

# Marlborough Town Council



## Full Town Council

Minutes of a meeting of Marlborough Town Council held Monday, 22 January 2024 in the Court Room, Marlborough Town Hall at 7pm

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<b>PRESENT</b>	Councillor Nicholas Fogg	Town Mayor
	Councillor Kym-Marie Cleasby	Deputy Mayor
	Councillor Lisa Farrell	
	Councillor Mervyn Hall	
	Councillor Mark Cooper	
	Councillor Jane Davies	
	Councillor Susannah O'Brien	
	Councillor Emily Trow	
	Councillor Bethany Kohrt	
	Richard Spencer-Williams	Town Clerk
	Dawn Whitehall	Corporate Services Officer
<b>ALSO PRESENT</b>	Nikki Morgans	Forestry England
	Greg Kerr	Forestry England
	Neil Goodwin	Marlborough.News
	Plus 12 members of the public	

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### PRAYERS

The Town Mayor opened the meeting with prayers.

### PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

One resident asked about the content of Forestry England's presentation. The **Mayor** hoped the presentation would answer all his questions.

### CRIME AND DISORDER

No officer was present but a written report for Quarter 4 2023 had been provided. **Councillor Farrell** was disappointed that officers were not able to attend Full Council meetings very often as that would provide an opportunity for members of the public to ask questions and to raise other issues in the town that weren't covered in the report.

## **PRESENTATION – FORESTRY ENGLAND MANAGEMENT PLANS FOR SAVERNAKE FOREST**

Nikki Morgans, Forestry England's Area Forester for Savernake, and Greg Kerr, Community Ranger gave verbal presentations on recent and planned activities in Savernake, as well as volunteering opportunities, then answered questions from residents and Councillors. The main points included:

- The team is based in Bristol and manages 18 woodlands across Bristol, the Mendips and Wiltshire.
- Tree works to deal with ash dieback along the A346 are 90% complete. Around 30 trees infected with ash dieback will be pollarded or other alternatives to felling where they do not present a risk to traffic and might provide valuable habitat, e.g. for bats.
- Bad weather and associated risk of causing ground and soil damage in the SSSI meant that tree harvesting had not taken place since spring 2023. A double programme would begin after the bird nesting season.
  - The selection process to decide which trees to fell varies, for instance to retain 'character' trees rather than straight, tall trees as is the case in other forests; to create space for woodland pasture providing more ecological value; to select conifers or non-native trees. Conservation panels erected at harvesting sites explain this process
  - Harvesting would cease during breeding seasons for wildlife or, for example, exclusion zones of up to 400m would be imposed where sensitive sites were identified, e.g. a goshawk nest
  - FE's approach to harvesting in Savernake is tailored to the forest's unique character and needs. Harvesting is planned to maintain a healthy and diverse forest, with careful consideration for the SSSI, ecology, veteran trees and soils
- Halo work around veteran trees will provide canopy space, access to light and remove competition allowing these trees to continue to thrive.
- Work to remove fast-growing birch trees from cattle enclosure areas to protect growth of young (and future veteran) oaks and give the cattle space.
- Over the past few months scheduled monuments, e.g. linear earthworks, have been surveyed, mapped and cared for.
- Community-led activities include volunteer days, accompanied walks and school, university and interest group visits.
  - Volunteer days take place on the fourth Thursday of every month. The next couple of months will include planting willows near ponds to provide the essential food plant for Purple Emperor butterfly larvae
  - There are opportunities for volunteers to get involved in halo work
  - New volunteers interested in conservation work are always welcome

- A guided walk in Savernake is included in the 2024 North Wessex Downs Walking Festival.
- The work of the team includes responding to issues, for example removing bike jumps, discouraging motorbikes, putting up signs, ensuring safety after storm damage to trees.
- A controversy arose about 18 months ago concerning a Forestry England document and Forestry England's response to concerns ([Full Council Meeting 11 April 2022, Min. No. 475/21](#)): Forestry England was asked to provide an update :
  - Forestry England has a 999 year lease for timber rights only. Whilst forestry does include recreation, Forestry England does not have recreation rights or any rights related to public access for Savernake Forest, and it has no plans to introduce cafes into the forest
  - The owners, the Savernake Estate, retain all non-forestry rights for Savernake Forest, including public access
  - Forestry England clarified that the document reported in the press was not a plan. The long-term land management plan for Savernake Forest is called [Our Shared Forest](#) and can be viewed online. The ten-year forest plan which prescribes management for the coming decade is already being prepared. That will be shared for consultation once drafted so Forestry England can gather public feedback
  - The document reported by the press was a thought paper prepared at the request of the Savernake Estate which owns the forest via their land agent Strutt & Parker to put forward a list of possible ways they could make money from the forest. It was not a recommendation by Forestry England, which does not have the rights to do anything listed within it without the consent of the Estate. There has been no further discussion of that paper since it was first drafted
  - A question was asked about concerns regarding the impact of traffic along the Grand Avenue. Forestry England is not aware of any plans to change access to Grand Avenue
  - It was suggested that representatives from the Savernake Estate or its agent be invited to attend a future Full Council meeting
- Questions about shooting in the forest, and an example of a recent incident at Twelve Oaks Drive where shooting continued within clear sight of a walker with dogs:
  - The Savernake Estate retains shooting rights, Forestry England has no control over it
  - There is a gamekeeper
  - Anyone concerned about shooting should provide a date and time as shooting could be poachers rather than the gamekeeper. Anyone with concerns could also report issues to Strutt & Parker
- Concerns that the status as an SSSI may be compromised by Forestry England works, such as the impact on Twelve Walks caused by widening the road to allow heavy equipment through. FE clarified that vegetation had been scraped

back to the width of existing hard standing on Sawpit Drive to allow haulage. Forestry England acknowledged some damage where Sawpit Drive meets Eight Walks and plans to address this in due course

- Forestry England explained that managed forests remain healthier and support more wildlife. Forestry England's management at Savernake is planned to gradually remove non-native species, increase structural diversity, restore biodiversity, protect the soils and nurture existing veteran trees and veterans of the future
- Questions about signs about 'no dogs' or 'dogs on leads' and their placement:
  - There are pheasants in the forest, the shooting season is November to February. As pheasants are reared and the pen areas change, different signs around dog walking may be erected by the gamekeeper. This is not controlled by Forestry England
  - Members of the public were invited to feed questions about dog walking back through FE or to go direct to Strutt & Parker
- Whether, once Standing Orders were in place, to resolve to record the issues raised during the presentation in the minutes of the meeting and to write formally to Strutt & Parker.
- To report issues in the forest or ask about volunteering call 0300 067 4800 or email [westengland@forestryengland.uk](mailto:westengland@forestryengland.uk) or [nikki.morgans@forestryengland.uk](mailto:nikki.morgans@forestryengland.uk). Residents were welcome to email Nikki direct, and she would provide contact details for the agent to the Town Clerk

The Mayor thanked both for attending and for such an open discussion.

*The presenters and 9 members of the public left the meeting*

#### **QUESTIONS TO AND FROM WILTSHIRE COUNCILLORS**

**Councillor Farrell** asked Wiltshire Councillors whether they knew if Aster had any plans to sell flats at The Priory. Estate agents and surveyors had been seen and tenants had raised concerns with her. **Councillor Davies** was aware that properties were often surveyed to check the status of services such as heating. She knew of no other plans for The Priory and agreed to write to Aster Homes to enquire.

**Councillor Cleasby** referred to housing associations having the right to sell properties where extensive works would be required to meet government standards such as Energy Performance Ratings. She was concerned that Aster set a low cut-off of £1,500 for these works and that any homes requiring more than that were sold, and asked whether there was any way to find out whether this was true and challenge it.

**Councillor Davies** referred to the recent declaration of a housing emergency for Marlborough, and recent flooding meant that unsuitable cottages in London Road owned by a housing association would now also be sold. She would be happy to cosign a letter from the Town Council to ask the question. She had already raised the issue of the selling of social housing stock with Homes4Wiltshire. It was a shame that the plans to build 10 new Wiltshire Council homes in Cherry Orchard had not yet come

to fruition. Different housing associations had different policies, for example about the weighting applied for potential tenants with local links. Policies about multiple occupation, for example not to take account of three friends with similar needs but who were not in romantic relationships or with family connections were also a concern.

**ACTION:** Town Clerk to set up a meeting with White Horse Housing Association to understand more about its approach and policies

**ACTION:** Town Clerk to set up a meeting with other housing associations to discuss issues raised by residents and Councillors

All interested Town Councillors would be notified and invited to the meetings, and it was suggested that a meeting with other parish councils who worked with the same housing associations would also be useful.

**404/23 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence had been received from **Councillors Ross, Barrett-Morton, Sheppard, Thomas, Luson and Shantry.**

**405/23 DECLARATIONS**

There were no declarations of interest or requests for dispensation.

**406/23 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Wiltshire Connect bus service was proving a great success, with 4,000 registered users. More passengers had used the service than standard bus services. The **Town Mayor** passed on his congratulations to the team behind the service.

It was hoped that Swindon 105.5 community radio and its Marlborough service would begin to broadcast to the town in March.

It was good to know that a local artist was to attend Marlborough St Mary's primary school to talk to pupils about poetry and art.

**407/23 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** that the minutes of the meeting held 8 January 2024 were accepted as a true record with one amendment and signed by the Town Mayor

**408/23 ACTION LOG**

Members noted the updated action log.

**409/23 TOWN MAYOR 2024-25**

Proposed by **Councillor Farrell** and seconded by **Councillor Cooper** and **RESOLVED:** that the Town Mayor for 2024-25 will be **Councillor Kym-Marie Cleasby**

**410/23 GRANTS POLICY**

Members noted the Town Clerk's report and considered the proposed updates to the Grants Policy as proposed by the Finance & Policy Committee.

**Councillor Davies** was concerned that the application criteria might exclude very small, grassroots organisations that did not yet have annual accounts or terms of reference in place. **Councillor Cleasby** referred to para. 2.6 which allowed such groups to nominate an accountable body which could 'host' the award fund.

**RESOLVED:** to adopt the Grants Policy and review after one year, identifying whether any applications from small groups with accountable bodies had applied

#### **411/23 INFORMATION MANAGEMENT POLICIES**

**RESOLVED:**

- i. that the Data Protection Policy (adopted November 2020) be readopted
- ii. that the Data Protection Subject Access Request Procedure (SAR) (Reviewed 7 August 2023) be readopted
- iii. that the Special Categories of Personal Data Policy and Criminal Offences Data Policy (Adopted November 2020) be readopted
- iv. that the Data Breach Policy (Adopted November 2020) be readopted
- v. that the Data Retention Policy (Reviewed June 2023) be adopted
- vi. that the updated Data Retention (appendix) (updated June 2023) be adopted

#### **412/23 COMMUNITY AND YOUTH CENTRE**

Members considered a proposal to accept the Marlborough Community and Youth Centre from Wiltshire Council by means of an asset transfer at nil value on the basis of an asset transfer document for community use and an overage clause of 75% uplift on future disposal.

**Councillor Farrell** was delighted and thanked a long list of people, including **Councillors Davies** and **Thomas**, and **Councillors Hall** and **Ross** who had begun the petition to save the Youth Centre around 10 years ago.

**RESOLVED:** to accept the proposed asset transfer of Marlborough Community and Youth Centre from Wiltshire Council to Marlborough Town Council

#### **413/23 OUTSIDE BODIES**

Members provided verbal updates on recent interactions:

**Youth Council – Councillor Farrell** had restarted a Youth Council and was liaising with the Town Clerk and Councillor Thomas. St Johns Academy and Marlborough College had both agreed to put students forward for membership.

**Sports Forum** – members were asked to note there would be a fete/festival on 6 May and a dinner at the Town Hall in September.

**The Jubilee Centre – Councillor Davies** asked whether the Town Council could use social media to help publicise and share what the Centre offered and its activities.

**Area Board** – a recent meeting had been very useful, covering volunteering and community support groups. A central hub was required to bring everything together

and there may be some funding available to the Town Council if it was to provide this support.

**Community Support Forum** – at a recent meeting all had agreed that bringing support together into one forum worked very well. Any other organisations that felt they could contribute would be very welcome. Thanks were expressed to the **Civic and Cemetery Administrator, Andrea Millar** who had worked very hard on the forum.

**414/23 COMMITTEE MINUTES**

In accordance with para 3.1 of the Scheme of Delegation, Members noted the approved minutes of the following committee meetings: **Planning** – 16 October 2023, 13 November 2023 and 4 December 2023; **Amenities & Open Spaces** – 9 October 2023.

**415/23 MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME**

No questions had been submitted.

**416/23 COMMON SEAL**

Proposed by **Councillor Farrell** and seconded by **Councillor Hall** 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 8.24 pm

Signed: .....

Town Mayor

Date: .....