

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING  
HELD ON TUESDAY 19<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2019 AT 7.30PM  
AT WOODSTOCK COMMUNITY CENTRE**

**PRESENT:**

The Town Mayor Cllr P Jay, Deputy Mayor Cllr A Grant, Cllrs J Bleakley, J Cooper, M Parkinson, U Parkinson, E Poskitt, CCllr I Hudspeth, Roger File COO Blenheim Palace, Tom McCulloch Joint Chief Executive Community First Oxfordshire and approximately 100 members of the public.

**APOLOGIES:**

Cllrs D Davies, S Parnes, S Rasch, P Redpath and T Redpath.

**WELCOME:**

The Town Mayor, Cllr P Jay confirmed that this is a Town Meeting but it is incumbent on the Town Council and his role as Chairman of the Council to Chair the meeting to set a 'suggested' Agenda as a starting point for discussion.

**ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA:**

The members of the public in attendance **resolved** to accept and adopt the 'suggested' Agenda.

**MINUTES:**

It was **resolved** to approve the minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Tuesday 20th March 2018 and the Town Meeting held on Tuesday 26th November 2018. The Mayor, Cllr P Jay signed the minutes as a true record of those meetings.

**CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF THE TOWN:**

The Mayor, Cllr P Jay briefly introduced the agenda item stating that the Town is likely to change physically and socially over the next several years. He said that this is obviously a matter of interest and concern for the people whom live in Woodstock and it is very important that they have an opportunity to have their say about the character of that transformation. The Mayor outlined the role of Community First Oxfordshire (CFO) in facilitating the public consultation and introduced Tom McCulloch, Joint Chief Executive Officer, CFO who would be giving a presentation after the representative from Blenheim had spoken.

Mr Roger File, Chief Operations Officer, Blenheim explained that he is responsible for leading the strategic land promotion programme. He said that Blenheim regard the consultation process as a very important process and that they want to be able to make sure that the new developments coming to Woodstock become fully integrated with the old. He stated that they also want change to be a positive thing and want Woodstock to end up being a better place in its new form.

He hoped that with CFO facilitating the consultation process residents would express their views and thoughts freely. He mentioned that the Section 106 contribution from the developer is only so big and cannot fund all the things that might be proposed from the consultation process.

Mr File finished by confirming that when the consultation process is complete Community First Oxfordshire, Woodstock Town Council and Blenheim will review the conclusions and see what can be designed into the scenes being worked up.

Mr Tom McCulloch Joint Chief Executive Community First Oxfordshire, gave a brief overview of how CFO will facilitate the consultation process to ascertain the current and future needs of the town and help produce the community infrastructure delivery plan. He explained CFO are a Community Development Charity and their core mission is to help communities to help themselves and offer support for community development strategies.

The community part of the plan will look at the needs of the existing community groups and organisations and how they can be supported and what else they might need as the town expands.

The infrastructure delivery side of the plan will focus on the key infrastructure requirements necessary to support planned new development such as roads, buses etc. The aim is to ensure that the special character of the town is preserved, facilities enhanced where necessary and new development is successfully integrated with the existing communities of Woodstock.

He said that the comprehensive community consultation exercise will identify and prioritise projects and set out strategies for delivering them. He commented that as all the development sites are owned by Blenheim this presents a unique opportunity with a single landowner with an ongoing interest in the town to implement holistic joined up infrastructure improvement in the town.

Mr McCulloch reiterated that there is an opportunity in the here and now to shape the actual planning applications and developer contributions on these housing sites and is the time for the community to have their voices heard and drive the process.

The plan will have two main phases, firstly the consultation phase this will identify key issues and priority projects to be discussed with the community and the second phase is to develop road maps that will set out how the priority projects identified might be delivered in practice. Each phase will take about 6 months. Three initial events have already been held with approximately 100 attendees and will be followed up with a community survey, meeting with community groups and organisations and more focussed approaches targeted at harder to reach residents.

CFO will feedback on progress and update the community on future plans with articles in the Woodstock and Bladon News, updates on community facebook pages and also on the CFO website. Tom provided an outline of the timeframe for the process.

Question: Are you looking at best practice elsewhere when looking at new developments attaching themselves to communities of historic towns like Woodstock?

Response: *CFO has completed extensive research for Cherwell and South Vale District Councils about best practice and have reviewed a number of different development contents and there is a lot of best practice material for CFO to draw on.*

Question: Can members of the public gain access to that material?

Response: *All material is available on CFO website.*

Question: How are judgements made on whether capacity is suitable/enough for roads, schools etc?

Response: *Mr File stated that the Local Plans goes through to 2031, the allocations that have been made or are under consideration (Cherwell site), have put forward for planning reasons around sustainability which is a subjective term. He said that the important thing for Blenheim is that we need to make sure we get this right and make it work for the wider community and need to build something that has a legacy attached. He quoted the landowner legacy principle that states long term landowners have a social, moral and economic responsibility to the communities they develop within and that is one of the guiding principles Blenheim are using in bring these projects forward.*

Question: Is this process too late in the day?

Response: *Mr File said that he didn't think it was too late but acknowledged that it may have been better to have had this consultation some years ago. Rather than dwell on the past he encouraged everyone to take the opportunity they have to look forward and make this really work.*

Question: How is the affordability of the affordable housing worked out?

Response: *With Blenheim being one developer owning all of the sites they have the opportunity to look at this a little differently but the development scheme has to be viable and a viability assessment must be carried out. Blenheim would operate within those guidelines. He said that the affordable housing Blenheim are delivering, particularly the affordable rental that will be at a deeper discount than any other affordable housing provider that operate in this area. Most affordable housing providers will only offer a discount of 20% of the market value. Blenheim want to reduce the affordability gap and their affordable rental housing will be at 40% discount of the market value. They are also planning to retain ownership of all the affordable housing so this can be controlled. The percentage of affordable housing Blenheim deliver will be determined through the planning process.*

Question: Would Blenheim like to give up some of their land by the main gate and allow visitors to park and walk into Woodstock?

Response: *Mr File reiterated that this is what the consultation part process is about. He said that he understood why residents feel that Blenheim should allow visitors to park and walk into the town but they have a pay envelope and need to generate funds to maintain the palace. He also mentioned that Blenheim are only permitted to have 300 hard surface car parking spaces within the park which are needed for paying visitors.*

Comment: It would be in the interest of Blenheim and commuters to make better use of Hanborough Station but the walk/cycle from Woodstock through Bladon is extremely dangerous.

Response: *Mr File confirmed that Blenheim are currently in the process of mapping all the footpaths and bridleways around Woodstock and seeing where there are gaps and can they improve the connectivity between the cycleway on the A44 and Hanborough Station. He also confirmed that there are improvements planned for the station.*

The Mayor Cllr P Jay proposed to bring forward agenda item 6 - Other Issues Raised By Residents as Mr Brian Yoxall's request was relevant to the current agenda item, this was seconded by Cllr A Grant.

It was **RESOLVED** to bring this item forward.

### **OTHER ISSUES RAISED BY RESIDENTS**

Mr Brian Yoxall addressed the meeting with the background history to his proposal stating that nearly 3 years ago, in May 2016, he was instrumental in drafting the WTC response to the consultation on the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan. To the question of whether the right priorities and commitments to assist connectivity had been included in the Plan WTC unanimously agreed to say, among other things: "The necessary infrastructure needed to be provided in advance of further growth. He stated there is no sign of, for example, early solutions to the problems posed by the single carriageway bottleneck between Yarnton and Loop Farm near Peartree".

As a resident, no longer a town councillor, he raised the same point at the last town meeting and afterwards in email correspondence with Cllr Ian Hudspeth, both in his capacity as Leader of OCC and County Cllr for Woodstock Division.

The reason he has described this as an acute highways infrastructure problem is that this section of the A44 has two bridges, one over the Oxford Canal and another over the Oxford-Banbury railway. To widen the railway bridge would require a blockade on the railway which would be a major problem in itself and it would also be costly. It is just possible that less radical and less costly ways of improving capacity on this stretch of highway might be adopted but there is absolutely no sign of that yet and they would require the usual lengthy Consultation procedures

Meanwhile housing development has commenced at Woodstock East despite the efforts of many including our District Cllrs J Cooper and E Poskitt to press the point in response to the consultation on the West

Oxfordshire District Council Local Plan about the need for infrastructure to precede housing development. Mr Yoxall said that he still maintains the effect of the increased traffic which will arise from housing development in Woodstock and Long Hanborough on the single carriageway bottleneck between Yarnton and Loop Farm roundabout will be horrific and that the problem could be exacerbated by more development at Begbroke and Yarnton. He said that he felt very strongly that Woodstock residents should ask our M.P. to demonstrate his willingness to be true to his word by him calling for a halt to all housing development in Woodstock until remedial measures are brought to bear on this bottleneck and the problem addressed by them being physically brought to fruition.

He proposed that:-

*In a recent newsletter our Member for Parliament declared that he has always been clear that infrastructure upgrades should precede NOT follow housing development.*

*In the light of this statement this meeting calls upon our MP to request a halt to house building in Woodstock until the acute highways infrastructure problem on the A44 between Yarnton (Turnpike Inn) and the Loop Farm roundabout has been addressed and brought physically to fruition.*

Mr File did not disagree that infrastructure should be delivered before housing but being realistic the only way that the money could be found for this would be from residential developer Section 106 contributions.

The Mayor Cllr P Jay called for a vote.

**VOTE:** For: 50 Against: 10 Abstaining: 0

It was **resolved** to carry the motion.

#### Report from the Chair of Oxfordshire County Council

Cllr I Hudspeth provided a summary of his report drawing attention to the biggest challenge for the County Council which is still Adults and Childrens Social Care each year more funding being put into both areas. He confirmed that a new lighting contract had been put in place to replace all 59,000 street lights across the county with smart street lights. Since last winter 42,000 defects have been repaired (including Shipton Road). He also mentioned the Growth Deal where all Councils are working together and have £30,000,000 for infrastructure delivery over a 5 year period, £60,000,000 to deliver additional affordable homes and £5,000,000 of capacity funding for the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan which will be looking across Oxfordshire to see where new development should be. The £215,000,000 for assisting the delivery of homes over 5 years was also mentioned.

He also provided an update on the bids that the County Council will be submitting for improving the infrastructure on the A40 corridor which will have an impact on the A44 corridor.

Cllr Hudspeth stated that the County Council are working with Network Rail, Great Western Rail on the North Cotswold Task Force which is looking at improving the frequency of trains on the Hanborough line and also a new station building is being put in.

He finished by providing an update on Woodstock Library, advising that he was informed that it was unsafe at the same time as everyone else. The wall survey report has been shared with Woodstock Town Council and is available publicly. The outcome of the report is that the building has to be demolished and the library is currently located on the museum site in Fletchers House.

Question: Does WODC or OCC or the government put money into improving the parking situation in Woodstock?

Response: Cllr I Hudspeth replied that there is no money available for improving car parking in Woodstock, any funds would have to come from Section 106 developer contributions.

Question: Why did OCC remove the application for a cycle path to be funded by Central Government which would have improved connectivity on the B4044 Community Path between Dean Court - Farmoor - Eynsham?

Response: *Cllr I Hudspeth explained why the request for a cycle path was removed from the original application and advised that OCC are looking trying to find the funding for that cycle path.*

#### District Councillors Annual Report

Cllr J Cooper provided an outline of the District Councillors Annual report drawing particular attention to the West Oxfordshire Local Plan, the £10,000,000 loaned by WODC to Cottsway for the provision of more social and affordable housing, the need to put pressure on local landowner such as Oxford Colleges to increase their affordable housing provision, West Oxfordshire Community Grants from which Woodstock Youth Club & Hanborough Station will benefit.

Question: Is there any chance of having a 5 hour limit for parking in the Hensington Road Car Park?

Response: *Cllr E Poskitt said that this is something which is going to be considered as a result of the Woodstock parking survey.*

#### **OTHER ISSUES RAISED BY RESIDENTS**

Mr Bob MGurrin addressed the meeting on the potential effects of air pollution (especially nitrogen dioxide levels) in Woodstock. He confirmed that the Woodstock Action Group (WAG) had in July 2018 requested that several air pollutions were set up in the town which WTC passed as a resolution in October 2018. The monitors were repositioned one in the centre of the town and one at the junction of Hensington Road and the A44 in January 2019. Mr McGurrin drew attention to the increase in tourist coaches, delivery vans, local buses and other vehicles coming through the centre of the town. He said that he personally believes that there are no safe levels of nitrogen dioxide however with the monitors in place we should be able to see if Woodstock residents are being exposed to dangerous levels of air pollution. He finished by saying "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

The Mayor Cllr P Jay thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

The meeting closed at 8.55pm

A list of documents available at the meeting are retained in the Town Hall Office.