

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting

A meeting of the Bicester Town Council was held on **Monday, 20th May 2024** at **19:00 hrs** at **The Chamber Room, Bicester Town Council, Launton Road, Bicester, Oxon OX26 6PS**.

Present:

Cllr Damien Maguire - **Chair**
Cllr Jim Webb – **Vice - Chair**
Cllr Donna Ford
Cllr Sam Holland
Cllr Rachel Mallows
Cllr Nicholas Mawer
Cllr Christopher Pruden
Cllr Alisa Russell
Cllr Les Sibley
Cllr Paul Wheatley
Cllr John Willett

In Attendance:

Phil Evans, Town Clerk
Helen Pool, Responsible Finance Officer

1/2425 Apologies for Absence

RESOLVED that apologies were received for: Cllr Nick Cotter, Cllr Tom Beckett and Cllr Dan Hallett.

2/2425 Minutes of the Annual town

RESOLVED to confirm the minutes of the Annual Town Meeting upon the amendment to include the Planning Report for 2022/2023 on:
Monday, 16th May 2022.

3/2425 Reports from the Town Council 2023/2024

RESOLVED that Cllr Maguire reported on the following points over the year 2023/2024 for the **Environment Committee**

- Southwold Play area is now complete.
- Memorial Bench
- Bicester Pride
- Nai's House event
- The Wessex mower was in the process of being replaced.
- Winter and summer bedding has taken place.
- We welcome John Burnett as the new Facilities Manager.

RESOLVED that Cllr Mallows reported on the year 2023/2024 for the Policy Committee:
It has been an honour to chair the committee for the past 12 months and I appreciate the opportunity it brings to shape the council and to work with townsfolk, officers and councillors to make that happen. We also had guidance from Cllr Sibley to assist and I was ably assisted by Cllr Wheatley as Vice.

Opening the year, the committee had the following on its forward plan:

1. Closure policy for cemetery
2. Retention of assets policy
3. Future management of 'new' open space play areas
4. New burial ground and memorial policy
5. Working on town centre group
6. 20mph speed limits

- Ongoing Policy Review

The Council currently has 30 policies. It is standard part of any organisation to periodically review policy and procedure and that is the primary role of this committee.

Upon taking over the role, it was pleasing to discover that this task had been performed assiduously so there was no backlog of policies to review. Each policy is generally reviewed on a three-year basis or sooner if necessary.

Over the last 12 months we have reviewed 10 policies including;

1. GP3 Fraud & Corruption
2. GP7 Grant Aid
3. GP12 Freedom of Information
4. GP13 Sponsorship
5. GP14 Partnerships with Outside Bodies
6. GP20 Allotment Inspection
7. GP22 Flag Flying
8. GP24 Tree Management Policy
9. GP26 Councillor Vacancy Policy
10. GP27 Sale of Land

- Other

Allotment Tenancy Agreement Update – A substantial change to the existing agreement that has been largely directed by the working party to better meet the needs of sensible and prudent management of the Council's allotment assets whilst providing individual tenants with greater clarity.

Visit from Mr Matthew Barber, Police & Crime Commissioner Thames Valley Police.

New Leases Signed

1. Jubilee Lake / Thames Water
2. Citizens Advice Bureau
3. BRFC SLA
4. Ground Maintenance Contract
5. Nai's House Lease

Summary

Firstly, I would like to thank my fellow committee members for their invaluable inputs at every meeting.

Secondly, I would like to thank our Chief Clerk, Mr Phil Evans for his expert guidance on how to chair meetings; his experience firstly as Services Manager and now as Town Clerk, he has an acute sense of what the council's operation needs and how policy should support that.

I propose that going forward we analyse our existing policies to a greater degree and consider cases to stress test our policies. We should also look at policies from peer councils to identify areas we could develop further and there could be an opportunity to develop relations with other Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire councils for knowledge sharing.

So let us mark my homework based on the list I was handed at the beginning of the year:

1. Closure policy for cemetery
2. New burial ground and memorial policy
3. Retention of assets policy
4. Future management of 'new' open space play areas
5. Working on town centre group

This is an area where I have been outspoken upon and so have several members of the council. This area of discussion has rightly spilled over to the full council. It is my belief that CDC's view of a town centre working group was extremely narrow and failed any reasonable test of being representative of interested parties or townsfolk.

Following a discussion between all councillors I am pleased that we, BTC took up a position on the working group. I am also heartened that the individual officer that led the project has departed and with the change of Administration at CDC, that we will in future see a. a plan that local people can embrace, b. actually see plans become reality. Market Square is in a dire state of repair and is an embarrassment to our town.

6. 20mph speed limits

20 mph speed limits are like marmite, it makes the topic of Brexit look like a mere disagreement. Some people see them as fundamental attack on their right to drive at whatever speed they want, another example of the woke agenda that if we accept will inevitably end with us living in some 15-minute, Big Brother dystopia, eating tofu.

Others see them as a way for their children to not get run over.

We need to not lose sight of the fact that where significant 20mph zones have been implemented in Oxfordshire, it is after a consultation with the population.

I am heartened to see therefore that following OCC's recent stage one consultation from the start of this year, that there was actually some consensus. Although only 5% of local households took part, it was apparent that few were in favour of making all roads within town 20mph including the main roads of Buckingham, Launton and Banbury roads. Similarly, more were in favour (strongly agree/agree) with housing estates and outside parades of

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Signed

Dated

shops. Interestingly OCC didn't ask the question or provide the results for, areas around schools.

RESOLVED that Cllr Wheatley reported on the 2023/2024 for the Finance Committee.

The Finance Committee welcomes our newly appointed Responsible Finance Officer Helen Pool who has continued to keep a tight hold on expenditure so that we expect the year end accounts to record a small underspend against budget that will be allocated to earmarked reserves for future projects. The Council has approved a balanced budget for the new financial year.

4/2425 Reports from Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Councillors servicing Bicester Wards.

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

Report from Cllr Miller of Oxfordshire County Council reported on:

- Transport and seven-mile road resurfacing is ongoing.
- The delegated decision meeting regarding the Cycle Report that will not proceed. There will be further representation.
- Foster Care Fortnight is in progress.
- School Meals: The Cabinet will maintain and continue school meals for lunch.
- The Oxford United Football Club and surrounding traffic. Legal documents have been agreed. OCC Highways have objected to the planning application and there is a determination of planning outstanding. The details for health and safety issues have not yet been resolved.
- Howes Lane Project. Recommendation has been made by the Housing Board. Councillors enquired about the refunding issue and recommendations have been made by the Housing Board. Cllr Miller responded saying that Oxfordshire County Council held the funds and would not block the groups decision.
- Banbury Road roundabout development: Cllr Ford said permission had been given to close from 1st July and the Fringford Road will not be closed at the same time.

Report From Cllr Waine; Cllr Ford and Cllr Sibley for Oxfordshire County Council

We have consistently been active in safeguarding the best interests of our town in planning and other matters of importance to the residents of Bicester.

Realigned Howes Lane – Oxfordshire County Council at its Cabinet Meeting in December 2021 agreed to the removal of the allocated Government funding towards the much-needed A4095 project. Since that time the scheme has been, more or less dormant. Even with very regular promptings from councillors much time has been lost on this vital piece of road infrastructure. However, there is a glimmer of activity to get matters moving forward, and at last seeing the railway under-bridge, completed in April 2021, put to use. It is interesting to note that OCC has indicated that it is willing to return just over £4 million of the original £15.75million to the project!

Banbury Road roundabout development – given the disregard of residents views on the proposals we were very concerned to see the budget for the revised traffic-lighted 'roundabout' leap to £10.7million, funds better spent on the Howes Lane realignment. The management of the project has led to serious concerns. Most recently residents of Bure Park

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will be left without easy access to a bus service whilst Banbury Road is closed for months – the nearest bus stop after Elmsbrook being at Buckingham Road.

SE Link Road - As members we continue to press for this essential relief road to become a reality taking the ever-growing A41 traffic away from Bicester especially given the growth of the town in the south, both on the London and Oxford roads. Even with Section 106 monies being earmarked for the scheme we continue to press the County Council to give the scheme priority, especially given the planned growth of the town in the south, the London Road crossing issue, and developments on the edge of the town including Sieman's and Wolf Water Resort. Unfortunately, the Administration has seemingly been more concerned with matters at the southern end of the county and Oxford.

We continue to press for medical facilities in the right locations, readily accessible to residents and 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 for herself and councillors 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) when offered.

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

20mph speed limits – We asked for a full consultation with towns people and said we would act accordingly. An 'informal' consultation took place earlier this year through the Garth Gazette with clear preferences being shown. We are now waiting to understand what the next step will be!

Cycling in Sheep Street proposal – We have actively pressed for a full public consultation on the proposal to allow two-way cycling at all times in Sheep Street. The very limited 'consultation' unfortunately failed to consult the main user group, pedestrians. The proposal did not in any way seek to deal with issues such as: safety and access from north and south ends of the street. We understand the proposal to be on 'hold' with the promise of a full consultation of all residents, both of Bicester and of surrounding villages. We sincerely hope that the voice of local people will count!

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, particularly in the town centre. The County needs to use its legal powers more often to ensure that public service providers and their contractors reinstate roads and pathways properly and return for remedial work. There is also an unacceptable backlog in street lighting repairs and maintenance.

For the last eighteen years we as local councillors have greatly benefitted from a very positive working relationship with local Highways Officers through regular informal meetings, however, this has broken down much to the detriment of dealing with local issues/matters quickly and in the best interests of residents. A commitment to restore these 'surgeries' has yet to happen!

Making consultation matter – We fully support the County Administration in its expressed desire to consult over local issues/changes but feel very strongly that the local voice needs to be heard and not a central view imposed!!

Report from Cllr Mawer for Cherwell District Council:

It was my pleasure to have served as the Portfolio holder for Housing last year
My team created a charter for tenants that would serve as an example for all landlords and tenants whether Housing Associations or Private
The main focus of the homelessness team is on prevention. In fact 80% of cases never progressed to actual homelessness.
The team was also heavily involved in placing refugees from Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan.
As a member of the Shareholder committee for Graven Hill, I can confirm that the Council has received a return on its investment. The sale of the D1 and D8 sites allowing this.

Report from Cllr Mawer on the Countess of Jersey Educational Trust:

There are 8 trustees and a clerk. One each of the trustees is from Bicester School and Cooper School

The trust has £130,183 invested in the COIF Charities investment Fund

The charity received income from investments of £3818

20% of the fund is distributed to elderly needy residents of Middleton Stony
£2900 pounds was distributed to pupils going to university or apprenticeships with a higher weighting given to students who live in Middleton Stony. All pupils were students of Bicester School or Cooper School, but no rep from Cooper school was present to offer additional insight into the relative needs of any of their pupils. 20 applicants received contributions.

Heyford School has not engaged with the Trust.

The trust is considering engaging with Whitelands Academy

However, if the trust has too many applicants, then the value of each grant which is relatively small anyway, would be seriously diminished. There is no obligation in the trusts charter to widen the scope of engagement.

Report from Cllr Ford for Cherwell District Council:

Consultants have been appointed for the Market Square and it is required that we invite them to give a presentation. We have attempted to put together a Town Centre Task Group and only one business offered to join despite attempts to get more involved.

5/2425 Consideration of any written resolutions of which the Town clerk has been given three days' notice.

No resolutions were **RECEIVED**.

6/2425 Public Questions and Comments

RESOLVED that Council **NOTED** the following:

Mr Broady raised the following issue regarding the 20mph speed limits for the Langford Estate. Documents were produced on how it was going to be laid out. Mallards Way have been campaigning for 20mph.

Cllr Ford will chase this up. Unfortunately, the person dealing with the consultation has left. There was a consultation in the Garth Gazette and it was an informal consultation.

Mr Broady stated that the Rodney House Roundabout to Launton Road was still being used by 42 tonne trucks down the London Road to Launton.

Cllr Ford that this would be brought up at the next Traffic Meeting.

Mr Broady enquired about the South East Relief Road Consultation, 4 routes where bridge was going to be.

Ms. Clements asked if the Market Square consultation was open to residents, and it was confirmed that only shops and retails were currently being consulted.

Ms. Clements raised the issue of the Level Crossing by the railway line that causes a tailback up in traffic.

Councillors advised that the signalling had been adjusted to as much as possible due to the speed and size of the trains. They are keen for residents to attend the latest consultation regarding this matter.

7/2425 Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 24th June 2024, 7.00pm – The Chamber Room, Bicester Town Council

Close of meeting: 21.30hrs