

# 10<sup>th</sup> April 2018

Minutes of the proceedings at the **FORTY FOURTH ANNUAL TOWN MEETING** held this day in the **MAIN HALL, TOWN HALL, WOKINGHAM** from 7.30pm to 8.45pm.

## **PRESENT**

The Worshipful the Town Mayor of Wokingham  
(Councillor Peter Lucey - in the Chair)

Cllrs: M Bishop, N Campbell-White, D O H Davies, Mrs A N Drake, Ms L Forbes, C R George, Ms S C Gurney, Mrs G Hewetson, T J Lack, D G Lee, P M Lucey, J P McGhee-Sumner, J P Mirfin, M Monk, M L Richards, I L Shepherd-Dubey, A N Waters and R J Wyatt.

## **IN ATTENDANCE**

23 members of the public  
Town Clerk  
Responsible Finance Officer  
Civic Officer

## **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)**

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from the following Councillors: M Ashwell, C J Bowring, Mrs UK Clark, C Moore, K G Morgan, S Odedra and Mrs S Steatham.

## **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 2)**

The Minutes of the forty third Annual Town Meeting, held on 11th April 2017, were submitted to the meeting (pages 298 to 311, copies circulated at meeting).

**RESOLVED**  
**99**

It was proposed by Cllr Mrs G Hewetson and seconded by Cllr Waters and it was that the Minutes be received as a true and complete record and be confirmed and signed by the Town Mayor.

## **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (Agenda Item 3)**

No matters were raised.

## **NOTICE CONVENING MEETING (Agenda Item 4)**

The Town Clerk stated that the Notice had been posted in accordance with statutory procedures.

## **TOWN MAYOR'S ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 5)**

The Town Mayor gave the Annual Report as follows:

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, and thank you all for attending this Annual Town Meeting - in our beautiful, and just-redecorated, Victorian Town Hall. Unlike our regular meetings the Annual Town Meeting is our Parish end-of-year meeting, where the various committee chairmen report directly to you on their committees' achievements in the past year. It is also an opportunity for members of the public to ask questions and we will be pleased to answer any that you may have, either pre-submitted written questions or questions straight from the microphones. – It may be we are unable to fully answer some of the latter “ad-hoc” questions tonight – in that unlikely case the question will be noted and you will receive a written reply as soon as possible.

I'd like to start my Annual Report by thanking all of my councillor-colleagues for their time, effort and dedication to serving Wokingham Town. They have shown great commitment and service to our council and to our town (all that commitment and service is, of course, voluntary and unpaid!)

I should also like to take this opportunity of offering my personal thanks to Jan Nowecki, our Town Clerk, whose enthusiasm and drive have again really been evident, not least in the work involved with the Market Place. Although my motto has been "Positivity" I acknowledge that it has been a challenging year, with much upheaval. I recognise that our Town Council is served by a small, first-class team of officers, and I and the Council are indebted to them for their unstinting support and for the excellent work they do for the Town Council. Our officers have worked well in challenging circumstances, my thanks to them all, and I was particularly delighted that the Town Hall was fully booked, with weddings still abundant. We welcomed two new officers this year, Bob Sherrard and Miles Thorne, one as Market & Bloom Officer, a newly-created post designed to enhance our Market and Wokingham in Bloom efforts.

I won't list our achievements last year – my colleagues, who chair the major committees, have their own reports – but will briefly mention that as part of its Civic duties the Town Council is involved in many events within our Town: the Children's Family Fun Day, the May Fayre, Sunny Saturdays, Heritage Weekend, Remembrance Sunday, Living Advent Calendar and the Winter Carnival. In addition, we had our annual Civic Awards ceremony, in which the Council formally recognises and thanks individual residents who have given their time and energy voluntarily in the service of others. The Council's objective in supporting and/or promoting all these activities is to further strengthen our Civic pride and feeling, and enhance Wokingham Town's reputation as a lovely place in which to live and work.

Since taking office in May 2017, I have represented the Council at many events: from a total number of 132 engagements, I have personally attended 124. Another 8 have been attended by the Deputy Mayor or Past Mayors, in my absence. And it was lovely to be accompanied at 5 events by the Mini-Mayor, Miss Caitlyn Hyde!

I find such civic duties extremely rewarding and am always impressed by the public-spiritedness of the residents of Wokingham. Later this evening, we shall be recognising some of this work when we present the 2018 grant cheques.

I will end with my usual plug for the "Love Wokingham" website, you can enter your email address and we will send you – just one(!) - email per month listing what's on. Often people don't know what is happening and it is a challenge to get the message out, without swamping those not interested - we want to spread the word to those interested such that you don't miss all the great things that are happening in our town. So please register for you and your friends! Upcoming of course we have the May Fayre, our May Cultural Month, Family Fun Day and our International Street Concert on 2<sup>nd</sup> June.

We have with us tonight our Chairman of Committees: Councillor David Davies, the Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee, Councillor Andrew Waters, the Chairman of the Planning and Transportation Committee, Councillor Nick Campbell-White, Chairman of the Amenities Committee, Councillor Gwynneth Hewetson who is Chairman of the Civic Committee, Councillor Sally

Gurney Vice-Chairman of the Arts and Culture Committee. Councillor Lynn Forbes will also be giving us an update about graffiti.

It's worth noting here that most regular council meetings are open to the public and you are always welcome to attend and ask questions at these – not just the Annual Town Meeting! We truly welcome your interest!

I will now hand you over to the Committee Chairmen to present their reports starting with Cllr David Davies, Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee.

## **COMMITTEES' ANNUAL REPORTS (Agenda Item 6)**

### Chairman of Finance and Personnel Committee

Cllr Davies stood and presented his report as follows:

I am David Davies, Chair of the Finance and Personnel Committee, leader of the Town Council and member for Wescott East for the past seven years.

As usual I will leave my colleagues chairing the other committees to provide you with the more interesting details of what the Council has been doing in this past year, as mine is a committee that is most effective when it is most boring.

The Finance and Personnel committee, as the name suggests, is responsible for managing the budgets on behalf of the Full Council, as well as managing and supporting staff and officers of the Council. On the latter point I would like to personally thank all of our officers who work tirelessly to enact the decisions of the council and do an amazing job. In particular for this committee and as leader I would like to thank Nicky Harmsworth, our RFO, and the Town Clerk, Jan Nowecki who ensure that the Committee and the Council run effectively.

We have grown as well in this past year and I would like to welcome Technical and Planning Officer - Miles Thorne and Markets and Bloom Officer - Robert Sherrard to the team, and I am very pleased for Mike Dunstan who has retired and I thank him for his service to the Council over the many years and wish him well.

Whilst we are a Town Council we are relatively large, for example this year our budget is slightly over £2.6m and a large part of the committee is simply the monitoring of budgets, questioning and challenging the reporting and ensuring that we are making the best use of your money. We receive income from the precept, and are responsible for proposing the annual precept to Full Council, as well as the Community Infrastructure Levy, some legacy S106 funding, and events from the market through to weddings and if anyone would like to hire this wonderful space we are in tonight then please do speak to me afterwards. The committee also works with the internal and external auditors and as always, and thanks to our RFO, we again have received a clean bill of health.

There are a number of specific areas that the committee is directly responsible for however over and above simply managing the money. We are responsible for ensuring that the more mundane services such as insurance are providing us best value and in a related field we ensure that risks to the Council are understood and controlled and we have plans and contingencies for, almost, any eventuality.

We lead the engagement with our tenants in the Town Hall building and importantly for this year the F&P committee funds the Council's marketing budget and we have attempted to help the traders within the town during the disruption

as a result of the work on the Market place and have, for example, jointly funded the production of videos to try and promote the town during these works. We do appreciate that this only goes so far but as much as we are able we have tried as a Council to support everyone in the town during the past few months.

Moving on we are the primary point of contact with the Police and the Council actually provides funding for half a PCSO. This not only provides additional policing within the town but allows us to influence the focus of the police, with the changes to parking enforcement we have seen a huge decrease in anti-social parking, but we do see speeding as a significant issue and work with the police and community groups to try and reduce these.

Finally and in some respects the most, and least, enjoyable part of the committees work is the distribution of grants. Every year we distribute between £60k and £70k to charities and good causes, however every year we typically receive requests for twice that amount. We have some wonderful groups that we have supported over the years and others we consistently support such as the May Fair and Winter Carnival. It is amazing to be able to give this money and make a real difference to people and I would encourage groups and charities looking for support to apply, particularly for seed funding to get a good idea off the ground.

I'll hand over now to my fellow councillors who will tell you more about the various things that we do.

Next the Mayor asked Cllr Campbell-White to present the Amenities Committee report:

#### Chairman of Amenities Committee

Cllr Campbell-White stood and presented his report as follows:

The Amenities Committee has the largest workload and is responsible for :- Buildings, Parks and Open Spaces, the Market Place, Christmas Lights, Allotments, Horticultural Competitions, Litter and Graffiti.

#### Buildings:

- Town Hall - This room, the Annexe and the Committee Room, have been completely redecorated and the floors stripped and repolished. Not a straightforward task, as all the pictures and honours boards, etc had to be professionally removed, stored and re-installed + working around two Weddings
- There is always work needed on this Listed Building which is carried out on a planned maintenance programme
- Woosehill Community Centre - Well used by the community and brings in useful rental revenue. The meeting rooms, entrance hall and stairway have been redecorated and the floors refurbished.
- The shops café and offices within the Town Hall complex - again bring in useful rental revenue to the Council.

#### Parks and Open Spaces

- We look after and maintain all our playgrounds and play equipment
- We look after and maintain all our own grounds for which a new 3 year fixed price tender has been accepted following competitive tendering
- We have an extensive tree works programme

- We continue to support the Holt Copse Volunteers with their maintenance and improvements of Joel Park.

#### Markets

- We have continued to help and support our market traders whilst they have been displaced. Trading has been difficult for them, a few have left, while other new ones have arrived. We are confident once back in their new spaces, with improved surroundings and facilities, that trading revenue will pick up.
- Cllr Peter Lucey will update you on the Market Place

#### Christmas Lights

- We hope you agree with us that the first year of the new three year contract with Lite was an improvement on the displays in previous years.
- You will see a more comprehensive display this Christmas

#### Allotments

- We currently have four allotment sites with 385 plots. The waiting list at the moment is short so if you are interested in taking on an allotment, please contact us
- Shortly two more allotment sites as a result of the new house building will be added. Crest Nicholson are due to hand over a prepared site in the Kentwood development and allotments will be available at Mulberry Grove on the Montague Park development at the end of the year. If they are not taken up by the new residents, as we expect they will be, they will be available for those on the Town waiting list.

#### Horticultural competitions

- Thames and Chilterns in Bloom . We are once again entering, following a fallow year due to the development disruption. Although it will be a big challenge with ongoing building works, we are again aiming for a Silver Gilt medal, the same as we gained in 2016. All the small diverse gardening groups that previously contributed to our success are still flourishing
- Wokingham in Flower; this competition runs in parallel with Wokingham in Bloom and is open to commercial premises and public houses with gardens or hanging baskets
- Greenfingers competition; this is the competition for all residents together with residential homes with either a front or rear garden that they wish to enter.

#### Litter

- Cllr Tony Lack organised a successful BIG TIDY UP in the Town Centre on the morning of 24 March which was well supported by the general public for which we are very grateful. He then went on to organise another successful collection around Woosehill in the afternoon

#### Graffiti

- We are currently experiencing widespread graffiti around the Town Centre, Woosehill and Norreys.
- This is taking up a disproportionate amount of the Amenities Officer's time trying to encourage property owners to have it removed. Network Rail and WBC will only remove graffiti if the content is offensive.

- Cllr Tony Lack, whose mission is to rid Wokingham of litter and graffiti, removes a considerable amount in his free time and with his own equipment.
- Cllr Lynn Forbes who leads our graffiti sub-committee is on a long term mission to educate our schoolchildren and will tell you what she is doing.

### Thanks

I would like to offer many thanks to the Amenities Committee for all their hard work, but specifically to those that do the real work and do not just do standard 38 hours but work as required. We are fortunate to have such a dedicated team.

- Paul Smith (Amenities Officer)
- Rob Vincent (Buildings and Grounds Officer) and the grounds staff
- Caretakers and particularly Kevin Belstone who looks after all the Events and Bookings for the three Town Hall rooms which hold so many functions
- Please remember that the Town Hall is available for hire for Weddings, either for a full service or a reception in this elegant main hall or in our Diamond Jubilee Room for smaller gatherings. Brochures are readily available from our Information Centre

Cllr Nick Campbell-White asked Cllr Lynn Forbes to provide an update on behalf of the Graffiti working party:

### Graffiti Working Party

Cllr Lynn Forbes explained that she has been working with local secondary schools to get them engaged at the early stage to educate them about preventing and managing graffiti.

Cllr Forbes has engaged with the Holt, St. Crispins and Emmbrook Senior Schools who are developing ideas to help eradicate the problem whilst learning useful skills along the way.

Next the Mayor asked Cllr Andrew Waters to present the Planning and Transport Committee report:

### Chairman of Planning and Transport Committee

Cllr Waters stood and presented his report as follows:

Once again this council year has been a very busy period for the Planning & Transport Committee at Wokingham Town Council.

As many of you will know, our position is defined under law as statutory consultees to Wokingham Borough Council for all planning applications which fall within the Wokingham Town area. In the past twelve months this committee has received 455 such applications, commented on 42 and raised 16 objections. We have also commented on several Borough consultation documents including the new Strategic Development Plan which determines the location of future developments in the area up to 2036.

Despite the fact that we can only act in an advisory capacity, our voice is strong and when we speak we are listened to.

Within the major housing developments such as Matthews Green and Montague Park, we have been highly effective in pointing out major planning flaws within proposed applications. This has resulted in alterations to the original design and a better built environment for the residents who will eventually live there. In

addition, we have also taken up existing residents' concerns during the construction phase of such projects, ensuring that the contractors only operate within the terms of their construction management plan, working within their permitted hours and ensuring that highways are kept clear of debris as well as reporting incidents where construction vehicles are not driven in a safe and courteous manner.

The town centre redevelopment has been challenging for the whole community and again members of our committee have been very active in highlighting concerns relating to pedestrian safety and suggesting better phasing of traffic lights so as to minimise disruption as the project progresses. We have also been very conscious of the financial impact town centre redevelopment has had on our shops and restaurants, resulting in our very vocal support for the Free after Three parking scheme implemented during the most restrictive phase of the project.

Over the past year, this committee has sought to embrace a wider remit and have actively engaged with the borough council to promote better coordination of major roadworks during this period of rapid expansion and redevelopment for our town. We have lobbied hard to improve local planning legislation calling for more and larger parking spaces, wider roads and more generous living space for housing developments.

And if this committee thinks there is something wrong, we are not frightened of going to the very top. For some time now, all of us involved in Local Government have been very concerned at the unfairness of current planning legislation, which is stacked in the favour of developers and takes little account of the wishes of local residents. As a result our Borough council has been forced to accept housing development that is poor in design and not supported by the infrastructure it needs to be sustainable. This committee wrote to the Prime Minister telling her just that and when we got no reply, we voiced our concerns to the press, urging our local MPs to take up our cause on the floor of the House of Commons. Amazingly, we received a reply a few days later.

I am very proud of the cross party members of our Planning & Transport Committee who it is my great privilege to chair, I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for all their hard work over the past year much of it unseen, reviewing complex planning applications and the many points of Law which impact on our recommendations.

I speak for all of us when I say how honoured we all feel in serving the people of Wokingham Town and look forward to another busy municipal year.

Next the Mayor asked Cllr Sally Gurney (Vice-Chairman) to present the Arts and Culture Committee report:

#### Chairman of Arts & Culture Committee

Cllr Ms Gurney stood and presented her report as follows:

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Sally Gurney, I am the Vice Chair of the Arts & Culture Committee. Our Chairman, Councillor Gwynneth Hewetson, has asked me to present the report for our Committee this evening.

On behalf of the Chairman and myself, I would like to thank the Councillors who serve on the Committee for their time, their ideas and their efforts; and extend our gratitude and appreciation to our Arts & Culture Officer, Gemma Cumming, the Town Clerk and all the Officers who have a seemingly boundless well of

enthusiasm for bringing our ideas to fruition. Without their hard work, all this Committee would be is hot air!

This has been a challenging year for the town, and one in which the work of this Committee really underpins the town vision – encouraging the life and vibrancy of Wokingham Town for its existing and future residents and businesses.

Starting the Council's year as ever is the May Cultural Month. Gemma works tirelessly on putting this together, creating a 40 page brochure of over 100 events running in the town during the month of May. This is a great way to engage with local societies and sample just a small number of the events and activities that run year-long in our town. This year's brochure is just as big, with just as many events, and if you haven't received a copy through your letterbox already, there are copies available at the back of the hall!

Kicking off the month as always was the May Fayre, an event sponsored by the town and run by the Lions, with stalls, music, fairground rides, morris dancers, and even ferret racing. It's always amazing just how many people you can fit in the town at one time!

On the last Saturday in May was annual Family Fun Day at Langborough Recreation ground. It's a completely free event for families, with face painting, magic shows, petting zoo, more fairground rides, candyfloss and lots of fun! Even when it drizzles, all we see are huge grins on the faces of the kids having a brilliant time. It's rapidly become a fixture in the Council's calendar, and this year will be no exception.

The fourth year of Theatre in the Park included 2 plays each having two performances. In May, Theatresmith took us on a whistlestop tour through Shakespeare's four greatest tragedies, especially adapted for Howard Palmer Gardens, with a "Who's Line Is It Anyway?" twist. It was so good, I almost went twice!

In July, Theatre in the Park returned again with one of Aesop's Fables, the Tortoise and the Hare, including a special performance for local schools. Both plays proved popular with the audience.

I love the relaxed and cheerful atmosphere of Theatre in the Park, and I think this event is one of our hidden gems. I hope even more will come and enjoy it this year. We've got The Owl and the Pussycat in May, and July's play will be an award-winning pre-existing play by a local theatre company as part of a tour of the work. Both plays are perfect for families – and picnics.

Rewinding to June, the International Street Concert moved to Broad Street, and was a great success with a bigger audience than ever before. The headliners Foxx UK were very popular, and the variety of acts meant there was something for everyone. We're finessing it each year, and based on some really great feedback from you, we are tweaking the layout for this year to make it even better. This year's concert is on Saturday June 2nd – the stage is set, the acts are confirmed and the compere is booked so bring your folding chairs and enjoy a fantastic evening of live music in the street.

After the success of the first ArtFest, it returned again last year on Rose Street, taking advantage of the International Street Concert in the evening. The art market had over 50 Artists, selling and exhibiting original artwork, limited-edition prints, sculpture and ceramics. ArtFest returns again this year on day of the Street Concert.

Carrying us through summer all the way from May to September were Sunny Saturdays – a variety of local acts bringing us a small haven of entertainment in the town centre. The Market Place works meant that this year they moved to a temporary space along with the market, and that worked well enough, but we are looking forward to being back on the new improved Market Place later this year! Once again, in September, we welcomed the Wokingham Arts Trail, a weekend-long exhibition in sites in and around the town by all manner of talented local artists.

Wrapping up the end of year was the Wokingham Winter Carnival, run by residents, sponsored by the Town, and one of the most popular street events in the South. The Living Advent Calendar carries that holiday spirit forwards throughout December, organised for us by More Arts this year, with nightly pockets of entertainment around the town, supporting local charities who get involved. We have some amazingly talented people in Wokingham! Despite the disruption around town, we had more people attending than previous years, and the charities benefitted accordingly.

Since this time last year, we have been lucky to have the time and enthusiasm of volunteer Kevin Lenton working on our Virtual Museum. In just six months, he has been able to more than double the content, including all the items of historical significance held by the Town Council. It now has 12 collections and Mr Lenton is working with Gemma on identifying new collections to include in virtual form in the future. This is truly a remarkable resource, and well worth a look. Looking ahead, then, to 2018 – the Wokingham Mosaics are proceeding apace, and the in-progress artwork that I've been lucky to get a sneak preview of is absolutely stunning. The first of these will be put in place as part of the market place works, so it's not too much longer now before you will be able to see them in situ, and an app will follow in due course.

In addition to all these great events which will be running again this year, we are launching a new event in October, the Wokingham Children's Book Festival. We are still firming up plans, but you can expect some fantastic children's authors and book readings around the weekend of 20th/21st October.

Whether you are artist or performer, resident or work here, I hope you have enjoyed the events of the last 12 months, and will continue to be involved, as performer or audience, in the events of the next 12. I thank you all for your involvement and support of the town, and I would encourage you to sign up to the Love Wokingham newsletter and website, or follow us on Facebook, so that we can continue to share these events with you in the future. Thank you for your time.

Next the Mayor asked Cllr Mrs Gwynneth Hewetson to present the Civic Committee report:

Committee Member of Civic Advisory Committee

Cllr Mrs Hewetson stood and presented her report as follows:

To maintain our traditions and make them accessible to all is one of our objectives. Wokingham Town is loved by residents and a large part of this is our commitment to uphold our traditions. As Chairman of the Civic Committee this year I was proud to be part of the selection for the Civic Awards. Democracy can only function if citizens are conscious and exert their civic rights and duties. The shaping of civic attitudes through Voluntary work is not always given due attention and so our annual Civic Award ceremony is one way we can help to

redress that balance. It is wonderful to hear the citations and witness the pride that the recipients have in their award and their well-deserved recognition.

The Mayor is our first citizen and Chairman of the Town Council and most traditions stem from this appointment. In a little over a month we will host Mayor's Sunday in a slightly different format from previous years. On this day we will elect the Mayor for the coming year and this year we will also be bidding our High Steward farewell and welcoming her successor. It is a highlight of our Civic Calendar and our newly appointed Parade Marshal will work with our Honoraries to ensure the timings and march to the Church go smoothly.

Later in the year we open our Town Hall to the public as part of the country wide Heritage celebrations. This year the theme will be Extraordinary Women and our Civic Officer has been working to ensure that this is yet another event that showcases our beautiful building and artefacts.

In November we have a very important commemoration and that is 100 years since the end of the First World War. There are many events planned in the week preceding Remembrance Sunday and then on the day itself we will follow the National Programme, including the armistice day two-minute silence in the Market Square, and later the Civic March to All Saints Church. This service was extremely well attended last year so if you do want to attend please come early to ensure a seat.

We engage with the schools to educate our young citizens in the history of the Town and each year a young primary school student is selected to be the Mini-Mayor. This is now and in its fifth year and is already yet another valuable tradition embraced by our Council and residents.

We strive to be an inclusive Town Council and several interested residents are participating in the Mosaic Working Party. In the next few weeks you will see the first few Wokingham Town Mosaics being laid in our refurbished Market Place. My thanks to all those who have given so readily of their time and expertise over the past year or so as well as those who have so generously sponsored the mosaics.

I have to end by giving my warm thanks to our Civic Officer, Nikki Payler, whose dedication to our Town is apparent in all the Civic Events and Commemorations. Also to our Town Clerk who is a tradition in her own right.

The Mayor thanked all the Chairman for their reports.

#### Market Place Working Party Report

Cllr P Lucey stood and presented his report as follows:

The Market Working Party (MWP) duties include promoting Wokingham Market and its Market Place. Our focus this year has been on the renewal and improvement of the Market Place itself (on a personal note, the Market Place improvement has been a long-term ambition of mine.) As you know our Market Place's surface was poor and uneven, the tree roots damaged the surface and underlying utilities, there was no proper power or lighting, the bus route, Denmark Street width, and the "sunken-semi-road" west of the Town Hall were confusing and wasted space. It was unsightly, restricted use and did little to enhance our lovely Victorian Town Hall.

The current plans have been developed over some years and now Wokingham Town Council (WTC), in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council (WBC), is

delighted to be finally delivering on them. You can already start to see a larger, useable space, by removing the bus lane and expanding the paved area in front of Boots. Even, and attractive York Stone paving (with individual mosaics) is being laid with properly embedded power and utilities for lighting and for the market. We will have renewed trees, with proper tree pits that allow their roots to flourish safely. The vision which is now coming to life is that of a beautiful, configurable space which can be used to improve the market provision and any number of diverse events.

The Market Place is WTCs Biggest Project Ever; a challenge, especially for residents and businesses, but one that will pay deep returns in the future. You don't want to hear tales of difficulty, but I'll just note that the Market Place had never been properly dug before, such that the utilities and various cables had not been comprehensively mapped or planned, and we were even legally obliged to consult archeologists! I feared they might uncover fragments of Aethelred the Unknown, and we would be forced to delay the improvements for years... However, all is moving on.

There have been some delays, and in my experience any building work is fraught, but we can see the Market Place taking shape and from this year we will start to see the payoff and hope that you will all very shortly be enjoying what has been achieved.

The MWP has taken responsibility for general Market Trading; replacement pitches at reduced rates have been provided to support our loyal traders while the work is under way; we have released regular marketing information, including videos on social media, to promote local businesses and the market; and we have now appointed a new Market & Bloom Officer to lead the development of our market - which will be much easier once the beautiful new Market Place is complete. My sincere thanks to our loyal current traders and all their efforts through this year – and the years to come!

And also my thanks to my fellow MWP Councillors and of course to Robert Vincent, the Buildings and Grounds Officer, and to the Town Clerk for all their hard work this year.

### **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (Agenda Item 7)**

Mr Keith Malvern thanked the Town Clerk for her efforts in her weekly updates on the Market Place as she has done a lot to satisfy residents queries and offer clarity about the progress. He then asked:

#### Costs of the Market Place changes

'The project was expected to cost £3.8 million and is the total cost now increased with the longer time involved?

Additionally last year the Town Council took out a loan of £1.15 million from the PWLB for this work. At what interest rate, what will the total cost of the loan be and will this be paid for using CIL?'

The Mayor asked Cllr D Davies to respond who gave the following reply:

Thank you for your question.

- As you indicate the budget for the project is £3.8m and this is through a 50-50 partnership arrangement with WBC. Whilst the project is taking longer than anticipated due to unforeseen problems with the utilities at

the moment it remains in budget. If this were to change the matter would have to be brought before Full Council here at the town.

- Again you are correct, Wokingham Town Council has taken out a PWLB loan for £1.15m. This is a normal approach for local authorities undertaking major projects and as with all PWLB loans the interest rate is very favourable at 1.82% over 10 years.
  - The total cost of the loan over that period will be £1,263,033 (payable by half year annuity of £63,151.64)
  - The loan will be covered by CiL so it is paid by the developers.

Mr David Hughes then gave his views on a couple of topics:

'I have been a resident in Wokingham for nearly 30 years and I think there is currently more development than I have ever seen and the disruption is considerable. I am sad to hear about the graffiti but I think it is a shame that it was encouraged on the hoardings at Elms Field.

#### Station drop-off

I understand that Network Rail is responsible but at the station, there is only one single line of traffic travelling through the station and there is nowhere to drop off as there are double yellow lines. I regularly see traffic queuing back up to Molly Millars Lane and the Finchampstead Road.

#### Housing development

My main issue is the 40,000 houses being built over the next number of years and I am disappointed about the sheer volume. There is a problem with the infrastructure particularly in the centre of Wokingham.

#### Shop frontage

Lastly, I hope we will see the frontage of the new shops in Peach Place offering some more character back into the town as the preview on the images looks very bland.'

Cllr Andrew Waters gave the following reply in relation to housing numbers and the shop frontage:

Thank you for so many points you have raised. I will address the planning points you have raised.

The current planning legislation is of great concern to residents in the town and the Borough. Whichever government is in power they continue to set requirements for local authorities to build more houses and the short answer is that we can do nothing.

However what we can do and only with your help, is we can actively raise to the government the limitations of some of the current planning legislation. Where we have numerous large developments in this area and have advised they do not fit with our regulations and sometimes WBC have agreed too, they have still been rejected. Under the current planning legislation, developers can talk to an independent body to act as a final decision making authority and often a rejected application can be overturned. The problem with this is that any CIL money we would have got from the developers, we would then no longer receive and we could be subject to legal costs too. We are working hard with WBC to lobby MPs to provide them with feedback and hopefully with resident input this can make a difference.

The Peach Place development is being managed by WBC but our planning committee is liaising closely with them so that it retains the Market town feel.

Cllr David Davies and Cllr Nick Campbell-White replied regarding the station drop off point:

There is a partial drop off point at the station and although there are double yellow lines, people are allowed to stop there briefly to allow passengers in and out.

Numerous changes have also been made to the order of the traffic lights to help the traffic situation at different times.

Mr Geoff Marsden then asked the following:

#### Town Twinning

'I am aware that Wokingham is twinned with two towns but I have seen very little about what is going on with it, could someone offer me an update please?'

Cllr Nick Campbell-White gave the following reply:

I am a member of the Wokingham Town Twinning Association. Unfortunately there are very few members now and those who are still members are all over 65. Erfstadt has the same problem but Viry-Chatillon are still very active. The association would love more members and details are available on their website and they also advertise at the library and key events such as the May Fair.

#### **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT ELECTORS MAY WISH TO RAISE (Agenda Item 8)**

No other business was discussed

#### **GRANTS (Agenda Item 9)**

The Mayor then asked the RFO to announce the following names of the grant recipients for them to collect their certificates for grants they will be receiving for the financial year 2018/2019:

The RFO explained that this year a presentation will not be made to our service providers as funding is continuing from previous years but mentioned the fantastic work of all the service providers who are:

All Saints Church  
The Cultural Partnership: More Arts  
Holt Copse Conservation Volunteers (HCCV)  
Lions Club of Wokingham - May Fayre  
St Catherine's Church  
St Paul's Church  
St Sebastian Band  
Wokingham Winter Carnival  
Sports Sponsorship Fund

Other organisations that received grants were:

ARC Youth Counselling  
Citizens Advice Wokingham

Friends of Emmbrook  
Home Start  
Readibus  
South East Berks Gang Show  
Wokingham Air Cadets  
Wokingham Choral Society  
Wokingham Job Support Centre  
Wokingham Ranger Unit  
Wokingham Volunteer Centre

**CHAIRMAN**