

21st May 2023 Annual Council Meeting Mayoral Inauguration

Minutes of the proceedings of the **FIFTIETH 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:

Chair: Cllr M Gee (Mayor)

Cllrs.: B Alvi, A Betteridge, R Bishop-Firth, B Callender, R Comber, S Cornish, A Croy, P Cunnington, W Dixon, A Domingue, A Fraser, M Fumagalli, S Gurney, A Jones, T Lack, M Lucey, K Malvern, M Malvern, A Medhurst, N Nagella, H Richards, I Shepherd-Dubey and D Spencer

IN ATTENDANCE:

Katy Hughes – Town Clerk

Nikki Payler – Civic Officer

Dr Stefan Fafinski and Emily Fafinski (Deputy Lieutenant and wife)

Mr Simon Muir and Sarah-Jane Muir – (High Sheriff of Berkshire and wife)

Lucy Zeal and Chris Zeal – High Steward of Wokingham

Cllr Beth Rowland – Borough Mayor of Wokingham

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Cllr M Fumagalli.

COMMUNICATION (Agenda Item 2)

The retiring Mayor, Councillor Maria Gee, addressed the meeting:

“Good afternoon, everyone, what a beautiful day! You know, I went to Park Yoga this morning, and there were over one hundred people in Howard Palmer Gardens. Parents were able to exercise alongside their babies in buggies, there were little ones and teenagers joining in family yoga sessions, and I’m pretty sure the oldest person attending was in their eighties. It’s a great use of our closest park for all ages and yoga in the sunshine, with the trees swaying in the breeze and the birds singing is a sublime start to the day.

Now, thinking back on my year of Mayoring. It was a year that started and ended royally: meeting the Queen (sorry, Queen, the tribute band) at the Platinum Jubilee Concert and ending this Friday meeting with 130 members of royalty at the Link/Age Concern Coronation lunch; well, I think they were all royalty as everyone was wearing a crown. In between, talking with and listening to the many wonderful people that make our town a welcoming and supportive place.

From the BSL interpreters and accessibility platform at the Concert, to excitable and excited Brownies in the Town Hall, to our first Lunar New Year celebrations in the Market Place, and the vigil for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, it has been a year of inclusion. The Council can pride itself on living up to its principles, and this coming year we can reflect on how far we have come and what we need to do to be even more inclusive.

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It is important to me that the Council serves our current residents and businesses, but also secures Wokingham for future generations; I am proud to have represented a council that aims to make our facilities and events, and our parks and allotments, more sustainable. Talking of allotments, I learned from Tony (my predecessor) not to visit the allotments in my best clothes. I'm afraid I failed very early on to follow his advice about not being photographed with a glass of Prosecco in my hand. There was so much to celebrate! I did take his advice on wearing the robes as much as possible, which was good in the winter, but resulted in some serious melting in the summer.

On the vast majority of the one hundred and three engagements that I have attended, my Mayor Consort, Chris, has been there supporting me. I would like to invite Chris up here to thank him in public for dusting off his suit, learning not hare off ahead of me (as he usually does), ignoring his beloved workshop, and coping with my erratic diary for the last year.

There were some events that I could not attend, and some where it was important that both Mayor and Deputy Mayor attend. My Deputy Mayor, Councillor Sally Gurney, served the whole of her last four-year term as Chair of the Arts and Culture Committee. Under her guidance, with the support of our brilliant officers and our event partners, the Council delivers events that make Wokingham distinctive and attract people from far and wide: The May Fayre and Winter Carnival, Party in the Park, the Children's Fun Day, and the TableTop Takeover, to name but a few. I want to thank Sally for her service to the Council and her support to me throughout the last year, and to wish her well in the coming year.

Of course, no major event is complete without our Mini Mayor. In fact, at the fireworks last November, our Mini Mayor rose to the occasion to be our town's representative because neither Sally nor I could attend. Jayden has been the Town Council's Mini Mayor since the beginning of the current school year, and he joins me in retiring today. I did wonder if he was going to make it after he enthusiastically took up boxing at the May Fayre, but I am delighted he is still here in one piece. I know he has had a great time. He is a credit to his family, friends, and school. I have a gift for him today and would invite him to come up to receive it.

Throughout the year I have been honoured to spread the word about my Mayor's Charity, Kaleidoscopic. I am very grateful to those individuals and organisations who have supported the charity this last year. For those who do not know, Kaleidoscopic UK was founded in 2019 to support people subject to domestic abuse. It has now expanded to deliver education to children. The *Educate to Eradicate* programme, which the money raised throughout the year will fund, focuses on the prevention of abuse by educating children and those that support them, as well as providing recovery and support for children. I am pleased to announce that a total of £6,439.58 has been raised, and I would like to call Vickie and Nicole up to receive the rather large (physically and monetarily) cheque!

Katy Hughes, our new town clerk keeps me up to date and has made a fantastic start to her role. In addition to Katy's guidance, Chris and I have had Nikki Payler to call on whenever we did anything as Mayor and Mayor Consort. Nikki is our Civic Officer who puts on events like this one today and the Remembrance Day Parade. She is immensely kind - to everyone - not just me. I cannot begin to say how much Nikki has done for Chris and me over the year. I am sure she is signing

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a breath of relief that she does not now have to put up with my 'jokes' about selling the family silver. I would like to thank Nikki from the bottom of my heart for her support.

The Council is supported by our Honoraries, many of whom you can see here today, dressed up in their finest. Thank you for making Wokingham and its traditions so distinctive. One aspect of our distinctiveness is our Mace, which you can see here, and our Mace Bearer, David Dunham. He is gutted not to be here today, I know. David is the Mayor's Attendant and accompanied me to protect the chains. I hope he would jump in to protect me too, although he likes to keep me on my toes about that. One thing the new Mayor needs to know is that it always takes twice as long to walk somewhere in Town because David knows absolutely everyone! Thank you so much, David, I hope you are watching from home, and make sure you check your inbox where a surprise awaits.

I want finish up now. Welcome our new councillors today, you are going to have a ball, I have. I also want to thank those who started with me four years ago, it's been great working with you all. Sadly, one of the councillors who started with us four years ago, James Box, suddenly and unexpectedly passed away in 2020. It was a pleasure to serve with James on this council. If I might quote Andy Croy, "James was loved and respected. Caring, principled, full of energy and with a zest for life that lifted those around him."

I don't know if you are aware, but James' wife, Lynne Bellchamber, is an extremely talented fine artist. Part of her work takes, as her subjects, buildings around our town: St Pauls Church, the Queens Head, and the building in which we now sit. I am delighted to gift to the Council Lynne's painting of the building at the heart of Wokingham, our Town Hall. I hope, between enjoying the canapes, you can take time to admire it. I am assured it will be displayed in a prominent place for the enjoyment of visitors to our historic building.

Thank you."

Cllr I Shepherd-Dubey gave a short speech of thanks for the outgoing Mayor:

"Becoming the Mayor of Wokingham is indeed a great privilege and our town's most honourable position. It is a non-political role, and it does not matter what colour your rosette is on election day. I hope that if any of you get the opportunity to be mayor, you will do it with the same enthusiasm and good grace that Mayor Maria Gee has done.

Maria served two years as our Deputy Mayor before finally becoming our Mayor, last May. In her year as mayor, she and her husband Chris have made almost 100 visits using this position. Largely, to care homes, allotments, charity events and many more things that are too numerous to mention here.

In our emergence from the effects of Covid, she also saw us through the last of our 4-year strategy of inclusivity and sustainability and was key in the recruitment and introduction of our new town clerk.

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Our Platinum Jubilee event, last year, was very successful and included support for sign language and wheelchair users along with wide range of food and music representing the diversity of the commonwealth.

She was there for our proclamation, after the death of the queen. Quite a formal and traditional event, but extremely well attended.

And we were all surprised at the popularity of our Lunar New year event earlier this year, which was almost too well attended.

Either way I am proud of the work we have done to celebrate our town - and Maria has been a great Mayor that has served us all. I wish her and Chris well, for the future."

ELECTION OF TOWN MAYOR (Agenda Item 3)

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

Cllr K Malvern gave a short speech in support of his nomination for Cllr Sally Gurney:

"Thank you retiring Town Mayor.

I will be short. Last year, I seconded Sally Gurney as Deputy Mayor.

Everything since then has convinced me that Sally is the right choice for the post of Mayor, and I therefore propose her for Mayor for the ensuing year."

Cllr R Bishop-Firth offered her support of her nomination for Cllr Sally Gurney:

"I'm delighted to be able to second Cllr Sally Gurney as Wokingham's Town Mayor. Sally has been a Councillor serving Wokingham for quite a few years now and a Deputy Mayor for the last year.

She always thinks about what is best for residents and will be a great and very modern Mayor of Wokingham. Sally, I hope that you enjoy your year as Mayor.

It was proposed by Cllr K Malvern and the nomination was seconded by Cllr R Bishop-Firth and it was

**RESOLVED
30616**

that Cllr Sally Gurney 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 S Gurney 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 K Malvern and Cllr R Bishop-Firth.

ADDRESS BY TOWN MAYOR (Agenda Item 5)

The new Town Mayor then gave her introductory speech.

“Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, friends, family, and fellow residents, welcome.

Today, I stand before you with immense gratitude and a deep sense of responsibility as I accept the honour of serving as the Mayor of our wonderful community. I am humbled by the trust you have placed in me, and I assure you that I am committed to working to uphold the values and aspirations of our town.

I particularly want to extend my thanks to our outgoing Mayor, Maria Gee, for her dedicated service and for the positive impact she has made on our community. It was a pleasure to serve as her Deputy, and her advice along the way has been very welcome.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my consort, Chris, for his company throughout this journey. His support and encouragement will be invaluable as we work together to serve our town.

And lastly, I want to welcome all our new Councillors. You're all passionate about the well-being of your town, you got off your soapboxes, and you stepped up. Your residents chose you to represent their interests, and your journeys are just beginning. As town councillors, we are all unpaid volunteers, and that can sometimes be forgotten. On behalf of myself and the town, thank you.

I've just come home from my company's annual marketing summit where a recurring theme prevailed: interdependence. "I serve us, so we can serve others." This mindset of respect and collaboration is precisely what I aim to cultivate within this council. I want each one of us to feel encouraged to express our unique perspectives, knowing that our words will be acknowledged and carefully considered. By approaching every discussion with open minds, we ensure that the decisions we reach reflect the wisdom gleaned from the diverse representation across our council. Together, we will make informed choices that benefit our whole community.

Service to our community lies at the heart of this council's endeavours. From Bloom and our allotments, playparks and beautiful natural green spaces to our many civic and cultural events, our community hall and this beautiful building, installation of public art, support for our many fantastic local charities through grants, and our less glamorous but just as important activities – reviewing planning matters in our town and ensuring fiscal responsibility of our council. All of these are for the ultimate benefit of our residents.

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Our commitment to supporting local charities will remain unwavering. I am proud to announce that the mayor's charity for this term will be Berkshire Search and Rescue Dogs. They are a fully qualified Lowland Rescue team of two-and four-footed volunteers on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. They support the police in searching for, locating and reuniting high risk vulnerable missing people with their loved ones, in Wokingham, and in the wider Berkshire area. They are self-funded and have to find £10,000 a year to operate which covers things like insurance, radios and other equipment. They even pay for their own fuel when driving around. Our support will make a significant impact to the vital work of these dedicated volunteers.

But I cannot achieve these goals alone. It is the collective effort of our entire community that will lead us to success. I call upon each and every one of you to actively participate in shaping our town's future. Share your ideas, engage in open dialogue, and let us work together to find innovative solutions to the challenges we face. Your input is invaluable, and together, we will build a stronger, more resilient community.

In closing, let me once again express my profound gratitude for the honour of serving as your mayor. I am eager to embark on this journey with you, to lead by example, and to build bridges that will connect us all. Together, we will create a town that future generations will be proud to call home, a town that celebrates the arts, supports our local charities, and fosters a strong sense of community.

Thank you and let us move forward together on this exciting new chapter in our town's history.”

MAYOR'S CONSORT (Agenda Item 6)

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

MAYOR'S CELEBRANT (Agenda Item 7)

The Town Mayor announced the appointment of her Celebrant Helen Jefferies.

NOMINATIONS FOR THE OFFICE OF DEPUTY MAYOR (Agenda Item 8)

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

It was proposed by Cllr H Richards and seconded by Cllr A Betteridge and it was

**RESOLVED
30617**

that Cllr R Comber 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 R Comber be duly elected to the Office of Deputy Town Mayor for the ensuing year.

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HONORARY APPOINTMENTS (Agenda Item 9)

The Town Mayor asked that it should be noted again for record purposes, that Lucy Zeal was granted life tenure of the Office of High Steward of Wokingham at the Council meeting held on 13th May 2018.

The Town Mayor asked for it to be recorded in the minutes that thanks be given to Lucy Zeal for her continued support to the Town Council.

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

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

It was proposed by Cllr T Lack and seconded by Cllr D Spencer and it was

that the following continue in their appointments:

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

**RESOLVED
30618**

ADJOURNMENT (Agenda Item 10)

It was proposed by the Mayor, Cllr S Gurney, and seconded by the Deputy Mayor, Cllr R Comber, and it was

that the meeting be adjourned until Tuesday 23rd 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.

**RESOLVED
30619**

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

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

CHAIR'S SIGNATURE _____

CHAIR'S INITIALS _____

