

Minutes of the Annual Town

A meeting of the **Annual Town** was held on **Monday 22nd May 2023** at **19:00 hrs** at the **The Chamber Room, Bicester Town Council, Launton Road, Bicester, Oxon OX26 6PS.**

Present:

Cllr Tom Beckett
Cllr Nick Cotter
Cllr Donna Ford
Cllr Dan Hallett
Cllr Sam Holland
Cllr Harry Knight
Cllr Jamie Jessett
Cllr Damien Maguire
Cllr Rachel Mallows
Cllr Christopher Pruden
Cllr Les Sibley
Cllr Jim Webb
Cllr Paul Wheatley

In Attendance:

Phil Evans, Town Clerk
Dominic Hilton, Administration officer (Civic and Democratic)

44/ Apologies for Absence

2324 RESOLVED that apologies were received for Cllr Nicholas Mawer, Cllr Nick Cotter and Cllr Rich Oliver

45/ Minutes

2324 RESOLVED to confirm the minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on:

Monday 16th May 2022

46/ Town Mayor's Report

2324 No report given.

47/ Reports from the Town Council for 2022/2023

2324 RESOLVED that reports were given on behalf of Bicester Town Council:

Environment Committee

This committee deals with the upkeep of our town open spaces, play areas and cemetery as well as through its working group the Events committee organises all the council events held throughout the year.

During the year we welcomed Paul Canning to the team as Service Manager.

It has been a busy year with council continuing with the refurbishment / up grading of its play areas including Keble, Banbury Road, Bisley and Villiers Road with more to come in the new council year including an ambitious project to turn Garth Park into a showcase including splash park.

We took over the management of the Whiteland's Farm Sports facility during the year and are working closely with all the sports teams in Bicester via the sports working group to ensure that we understand their needs/wants to ensure facilities meet these.

Garth Park footpaths have been resurfaced during this year programme care was taken to ensure it did not cause any damage to the roots of our trees.

The events committee welcomed Shannon O'Connor to the team this year. Events saw a series of fantastic events during the year including 2 sell out summer events.

Finance Committee

The Finance committee working with our newly appointed Responsible Finance Officer Sharon Botham has continued to keep a tight hold on expenditure so much so that we expect the year end accounts to record a small underspend against budget.

The committee is very conscious of the strain on resident's finance and will always strive to keep any precept increase to a minimum whilst making sure our service to residents is maintained and improved where possible.

Policy Committee

The policy committee has been busy working on many leases during the year including Whiteland's Sports Facility, Whiteland's 1st floor lease, Bowls Club, CAB as well as various leases for land around the town. The upcoming year will see us consider leases/land transfers for land on the Kingsmere development which is currently unadopted.

The policy committee has continued its scheduled review of policies as they fell due or changes in law required updates. Amongst these policies a new sale of land policy was produced and the flag raising policy was amended to give it more flexibility.

Planning Committee

Last year, the Town Council considered a large number of planning applications from private individuals to extend and modify their homes and for the vast majority of these, no comment was particularly required. Many applications were welcomed especially for the development of small businesses.

The Town Council also considered a number of larger planning applications. The Town Council provided a long list of planning-based objections to the Bicester Village application to build on Oxford Road. Other applications that were objected to included the Churchill retirement home, the demolition of the magistrates court and an application to convert shops in sheep street into flats with no retail space.

One smaller application that the Town Council objected to, was the plan to build a number of houses on the small car park by the shops on Southwold

The Town Council's planning committee watched with alarm, a growth in the number of planning applications for houses of multiple occupancy, not a bad thing in themselves, but where they are sited inappropriately, they have the propensity to bring parking chaos to neighbouring streets.

We did support the District Council in its bid for planning permission to develop the D8 site on Graven Hill to be a new depot for Bicester and the South of the District.

On North West Bicester, we were alarmed by the attempts of Firethorn and Hallam land

to expand the boundaries of their developments and to water down the eco credentials. This cannot be allowed to happen. Unfortunately, in the case of Hallam Land it is believed that the need to find funds to replace those removed by the County Council to build the re-aligned Howes Lane is behind the viability request to expand the boundary.

We also expressed alarm and support of the position of CPRE over the giant Padbury Brook Solar farm on the outskirts of Bicester but well within the leisure use area of Bicester residents. Solar panels should be installed on roofs and brownfield

**48/ Reports from Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District
2324 Councillors servicing Bicester Wards**

RESOLVED that reports were given on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council officers and Cherwell District Council officers and the following points were covered:

Report from Cllr Nicholas Mawer, Cherwell District Council

It was my honour to be the Portfolio holder for housing at CDC last year.

One of our major priorities is preventing people becoming homeless before they present. 80% of cases are dealt with ahead of crisis, so only 20% of all the people who are at risk become homeless though this number of course is too high and a tragedy for all involved.

My department also provided hundreds of minor works and Disabled facilities grant works in order for example to help keep elderly folk in their homes or to make homes suitable for disabled people and thereby in both cases ease NHS hospital bed blocking.

Throughout Cherwell there are about 14 rough sleepers but the individuals involved are not typically on the streets for as long as two months. There are no entrenched cases. So every month it is a different 14 folk.

There are about 37 people in temporary accommodation.

There are about 2000 applicants on Cherwell's housing register. There were 546 lets. There is a particular problem with families needing 4 or 5 bed homes. Remember that these people can only have affordable housing if it is built. We have to have more houses built in the district or we will not solve this problem or reduce the number of people on our register.

At the year end 117 properties were built for affordable rent, 59 for shared ownership and 5 for social rent.

There was a massive increase in demand for Housing Standards interventions, mostly for damp and mould and mostly as a result of the tragic death of Awaab Ishak

My department was managing the settlement of asylum seekers and refugees from Syria and Afghanistan in houses and in hotels. We were also involved with the Ukrainian resettlement scheme and I am personally proud to have been hosting a Ukrainian for the last 6 months.

Finally following an amended resolution at Full Council, officers are preparing a Tenants charter for the just under 200 tenants that the council has directly. (We can't have any more without opening a Housing Revenue account which is a massive and costly piece of work which we would need if we only had 201 tenants) Our tenants charter could be used as a model for other landlords

On a ward level, I am still hopeful that we can increase the wooded area on Bure Park and diversify the types of trees in the woodland as the white poplars are beginning to fail.

Report from Cllr Michael Waine, Oxfordshire County Council

We have consistently been active in safeguarding the best interests of our town in planning matters:

Waverley House, Queens Avenue (Formerly the Magistrates Court) - we provided written objections to demolition and the building of 48 high rise flats, given the local listing of the building, the negative impact of the proposed development on the area, along with the lack of car parking facilities on site for residents and visitors. The proposed development was also contrary to the local plan. CDC refused permission.

Councillor Sibley subsequently attended and spoke at the Planning Appeal Hearing to underline our objections, and fortunately, the appeal was rejected.

Pakefield House, St. Johns Street – We objected at the bulk, scale, and massing of the proposed four store building/development, and its impact on neighbouring properties which are listed and in the Town Conservation Area. Permission was refused by CDC but granted on appeal.

Industrial Warehouses off Howes Lan (Albion Land Phase 3) – again objected, refused by CDC, but granted after an appeal hearing which Councillor Sibley attended and spoke underlining that housing was the key to the delivery of the re-aligned Howes Lane, not more warehouses.

Realigned Howes Lane – Oxfordshire County Council at its Cabinet Meeting in December 2021 agreed to the removal of the allocated Government funding from the much-needed A4095 project to fund the A34 Lodge Hill interchange scheme, and to increase the funding for the Milton Heights Pedestrian and cycle bridge in the Vale. We strongly objected, and are still unsure of these schemes status.

Banbury Road roundabout development – given the disregard of residents views on the proposals we are very concerned to see the budget for the revised traffic-lighted 'roundabout' leaps to £10.7million. These funds would be better spent on the Howes Lane realignment.

SE Link Road -As members we continue to press for this essential relief road to become a reality taking the growing A41 traffic away from Bicester given the growth of the town in the south, both on the London and Oxford roads. We are pleased to see the first Section 106 monies earmarked for the scheme.

Health Hub – Plans for the Super Surgery at Graven Hill will not go ahead, and we gather that GP surgeries earmarked for closure will be refurbished and remain open. We will continue to press for medical facilities in the right locations, readily accessible to

residents. We continue to press for our community hospital to be fully developed with facilities commensurate with a town our size.

London Road Crossing – Victoria Prentis MP has established regular meetings the EW Rail officials with regard to the London Road crossing. Unfortunately, by their own admission, EW Rail has quite deliberately left this issue to the last-minute meaning that any viable options are limited in the extreme. The main aim of the group of representative local councillors is to keep the crossing open and to review any feasible alternative option(s) offered.

Oxfordshire re-cycling – We are delighted that once again Oxfordshire is top local authority for re-cycling, now for the ninth year running!

20mph speed limits – Whilst generally supporting 20 mph limits on town estates, side roads and by schools we have expressed concerns regarding strategic routes into and out of the town. We have asked for a full consultation with towns people, and we will act accordingly.

Potholes and deferred schemes – We are growingly concerned about the number of potholes and often quality of re-instatement, and also the deferment of agreed patching and re-surfacing schemes. The County needs to use its legal powers more often to ensure that public service providers and their contractors re-instate roads and pathways properly and return for remedial work.

Making consultation matter – We fully support the County Administration in its desire to consult over local issues, but feel very strongly that the local voice needs to be heard and acted upon!

**49/ Consideration of any written resolutions of which the Parish Clerk has
2324 been given three days' notice**

RESOLVED that Council **NOTED** the **RESOLUTION** given by residents in Bicester regarding the Garth Park Christmas Light Trail.

50/ Appointments to Outside Bodies

2324 RESOLVED that Mrs Diana Edwards as a trustee of the Bicester Feoffee charity for the ensuing 4 years

51/ Public Questions and Comments

2325 RESOLVED that Council **NOTED** the following:

Mr Barrow commented: The environmental impact of the diesel generators for the Garth Park Light Trail.

Mrs Perry commented: Regarding the marketing of the Annual town meeting and subsequent council meetings.

52/ Date of Next Meeting

2324 Monday 20th May 2024 – 7pm – venue to be confirmed.

Close of meeting: 19:32