

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

Thursday, 26 January 2023

Attendance:

Councillors

Craske (Chairperson)

Batho (from item 6 onwards)	Reach
Becker	Scott
Edwards	Tippett-Cooper
Ferguson	Thompson
Learney (except items 8 & 9)	Tod
Radcliffe	Westwood

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Green

[Full video recording](#)

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for the meeting were noted as above.

2. **DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS**

Councillor Tod declared a personal (but non prejudicial) interest concerning agenda items that may be related to his role as a County Councillor.

3. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairperson made the following announcements:

Tribute to Allan Mitchell and Eloise Appleby

The Chairperson paid tribute to former councillor and Mayor of Winchester, Allan Mitchell and former officer of the council, Eloise Appleby, who had both very sadly recently passed away.

As a mark of respect, the forum stood for a one minute silence in tribute to their memory.

Grant Funding

The Chairperson provided a progress update had been made in relation to small grants within the grants programme since the matter was discussed at the last meeting. It was also noted that, due to the limited uptake of the crowdfunding programme, a new projects grants scheme had been developed to replace this programme, with the aim of supporting not for profit organisations in the town and across the wider district. The application window to apply for a grant was open from the 1st to 28th February 2023 with further information available on the council's website. The forum were asked to encourage their communities to apply for this funding opportunity.

Furthermore, it was noted that grants were available for coronation parties with details set out on the website, along with road closure information for parties due to take place.

Car Boot Sale

Lastly, it was announced that the car boot sale was due to recommence from Sunday, 12 February with proceeds and contributions to the All Saints Primary School.

4. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 9 NOVEMBER 2022**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2022 be approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Ian Tait spoke during public participation, in summary he made reference to the removal of benches in the High Street, effective signage and advertising in the town centre and use of the proposed BT Hub information points.

In response to points raised during public participation, it was recognised that certain street furniture was an issue for members of the public with limited eyesight and mobility issues to navigate and that this was a matter for the planning committee to consider going forward.

In conclusion, Councillor Thompson advised that she would be happy to discuss improvements to signage and the use of A board signs on the high street with the business improvement district (BID) going forward.

6. **LOCAL DESIGN CODES (PRESENTATION)**

The Strategic Planning Manager gave a presentation that was circulated with the agenda, setting out government guidance and proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the national design code and guidance, local design code related documents, the vision, the regulation 18 local plan, the stakeholder and workshop events and feedback highlighting five key areas, the collaborative design code process with the parameters for achieving this and the next steps to be taken.

It was outlined that there was an opportunity to collaborate with Andy von Bradsky, who used to be the government's Head of Architecture and was the author of the national modern design code. Andy would be willing to act as a 'critical friend' in the preparation of a local design code. It was recognised that this would be at a cost which could be shared among the forum, the City of Winchester Trust and the council.

The forum proceeded to ask detailed questions on the following matters which were responded to by the Strategic Planning Manager:

- (i) Was there a sense of where change is expected to happen, particularly the assumptions on densification? Using CIL as an indicator, Chilbolton Avenue had experienced the greatest change, with similar pressures in other parts of the city, such as Sleepers Hill. In relation to densification, it was suggested that this could be better controlled/included via any updates to the High Quality Places Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
- (ii) Were there plans to update existing design codes and looking closer at residential areas? It was recognised that design codes were not just residential, but were about other spaces and opportunities for roads, surrounding areas etc.
- (iii) How the emphasis on design codes would fit within existing planning framework.
- (iv) Could areas be extended once they had commenced.
- (v) The impact of design codes in the planning process? It was noted that the Levelling Up Bill had indicated that Local Design Codes would hold the same weight as a Local Plan.
- (vi) The output from the process – a single design code or a pilot area? The main challenge was where to start the trial and testing process. The need to secure the 'buy in' of large architectural firms in Winchester to be involved in the design codes was highlighted.
- (vii) Building a level of resilience into the design codes to enable them to continue to be usable working documents in an ever changing environment over years to come.
- (viii) The timescale for the first design code and subsequent roll out in other areas –it was anticipated that it would take between 9 to 12 months to prepare local design code.

During debate, the forum considered that the primary focal points for the design code process first phase of delivery should include three sites at Romsey Road; Harestock and wider St Barnabas; and Easton Lane. It was suggested that analysis work with officers take place to consider which of these three sites should be selected for the primary study with a report back of its findings to come back to the forum in due course.

In conclusion, the forum thanked officers and welcomed and supported the design code process and the formation of a partnership group to include members of the forum, the council and the City of Winchester Trust.

RESOLVED:

1. That the presentation be received and the comments raised by the committee, as summarised above, be noted;
2. That the Strategic Planning Manager be asked to undertake an analysis of the suitability of the three locations highlighted above: Romsey Road, Harestock and wider St Barnabas and Easton Lane and be invited to report back to the next meeting of the forum; and
3. That, subject to the agreement of the location, the forum authorise a contribution of £3,000 from the vision delivery budget towards the collaborative cost of work to be carried out by Andy von Bradsky to commence delivery of the design code process.

7. **WINCHESTER TOWN ACCOUNT BUDGET FOR 2023/24 (TO BE RECOMMENDED TO CABINET) (WTF314)**

Councillor Learney introduced the report setting out the improvements made to facilities and those projects on going in the town area, alongside work being carried out with officers on heritage and streetscene as part of district programmes. However, it was emphasised that the town area was severely under-funded in comparison with other larger parishes and market towns in the district. It was recognised that the town area were subject to the capping regime imposed by the council, which reduced the flexibility available to other parishes when setting their precepts, by imposing limits of how much the precept for the town area for the district element of council tax could be increased by.

It was noted that the Town Accounts Informal Group had been looking at the position closely and although action was required, the level of reserves provided some breathing space to take considered decisions over the course of the next year, to focus particularly on the play area improvement programme, open space and grounds maintenance, cemeteries and grants. As a result, the informal group were recommending to the forum that it be recommended to Cabinet that an increase in the Band D town charge of the maximum commensurate with the council tax referendum limit for 2023/24 be made, which was expected to be an increase of approximately 5.5% (equating to a less than 9p per week increase based on a Band D charge).

Finance Manager (Strategic Finance) provided further information on the reserve position highlighting that the projections, as set out in Appendix 1, would take the town account below the financial strategy target of 10% during 2023/24, although there were some significant areas of review over the next year which were expected to stabilise this position for the medium term.

The forum asked questions and raised comments, particular in relation to the importance of CIL for the town and of considered communication of the town precept levels in real terms to residents which were addressed by Cabinet Member and the Finance Manager (Strategic Finance) accordingly.

RESOLVED:

That the Town Forum;

1. Agrees the draft budget for 2023/24 and the indicative projections for the strategy period, as shown in Appendix 1 of the report.
2. Recommend to Cabinet that the Council Tax precept for the Town area be increased to the maximum commensurate with the council tax referendum limit for 2023/24, noting the requirements for the council to keep within overall referendum constraints; and
3. Approves the release of £50k from Town CIL as the Town Account contribution towards the KGV Park Plan Improvement Project. It was noted that the total budget was approved by Cabinet in September 2022 (CAB3360 refers), subject to the approval of Town CIL funding.

8. **INFORMAL GROUP - VERBAL & BRIEFING NOTE UPDATES**

The Forum received individual updates from the Chairpersons of various Town Informal Groups. Each summarised the work that had been carried out by the respective groups over the previous two-month period.

Councillor Craske – Planning for the future in Winchester Town

Councillor Craske had provided a detailed briefing note of the informal group and forums recent response to the Regulation 18 Local Plan. This update paper was circulated with the agenda and its contents were noted by the forum.

Councillor Radcliffe – Parks and Recreation Informal Group

North Walls River Park – Surveys had been carried out and a topography survey was almost finalised with a survey of the ecology of the park expected to take the rest of the year to complete, the findings of these would inform the park plan. The council had approved the installation of an upgraded temporary toilet block to be in place by Easter to improve facilities for park users until the café had been built out.

KGV Pavilion – construction underway and a further 14 new trees had been planted near the new play area. Works due to commence on the new play area at KGV by the end of the year pending completion of the pavilion

St Giles Hill Park – A new five year park management plan had been developed which had involved significant work by council officers including a complete tree survey, bat scoping and a draft of the plan would be shared at the next meeting of the forum with public consultation taking place during Spring 2023 and several essential work streams had already commenced, including tree works.

Play Area at Abbey Gardens – ready for safety surfacing to be laid and new play equipment had been installed. A plan was published in December reflecting the comments of users following consultation and was on track to open to the public during the spring. Thanks were given to the council’s open parks and recreation team for their work carried out to date.

Councillor Edwards – City Centre Group.

High Street Seating – it was noted that several benches had been removed and were being refurbished for re-installation in March. The planters on top of security blocks had proved costly to maintain and were subject to vandalism. Therefore, a decision had been taken that the planters be removed and hard wood tops had been ordered to replace these by the end of February. The remaining town centre benches would be replaced with new benches of a similar size.

Councillor Tippett-Cooper – Heritage Group

Progress updates from the group included:

- (i) The Buttercross – a resurvey of monument has been completed and the council was compiling work for the tender of the restoration works to commence.
- (ii) Hyde Abbey Gateway – a resurvey of monument was complete and specification for tender was currently being prepared with repair works due to commence during Summer 2023.

RESOLVED:

That the updates received from the Town Informal Groups, be noted.

9. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Forum considered the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year, 2022/23.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the inclusion of a follow up item regarding Local Design Codes for the next meeting on 13 March 2023, the 2022/23 work programme be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 8.25 pm

Chairperson