

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
BOROUGH COUNCIL OF WOKING

held on 9 February 2023

Present:

Cllr S Hussain (Chairman)

Cllr M I Raja (Vice-Chair)

Cllr H Akberali	Cllr C S Kemp
Cllr A Azad	Cllr A Kirby
Cllr T Aziz	Cllr R N Leach
Cllr A-M Barker	Cllr L S Lyons
Cllr A J Boote	Cllr L M N Morales
Cllr J Brown	Cllr J P Morley
Cllr K M Davis	Cllr E Nicholson
Cllr S Dorsett	Cllr S M Oades
Cllr G W Elson	Cllr D Roberts
Cllr W P Forster	Cllr J R Sanderson
Cllr P J T Graves	Cllr T G Spenser
Cllr I Johnson	Cllr M A Whitehand
Cllr D M C Jordan	

Also Present:

Absent: Councillors M Ali, A Caulfield and G T Cosnahan

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Caulfield, Councillor Cosnahan and Councillor Ali.

2. MINUTES.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 1 December 2022 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

3. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS.

The Mayor paid tribute to two senior officers of Woking Borough Council, Adele Devon and Ernest Amoako, who had sadly passed away in recent weeks.

Adele had been the Council's ICT Manager and had worked at the Authority for over thirty years. Passionate about work and always thoughtful of others, Adele had been a great mentor to many over the years. Ernest had joined Woking Borough Council in 2009 and

had served as the Council's Planning Policy Manager. Ernest had been much admired for his sense of humour, and his dedication to work and the Borough of Woking.

Both Officers had been greatly respected and liked across the Authority and Surrey as a whole, and they would be much missed by both Officers and Elected Members. On behalf of the Council, the Mayor extended the condolences of Officers and Councillors to the families and friends of Adele and Ernest. Those present at the meeting stood and observed two minutes' silence in memory of Adele and Ernest.

Before moving onto his report on the recent events and activities he had participated in, the Mayor congratulated Councillor Kirby, his wife and family on the recent birth of his son.

The Mayor outline the engagements he had attended over December and January. These had included a tea at the Civic Offices with John Goslen, a resident of Old Woking who had dedicated his life to the local community. The Chinese New Year had been celebrated on the previous weekend, marking the start of the Year of the Rabbit. The Mayor had attended the Young Musician Performers event at St Johns Church, as well as several events at the New Victoria Theatre.

The Mayor congratulated the Surrey and Woking residents who had been included in the King's New Year's Honours List, including Julie Hopkins, manager of the Community Fridge in Knaphill.

4. URGENT BUSINESS.

No items of Urgent Business were considered.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Chief Executive, Julie Fisher, declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the companies of which she was a Council-appointed director. The companies were listed in an attached schedule. The interests were such that Mrs Fisher could advise on those items.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Strategic Director - Corporate Resources, Kevin Foster declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the companies of which he was a Council-appointed director. The companies were listed in an attached schedule. The interests were such that Mr Foster could advise on those items.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Strategic Director - Place, Giorgio Framalocco, declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the companies of which he was a Council-appointed director. The companies were listed in an attached schedule. The interests were such that Mr Framalocco could advise on those items.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Strategic Director - Communities, Louise Strongitharm, declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the companies of which she was a Council-appointed director. The companies were listed in an attached schedule. The interests were such that Mrs Strongitharm could advise on those items.

6. QUESTIONS.

Copies of questions submitted under Standing Order 8.1 together with draft replies had been published in advance of the meeting. The replies were confirmed by Members of the Executive, supplementary questions were asked and replies given as set out below:

1. Question from Councillor Gary Elson

“Please can the Leader / Portfolio Holder update members on the latest status of applications for Financial Assistance received from the various Community Groups and Organisations within our Borough.

How many have applied, how many have been successful in being granted the full amount requested, how many have been granted reduced funding and how many will not receive anything?”

Reply from Councillor Will Forster

“This year applicants wanting to be considered by the Woking Council Community Fund were asked to apply to the Community Foundation for Surrey (CFS). The deadline for full applications was 23rd January 2023.

All previous beneficiaries of the Council’s community grants were contacted at the end of the Summer 2022 to inform them of the new process. Two Q&A sessions were facilitated online with community groups to discuss the process in more detail, held in September and December 2022. Both sessions were informative and attendees were grateful for the information.

At the deadline for full applications CFS had received 33 full applications and are now in the process of reviewing these. All eligible full applications will be presented and discussed at the Woking Council Community Fund Panel on the 4th of April 2023. Awards will then be made in May.

Service Level Agreements for five charities are now being drafted ready for the next financial year. These are for groups who provide specific services for the Council, and this process will ensure they are funded for the work they do. The value of these services is just under £500k.

A full report will be provided to the Executive in June 2023 detailing the outcomes of the grant awards. This will include an overview of the applications plus all of the wider discretionary benefits the Council provides to support the voluntary sector in Woking.”

Supplementary Question

No.

2. Question from Councillor Gary Elson

“Can the Portfolio Holder explain why consideration was not given to change the status of the emerging Town Centre Masterplan from a SPD to a DPD having insisted that pre prescribed tall building height limits would be set within a range?”

Reply from Councillor Liam Lyons

“The National Planning Policy Framework (last updated July 2021) defines SPDs as ‘documents which add further detail to the policies in the development plan. They can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites, or on particular issues, such as design. Supplementary planning documents are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions’. Similarly, in National Planning Practice Guidance (published 2019) it is further specified that ‘supplementary planning documents (SPDs) should build upon and provide more detailed advice or guidance on policies in an adopted local plan. They are however a material consideration in decision-making’.

Although SPDs clearly have legal weight in determining planning applications, the report to the meeting of the Executive on 2 February 2023 sets out the reasons why we should not move to adopt the Masterplan as an SPD at this time. Both myself and the Leader clearly stated that, contrary to a rogue newspaper headline last week, the Masterplan is very much alive. It is very clear from the outcome of the extensive consultation process that there is a large amount of support for the Masterplan, and for providing a clear position on what development might be considered appropriate in the town centre. As part of the next stage in the town centre Masterplan’s timetable for delivery, Officers will bring a report back to the Executive, outlining the options available to the Council in taking the Masterplan forward to its next stage.”

Supplementary Question

No.

3. Question from Councillor Gary Elson

“Can the Portfolio Holder please confirm that he is still of the opinion that he expressed at the meeting of the Executive on Thursday 2nd February, that the Town Centre Masterplan as it stands as a SPD does not conflict with the adopted SADPD and that in doing so he disagrees with opinion and advice given by our Officers?”

Reply from Councillor Liam Lyons

“Whilst on some sites the draft town centre Masterplan proposed fewer homes than the SADPD, given that the overall number of homes provided for by the draft Masterplan exceeded the minimum numbers set out in the SADPD, taken as a whole there is no material conflict. I therefore agree with the legal and Officer advice given in relation to those individual sites, as I stated at last week’s meeting of the Executive. How we address those individual sites will be considered as part of Officers’ report back to the Executive.”

Supplementary Question

No.

4. Question from Councillor Steve Dorsett

“How much money has been spent putting together the Masterplan; including all consultations, roadshows, pop up shops etc., to date?”

Reply from Councillor Liam Lyons

“The overall amount spent to date is £168,528.29. £100k was agreed by the Executive and this budget has been supplemented with funds secured from Homes England. This allowed the completion of significant public consultation, undertaking of a town centre housing market appraisal and the drafting of a detailed townscape strategy and site analysis. These documents and the feedback received through the consultation responses provides robust and comprehensive evidence to support the delivery of the town centre Masterplan.”

Supplementary Question

“I do Mr Mayor, thank you. Thank the Portfolio Holder for his reply. £168,528.29 does seem rather a lot of money for a master plan that we can't adopt, as was announced at the Executive last week. Obviously residents have seen that the master plan is in trouble and legal action has potentially been taken against the Council so how much money could the Council stand to lose if the master plan is adopted, as it is at present, and legal action is taken against the Council, as has been threatened?”

Reply from Councillor Liam Lyons

“Thank you Mr. Mayor. Very difficult for me to answer that question, because I just don't, I just don't understand that that vision of the Masterplan that Councillor Dorsett has, has just described. The master plan is very much going ahead. There's no question of us losing money if we stopped now, I've no idea, but we're not stopping now, so I'm, I'm very sorry, I can't answer any further than that. The master plan is very much going ahead, as outlined at last week's Executive, and, and the, the funds spent so far will go towards producing a robust planning document that the public consultation showed that it really wanted.”

5. Question from Councillor Steve Dorsett

“If, as local media suggest, the Masterplan is to be scrapped, how can we ensure the Town Centre is protected and does not become a free-for-all for developers?”

Reply from Councillor Liam Lyons

“The town centre Masterplan is very much alive. There will be a further report to the Executive that will outline the next steps in taking the Masterplan forward.”

Supplementary Question

“I do, Mr. Mayor. I accept Councillor Lyons' points, but there have been media reports about the potential for the master plan to be scrapped. Now says that's not going to happen, but I think residents deserve to know if that does happen, is there a plan B? Is there an alternative plan being formulated?”

Reply from Councillor Liam Lyons

“Thank you Mr. Mayor. I am wondering if Councillor Dorsett has read the papers. The master plan is not being scrapped. I don't know where that that rogue headline came from, it certainly didn't come from me or any of my colleagues so, no there isn't an alternative plan, we're pressing ahead with the master plan.”

6. Question from Councillor Steve Dorsett

“Can the portfolio holder outline a time frame for the remaining Sheerwater regeneration, given the announcement at the Executive that the administration intend to pause certain phases.”

Reply from Councillor Will Forster

“A mid-point review was always intended for the Sheerwater Regeneration project. In light of the Council’s financial position, it is proposed that this is brought forward sooner. Construction of Red, Yellow and Copper will continue in parallel with the review, as will the tender process for future phases. Further details will be included in the Thamesway Business Plans being reported to Council on 23 February 2023.”

Supplementary Question

“Yes Mr. Mayor. Bearing in mind that the regeneration is being paused, when the regeneration was started, the idea was to put the infrastructure in there at the start. So what effect will the pausing have on the long term projections for the community facilities such as the Eastwood Leisure Centre if, as indeed it is possible that, half of the regeneration goes unfinished?”

Reply from Councillor Will Forster

“Thank you, Mr. Mayor, you got my surname right the third time, thank you. So Councillor Dorsett, the regeneration scheme is not being paused, it’s being reviewed. When the regeneration scheme was started, there was always going to be a mid term review, and that is what is commenced already. The Council is keen to deliver the Sheerwater Regeneration scheme as envisaged. I think the question mark is, considering the financial situation facing the Council, is how we can deliver that, and the question is, can we work with housing partners not necessarily Thamesway to deliver it? So our intention is to deliver it. The question is how. Thank you.”

7. Question from Councillor Ayesha Azad

“The Councils accounts remain unaudited since 2019/20. Can the Leader provide an update.”

Reply from Councillor Dale Roberts

“The audit of the 2019/20 Council accounts has been substantially completed but there is outstanding work on a number of areas, including the Council’s group accounts. The external auditors, BDO, do not currently have the resources available to complete this work. The Chief Executive has escalated this issue, meeting with the Financial Reporting Council (FRC), and Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) in recent weeks to seek a way forward and to urge relevant parties to respond to the national issue with local government audit delays and take action to halt the worsening position. The detail of the work currently completed and outstanding has been reported to the Standards and Audit Committee at each meeting.”

Supplementary Question

“I do Mr. Mayor, thank you very much. So it’s disappointing to note that the accounts still remain incomplete, but it’s also disappointing that the Portfolio Holder and his party in their literature last year accused the Conservative administration for being

responsible for the delays, so would he now like to take up the opportunity to offer an apology for that inaccuracy or take responsibility for the delay. His choice.”

Reply from Councillor Dale Roberts

“Thank you, Mr. Mayor, thank you, Councillor Azad.

There are two questions in there, so let me address my concerns last year. It's true to say, as the question has been fully answered, that the delays to the audit work are as a result of resources. It's a national problem, I don't think there's any debate about that. It's also true to say that the audit opinion cannot be made until that work is completed.

But resources are not the only issue with the Auditor's opinion, that was my point, which I was making last year. Auditors have also raised concerns relating to the recoverability of loans and at one time going concern and minimum revenue provision.

I raised those concerns, actually as it turns out, in opposition back in November 2021, so thank you for asking the question, Councillor Azad, welcome to the party. I continue to ask those questions in 22 in opposition and we have made some progress in administration by escalating those issues to the FRC and the PSAA so no, no apology. We are working on the issues. Some of those issues are very difficult to resolve we we respect that and my concerns remain.

Thank you, Mr. Mayor.”

8. Question from Councillor Ayesha Azad

“The Woking food festival is a great way to show case our town as well as local produce which helps small and micro businesses. Can the portfolio holder confirm if there will be a 2023 Food Festival.”

Reply from Councillor Ellen Nicholson

“I agree that the Woking Food and Drink Festival was a great event for the Town Centre.

This large scale event required significant financial and Officer resource to organise and deliver which will not be available in 2023. However, we are currently working on a cost neutral program of events in Woking Town Centre in collaboration with local market traders and community groups – showcasing smaller artisan food markets and community events.”

Supplementary Question

No.

9. Question from Councillor Ayesha Azad

“Residents in Sheerwater are concerned that the community facilities promised to them as part of regeneration scheme may be at risk of not being provided. Can the Leader assure residents the regeneration scheme will be completed as originally promised to the residents of Sheerwater.”

Reply from Councillor Will Forster

“The Council remains fully committed to delivering the Sheerwater regeneration project. Given the Council’s financial challenges, we need to review how we can achieve this in an affordable, responsible and sustainable way. It was always in the plan to undertake a mid-point review and now is the right time to conduct this.”

Supplementary Question

No.

10. Question from Councillor Ian Johnson

“Please can the Council confirm when the outstanding accounts for this Council and its wholly owned or partially owned companies will be complete and published?”

Reply from Councillor Dale Roberts

“As I explained in my answer to Cllr Azad’s question, there continues to be delays in the audit of the Council’s 2019/20 accounts. The external auditors will not commence the audit of subsequent years accounts until these are complete. Alternative solutions are being considered at a sector level to address this unacceptable position. Officers are working with Victoria Square Woking Ltd (VSWL) to understand the timescales to complete the outstanding accounts and audit of the 2021 accounts. All the other Council companies’ accounts are up to date.”

Supplementary Question

No.

11. Question from Councillor Will Forster

“Please can the Council confirm if people in properties including Brockhill and Hale End Court, where they pay their energy bills alongside their rent are eligible for the energy rebate, energy price gap and/or warm homes discount?”

Reply from Councillor Ian Johnson

“At the moment, there is no national energy rebate scheme in place for residents who receive all their energy supplies through communal energy distribution networks. The Government has stated that an update will be given on this by the end of the month.

Any scheme is likely to be administered centrally with the onus put on residents to apply for any rebates available and local authorities being responsible for verifying claims. The Council will support residents with this process once the Government has released the details of the scheme.”

Supplementary Question

No.

12. Question from Councillor Will Forster

“I was delighted to see that the Bonsey Lane to Westfield Road path through Westfield Common has been surfaced by Surrey Wildlife Trust and Woking Borough Council.

Please will the Council consider putting the same treatment on the route in Westfield Common between Highlands Lane and Westfield Primary School, and between Balfour Avenue the Coop, both of which are also well used by children and parents of Westfield Primary School?”

Reply from Councillor Peter Graves

“I am pleased to hear that the works to enhance the footpath through Westfield Common have been positively received. While further potential footpath improvements were identified in the Westfield Common management plan, at present there are no plans to undertake further footpath works of this nature. Any such works would be subject to identifying suitable funding. Officers would be happy to discuss possible options with Councillors, which could include utilising local neighbourhood allocation of Community Infrastructure Levy funding.”

Supplementary Question

No.

13. Question from Councillor Andy Caulfield

“Please can the Council provide an update on the rebuild of the Old Woking Community Centre?”

Reply from Councillor Dale Roberts

“The Old Woking Community Centre (OWCC) refurbishment and alteration works commenced on 24th October 2022 and were scheduled to complete on the 12th May 2023. The OWCC project has subsequently received additional funding of £980,000 from Your Fund Surrey (YFS) and there is a significant amount of work ongoing to agree the detailed scope of works that will be funded by the YFS grant, including air source heat pumps, photovoltaic panels and insulating and recovering the existing roof. A planning application has been submitted for the YFS funded works and a decision is due on the 24th March 2023. The additional YFS funded works once added into the contract works will extend the current contract period to complete for the new academic year.”

Supplementary Question

No.

14. Question from Councillor Louise Morales

“The fence in Woking Park near the gardens of properties on Claremont Avenue has been damaged for sometime and the car park nearby this fence has been closed as well. Please can the Council confirm when the fence will be repaired or replaced and the car park reopened?”

Reply from Councillor Peter Graves

“The fencing in question was originally installed as part of the temporary Hoe Valley School site in Woking Park as both a boundary for the School but also to mitigate noise from the School site to adjacent properties. As this fence was installed as a temporary measure alongside the School, the fencing will not be replaced. The Council intends to encourage this small corner of the park to develop into a more natural boundary treatment, providing both a buffer between residential property boundaries and the car park. I understand that the plan is to reinstate the car park and we will review this given the update on Council spending controls. Details and timing on the car park will need to be confirmed at a later date.”

Supplementary Question

“Yes I do Mr. Mayor, thank you. While I welcome the huge increase in biodiversity with the natural planting that's going to be along the back of this car park which, given that we declared a climate emergency over a year ago, having extra plants, is always welcome. Was the, was the Portfolio Holder aware that there was some suggestion when it was put up that this fence might have been left there permanently and is there any other options that could be done to repair said fence. Thank you.”

Happy to take a response afterwards if you don't know.”

Reply from Councillor Peter Graves

“Mr. Mayor, I think I'll have to come back on that one if you don't mind, thank you.”

15. Question from Councillor Rob Leach

“What steps are being taken to clear the graffiti on the statue opposite the station and can a solution be found that can be used promptly for any future incidents.”

Reply from Councillor Peter Graves

“It is always disappointing when graffiti appears around the Borough and even more disappointing when pieces of art are the target. In the case of the Wanderer statue outside the station the removal of the graffiti needed special treatment and after liaising with the artist, an agreed method was adopted. This method can be applied promptly to any similar future incidents.”

Supplementary Question

No.

16. Question from Councillor Melanie Whitehand

“Increasing the number of Greenwaste recycling users is of paramount importance for a sustainable borough, however residents who want to sign up for the service are still having to wait a long time to have their applications approved. Can the portfolio holder please update the council on what the waiting time frames are and when the back log will be cleared.”

Reply from Councillor Peter Graves

“Our waste contractor, Amey, have reported around 100 applications outstanding where new subscribers are waiting for the delivery of a garden waste bin. The oldest

order is dated 25/01/2023. Joint Waste Solutions will continue to monitor Amey's performance in respect to bin delivery timeframes."

Supplementary Question

"Yes, I do, thank you, Mr. Mayor.

This is a disappointing answer, if you don't mind me saying so. The questions are raised, from my perspective, in order to have some definitive, if not detailed, responses. This is pretty much a generic answer that's been coming through for some time now and so no information given that can't be obtained from the website doesn't really help when a question is put forward, its hoped to have a bit more flesh on the bones and I'm afraid this is sadly disappointingly not."

The Mayor

"That wasn't a question was it, just a statement."

Councillor Whitehand

"Well it is in as much as I'm disappointed because they're not improved."

The Mayor

"I think take it out of the meeting."

Reply from Councillor Peter Graves

"Would you like me to make a reply? I could make a statement in reply if you'd like.

My statement is that, as of yesterday, yesterday evening, there were 250 bin deliveries outstanding in Woking. Just 250 and bear in mind that we have 100,000 pickups every, every week of which, of which, admittedly 100, 100 of those are garden bins. The others are a mixture of the rest, and the the SLA - we like acronyms, acronyms in this, in this Chamber - acronym mean SLA, I think, means Service Level Agreement, is that correct? Thank you. I was obviously listening to the lesson on acronyms.

The oldest garden waste delivery on the system at the moment is the 21st of January. Sorry the 25th January, so it's actually not that far away and we have actually only got, as I say, 100 outstanding the moment.

We do employ a bin delivery round, which completes about 65 deliveries a day, and they tackle requests in order to minimise delays.

There was a week when the contractor was unavailable, so we are picking up on the backlog and that if there are any remaining deliveries we will sort that out over the next few weeks. Thank you Mr. Mayor."

17. Question from Councillor Melanie Whitehand

"It is no secret that residents are having their green waste bins removed or not emptied without any prior notification of such.

When residents contacted Amey to enquire regarding the non-collections, they were advised that their subscriptions had expired and records show that they had not been renewed. This is despite residents stating that they had not received any renewal notices in order to continue with the collection service.

Given there has been a cost increase from 1st April, it is questionable that a price increase is justified when such poor customer service is being meted out to residents.

Can the Waste Portfolio Holder please update us on the current Green Waste Collection renewal system.”

Reply from Councillor Peter Graves

“It is acknowledged that there have been challenges with managing this volume of subscription renewals in a condensed time period. While some complaints have been received about letters or emails not arriving, these have all been investigated and responded to on a case-by-case basis.

Officers continue to work with Amey to improve our services and will of course be happy to pick up on any outstanding issues should residents make contact with you directly.”

Supplementary Question

No.

18. Question from Councillor Melanie Whitehand

“Can the portfolio holder update the council on the development status of the Robin Hood pub site and the Anchor pub which were purchased by the Council for community redevelopment purposes. Residents have raised concerns the sites will potentially be sold off in a fire sale by the Council with no long-term benefits to Knaphill or its residents.”

Reply from Councillor Dale Roberts

“The plans for the Robin Hood Site (owned by Rutland Woking) and The Anchor pub are currently under review. Given the complexities of the sites, in particular the Robin Hood site, we will need to carefully consider our options. The Council now has a strategic approach to the management of its assets and future proposals for all Council assets will be considered in the context of the Council’s strategic priorities and our wider financial challenges.”

Supplementary Question

“Thank you for indulging me, Mr. Mayor.

So this has been the response every time I raise the matter on these two sites. By now, one would hope some more definitive timescale would be available. Both sites are now a shadow of their former glory and, in the case of the Robin Hood pub, derelict. It is disappointing because residents are constantly questioning what is happening on those two sites and are beginning to feel that the Council is more concerned with the town centre than any of its villages. I would like to know if there is at least some timescale when these sites will be addressed. Thank you.”

Reply from Councillor Dale Roberts

“Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

And so, the sites are under review. I can't give you any definitive timescales at, at this point. I can tell you, and I can reassure the residents of Knaphill, that all assets, all Borough assets, will be optimised in the best interest of the long term financial position of the Borough, there will be no fire sale. A job not made particularly easy, by the way, by the way in which they were purchased. These two assets included other assets costing many millions of pounds made without valuations and so I can reassure residents that there won't be any fire purchases in the future either. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.”

19. Question from Councillor Peter Graves

“How much CIL has been collected across Woking to date and how do these funds break down into a) Neighbourhood CIL b) SANG payments c) funds available for local infrastructure d) administration fees.”

Reply from Councillor Liam Lyons

“The amount of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) collected across the Borough to date (to 25 Jan 2023) is £10,538,167.75. CIL is allocated as follows:

- 5% Administration fee
- 15% Neighbourhood CIL for Wards where no Neighbourhood Plan is in place; or
- 25% Neighbourhood CIL, where a Neighbourhood Plan is in place.

Of the balance:

- 40% SANG
- 60% Strategic Infrastructure

Based on the above breakdown, responses to the questions are that:

- a. Neighbourhood CIL of £1,976,523.26. This has been used to support around 25 local projects around the Borough
- b. SANG payments of £3,238,163 (to 31 Mar 2022, SANG payments are monitored by Financial Year)
- c. CIL funds for strategic infrastructure of £4,473,096.10
- d. Admin fees of £526,908.39.”

Supplementary Question

No.

20. Question from Councillor Josh Brown

“The Portfolio Holder previously promised to stop what he called the “culture of piling them high”. With the latest update on the masterplan, can the Portfolio Holder reconfirm that there will be a 15-storey height limit to developments within the town centre, as previously promised?”

Reply from Councillor Liam Lyons

“I have never given a commitment that the town centre Masterplan would limit the height of future developments to 15 storeys.

The emerging Masterplan has always sought a consensus on a vision for Woking town centre, including guidance on what height might be considered acceptable to residents for future development, whilst taking the existing townscape into account. The previous administration favoured extremely high rise development and the lack of clear planning guidance over several years has allowed a number of very high developments, initially refused by the Planning Committee, to gain planning permission on appeal. Unfortunately, those appeal decisions have had a permanent impact on the future townscape, not least on the heights of future developments in the town centre. The draft town centre Masterplan seeks to address this by proposing specific height limits on each site, taking the height of existing buildings (including those for which planning permission has already been granted, but not yet built) into consideration.”

Supplementary Question

“Yes I do. The Master Plan would have capped the developments in the town centre to 14 storeys. The Leader previously stated that the new administration, and I quote, are hopefully stopping the huge number of skyscrapers and, and accused the previous administration of given free rein for developers to reach for the skies, so can you confirm that the height limit of 14 stories will remain?”

Reply from Councillor Liam Lyons

“Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I’m not sure where that height limit of 14 stories came from. The draft Town Centre Master Plan sites individual height limits on, on different sites, so some are 14, I think the highest is 28, but the, the draft master plan when it was put together was meant to reflect the character of the town and, unfortunately, because of the lack of planning regulation for some years, we have a number of very high structures which will have been allowed on appeal even when a local planning committee has refused them and that has set a precedent which makes it very difficult to, to go down from those heights in, in, in some cases. So yes, the master plan will limit heights and it will be limited for different heights on different sites and hopefully give clarity to developers, but I just don't recognise where that blanket 14 stories come from it didn't come from me.”

7. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE WBC23-009.

Councillor A-M Barker moved and Councillor W Forster seconded the reception and adoption of the report and recommendations from the meetings of the Executive held on 8 December 2022 and 19 January 2022.

7.1 Empty Homes Plan EXE22-049

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Johnson, introduced the recommendations of the Executive in respect of the proposal to adopt the Empty Homes Plan for 2022 to 2027. The Plan set out how the Council would seek to achieve three key priorities, namely to minimise the number of empty homes through interventions, to maximise the opportunities for returning empty homes back to use through initiatives and incentives, and to maximise the effectiveness of enforcement action to bring empty homes back into use. The targets set were realistic and had been based on what was considered achievable over the five years, recognising the amount of time each investigation took.

The proposals were welcomed by the Council and the Portfolio Holder responded to points raised during the debate before the Mayor referred Members to the recommendations of the Executive.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the Empty Homes Plan 2022 – 2027, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be adopted; and
- (ii) the Strategic Director - Communities be delegated authority to make minor amendments to the Empty Homes Plan in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

7.2 Notice of Motion - Cllr S Dorsett - Renaming of Henry Plaza EXE23-018

In December 2022, the Council had received a notice of motion from Councillor Dorsett which proposed the renaming of Henry Plaza to Queen Elizabeth II Plaza. The motion stated:

“The passing of Her Majesty Queen is one of the most important events in our lifetime. Many Woking residents, including current and former Councillors, made the journey to Westminster to pay tribute by “Queuing for the Queen”. Our own events over that week, including the Proclamation of the new King, and the moment of National Reflection, were extremely well attended by Woking residents, and Jubilee Square was fill to capacity. Given the strength of feeling Woking residents clearly have for the Royal Family and especially to the memory of Her Majesty the Queen, we are proposing a permanent tribute to Her Majesty. With that in mind it is proposed we rename Henry Plaza, the newest part of the Victoria Place, to Queen Elizabeth II Plaza.

Given that the Plaza opened in March of this year, the same year of her Platinum Jubilee and her untimely passing, it feels right in this year we can commemorate her memory with this tribute. Few residents are aware of the reasoning behind the current name of Henry Plaza. But having it be named Queen Elizabeth II Plaza, along with Jubilee Square and the Victoria Place itself, feels thematically constant. This tribute will reflect the love and admiration for her felt by our Woking community.”

The motion had been referred to the Executive for consideration and, at its meeting in January 2023, the Executive had recommended that the motion should not be supported. The square had been named after Henry Cawsey, a local resident who had served on both Surrey County Council and Woking Borough Council. He had been a Borough Councillor for over fifty years, had been elected Mayor and had been chosen as one of the first Eminent Citizen’s of Woking. The Executive had, however, supported the ambition to commemorate the life of the Queen and alternative locations would be considered.

In introducing the recommendation of the Executive, the Portfolio Holder for Special Projects, Councillor Forster, further advised the Council of the legal and financial implications of a name change of the nature proposed. A street name change recently reported in the press, for example, had revealed that it had cost the local Authority £185,000. It was emphasised that Members supported the idea behind the motion but that Henry Plaza was not suitable, recognising the likely costs involved and the upset the proposal had caused for the family of Henry Cawsey. It was therefore reiterated that other locations would be explored for a suitable memorial and that a plaque would be erected in Henry Plaza setting out the significant contribution Henry Cawsey had made to the Borough for over half a century.

Councillor Dorsett spoke in support of the motion, stressing that the proposal sought to achieve a lasting memorial of the Queen, recognising the impact she had had on generations. He had not intended any disrespect to the family of Henry Cawsey, though noted that many residents were unaware of the former Councillor and Mayor.

The Members debated the merits of the motion before the Portfolio Holder responded to the key points raised. The Mayor advised that, in view of the nature of the debate, the recommendation of the Executive would be put to a vote in accordance with Standing Order 10.8. The names of Members voting for and against the recommendation, were recorded as follows:

In favour:	Councillors Dr H Akberali, T Aziz, A-M Barker, A Boote, W Forster, P Graves, I Johnson, D Jordan, A Kirby, R Leach, L Lyons, L Morales, J Morley, E Nicholson, S Oades, M I Raja, D Roberts, J Sanderson and T Spencer.
Total in favour:	19
Against:	Councillors A Azad, J Brown, K Davis, S Dorsett, G Elson, C Kemp and M Whitehand.
Total against:	7
Present not voting:	The Mayor, Councillor S Hussain.
Total present not voting:	1

The recommendation was therefore carried by 19 votes in favour and 7 votes against.

RESOLVED

That the motion be not supported.

7.3 Notice of Motion - Cllr S Dorsett - Minutes of Council Meetings EXE23-019

At its meet in January 2023, the Executive had considered a further motion submitted by Councillor Dorsett in respect of the minutes of meetings of the Council. Whilst the original motion had referred solely to the minutes of Council meetings, the Executive proposed an amended motion which would ensure that the proposals would apply equally to the minutes of the Executive. The Leader of the Council therefore advised that the Executive had supported the motion as amended below (with the additional wording highlighted in bold):

“Openness and Transparency are vital to the workings of this Council. Therefore the minutes of Full Council should adequately reflect members supplementary questions to the Leader and the Executive.

At present Councillor Questions to Full Council are recorded with the written answers given as a printed document. However supplementary questions and answers are not minuted.

This means the only way for our residents to understand the supplementary question and subsequent answer is to watch the meeting from the webcast.

We want to make it as easy as possible for our residents to engage with the work we as a council do therefore moving forwards this Council resolves to include in the minutes all Supplementary Questions from members, along with the answers given. This will allow our residents to better understand and follow how the Executive is held to account by members. **Furthermore, the Council resolves to include in the minutes of the Executive all public questions, supplementary questions and the answers given at meetings of the Executive.”**

The proposals were welcomed by the Members and the amended wording was agreed by the Council.

RESOLVED

That the Motion, to be amended to include Public Questions to the Executive, be supported.

7.4 Notice of Motion - Cllr W Forster - Community Diagnostic Centre in Woking EXE23-020

At the meeting of Council in December 2022, Councillor Forster had presented a notice of motion which welcomed the recent decision to open a community diagnostic centre at Woking Community Hospital. The motion stated that:

“This Council notes that our residents’ closest diagnostic centres are currently in Ashford, Chertsey and Guildford. At present Woking residents often have to travel outside the Borough for medical tests or a diagnosis.

This Council warmly welcomes and fully supports the decision to open a community diagnostic centre at Woking Community Hospital. The planned expansion of a diagnostic hub in Woking is in line with the NHS Long Term Plan will provide a local, accessible service for our residents. The Council recognises that access to the new services has the potential to improve our residents quality of life and may help to save lives.

This Council believes that the decision to open a strategic community diagnostic hub in Woking is a clear example of this authority’s close working relationship with our key partners, especially Ashford and St Peters NHS Trust, Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care Board and CSH.”

The Leader of the Council introduced the recommendation of the Executive to support the motion in recognition of the significant benefits the new centre would bring for the residents of the Borough. Councillor Forster spoke strongly in support of the motion, and the confirmation of the diagnostic hub was welcomed by the Councillors.

RESOLVED

That the Motion be supported.

8. ALLOCATION OF POLLING PLACES WBC23-007.

The Leader of the Council introduced a report which set out the outcome of a review of three polling places, and recommended the designation of three new polling places. The three polling places – Oaktree School, Barnsbury Primary School and Nursery and the Lightbox on Chobham Road – had been reviewed amid concerns over availability, accessibility and disruption to schools. As a result, three new locations had been identified, comprising Sutton Avenue, the Lighthouse, Barnsbury and the Welcome Church.

The report outlined the considerations the Council had to take into account when reviewing polling places, in particular around accessibility. The Council noted that the proposals had been considered at a recent meeting of the Elections Panel, the Chairman of which, Claire Storey, was present at the Council meeting. The Councillors for the Wards affected welcomed the proposal and the benefits it would bring for electors and the local schools.

The Council thanked the Officers for their work in identifying suitable alternative sites and noted the measures that would be taken to ensure the electors were advised of the new arrangements.

RESOLVED

That the designation of the following sites as polling places be agreed:

- Sutton Avenue, St John's West polling district in the St John's Ward;
- The Lighthouse Barnsbury, Barnsbury polling district in the Heathlands Ward; and
- The Welcome Church, Town Centre/Town Centre North polling district in the Canalside Ward.

9. APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES 2022-23 WBC23-006.

Following his appointment to the Executive with effect from 1 January 2023, Councillor Graves had stood down from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Planning Committee, the Standards and Audit Committee and the Standards Panel. The report proposed the appointment of Councillor Leach to the resulting vacancies for the remainder of the Municipal Year, after he had stood down from the Executive. The membership of working groups and task groups was unaffected.

RESOLVED

That Councillor Leach be appointed to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Planning Committee, the Standards and Audit Committee and the Standards Panel for the remainder of the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

10. APPOINTMENT OF STATUTORY OFFICER WBC23-008.

The Council received a report which dealt with the management arrangements resulting from the resignation of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services. The report

recommended appointments to five statutory positions held by the Director; these were: the Council's Monitoring Officer, the Deputy Electoral Registration Officer, the Data Protection Officer, the Senior Information Risk Manager and the Caldicott Guardian. An explanation of each of the roles was included in the report.

RESOLVED

- That (i) Gareth John, Interim Director of Legal and Democratic Services designate, be appointed as Monitoring Officer, Deputy Electoral Registration Officer and Data Protection Officer with effect from 3rd April 2023;
- (ii) Kevin Foster, Strategic Director of Corporate Resource, be appointed as Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) with immediate effect; and
- (iii) Louise Strongitharm, Strategic Director of Communities, be appointed as Caldicott guardian with immediate effect.

11. NOTICES OF MOTION.

No notices of motion had been received.

12. ANNOUNCEMENT OF NOMINATION OF DEPUTY MAYOR 2023/24.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor A-M Barker, announced the intention to nominate Councillor Louise Morales as Deputy Mayor for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

The meeting commenced at 7.05 pm
and ended at 8.59 pm

Chairman: _____

Date: _____