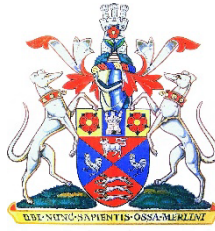


Marlborough Town Council



Full Town Council

Minutes of a meeting of Marlborough Town Council held Monday, 11 April 2022
in the Court Room, Marlborough Town Hall at 7pm

PRESENT Councillor Mark Cooper Town Mayor
Councillor Nicholas Fogg
Councillor Andrew Ross
Councillor Noel Barrett-Morton
Councillor Mervyn Hall
Councillor Jane Davies
Councillor James Sheppard
Councillor Mark Luson

ALSO

PRESENT Richard Spencer-Williams Town Clerk
Dawn Whitehall Corporate Services Officer
Sue Fry Office Manager
Nigel Weatherly Grounds Manager
Ryan Atcherley Senior Groundsman
Fr. John Blacker Mayor's Chaplain
Sgt. Gareth Cole Wiltshire Police
Chris Carey Woolley & Wallis
Neil Goodwin Marlborough.News
Geoff Baker Gazette & Herald
Plus more than 60 members of the public

The meeting was preceded by a presentation about Homes4Wiltshire.

PRAYERS

Fr. Blacker opened the meeting with prayers.

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions.

CRIME AND DISORDER

Sgt. Cole from **Wiltshire Police** reported that, in line with a national trend of increases in rural thefts including red diesel, Wiltshire Police was to run an operation to involve the farming community. He appealed to the those in rural areas to be vigilant and report any concerns to the police. Points in response to questions included:

- The rural operation would have a dedicated officer appointed; communications would be improved and include the Farm Watch network and Community Messaging. **Councillor Sheppard** suggested the NFU would be helpful and provided a contact name.
- Residents had raised violence and/or anti-social behaviour in the forest with **Councillor Davies**: while there were no live reports on the police logs about incidents in Savernake Forest, anyone with concerns was reminded to call 999 for incidents in progress or 101 to report other issues. **Sgt. Cole** confirmed the area would be on the list for team patrols and he agreed to provide data for a future meeting.

ACTION POINT: Future meeting to include a police report with data for any incidents that had been reported in Savernake Forest

QUESTIONS TO AND FROM WILTSHIRE COUNCILLORS

Councillor Hall asked Wiltshire Councillors to engage with residents at York Place who had received 12 months' notice from Aster with an offer of financial compensation but had not yet received offers of help to rehome them. Many were vulnerable and would need help beyond money to avoid the risk of becoming homeless. **Councillors Davies** and **Thomas** had recently met with Aster where they had offered to provide an update about York Place at a future Council meeting. The building was run down, with 18 tenants in 32 units. It would be redeveloped at a cost of £1.3M to provide up to date energy efficient accommodation with shared ownership and affordable (social) housing, providing 36 one and two bed units. There had been reassurance that Aster would care for the existing residents to the extent of offering alternative accommodation with options for décor, help with the move and even a hot meal on moving day. Wiltshire Councillors would keep close to this on behalf of the tenants.

LENGTH OF SERVICE AWARDS

The Mayor was delighted to present 30-year length of service awards to two members of staff: **Sue Fry, Office Manager** and **Ryan Atcherley, Senior Groundsman**. Both were outstanding servants to the people of Marlborough: he acknowledged the fantastic service they provided to the Mayor, Councillors, and residents of the town. It was an especially personal honour for him to present the awards because his father **Maurice Cooper** had been Mayor when Ryan joined and Sue had joined on his Grandmother's birthday.

470/21 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from **Councillors Loosmore, Farrell, Heath, Waltham, Allen, Cleasby,** and **Thomas**. **Councillor Fogg** gave apologies that he would need to leave the meeting at 7.45 pm.

471/21 DECLARATIONS

Councillor Hall – agenda item 18 – Mayor's Awards – non-pecuniary interest.

472/21 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

A notice of election would be published on 20 April inviting nominations to be submitted between 20-28 April to fill a vacancy for a Marlborough Town Councillor for East Ward. If nominations were received an election would take place on 25 May. As this was his last Full Council meeting as Mayor, **Councillor Cooper** thanked **Father Blacker** for his support as Mayor's Chaplain. It had been an honour and a privilege for him to serve as Mayor since May 2020, and he thanked every Councillor from the

current and previous Councils for their help and support along with the **Town Clerk** and Town Council staff.

473/21 MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held 28 February 2022 were approved as a true record and signed by the Town Mayor

474/21 ACTION LOG

Members noted the updated action log.

475/21 SAVERNAKE FOREST

The Mayor and Councillors were aware of many emails and comments from residents about Forestry England's Land Management Plan for Savernake Forest.

The Mayor read out a statement from Rob Cullen of Forestry England (FE) received in response to what they believed to be misleading information that had been levelled against them. FE had also offered to come and make a presentation to the Council at an agreed time in the near future and, following that, to invite Councillors to a guided tour of the forest and discuss openly any areas of concern.

"Statement:

Since 1939, Forestry England has managed Savernake Forest under a forestry purposes lease from the Savernake Estate, delivering world-class forestry certified by the Forest Stewardship Council via the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme. Now - nearly 100 years since that lease began - society is facing a climate emergency and biodiversity crisis that are putting Savernake Forest under pressure unlike anything it has faced in its long history. In response, Forestry England has published the Our Shared Forest Land Management Plan. This was developed in consultation with members of the public and expert stakeholders to set the framework for how we will manage, protect, and enhance this nationally important forest - and balance the needs of the people who love and enjoy it, with the needs of the natural environment. In due course, Our Shared Forest will guide and inform more detailed plans that will specify our management activity over the short- and medium-term. Our Shared Forest has been available for public comment since last month.

Since Our Shared Forest was published, there have been many reports misrepresenting an internal discussion document called 'A Way Forward', which was prepared at the request of our landlord, the Savernake Estate. This paper makes no formal proposals for the Forest. It was drafted in response to concerns raised by the Estate regarding the impact of public access, particularly in light of growing visitor numbers since the start of the COVID pandemic. The document explores potential ways we might work to deliver some of our management commitments within Our Shared Forest. A number of our aspirations for a sustainable and resilient Savernake can only be achieved with Estate consent, so early discussion between tenant and landlord is essential. Public access within Savernake Forest has always been with the agreement of the Estate. Any changes to public access can only happen with the consent of the Estate trustees. This internal document has been extensively quoted out of context so we have published it in full on our website so that the community may read it themselves.

We recognise and appreciate the great depth of affection felt for Savernake Forest. In response to the extraordinary level of interest in Our Shared Forest, we have

extended our feedback survey until 22 April to ensure as many people as possible are able to review the information and have their say at <https://forestryengland.uk/savernakeoursharedforest>'

Rob Cullen – Forestry England"

Prior to the recent update and extension of the survey **Councillor Thomas** had proposed a response that, if agreed, would represent the Town Council's position to be forwarded to Forestry England:

"Proposal

That Marlborough Town Council strongly objects to the Forestry Commission's proposals to:

- *ban all vehicular access to the forest with the exception of Postern Hill car park*
- *extend this car park to accommodate 300 vehicles*
- *and introduce a parking charge.*

The Council believes this move will take away the rights of access enjoyed by thousands every year; open access granted for years before and since the 1930s when the Forestry Commission became tenants. We fully appreciate conservation is key, but conservation measures need to be taken with the public, not against them in order to be successful. Your website states "We know that decisions are better, and mistakes are less when a diverse group of people work together". The Marlborough public are such a diverse group.

The Council is aware local and national media have referred to an internal document that outlines Forestry England's proposals that are not explicit in the Savernake Land Management Plan. We believe that the Forestry Commission has not undertaken a transparent consultation to initially justify such proposals, nor has it properly consulted on them with insufficient time for the public to respond.

The Forestry Commission is a public body with responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. The Act requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- *eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010*
- *advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups*
- *foster good relations between people from different groups*

Such actions will, in our opinion work against all three points and will:

- *introduce discrimination and reduce opportunity by severely limiting access to the forest to wide sections of the local and wider population who experience limited physical abilities, have young children and/or suffer from financial constraints, while benefiting the fit hikers and off-road cyclists. Your own web site states, "Our forests only work for our visitors if they are accessible" and that "Our continued success, as an employer and a provider of first-class services to the public, depends on our track record on equality,*

diversity and inclusion". Restricting access as proposed would damage any such a track record.

- *Further reduce equality of opportunity as the accessible sites are more likely to experience damage done by people concentrated in one area – as is already evident around the Postern Hill site*
- *encourage poor parking practices, with resulting safety implications while damaging relationships with those living nearby, in numerous sites around the forest as drivers attempt to avoid the parking charges and/or seek to access quite areas not dominated by those concentrated around Postern Hill.*

We also suggest the Commission needs to undertake an objective Equality Impact Assessment to support such proposals – with the public's views taken into account.' Cllr Thomas"

Members were reminded that the forest was within the Parish of Savernake, not Marlborough. Members' comments included:

Councillor Fogg:

- The number of residents present, and the volume of letters and emails received by Councillors, demonstrated the strength of the public reaction to the proposals
- Although the issue appeared as a result of a leak to the press, it did seem to have been a genuine proposal which, if enacted, would restrict access to the forest for the elderly, the disabled and those with small children. Forestry England had acknowledged that it was part of an internal discussion document and used the word 'commitment' in this context. Marlborough Town Council had therefore to take this proposal seriously and respond on behalf of those it represented. He wondered whether the latest response by Forestry England was part of a damage-limitation exercise
- While some decisions would rest with the Savernake Estate, the Town Council should still take the precaution to voice its strong opposition
- He recognised there might be a need to close parts of the forest on occasion for conservation purposes; to effectively close the whole forest was an outrage
- Access to the forest was not a right but was a historic privilege and he condemned the proposals in the strongest terms

Councillor Barrett-Morton proposed that the Town Council should object exactly in line with **Councillor Thomas's** proposal.

Councillor Davies had received a lot of representations from the public with the huge majority being opposed to the proposals:

- Two had expressed concerns about violence and anti-social behaviour: everyone needed a safe forest and it would be important to encourage the police (and anyone else who could) to support safer access
- One had made representation about conservation
- The idea of creating surface tracks and specified routes would destroy ecology; this, in addition to a café and cycle hire shop would create an utterly sanitised environment and destroy the wild quality of the forest beloved by all

Councillor Sheppard added:

- Concerns about the impact to traffic on the southern route into Marlborough by channelling more traffic to a larger car park, and the dangerous access to a busy road which was already congested at peak times
- Losses to the right to roam: the forest was a fabulous asset to the local area and he would hate to see any steps taken which would restrict peoples' use of it

Councillor Luson had moved to Marlborough fairly recently and its setting, including proximity to the forest, had been part of his family's reason to choose Marlborough. He did not want his young family's future to include the loss of access to the forest.

The **Mayor** agreed with everything expressed so far and urged residents to contact Savernake Parish Council.

RESOLVED: that the Town Council strongly objects to any existing or possible proposals the Forestry Commission may have or make to ban all vehicular access to the forest except for Postern Hill car park, and to extend this car park to accommodate 300 vehicles and to introduce a parking charge. Further to write to the Forestry Commission to express the Town Council's objections for the reasons set out in Councillor Thomas's proposal

Approximately 50 members of the public left the meeting

476/21 CHRISTCHURCH

The Christchurch Methodist Church in New Road and its Church Hall in Oxford Street were due to close for community hire on 31 August 2022 with the church closing for worship in January 2023. Members considered whether to apply to register it as an asset of community value. Discussion points included:

- Councillor Fogg explained the history of the building including its use as a hospital during WW1: it was a historic institution in the town
- The congregation had dwindled from 225 in 1851 to around 40 today
- It was a costly building to maintain and it was believed the church would seek more modest accommodation in the town, in line with Wesleyan principles
- It would be a great loss to around a dozen community groups which regularly used the building as a meeting place; especially as similar amenities had already been lost following the closure of the Royal British Legion and Conservative Club facilities
- The thriving congregation of Emmanuel Church also used the venue
- Applying to register the building as a community asset could not prevent its sale or affect the sale price but would give any community groups interested in making a bid some time to do so before it went for sale on the open market
- Members expressed a preference for the building to remain available for community amenity in future rather than being converted into private accommodation
- The building was not listed; there were concerns that a future developer might demolish it

RESOLVED: to apply to register Christchurch as an Asset of Community Value and for the Town Council to do all it could to support its continued use as a community facility

Councillor Fogg and one member of the public left the meeting

477/21 NEW WORKSHOP

Members considered outline proposals to redevelop the Salisbury Road Recreation Ground workshop to provide extended facilities for the Grounds Team. Discussion points included:

- Whether to abandon any further investigation into using the Port Hill site, where groundworks alone could be as much as £100,000
- That the rough estimates showed the Salisbury Road site might be achieved at approximately a third of the cost of the Port Hill site
- That the Town Council already owned the Salisbury Road site
- The Recreation Ground was an important site for a lot of residents

During a suspension of Standing Orders the Town Council's agent, Mr Chris Carey, answered questions about the proposal and plans including:

- Layout: limits of the existing boundary; whether any other parts of the area could be reconfigured, e.g. extending car parking for the public and Bowls Club while using existing car parks or a small strip of adjacent grass to increase the footprint of the workshop
- Planning policy and expected outcomes to applications to build on green spaces; that research could be done into appeal outcomes about similar areas
- Whether mesh could be added to allow parking on grassed areas on match days
- That the Neighbourhood Plan would afford protection to existing green spaces; the site was not designated as a village green
- That the proposals were a first draft and could be explored
- Estimates were based on conversations with 3 contractors but were not detailed: the rising costs of materials would quickly render quotations invalid
- Whether the use of second-hand structures could be considered
- That the design would allow for a solar array on the roof at additional cost
- That installation of EV points could be explored
- That the internal layout was just a starting point and could be reconfigured e.g. to include a management office
- Increasing the height would be possible but may be limited by location and neighbouring amenity
- Carbon footprint: whether the building would be environmentally efficient. Most of the building would be used for storage so insulation was not necessary; more insulation could be added but would increase initial costs
- That the build could be carried out in stages
- Whether to rule out the Port Hill site or conduct more investigation into soil quality, which might reduce the costs for that site
- The next steps should be to draft a final plan for Town Council approval then seek planning permission. Quotes could then be obtained.

- The Grounds Manager was enthusiastic about the proposal. He recognised that it was smaller than the Port Hill site but was satisfied it would meet current needs and improve storage, security and be more attractive to the public. Future storage needs following devolution of any services from Wiltshire Council were less certain
- That use of a nearby Wiltshire Council depot might form part of any devolution agreement
- Whether overall improvement to the Recreation Ground site, e.g. improving the gardens and installing historic artefacts, could be incorporated

RESOLVED: to rule out the Port Hill site and move forward with proposals to develop the Salisbury Road site for a new workshop

A member of the public left the meeting

478/21 CORPORATE IDENTITY POLICY

Members considered a draft policy as recommended by the Finance and Policy Committee. Members discussed the most appropriate means of identification for Councillors compared to staff, for example badges or lanyards. It was agreed to amend this section.

RESOLVED: that the Corporate Identity Policy be adopted with one amendment

Messrs. Carey and Weatherly left the meeting

479/21 SWINDON 105.5 RADIO

Members noted the Town Clerk's report and the request for a letter of support to Swindon 105.5 Radio's application to extend its service to the Marlborough Area.

Councillor Sheppard outlined some of the benefits that had been suggested:

- The ability to promote "all things Marlborough" within the town and further afield – i.e. Swindon – as any Marlborough output had the potential to be carried in Swindon output
- Dedicated Marlborough output
- Facility for the Town Council and community groups to reach residents who might not use the internet or paper media for local news
- Local interest items could be carried at no cost, benefitting marginalised or less well-off families
- A leadership exercise by the Town Council to demonstrate inclusivity and an intention to lead rather than follow
- Business advantage – those who wish to support the establishment of the facility can expect to get the benefit of coverage of their support. Once up and running those who wish to maximise exposure can do so cost effectively by sponsoring programmes
- Any very local/community internet service could be invited on. Training for local people towards a dedicated service could be offered
- There were up to two years to make it a reality; another opportunity will not be offered by Ofcom for some time
- Decisions could be withdrawn with no penalty

Matters arising included:

- That with the proposed location of Savernake Hospital falling within the Parish of Savernake it would be courteous to contact Savernake Parish Council
- Whether the hospital had raised any objections (none were known) and that the transmitter would be very small – this would all be addressed by the planning process

RESOLVED: to write a letter of support for Swindon 105.5 Radio to extend its service to cover Marlborough

480/21 PLATINUM JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS AND TREE PLANTING

Members noted the Town Clerk's update report and the programme for the Jubilee weekend.

Councillor Lusson provided more background information and sought views on sponsorship; there were no objections in principle.

The **Town** Clerk advised that the road closure application had been submitted; and that a change in policy at Wiltshire Council meant that the U3A Classic Car show planned to go alongside the market on Saturday would be subject to parking fees. **Councillor Sheppard** asked to be kept informed about the road closure application and whether the Town Council would be asked to cover lost parking revenue as a result: he offered support to persuade Wiltshire Council to waive this for such a unique, one-off event.

ACTION POINT: confirm to Councillor Sheppard whether the road closure for the Platinum Jubilee High Street party would be subject to car park charges

Two members of the public left the meeting

481/21 CLIMATE EMERGENCY WORKING PARTY UPDATE

Members noted the progress update report from the Climate Emergency Working Party.

482/21 OUTSIDE BODIES REPRESENTATIVES UPDATE

Before leaving the meeting, **Councillor Fogg** had provided an update on bus services following a public survey and collaboration with Lee Fletcher of Option 24. It was good news that services would be extended to:

- Improve connections to meet train times at Great Bedwyn
- Add more services to Ogbourne St George and Ramsbury
- Reinstate a direct service between Marlborough and Devizes
- A business case for additional A76 Marlborough/Bath services was being progressed

Councillor Fogg suggested that Lee Fletcher be invited to present at a future meeting.

483/21 CALL-IN

Councillor Waltham, supported by **Councillors Thomas** and **Luson**, had called in Min. No. 445/21 of the Finance and Policy Committee for discussion at Full Council:

“With reference to the budget and precept resolution as stated in the minutes of 4 January 2022, and informed by the agenda budget report of the Full Town Council on 4 January, clarification is sought from the Full Council as to whether they wish to vire funds from the 2021-22 budget savings to the Climate Emergency EMR”

“Min. 445/21 EAR MARKED RESERVES - RESOLVED: that current Ear Marked Reserves remain for 2022-23, and savings from 2021-22 budget be vired to EMRs to increase the events budget, and further increase EMRs for Town Hall Works, Workshop Extension and Emergency Fund; with the exact sums to be agreed by Cllr Ross and the Town Clerk on completion of the year end accounts”

Councillors Waltham and **Thomas** were not present. **Councillor Luson** had supported the call-in on principle, strongly believing that decisions taken by Full Council should be carried through into Committee decisions.

Councillor Ross explained the process for viring surplus had to be done on the day the accounts were prepared, and he had asked the Finance & Policy Committee to state priorities for allocation of any surplus. Around £10,000 had been agreed for the Jubilee celebrations and a small item for Emergency Fund should the town need to support Ukraine refugees or otherwise in response to the Russian invasion should it escalate, with the balance to go towards the Town Hall reserve for roof insulation and towards the new workshop. As the Town Hall roof insulation would improve the Town Council’s carbon footprint it would be desirable to complete the work before winter, especially with the rising cost of gas to heat the building. He wasn’t aware of the details of how a Climate Emergency EMR might be used but would expect works to improve carbon footprint to fall within existing Committee budgets. He had no difficulty with it, but would ask what the fund would be used for. Insulating the Town Hall roof, and adding solar panels to a new workshop would both be steps to improve the Council’s climate footprint. He reminded members that budgets were specific to Committees whereas EMRs were not.

Councillor Hall noted that most spend to reduce carbon footprint would likely fall to the Property Committee budget and projects. He suggested that anything spent on reducing the Town Council's carbon footprint should be recorded to provide an overall picture of the steps it was taking; a new category of carbon reduction projects could be applied.

Councillor Davies recalled the discussion at Full Council and the minutes recorded the Town Council's aspiration to allocate more funds to Climate Emergency work.

RESOLVED: to clearly identify/rename all appropriate projects in Committees as climate emergency projects and record them, along with the existing budget for a climate audit and any resulting future outcomes

484/21 COMMITTEE MINUTES

RESOLVED: that in accordance with para 3.1 of the Scheme of Delegation, Members noted the approved minutes of the following committee meetings: **Planning** – 10 January, 7 February, 21 February and 14 March 2022; **Amenities and Open Spaces** – 10 January 2022; **Property** – 4 October 2021 and 24 January 2022 and **Finance and Policy** – 6 December 2021.

485/21 MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME

Councillor Heath had submitted a question:

'I have read that Prospect are going to be moving to the shop next door to Nationwide. I would like to raise this as a question (at a Full Council meeting) please as to The Town Council making use of the property next door to our offices. Can we consider using it as The Heritage Centre and Tourist Information.'

Discussion points were based on the impact to the Town Council's budget as a combined result of the loss of around £20,000 per annum in rental income and the unknown cost to redevelop the space.

RESOLVED: not to proceed with proposals to investigate the use of the 5 High Street shop as a possible Heritage Centre/Tourist Information Point at this time

486/21 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: that under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and representatives of the press and broadcast media be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following item of business as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest because of the confidential or commercial nature of the business to be transacted

*All remaining members of the press and public left the meeting and **Councillor Hall** left the room*

487/21 MAYOR'S COMMUNITY AWARDS

RESOLVED: that Members supported the nominations for the Mayor's Community Awards

Councillor Hall returned to the meeting

488/21 COMMON SEAL

Proposed by **Councillor Ross** and seconded by **Councillor Barrett-Morton** and
RESOLVED: that the Common Seal of Marlborough Town Council be affixed to all documents necessary to give effect to the decisions of the meeting

The meeting closed at 9.06 pm

Signed:

Town Mayor

Date: