

**WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM**

**9 March 2016**

Attendance:

Councillors:

Weir (Chairman) (P)

E Berry (P)

J Berry (P)

Burns (P)

Gosling (P)

Green

Hiscock (P)

Hutchison (P)

Mather (P)

Maynard (P)

Osborne (P)

Prowse

Sanders (P)

Scott (P)

Scowen

Tait (P)

Thompson (P)

Tod (P)

---

1. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 January 2016, be approved and adopted.

2. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Councillors Mather and Tod declared disclosable pecuniary interests due to their role as Hampshire County Councillors. However, as there was no material conflict of interest, they remained in the room, spoke and voted under the dispensation granted on behalf of the Standards Committee to participate and vote in all matters which might have a County Council involvement.

Councillor Tod also declared a personal (but non prejudicial) interest in respect of Item 6 due to his provision of website assistance to the Winchester Fairtrade Network, for which there was no charge made.

Councillor J Berry declared a personal and prejudicial interest in respect of Item 6 in her capacity as Executive Member for the Winchester Fairtrade

Network Committee. She left the room during the consideration of the item and took no part in the discussion or vote thereon.

### 3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

During public participation, John Cloyne, Mike Gibbons and Andrew Scott addressed the Forum under public participation in relation to St Faith's Meadow (Item 4 below). A summary of their comments are outlined below:

John Cloyne addressed the Forum stating that, as experienced naturalists, both he and Mike Gibbons had the capability to identify wildlife likely to occur at the St Faith's Meadow site. He reported that conservation objectives from the 2002 visionary plan had not been met and that the Council needed to be aware of the current situation and the lack of proper accountability for public money. John Cloyne outlined the Council grant funding of £5,000 that had been provided annually to the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HWT) over a three year period, to progress the management of the site. John Cloyne made reference to the stringent requirements set out under the grants process and the High Level Stewardship scheme criteria, whereby various documents had been supplied to the Trust to ensure that it maximise biodiversity on the site. In this regard, he made reference to two specific points, these being;

- That the land must be waterlogged all year; and
- That after five years there were expected to be at least five specialist wetland species selected from a list which included 17 plants, Water Vole and the rare Southern Damselfly.

In conclusion, John Cloyne suggested that these two pertinent points had not been achieved by HWT on site and asked that the Council think carefully about these aspects and consider further investigation on this matter.

Mike Gibbons addressed the Forum raising particular concern regarding biodiversity at the St Faith's Meadow site. He referred to his aspirations to see clear water at the site at the earliest opportunity which was not of a water meadow, but rather a natural run off effect to restore biodiversity. He considered this to be the primary focus. Mike Gibbons reiterated that there had been a lack of monitoring made to the work carried out for the grant funding that had been supplied by the Council to HWT and with little accountability provided, given that this was taxpayer's money.

Andrew Scott addressed the Forum stating that he was unclear in his own mind of what HWT were trying to create – whether this was a water meadow, a fen or another purpose? He suggested that part of the site (the other side of the electric fenced area) was in poor condition due to excess wetness which would need to be drained in order to achieve a dry and workable area.

In conclusion, the Chairman announced that there had been a number of issues raised regarding St Faith's Meadow which would be addressed within the presentation to follow from HWT. The Chairman thanked John Cloyne,

Mike Gibbons and Andrew Scott for making their representations to the Forum.

4. **UPDATE ON MANAGEMENT OF ST FAITH'S MEADOW**  
(Report WTF230 refers)

The Forum received a presentation by Rachel Remnant of Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HWT) which outlined the history, progress and management of the St Faith's Meadow site. The site was owned by the Council and formed part of the River Itchen Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and part of the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which had been leased to HWT to manage in 2012.

In summary, the presentation outlined the progress made to date on site and detailed the following points:-

- River Itchen SSSI – grazing and habitats
- Water Meadow Management
- St Faith's Meadow Topography restoration for internal drains
- Poplar and Willow Plantation
- Issues at St Faith's Meadow including an artist's impression, restoring the site to a meadow to improve the site for wildlife and to connect people with wildlife.
- Tree felling work undertaken during January 2013
- Timber removal and brash burning undertaken in September/October 2013 – this proved costly due to the railway bridge on Garnier Road and the sensitivity of the site with specialist work necessary
- Repairs made to the soil profile – historical features and traditional drains
- Footpath resurfacing undertaken in November 2013
- Replacement bench and climbing log installed during November 2013
- Fencing, gates and stiles installed during October/November 2013 with grazing reintroduced from May 2014
- Indicators of unimproved fen meadow – eyebright, nettles and docs
- Ongoing management work – working with students of Sparsholt College to repair banks and groups of volunteer workers at the site

In conclusion, Rachel reported that, as was the case with the management of Winnall Moors, St Catherine's Hill and the butterfly conservation at Magdalen Hill, the HWT were dedicated and determined to work at St Faith's Meadow. They would continue to rely on the support of the local community and would welcome the opportunity to engage with residents regarding the vision for the St Faith's Meadow site.

The Forum also gave consideration to a Report which outlined the work that had been carried out by the HWT and the wishes expressed by Natural England for the site. It was noted that together with the £5,000 grant funding paid annually to HWT and over a three year period by the Council, a one off grant of £7,000 had also been made to HWT in order to prepare a grant

application for a Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) to Natural England for a scheme of enhancement to maximise the ecological potential of the site.

In response to Members' questions regarding public engagement and improving important learning links, it was noted that two guided walks were ran at St Faith's Meadow every year, plus two family events at St Cross Meadow. These events took place alongside a host of school visits (four per year) and regular visits by the Guide and Scout Groups.

During debate, reference was made to the ditch features and the development of plant species which it was noted would be included within an assessment this year during a botanical survey that was scheduled to be undertaken.

In conclusion, the Forum were fully supportive of the work that being carried out by HWT, in conjunction with Natural England and considered that it may be beneficial for a short annual report to be taken to the Forum to monitor the work being carried out at St Faith's Meadow and at other space green areas and requested that this item be added onto the work programme for future reference.

#### RESOLVED:

1. That the content of the Report and the successful management of St Faith's Meadow and value for money service, provided by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, be noted; and
2. That Rachel Remnant be thanked for providing an informative presentation on the progress made with management of the St Faith's Meadow site.

#### 5. **REVIEW OF MARKETS PROGRAMME** (Report WTF234 refers)

The Assistant Director (Economy and Communities) outlined the Report which summarised the evidence gathered as part of the review to address concerns raised by the Business Improvement District (BID) and context for the presentation of findings given by The Retail Group, as summarised below. The views of the Forum were sought which would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 29 March 2016.

The Forum received a presentation by Mike Evans, Director of the Retail Group which had been in operation for 25 years and had developed a Town Centre Strategy for the Winchester, as commissioned by the Council.

In summary, the presentation outlined the objectives and scope of the survey undertaken amongst Town Centre retailers and market traders which had resulted in responses from 111 retailers and 35 market traders. The outcomes of the retailer and market trader surveys were analysed and it was noted that research on the Wednesday to Saturday period whereby the market offered

the most popular food stalls, such as fruit and vegetable produce, specialised food stalls and various takeaway hot food options. Success criteria were evaluated and improvements to the current Winchester Market formation were suggested. These included better access to shops, a dedicated location and market area and improved customer flow.

The views and opinions on the Winchester Markets were sought and it was noted that in comparison with trading levels across the country, Winchester was fairing well. Following the results of the existing Winchester Street Market Customer Survey carried out in February and comments received by market traders, consumer opinion of the markets overall were very positive, with Winchester setting a benchmark for the variety of stalls, quality produce, cleanliness and presentation with a loyal regular customer base.

In response, Members raised various concerns and points for improvement and further clarification such as, the consideration of an indoor market, relocation options, the financial and economic viability of the market, the repositioning of stalls to ensure wider walkways and accessibility to shops, improved signage, the removal of 'choke points' particularly in the High Street leading to the Buttercross to improve pedestrian flow.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the comments of the Forum on the markets programme as part of the wider markets review, be noted; and
2. That Mike Evans be thanked for his comprehensive and informative presentation.

**6. FAIRTRADE RENEWAL FOR THE CITY – PRESENTATION**  
(Oral Update)

The Chairman welcomed Charlotte Bailey, Chair of Winchester Fairtrade Network to the meeting who addressed the Forum regarding the Fairtrade Renewal for the City which was now due. The Forum noted that Winchester had first acquired Fairtrade City Status in 2008 and that this was previously renewed in 2013.

Reference was made to the application for renewal status, which required the Network to outline their achievements in the previous term and goals for the future. Signatures from a representative of Winchester University, the Chairman of the Winchester Fairtrade Network and a representative from the City Council were required for the submission of the renewal application.

The Forum's attention was drawn to the recent activities of the Fairtrade Network, which included regular Fairtrade Fortnight events to continue to enhance the Fairtrade Status of the City.

RESOLVED:

That the Fairtrade Renewal for the City be supported and signed by the Chairman of the Winchester Town Forum.

7. **SOLAR CITY UPDATE**  
(Oral Update)

Assistant Director (Economy and Communities) provided an update on the progress made to date on the Solar City Project. It was noted that in the run up to Christmas there had been national uncertainty regarding the future of the 'Feed in Tariff'. This was one of the key incentives for organisations to take part in the renewable energy project.

As a result, the steering group delayed action in relation to the recruitment of potential participant organisations until the New Year when information became available.

The Forum noted that, during January an encouraging meeting had taken place with the Hospital and a recent discussion had since occurred with Hope Church (Middle Brook Street). It was anticipated that the Council would include the new build element of its Creative Enterprise Partnership at Barfield Close within the project. Discussions with Biffa were due to be arranged regarding the new depot, also in Barfield Close.

Upon completion of these discussions, it was hoped enough organisations would be on board for the pilot renewables project which would be brought back to a future meeting of the Forum.

In the meantime, it was noted that the completion of the Winnall Planning Framework had opened up possibilities for a bid to Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for a funding package which could include a linked photovoltaics project for parts of Winnall. Reference was made to a new business forum that was being established which would actively be involved in the development of such schemes.

RESOLVED:

That the Solar City progress update be noted.

8. **ST MAURICE'S COVERT**  
(Oral Update)

The Assistant Director (Economy and Communities) provided an update on the progress of the Members Working Group which took place with external stakeholders from Debenhams, Greggs, The Mercure Wessex Hotel and the Church Commissioners at the end of January, together with a representative from the Business Improvement District (BID). It was noted that the Group shared aims for the project and were all invited to submit considerations for a design specification.

The Forum noted that the final deadline for comments on the comprehensive specification was the end of the week and that this would be used to commission a public realm professional or practice to develop a scheme for the Covert with appropriate community engagement. The eventual scheme was considered which was likely to be delivered in stages and would be subject to funding and partnership contributions.

In conclusion, it was noted that the specification would be published on the South East Business Portal and Government Contracts Finder website next week and circulated to potential bidders known to the Working Group/Council. The dates of the evaluation and selection of the preferred bidder are included in the specification, with the process to be completed after the Elections in May to ensure continuity of Members representation once works commence.

**RESOLVED:**

That the progress update on St Maurice's Covert, be noted.

9. **WINCHESTER EVENING BUS SERVICES UPDATE**  
(Report WTF238 refers)

The Forum gave consideration to the Winchester Evening Bus Services Update which provided an update to the Forum on the Patronage and use of the late evening bus service which linked the Town Centre with Badger Farm, Stanmore, Weeke and Harestock (the night bus) Thursday to Saturday. It was noted that the existing contract was due to expire in September 2016, whereby the Forum would need to decide whether, in principle, it wanted to continue to support its operation by continuing with its financial contribution. At the previous meeting of the Forum, it was agreed that provision be made to do this with a budget of circa £13.8k for 2016/17. However, with the Forum facing budget challenges over the next few years, it carefully considered a review of this financial provision.

A revised version of Appendix A, containing updated patronage statistics for the period September 2012 to February 2016, was circulated to at the meeting and available as an addendum.

During debate, Members raised concern regarding the duplication of bus services in the areas operated by the night bus, such as the Stagecoach service which runs parallel to the Route 66 service (Winchester to Romsey) which operates a night service until 10.40pm six days per week. In response, it was noted that, whilst there was some overlap of this service, one bus ran to Harestock and the other to Badger Farm making these distinctly separate services.

## RESOLVED:

1. That, in principle, the Forum supports the continuation of the Winchester Evening Bus Service beyond September 2016 when the current contract expires;
2. That Hampshire County Council be authorised to tender the service for two or three years, based upon the service provided by the current contract; and
3. That the revised Appendix A to the Report, outlining the Winchester Night Bus Patronage, be available as an Addendum.

10. **UPDATE FROM THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INFORMAL GROUP**  
(Report WTF239 refers)

The Chairman of the Community Engagement Informal Group, Councillor Hutchison introduced the Report and outlined the discussions that took place at the recent Informal Group meetings.

The Forum made reference to a number of issues, as set out in 5.2 of the Report and also discussed the current formation of the Town Forum which they considered discouraged public engagement and lacked consistency and envisaged the Town Forum would be better placed in its original concept as a larger scale meeting to test public opinion. Members agreed to consider this matter further during the next municipal year.

Members raised concern with regard to Silver Hill, requesting that assurance be sought to secure the full involvement and participation of the Town Forum in all future discussions regarding Silver Hill going forward and to ensure this was embedded in the process.

In response, the Chairman advised that she would write to the Leader, Councillor Godfrey, to ensure that the Town Forum were involved in the decision making process prior to proposals being taken to Planning Committee and stating the view of the Town Forum be fully taken into account in the process going forward.

## RESOLVED:

1. That the work of the Community Engagement Informal Group, as set out in the Report, be received and noted;
2. That Councillor Hutchison be thanked for her work undertaken as Chairman of the Community Engagement Informal Group;



3. That the Chairman of the Town Forum (Councillor Weir) contact the Leader regarding future involvement on the Silver Hill development, as set out above; and

4. That the Town Forum seek to establish a Working Group in the new municipal year to further investigate the matters, as set out in the recommendations and in paragraph 5.2 of the Report

11. **VOTE OF THANKS**

This being the last meeting of the Municipal Year, the Forum passed a vote of thanks to its Chairman, Councillor Weir.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 9.40pm

Chairman