

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN MEETING  
HELD ON TUESDAY 17<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2017 AT 7.30PM  
AT THE WOODSTOCK COMMUNITY CENTRE**

**PRESENT:**

The Town Mayor, Deputy Mayor, 7 Town Councillors, 1 County Councillor, invited speakers from Blenheim Estate and approximately 100 members of the public.

**APOLOGIES:** None

**WELCOME AND ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

The Town Mayor introduced herself and welcomed residents to the meeting. She reiterated that it was the resident's meeting not a Council meeting and invited questions and comment where appropriate.

**MINUTES**

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> March 2016 were received and agreed after feedback was received from a Councillor on the structure of future minutes.

**LATEST DEVELOPMENTS FOR WEST OXFORDSHIRE & CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCILS' LOCAL PLANS**

The Mayor gave an outline of the proposed developments being considered within both West Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Councils local housing plans. She confirmed that within the West Oxfordshire plan which was submitted and considered in June 670 additional houses were proposed for Woodstock. 120 behind Hill Rise, 250 North of Banbury Road and 300 on the South East Field behind Hensington Gate). The 300 houses on the South East Field already have planning committee approval but have not yet been accepted by the inspector to be included within the plan. The South East Field is an important site as it connects to the adjacent field in Cherwell which Cherwell District Council has put in a proposal to build 410 houses on. If all sites are approved this would increase the number of houses proposed for Woodstock to 1,080. West Oxfordshire have had to find extra sites for housing development to deliver the number of houses stated within the Strategic Market Housing Assessment (SHMA). The Mayor, a number of Town Councillors and the Transport Consultant employed by the Town Council attended the enquiry, at which the Inspector stated that he was not prepared to consider any Woodstock sites as he recognised their effect on the Historic Town and the World Heritage site (Blenheim) until the District Council had produced a Heritage Assessment. All submissions have been made and it is now a matter of awaiting the Inspectors Report.

Cherwell District Council already have a local plan which was agreed but have undertaken a second partial review of their plan because they have a duty to cooperate with Oxford City Council who claim they can't deliver all the houses SHMA require of them. Cherwell now have to deliver 4,400 houses in the area as close as possible to Oxford. The 410 houses in Woodstock is bad enough but the remaining 3,900 are proposed for the Kidlington Gap going into North Oxford, to Yarnton and Begbroke. This will have a massive effect on increased traffic using the A44 and other local roads. Woodstock Town Council felt it was important to have their own Transport Assessment on the road network. Oxfordshire County Council have a plan for Improved Transport Infrastructure which includes a bid for £152 million towards the upgrade of the A44 and A4260.

Woodstock Town Council submitted their responses to both West Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Councils by the deadlines and awaiting the outcome and next stage of the process review. The Mayor also confirmed that the Council had also commissioned a planning lawyer to look at the housing figures presented within a recent Government Consultation paper 'Planning for the right

homes in the right places.’ as these are considerably lower than those stated in the SHMA for the duration of the plan. This may result in a reduction in the actual allocation of housing for Woodstock.

In summary the basic argument is that Woodstock will be completely overwhelmed by the number of houses and that it will have a dire effect on the heritage of the historic town of Woodstock.

The Mayor advised in view of the annual requirement figures quoted for each local district within the government publication ‘Planning For The Right Homes In The Right Places’ WTC have commissioned a Planning Lawyer to look into the planning figures further.

A leaflet has been distributed to all residents requesting donations towards the fighting fund, some donations have already been pledged and a queries received in the office as to why this is? WTC have revised the budget to meet the current cost of professional support but are anticipating the expense in obtaining further professional advice, reports etc will exceed this budget. It was felt that there may be resident willing to donate a bit extra towards these costs, all donations will be logged and if unused returned. Details of how any donations are used will be made available within the public domain. The Mayor gave a warm ‘thank you’ in advance to anyone who has already made or is planning to make a donation.

Question received from resident via email:-

*“If your planning consultant is suggesting that you engage independent consultants to assess Heritage and Highways impact of the development proposal, why is this being raised only now and why was it not made a planning condition by the WODC to be fulfilled by the developer? Should it be at town resident’s expense?”*

The Mayor advised that West Oxfordshire District Council did not bother to obtain it’s own Heritage Assessment before submitting their local plan and they were ‘told off’ by the Inspector at the enquiry held in June and told to rectify this before consideration would be given to whether or not any sites in Woodstock were suitable.

Question received from member of the audience:

*“Are WTC in favour of any new housing in Woodstock? Has Woodstock been disadvantaged due to not having a Neighbourhood Plan?”*

The Mayor responded that WTC try to look at the effect of development on the infrastructure and would support ‘affordable’ housing for local people but acknowledge that ‘affordable housing’ comes at the expenses of larger development.

Question received from member of the audience:

*“Having returned to the town after two years away and seeing it in a recession, there is no trade and no life. Traders are struggling to the point of having to close their doors. Can Blenheim offer Woodstock what it needs to survive?”*

The CEO of Blenheim responded to advise that Blenheim has been working with the local GP surgery in view of them moving to a new site although lack of NHS funding halted progress. Blenheim recently purchased the Thames Valley Police site and are holding it as a site that could give a solution to either the Surgery or parking problem within the town. He also confirmed that both Blenheim and WTC have communicating with the banks to try find ways to alleviate the difficulties caused by the closure of Barclays Bank.

A Councillor advised that a copy of WTC's vision statement was distributed which set out how Woodstock should develop and that it would be prepared to accept 'gradual' development of the town. He advised that Woodstock does not have a Neighbourhood Plan as WTC's vision is opposed to the District one and the concept of a Neighbourhood Plan is that it has to be consistent with the strategic objectives of the District Council.

Question received from a member of the audience:-

*"Would Blenheim allow the Police Station to be used for parking before it is developed?"*

The CEO of Blenheim responded to advise that this may be possible, although the Police are currently still using the station and are not agreeable for the car park to be used publicly.

A member of the audience commented on the parking issues within the town due to lack of movement of cars. Commuters driving into Woodstock parking up and then getting the bus.

The Mayor acknowledged this and drew attention to recent discussions held at the Traffic Advisory Committee meeting with representatives from WODC relating to the lack of parking enforcement.

A member of the audience stressed the need for sustainability in any housing development including good quality design and low carbon footprint which would enhance the quality of the environment regardless of whether large numbers of houses were built.

A Councillor commented on the duty for councils to 'co-operate' but not 'agree with development', referencing some of the potential sites in Oxford. He outlined some initiatives that were due to be heard at forthcoming District Council Committee meetings and advised that any relevant information relating to these would be reported on at the November Town Council Meeting.

#### **DREDGING OF BLENHEIM LAKE**

The Head of Blenheim Estates gave a brief outline of the plans for dredging the Queen's Pool. He advised that this is the most ambitious project Blenheim has undertaken with a huge number of stakeholders and estimated cost of £12 million. There is a huge technical team involved in the project as the water level will need to be dropped and the silt removed manually by mechanical digger. Work will commence in Spring 2020, the silt unfortunately proving to have very little nutrient value the silt will be moved to the north of the park and spread about a foot deep across a site of 200 acres and will have little or no odour. Whilst the water level is dropped the foundations of the Grand Bridge will be checked and any restoration and repair work completed. The cost of this is estimated at approximately £3.5 million. Blenheim also need to slow down this process from happening again. They are looking at a catchment based solution going up from the Seven Arches to the Dawn/Evenlode Valleys. He explained that a catchment based solution is part of wet woodland and putting interceptors into the ground.

A Councillor asked two questions relating to the:-

*"Will there be any adverse effect to the Water Meadows water levels?"*

The Head of Blenheim Estates responded the project is being heavily controlled by the Environment Agency who have been working with Blenheim since 2014 and they will not consent to any work that will have a detrimental effect to the water levels.

*"Have you considered what's happening on the Water Meadows as a result of the Himalayan Balsam coming downstream from Blenheim land."*

The Head of Blenheim Estates acknowledged that the Himalayan Balsam has been a growing problem particularly over the last five years and felt that it could be effecting bank erosion. In terms of a 'Catchment Solution' it needs to consider all of those options, it needs to look at how bank erosion is dealt with, which could be through agricultural practices/ land management.

Question received from member of the audience:-

*"What is going to happen to the bird life during the 5 months when the Queens Pool is dredged?"*

The Head of Blenheim Estates confirmed that this issued had been discussed with Natural England, who had advised that if they do nothing then there is a risk of losing the habitat for the bird populating the Queens Pool. They advised that by undertaking the work it will possibly have a detrimental effect on the birds but will hopefully see a recovery quickly.

### **BLenheim 10 YEAR PLAN**

The Chief Executive of Blenheim Estate explained briefly that within the leaflet distributed to Woodstock residents at the start of October Blenheim shared in more detail the ideas that were presented at the March 2017 Town Meeting.

He advised that Blenheim want to hear the local residents views on those ideas for executing on their goals. Blenheim believe that their core purpose, the point of Blenheim existing today is to be the lifeblood of the local economy, to enhance the lives of the people of the area, to share this magnificent place and to conserve and protect it for future generations. They aim to achieve this by making profits in ways which benefit the whole community.

The goals which Blenheim are hoping to achieve over a ten year period:

1. Triple their contribution to the local economy
2. Train over 100 apprentices in 10 years plus training goal for developing own staff
3. House 300 families in high quality truly affordable accommodation
4. Receive 750k paying visitors (probably around 1.2m total) with a top quartile Net Promoter Score
5. Become a net generator of green energy.
6. Be rated as a top 100 best employer
7. Have transformed the Palace and Park by completing a £40m restoration programme
8. Have reacquired key works from the old collections and established a new one
9. Create an additional endowment portfolio of £45m dedicated to the conservation and enhancement of our World Heritage Site
10. Double our charitable contribution to the community

He confirmed that the first seven apprentices have been hired and they are local and brilliant. Within housing development Blenheim are determined to pursue the target that young people growing up in Woodstock can realistically aspire to live in the area they or their parents chose for them.

A member of the audience raised concerns that Woodstock had missed out on low cost housing previously as development had been piece meal and not planned around putting any services in. He then asked the question:-

*"Please will you consider putting as much of the infrastructure in early?"*

The Chief Operations Officer from Blenheim advised that funding for infrastructure is dependent on doing the market housing first. He advised that there is no affordable housing provision within the first phase of the Woodstock East development as the percentage to be included could not be agreed with the Council. Once the first phase is complete the allocation of affordable housing will be assessed and will be delivered evenly through the subsequent phases. He confirmed that the delivery of housing will be managed very closely to the delivery of the infrastructure, ie when school places are needed that will be there. Blenheim has been in discussion with the County Council. He also stated that they are waiting for the local plan to be agreed as the solution for 300 houses will be very different to the solution for 700/800 houses. They need to look at the whole picture so not just picking one site off at a time. He confirmed that when the local plan is agreed, Blenheim would like to sit down with both WTC and WODC to work out how across all of the sites we can deliver the infrastructure that the town needs. This would not just include the development sites but also the Football Club and Police Station sites.

A member of the audience raised the fact that Woodstock Surgery is under great pressure from a lack of space and if we extend the town we need to think what we will do about the surgery. The Chief Executive of Blenheim Estate of Blenheim confirmed that the issues with the surgery will need to be resolved as part of development.

A member of the audience wanted the wonderful work Blenheim had undertaken as part of a community project with St Hugh's of Lincoln Catholic Church to create a garden of thanksgiving at noted and thanked The Chief Executive of Blenheim Estates personally.

The Chairman of Wake Up To Woodstock acknowledged that the approach in the last year or so from the new team in Blenheim has been hugely helpful.

Question received from member of the audience:-

*"How do you propose to mitigate the effects on traffic of your new developments? Users of the A44 and A4260 will know that both these roads especially at rush hour are absolute bottlenecks and are almost at maximum capacity now. Additional houses will produce additional cars but little seems to have been said or thought about how on earth we are going to deal with this extra traffic."*

The Chief Executive of Blenheim Estates confirmed that the County Council has been working for a number of years on the connecting Oxfordshire strategy, which has now gone a step further with the infrastructure analysis report completed in the last two months and bids now submitted for the A44. He advised 'all that is being done at this stage is being done by the right people'. Blenheim are very engaged in that and are willing to put their money where their mouth is on that. He thought that A44 and A4260 have been significantly improved, especially the A44 by the works completed at the Wolvercote roundabout and the queues are a lot less. He stated that we are moving into an era where we have better public transport to Woodstock with the bus service being tripled. Blenheim now employ more people locally than ever and that will make a difference to transport management. He feels all these things are moving in the right direction but does share the concerns of the community.

Question received from member of the audience

*"Would Blenheim help fund the cost of the Heritage Assessment Report?"*

The Mayor advised that the Heritage Assessment Report did form part of WTC's comments on the Cherwell Local Plan. The Clerk confirmed that they would be made available to view on the Town

Council website. The Chief Executive of Blenheim Estates confirmed that Blenheim had also completed a Heritage Impact Assessment as have WODC after being prompted by the Inspector.

A Councillor commented that Blenheim had given affordable housing sites including Kerwood Close and Budds Close in Woodstock, Heath Lane and Home Farm in Bladon. He made reference to losing affordable housing due to the changes in 'Right to Buy' legislation. He drew attention to the district boundary and proposed that an application should be made to the District Council Boundary Commission to change the district council boundary. If the Cherwell application is successful Woodstock will have houses on the edge of the town that are not contributing to our Council Tax level.

The Chief Executive of Blenheim Estates thanked the Councillor for his comments on the contribution to affordable housing Blenheim has made, he then added that Blenheim were due to discuss 'Right to Buy' the following day. He indicated that by avoiding 'Right to Buy' Blenheim can ensure that the original need for affordable houses will be met. A member of the audience asked if they are leasehold to which he responded that affordable housing is divided into three categories – 'affordable rent' the landlord has the freehold and the tenant signs a tenancy agreement, 'shared equity' where a person will buy a freehold interest and 'intermediate' for which they did not know the rules yet.

#### **COMMUNITY PLAN**

A Councillor talked about the aim of the town council to enlist support from residents with a view to them preparing a Community Plan which would identify issues and projects needing to be tackled to complement the housing development planned, thus ensuring that Woodstock continues to be an attractive place to live. He stressed that the town council's role would merely be one of helping to facilitate the process, not to dictate what form the plan should take.

He made reference to the document he had prepared that had been distributed on the chairs which outlined a framework and process. The residents will develop the content of the plan with participation of as wide a cross section of the community as possible.

In the last 20 years two exercises had been completed, the Town Appraisal in 1998 and the Town Partnership exercise in 2012/13. He was sure that some of the work which went into both of these will give the community something to build on.

The Councillor confirmed that before the end of the year all households will be written to and those who would like to be involved should contact the Town Hall.

A member of the audience stressed the need to consider how the town is generating energy and lowering our carbon footprint. She felt a transport plan is very important and we should be considering alternatives to jumping in a car and driving into Oxford.

A Councillor said he thought the proposal was a very good idea but felt that it was going to take a lot of people, a lot of energy to complete and that the whole process may take up to two years. He did acknowledge that it was a good way to cement the community together.

The Councillor hoped that there would be a lot of interest and said WTC would do their best to involve as many people as possible and want to get a representative cross section of the community. A member of the audience suggested using social media to engage people who would like to be involved but may not physically be able to attend meetings.

Dennis Allen drew attention to the two museums in the centre of the town and encouraged anyone who had not been into the Soldiers of Oxfordshire museum to view the 'Art in Conflict' exhibition there. He stated for a small town Woodstock is art rich.

The Chief Executive of Blenheim Estates committed their support to the development of the Community Plan and offered the assistance of Blenheim's Digital and Marketing Teams if required.

A member of the audience 'new' to Woodstock commented that he had been looking for information about where to go and things to do online and there was hardly any available. He asked if the Town Council could play a role in this with their website? A Councillor advised that a 'This is Woodstock' day had been held the previous year where various societies and other activities had a stall promoting what there is to enjoy in the town.

The Mayor thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Meeting Closed at 9.20pm