

PARISH OF GODALMING

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting on Thursday, 14 March 2024

WELCOME

The Mayor, Councillor Adam Duce welcomed all those present (41 residents attended in person) and requested that a minute's silence be observed to mark the passing of Mrs Zadie Caudle, Honorary Freewoman of Godalming on 28 February.

Following the tribute to Mrs Zadie Caudle, the Mayor introduced Emma Young, Principal of Godalming College to reflect upon the role of the college within the community.

1. **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on the 16 March 2023, having been previously distributed, were approved by the Meeting and signed by the Town Mayor as a correct record.

2. **PRESENTATION BY DAN ELEY OF THE DAN ELEY FOUNDATION**

The Mayor welcomed Dan Eley, who gave an inspirational speech on the impact of his injuries and how the local community supported him at the worst of times and that same community is now supporting The Dan Eley Foundation to improve the life chances of young people within our area.

The Dan Eley Foundation is a streamlined, cost-effective charity, whose objective is to help young people living in disadvantaged circumstances access educational opportunities, training, and other opportunities for self-development.

3. **PRESENTATION OF THE MAYOR'S AWARD FOR VOLUNTEERS 2023/24**

The Town Mayor, Councillor Duce, announced the recipients of the 2023/24 Mayor's Award for Volunteers.

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

2023/24

Simon Bragman
Sandy Crowther
Vanessa Lanham-Day
Sue West

4. **PRESENTATION BY VANESSA LANHAM-DAY OF THE GREEN HUB**

The Mayor invited Vanessa Lanham-Day to give a presentation on the work of the Green Teen Hub & Parent Hub.

Through their work in their garden areas, The Green Hub Project for Teens works to promote awareness and understanding of mental-health and emotional wellbeing for young people, with the aim to achieve positive, measurable outcomes for teen mental health, including self-love, active lifestyles, social interaction and inclusion, as well as the development and application of a range of learned skills.

The Green Hub Project recognises how hard it can be for other family members when a teen is struggling with mental health, emotional or other anxiety-inducing issues. Which is why the

Green Hub created the Parent Hub to provide a safe space where they can talk with other parents and people dealing with the same situation.

Vanessa finished her talk by showing a video message of support from Kate Winslet.

5. REPORT BY THE TOWN MAYOR

The meeting approved an oral report by the Town Mayor, Councillor Duce, summarising the work of the Town Council since the last Annual Town Meeting. In addition, a printed Annual Report 2023/24 was tabled at the meeting and a copy of that report is attached to the official record copy of these minutes.

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

The Mayor opened the meeting to questions from the electors of the parish of Godalming.

Question from Victoria Kiehl – Resident and Borough Councillor

I am one of the ward councillors for Godalming Central & Ockford on Waverley Borough Council. I have noticed the increasing problem of parked and idling cars along Godalming High Street and have concerns about safety of pedestrians including young children and people with disabilities, pollution levels, congestion and obstruction, and the apparent lack of enforcement of the parking restrictions by Surrey County Council. These concerns have also been raised with me by residents. Could the Council please consider what it could do to help improve the safety of our High Street?

Response: The Mayor asked Cllr Follows to respond:

Cllr Follows informed the meeting that Godalming Town Council (GTC) recognises the points made in regard to inconsiderate parking, which does cause difficulties for pedestrians, with idling engines being particularly harmful to young children. Likewise inconsiderate parking causes issues for other road users including buses and delivery vehicles. As on-street parking enforcement arrangements were removed from the Boroughs last April they are now directly managed by Surrey County Council (SCC). Cllr Follows stated that he and other County Council members had highlighted these issues and he was pleased to see recently the presence of parking enforcement officers in Godalming and he hopes that this will continue.

Cllr Follows, along with Cllr Penny Rivers, SCC Member for Godalming North, will be pushing SCC to consider the proposals submitted by Godalming Town Council for 20mph limits within the Town Centre and elsewhere within the parish, as well as the proposals put forward by the Town Council for the pedestrianisation/traffic restriction in the town, which so far have not been responded to by SCC.

Question from Hugh Pile – Resident

I live in Busbridge and I believe Busbridge is being allowed, by this council and the two tiers above it, to go, in some respects, downhill. An example being the footpath between Godalming College and Ashted Lane used by students to get to their playing fields and by others to avoid the sharp cambers along Tuesley Lane. This path has been allowed to deteriorate. I have a personal interest in this as after Admiral Way was built, I worked with Peter Martin and others to put scalping down, which made the path hard with no puddles or mud. About a year or so ago, a contractor dug it up and we now have puddles and mud. I think those contractors should be brought in and their contract pointed out and the path re-instated. Certainly, someone in this building should do so.

We say we are green, but we allow people to park on the grass verges without doing anything about it. We also allow contractors to dig up the grass verges when they are doing gas work or something of that kind and we don't ensure when they leave that they put down turf or reseed or whatever is needed to replace the verge when they finish. These are little, tiny things in many respects, but accumulatively it adds to the appearance of the townscape. Do we want

muddy ruts as in Shackstead Land, as in Busbridge Lane and the junction of Busbridge Lane and Holloway Hill or do we want it to be decent? I ask these councillors who are here tonight.

I'm sorry to utter the word potholes. It is 1 day short of a year since our MP, Jeremy Hunt, said he would be adding £200 million to the pothole fund and name checked Peter Martin. In our household we call it the Peter Martin premium, the £200 million. Yet Holloway Hill is a disgrace, it is so bad that there is a trench across the bottom of it that I nearly came off my bike. You, Mr Mayor, drive over it daily. The stretch between Ramsden Road and Oakdene Road, is shocking, I know it gets repaired but not satisfactorily.

I know we all suffer from potholes, I ride a Brompton, but I wouldn't ride my Brompton in the area, not nowadays. What has happened, here we are in Peter Martin's constituency who got the premium, we are in Jeremy Hunt's constituency and what do we have? A hill full of potholes and nobody seems to do anything about it. These are my complaints.

May I end by commending to you what was said by Dan Eley. He came to talk at the Godalming College about 10 years ago and a number of students said to me how deeply moved they were by his personal story and the charity he runs. I can only commend him to you.

Response: The Mayor asked Cllr Follows, the Town Clerk and Cllr Martin to respond:

Cllr Follows:

Thank you very much Mr Mayor I am the Leader of Godalming Town Council and also of Waverley Borough Council. I am a Surrey County Councillor for the area in question but sit in opposition at Surrey County Council. The path from the college to Ashted Lane, is I agree, dreadful. Surrey County Council's budget for funding for highways, every aspect of highways, has materially decreased over the last 4 years. Where there has been promise from the MP or others to increase funding in highways it hasn't actually got to the highways funding. Even if the highways funding had materially increased over that time, the cost of highways projects has also skyrocketed. So, the real purchasing power of the highways budget has materially decreased over the last 4 years. Now, as bad as most parts of Holloway Hill are, and I completely agree, they are bad, they are not even the worst in the Godalming South Milford & Witley division let alone the county at large. When you look at the county's entire works programme together, parts of Waverley don't even come up very highly on that list as Cllr Penny Rivers will know for Godalming North as well. There are areas of Surrey that are somehow still much worse than this.

So, in terms of some of the other points you made, the management of verges, many of these were managed by Waverley but Surrey unilaterally took them off Waverley Borough Council to manage them themselves. They unfortunately, therefore, use their own pesticides regime on those verges instead of Waverley's pesticides regime which is none. So, they are using harmful pesticides on the verges again. They also do not manage them properly in terms of parking or enforce them. This was done by Waverley and by every district and borough until Surrey decided without consultation to withdraw that from the districts and boroughs last year. So, at every level we are trying to address this, but these are matters controlled by the county; they do not have the budget to do it. Regardless of what anybody is saying in budgets or speeches or in other areas, that money is either meaningless or not getting to the county in any material way or other elements of the cost-of-living crisis have completely eroded their budget to such a degree that they have had to backfill.

For example, highways money was certainly used to prop up adult social care and other elements of the children's services budget throughout the last two budget cycles at Surrey. So, they have been moving money around from large departments in this way to cover up some of those gaps, so I don't think this is going to change over the course of the next few years without a material change in the way local government funding is funded, which of course has not been announced in the current budget and will not be by the current Chancellor at all.

While I will promise you that from the allocation of £100,000 that I get every year, which by the way hasn't changed in several years despite inflation and building costs, I will ensure that for that particular path, a study is done to see if it can be done effectively and sorted out. The path itself. That genuinely is the most I can promise and I don't want to give you unrealistic expectations. There is so little in terms of the funding that really is the maximum I can promise.

We used to have this thing called the Local Committee which brought together town, parish, Waverley and the County together in this room to talk about highways matters and other county matters that were important within this particular borough and this particular town. That was where we used to hold highways to account and contractors to account. That has been stripped from all of the boroughs. There is no such thing as Local Committees anymore. All those footpaths still sit under the jurisdiction of County Highways.

Town Clerk

Thank you Mr Pile. On the first instance about the contractors, if you could let us know who the contractors were and who was carrying out the work then we might be able to see if anything can be done. One of the problems that Surrey County Council has is that sometimes it's more costly to take people to court than it is to do a remedy. Surrey County Council has to make a decision about whether to do that or not. It's not right, nobody is saying its right, but that's the reality that we are in.

As far as Godalming Town Council is concerned, and this is all the Councillors here tonight can speak for because this is a Godalming Town Council meeting, on the 21 March ie. next Thursday, there is an item on the agenda about footpaths and the alleyways in Godalming. Footpaths and alleyways in Godalming are either the responsibility of Surrey County Council Highways Department, Surrey County Council Countryside Access Department or Waverley Borough Council depending on if they're in housing areas. Those organisations, councils, are carrying out their statutory level of maintenance. We may not agree that statutory level of maintenance is what we want, but they are carrying out the statutory maintenance level. Therefore, next week Godalming Town Council has a Policy & Management Committee and on the agenda, which was published at midday today, which was before we knew about your question, is an item where there is a list of alleyways and footpaths that have been put forward to the council for the council's maintenance team to do additional maintenance to them. This would be over and above the statutory maintenance. Now I don't know whether that particular alleyway is on there because I don't know what footpath number is on the list. If it not on there, one of the reasons it's not, is because people have not reported issues with it to us. If something is not reported we won't know about it.

Mr Pile informed the Town Clerk that he had reported the footpath to the Mayor.

Well in that case it will probably be on that list. I just don't know what the footpath number is. Every footpath has an asset number. Godalming Town Council is doing what it can do. As far as the other councils are concerned, Surrey County Council has to make a decision about the cost of trying to get somebody to reinstate to the standard that it is supposed to be reinstated to against trying to just patch it up. That's the reality we're living in. So, hopefully when you see the minutes of the Policy & Management Committee of the 21 March you will find that footpath on that list.

Regarding the grass verges, again, they are the responsibility of the Highways so, we can't go round putting dragons' teeth on to the verge. Godalming Town Council can't do that.

Cllr Martin

If I could say just two things. Over many years and over governments of all hues, Central Government funding of County Councils for roads has been curious in that they tend to give out the money based on the mileage of roads in a particular county. They have never given sufficient weight to the usage of those roads and on several occasions, I have tried to change

that. I'd point out that Northumberland for instance has the same mileage as Surrey and gets the same amount of money for maintenance of their roads and they're pristine because no-one ever uses them. It's a rather curious thing. So that's one factor and I've always pushed our member of parliament to get more money spent on roads and we've had some impact as a result. Of course, I have to say in particular on Holloway and Shackstead Lane when I was a county councillor Shackstead Lane was resurfaced twice and Holloway was resurfaced once. You do have to push for your bits to get it done and I certainly did that. Doubtless Cllr Follows will get his bit done in time and I hope that he's successful. Part of the problem with those two roads is the surface is not good, the whole structure of the road is inadequate. They were never properly laid; they are ancient roads and there was just a bit of asphalt put across the top a hundred years ago and that has just been the case ever since. What we really need is a comprehensive dig-up and a complete laying down of road surface and I don't see that happening in a hurry. That's not giving Mr Pile the answer he wants; I've discussed this with him many times in the past, but that's the reality at the moment and I will do my bit to push for more money, but I'm no longer a county councillor I have to say. Thank you.

Cllr Penny Rivers

I think we all recognize there is great frustration about the lack of infrastructure and maintenance of that infrastructure. However, just to chip in with my little bit, indeed Surrey County Councillors are allocated a sum of money for the clearance of overhanging vegetation. In 2017 that sum was £7,500 per county councillor. I, not typically, I think I maybe the only county councillor who opted to allocate that £7,500 to Godalming Town Council who are an incredibly effective organisation. So, if I ask them to do a bit of clearance, it gets done. £7,500 however for all of Godalming north, that's half of Godalming, that was for the clearance of overhanging vegetation. We found out yesterday that that sum, that is allocated to each county councillor, is still £7,500 and that now has to cover overhanging vegetation, the clearance of paths, grass verges and sign cleaning. We all understand your frustration.

Question from Seema Jamil-O'Neil – Resident

I wanted to make two tributes and then ask a question.

So, two tributes. First of all, wonderful Mr Mayor, you don't know me but you probably know my son, who is at Godalming College, last year he left and is at university now. I just wanted to pay tribute because your election, in particular, was really interesting to all of the Godalming College students. I saw that first hand, but it especially helped them take part in democracy. I saw lots of my son's contemporaries actually vote because they realised somebody very close to their age would be taking part in democracy. So, really a huge tribute to you for that.

The other tribute I want to make is to Dan Eley who I know my son has been really influenced by and then re-inspired watching him talk to local kids and local schools and it's been wonderful to see him here today because I have heard about him many, many times so it's wonderful to see him here.

Now the thing I wanted to just ask. I live round the corner from Godalming College, and I work in London and therefore most of the time I don't come across the students at all. However, one of the problems I think we have got is the quantum of traffic just generally going up to Godalming College and part of the problem with Holloway Hill in my opinion and Shackstead Lane is just the sheer quantum of traffic, and it not only on the road; the cars coming in and going out but, actually on the pavements; it's the kids going up and down. I was interested in seeing your greenhouse gas emissions and we appear to be achieving quite a good result there. I wonder whether there is a little bit of progress I could suggest there. Could we consider perhaps like a bus service or something from Godalming main town centre, train station, something like that to the College? A, its greener but it would help preserve the roads to some extent, certainly reduce some of the traffic maybe but actually just generally the kids in Busbridge have no access to public transport unless they go down to Meadow or go to the train station. We've got No. 42 I think about twice a day, I don't think that's sufficient

necessarily. But I just wonder whether a simple bus service perhaps may actually help address that. Thank you for listening to me and I hopefully this will help.

Response: The Mayor spoke and then asked Cllr Follows to respond:

Mayor

Well from a Waverley perspective it is a key manifesto pledge to get better connections locally with bus services. So that's probably going to come up from September onwards.

Cllr Follows

So, firstly, yes we are looking at internal intra-Godalming bus services because 40% of the overall traffic in Godalming is people moving to other bits within Godalming, so really some kind of shuttle that does the outside or from the spoke to the different areas moving into the centre is the sort of thing we're looking at. Particularly those who haven't got access to public transport and are coming into the college from the Godalming station direction you'll see many of them clear out every single taxi that exists there. There's clearly a market for a sort of short, inexpensive trip up the hill in a large bus that would deal with many of those kids so it is one of the first areas that we'll look at. The Mayor is actually part of that group at Waverley for obvious reasons because of the connections to the college, so we're very much on the same page as you. All of the parties that run the Town Council and Waverley Borough Council are committed to that same manifesto pledge.

Question from Janet Crowe – Resident – Godalming Town Councillor

Thank you very much Mr Mayor. I just wondered if we could possibly have an update about Broadwater please?

Response: The Mayor spoke and then asked Cllr Follows to respond:

Mayor

Thank you. I believe that's a Waverley issue. I'll defer to the Leader of Waverley Borough Council, Cllr Paul Follows.

Cllr Follows

So, yeah, just for the councillors here, Waverley is going to be requesting a formal briefing here at Environment & Planning in May subject to a discussion with the Chairman of that committee and the Clerk.

The residents of Godalming here may be aware that Waverley sought to take back control of Broadwater Park when a previous administration offered what I would class as an inappropriate lease to the golf club, which I sought to revoke when I took office in 2019. This legal dispute concluded last year, and the land has now returned formally into public control.

I'm certainly of the opinion that public land, public assets, should be for public benefit and that's certainly where the council stands.

The ambition of Waverley is to make the park a park for sport and leisure for the whole of the southeast of England. Waverley conducted a survey before Christmas to ask the community what sorts of leisure activities they would like to see on the park which highlighted a diverse set of ideas ranging from keeping it to absolutely nothing to things like a BMX facility.

At present we're procuring required technical surveys to remap the landfill so that we can start the capping process that will enable the next steps of that. When we get further in that process there will be a second round of public engagement as well as some activity in the high street so we keep everybody informed as well as a big public meeting that we'll host when we've got

what we're going to call the plan for Broadwater, which is likely to be about September this year. So, there will be a lot more going on with that over the course of the next 6 months, but we're really just getting to grips with the technical details of such a large site but we'll just re-commit that we don't intend for it to be anything other than a leisure facility. That's all it really can and should be.

Question from Chris Meeks – Resident

I'm one of these people who believes in environmental action rather than just words and so I would like to echo the thanks to all members of Godalming Town Council, the Councillors and our Mayor for what is actually happening and I'm very impressed, particularly as its been pointed out the financial side that there is such an enormous amount of voluntary input so that's my starting point.

Also, to extend the thanks to our Clerk and our paid staff who, though they do get paid, there's a big difference between people who just do a job and those who do it in a way that shows real interest and involvement and so I extend my warm thanks in that direction as well.

I hope I will be forgiven if I raise another issue about the county council. Because to me it's quite important and perhaps If you want it in the form of a question whether our county councillors could possibly address what I'm about to raise and that is with regard to the recycling centre at Witley. Now here we had an extraordinary situation during Covid where pedal cyclists and pedestrians were prevented under rules from taking stuff to that centre which seemed completely at odds with the county councillors' policies as stated on the website and generally. The website doesn't ban pedal cyclists but it still says as at today no pedestrian access. Now I find this extraordinary. But here we are. We've got a considerable minority of people, myself included, who for environmental reasons choose not to have a car or, for economic reasons, an increasing number of them are in that situation, where they don't have a car. I think it's so important we are tuned in and I'm sure town councillors are sympathetic to exactly what I'm saying, but I just wonder amongst all the councillors we've got here whether somebody, because the effort so far to get this changed has failed, and it may be that we need a councillor to take it up or we can go to the press of course but that's my main point, but particularly to thank our councillors for their service.

Response: The Mayor asked Cllr Follows to respond:

Cllr Follows

I can answer that one fairly quickly I'm afraid Chris.

The reason the county doesn't let individual pedestrians go up to the Witley Recycling Centre is entirely because of safety. They don't particularly like individuals wandering around the site. Their argument, and as you know I don't drive either so I've had this debate with them myself, because an individual can't bring a volume of material up, effectively they're likely to be walking in front of cars, in front of other traffic, and so they've always said no on safety grounds.

I'm very happy to ask them to put that in writing for you so you have chapter and verse on their reasoning for that. But there have been a number of incidents that some of the other recycling sites across the county involving pedestrians and they did notice during the pandemic that the incidents went down because they had obviously to stop people going on to the site...its fairly obvious because the statistics, if you don't let people on there the injuries will go down. I think that's fairly logical but they obviously then didn't review that afterwards. So, I will ask them to write to me and to you to give you chapter and verse but it is safety that is the primary reason.

Chris Meeks

Would you mind if I come back very briefly? It's just one of the local residents had an email which read "once the social distancing requirements for covid have been lifted they are very keen to resume pedestrian access" but it's never been implemented. I take what you're saying

but I think there are, with positivity, ways of solving that. I don't see why we should allow the motor vehicle to totally dominate our lives. It already does to far too great an extent.

Question from Clare Weightman – Resident – Godalming Town Councillor

I would like this to be directed to the appropriate person. I would like an update on the site, the former M&Co building also known as number 69 High Street. If anybody could shed any light on its ongoing status. Thank you.

Response: The Mayor responded:

I've been told by the Town Clerk we'll be getting a briefing on that on the 21st next week at the Policy & Management Committee.

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