

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

Thursday, 12 June 2025

Attendance:

Councillors

Westwood (Chairperson)

Aron
Batho
Becker
Eve
Learney
Morris

Reach
Scott
Thompson (from Item 8)
Tod (from Item 8)
Tippett-Cooper
Wise

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Murphy

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Horrill

Others in attendance who did not address the meeting:

Councillor Laming

[Full video recording](#)

1. **APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIRPERSON AND VICE CHAIRPERSON FOR THE 2025/26 MUNICIPAL YEAR**

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Westwood be elected Chairperson and Councillor Eve be appointed Vice-Chairperson for the 2025/26 municipal year

2. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Murphy. Apologies for lateness were also received from Councillors Thompson and Tod.

3. **DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS**

There were no disclosures made at this meeting.

4. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements made at this meeting.

5. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 23 JANUARY 2025**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 January 2025 be approved and adopted

6. **TO NOTE THE DATE AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE FORUM AS SET OUT BELOW:**

RESOLVED:

That the date of future meetings for 2025/26, as set out on the agenda, be noted.

7. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Five members of the public/groups and one visiting councillor addressed the Forum.

Ian Tait, Richard Spalding, Kate Needham and Stephanie Danby and Jo Ashwell on behalf of Chesil Theatre spoke during public participation. A summary of their comments are set out below.

In addition, Patrick Davies and Councillor Horrill spoke during item 8 (Response to the request of Winchester Town Forum for a CGR) and a summary of their comments are set out under the relevant minute below.

Ian Tait

Raised concerns regarding the Winchester River Park redevelopment and the former River Park Leisure Centre site, highlighting the following points:

- Stated that he was reminded during the Winchester Park Run of a land transaction considered by Cabinet on 9th March 2022 regarding the River Park Leisure Centre and Southampton University, whereby he had spoken in support of the proposals and welcomed the link to the University.
- Mr Tait recalled that at the time the Leader had welcomed his support and explained it was not appropriate to delay the decision, emphasising that future extensive collaboration consultation would be undertaken by the University.
- Mr Tait then referred to the recent statement of the Leader dated 20 March 2025 which confirmed that the University was not going head and were considering their options.
- Mr Tait made reference to feedback he had received from several people at the University and questioned the dialogue that had taken place with them.

He asserted that consultation could only achieve so much but action was now critical given the disgraceful state of the old leisure centre building.

- He reported that information on the public notice board regarding the site was four years out of date and he had been unable to find information from the council.
- He made referenced to the successful Laundry Art Project which drew residents and visitors to Winchester.
- In conclusion, Mr Tait stated that in 2022 solicitors had offered assurance that the covenant on the land had been looked at in detail but three years later nothing had been done which he deemed unacceptable.

In response, Councillor Becker thanked Mr Tait for raising this matter in a timely manner as the council were imminently due to be issuing a press release inviting people to a public engagement session on 26th June, at 3pm to 7pm in the Courtyard, Winchester Guildhall. The session would seek public opinion and ideas regarding a planned process for the future of the site and would be widely advertised via regular channels, including the council's website once information was released on 13 June.

Richard Spalding (on behalf of Winchester Rotary)

- Mr Spalding sought approval to install a peace pole in the soroptimist garden at the back of Abbey House.
- He made reference to the history of peace poles around the world, with the initiative originating in Japan in 1954, with few in existence in the UK.
- He highlighted the standard wording contained on the peace pole which was written in seven languages.
- It was hoped that Winchester could be the first city in the South of England to erect a peace pole, with Abbey Gardens considered to be the best location as Winchester promotes peace, was a City of Mayors for peace, had the longest-serving mayoralty outside London, and was a City of Sanctuary.
- Mr Spalding stated that Abbey Gardens was the mayor's garden, and the soroptimists had agreed to the installation in their garden behind the house. A location which would provide an appropriately serene and discreet, yet visible and tangible, focus for Winchester's goal to support peace.
- Other benefits included helping to spread the culture of peace, especially to children, who along with schools, could visit to initiate conversations and undertake projects on peace. International visitors could also enjoy this with its seven languages, which would promote Winchester.
- Mr Spalding suggested that the next Mayors for Peace commemoration in early August would be a highly appropriate target for its installation and had shared images of what the pole might look like in the soroptimist garden upon installation.

In response, the Chairperson thanked Mr Spalding for attending and presenting the proposal, noting the support from both past and present Mayors, and acknowledging previous discussions with officers and councillors.

It was agreed that the Town Forum's Climate and Open Space Informal Group, which monitors and makes recommendations about open spaces within the town

area, would progress the matter and aimed to provide a proposal for the next meeting.

Kate Needham

- She expressed concern regarding urban tree and hedgerow management, specifically highlighting the removal and cutting of hedgerow along the footpath between Priors Dean Road and Andover Road.
- It was noted that the hedgerow had been removed during peak bird nesting season.
- She emphasised that urban hedgerows were extremely important as they supported a multitude of wildlife, helped to mitigate climate change, clean the air, and prevent localised flooding and she wished to prevent similar incidents.
- It was highlighted that the council responded to concerns by stating that overhanging branches had been reported by members of the public and that the work may have been necessary for safety reasons. If this was the case, the offending branches could have been identified and removed, or cut back a little along a 'wide path'.
- A bird survey was reportedly carried by the contractor. She stated that local people familiar with the path and had seen nesting birds, were not content with the reasons for the cutting and removal of hedgerow and believed that if a robust procedure had been followed, involving the council's natural environment team, this habitat would have been protected.
- In conclusion, Mrs Needham added that she had written to IdVerde 12 days prior but had received no reply and questioned the policies and procedures that were in place to justify the action taken, instead of protecting important urban habitats and suggested that a performance review be undertaken.

In response, Councillor Learney (Cabinet Member for the Climate and Nature Emergency) highlighted the importance the council placed on protecting hedges and trees, but acknowledged that on rare occasion, works were deemed necessary. The path in question was frequently used by pedestrians and cyclists accessing Henry Beaufort Secondary School, Kings Barton and Harestock Primary School, thus works needed to be carried out during school holidays to minimise disruption and avoid lengthy detours for regular users.

It was reported that contractors had carried out nesting bird activity checks in the weeks prior to and on the morning of the works commencing, with work log evidence being taken throughout, indicating no bird activity in the areas that were cutback which had been further confirmed by professional ecologists.

In conclusion, Councillor Learney stated that the council were content that necessary checks had been undertaken and the works were justified but agreed that a more formal procedure should be investigated in respect of allowing works during this time of year.

Stephanie Danby (Chairman of Chesil Theatre), with Jo Ashwell (Co-Trustee of Chesil Theatre) also in attendance

- The Chesil Theatre was an entirely voluntary community theatre run as a charity, producing up to eight productions per year. In addition, they conducted "Chesil Outreach Out," where they take drama out to community

groups in churches and similar venues and "Community Outreach In," where they bring groups, such as Hampshire County Council children in care, into the theatre to spend a day learning about their work.

- The theatre has a vibrant youth theatre. They run the Chesil Take Creative Writing Competition, which, although national, involved large numbers of people across the Winchester district, with the aim to do more of what they do really well.
- The planning consent received for their extension in November 2024 was welcomed. The theatre now owned the freehold of the church location and had acquired the freehold of the land next door, which was currently a derelict house.
- Reference was made to planned improvements including, improving audience amenities, a performance studio/community room for community use and a new planned entrance. It was also hoped they could address other issues such as making facilities wheelchair accessible and improvements to separate dressing rooms for children in performance
- Project costs were estimated at £2.1m, with over £1m raised to date, a further £1.1m required. Stephanie thanked the council for its support and the grant funding of £90,000. Once built the theatre would operate sustainably without revenue grants and was financially well managed, making a surplus year on year.
- The work of the youth theatre was highlighted and details of the fundraising capital campaign that commenced in March were shared.
- In conclusion, forum members were invited to contact Stephanie Danby if they wished to attend a guided tour of the theatre.

The Chairperson thanked Stephanie Danby and Jo Ashwell for attending and providing the opportunity for a guided tour. The forum supported and acknowledged Chesil Theatre as a valued asset in the city and as a fantastic facility offering a fun, diverse and interesting programme to many people across the Winchester district.

The Chairperson conveyed the forum's support to help raise funds for the build of the new development proposed and acknowledged the continued support of the ward members for St Michael.

8. **RESPONSE TO THE REQUEST OF WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM FOR A COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW (REPORT WTF339 AND PRESENTATION)**

Patrick Davies addressed the Forum on this item. His comments are summarised below:

- He expressed that the proposals presented were expensive, confusing and at the wrong time. He considered the costs outlined in the presentation slides to be "potentially devastating" for people living in the Winchester town area. If established, a town council precept charge could significantly increase to potentially £400 per annum from £90 per annum (for a Band D property).
- He suggested a new level of bureaucracy, involving paid staff and offices for the new setup would bring confusion, which would contradict the stated

purpose of local government reform, meant to "clarify and streamline local government services".

- The reform aims to achieve this clarification and streamlining with one unitary authority in place of the current county and district councils. The timing of this particular exercise he deemed "absurd".
- Mr Davies stated that although the January meeting initiated the current exercise, there had been silence for five months. The report claimed that the full council had decided to accept the forum's request, but he stated that this had never been to full council.
- He considered that there was a need for clarity on how local government services in a new unitary authority covering Winchester would be settled, which was currently unclear.
- He stated that the forward plan going to the next week's Cabinet indicated that the council's "first and final submission" would go to their meeting on 25th September. However, there was nothing until then apart from a brief oral update from the Leader at the last Cabinet meeting.
- Mr Davies believed it was premature to proceed in the way suggested in the report until the shape and size of the new unitary council was known and that this should be the council's priority.
- In conclusion, Mr Davies considered that proceeding as recommended would cause hopeless confusion amongst the public and at significant expense.

Councillor Horrill addressed the Forum on this item. In summary, Councillor Horrill made reference to the following points:

- Councillor Horrill questioned why the current presentation suggested a governance review beyond the scope of the forum's earlier request and noted the same matter on the agenda at the Licensing and Regulation Committee next week, specifically referencing item 11.2 in the papers.
- She expressed concern that the devolution and local government reform process, as indicated in the papers, could create a divergence in local governance within the Winchester district.
- She stated that such inconsistency could lead to disparities in service delivery, the level of community representation, and the overall sense of local identity between parished and unparished parts of the district.
- Councillor Horrill acknowledged the message that those not currently parished wished to become parished and ultimately form a town council, but stated that it was not clear what benefits an extended geography for the town council would bring to new residents or the parished areas intended for inclusion.
- She cited examples from other authorities where similar processes had led to significant increases in resident precepts.
- She questioned if the proposal was "a land grab for a larger town area" or politically motivated to ensure the city's voice was still heard in a larger unitary authority
- Councillor Horrill stated that if it was a genuine concern for the residents of the district, the papers needed to be enhanced significantly, and it was hoped that the officer team would ensure a level playing field as the process continued.

- She believed that those being asked to consider joining the extended Winchester area were not being given anything of meaning to assess that offer and questioned if they even wanted to consider it.
- In conclusion, Councillor Horrill stated that there was a lack of understanding at parish council's of what the changes would mean on top of devolution and local government reform.

In response to the points raised by Patrick Davies and Councillor Horrill, Councillor Becker (Cabinet Member for Healthy Communities) reminded the forum that this was the beginning of a process to decide if a new town council should be established. She clarified the significant range of precepts within the district which varied greatly and set out the Community Governance Review process; the timing of which had been determined by the Government, with the town forum impacted by local government reorganisation.

Councillor Becker introduced the report emphasising that the review process was consultative and provided the opportunity for residents to express how they wished to be governed; it was not a land grab, nor political. The process would engage with communities regarding the historic boundaries of the town to determine if they wished to join a new town council or remain within their current parish area, such as Kings Barton.

Furthermore, Councillor Becker stated that the review would comprise of many detailed engagement opportunities with residents and parishes to enable involvement in the process, including the draft and final terms of reference, as well as various committee meetings and parish briefings.

The Director (Legal) gave a presentation following the request of the forum at its last meeting on 23 January 2025, to consider a Community Governance Review (CGR) with a view to establishing a town council for central Winchester. The presentation highlighted key areas including, governance arrangements and the areas under review, consultation and engagement, finances, funding and assets, the Winchester City status, mayoralty and coat of arms, the initial next steps and proposed action plan.

In addition, the report set out the framework to steer the CGR process noting that within the constitution, the duties and functions relating to CGR's under the Local Government Public Health Act 2007, are the responsibility of the Licensing and Regulation Committee, with the exception of the making of the final order which would be subject to Full Council decision. At its meeting on 16 June 2025, the Licensing and Regulation Committee would initially be asked to acknowledge the potential for a CGR and establish a cross-party member working group to oversee the process, with additional committee meetings to be scheduled as the process progressed.

The forum proceeded to ask questions and comment on the following matters which were responded to by the Cabinet Member, Director (Legal) and relevant officers, as summarised below.

- (a) The pathway for the forum's continued engagement in the Community Governance Review (CGR) process.

It was noted the forum would appoint members to the working group that was to be established by the Licensing and Regulation Committee. In addition, it was within the remit of the forum to establish its own informal group to discuss issues pertinent to the process.

- (b) It was suggested that CGR could become a standing item on the agenda for future meetings to receive progress updates. It was agreed that the method for this engagement needed to be discussed further to ensure an appropriate process was in place.
- (c) The potential relationship between a future town council and the Winchester BID (Business Improvement District) and its potential was raised, considering that the BID was funded through business rates and not expected to be part of the town council's funding.

It was reported that the BID process would not necessarily be affected by the creation of a town council, as it was not funded via the precept. No changes or implications from this process were envisaged. The BID would have the opportunity to participate in CGR to ensure its voice was heard as part of the consideration.

- (d) Could any recommendation or outcome reached by this council through the established process for the CGR be overturned or "unpicked" by government intervention?

In response, it was noted that the government could ultimately create legislation to prevent the formation of any new parish or town councils, as this was within their authority, although this outcome was considered unlikely.

- (e) If a town council for Winchester were not established, would all services, otherwise handled by a town council, then become the responsibility of a new unitary council, potentially with councillors who lived outside of Winchester with limited knowledge of the area?

It was confirmed that the default position would be that everything would transfer to the new unitary authority. This situation would still necessitate resolving issues related to the mayoralty and city status, possibly through a charter trustee position, which was described as a holding arrangement for the heraldic assets of the city.

It was highlighted that residents of the city's unparished areas would face a democratic deficit with no local representation comparable to parished areas.

- (f) Members recognised the fundamental purpose of the CGR was to ensure that residents living in the five unparished parts of the city of Winchester received the same level of representation as all other residents in the district and considered that this needed to be addressed.

During debate, the forum made reference to a number of points including:

- (i) Precept charges – these would be dependent on the services a town council would choose to deliver.
- (ii) Special expense charges that would apply should a town council not be established.
- (iii) The opportunity to review boundary anomalies.
- (iv) The need to expedite matters with the risk that the decision-making powers of the council may end prior to the completion of the CGR process.
- (v) The scope of public consultation, respecting the views of residents and the importance of including existing parished areas in the consultation process.
- (vi) The principle of devolution.
- (vii) The right to equal representation
- (viii) The preservation of the Mayoralty and City Status.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report, specifically the agreement to undertake the requested Community Governance Review (CGR) for the central Winchester area, be noted.
2. That the governance arrangements established for the initial stages of the review, including the role of the Licensing and Regulation Committee and the formation of the Members Task and Finish Group, incorporating Town Forum representation, be noted; and
3. That the presentation be received, and the comments raised by the committee, as summarised above, be noted.

9. **INFORMAL GROUP - VERBAL UPDATE**

The Chairperson announced that due to the start of the municipal year and changes to the position of Chair and memberships of the Informal Groups, there were no verbal updates at this time. However, these would resume at the next meeting in September.

10. **TOWN FORUM INFORMAL GROUP APPOINTMENTS AND WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2025/26 (WTF338)**

The Forum considered the work programme and its appointments to the Winchester Town Informal Groups for 2025/26, as set out in the report and its appendices.

RESOLVED:

1. That the items listed in Appendix 1 and 2 of the report be noted, the 2025/26 work programme be approved and authority be delegated to the Strategic Director, in consultation with the Chairperson, to further set the detailed work programme for the municipal year.
2. That the informal groups, as set out in paragraph 11.2 of the report, be re-appointed for 2025/26.
3. That an additional informal group, namely 'Winchester Town Forum (Community Governance Review) Informal Group', be established for 2025/26.
4. That the membership of the Forum's informal groups for 2025/26 be approved as stated above, and appointed as set out below:
 - (i) Winchester Town Forum (Streets and Spaces) Informal Group
Cllrs: Murphy (Ch), Aron, Batho, Eve, Tod, Thompson and Westwood
Lead Officer: C Williams
 - (ii) Winchester Town Forum (Climate and Open Space) Informal Group
Cllrs: Eve (Ch), Batho, Murphy and Learney
Lead Officer: R Smith
 - (iii) Winchester Town Forum (Account) Informal Group
Cllrs Learney (Ch), Aron, Batho and Morris
Lead Officer: D Kennedy
 - (iv) Winchester Town Forum (Culture) Informal Group
Cllrs: Tippett-Cooper (Ch), Eve, Morris and Thompson
Lead Officer: A Gostelow
 - (v) Winchester Town Forum (Grants and Community Empowerment) Informal Group
Cllrs: Aron (Ch), Batho, Becker, Eve and Wise
Lead Officer: S Lincoln
 - (vi) Winchester Town Forum (Community Governance Review) Informal Group (new group established for 2025/26)
Cllrs: Batho, Eve, Morris and Thompson (Chair tbc)
Lead Officer: G John

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 8.00 pm

Chairperson