

PARISH OF GODALMING

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting on Thursday, 16 March 2023

WELCOME

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

1. **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on the 17 March 2022, having been previously distributed, were approved by the Meeting and signed by the Town Mayor as a correct record.

2. **PRESENTATION BY REV. SIMON TAYLOR**

Rev Simon Taylor, the Rector of Busbridge & Hambledon gave an interesting and informative presentation on the creation of Godalming Minster – The Why, The How and The Future.

The Church of St Peter & St Paul was founded out of an ancient monastical Minster, and through time the Parish of Godalming and subsequently Busbridge and Hambledon was formed. The creation of Godalming Minster removes the ecclesiastical boundary between Godalming and Busbridge & Hambledon to form a Minster area.

In doing so, the diocese will be investing in the church infrastructure, and all being well, having gained government approval, the Godalming Minster will formally come into being on 1 January 2024.

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

The Town Mayor, Councillor Faraday, announced the recipients of the 2022/23 Mayor's Award for Volunteers.

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

2022/23

Mandy Brook
Emma Follett
Cherry Gay
Phoebe Gaydon
Tim Stephens
John Taylor

4. **PRESENTATION BY CHRISTINE HOWARD, CHAIR OF THE SURREY ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS**

The Mayor invited Christine Howard, Chair of the Surrey Association of Local Councils, to give a presentation on becoming a local councillor.

The Surrey Association of Local Councils is an umbrella organisation for 93 town and parish councils in Surrey, that provides advice, and guidance as well as sharing best practice and running training courses for both local councillors and local council staff. The Association also lobbies other national bodies on behalf of the local council sector in Surrey.

Christine shared her story from being a local resident concerned about a single issue to becoming a local councillor who supports and advocates on behalf of her local community.

Christine highlighted the support available to those who put themselves forward to represent their community and encouraged people to become involved as a local councillor.

5. REPORT BY THE TOWN MAYOR

The meeting approved an oral report by the Town Mayor, Councillor Faraday, summarising the work of the Town Council since the last Annual Town Meeting. In addition, a printed Annual Report 2022/23 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.

Question from Mr Tom Hawksley – Farncombe Initiative

The Farncombe Initiative is very keen to see the narrow, badly lit footpath connecting Farncombe Street to Marshall Road widened.

Our question to the council then is this:

Will Godalming Town Council do all in its power to campaign with passion and persuasive argument to bring about the widening of the path connecting Farncombe Street and Marshall Road?

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our councillors and the council staff for their work for our community.

Question form Martyn Sandford – Godalming Cycle Campaign

Does Godalming Town Council support the plan for widening the public path between Marshall Road and the level-crossing in Farncombe Street to provide a more suitable active travel link to the shops, station and local schools? If so, how can Godalming Town Council be instrumental in bringing the necessary parties together to make it happen?

As both questions were of a similar nature a single response was provided.

Response:

A challenge to widening this footpath is that it is constrained on both sides, which limits the options. On the one side is housing and the other the fence line protecting the public from the railway line.

As indicated on the Waverley Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), this footpath is shown as part of the Farncombe Core Walking Zone, and as a shared path. However, at present, due to its narrow width, this footpath is not a cycle path and signage is in place to indicate this fact. Clearly the narrowness of this footpath is currently unsuitable for use by both pedestrians and cyclists or indeed pedestrians using pushchairs or mobility cycles trying to pass others coming in the opposite direction.

There was a previous proposal to widen footpath 16 as part of the National Cycle Network and negotiations between Sustrans and Network rail took place in 2008. However, this was not progressed. The Town Clerk has also previously engaged with Network Rail on an informal basis to glean an idea of the costs involved in relocating the fence closer to the railway line.

Whilst GTC is, at this stage unaware of any proposals as part of the LCWIP to seek opportunities to widen Footpath 16, it would be inconceivable for it to be a shared footpath without it being widened. Cllr Gerry Boyle did ask the Town Clerk to re-engage with Network Rail to explore whether they would consider an option to reposition the fence closer to the railway line to enable the widening of the path. Network Rail has responded that this is being discussed internally and that they will get back to the Council in due course.

It should be noted that if Network Rail are minded to agree that the fence line can be moved, this would need to be done by Network Rail contractors and as an adopted Footpath any changes would require approval from Surrey County Council.

Godalming Town Council will continue to engage with Network Rail and Surrey County Council as part of the LCWIP process.

Question from Mr Stuart Gardener – Resident

I'd like to ask why Godalming Leisure Centre isn't named Farncombe Leisure Centre? The centre is clearly in Farncombe, so it feels like it's an attempt to 'Godalming-wash' Farncombe off the map. Is it a case that Farncombe is seen as the lesser brother of Godalming?

Response: Godalming Town Council serves all communities within Godalming equally and does not consider any area of the town to be lesser or greater than another.

Historically, parish administrative areas were aligned with the ecclesiastical parish. What is now the Civic Parish of Godalming consists wholly or partially of three historic ecclesiastical areas, Godalming, Farncombe and Busbridge.

Within the civic parish of Godalming, the Town Council clearly recognises the unique identities and characteristics of the different areas and Farncombe is undoubtedly an area of Godalming with its own unique identity, hence why the Neighbourhood Plan, which was adopted by a referendum vote in 2019, is called the Godalming & Farncombe Neighbourhood Plan and in July 2022, following public consultation, the Town Council adopted the Farncombe Village & Binscombe Community Vision for a Greener Cleaner Sustainable Future.

Regarding the naming of the Godalming Leisure Centre, the centre was opened by Waverley Borough Council in 2012 to replace the old Godalming Swimming Pool & Leisure Centre which was built in 1961 and was also located within Broadwater Park and which was also called the Godalming Leisure Centre, as such it seems that the name that had been used since 1961 was transferred to the new facility.

Cllr Follows, as Leader of Waverley Borough Council, stated he will raise the issue with the portfolio holder to see whether the leisure centre can be renamed either the Farncombe Leisure Centre or the Godalming & Farncombe Leisure Centre.

Question from Rosa Garret – Resident

The buzz word on climate is carbon, but the real threat is biodiversity loss. A study found that the UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, with an average of about half of its biodiversity left. The UK is in the bottom 10% globally for biodiversity. Prof Andy Purvis, Natural History Museum in London, said 'biodiversity is what provides us with so many of our basic needs. It's the foundation of our society.' And that biodiversity is declining faster than at any time in human history.

One oak tree can support a whopping 2,300 wildlife species and of these 326 are entirely dependent on an oak tree for their survival. The oak tree is an extremely efficient carbon capturing tree, it can absorb 10,994 tons of carbon dioxide in its lifetime. A long-term resident born in 1957, told me 'I have witnessed the felling and loss of half of the oak and large trees in Farncombe and Binscombe.' A shocking observation! But all trees absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, guard against flooding, give us oxygen to breathe, create vital homes for wildlife, make us happier and healthier and even increase house prices.

So, this year, I have heard on FB, that Shady Hanger is no longer shady, Summers Road trees have been cut, Boat House trees have been cut and Broadwater Lake trees has been stripped in a most severe way.

There is no evidence of any effort to replant trees in the areas where they have been removed.

Godalming Town Council has stated that there is a climate emergency and that they are committed to restoring biodiversity.

My question to the council is this: When can we use biodiversity as a lens to focus all of Godalming Town Council's decisions? Changing our view of the world to consistently prioritise nature. No longer just a hedge to a vital habitat, not just a field but a home for wildlife?

And integral to this new, dynamic, innovative approach, when will the Council have a cohesive Tree Strategy that underpins all Council planning?

A move from tree destruction to tree conservation; from tree problems to tree innovation? Replacing all trees felled whether or not they have a Tree Planning Order? A move from tree loss to tree canopy?

It is the mature trees that are doing the work and with ever increasing extreme weather patterns, tree disease and biodiversity loss we must act now to preserve and maintain our mature trees and change our perception of the natural world in which we live.

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Response:

As one of the first acts after the 2019 elections, Godalming Town Council passed a Climate Emergency Motion. Since then, it has been working towards its end goal of becoming a net zero council in Scope 1 & 2 emissions, with a carbon reduction of between 34 & 37% from the 2019 base line achieved each year, it is also investing through its Capital Works Programme to decarbonise the Council's buildings, starting this summer with the Broadwater Community Centre.

Not only are the Council's actions good for the planet, but they are also wise investments that will reduce future energy costs.

Godalming Town Council also recognises that decarbonisation of itself is not enough, which is why it is also working towards improving the biodiversity of its land holdings.

As shown in the annual report, GTC and the former Joint Burial Committee who manage Eashing and Nightingale Cemeteries have undertaken a programme of rewilding, alongside changes to its mowing regime that has improved the environment and habitat for pollinators and other invertebrates. It has also worked to protect and restore its hedgerows that provide an important wildlife habitat.

In achieving Gold awards from South & South East in Bloom for both Easing and Nightingale Cemeteries, with these cemeteries having both won best in class for the whole of the South & South East area, the judges specifically commenting that these major land holdings, which are in the care of Godalming Town Council are showcasing the natural environment excellently, are forward thinking and working with a number of other organisations, such as the Community Orchard South East and the local community to further create an environment that is of benefit to everyone. Godalming cemeteries are not only places of peace and tranquillity, but they are also havens for wildlife, flora, and pollinating insects.

But the Town Council recognises it can do more, plans are underway to work with Bug Lines to help towards the creation of movement corridors for invertebrates and although the Council must manage its tree stock, it is planning to adopt a tree replacement strategy, (which comes to council next week). This strategy will not only set out how trees will be replaced but is aimed at increasing the biodiversity of the council tree stock.

Regarding the specific areas highlighted, none of these are on land owned by Godalming Town Council, for the areas which are managed by Waverley Borough Council, they will be managed in line with the Waverley Tree and Woodland Policy & Action Plan which was adopted in April 2022.

Question from Anne Gray – Resident

I have always understood Godalming Town Council is elected to represent the people of Godalming. Recently GTC voted to support the WBC proposals for the regeneration of Godalming by putting social housing on Crown Court Car Park instead of opposing these plans on behalf of the majority of residents of Godalming.

Response:

With the Mayor's permission Councillor Follows responded as both Leader of GTC and WBC.

Godalming Town Council recognises that some level of change is not, in itself, a bad thing by default and to try to regenerate some parts of Godalming is also not a bad thing.

Crown Court Car Park has been described as many things but it couldn't be described as some sort of paradise or magnificent vista to look at; it is not even a very good functioning car park as the data shows quite frequently.

As the meeting is for the electors of Godalming it was felt appropriate to put out new information. One of the things necessary for a responsible person, councillor and council is to step up when there are financial issues and that GTC and WBC could not just ignore the financial challenges of the cost of The Burys building and it was clear from the budget that there would be no more funding support for local government. So, with nothing coming there is only what we currently have.

The reality when a petition was put to WBC opposing it, there were no alternatives and very little recognition of a problem. The petitioners of course do not have to do that as it is the council's problem, however, it was put forward to WBC by some councillors with no alternative proposal. The administration responded to the petition by suggesting a non-political group be formed to reconsider the proposals that were on the table in light of the negative comments about Crown Court, but also factoring in the financial problems the Borough Council has. There were obviously negative components around Crown Court but the majority of the rest of the proposals were relatively well received. Unfortunately, one of the political parties decided not to engage with this process so the administration was forced to take action separately which it has done. It can therefore be announced that Guildford Borough Council and Waverley Borough Council will shortly be announcing their intention to co-locate on a single site and that site will be determined in the near future, subject to consultation and discussion with staff at both councils. Either way this decision should negate the need to take the Crown Court element of the proposals forward whilst addressing the financial pressure both councils face. The Wharf Street element that was well received is still likely to go ahead. More detail will be coming forward. An engagement exercise was conducted so that WBC could understand how people felt about the proposals that were put forward. The council understood the need to deal with the financial issues, there was no support for the Crown Court area and unfortunately a section of councillors at WBC decided to ignore their financial responsibilities, as such in response the administration found an alternative solution and is now in a position to move forward with that. There will be no development on Crown Court but as a responsible council the financial issues of The Burys have been dealt with.

Question from Chris Meeks – Resident

I'd like to start off by congratulating the Council for the part of the Annual Report to do with public transport. I feel passionately about proposals from SCC for reduction in bus opportunities for travel, which at this time seem extraordinary to me.

The County Council and Government seem to be going in opposite directions as pointed out in the letter sent by GTC. The government has plans to promote travel, the £2 travel scheme is brilliant, but proposals from SCC are quite extraordinary.

The GTC letter makes some really good points. Is there any more information on this?

Also, in relation to the recent works at Godalming Station there seems to be a missed opportunity for a bus stop outside Godalming Station, or indeed Farncombe Station. I would have brought these up at the Waverley Local Committee, that was the interface between residents and Surrey County Council, but it seems to have just disappeared.

Response:

On 15 December 2022, following consideration of SCC proposals put forward as part of the Future Bus Service review, Members of Godalming Town Council expressed concerns about the proposed reductions in the county’s bus services and the impact they would have at a time when use of bus services should be promoted and encouraged as a means of meeting the county’s climate change challenge and when residents are having to deal with a cost of living crisis. Members considered that the withdrawal of local bus services could create even more challenges for many residents.

GTC’s concerns related to the withdrawal of the No. 42 route service from Catteshall Lane, the only service linking the residential areas of the town with The Mill Medical Practice and the potential alteration to the service for Godalming College. Additionally, GTC raised concerns regarding the proposal to withdraw early morning and evening services on the 70/71/72 route.

The outcome of the consultation is due to be considered by the SCC Community, Environment and Highways Select Committee on 20 March, see [Agenda for Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee on Monday, 20 March 2023, 12.00 pm - Surrey County Council \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](#). The changes between the consultation proposals and the final proposals are shown in the table below.

Of the consultation survey responses received by SCC, the second highest level was from the Waverley area (Guildford being the highest), with the No 70/71/72 route being the second highest used route by survey respondents. The No. 42 route was the 14th most used. The GU6, GU7 & GU8 postcode areas, which are served by route 42 and route 70/71/72 accounted for over 60% of the responses from the Waverley Borough area. Whilst the consultation was promoted via several sources, it is contended that the GTC’s social media campaign which reached 1,850 accounts was a significant factor raising awareness of the consultation.

Service	Route	Days of Operation	September 2023 Consultation Proposals	Final Proposal Post Consultation
42	Guildford Godalming Cranleigh	Mon-Sat	Withdraw from Catteshall Lane Godalming, Ifold and Loxwood, considering maintaining Godalming College journeys and converting the rest of the service to DDRT.	This service is commercial, and the operator is revisiting the longer-term viability of maintaining the service along Catteshall Lane in Godalming. To be withdrawn from Ifold, Loxwood and Plaistow in W. Sussex. No change to Godalming College journeys.

70/71/7 2	Guildford Peasmarsh Farncombe Godalming- Milford Witley- Brook Haslemere Fernhurst- Midhurst	Daily	Withdraw the following journeys: 5.49am from Chiddingfold to Guildford, 6.08am Haslemere to Midhurst, 8.25pm Guildford to Shottermill, and 9.26pm Shottermill to Godalming.	This service is commercial, and the operator is revisiting the longer-term viability of maintaining the early and late journeys. A decision is expected by June.
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Cllr Follows stated that anyone trying to get to or from work using the bus would know of the challenges they face. In relation to the £2 travel scheme, if there are no buses to use, it is a worthless scheme.

In addressing the point regarding the Waverley Local Committee, Cllr Follows informed Mr Meeks that the committee was a Surrey County Council committee, which they decided to abolish with no replacement. For the coming civic year, 7 out of the 9 County Councillors within the Waverley area have agreed to use WBC facilities to try to replicate the excellent work formerly done by the local committees.

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