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WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

Wednesday, 8 November 2023

Attendance:

Councillors

Reach (Chairperson)

Batho
Becker
Edwards
Eve
Learney

Morris
Thompson (from item 8)
Tippett-Cooper (from item 6)
Wise
Westwood

Others in attendance who addressed the forum:

Councillor Lee

[Full video recording](#)

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Prest, Scott and Tod.

2. **DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS**

There were no disclosures made at the meeting.

3. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Hiscock, Hampshire County Council, to the meeting.

The Chairperson announced that scaffolding had been erected in the High Street where investment works were currently taking place and that the structure of the new doctor's surgery was being progressed on the corner of Upper Brook Street/Friarsgate; two positive updates since the last meeting had taken place.

4. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 September 2023 be approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Ian Tait spoke during public participation, a summary of his comments are set out below.

In addition, Councillor Lee addressed the forum in relation to Item 6 (Winchester Town Account Medium Term Financial Position). His comments are summarised under the relevant item below.

In summary, Ian Tait made reference to the following points:

- Spoke at Cabinet in January 2023 raising the matter of the state of the public conveniences in the city centre and welcomed the report and the proposals considered by Cabinet at its meeting in September 2023 on this matter.
- Referred to the revised cleaning and maintenance regime with one person being responsible for both the Abbey Gardens and Market Lane public conveniences which had seen little improvement.
- The lack of baby changing facilities at Market Lane due to anti-social behaviour remains unresolved.
- Broken cubicle doors, overflowing basins, lack of toilet paper and low pressure on water fountains remained outstanding at the Market Lane facilities. Suggested regular cleaning and maintenance checks were essential to mitigate these ongoing issues.
- The costly damage from anti-social behaviour to the conveniences at River Park must be overcome.

In response to the matters raised by Mr Tait, the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency emphasised the importance of public conveniences across the district and raised ongoing concerns surrounding anti-social behaviour and drug misuse in facilities, particularly Market Lane. This had prevented baby changing facilities being reopened and would be looked at as part of a wider action to tackle behaviour in this location with a view to bring this back into use. The cleaning and maintenance regimes in place would continue to be monitored going forward.

6. **WINCHESTER TOWN ACCOUNT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL POSITION (DRAFT BUDGET OPTIONS) (WTF324)**

Councillor Lee addressed the forum on this item. In summary, he made reference to the following points:

- Speaking as Winchester district resident, trust member and city councillor who cherishes the city's unique historic surroundings and the part the city plays in the wider district.
- Signposted an opportunity to address the rising environmental economic financial and planning challenges for the city and environments.
- He stated that whilst master plans were welcome, there must be strong mitigating joined up actions for the unique locality covering energy, transport, economic social climate and nature crisis including the need to create and attract businesses.

- Incomplete considerations of the best planning outcomes for the city and wider district.
- Made reference to the Station Approach risk register under the timing risk, namely for Central Winchester Regeneration, Station Approach, the former leisure centre, entry junction 9, St John Moore Barracks, northern park and ride Bar End and Bushfield. Whilst these developments would run independently, it was clear significant cross collaboration to integrate and address challenges to ensure sustainable development, co-benefits and proper affordability and viability tests were achieved. Following recent preview of the regulation 18 amends for the new local plan, he could not see how, without a city-wide neighbourhood plan, the challenges could be addressed in sufficient detail for the best planning development outcomes.
- Councillor Lee stated that the local plan and the masterplan should be considered to be deficient, as without a city-wide neighbourhood plan, there would be insufficient detail to deal with the interlinked critical challenges.
- Considered that the Winchester Movement Strategy should be put into the context of a city-wide plan to further improve Winchester.
- A Winchester city neighbourhood plan would empower the community to create a shared vision and deliver the local sustainable development challenges.
- In conclusion, he urged the forum to reinvigorate an approach for a neighbourhood plan led by a community group using the vision created in 2021 and the work previously undertaken by the Town Forum (Planning for the future) Informal Group.

In response to the matters raised by Councillor Lee, the Chairperson stated that whilst the forum shared the aspirations, these matters did not fall within the scope of the report or the remit of the forum. The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency made reference to the quantity of resource required for work of this scale and clarified that there were no available resources within the town account. It was noted that there was ongoing work on a North Winchester plan, but the consensus in communities was that they would like individual community plans, rather than one for the entire city.

In conclusion, it was suggested that Councillor Lee address the matters raised with Cabinet Committee: Local Plan going forward and review previous forum papers where this matter was discussed in 2019 and 2020.

Councillor Learney provided an overview of the report as member of the Town Accounts Informal Group who had reviewed the medium-term financial position. Councillor Learney outlined the ambitious programme of works and facilities provided to residents and made reference to the notable increases to contract inflation and other costs which had a significant impact on the Town Account and required management within limited resources.

Councillor Learney reported that a changed approach to the playground refurbishment programme was anticipated which, if agreed, would result in a positive impact to the budget to maintain a reserve of 10% of the budget without further changes for the next year. However, it was emphasised that it would not be possible to maintain this level of reserves without further action being taken.

The forum were reminded that the town charge was broadly the equivalent of a parish precept, but compared (based on an average band D annual council tax property charge) to market towns in the district and that of surrounding local authorities, the town precept charge was significantly less and offered very good value for money for the quality of facilities and services provided to those residing in the town area.

It was recognised that options would be constrained going forward, with limited ability to raise funds through charges, with increases to town precept charges being bound by the Government's capping regime. Therefore, following the review of the playground refurbishment programme, further budget reviews were scheduled to look at services such as cemeteries, open spaces and grounds maintenance and grants over the next year.

At the conclusion of debate, the forum supported that report and thanked officers and the Town Accounts Informal Group for a robust medium term financial position.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be received and the budget issues identified be noted for consideration; and
2. That the comments of the Forum be noted and reported back to Cabinet in relation to the wider budget consultation.

7. BUDGET REVIEW: PLAY REFURBISHMENT PROGRAMME - FINAL PROPOSALS (WTF326)

The Cabinet Member for Community and Engagement and the Service Lead: Community and Wellbeing introduced the report which was provided as part of the medium-term financial strategy planning, requested by the forum, to review areas of its expenditure and identify ways that costs could be reduced; this included the play area refurbishment programme. The report set out the proposed new five-year programme and how the programme of work will be managed to ensure the play areas remain safe, high quality and accessible for everyone.

It was proposed that going forward equipment would only be replaced when it was deemed necessary. Although the proposal did have an increase to the reactive maintenance budget in order to carry out an increased number of 'fit for purpose' inspections and any necessary repairs to equipment, the revisions to the refurbishment programme overall would deliver a financial benefit to the forum, as set out in the report.

Members asked a range of comments and questions which were responded to by the Cabinet Member for Community and Engagement and the Service Lead: Community and Wellbeing, these included the following matters:

- Costs included within Appendix 1 relate specifically to the KGV play park, rather than the skate park.

- Damage caused due to anti-social behaviour.
- Changes to consultation approach with play area users on reactive repairs to individual sites to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

At the conclusion of debate, the forum supported the report and its positive prudent financial impact and thanked officers for the work carried out.

RESOLVED:

1. That the five year refurbishment programme to play areas, as set out in Appendix 2, be approved: and
2. That an increase of £5,841 to the Town Account budget from 2024/25, in respect of an increased reactive maintenance and annual life expectancy reports on play equipment as detailed in paragraphs 2.6 and 2.7, considered as part of the town budget process for 2024/25, be approved.

8. **INFORMAL GROUP - VERBAL UPDATE**

The Forum received individual updates from the Chairpersons of various Town Informal Groups, where updates had not already been provided within the items considered above. Each summarised the work that had been carried out by the respective groups over the previous two-month period.

Councillor Batho – Town Vision Group

Progress updates from the group included:

- (i) An initial meeting of the town vision group had taken place to review and reflect on what had taken place, with a report that comes to the forum on an annual basis on this matter. The direction of travel for the vision going forward would be reviewed at the next informal group meeting next month. It was noted that this was a vision and planning group to discuss the policies going into the local plan for the town area.

Councillor Tippett-Cooper – Heritage Group

Progress updates from the group included:

- (i) The Buttercross and Hyde Abbey Gateway – there had been positive discussions with Historic England and matters were on track to submit the draft application for the restoration works by the end of this year, with a view to commence works by Spring 2024.
- (ii) Roman Wall at The Weirs – special maintenance was due to treat and remove weeds at the exposed area of the roman wall at the Weirs shortly.
- (iii) Nunnaminster – It was noted that a bid had been placed with the shared prosperity fund for rejuvenation of this site and investigate the restoration of the interpretation boards.

RESOLVED:

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

9. **WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24**

The Chairperson reported that due to a number of reasons, several items that were due to be considered at this meeting had been moved to the next meeting in January on the work programme.

In addition, the Chairperson had requested that an item be added to the work programme for allocation in the next municipal year, this should be amended to be read 'Update from the Friends of St Giles Hill Park'.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the amendments set out above, the work programme for 2023/24 be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 7.15 pm

Chairperson