

PARISH OF GODALMING

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting on Thursday, 17 March 2022

1. WELCOME

The Mayor, Councillor Steel welcomed all those present particularly those Members of the Public watching the Facebook livestream.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on the 11 May 2021, having been previously distributed, were approved by the Meeting and signed by the Town Mayor as a correct record.

3. REPORT BY THE TOWN MAYOR

The meeting approved an oral report by the Town Mayor, Councillor Steel, summarising the work of the Town Council since the last Annual Town Meeting. In addition, a printed Annual Report 2021/22 was tabled at the meeting and a copy of that report is attached to the official record copy of these minutes.

Councillor Follows gave public thanks to Councillors and Officers for delivering an ambitious cross party programme.

4. PRESENTATION BY THE AIR TRAINING CORPS

Due to illness, the presentation was unable to go ahead as planned.

5. PRESENTATION OF THE MAYOR'S AWARD FOR VOLUNTEERS 2019/20 AND 2020/21

The Town Mayor, Councillor Steele, announced the recipients of the 2021/22 Mayor's Award for Volunteers.

Awards, comprising a framed certificate and town badge were presented to:

2021/22

Madeleine Gibb
Mike and Sue Mandeville
Alastair Marks
Cathryn Vose

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS RAISED BY ANY LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTOR CONCERNING THE TOWN'S AFFAIRS.

A question raised by Paul Devereux and a resident of the town:

Myself and local residents have grown tired of the continual talk of expansion regarding the Godalming Leisure Centre. I've witnessed the continual ruin of this lovely local beauty spot near the lake. Originally John Stanley Jeffries left a large sum of money which was used to build the original, privately run, swimming pool beside Broadwater Lake. It opened in 1974 and was a low level inconspicuous building which caused little offence and, being tucked away in the corner plot received no resistance from local people.

However, around 2009 a meeting was held where it was announced a new Leisure Centre was to be built for Godalming but placed in Farncombe despite five other more sensible locations put forward.

We were told it was the most cost effective (cheapest) quotation. When a resident asked the Waverley representative ‘what happens if you ever wanted to expand the new leisure centre?’ he was assured ‘we cannot expand the leisure centre because it has to stay inside the same footprint as the original centre, it’s against the law’.

Before the work commenced residents were sent a Waverley BC leaflet reiterating the points raised at the meeting, explaining in writing that the Leisure Centre would not be expanded but that a small car park would be built to stop car parking in our nearby roads. There was great dismay and protests however when the large, well established willow tree and oak trees were cut down to make way for a much taller and in appearance (due to the great overhang) larger footprint building.

Therefore, you can imagine our horror when, a couple of years ago, we found out, pretty much by accident, that Surrey County Council were planning to transfer land from Broadwater School to Waverley Borough Council to allow the building of a leisure centre extension with yet more car park. It seems that the process to transfer the land is still going on.

So tonight I want to ask what exactly is happening? What decisions are Waverley making and when will they be making them, and how do we the local residents get our voice heard better than we did in 2009? [QUESTION 1]

We are deeply worried about increased traffic on a narrow residential road which is the only route to and from the rest of Farncombe, and ripping up a green space for a car park seems crazy in a climate emergency.

Surrey County Council Highways are responsible for highways matters including commenting on planning applications that may have an adverse impact of traffic, they are also required to be mindful of accumulative effect of developments in an area.

If more leisure facilities are needed, why can’t they go to much more appropriate locations, of which there are lots? [QUESTION 2]

Cllr Steel and The Town Clerk answered on behalf of the Town Council:

Thank you for your question and of course your opinion regarding the continual ruin is noted, and is of course balanced against differing viewpoints.

It is not for Godalming Town Council to comment on alleged conversations, however, whether expanding the leisure centre is a lawful action or not in planning terms or whether there are underlying restrictions that preclude an expansion is for the Local Planning Authority to determine.

The questions asked are best made to Waverley Borough Council as the owners of the Godalming Leisure Centre. However, as with any local authority, Waverley Borough Council publishes its agendas of its meetings on its website and residents have the right to ask either formal or informal questions of the Council. The process for doing so is available on Waverley Borough Council’s website. In regards to whether your voices are heard better than in 2009 I cannot say, but I think it fair to say that all administrations take into account the views of residents, but of course different administrations do have different priorities which may determine the weight given to differing viewpoints.

Whether there are more appropriate locations for additional leisure activities is of course a moot point, and whilst some may feel there are lots of alternative locations, what may seem an obviously appropriate site, on closer investigation, may not be so. That said, Godalming Town Council will shortly be opening a consultation on Farncombe Village & Binscombe

Community Vision for a Greener Cleaner Sustainable Future. Within that document Godalming Town Council has stated that:

In considering the extension of the Leisure Centre, Godalming Town Council would wish to see a robust business case before any further development is allowed to take place in this, already significantly developed area of the park. Such business case should take into account the existing supply of recreational and fitness facilities in the area, including community facilities such as Broadwater Park School Community Gym, private membership fitness centres and multi-sports facilities in neighbouring areas such as the Surrey Sports Park as well as the specific needs of the community. Additionally, in light of Waverley Borough Council's declared climate emergency, GTC would question the desirability to focus additional facilities at the existing Leisure Centre location, as opposed to expanding opportunities at other locations, such as Godalming 6th Form College in Busbridge Ward or at Rodborough School in Milford, thus reducing the need for extended vehicle movements across the local road networks.

Additionally, Godalming Town Council would also wish to see comprehensive traffic analysis that model the impact of any extension of the Leisure Centre, especially in relation to any cumulative affect associated with the expansion of Broadwater School. Additionally, although potentially exempt by virtue of development for recreational purposes, Godalming Town Council would be concerned with the over-riding of Green Belt protection to provide additional car parking spaces. This is especially true as the land in question also forms part of the existing school playing fields.

Godalming Town Council would encourage all residents to provide feedback as part of the consultation.

Cllr Follows responded as a member of Waverley Borough Council, noting that as highlighted by Godalming Town Council, a robust business case would need to be established before any plans or proposals would be considered.

A question was raised by Rosa Garrett, a resident of the town:

The GTC draft consultation document states that Farncombe has 'featureless patches of grassed areas with limited benefits for wildlife. The verges, areas of grass and communal play areas located throughout the area are often scruffy and poorly maintained.' In the document it does not refer to the fact that Farncombe Council Estate was built on beautiful and ancient woodlands. Farncombe or Fernecome as it was known in 1086 boasted two ploughs, woodlands and large areas of meadow. But Farncombe is actually an ancient settled site and Bronze Age archaeological finds were unearthed in Northbourne. The scruffy patches of land in between the houses, Combe Rd and Longbourne play areas and Green Lane itself, were graced with glorious oaks and limes and horse chestnut trees that remained from the woods upon which the estate was built. However, it has been counted that at least 70 ancient and veteran trees have disappeared in the last 30 years, clearly leaving the Councillors to wonder what these featureless patches of grassed areas were ever for. It is a sad demise. I have known Waverley Borough Council to descend uninvited to cut down two 400 year old healthy trees in people's back gardens with no recourse to any consultation. 400 to 600 year old trees gracing Farncombe...think about it... saplings when George Fox preached in Fox's Barn; saplings at the time of Cromwell and the civil war. Until the whirr of the chain saws arrive unknown and unannounced and you look in dismay at the empty sky feeling such loss that another tree has gone

The document states 'Parks and green spaces contribute to all aspects of health and well-being including increasing levels of physical activity' The trees with their beauty, bird song, shade and abundant life is a tremendous promoter of joy, health and wellbeing and a main stay for the protection of biodiversity.

My questions are:

Does the Council agree that mature trees need to be protected?

And, as these ancient trees were actually a beautiful cohesive woodland at one time, can the Council envisage a future when these lost trees will be replanted in Binscombe and Farncombe to return our villages to their former natural heritage?

And most importantly, are the Councillors willing to be innovative and resolute to fight for these veteran and ancient trees so that no more will be felled in Farncombe and Binscombe?

Cllr Steel, Cllr Follows, Cllr Williams and The Town Clerk answered on behalf of the Town Council:

The document referred to will be published next week (week commencing 21 March 2022) and will be subject to public consultation which will allow for all views to be heard. However, it is correct that its preamble does state that 'that Farncombe has 'featureless patches of grassed areas with limited benefits for wildlife' which is why the document then goes on to seek ways that this could be changed.

Without knowing the specifics of the trees that you are referring to when you say that "WBC descended uninvited to cut down two 400 year old healthy trees", without knowing the specifics of the case, including location and dates, all we are able to say is that WBC is required to undertake regular survey of trees which grow on its land and have a duty to ensure that any risk posed by a tree is an acceptable risk in relation to its location. Trees may be protected by a Tree Preservation Order and any tree with such protection is subject to a consultation process through the planning process for work to be undertaken on it.

The draft Farncombe Village & Binscombe Community Vision for a Greener Cleaner Sustainable Future Godalming Town Council sets out the Town Council's desire in regards to tree planting and states that planting should have a focus on residential areas and verges for tree planting. As a community within a wider borough, GTC would wish to see tree planting being undertaken in line with the Waverley Tree Planting Strategy. Location of sites and type of trees should be identified through consultation with local residents, businesses and schools.

The Town Council has also stated that In order to provide added protection to trees not subject to a TPO, Godalming Town Council would wish to see WBC add all trees lying within a conservation area, protected woodland or other area where trees are subject to protection by a local policy from felling, topping, lopping, uprooting, wilful damage or wilful destruction with a trunk diameter of 75mm or more when measured at 1.5m above ground level, added to the WBC digital mapping system.

Godalming Town Council will, as part of its review of the Godalming & Farncombe Neighbourhood Plan, as is already the case for the wooded hillside of the town, seek to establish an area protection for the tree stock within the Farncombe and Binscombe area.

This is a document subject to consultation, and therefore needs the support of and comment from Godalming residents.

The questioner was informed that if they provided the details of the incident described GTC would make enquiries of WBC.

A question was raised by John Bennett, a resident of the town:

In February 2021 the Farncombe Initiative undertook a survey of all road junctions in Farncombe and submitted a list of over 40 junctions where the road markings were close to being invisible, even in daylight, and utterly impossible to see from the driver's

perspective at night. In addition, many of our roads had almost totally worn out central white lines.

This audit was sent to SCC with a request to tackle this deplorable failure of maintenance, but a year later only seven junctions have received any attention. Apparently, the rest of these clearly dangerous junctions and the white lines themselves, “do not fit the criteria for a work order”.

Is this not a major safety issue which should be dealt with by the Town Council and SCC as a matter of course?

The Town Clerk and Cllr Penny Rivers answered on behalf of the Town Council:

Whilst individuals may have their own view on what constitutes a major safety concern, Surrey County Council must work to an established criteria to determine priorities and allocation of available funding. Whilst not directly the responsibility of Godalming Town Council, if the list in question is provided the list to the Town Clerk, he will look to review it and seek further clarification from SCC

Cllr Penny Rivers responded as the SCC representative for Godalming North and noted the lack of funding from SCC for this kind of maintenance.

A question was raised by Peter Stevenson, a resident of the town:

What is the Town Council doing to pursue the creation of a full sized skateboard park at Farncombe for our younger community?

The Town Clerk, answered on behalf of the Town Council:

Following a presentation by a local resident on a vision for a skate and bike park in Farncombe, Godalming Town Council has written to WBC to set out its support for such a facility. GTC does not in itself have suitable land holdings to provide such a facility but will work with the borough council to seek solutions and identify opportunities.

A question was raised by Jagienka Rebielak, a resident of the town:

I live at Shackstead Lane which is way too narrow for the volume of traffic it currently serves. The road gets regularly blocked and cars parked outside end up damaged due to bigger vehicles, including double decker buses, trying to squeeze through. Please let me know what are the plans for this road? Could a one way system or traffic light instalment be considered?

The Town Clerk Cllr Follows and Cllr Martin answered on behalf of the Town Council:

Highways is a SCC matter so all GTC can do is write to SCC to ask if there are any plans for this road.

It is believed that every possible permutation of traffic management has been considered for this road with no clear solution available that does not cause other traffic issues.

A question was raised by Anne Gray, a resident of the town:

Apart from the giving an occasional grant to Farncombe Day Centre, what money does the Council give to support the elderly?

The Town Clerk and Cllr Follows answered on behalf of the Town Council:

Godalming Town Council's grant to Farncombe Day Centre is provided as part of a Service Level Agreement (SLA), which allows the Day Centre to provide a minibus to support vulnerable elderly residents access the day centre. In addition to the current SLA, which is in place until 2024, GTC also provided a grant to the Day Centre that allowed it to provide 'ready meals' to the elderly throughout the pandemic, the machine purchased by the grant also allowed the day centre to take over the Community Meal service from Waverley Borough Council.

In addition to the Farncombe Day Centre, GTC also provides a grants via Service Level Agreements to the Hospital Hoppa Community Transport and to the Citizen's Advice Waverley, both SLA's are in place until 2024, thus providing financial certainty to those organisations. The grant provided by GTC to the Citizens' Advice means that GTC is the second largest single source of funding for the CAW and the SLA ensures that the residents of Godalming have access to a 5 day a week in person service based in central Godalming

The Council provides, through its community centres, space at a discounted rate for services aimed at the elderly. This includes the NHS outreach services, additionally the Council provides use of the Wilfrid Noyce Centre to the Godalming Film Society in order to be able to provide Relaxed Screening events that enable those with dementia and other health issues to be able to continue to enjoy the 'movies'.

The Council also supports two cemeteries which provide a tranquil environment for local residents. It is a fact, as it should be, that the majority of burials tend to be the more elderly residents. Not only are the cemeteries well maintained which provides peace of mind to surviving spouses and other relatives, the efficient and effective management of the Godalming cemeteries means that it is available to residents as an affordable alternative to cremation, thus offering a genuine choice.

The Council provides public conveniences, which during the campaign to get them re-opened, many residents, including the questioner, highlighted the importance of public conveniences to the elderly as a reason that GTC should fund the operation and maintenance of the public toilets.

There are a number of services provided that may not seem to directly support the elderly, but of which the elderly are significant beneficiaries, for example the provision of allotments.

A question was raised by Fiona Jenkins, a resident of the town:

What are we doing about refugees from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and now the Ukraine?

Cllr Follows answered that both Godalming and Waverley Borough Council are standing by to assist refugees from all conflict areas, but are awaiting clear guidance from the Government on how the various schemes that have been announced are to be implemented on a practical level.

The Mayor also asked Mr David Allen, President of Woolsack Rotary, to report on the Ukraine appeal collection held in the Town on the previous Saturday. Mr Allen reported that the collection raised over £7,000 and thanked residents for their generosity.

A question was raised by Damien Wheeler, a resident of the town:

There has been a reduction of trains to Farncombe Station in off peak times Monday to Friday and Saturday. What is the Council doing to restore previous levels of service?

The Mayor and the Town Clerk, Andy Jeffery, answered on behalf of the Town Council:

The Council wrote to SWS Railways regarding previous service reductions from Farncombe, which did result in the re-instatement of services. However, the improved service was short

lived and the off-peak service was once again reduced. As such, the Council has written again regarding these latest service reduction and encourages residents and organisations to do the same.

The Council has not only requested the re-instatement of a two train per hour off peak service Monday to Friday but wishes to see the service operate two trains per hour on a Saturday and a Sunday.

There being no more questions, the Mayor brought the Annual Town Meeting to a close at 20.13.