

Minutes of the Bicester Town Council

A meeting of the **Bicester Town Council** was held on **Monday 20th January 2025** at **19:00 hrs** at **The Chamber Room, Bicester Town Council, The Garth, Launton Road, Bicester, Oxon OX26 6PS.**

Present:

Cllr Damien Maguire (Chair)
Cllr Alisa Russell (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Chris Pruden
Cllr Dan Hallett
Cllr Donna Ford
Cllr Jim Webb
Cllr Les Sibley
Cllr Nick Cotter
Cllr Paul Wheatley
Cllr Rachel Mallows
Cllr Sam Holland
Cllr Tom Beckett

In Attendance:

Phil Evans – Town Clerk
Helen Pool – Responsible Finance Officer
Martin Fraukum – Solicitor (Whitelands)
Jane Olds – SLCC
Julia Harrington – Cherwell District Council – Market Square Update
Carole Hetherington – Chairman Langford Village Community Association – London Road

40/ Apologies for Absence

2425 RESOLVED that apologies for absence were received from Cllr Harry Knight, Cllr Nick Mawer and Cllr John Willet.

41/ Declarations of Interest

2425 RESOLVED that no declarations of interest were received.

42/ Public Session

2425 Carole Hetherington – Chair Langford Village Community, talked about the London Road Crossing. This is an important crossing that affects traffic in all wards. There are approximately 62,000 vehicles moving over the crossing causing crowding, and congested roads. This effects the outer roads that people are diverting on to and impacts the villages. This has a negative impact on the income in the villages and also results in people from villages travelling to other towns, for example Upper Heyford commute to Banbury is as easy as going to Bicester. The maximum required would be 7 ½ ton vehicle limit with pedestrians and cyclists. She asked for the Council to vote in favour for access along London Road to help the villages.

43/ Minutes of Town Council Meeting

2425 RESOLVED that Council **APPROVED** the **MINUTES** and **RESOLUTIONS** contained in the minutes of the following meetings proposed by Cllr. Maguire and seconded by Cllr Hallett:

Minutes: BTC05/2425: Bicester Town Council
Monday 20th January 2025

Page 1 of 7

Signed

Dated

- **BTC05/2425 – Monday 14th October 2024**

44/ Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting

2425 RESOLVED that Council **APPROVED** the **MINUTES** and **RESOLUTIONS** contained in the minutes of the following meeting proposed by Cllr. Russell and seconded by Cllr Wheatley. :

- **FIN02/2425 – Tuesday 9th July 2024**

45/ Minutes of the Planning committee Meeting

2425 RESOLVED that Council **APPROVED** the **MINUTES** and **RESOLUTIONS** contained in the minutes of the following meetings proposed by Cllr. Maguire and seconded by Cllr Webb:

- **PL03/2425 – Tuesday 3rd September 2024**

46/ Minutes of the Policy Committee Meeting

2425 RESOLVED that Council **APPROVED** the **MINUTES** and **RESOLUTIONS** contained in the minutes of the following meetings proposed by Cllr. Wheatley and seconded by Cllr Mallows. :

- **POL01/2425 – Tuesday 18th June 2024**
- **POL02/2425 – Monday 16th September 2024**
- **POL03/2425 – Tuesday 8th October 2024**

47/ Minutes of the Working Parties Meeting

2425 RESOLVED that Council **APPROVED** the **MINUTES** and **RESOLUTIONS** contained in the minutes of the following meetings proposed by Cllr. Maguire and seconded by Cllr Ford:

- **BTAG02/2425 – Thursday 19th September 2024**

48/ Market Square CDC Update

2425 Julia Harrington – Cherwell District Council, explained that the Bicester Square Market project had an engagement event in July that had not be positive, however, the November event was productive. They have hosted other business and member events and over 1500 people on an online survey. There are two options being considered: 1. To keep parking in the Market Square as it is with improvements with seating, lighting and planting. 2. Have a wider layout with seating and plants.

The next event will be at The Chesterton on the 27th January 2025. All are invited and there will be 3 options presented. Further events will be on the 29th in the library and 31st January at the Market on Sheep Street, where they can see the plans. This will then be reduced to one preferred plan in February which will then be discussed with OCC to plan

Minutes: BTC05/2425: Bicester Town Council
Monday 20th January 2025

Page 2 of 7

Signed

Dated

the roll out.

They are still looking at the Sainsbury area to consider new lighting and seating, enhancing the area.

The Travel Lodge are is under review and will take 18 months to 2 years.

The East / West Rail and CDC are holding formal consultation regarding the under pass next Thursday.

Councillors expressed concern on the impact this would have on London Road and Market Square and whether vehicle access has been considered for the under pass. They also commented on the fact that this has been kicked down the road for a number of years without answers from CDC and CDC had not voiced concerns about access and the impact on traffic.

Ms. Harrington stated that they had only been asked about access and need enough evidence to consider vehicles. 400 People had expressed concern about the road by Market Square and they were working with the Transport Team regarding this.

She clarified that everyone has a voice, and they are trying to listen to all. They are changing the format on how people can feed into the CDC. They are creating an oversight group and need a Town Councillor to join. They are unhappy with East West Rail for diverting traffic through Market Square and they would consider attempting to get funds from them should this end up being the situation.

She further acknowledged that they haven't consulted well with the public and it would be good for some traffic to go through an underpass.

Cllr. Wheatley wanted to commend the work completed by the CDC team on the Bicester Square Market project and said it solidified matters; seconded by Cllr. Maguire.

49/ 2425 Budget Setting for 2025/2026

10.2 Alternative Budget Motion Proposal by Cllr Ford

It was agreed that the Motion Proposed by Cllr Ford be addressed first.

Cllr Ford introduced an alternative budget with minor amendments.

Cllr Ford proposed the motion, seconded by Cllr Holland.

RESOLVED, the Council voted against the motion.
In favour - 2, Against – 6 and Abstained – 3

10.1 Breakdown for Precept request

Councillors thanked the Town Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer for the work completed on the budget especially for the transparent lines with details. The proposed budget currently shows a minimal increase of £3.18 per year over what residents have

paid in 2024/2025. Last year, all residents had a decrease in what they paid but all towns are in a similar position this year.

Councillors contented, that historically a 2 to 3 % increase was added to the precept. However, we are not taking onboard the fact that the increase in the town Band D property level is partly due to the new estates and that the new estates do not get the same services from the various councils.

Other Councillors explained that we need to be prepared for future changes and plans. We need to invest for the Town Council in the future. We need reserves for any unforeseen projects that could occur such as the boiler that required replacement in the Bowls club. We also need to keep a reasonable reserve for the larger projects such as the cemetery. A top priority is to keep earmark reserves available should an opportunity arise to purchase land for this purpose.

Proposer – Cllr Russell; seconded – Cllr Beckett

RESOLVED the Committee **APPROVED** the precept with the understanding that the precept is subject to change once the Bank D numbers are confirmed by Cherwell District Council and **APPROVE** the amount of the precept of £1,872,967.62.

50/ 2425 Financial Reports Pass Through

In line with the Finance Regulations, the Council is asked to approve the following reports that have been approved through the relevant committees.

11.1 Outdoor Team Rest Room

RESOLVED the Committee **APPROVED** Supplier A, in line with the finance regulations, supporting the approval already given by the Environment and Finance Committee.

11.2 Asset Disposal

RESOLVED the Committee **APPROVED** the removal of the assets in the report in line with finance regulations, supporting the approval already given by the Environment and Finance Committee. Officers will try to sell the listed equipment as spare and repairs.
Proposer – Cllr Russell, Seconder – Tom Beckett

11.3 Earmarked Reserve Spend

RESOLVED that the Committee **APPROVED** the spend from Earmarked Reserves 901/9014 of £132,765.93 for the parks and gardens contract, in line with finance regulations, supporting the approval already given by the Finance Committee.
Proposer – Cllr Russell, Seconder – Tom Beckett

51/ 2425 Conclusion of Audit (Audit Report APPENDIX 1

12.1 Interim Audit

Councillors asked if the Responsible Finance Officer and Town Clerk accepted the performance by the Internal Auditor.

The Responsible Finance Officer explained that as this was the first interim audit for her, it would have been preferable to have an onsite audit as a learning tool, however, she was content with the audit and found the Auditor to be professionally helpful.

The Town Clerk confirmed that he was happy with the internal audit.

Councillors asked why the website was still not up to date as per the recommendation by the Interim Audit regarding minutes and agendas. They further pointed out that the agenda for the meeting had not been published within the times specified by Standing Orders. The Town Clerk explained that we have new staff that are currently being trained and that these are in the process of being updated on the website in line with training.

RESOLVED that the Councillors **NOTED** the information.

12.2 Independence and Competence of the Internal Auditor.

Councillors asked if we were under a retainer for the Internal Auditor.

The Town Clerk said the Auditor was covered under a retainer and we would reassess the situation towards the end of the period.

RESOLVED that the Committee **REVIEWED** the independence and competence of the Council's internal auditor in accordance with good practice guidance offered by the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG) Practitioners' Guidance published by NALC.

12.3 Notice of Conclusion of Audit and External Auditors Report.

The Committee **NOTED** the Notice of Conclusion of Audit and the report of the External Auditor as well as future actions required.

Councillor Stepping Down from Role

52/
2425 Cllr Webb officially stepped down as Deputy Town Mayor. Councillors thanked him for being an excellent Deputy who performed his duties in an exemplary manner.

Cllr Webb thanked the council for the opportunity representing the town as Deputy Town Mayor. Cllr Webb nominated Cllr Russell to the position, seconded by Cllr Wheatley.

RESOLVED that the Committee **APPROVED** the adjustment to roles for the year 2024/2025 and **APPROVED** the appointment of Cllr Russell as Deputy Town Clerk.

53/ Mayors Report

2425 **RESOLVED** that the Committee **NOTED** the Mayors report.

54/ Councillor Motion **2425 Motion 1**

Cllr Holland said that we need to be a voice in the community communicating to East West Rail what we require for the town. Allowing for light weight vehicles is giving in to East West Rail and we should be firm and resolute saying no to them. They need to be told that they need to investigate a solution to keep the access open.

Cllr Holland proposed the motion, seconded by Cllr Ford.

Cllr Wheately proposed to have the word 'all' removed from the motion: 'This council re-affirms that it wants to retain access for all vehicles over the London Road Railway Crossing'. The term 'all' can include large vehicles up to 7 ½ tonnes. We do not want large vehicles going through the town.

Motion seconded by Cllr Cotter.

Councillors commented that the larger vehicles going down Launton Road and other areas do damages to walls, etc. By taking out the word 'all', we leave the motion open to allow all vehicles and we can then compromise removing higher tonnage vehicles.

Councillors voted on amendment to remove the word 'all' from the motion.

In favour - 9, Against – 0 and Abstained – 2

Other Councillors countered saying that the consultation with East West Rail has been going on for more than 10 years and East West Rail have not been able to find a solution. They have looked at all proposed solutions and listened to opinions. The current consultation is for pedestrians and cyclists to have a bridge or ramp and both of these would affect the houses in the area.

Councillors commented that the current crossing bridge is not feasible in terms of access and time taken to cross, an underpass would be a better option for pedestrians and bikes.

A further comment made was a discussion had with a Civil Engineer at the Langford meeting who said there was a way to get a vehicle underpass, it was feasible and East West Rail had not thoroughly investigated an under pass for vehicles.

Proposer – Cllr Pruden; seconded by Cllr Ford.

Councillors voted on the motion, **In favour - 10, Against – 0 and Abstained – 1**

Action: Town Clerk to work with Cllr Maguire and Cllr Holland to pen a letter to East West Rail without the word 'all' and for it to be reviewed by the Councillors before it is sent.

Motion 2

Cllr Wheately proposed an amendment to the wording of the motion: "This council welcomes Oxfordshire County Council's commitment to consult town and parish councils on its 'Dark Skies' proposals and only to implement changes that they support. Noting the County Council has already committed that lights should remain on where there is a safety concern, we underscore that our priority in considering this proposal is the impact it will have on all Bicester residents' safety at night in our town."

Cllr Holland requests that the Town Clerk writes to Oxfordshire County Council confirming that this council will not support any proposal which negatively impacts the safety of its residents. The 'Dark Skies' proposal was passed through OCC without public consultation, and it was deferred due to negative feedback. OCC have now agreed to consult on this.

Councillors expressed sincere concern with the proposal due to the safety for all who must walk on the dark streets at night, especially those walking from the train stations and from Bicester Village. A proposal that collaborates with the community to investigate where lights could be turned off that had minimal impact, would be appreciated and could lead to financial savings.

They stated that further information was required before a motion could be agreed.

Proposer – Cllr Sibley; seconded by Cllr Hallet

RESOLVED the Committee **DIFFERED** the motion until further information is gathered.

Whitelands Lease Legal Steer

**55/
2425**

Resolution was passed to allow Martin Frankum and Jane Olds to remain in the meeting.

Jane Olds left the meeting.

A verbal report was offered from the legal advisor as to the council's position on the delay incurred from the new lease/Service level agreement being received by Cherwell District Council.

Councillors agreed to ask CDC Councillors to attend a policy meeting.

**56/
2425**

Date of the next meeting

Monday 10th March 2025

CLOSE OF MEETING: 21:10