

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
HELD ON TUESDAY 18th MARCH 2014 AT 7.30PM
IN THE COMMUNITY CENTRE, WOODSTOCK**

PRESENT: The Town Mayor, Councillor Mr J Cooper, members of the Woodstock Town Council (WTC), County Councillor Ian Hudspeth, District Councillors Julian Cooper and Elizabeth Poskitt, Mr Huw Mellor from Kemp & Kemp (the Council's planning advisors) and some 75 members of the public.

1. **WELCOME**

The Town Mayor welcomed residents to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

2. **ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

The Mayor asked residents whether they were happy to accept the proposed agenda and nobody opposed this suggestion and so this agenda was adopted for the meeting with an additional planning item included about the planning proposal for the Marlborough Field.

3. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Tuesday 19th March 2013 were received and considered. There were no suggestions for amendments and therefore the Mayor signed them as being a correct record.

The minutes of the Woodstock Town Meeting held on Tuesday 18th June 2013 were also received and considered. There were no suggestions for amendments and therefore the Mayor signed them as being a correct record.

There were no matters arising from either set of minutes.

4. **PLANNING REPORT**

Cllr S Parnes asked Mr Mellor if he had seen the Planning Inspectors decision about an application in Chichester that looked very similar to the proposals for the Marlborough Site. It included poor design that segregated the affordable housing from the other large houses and the Planning Inspector had refused this application.

Mr Mellor said that he would take a look at this application to see if it was comparable to the proposal for Woodstock.

Mr P Redpath said that pre-planning discussions were held between the planning applicants for 18 Shipton Road and WODC. He said that WODC had advised them not to submit a full planning application as it was likely to be refused. Mr P Redpath said that WODC had advised the applicants that they would need to demonstrate adequate parking and were concerned about the intensified use of access by the two proposed houses on Shipton Road. He queried whether WODC had given the same advice to the planning applicants who were now proposing to build 64 houses.

Mr Mellor noted that many developers seek informal pre-planning advice from the District Councils and OCC which is not binding on either party. It helps developers identify concerns that they may need to address. Mr Redpath noted that the Holdings had got planning permission.

The Mayor noted that WTC and WAG have a protocol whereby they share information and so asked for a copy of the information that Mr Redpath had presented to be passed to the Town Council.

Mr C Bayliss asked Mr Mellor to explain how the Government planning directives affect local planning matters.

Mr Mellor said that planning was currently a very 'hot potato'. The national position is that National Planning Policy overrides local planning policy and if a District Council cannot demonstrate a 5 year rolling land supply the national requirement for new houses will override local planning policy even when the local planning policy prohibits development in specific areas. West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) only has a 4 year supply and therefore a deficient housing supply and so the national policy will, to a point, over-ride local planning policy. This is the position that Woodstock is in and the national planning policy will continue to override local planning policy until the numbers are met. The housing supply is 600 short across the district today and this may result in more appeals being submitted and allowed.

Mr C Bayliss proposed the following motion: "That the government has directed local authorities to make more land available for housing. Those that fail to do so will effectively be ignored and development sites are likely to be imposed upon them through the appeals process.

Woodstock is a sustainable town with schools, medical facilities, shops and good transport links. It is in the firing line for development.

The community of Woodstock has two options. It can ignore the government's direction and forgo any influence on the town's future, and on how any section s106 contributions or other infrastructure levies might be allocated, or it can engage with developers to secure the best possible deal for the townspeople.

Woodstock is unique in that almost all available building land is owned by Blenheim, an organisation with whom the town has a good working relationship, and who can be trusted to take reasonable account of public opinion.

The Town Meeting therefore proposes that the town council engage with Blenheim and their partner developers in detailed discussions on the following:-

1. The long term development plans for the town
2. The level, type and value of community infrastructure (e.g. affordable homes, extra parking provision, youth facilities, etc.) that might accrue from such development.
3. How, when and where such development might be pursued such that the best interests of the community may be served and protected."

Cllr C Carritt seconded this motion. Discussion followed.

Dr R McGurrian said that The Woodstock Action Group (WAG) was not against development but wants more affordable houses in sustainable places and doesn't think that the Shipton Road is sustainable. He noted that Woodstock is being saturated with expensive houses

and that there were not enough affordable houses. He said that the residents of Marlborough Close shop in Kidlington rather than Woodstock due to parking problems.

Mr T Gardiner said that residents and WTC has a long record of being successful in resisting developments and therefore recommended that residents vote against the motion put before them as it undermined WTC policy.

Mrs T Redpath said that the application was not surprising and asked Mr Mellor how we might oppose this particular proposal. She noted that it was easy for people who do not live in the area to say that it's ok and that having read the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) recognises that WODC has, alone in the county, already delivered more houses than it should have. Mrs T Redpath noted that many of these houses were in Woodstock. Mrs T Redpath also asked for Mr Mellor's opinion about Woodstock's slightly more special position than some other villages and towns.

Mr Mellor said that the SHMA has recognised WODC's contribution and given it the least additional houses to deliver now. Regarding specialities, Mr Mellor said that whilst there is an overriding requirement for WODC to demonstrate its housing supply planning policy still allows for subjective consideration of the specialness and character of a place. He was unsure as to the weight that Mrs T Redpath's point about the number of houses already delivered in Woodstock will carry.

Mr D Allen suggested that if it is necessary for WODC to have a 5 year land supply plan, WTC should perhaps also have a plan to put forward about the amount, type and location of developments in Woodstock which should be put forward now to address the supply requirements in the Town. He said that it was the Town Council's choice but that 'no development' did not seem to be a very realistic position especially when a planning application goes to appeal. He asked Mr Mellor if it might be better for Woodstock to put in a good case for minimum development rather than none. Mr Mellor said that this would have some weight but not an over-riding weight.

Mr S Scott asked Mr Mellor to explain the definition of an 'Affordable House'. Mr Mellor said that there are different types - it could be social housing or shared ownership in perpetuity and explained the difference. You get it under planning policy and there is 50% requirement for this development that WODC can impose or that might be negotiated away. You need nomination rights to the occupancy of the units from the District Council. The Mayor noted that these nomination rights applied to Bens Close and Budds Close.

County Cllr I Hudspeth noted that Thame put in a Neighbourhood Plan into the Local Development Framework (LDF) to influence where any new developments will go but that we are now going into unchartered territory. He gave an example of a site which WODC would have previously refused but that had now been put forward for acceptance. He said that the SHMA expected WODC to move from delivering 305 houses to 660 houses per annum going forward for the period 2012-2031.

Mr P Redpath noted that no affordable housing had been delivered on the former railway station site as the developers had claimed that it was unviable. He reiterated his concerns about traffic problems and congestion arising from a further development in the Shipton Road.

Professor A Glees said that no one wants to see Woodstock expand hugely and that residents should listen to Cllr I Hudspeth. He said that WAG talk about no more houses but want affordable housing. Professor Glees said that we need to be mindful of the people who would like to live in this beautiful town and to have more houses for our children. More affordable housing will come with more housing and so there should be a planned approach rather than an expansion without help.

In response to a suggestion from Cllr P Jay that the proper place to debate the motion was under item 7 on the agenda, Open Forum, the Mayor confirmed that he was happy for it to be debated now. Cllr P Jay said that he had great respect for Mr Bayliss but believed him to be mistaken in believing engagement would be beneficial to the community. Cllr P Jay believed that communities were at threat of being down-trodden unless they agreed to more houses. He said that this is a democratic country with a political process and that everyone had a fundamental political right to make a 'hoo-ha' and embarrass those who wish to take our homes etc. It is our fundamental right to say that the outstanding contribution by Woodstock is enough and that we are entitled and right to say it against developers who are threatening our community. Cllr P Jay hoped that Woodstock would not succumb to pressures and temptations otherwise there would be nothing left to defend.

Dr R Edwards said that wise generals do not engage in battles that they will lose. He suggested that Mr Mellor and Mr Bayliss had suggested that Woodstock will lose the battle and that it was therefore not worth fighting.

Mrs K Barker noted that on the Pye planning application there was no mention of traffic going through Randolph Avenue and so this issue still needed to be addressed.

The Mayor said that we need facts and precise policies to quote when fighting off this development. He noted that car parking was still a problem in the centre of town. He said that the WODC land supply figures had recently improved with 200 houses being approved for Bampton and that there were also planning applications under consideration relating to Chipping Norton and Carterton. He said that Eynsham and Woodstock had already made a significant contribution and reiterated the need for facts when opposing the application.

Cllr C Carritt summed up the debate and said that this was not a rear guard action regarding the Pye development. He had signed the WAG Pye application objection but this doesn't mean that we shouldn't talk to developers about future affordable housing. He asked how you can you do this without talking to them? He said that a Planning Inspector would look at the sustainability of the town and that Woodstock had good facilities and would therefore be in the firing line. Cllr Carritt said that the town therefore needed to behave responsibly rather than stick its head in the sand. He said that the proposal was about modest small scale developments that would benefit the town via s106 and was the only way to get better schools, parking etc.

The vote was then taken the result of which were as follows:

For: 9 votes.
Against: 32 votes
Abstentions: 22 people

The motion therefore fell.

The SHMA figures were further discussed and Mr Mellor noted that these will be continually reviewed and revised. He said that some of the 660 houses required today would probably be put forward in locations where people won't expect an appeal. He said that WODC are currently going through the LDF process to produce an up to date plan to say where the houses should go but that they were currently in a period of flux and uncertainty as were the Cherwell and Vale of White Horse District Councils.

Honorary Townsman Dr R Edwards reminded participants at the meeting that they shouldn't vote unless they were on the electoral roll and that a motion from the Annual Town meeting was not binding – it had to go before the Town Council.

Mrs T Redpath said that Woodstock shouldn't go in the WODC Local Plan as a designated area otherwise you can't negotiate.

Mr Mellor left the meeting at 8.30pm.

5. **REPORTS FROM THE TOWN COUNCIL**

a) The Town Mayor – Julian Cooper

The Mayor reported that Glenn Fleetwood had resigned from the Council and thanked him for his contribution. He also said that Cllr Mrs P Richardson had died and noted her considerable achievements for the Council and other organisations within the Town. These two events had resulted in two by-elections that had been won by Cllrs Mrs Emma Jay and Louisa Maybury. The Mayor made residents aware of the various reports that were available for collection from the back of the room.

The Mayor also reported that:

- (i) WTC will dispose of the 'Capability Brown' sketch and use the money for an unspecified capital project.
- (ii) The upgrade of the infrastructure etc. for the Christmas Lights had cost £1k this year.
- (iii) Discussions about the police station had taken place with the Chief Constable.
- (iv) The CLA game Fair was coming back to the town and that WTC had already written to the Chief Constable. Cllr B Yoxall will lead on this matter.
- (v) Two additional historic plaques were being installed in the town.
- (vi) WTC will liaise with the British Legion over participation in events to commemorate D Day and the start of WWI.

The Mayor asked Mrs A Grant to help make the Youth Club draw and the Town Clerk drew the numbers.

Professor A Gles noted how much better the Yarnton Doctors surgery was than the one in Woodstock. He said that something needed to be done to improve the Woodstock facility and asked what pressure WTC was putting on the surgery to make this happen. The Mayor said that when he had met with the Health Authority it had been noted that Woodstock had been the second worst in Oxfordshire when scored against various criteria and it was therefore keen to do something. The Mayor said that WTC was putting as much pressure on them as possible to get an improved facility.

Honorary Townsman J Banbury asked the Mayor if it was possible to take a report from the WTC Public Footpaths and Open Spaces Working Group next and the Mayor agreed to this.

b) WTC Public Footpaths and Open Spaces Working Group – Honorary Townsman John Banbury

Honorary Townsman J Banbury referred to the large map that was on display at the meeting and said that it was the only map of footpaths in the parish. He spoke about the public right of way that ran beside the land leased by the Old Woodstock Football Club and said that the Football Club was happy for people to use it in a proper responsible way. He noted that there is a recognised footpath that has been blocked up at the Youth Club end and that the working group was currently negotiating to get this opened up again to residents.

Honorary Townsman J Banbury noted that the footpaths map showed a footpath running between Woodstock and Barton Abbey. He reminded residents that anyone using a footpath must be responsible for their actions and show due respect to landowners. He noted that residents might lose the use of footpaths if people do not act responsibly and ask for permission beforehand if they are letting dogs off leads. He referred residents to the survey about the public use and rights of way in Old Woodstock and asked people to complete these and return them to the Town Hall so that we have evidence that shows that they are used.

c) The Chairman of the Environment Committee – Cllr Colin Carritt

Residents received a report from Cllr C Carritt Chairman of the Environment Committee. Cllr C Carritt reported that:

- (i) Cllr Mrs E Jay had taken over the work on the Water Meadows from Cllr Mrs P Richardson and that a new five year management plan was currently being drawn up by the Wychwood Project.
- (ii) Cllrs M Robertson and P Jay had worked on the Old Woodstock Line (OWL) Nature Reserve extension and that there would be an official opening ceremony soon. The new extension had been designed to require a minimum of maintenance. Cllr Carritt thanked Bob Pomfret for the voluntary work that he continues to undertake on the OWL Nature Reserve
- (iii) Cllr M Robertson is the Cllr leading on the play area refurbishment project for the New Road and Budds Close play areas. Work will start in June 2014. The diagrams of the two schemes were on display at the meeting
- (iv) A new roundabout has been installed in the Old Woodstock play area.
- (v) The new cemetery extension has been purchased, measured out, fenced off and will be seeded soon so that the lawns will look nice when needed.
- (vi) WTC has a highways and traffic consultancy role with the County and District Councils. The main issue under discussion at present is the town centre parking survey.
- (vii) Woodstock in Bloom has been extraordinarily successful and therefore it was only fair on the volunteers that the town take a break for a year. Two new planters have been purchased to complement the six seats.
- (viii) The work of the Public Footpaths and Open Spaces Working Group had already been reported by Honorary Townsman J Banbury and there commendable work was noted.

Professor A Glee noted that the playgrounds were not being done until June 2014. Cllr M Robertson said that the project had suffered from lengthy delays. She reported upon the consultations that had been undertaken and said that the feedback from this had been taken into account when drawing up the plans. The work had had to go out to tender due to the

size of the job but the project has now been let. The installation will take 4-5 weeks to complete. Cllr M Robertson apologised for the delays.

Mr C Taylor asked about the measures in place to deal with the large number of pot holes. Discussion followed.

Cllr C Carritt noted that OCC had a huge backlog of pot holes to fill which had been made worse by the wettest winter on record. The backlog will take months to complete. It was noted that OCC had an extra £1m towards this work. Residents were asked to report any pot holes that they see direct to OCC in order that they are logged on the system and processed. If it is an urgent situation they will get repaired with 24 hours, if not within 28 days. County Cllr I Hudspeth informed residents that the telephone number they should use to report pot holes is 0845 310 1111 or they could report them via the OCC web site.

Mr P Redpath noted that there were currently 26 volunteers involved in the Green Gym and that more would always be welcome.

Cllr Mrs E Jay informed residents that she would like to revive the Friends of the Water meadows.

d) Finance – Cllr Peter Jay

Cllr P Jay presented an oral overview of the Town Council's financial position and said that WTC's financial affairs were in a healthy state. He spoke to the summary sheet that had been distributed to residents at the start of the meeting. Cllr P Jay said that the precept equated to £50 a year for a Band D property, less than £1 a week which demonstrated prudence without austerity. Cllr P Jay thanked the late Mrs Ann Cooper for getting the property for Woodstock when the Borough ceased to exist.

Mr C Bayliss asked how the TC revenue remained the same if more people were moving in and Cllr P Jay explained that this was due, in part, to the changed regime about single resident's discounts.

Mrs T Redpath asked if WTC had been affected by the change in the Council tax benefit system and if WODC would be giving some of this money to Woodstock. The Mayor said that this had not been taken into account by WODC this year. It was noted that WODC could pass this on or it might otherwise be lost.

e) Property – Cllr Mrs V Edwards

The Council member for Property (CMfP), Cllr Mrs V Edwards reported that:

- (i) WTC has brought the refurbishment of 4 Park Street in under budget and on time and already had a tenant moving in at the end of the month. A local contractor was used to do this job.
- (ii) WTC has spent a lot of money on refurbishing the Community Centre and now needs to do the same at the Town Hall to upgrade the facility to make it the amenity that we need.
- (iii) The bookings for both venues will be looked at and a plan devised for how we might fill the current gaps, possibly by using an on-line booking system.
- (iv) Overall the situation on the Council's property is much better.

Professor A Glees asked whether we could have some better signage to the facilities such as the Community Centre and the CMfP said that this was part of the current plan.

Discussion followed about the number of shops that were closing and whether anything could be done to help stop this e.g. through the business rates. The CMfP asked residents to send any suggestions that they might have to the Town Hall. It was suggested that parking problems may be contributing to this and that the parking time limits should be enforced.

The Mayor confirmed that there was nothing that WTC could do to make a property owner re-instate a shop later if they had been given permission for a change of use to residential. The forthcoming closure of NatWest was of concern.

Mr D Allen was pleased that the CMfP was taking a strategic view of the shops and suggested that Woodstock needed to be seen as a shopping area of independent retailers.

f) Car Parking Review Update – Cllr C Carritt

Cllr C Carritt thanked the 354 residents who completed the survey. The full report is available on the WTC web site but the highlights included the following:

- (i) Most residents want tighter enforcement.
- (ii) There was support for a review of the parking periods in the Town Centre
- (iii) There is no consensus about the possible removal of yellow lines in Hensington Road
- (iv) OCC/WODC have ruled out a residents parking scheme but it was the biggest single comment so it is hoped that there may be a way to accommodate Town Centre residents
- (v) OCC/WODC will look at installing yellow lines at the bottom of Union Street.

Professor Glees suggested that the response rate was not very good out of a population of three thousand people. He said that a mixture of parking was needed in Woodstock and considered that residents parking would be a disaster resulting in aggravation and arguments. Mr G Myatt agreed and said that he couldn't see how a residents parking scheme would work. The residents who will benefit will be those who bought a house knowing that it had no parking. Some residents said that they liked the current light touch on enforcement. It was noted that:

- (i) There are very few garages.
- (ii) People who work in Woodstock need to be able to park all day.
- (iii) Only 1 hotel has parking
- (iv) Most of the pubs don't have any parking
- (v) WTC should engage with Blenheim to stop people parking on Woodstock streets and then walking into Blenheim
- (vi) There is not enough parking in the town and the only place where extra car parking might be developed is by introducing a second level above or below ground at the Hensington Road car park.
- (vii) Over enforcement may put people off visiting the town therefore if this route is followed the Town should get a percentage of the revenues that are generated.
- (viii) Parking by students from the Oxford School of Drama who park in Hensington Road still causes a problem as also do parents dropping off or collecting children from the schools.

- (ix) Parking for users of the Community Centre is a problem and something needs to be done about this. There is no provision for disabled people parking outside this building.

Cllr C Carritt said that if any of the regimes were to be changed there would be a statutory period of consultation beforehand.

A resident asked whether Blenheim Estate could be used if residents could use their staff car park overnight and the Mayor agreed to ask John Hoy about this. The possibility of a Park and Ride was discussed but this was thought to be out of the question unless resident's numbers increased significantly.

6 REPORT FROM THE COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLORS

a) County Cllr Ian Hudspeth

County Cllr Hudspeth presented his highlights of the year. His presentation included information about the election, reductions in government spending, budget savings, Home to School Transport, other transport matters including the new car park at Long Hanborough Station, the City Deal, better broadband, flooding, the SHMA and Children's Centres. A report of his presentation was available to residents at the meeting.

Mr R Kinch asked if OCC could ask school buses to use the A4095 and not go through Woodstock. County Cllr I Hudspeth said that a one way system might be considered but that there would be a cost.

Mr D Allan asked OCC to install a lower level at the Hensington Road car park. Cllr I Hudspeth said that this car park belonged to WODC, that such a modification would cost lots of money and wouldn't double capacity.

Cllr Mrs E Stokes asked about the possibility of a one way system around the centre of Woodstock but Cllr I Hudspeth said that two- way traffic was more effective

b) District Cllr Julian Cooper

District Cllr Cooper spoke on behalf of himself and District Cllr Poskitt and presented the report from the District Cllrs. The highlights included information about the 2014/15 budget, recent planning decisions and the future, transport related matters and positive ventures and developments. There were no questions from residents. Hard copies of the report were available to residents at the meeting.

A report from TVP was noted although nobody had been available to attend the meeting.

7 OPEN FORUM

No resolutions had been received.

Dr R McGurrin spoke about the WTC minute style and asked why they no longer contained full details of discussions and who said what. The Mayor said that it was not common practice to do detailed minutes. Only two Cllrs had voted against the current style of minutes – Cllrs S Parnes and B Yoxall. Cllr Mrs E Jay had abstained. WAG was worried that this reduced transparency and made it difficult for residents to see how decisions are made. Mr T Gardiner said that it had never been satisfactorily explained why shorter minutes were better.

Honorary Townsman Dr R Edwards explained that the purpose of minutes is to record the decisions of the Council and that that is what you need. Mrs T Redpath suggested that minutes are easier to write if longer. Mrs A Grant said that she disagreed with short minutes and that longer minutes helped new Cllrs.

Cllr P Jay explained that the rationale behind minutes is that they are written to record executive decisions that are made and to enable these decisions to be carried out. Cllr P Jay said that it was not useful to have long opinions included in the minutes as it's not what the minutes are for and therefore the Council decision was right and it would be a waste of time and money to go backwards.

Mr C Bayliss said that the Town Council meets in public and so anyone can attend and therefore it is not being secretive.

The Mayor said that the trial of the current minute style would be reviewed at the end of May.

Dr R McGurrin suggested that a straw poll be held but Mr G Myatt proposed a formal resolution instead that:

“This meeting calls upon WTC to reverse its decision of 12th November 2013 and to ensure that Council minutes include sufficient information to enable the public to understand the reasons behind Council decisions”

Cllr C Carritt seconded this motion and it was carried by an overwhelming majority.

The Mayor then wished the residents good night and thanked them for attending.

The meeting rose at 10.15pm.

Signed..... Date.....

Copies of the minutes from the Town meetings on 19th March 2013 and 18th June 2013 were available at the meeting along with the papers presented by Cllrs, information about the Historic Woodstock Wall Plaques, the Town Centre Parking Review and the Footpaths and Open Spaces Report and Questionnaire. Information was also available about Thames Valley Police, ‘Wake-up to Woodstock’, the Youth Club Newsletter, the ‘Good Neighbours’ scheme, ‘Sustainable Woodstock’, the Wall Hangings Trust, the ‘Woodstock Action Group (WAG)’, the ‘Woodstock Town partnership’, the ‘Woodstock Library Friends (WoLF)’, the annual litter pick and the events that are scheduled at the Oxfordshire Museum in Woodstock.