

Woodley Town Council

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Thursday 26th May 2022 at 7 pm

Present: *Councillors J. Sartorel (Chairman); J. Anderson; A. Chadwick; R. Horskins; C. Jewell; R. Skegg; D. Smith; A. Swaddle*

WTC Officers: *K. Murray; A. Ransley; M. Filmore;*

Also present: *Gregor Murray (Wokingham Borough Council)
Steve Cook (Local Bee Keeper)
11 other members of the public*

Apologies: *Councillors S. Brindley; K. Gilder; B. Rowland*

1. **TOWN MAYOR WELCOME**

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the Annual Town meeting. The Mayor highlighted that the focus of this year's meeting is the declared Climate Emergency, and there will be three presentations; first from Gregor Murray, Wokingham Borough Councillor, followed by Steve Cook, Local Beekeeper, and finally from Kevin Murray, Woodley Town Council Deputy Town Clerk.

2. **CLIMATE EMERGENCY PRESENTATIONS**

2.1 **Councillor Gregor Murray, Wokingham Borough Councillor (WBC)**

Councillor Murray provided a presentation to the meeting on WBC's declared Climate Emergency and the initiatives the Council have and are planning to put in place to address this.

Some of the key elements of the presentation were as follows:

- WBC have spent over £50m on initiatives
- Tackling climate change is not solely about reducing carbon footprint, but also putting in place the governance to ensure plans are able to work
- Experts have been engaged to provide support
- Innovative plan to plant 250k trees; 10,000 of which are to be provided directly to residents
- Both Dinton Activity Centre and Woodley Library have been made net zero carbon buildings at no cost to the taxpayer
- Provided cavity wall and loft insulation to 1,500 of the least efficient houses in the area
- Improving Active Travel (walking and cycling) networks to make people more active; including the installation of permeable paths which absorb water and don't get muddy in winter
- Looking to introduce Electric bin lorries by 2027/28
- Increasing electric vehicle charging points, from 20 to 180 by the end of 2022, with a target of over 500 by mid-2024
- Installation of plastic kerbstones; less carbon produced during production compared to concrete, and damaged kerbstones can be removed, melted down, and reformed into new kerbstones
- Ran mock 'Cop 26' events in schools to educate children
- An Action Plan to tackle the Climate Emergency has been drawn up by the Council with 148 actions; many ideas came from Resident suggestions
- WBC want to ensure that action is taken as fast as possible, but that it is done correctly; they do not wish to cause further climate issues down the line

2.2 **Steve Cook, Local Beekeeper**

Steve Cook provided a presentation to the meeting about the Reading Road Allotment Bee Keeping Project, which started in 2020.

Steve provided details of the life cycle of the honey bee and the pollination process. He advised that the Reading Road Allotment site is ideal for keeping bees as the area is surrounded by various fruit trees and brambles. Allotment tenants are encouraged to help the bees by planting fruit trees, fruit plants and wild flowers, and areas of the site are not mowed and kept wild. Even in winter, if the temperature is over 10 degrees, then bees will be out.

Steve advised the Meeting that it was important for individuals to continue to provide bees with nectar and pollen sources all year round, and listed some important flowers and plants.

2.3 **Kevin Murray, Deputy Town Clerk – Woodley Town Council**

Kevin Murray provided a presentation to the meeting regarding the Climate Emergency from Woodley Town Council's perspective.

Kevin advised that the Council has an aim of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. The Council has set targets and is monitoring progress against a Climate Emergency Action Plan which has been drawn up.

Kevin provided details of some of the initiatives the Council are undertaking, including moving the Council's energy supplies to a carbon neutral energy supplier, installing solar panels at both the Oakwood Centre and Woodford Park Leisure Centre, installing LED lighting in all buildings, and installing rainwater harvesting tanks. Also, in the future the Council wants to work with WBC to plant more trees in the area, to reduce energy and replace Town Council vehicles with electric vehicles, to improve the waste collection in parks to ensure suitable waste is recycled, and to install more rainwater harvesting tanks.

Kevin advised that there were challenges around understanding the issues, as well as the technical solutions and their benefits. There is also a resource issue, with the Council aiming to be realistic regarding what it can achieve, whilst not limiting ambition.

4. **QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

The Mayor thanked Gregor, Steve and Kevin for their presentations, and invited questions from those in attendance at the meeting.

- 4.1 In response to a query regarding WBC's plan to plant 250k trees, Councillor Murray advised that, whilst the majority of trees would be provided as whips, there was scope to provide some larger, more mature trees. When conducting industrial scale planting, Councillor Murray said it was most effective to plant as many trees, appropriately spaced, as possible, in line with Woodland Trust advice.

Councillor Murray advised that the Town Council can discuss with WBC if they feel there are any areas where planting more mature trees would be more suitable. He advised that the 10,000 trees to be provided to individual residents would be whips.

- 4.2 In response to a query regarding the need for up-to-date statistics when considering the carbon footprint reduction provided from planting trees, Councillor Murray advised that the DEFRA statistics were currently the most up to date, although these were several years old. He advised that WBC are working with the University of Reading to improve the statistics regarding carbon reduction, stating that when the Council were planning to install 76,000 solar panels on a solar farm they received had different figures from the various people they had asked.

- 4.3 A member of the public commented that the targeted 20% reduction in private car use, included in Councillor Murray's presentation, was a relatively low ambition. They also highlighted that

there is no cycle way through Woodley, and asked whether it was now time to make a real effort to get people using bikes.

Councillor Murray stated that Wokingham Borough has the single highest car ownership numbers in Britain, with 2.4 cars per household. As such, reducing car usage by 20% would still be a significant reduction.

Councillor Murrery stated that WBC does not have the power to make people stop using their cars, but need to target and solve the reasons why people use cars. He advised that WBC were working with businesses to reduce the number of people travelling into work, and highlighted that WBC currently has a working from home plan which means staff only come in where there is a need.

Councillor Murray advised that a lot of parents take their children to school via car, and that most parents feel the roads are not safe enough for their children to cycle to school. As such, the roads need to be made safer first. Councillor Murray stated that building segregated cycles routes would be ideal, however Wokingham is an 800-year-old market town and land would need to be taken from pavements and front gardens in order to have the space to build these cycle routes, which is obviously not feasible.

- 4.4 One attendee commented that more information regarding the Climate Emergency needs to be publicised to residents, and suggested using the advertising columns in Woodley precinct.

Councillor Murray responded to say behaviour change is the single most important thing needed to improve climate change. He indicated that Covid had been prioritized with regards to communications over the past two years, but that he hoped we would now move to be able to publicise more information on the climate emergency.

- 4.5 A query was raised about whether there was anything that could be done locally to allow e-scooters to be used in the area, even though they are currently not legalised. Comments were made that lots of people would like to use e-scooters.

Councillor Murray stated that, whilst WBC can pilot schemes where legislation might prohibit them, e-scooters are quiet and so cause a risk to pedestrians, which is a health and safety issue at present.

One resident recommended requiring individuals to get a licence to ride an e-scooter. It was also commented that e-scooters would be an exciting alternative to car usage for teenagers.

Councillor Murray stated that he sensed government would be looking into legislating this matter soon.

- 4.6 The Mayor read out a question which was submitted prior to the meeting, asking why the Town Council's Youth Work is outsourced.

Councillor Anderson responded to state that the Town Council do not have the resource or expertise in house to provide youth work, and so outsource the work to experts.

5. **MEETING CLOSE**

The Mayor brought the meeting to a close by offering her thanks to those who had taken part.

The meeting closed at 8:25 pm
