

DRAFT

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 16 MARCH 2010 AT 7.30PM IN THE COMMUNITY CENTRE, WOODSTOCK

PRESENT: The Town Mayor, Councillor Peter Jay, and some sixty five members of the public.

1 WELCOME

The Town Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Annual Town Meeting held on Tuesday 17 March 2009 be signed as correct records.

3 MATTERS ARISING

Chris Baylis referred to the resolution about the Hardware Store adopted last year, namely:

“This meeting regrets the closure of the hardware store situated next to the Town Hall in property owned by the Town Council. This meeting encourages the Town Council to seek as a new tenant above other interests the most suitable applicant interested to offer a similar service to the community.”

He asked whether there was any progress on this matter. Cllr Mrs V Edwards, Chairman of the Property Working Group said that this would be covered in her property report.

There were no other matters arising from the Minutes.

4 APPOINTMENT OF NEW TOWN RECTOR

Cllr Mrs P Richardson informed the meeting of the appointment of a new Town Rector for the Blenheim Benefice that covers five churches. Adrian Daffern is currently a Canon Residentiary and Precentor of Coventry Cathedral. He has lots of experience to bring to the benefice and hopes to start in his new role at the beginning of July 2010.

5 REPORTS OF THE TOWN COUNCIL

Finance

The meeting received a presentation about the Town Council’s financial situation from Cllr T Gardiner, member of the Town Council’s Finance Committee. He presented the 2009/10 budget and explained that this had been based on the Council’s best assumptions. He outlined the income, expenditure and summary position and informed the meeting that the Council had successfully bid for grants for work at the Water Meadows. He noted that Woodstock had traditionally had the lowest

precept in the County because of the property portfolio, however major repair work was now required on the roof of the Park Street properties.

He then reported the actual situation to date. The summary position is that in 2009/10 there was lower rental income and higher fees. He reported that £12,000 had been budgeted for the employment of a specialist planning consultant to support Woodstock Town Council's (WTC's) endeavours to ensure that the proposed development of the former Railway Station site meets the requirements of the Town. He then informed the meeting that the retail properties had not contributed the expected income and the Town Council had also incurred some significant costs associated with these properties. He explained that the work on the Park Street was going to be deferred but then some roof slates started to slip thus forcing the Town Council to take action on Health and Safety grounds. He explained to the meeting that the Town Council is not allowed to go overdrawn and had therefore applied to the Public Works Loan Board for a loan of just under £70,000 to cover the cost of the Park Street Roof repairs. This application was successful and it was noted that the loan could be repaid early if the financial situation improved. He reported that the Rectory Lane Garage would be sold. He said that the year 2010/11 would be challenging but concluded by saying that the Property Working Group had done a good job under difficult circumstances.

Strategy

The meeting received a presentation by Cllr B Yoxall, Chairman of the Strategy Committee. He explained that retaining Woodstock's current character was core to the work of this Committee. He reported upon the housing developments that had been built since 2006 and suggested that the Town could not take any more houses as it would increase pressure on car parking, the shops, the Youth facilities, Health Centre etc. caution was therefore required. He then spoke about transport reporting that the Town Council had contributed a response to the Oxfordshire County Council consultation on the Local Transport Plan that covers the period to 2026. He also outlined the Town Council's education strategy and also that for Leisure and Tourism. He said that the Committee was seeking ways to improve community partnerships with residents.

Environment

The meeting received a presentation from Cllr Mrs T Redpath, Chairman of the Environment Working Group (EWG). She explained that environmental matters were now dealt with by a team of councillors. Cllr Mrs T Redpath thanked The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BCTV), who started the Green Gym 'Woodchip' for its great contribution. This group has saved the Town Council a lot of money and worked across all of the areas covered by the EWG. She reported that the EWG had faced challenges this year such as managing the grass cutting contract which is an issue that causes major controversy. The Council knows that people would like the grass to be taken away but it is extraordinarily expensive to do so. Cllr Mrs T Redpath then spoke about the Green Lane Cemetery and reported that some people were being inconsiderate by leaving their dead flowers for other people to remove. She made a plea that people either take their refuse away or use the bin provided. She reminded residents that the Council's Cemetery Regulations asked people to confine their memorials to the head of a grave space but noted that some people were forgetting to do so. She asked that people do not allow memorials, planting etc to extend beyond the head of the grave space. Cllr Mrs T Redpath concluded by reporting that space is rapidly running out in the Green Lane Cemetery (we are now utilising the last quarter of the current facility) and therefore the Town Council is saving for a new cemetery. It is currently in the process of identifying a new site.

Property

The meeting received a presentation from Cllr Mrs V Edwards, Chairman of the Property Working Group who reported that she had taken over as the Chairman of the group last May. She said that she had some good news to report because as of the end of May 2010 it was hoped that all of the commercial properties would be fully let again and that this should include a new hardware shop. She said that the Town Council did not want the recent events to reoccur and had therefore outsourced its property management to a professional property management service - Carter Jonas. They will produce a five year costed maintenance plan that will allow the Council to budget more accurately. This contract will also free up the Town Clerk from this time-consuming activity. She informed residents that the work on the Park Street Roof would start at the end of March and that any concerns should be raised with Carter Jonas as they are project managing this work. Cllr Mrs V Edwards concluded her presentation by informing residents that the money raised from the sale of the Rectory Lane Garage would be ring-fenced for use on the Woodstock Community Centre. She announced that as part of the Woodstock@900 celebrations, a competition will be launched in May for this project. The competition will be in collaboration with the Royal Institute of British Architects and a prestigious judge will evaluate the entries.

Woodstock@900 Celebrations

Mr Phil Pike the Festival Director then presented the plans for the Woodstock@900 celebrations. He reminded the meeting that the celebration was to mark the building of the seven mile circumference wall around the Blenheim Hunting Lodge/ Park. He told residents that -Your Town Needs You to help the organisers create a festival that is exciting, inclusive and involves everyone. He said that the festival launch will be opened on 01 May 2010 by the Duke of Marlborough. It will act as an umbrella for a wide variety of commercial and community events that will take place throughout the rest of 2010. It is hoped that every resident will attend at least one event and so the programme will be advertised in a variety of ways. The Mayor thanked Cllr E Poskitt for her help with the Town Council interactions associated with this event. A Woodstock@900 flag will fly from the Town Hall during the festival and the Mayor took this opportunity to tell residents that Cllr G Myatt has now taken over flag raising duties from Dr Robert Edwards and more recently Cllr C Carritt.

6 REPORTS FROM COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLORS

District Cllr Jill Dunsmore reported that she is still the Cabinet Member for Communities and also sits on the Uplands Planning Committee. She reported that West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) will be running a pilot scheme whereby the general public can attend planning meetings. This will start in May. She also told residents that the planning application by Berkley Homes for Young's Garage (the Former Railway Station Site) had been rejected by WODC and that they had also lost the subsequent appeal. She advised residents that a new application was due to be submitted soon. She reported that affordable housing for 30 residents was being built. She told residents about the new recycling service that will be commencing later in the year. She then reported that WODC had taken over parking enforcement locally. Cllr Mrs J Dunsmore and Cllr I Hudspeth have held two meetings with residents who have concerns about parking. She reported that the parking arrangements will be reviewed in six months time and mentioned that she hopes that a provision for 24 hour parking will be included. She also noted that WODC has raised council tax by 3.9% this year, the budget has cross-party approval, and that crime fell in Woodstock over the Christmas period. Cllr Mrs J Dunsmore will be chairing an older people's networking party to try and make them more aware of the services available to them. She concluded by assuring the meeting that her priority will always be to serve the residents of Woodstock and Bladon.

County and District Cllr Ian Hudspeth reported on his role as Councillor at both County and District levels. At District level, he is still the Chairman of the Licensing Committee and is pleased that a clear message is going out that underage alcohol sales will be penalised. He is also the Member for Growth and Infrastructure for Oxfordshire County Council. This includes the areas of waste, planning and highways. He said that he had been heavily involved with the budget and that there was currently a lot of pressure on Councils. He outlined the financial problems that arise from young unaccompanied asylum seekers as this costs tax payers £1 million a year. Although OCC get a rebate towards this cost there is still a deficit. He reported that the concessionary bus fares, currently supported by the District Councils, will be moving to the County Council. He then spoke about salting during Winter Weather at some length and explained that any salting that did not occur was not down to finance. OCC had the same salt stocks as they had held for the previous 20 years and an agreement with a salt supplier. However, bad weather elsewhere in the country resulted in this stock being re-directed to those areas. The OCC stockpile therefore diminished and couldn't be replenished and therefore supplies had to be conserved. As the adverse weather continued the Government decided where the salt supplies were sent and said that only A roads could be salted. There is still a national salt shortage and the prices have increased. He then reported on the Local Transport Plan and said that he was aware of Woodstock's aspirations but was unsure whether the funding would be available to meet them. He reported that Atkins has recently taken over as the Highways contractor. He then spoke about waste and concluded by talking about the fire service and the Fire Authority Action Plan. Of the 24 fire stations in the area 18 are manned by retained fire-fighters and it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit new staff. Therefore 4 full time fire fighters are being re-allocated in order to give the retained fire-fighters more support. Woodstock is one of the fire stations that need more retained fire officers.

7 TO CONSIDER RESOLUTIONS UPON WHICH THE TOWN CLERK HAS RECEIVED THREE DAYS NOTICE PRIOR TO THE DATE OF THE MEETING

No resolutions had been received.

8 OPEN FORUM

Cllr P Redpath asked Cllr Mrs V Edwards for further information about the location for the proposed redevelopment of the Community Centre. He considered that if the Town Council re-developed this building in partnership or on another site it could lose its exclusivity. He asked whether she could guarantee that any re-build would take place on the current site. She replied that it would be a Town Council decision but that in her view this was the only site owned by the Council that would be suitable for a refurbished/rebuilt Community Centre.

A resident then asked about the cost of the re-roofing of the Park Street premises and asked if it was the best estimate available. Cllr Mrs V Edwards said that the roof was being replaced on a like for like basis and that the tiles were expensive.

Cllr A Glee mentioned the fact that WTC had written to OCC and WODC about their response to the adverse weather conditions. He suggested that when the Councils were calculating the cost of salt they were failing to appreciate the personal and business costs involved. He therefore sought assurances that in future there would be manpower available to keep the pavements clean. Cllr Hudspeth replied that this matter would be looked into but that there was insufficient man-power across the county available to undertake such work. He also said that potential litigation was a problem. He said that as a child he remembered everyone clearing the pavement outside their house

and therefore OCC were trying to remove the threat of litigation arising from people resuming this approach of 'self-help'. He also said that the WODC bin-men had helped to clear the paths/roads.

Denis Allen then appealed to Town Councillors to let residents make comments. He said that the health and safety concerns had got out of hand and said that he thought it would be a good idea if people were made to clear snow outside their own house or shop.

Hilary Brown expressed a wish to see increased car parking in Woodstock but also wanted a couple of car parking spaces to be put aside for bicycles. Cllr B Yoxall said that the Town Council had made a plea to OCC for improved cycle storage and said that he understood that this could be side benefit arising from the Shipton Road housing development. Ms Brown also wanted to applaud the efforts of 'Sustainable Woodstock' for trying to make Woodstock a plastic free town. The Mayor informed her that as part of the Woodstock @900 celebrations 900 trees are being planted.

Marion Rathby asked why the proposed 20mph speed limit ended at the Black Prince. She considered that it should be continued up the hill. Cllr B Yoxall said that at Council it had been discussed whether it should be extended up to the zebra crossing but that this idea had been rejected by the Town Council.

A resident asked whether WTC and WODC had been proactive and tried to interact with Berkley Homes over the development of the 'Young's Garage Site'. Cllr Mrs T Redpath said that WTC had asked for talks with WODC and Berkley Homes but that Berkley Homes do not want to meet with WTC. However, the planning consultant employed by WTC has attended a meeting with Cllr Mrs J Dunsmore and the Planning Officer at WODC. Cllr Mrs J Dunsmore said that Berkley Homes were resisting discussions and is expected to submit a revised application soon. Patricia Moss asked whether WTC owned the 'Young's Garage' site and was told that it was not a WTC owned property. David Scott asked why people were so desperate to keep the site as it could be considered an 'eye sore'. Cllr Mrs T Redpath said that at the Town Meeting of December 2008 WTC was asked to make sure that the 'Former Railway Station' be retained. She said that it was quite a historic building. She also said that Berkley Homes wanted to build a high rise development right out to the road and so ruining the vista. Objecting to their proposals was the only way of preventing this from happening.

The Mayor proposed the following motion, seconded by the Deputy Mayor:

'That Berkley Homes be called upon to consult urgently and actively with WTC and the people of Woodstock about their plans'

This motion was unanimously approved by the meeting. Cllrs Mrs J Dunsmore and I Hudspeth abstained from the vote.

A resident asked that average speed cameras be installed in Woodstock to stop people speeding up as they go through the town.

Ray Kinch asked whether allotment plots would ever be provided in Woodstock. He was told that if six or more residents submit requests for allotments WTC will have to investigate whether it is possible to do so.

Peter Boon asked for details of the new WODC refuse policy. Cllr Mrs J Dunsmore said that small lockable bins will be provided to households for food waste. Another resident asked how this policy

