodford Park

- Further work on fixing the pool liner was carried out in the spring of 2019. Unfortunately, this led to the paddling pool opening later than had been intended.
- At the Garden of Remembrance, the Grounds Maintenance team installed new planters and box hedging as well as repairing the path surfaces and putting in new plants.

- Seats around the park and at the Rotary Garden, behind the Oakwood Centre, were refurbished and now sit on concrete pads.
- Initial meetings were held with landscape architects and play companies with the aim of installing a destination play area to replace the old play equipment in the area behind the Oakwood Centre. Residents will be consulted with on any potential schemes and equipment - the aim is to make the play area accessible and inclusive for all.

Malone Park

Fencing repairs were carried out at Malone Park.

Rivermead open space

At Rivermead open space, the fencing was removed, together with the large amount of vegetation that had grown up through the fence. A new chain link fence was installed and the area levelled and reseeded.

Green Flag Status

Woodford Park was again awarded Green Flag status in July 2019 and an application has been made for 2020.

Friends of Woodford Park

The Friends of Woodford Park meet regularly with representatives of the Town Council, now including a Councillor, to plan their projects, report on progress and receive updates on work that the Council is 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 even more crocus bulbs in the park this year.

Woodford Park Lake

The contracted work on the lake was completed on time, with the boardwalk the last feature to be installed. Water and marginal planting in and around the lake was carried out in the late summer, with more planting planned this year. The pathway around the lake was laid in September, after the nesting season had finished.

Community Fun Day

On 11 August the Council organised a Community Fun Day on the Memorial Ground to mark the centenary of the ground being purchased by subscription by local residents, after the end of World War 1. Activities included circus skills, reptiles, farm animals and emergency vehicles.

Climate / Environment

The Council successfully applied for 170 free trees from the Woodland Trust for planting in the Council's parks. The trees are a mix of hedging and small copse trees to encourage wildlife and biodiversity and will be received in time for planting in November.

The solar panels fitted in January 2019 saved around 7 tonnes CO2e from the energy generated over the year. The system installed in the Oakwood Centre in January 2020 will generate a similar amount annually.

The Council is currently looking at options for harvesting rainwater from the Council's buildings in the park – for reuse on the shrub and flower beds.

The Council set up a Climate Emergency Working Group to develop an action plan that will filter through all activities and services provided by the Council. This will influence the way the parks, buildings and services are managed in the future.

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.

The Allotment Tenants Committee teamed up with Launchpad, a charity supporting homeless people, and with the help of volunteers from large organisations, including Sage, 3 plots were allocated for the production of fresh food to be delivered to foodbanks and local meal centres.

The Tenants Committee worked with plot holders to develop bee and wildlife friendly areas and to introduce bee hives at the site. A member of the Wiltshire Bee Roadzz scheme gave a talk at the Oakwood Centre and explained the importance of increasing areas of bee and wildlife friendly zones and routes. A pond area was dug out at the allotment site and this will help to reduce the possibility of flooding and will also contribute to the biodiversity of the site.

Changes were made to the allotment tenants agreement, following discussions with the Tenants Committee – to restrict bonfires on the site to the autumn and winter months. This was to address issues of safety during periods of hot weather and dry conditions and also in consideration of neighbours, who were experiencing bonfire smoke throughout the summer months.

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 provide regular reports. The service level agreement between JAC and the Town Council was extended for one year to 31/3/21 to allow a survey to be carried out in order to understand what support and activities young people (aged 15 and over) are looking for.

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.

Following the conference 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, the Community Youth Partnership launched a parents' self-help group for families dealing with anxiety. The group was assisted by volunteer facilitators, who received training to support the group. The Community Youth Partnership was currently exploring whether there was a need in local schools for more training in dealing with anxiety, and hoped to provide more parents' self-help groups.

The Partnership was continuing 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 would be working with young people on an art project at this space in the near future. Plans to develop a Parkour (or Free running) area were also part of the vision for this site.

In conclusion, after completing his report, Councillor Bragg offered his congratulations to the three Woodley groups/clubs that had received awards in the recent Get Berkshire Active Awards ceremony. These were:

- Me2 Club - Youth Engagement Project Award
- KickTwist Cheerleading Group - Best Team Performance
- Woodley United – Best Community Club

Following the report of the Leisure Services Committee, Councillor Jewell asked when improvement work to improve the waterlogged area at the entrance to the allotment site would be carried out. The Deputy Town Clerk replied that a scheme to alleviate the problem would be undertaken soon and a longer-term drainage project was being investigated.

In reply to a question, Councillor Bragg said that it was hoped that the Climate Emergency Working Party would meet soon.

4.2 **Planning and Community Committee**

Councillor Philip Wicks, Chairman of the Planning and Community Committee, began by saying that he had taken over as the committee chairman when the former chairman, Councillor Jenny Cheng, stepped down in January. Councillor Wicks then presented his report, as follows:

The Committee had considered 179 planning applications since March 2019. Members of the public either attended the Planning Committee meeting or wrote to the Town Council about 41 of the 179 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 build a new teaching block at Addington School and extend the car park was controversial because the car park extension would encroach on land designated as a Site of Urban Landscape Value (SULV). The Committee were pleased to see plans for the expansion of Addington School to enable the school to cater for more local children, but also wanted to protect the SULV between Woodley and Earley. After lengthy discussion, on balance the Committee did not object to the application and it was subsequently granted planning permission by Wokingham Borough Council.
- A 2 storey addition to Loddon Vale House had previously been refused planning permission. A revised proposal 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, but planning permission was granted.
- An application to build 10 semi-detached dwellings on the site of the former Daycare Centre, Southlake Crescent was granted planning permission.
- An application for the redevelopment of the Adwest Western site in Headley Road East, to provide 5 industrial units and a unit for use as a builders' merchant, was granted planning permission
- An application to build 2 houses in Perimeter Road, on land to the south of Sandford Farm Cottage had previously been refused. A subsequent application to build one house on this land was granted planning permission.
- An application to demolish the existing property at 184 Loddon Bridge Road and build two semi-detached houses and one bungalow was opposed by the Committee on the grounds of parking provision and highway access, and was refused planning permission.

Highways

Wokingham Borough Council asked for the Town Council's comments on the following:

- A proposed toucan crossing on Spitfire Way.
- Proposed additional waiting restrictions in Keane Close, Ravensbourne Drive, Duffield Road and Hurricane Way.
- Proposed stopping up of the highway at 14 South Lake Crescent – required to enable the redevelopment of the former Day Care Centre site.

The Town Council also received notification from Wokingham Borough Council on scheduled roadworks in Woodley.

Street naming

The Committee suggested the name "Loddon Gardens" for the new road to be constructed on the former Pitts Works site in Colemans Moor Road. This was accepted by Wokingham Borough Council and Royal Mail.

Community matters

The Committee received the following reports and updates:

- Information from Citizens Advice Wokingham regarding the new Help to Claim service for people making a Universal Credit claim.
- Citizens Advice Wokingham Impact Report 2018-19.
- Reports of meetings of the Woodley and North Earley Community Forum.

The Committee responded to a request from Wokingham Borough Council for examples of areas where fly-tipping had occurred.

Community Speedwatch

During the early part of 2019, the data logger was deployed in roads around Woodley where speeding had been reported. Councillor Tom Barker, who had set up and organised the Community Speedwatch scheme, retired from the Town Council in May 2019. Councillors have met with representatives from Thames Valley Police to clarify issues regarding communication between the Town Council and the Police, and the data required by Thames Valley Police, and it is hoped that the Speedwatch scheme will be relaunched in the coming months.

Cycling in Woodley Working Party

This working party was set up in October 2019 to review cycling provision in Woodley, improve the cycling environment and provide better facilities for cyclists in Woodley. The working party has produced a draft action plan for its aims and as a result of a suggestion made by the working party, a Facebook group has been set up to provide a single point of contact where bicycles that have been lost, stolen or found in Woodley can be reported.

Grants

Annual grants will be given to Citizens Advice Wokingham, ARC, Keep Mobile and Revitalise, as part of the 2020/21 Budget. The Town Council will continue to provide annual funding to Readibus under a service level agreement.

Citizens Awards

Once again this year, awards will be presented to citizens who have made a real difference in the community. This year's chosen recipients will receive their awards from the Town Mayor at a reception on Friday 27 March.

Training/briefing sessions

The Committee sent representatives to attend a training session on planning matters and a briefing on the Local Plan Update – both provided by Wokingham Borough Council.

Consultations

The committee responded to the following consultations:

- From Wokingham Borough Council:
 - Review of the borough's Landscape Character Assessment
 - Draft Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030
 - Draft Local Validation List for planning applications
 - Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan
 - Review of Local Transport Plan 3 in advance of the preparation of Local Transport Plan 4
 - Review of the Voluntary Sector Strategy
 - Draft Local Plan
- From Central and Eastern Berkshire Authorities, regarding the Joint Minerals and Waste Plan:
 - Additional Regulation 18 (site specific) consultation on the potential allocation of the Bray Quarry Extension Site
 - Call for additional sites (Autumn 2019)
 - Focussed Regulation 18 consultation for sand and gravel provision and operator performance

Wokingham Borough Council also asked for the Town Council's comments on the following:

- Key issues to be considered in the development of a new Parking Management Plan
- Evidence to enable examination of the process for adopting new infrastructure following the completion of new housing developments
- Minor variation of a premises licence
- Application to renew street trading consent

Councillor Wicks thanked Councillor Cheng and all the other committee members for their hard work throughout the year. He also thanked the Committee Officer for her tireless work in support of the Committee.

Following the report, a local resident asked about the report in a local paper that 50 oak trees had been cut down. Councillor Wicks said that this would be dealt with by Wokingham Borough Council.

[Town Clerk's note: It was later confirmed that the trees had not been cut down in Woodley.]

The resident then asked whether anything could be done to stop cyclists in the town centre, which was supposed to be a pedestrianised area. Councillor Jewell replied that the Cycling in Woodley Working Party would be meeting with a representative from Wokingham Borough Council the following day and this was one of the topics that would be discussed. She said that the Town Council was aware of the problem and was trying to involve the Borough Council to enable a resolution to be found.

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 and its 4 working parties.

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. Our officers have been extremely occupied with a number of projects aimed at maintaining existing facilities as well as making significant improvements to provide additional features for our residents. Examples of refurbishment include work on the foyer and ladies' toilets at Woodford Park Leisure Centre, new seating in the Theatre. The transformation of the lake in Woodford Park is a great example of not only refurbishment but adding new features like the dipping pond access points. There are some exciting projects underway for the rest of 2020, including a brand new fully integrated play area in Woodford Park. By sound financial management by the Town Clerk and her team all these items of remedial work were fully covered by reserves or new loans.

The investment portfolio, put in place to pay off the loan on the Oakwood Centre, continues to perform as anticipated with an 8% return. It is still on track to meet the required funds in 2025/26 when the loan will be repaid.

Following three years of unchanged charges, unfortunately due to a variety of pressures the town council tax had to be increased by 5.78% or an extra 12p per week. Our neighbouring council Earley, which recently saw a change of political control, have increased their charges by 10.36%. Even then this is still lower than 2009/10 levels so we believe we are still providing great value for money.

Many residents have commented on the fact that facilities like Woodford Park and the Leisure Centre are excellent and have improved significantly over recent 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 and improving terms and conditions for those that excel. This included the success of the apprentice in the assistant administration role who has now been taken on in a full-time capacity.

We have long recognised the importance of communications and following the huge success of our new appointment last year we have nearly doubled their hours. Our presence on social media and the quality of activities have improved significantly.

The Town Council was already fully committed to make changes due to climate changes including solar panels and changing our energy supply to one that generates it from renewable sources. This was reinforced by being the first Town or Parish Council to declare a Climate Emergency.

From a community perspective, we continue to work with the TCMI on joint projects, provided grants to 17 community groups and 5 individual athletes and provide preferential access to the Oakwood Centre to several community groups including the Woodley Business Group and Woodley and North Earley Community Group.

All in all, another very busy but productive year. "

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 from Rathbones 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 achieved an 8% return and the

Council was advised that although the fund may track sideways in 2020 the fund was in a good position. The fund was still on track to meet its target in 2025/26. The Council's Treasury Management Strategy was considered by committee and approved at Full Council.

Catering Partnership

The Catering Partnership met regularly throughout the year to monitor the catering operation and coffee shop provision in the Oakwood Centre and explore opportunities to improve the service and income to the Centre. The Council would be considering the renewal of the catering partnership contract from March 2021.

Risk Management Working Party

The working party reviewed the risk management register and strategy and these were approved at the Council meeting in February 2020, following recommendation from the Committee.

Personnel Sub Committee

The hours of the Communications Manager post, which was appointed to in June 2018, were increased from 18 to 30 hours a week.

A post of Assistant Admin Officer was created in December and the former apprentice appointed to that post.

At Woodford Park Leisure Centre two Sports Officer posts were regraded to reflect their contribution to the success of the Gym on the Park and the other activities at the centre. The third Sports officer post was deleted from the establishment and a full-time post of Duty Manager was created to oversee the day to day upkeep of the facilities as well as working on some of the activities on offer.

Publicity

The Communication Manager had increased publicity about the Council and its activities, developed social media and reviewed websites, and would be setting up new websites for the Oakwood Centre and Woodford Park Leisure Centre. A marketing plan for the Oakwood Centre was being developed.

Financial/Licences/legal:

The Committee reviewed allotment rents and agreed an increase of 2.4% on the charges with effect from 1 January 2021.

The Council published its Equality Duty Statement and Equality and Diversity Policy, which is available on the website.

A loan of £270,000 was taken out to build a new workshop, fund the works to the lake in Woodford Park and refurbish the foyer and install new ladies toilets at Woodford Park Leisure Centre. The expenditure on the lake from these funds is complete, as is the refurbishment of the foyer and offices at Woodford Park Leisure Centre.

Oakwood Centre repairs/refurbishment

Roof

Specification for repairs and modifications to the roof, guttering and downpipes was currently being drawn up by specialist surveyors. This work would address issues of water ingress and would also consider opportunities for rainwater harvesting for use on the shrub and flower beds in the park.

Solar panels

As a result of the previous year's agreement to enter into 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 and Woodford Park Leisure Centre, the panels on the Oakwood Centre roofs were installed in January 2020.

Toilets

The Council would be allocating funding to refurbish the toilets in Oakwood Centre. The toilets are heavily used both by customers and as public toilets under the local loo scheme. It was anticipated that these works would be carried out in the summer.

Theatre

The Council agreed to allocate £22,433 from CIL funds to re-upholster the seating and install updated AV and connectivity in the Alan Cornish Theatre in the Oakwood Centre.

WTCMI

At its November 2019 meeting, the Committee agreed to WTCMI's financial and day to day management operations being transferred to the Town Council, which it was believed would be beneficial to the organisation. The WTCMI would continue to operate as a partnership between the traders, Town Council and Wokingham Borough Council.

Climate Emergency

Following the declaration of a Climate Emergency at the December 2019 Council meeting the Strategy and Resources Committee set up a Climate Emergency Working Party to identify priorities, develop a climate emergency action plan and monitor and report on progress to the Committee.

Service Level Agreement - JAC

At its January 2020 meeting, the Strategy and Resources Committee agreed to extend the Service Level Agreement with Just Around the Corner for the provision of detached youth work and mentoring for a further year to 31/3/21. Meanwhile the Council would be reviewing the nature of the support our young people in Woodley tell us they need and reviewing the draft tender document in line with the findings.

The Committee also dealt with some legal matters that remain confidential at this point.

Projects:

The public toilet in the town centre was opened on 6 June 2019.

The Committee continued to work with the University of the 3rd Age Shared Learning Project researching the history of Woodley and information had been displayed in the Oakwood Centre and on the Council's website.

The Council would continue to waive charges for the use of the Centre Stage up to 31 December 2020 when this would be reviewed.

Financial:

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

CIL funding

The Council had currently received Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) of £47,804 in total. A further £38,621 was due to be paid to the Council in April 2020.

Internal Audit Plan

The Council's internal auditors carried out an audit review during each of their 3 visits to the Town Council. Each report was received by the committee, with any items identified either already or in the process of being addressed.

External Auditor

PKF Littlejohn LLP had been the Council's external auditor from 2017/18 – and gave an 'unqualified' report on the 2018/19 Annual Return and Financial Statements.

Grants

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

2020/21 Budget

The 2020/21 Budget and precept charge was agreed at the Council meeting on 4 February 2020. The Band D charge had been increased to £112.88 for the year.

5. **CORRESPONDENCE**

No correspondence had been received.

6. **GENERAL PARISH AFFAIRS**

Councillor Baker thanked the four non-councillors who were present for attending the meeting. He asked anyone with suggestions for encouraging more people to attend to pass them on to the Town Council. A local resident said that he thought the main problem was poor publicity for the meeting.

Councillor Rowland agreed with the comment about trying to attract more people to the meeting, but felt that residents would get in touch with the Council if they had a complaint or wanted to pass on a comment, and did not need to attend the meeting to do this.

Councillor Al-Sanjari felt that it was important to get more residents to engage with the Council and thought that many residents didn't know what the Town Council did. She suggested that a leaflet could be produced to inform residents of the role of the Town Council and the services it provided.

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

The meeting closed at 8:45 pm
