

# 15<sup>th</sup> May 2022 Annual Council Meeting

## Mayoral Inauguration

Minutes of the proceedings of the **FORTY- NINTH ANNUAL MEETING** of **WOKINGHAM TOWN COUNCIL** held this day in the **MAIN HALL, TOWN HALL, WOKINGHAM**, from 12.00 noon to 12.55 pm.

### **PRESENT:**

Chairman: Cllr T J Lack (Mayor)  
Cllrs: R Bishop-Firth, A Box, P Cunnington, P Dennis, M Ferrai, M Fumagalli, M Gee, S Gurney, P Hornsby, D Lee, T Lloyd, P Lucey, M Malvern, K Malvern, A Mather, I L Shepherd-Dubey.

### **IN ATTENDANCE:**

Jan Nowecki – Town Clerk  
Nikki Payler – Civic Officer  
Cllr Keith Baker – Borough Mayor of Wokingham  
Alka Kharbanda – High Sheriff of Berkshire  
Lucy Zeal – High Steward of Wokingham  
Rev Judi Hattaway – Outgoing Chaplain

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

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Cllrs J Ainslie, E Bishop, N Campbell-White, L Forbes, N Fox, D Hinton, D King, A Tebboth

### **COMMUNICATION (Agenda Item 2)**

The retiring Mayor, Councillor Tony Lack, addressed the meeting:

“I have really enjoyed representing the Council and the town as its Mayor along with my wife Claire. We have had the pleasure of meeting and thanking so many people as their Mayor and Mayoress. We have probably been a bit old-fashioned but have really loved being together on so many appointments; 100 appointments this year alone.

We often look back to where we first started wearing the chains in lockdown. We visited the Town Council Allotments in our best clothes and shoes and melted in the warmth of the lockdown summer, we moved onto meeting and getting to love our Market traders and we still have a laugh (and swap insults) with many of them now. Popping into shops; Rances Lane, Norreys, Tesco and Morrisons as well as the Town Centre ones was always fun. Mostly we got a welcome and a smile, but sometimes a big moan - which is fine.

Then we moved onto thanking charities that had helped so many of our residents both during that lockdown and have been continuing to do so now that fuel poverty and inflation have taken over. And we ended our term with the May Fair as life returns to normal. A very turbulent couple of emotional years, you can guess why I would not want to do a third!!

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And on the vast majority of these Claire has been at my side. She was even my prompter and many video and “virtual” engagements. I would like to invite Claire up to thank her in public for being my Mayoress for two long years.

But there were a few we could not do so Maria as Deputy Mayor stepped in for me. Cllr Maria Gee is our Chair of Finance and Personnel and I’m happy to say that our finances are in great shape but I want to thank Maria for being around to cover for me when we could not do our duties.

Owing to lockdowns of various flavours and time when they could not meet, it took a while for us to get to visit the target of my Mayor’s charity – The 3rd Wokingham (Mayor’s Own) Scout Group. We dressed up in our finest and went to taste and judge an inter Patrol cooking competition. The good news is that nobody died of the cooking (although at least one of the Mayoral party did not taste all the dishes). For me it was a brilliant success.

The main characters behind this event (and many more beside) were Margaret and Mack, stalwarts of 3rd Wokingham for eons. I would like to invite them up to receive the proceeds, a rather decent sized cheque in both meanings of the word.

It has also been a couple of tough years for our Churches owing to those lockdowns. They had to close a lot, they have had limited numbers and periods of non-singing. Father Richard Lamey of St Pauls nicknamed me The Lockdown Mayor; not a title I enjoyed but reasonably accurate! Claire and I did manage to attend many church events, especially over the Advent periods and more recently at Easter. And Rev Judi Hattaway has served throughout as my Chaplain, joining us at Full Council and other formal events. I would like to thank Judi for her support in what I know has been a tough time for her.

We didn’t know it but after we had selected Joseph to be Mini-Mayor we discovered that he was also one of the Scouts at 3rd Wokingham. And no, his Patrol did not win the cooking competition! Joseph has been our Mini-Mayor since the beginning of the current school year, and he joins me in retiring today. I know he has had a great time, especially when winning a ferret race at our Heritage Day and locking his sister in the allotment loo we opened together. He is not getting a pension, but I have a gift for him for doing such a wonderful job for us.

As Mayor and Chair of the Council it’s never clear if Jan, the Town Clerk reports to me or me to her. I have never told her off but she has me so maybe that clarifies it! I’m going to miss the regular and irregular phone calls from Jan telling me about the latest issues. I won’t bore you with the details, but it varies from litter to behaviour, from Borough Council issues to Charity success and from our wonderful parks to street events. I hope that the next Mayor will benefit as much as I have from Jan’s knowledge and guidance.

In addition to Jan keeping me up to date I had Nikki Payler who managed both Claire and me whenever we did anything as Mayor and Mayoress. Nikki is our Civic Officer who puts on events like this one today and the Remembrance Day Parade. She is also the Mayor’s Secretary. She has been my supportive guide for the terms of office. Her experience really helped when we had non-standard

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things to do. Her kindness helped when we were struggling. Even the minutiae were covered. For example, did you know that if the Mayor is invited to an event outside their parish then Nikki has to obtain permission from the host parish for the Mayor to wear chains? Her tasks, like her patience are endless. I cannot begin to say how much Nikki has done for Claire and me over the years. I would like to thank Nikki for this.

Another person who has helped us out considerably is David Dunham our Mace Bearer but also our close support officer (aka Mayor's Attendant). I have to admit it wasn't easy having someone up close helping with chains and gown when we were all so scared of close contact with folk outside our family, but he managed us well. So thank you David.

I'm still not sure if he was there to protect me or to protect the chains!!

As a Town Council with a Civic remit, we are lucky enough to have a small band of Honoraries; Nigel-Town Crier, Jim-Parade Marshal, Damon-Bugler, Bernard-Meteorologist and our four Constables-Neil, David, Martin and Stan. They put the polish onto our formal events. Thanks guys.

Sometimes retiring Mayors donate a gift to the Town at the end of their term, Claire and I made our donation at the end of our first year. A stave topper. Stan please will you show our guests one of the staves.

Stan is now retiring, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his service over the last 20 years. Sadly, Stan has to come to the decision that his marching days are over. He will be missed but has promised to keep in touch. We certainly won't be able to keep him away from the likes of Heritage Day or from a chat in the Market Place. Not many people know this, but Stan has the 1943 Mayor, George Alfred Cheeseman, in his family tree. Stan was a traffic warden in Reading until he retired in 1997, he has been a band member – a drummer – for many years. And, along with his wife Liz, is involved with the Salvation Army. Stan thanks for all you have done to uphold traditions in Wokingham.

My role as Mayor is actually Chair of The Council. And while I have gone on about how Claire and I have had to adapt to different normal, so have the Councillors I serve. The biggest success for Wokingham Town Council is that it has continued to work - remotely, with limited numbers, outdoor meetings, one-way systems, larger venues (thank you WBC) and masked and unmasked. I really want to thank Councillors for putting up with two years of grief and struggle, for continuing with their tasks and for being the flexible supporting people they all are.

Councillors know me for my fight against un-clever graffiti which links me to one of my proudest moments: Unveiling the mural in the Plaza which Emma Marchant created for us. I still see people stopping to take a look every time I come past. Unlike Emma's artistic talents mine are limited to wallpapering the small panel below and beside the mural. I am currently glad to say that the mural has had no unwanted attention in its year of existence.

But we have experienced so many other great things.

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Blind sportsmen as motivational speakers for Berkshire Vision; Young gymnastics at Pinewood; Marching with the High Sheriff; our own events such as the fun day and Heritage; the May Fair and Winter Carnivals.

But our overwhelming memories will be of all the people we have met that give their time and effort (and money) via charities to help all sorts of people in our community of Wokingham with all sorts of issues and in all sorts of ways.

Thank you”

Cllr D Lee gave a short speech of thanks for the outgoing Mayor:

“Today we must unfortunately say farewell to two very prominent members of our team.

Firstly, to Councillor Tony lack who along with Claire has served us greatly over the last two years during the dreadful pandemic, this lead to Father Richard Lamey referring to him as the ‘Lockdown Mayor’.

And in addition, on behalf of all Councillors both present and past to say thank you Stan, our Honorary Constable, who has served our Town Council brilliantly for 20 years and kept us all in line and protected the Mace. I wish you a long and happy retirement with no more long parade marches.

Tony and Claire have been great ambassadors for our town. They have attended so many events during their two years meeting with our town shops, market traders, allotments, churches and attending the vaccine centres to thank volunteers and medical staff during these difficult years. I am reliably told that attending the opening of our town Brewery was much enjoyed.

Your outgoing gift will be very much appreciated by your colleagues, and I am sure the residents of our wonderful town.

As our Lockdown Major Tony’s attendances had to be mainly via video and films. Having to make so many videos and film appearances has given Tony another string to his bow, that as film director, and I understand that the new Shinfield Film Studio in the Science Park is keen to sign him up!

Tony loves the tradition of Mayor and dressing up in his robes, which unfortunately due to the pandemic he was unable to do on so many occasions. I have been told (by people who know) that Tony loves dressing up in his robes and mayoral chain so much and they wouldn’t be surprised if he wears them around the house.

I think his love of dressing up comes from his time as a scout leader where he and I first met and I talked him into becoming a Town Councillor and what a Councillor he turned out to be.

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When Tony and Claire were out and about in their regalia, especially when accompanied by Joseph our brilliant Mini Mayor and the Mace Bearer, David, they did make quite an impression.

Tony and Claire you have been a credit to this Council and the town and I am sure that we all send our thanks to you both for a sterling job well done.

### **ELECTION OF TOWN MAYOR (Agenda Item 3)**

The retiring Town Mayor invited nominations for the office of Town Mayor for the ensuing year.

Cllr Shepherd-Dubey gave a short speech in support of her nomination for Cllr Maria Gee:

“With what has been happening over the last couple of years, I was beginning to think this day would never come, but finally - here we are. Maria has been our Deputy Mayor for the last 2 years, during some very difficult times.

She tells me she has lived in the Wokingham area since 1984, her children went to school here.

I think she will be a great Mayor for Wokingham in 2022 -2023 and along with her husband Chris, they will be good ambassadors for Wokingham.”

Cllr Peter Dennis offered his support of his nomination for Cllr Maria Gee:

“I’m delighted to have seconded Cllr Gee as Wokingham’s Town Mayor. I know Cllr Gee will bring along graciousness and enthusiasm to the role with her strong support of community and of local businesses. I am wishing you a wonderful Mayoral year.”

It was proposed by Cllr Shepherd-Dubey and the nomination was seconded by Cllr P Dennis and it was

**RESOLVED  
30440**

that Cllr Maria Gee be elected as the Town Mayor for the ensuing year.

The guests were then entertained by The Redlands Quartet.

### **Declaration of the Result of Election**

The Town Clerk declared Cllr M Gee duly elected to the Office of Town Mayor for the ensuing year.

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## **DECLARATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE (Agenda Item 4)**

The Town Mayor duly made her Declaration of Acceptance of Office, which was witnessed by Cllr Shepherd-Dubey and Cllr P Dennis.

## **ADDRESS BY TOWN MAYOR (Agenda Item 5)**

The new Town Mayor then gave her introductory speech.

“As Imogen mentioned, I have lived in Wokingham for almost forty years since I moved here to live with Chris after University. My children were brought up here, so we have grown up with the town and through its many changes.

It is therefore with a feeling of great honour and excitement that I look forward to the coming year. Thank you to all Councillors who elected me as Mayor, and to my proposer and seconder. My thanks must also go to my family and friends for supporting me over the years, even if they are sometimes baffled by my career and life choices. My only sadness is that my mum could not be here, she would have been very proud.

Over the past two years, as Deputy Mayor, I have learned a lot about what it is to be Mayor from Tony. He and Claire worked extremely hard during a very difficult time, and I give sincere thanks to them. Chris and I have pledged to bring the level of dedication that Tony and Claire have to our roles so that the individuals, groups, and businesses that we meet know how much they are valued and respected in the town.

I would like now to introduce the Mayor’s charity for the year. Kaleidoscopic UK was founded by Vickie Robertson in January 2019 to support survivors of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse describes any type of abuse that is used to control and obtain power. It can include physical, emotional, and financial abuse. One in three women, one in five children, and one in six men will be subject to domestic abuse at some point in their lives.

I first met Vickie just over two years ago and I was so moved by what she was doing that I made her a promise to support Kaleidoscopic should I ever become mayor, and here we are. After her experience of childhood and adult domestic abuse, Vickie was inspired to help others in similar situations to find the support they need. Kaleidoscopic is uniquely survivor-led and threshold-free, meaning that anyone subjected to any form of abuse can access ongoing support for as long as they need.

Any money raised for the Mayor’s charity will support the Educate to Eradicate programme in Wokingham schools. The programme focuses on the prevention of abuse as well as providing support for children. Kaleidoscopic UK is about changing patterns after domestic abuse: domestic abuse may change people BUT it does NOT define people.

Our town has many inspirational individuals and organisations of which Kaleidoscopic is one. We aim to be a truly welcoming, inclusive community. The Town Council serves its whole community and recognises that Wokingham is distinct both in terms of its market status but also through its unique service

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delivery of Arts and Culture and its contribution to Civic life within the town. We aim to achieve our aims in a sustainable way. I am committed to these values and, as Mayor, I will do my best to help the Council to live its vision of enhancing Wokingham Town for its existing and future residents and businesses.

Thank you.”

#### **MAYOR’S CONSORT (Agenda Item 6)**

The Town Mayor announced the appointment of her Consort Chris Gee.

#### **NOMINATIONS FOR THE OFFICE OF DEPUTY MAYOR (Agenda Item 7)**

The Town Mayor stated that it was usual for the incoming Mayor to indicate their wishes for Deputy Mayor and her nominee was Cllr S Gurney.

It was proposed by Cllr M Malvern and seconded by Cllr K Malvern and it was that Cllr S Gurney be duly elected as the Deputy Mayor for the ensuing year.

The Redlands Quartet offered further musical accompaniment.

#### **Declaration of the Result of Election for Deputy Mayor**

The Town Mayor declared Cllr S Gurney be duly elected to the Office of Deputy Town Mayor for the ensuing year.

#### **HONORARY APPOINTMENTS (Agenda Item 8)**

The Mayor asked for nominations for the offices of the following:

- Honorary Constables
- Town Crier
- Honorary Meteorologist
- Honorary Bugler
- Honorary Parade Marshal

It was proposed by Cllr R Bishop-Firth and seconded by Cllr Lucey and it was that the following continue in their appointments:

- Mr David Ashley-Down as Honorary Constable
- Mr Martin Bishop as Honorary Constable
- Mr Neil Hodgson as Honorary Constable
- Mr Nigel Hopkins as Town Crier
- Mr Bernard Burton as Honorary Meteorologist
- Mr Damon Emes as Honorary Bugler
- Lt James Chappell as Honorary Parade Marshal

**RESOLVED  
30441**

**RESOLVED  
30442**

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**ADJOURNMENT (Agenda Item 9)**

It was proposed by the Mayor, Cllr M Gee, and seconded by the Deputy Mayor, Cllr S Gurney, and it was

**RESOLVED  
30443**

that the meeting be adjourned until Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> May 7.30pm in the evening.

The Town Mayor then declared the meeting adjourned and those present stood and sang the first verse of the National Anthem.

The Town Mayor then invited those present to join her for light refreshments.

The Macebearer requested that guests remain standing whilst the Mayoral party retired to the Council Chamber.

**CHAIR'S SIGNATURE** \_\_\_\_\_

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