

**MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF
THE WOODSTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
ON TUESDAY 7th JULY 2020
HELD VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCING**

PRESENT:

Cllr A Grant (Deputy Mayor - Chair)
Cllr J Cooper
Cllr U Parkinson
Cllr E Poskitt

Cllr L Burnham
Cllr P Jay
Cllr S Parnes
Cllr S Rasch

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: The Clerk, Mrs Janine Saxton, Cllr I Hudspeth, fourteen member of the public and Kate Begley as she will be writing a summary of the meeting for the Woodstock and Bladon News.

The Deputy Mayor opened the meeting and explained that due to the Mayor declaring a pecuniary interest as he worked in the hospitality sector she would be chairing the meeting.

WTC68/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Cllrs P Redpath and T Redpath.

WTC69/20 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST:

No disclosures of interest were received.

WTC70/20 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION:

The following residents addressed the Council on **Agenda item 7 Prospective road closure and al fresco drinking and dining in the centre of Woodstock.**

Dennis Allen, Chair of Wake Up To Woodstock addressed the Council and posed the question whether the temporary closure of the roads was a Good Idea or Bad Idea? He acknowledged the lack of public consultation which had been due to time constraints and spoke in support of the proposal as a trial to help keep local businesses open.

Emily Repp a town centre resident addressed the Council and expressed her objections to the proposal stating that the lack of transparency and consultation was disturbing and undemocratic. She drew attention to the town centre being predominately residential with a significant proportion of elderly residents and stated that as the pandemic had not gone away the influx of people coming into the centre could pose a risk to residents. Emily also alluded to anti-social behaviour that had been witnessed in the town centre recently.

Gregory Trotman a town centre resident addressed the Council and raised his concerns with the proposed road closures. He said that the town needed a plan that consulted with businesses and residents, considered businesses, residents and tourists alike, established accountability, had a clearly understood set of aims that can be measured as successful or otherwise after a trial period and balances the desires of businesses with the safety and quality of life of the local population. He would support a balanced well thought out approach which benefits everyone and mitigates risk but said that the road closure was not it.

Gian Lucio Montanino the owner of La Galleria restaurant and town centre resident addressed the Council and expressed his concerns and objections to the proposal. He was particularly worried

able being able to access his vehicle as he has a one year old child and needs to be able to park his vehicle in close proximity to his home. Gian Lucio also referred to the anti-social behavior being experienced in the vicinity of his residence and the risks of the virus being spread if more people were coming into the town centre to drink and eat.

Themis Avraamides town centre resident addressed the Council and raised his concerns that the proposal should address the community as a whole not just one segment of one sector. He also referred to the fact that there had been no consultation, no coherent response to the many objections raised to the proposal and that the Mayor had also communicated in an email that the road closure idea was a bad one and had promised to stop it. He said that the proposal should be rejected by Woodstock Town Council and any future proposal should be subject to proper due process and consultation.

WTC71/20 COMMUNICATIONS:

There were no communications.

WTC72/20 QUESTIONS

No questions had been received.

WTC73/20 MOTIONS PRESENTED TO THE COUNCIL:

Cllr P Jay read out his motion which had been seconded by Cllr S Rasch:-

The council considers that:-

1. *the proposed road closures pose an undue risk to the health, safety, environment and quality of life of Woodstock and its residents;*
2. *the proposed use of the town centre, without effective crowd control, prior consultation or proper risk assessment is reckless and dangerous, especially when the pandemic is still uncontrolled in the midlands from which large crowds might be drawn; and*
3. *before any trials go ahead, the town should gather and share with the Highways Authority a full statement of the objections voiced by residents to the scheme.*

Cllr J Cooper asked for it to be put on record that he thought that some of the comments made about CClr I Hudspeth were unfair on him. He also asked for a ruling from the Deputy Mayor on Standing Order 11a and stated that as there was no report for agenda item and unless two thirds of the Council request for item to process the debate should end now.

The Deputy Mayor said that this was a very important issue and ruled to continue the debate and would if necessary suggest Standing Orders are suspended to allow the item to be discussed.

Cllr S Parnes stated that under emergency considerations an item can be declared open for debate under urgency at the discretion of the Chair.

The debate continued

WTC74/20 PROSPECTIVE ROAD CLOSURES AND AL-FRESCO DRINKING AND DINING IN THE CENTRE OF WOODSTOCK:

Cllr E Poskitt said that too many people were trying to 'shoot the messenger' rather than the message and do not really get the urgency of the current situation and the matter has not been

introduced in the way they think proper but in her mind they have had a month at least to think about it. She also questioned the motion and stated it was largely based on presumption. Cllr E Poskitt questioned whether those residents making a fuss about the proposal make as much fuss when the roads are closed for events such as the Fair and Woodstock Live.

Cllr S Parnes said that he had originally supported the progression and exploration of the concept in principle and he still thinks there is scope for exploring it but since the idea was first presented to the Town Council numerous concerns have been conveyed and the vast majority have not been addressed. He would like to support it if those concerns are addressed. He also drew attention to the changes to the pavement licensing rules that will allow use of the pavements for up to a year. He finished by expressing his disappointment that local authority are not leading by example and opening the Library, the Museum and it's café.

Cllr E Poskitt clarified that the Library and Museum cannot open at present as it is unable to meet the guidelines. She also stated that the whole point of the proposal to close the road was due to the fact that most of the pavements in Woodstock not being wide enough to have a significant dining area on them.

Cllr L Burnham said that main driver for the proposal was to support the local businesses and the Council need to consider how urgent the need is for such support. He felt that businesses have suffered terribly over the past few months and they are asking for some support and if there is a lifeline that can be thrown to them then his inclination is to support them. He said that he would be supportive of a trial for one weekend and seeing how that goes.

Cllr U Parkinson suggested trailing the proposal during the month of August and only on a Saturday evening as a compromise.

The Deputy Mayor expressed her disappointment that Woodstock Town Council had been left in the dark and not told early enough by Cllr I Hudspeth and the three Councillors who were part of the group about the proposal. She said that she really believed that if the Council were involved from the beginning they could have helped with the consultation and other areas of the proposal. The Deputy Mayor asked Cllr I Hudspeth whether in hindsight he would say that he had not carried this out correctly as 8 out of 11 Councillors were unaware of The Town Centre Group until the meeting of 9th June and now they had been threatened with legal action through no fault of their own and that he owed WTC an apology

Cllr I Hudspeth apologised that the Deputy Mayor felt that Woodstock Town Council had been left out of the loop and said that after the government announced some funding that was an opportunity for the County Council to help, he had initially drawn a small group together to see if they had any ideas so a proposal could be put forward. The notes from the meetings on 29 May and 5 June show that this was not 'fait accompli'. The ideas were drawn together from the two meetings of the group and presented to the Town Council at the earliest opportunity. He felt there had been a big misconception and if the road is closed off that allows people to keep a safe distance. The proposal was to enable the businesses to increase their capacity by using the outdoor space whilst allowing their customers to maintain safe social distancing. Cllr I Hudspeth stated that he had been as open and transparent as possible and had answered as many emails as he could to respond to queries raised and he had also drawn up some FAQ's to try and alleviate concerns.

The Deputy Mayor stated she had not heard an apology to the Council and that according to the minutes of the Town Centre Group of 29th May 2020 it was recorded 'to ensure there is support from the Town Council' and yet this was not presented until the 9th June which in turn placed the Council in a very difficult position and caused great concern among town centre residents.

Cllr Hudspeth directed his apology to the Council.

The Deputy Mayor thanked him.

Cllr I Hudspeth acknowledge that of the two concepts within the proposal to have a one way system would not have been viable as it would have resulted in the loss of too many parking spaces. He stated that the consultation had actually been happening as no decision had been taken and residents' views were being listened to. He also clarified that the proposal would comply with the WODC licensing regulations and OCC highways regulations and that people have to take responsibility for social-distancing themselves. He felt that Woodstock should be able to have an alfresco style dining and café culture in the town which will support the local businesses. Cllr I Hudspeth said that he wanted to work together to develop a really good plan so that the businesses and residents in Woodstock can have a really good summer with alfresco style dining.

Cllr J Cooper pointed out that this is a joint venture with the Town Mayor who was involved in this since day one.

Cllr S Parnes stated that the County Council stated that the Libraries in Oxfordshire will be opening from mid-July but Woodstock Library will remain closed indefinitely, so if our town is so cramped and condensed that it is risk for them then maybe others should heed the warnings. Cllr S Parnes also recommended that everyone Google Israeli Health Minister' and read a very interesting report that was published earlier in the evening where she resigned because of their governments advice not being heeded and the second wave spikes catching up with the country.

Cllr P Jay summed up by saying that this is a very important issue, it has divided our community quite seriously and there are a lot of people that he acknowledged who have strong opinions the other way. He then read the motion out in full:-

1. *the proposed road closures pose an undue risk to the health, safety, environment and quality of life of Woodstock and its residents;*
2. *the proposed use of the town centre, without effective crowd control, prior consultation or proper risk assessment is reckless and dangerous, especially when the pandemic is still uncontrolled in the midlands from which large crowds might be drawn; and*
3. *before any trials go ahead, the town should gather and share with the Highways Authority a full statement of the objections voiced by residents to the scheme.*

The Deputy Mayor called for a vote which Cllr S Parnes had requested earlier in the meeting be a named vote.

VOTE: For: 5 Cllrs A Grant, P Jay, , U Parkinson, S Parnes & S Rasch
Against: Cllrs L Burnham, J Cooper & E Poskitt

RESOLVED: The motion was carried.

The meeting closed at 8.47pm