

AT A MEETING OF THE BOROUGH COUNCIL held in the Council Chamber - Town Hall, Maidenhead on Tuesday, 28th September, 2021

PRESENT: The Mayor (Councillor John Story), The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Gary Muir)

Councillors John Baldwin, Clive Baskerville, Christine Bateson, Gurpreet Bhangra, Simon Bond, John Bowden, Mandy Brar, Catherine Del Campo, David Cannon, Stuart Carroll, Gerry Clark, David Coppinger, Jon Davey, Karen Davies, Phil Haseler, Geoff Hill, David Hilton, Maureen Hunt, Andrew Johnson, Greg Jones, Neil Knowles, Ewan Larcombe, Sayonara Luxton, Ross McWilliams, Helen Price, Samantha Rayner, Julian Sharpe, Shamsul Shelim, Gurch Singh, Donna Stimson, Helen Taylor and Simon Werner

Also in attendance virtually: Councillors Carole Da Costa, Wisdom Da Costa and Amy Tisi.

Officers: Andrew Durrant, Adele Taylor, Andrew Vallance, Emma Duncan, Adrien Waite, Kevin McDaniel, Karen Shepherd, Alysse Strachan and David Cook

27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lynne Jones, Joshua Reynolds, Chris Targowski and Leo Walters.

28. COUNCIL MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2021 be approved.

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

30. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor had submitted in writing details of engagements that the Mayor and Deputy Mayor had undertaken since the last ordinary meeting. These were noted by Council.

31. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

- a) Ed Wilson of Clewer and Dedworth West ward asked the following question of Councillor Cannon, Cabinet Member for Public Protection and Parking:**

Does the Lead Member agree with many Windsor residents and business owners that the reintroduction of discounted parking for residents will enable the town to bounce back from the economic impact of the COVID 19 pandemic?

Written response: *Offering a discounted parking scheme for residents could assist with the bounce back of town centres and will encourage residents to shop locally which helps support the local economy, creates jobs and boosts local communities. I therefore remain committed to the introduction of a new residents discounted parking scheme and one will be introduced, as soon as it is financially responsible to do so, so the residents and businesses can benefit from it.*

By way of a supplementary question, Ed Wilson asked if the Cabinet Member would commit to publishing a timetable for the new scheme.

Councillor Cannon responded that he had already committed to bringing forward a new scheme when it was financially responsible to do so; he could not give a timetable because it was being led by the finances. A scheme would be introduced at the earliest possible time.

b) Ed Wilson of Clewer and Dedworth West ward asked the following question of Councillor Clark, Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Digital Connectivity:

Can the Lead Member advise what repairs and maintenance have been conducted at the Elizabeth Bridge and the Windsor Bridge in the past 5 years and at what cost?

Written response: *The project to extend the life of Queen Elizabeth Bridge in Windsor was completed in July 2021. We carried out essential repairs and improvements to the bridge on the A332 Royal Windsor Way to future-proof the structure. Investment in the 1960s-built bridge was necessary due to corrosion of some of the steel components over time. It is part of a major arterial route in and out of the historic town of Windsor, as well as a key link to the M4 over the River Thames, so keeping it in good working order was crucial for the borough's road users, those visiting and others passing through.*

The project demonstrated the council's commitment to investing in our ongoing highways maintenance and improvement programme, ensuring our roads are in a safe and usable condition for everyone. The main element of the work involved the replacement of the 20 tie rods. These hold down the back of the two shore sections of the bridge and allow the central span to extend out over the water. The project also included concrete repairs, expansion joints and waterproofing the structure. The work was carried out through contractor VolkerHighways, and its sister business VolkerLaser at a cost of £2.1 million.

The pedestrianised bridge between Windsor and Eton has not had any significant structural works only small rectification of defects such as replacing bollards etc, we are waiting for the exact costs from Volker Highways.

By way of a supplementary question, Ed Wilson asked if it would be possible for officers to clean the vegetation from the Queen Elizabeth Bridge and consider upgrading the welcome sign.

Councillor Clark responded that he would take the comments on board, raise them with officers and reply to Ed Wilson when he had a response.

c) Martyn Cook of Hurley and the Walthams ward asked the following question of Councillor Stuart Carroll, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health

As a serving veteran of the conflict in Afghanistan, I would like to ask the council and cabinet to outline the positive actions taken by RBWM to support refugees from the crisis in Afghanistan?

Written response: *The Council has proactively worked with partner organisations and private sector landlords to offer the following properties to support the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP). These are:*

- *3 x 1 bed units in Windsor suitable for single households*
- *1 x 2 bed house in Maidenhead, suitable for a family of four*

Currently the Housing Service is awaiting details of suitable matches from the Government's centralised resettlement team.

In addition, the Council coordinated a local 'donation in kind' scheme at John West House in Maidenhead. The Council was overwhelmed by the generosity of Borough residents with items received currently being sorted and categorised ready for the arrival of households in the Royal Borough.

The Council has proactively worked with Slough Refugee Support to manage monetary donations from Borough residents. Again, the generosity of donations received from residents, which currently total over £3,000, has been fantastic. These donations will be used in a targeted way to ensure that households moving into the Borough are able to access key items quickly upon arrival.

Slough Refugee Support will be working in partnership with the Council to deliver support to households arriving in the Borough, this support includes but is not limited to:

- *Welcome briefings*
- *A package of advice and assistance covering employment, welfare benefits, housing, health, education and utility supply*
- *Translation services*
- *Registration with GPs*
- *Support with approaching the Job Centre Plus*
- *Support to obtain a National Insurance Number*

Martyn Cook was not present to ask a supplementary question.

d) Victoria Parkin of St Mary's ward will ask the following question of Councillor Coppinger, Cabinet Member for Planning, Environmental Services and Maidenhead:

In light of the recent decision by the golf course to accept the offer from the council for the purchase of the lease, what are the council's plans for providing infrastructure to support the proposed 2000 new homes?

Written response: *The new Borough Local Plan is accompanied by an Infrastructure Delivery Plan, which identifies the key infrastructure needed to support the growth proposed in the new Local Plan, including on the golf course land.*

The Infrastructure Delivery Plan will be developed and refined as part of the South West Maidenhead Framework SPD process. More detailed work is underway on the

strategic highway improvements required to support development at South West Maidenhead. The SPD work will look at the mitigation likely to be required at key junctions, and when this mitigation will need to be in place. The cost of the mitigation works will be estimated, ensuring that the CIL contributions (along with S.106 financial contributions and any other funding sources) will be sufficient to deliver the necessary highway improvements needed to support development at SWM.

The SPD process will address the other types of infrastructure needed to support development at SWM, including in relation to the planned new primary and secondary schools, cycling and walking infrastructure, public transport, community facilities, open space and sustainable drainage.

Victoria Parkin was not present to ask a supplementary question.

e) Hillary Su of Oldfield ward asked the following question of Councillor Andrew Johnson, Leader of the Council:

In light of business rates loss from the Nicholson centre, does the Council have plans to attract new business into other areas of Maidenhead town to help offset the loss and balance the book? If so, how?

Written response: The council formed a new economic growth team as part of last year's budget, recognising the importance of a thriving economy to local communities. We invested additional resource into creating new posts to support our economic recovery plans to help tackle the impacts of the pandemic through employment and skills programmes, improved business support and attracting greater inward investment. Examples of this work include working with the Thames Valley Berkshire Business Growth Hub to provide expert advice, working with local people to start and grow their businesses and working with Government through the Department for International Trade on opportunities to welcome new businesses to the borough. We are already seeing that businesses want to work with us and locate into the Borough with IHG choosing Windsor for its new Corporate HQ and Quantuma moving from Marlow to Maidenhead. We will continue to build stronger partnerships with business to retain and attract investment to the borough.

Hillary Su confirmed she did not wish to ask a supplementary question.

f) Hillary Su of Oldfield ward asked the following question of Councillor Gerry Clark, Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Digital Connectivity:

Does the council have plans to improve fibre broadband/5G data connection in Maidenhead to accommodate growing business needs and WFH demand?

Written response: The council set out in its Recovery Strategy that improving digital infrastructure was a priority action for both community and economic recovery. We are working in partnership with the other six unitary authorities in Berkshire and the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership to deliver a Berkshire wide digital infrastructure strategy. There are a series of projects to improve mobile and broadband connections across the borough with the aim of increasing full fibre broadband to 95% coverage by 2025 and eliminating 'not spots' in mobile coverage. Within Maidenhead, Cityfibre already has plans for installing gigabit broadband and

we will continue to work with the public and private sector to deliver improved digital connectivity across the Borough.

Hillary Su confirmed she did not wish to ask a supplementary question.

g) Sunil Sharma of Furze Platt ward asked the following question of Councillor Ross McWilliams, Cabinet Member for Housing, Sport & Leisure and Community Engagement:

The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead has worked considerably hard on bringing in affordable housing to the town and it's great to see some of the developments across the borough. I understand the council is looking to support some refugees from Afghanistan. What sort of impact can we expect this to have for the borough & residents?

Written response: RBWM is committed to delivering significant higher levels of affordable housing, particularly social and affordable rent. The impact of COVID-19 has demonstrated how unsustainable our housing market is and we need to do more to ensure more local people are able to access homes in their local area. We have seen increases in affordable housing delivery in recent years and the adoption of the Local Plan later this year will help us drive these numbers up even further, particularly on council-owned sites, which provide a once-in-a-generation opportunity to deliver significant numbers of genuinely affordable social and affordable rented homes.

On our efforts to support Afghan refugees, the Council has proactively worked with partner organisations and private sector landlords to offer properties to support the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP).

Currently the Housing Service is awaiting details of suitable matches from the Government's centralised resettlement team.

Impact on the Borough and its residents is expected to be positive, as experienced professionals, who have served alongside the British Armed Forces, will be resettled into our local communities and bring their expertise with them. We look forward to welcoming those refugees who supported our armed forces over the last few years in often very difficult circumstances.

The response from Borough residents has been overwhelmingly positive with many contacting the Council to enquire about how they can assist households to settle into their new homes and feel part of the local community.

Sunil Sharma was not present to ask a supplementary question.

h) Derek John Wilson MBE of Bray ward asked the following question of Councillor Coppinger, Cabinet Member for Planning, Environmental Services and Maidenhead:

With the BLP proposed main modifications consultation finishing on Sunday 5th September, following the Examiner's confirmation, when is it expected to be adopted by RBWM for approval?

Written response: Shortly after the close of the seven-week consultation on Main Modifications to the Borough Local Plan, all of the representation received were forwarded to the Inspector. Once the Inspector has considered these representations, she will decide whether further hearing sessions are needed or whether she needs

more information from Council. Once the Inspector is satisfied that she has all the information she needs, she will issue her final report and it is firmly expected that she will find that it is 'sound' and can be adopted with main modifications. A report will be presented to Full Council, likely during November or December 2021, recommending the adoption of BLP.

By way of a supplementary question, Derek Wilson asked what would happen if Council did not pass the paper to endorse the BLP.

Councillor Coppinger responded that given the time spent developing the Plan and the Inspector's positive reaction to it, should the Council decide not to adopt it he would expect the government to take immediate action with the Secretary of State insisting it be done. This situation had recently happened in South Oxfordshire.

i) Adam Bermange of Boyn Hill ward will ask the following question of Councillor Coppinger, Cabinet Member for Planning, Environmental Services and Maidenhead:

Could the Lead Member please give a progress update on the steps taken so far in preparation of the emerging South West Maidenhead Development Framework Supplementary Planning Document and also an approximate timetable of the future actions required prior to adoption, including details of any stakeholder engagement planned?

Written response: Policy QP1b of the new Local Plan requires preparation of a South West Maidenhead Framework SPD. The policy sets out that the purpose of this SPD is to ensure the SWM area is planned comprehensively, and supported by the necessary new infrastructure (including community infrastructure and highways infrastructure).

Officers have agreed a Planning Performance Agreement with the principal landowners and developers within the SWM area, and this Agreement provides financial resources to the Council to instruct a consultant team to advise the Council on the preparation of the SPD.

Officers are currently looking at the scope of the SPD (including in relation to the matters that will need to be addressed in the SPD, and those matters that may be more appropriately addressed at the planning application stage). The evidence available to support the preparation of the SPD is being reviewed, and more detailed work underway to assess the impacts of the planned development on the strategic highway network; the mitigation required; the cost of these works; and how and when the works will be implemented, with funding from CIL and S.106 contributions. Work is also underway to look at the cycling, walking and public transport strategies for SWM, with a view to offering real alternatives to private car use.

Officers have been meeting with the principal landowners and developers, to understand the technical and design work that they have undertaken, and to encourage joint working, for example in relation to coordinating potential new access points onto Harvest Hill Road.

The new Local Plan sets a target for adoption of the SWM Framework SPD of April 2022. This is a very challenging timetable. The current intention is that a series of

stakeholder and local community engagement sessions will take place in November. These sessions will be focused on the challenges and opportunities associated with development at SWM, to help ensure that Officers and their consultants have a comprehensive understanding of the issues when preparing the draft SPD. Officers will then take the draft SPD to Cabinet for approval in early 2022, and the draft SPD will then be subject to public consultation. The comments received will be taken into account, and then the revised final SPD will be taken back to Cabinet for adoption.

By way of a supplementary question, Adam Bermange stated that he was concerned from what had been described, that preparation the SPD would be rushed and in particular the requirements in policy QP1b relating to green space retention and biodiversity net gain might be neglected. The policy also stated that the masterplan set out in the SPD would inform the phasing of development throughout the South West Maidenhead area and the PPA referred to in the answer would no doubt be important there too.

In relation to phasing, given the two-year extension agreed with the golf club, Adam Bermange asked if the Cabinet Member's department would be writing an update note to the Inspector setting out the impact the delay would have on the housing trajectory and was the Cabinet Member concerned a 5-year housing land supply could no longer be demonstrated in the 5 years following adoption of the BLP?

Councillor Coppinger responded that the council was fortunate to already have experience of an SPD of this type in Windsor. The council had been working with the developers there so had a good understanding of the issues. He fully admitted that the timetable was very tight. It had yet to be decided if the Inspector should be written to, but it was a good idea. Councillor Coppinger would ensure the answers to Adam Bermange's other questions were sent to him.

j) Adam Bermange of Boyn Hill ward asked the following question of Councillor Hilton, Cabinet Member for Finance and Ascot:

Could the Lead Member please provide an assessment of the financial impact on the Council of the recently-announced increase in Employers' National Insurance Contributions, broken down by the growth in the cost of (i) directly-employed Officers; (ii) the AfC contract; (iii) the Optalis contract; and (iv) any other outsourced services with a contractual passthrough built in for such rises?

Written response: We have calculated the additional NI costs across the Council, Optalis and AfC at approximately £500,000. An assessment of additional contract costs is still underway. The impact on the Council is unclear at present as we are not certain whether the Government will compensate us for Optalis and AfC costs

By way of a supplementary question, Mr Bermange commented that he understood that the Treasury modelling assumed that only cost increases relating to public-sector staff who were directly-employed would be compensated. The final details should become clearer after the Spending Review at the end of October although that would not leave much time to reflect these in the draft 2022/23 budget, due in November.

Therefore, in its work to produce a balanced budget for next year, was the Cabinet Member's department currently having to assume even deeper savings would need to

be made, not only due to the National Insurance rise but also due to the council's heavy reliance on outsourcing?

Councillor Coppinger Hilton responded that he was not sure that Members would be aware of the approximation of the £500,000 increase in costs which was significant. At this stage had had been told it was not possible to provide an exact answer, work was ongoing to assess the contract costs. It was not clear if government would mitigate the impact through the upcoming Comprehensive Spending Review. In the meantime, the costs would be included in the Medium Term Financial Plan strategy and managed through the budget setting process.

32. PETITIONS

Councillor Haseler, on behalf of Councillor McWilliams, submitted the following petition:

We the undersigned petition the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead to consider pedestrian and cycle improvements to Harvest Hill Road and to encourage sustainable travel.

Councillor Haseler explained that the East section of Harvest Hill Road between Kimbers Lane and Braywick Road was a busy, narrow, single carriageway, unlit road, subject to a 40mph speed limit, lined by tall hedgerows, with an unkempt verge on the north side. The road was used by various categories of road users: pedestrians and cyclists of all ages, motorcyclists, cars, vans, buses and large goods vehicles, with no provision for safe walking or cycling, creating potentially hazardous situations.

An infrastructure upgrade creating a safe walking and cycling route was badly needed; it was a vital missing link that would connect the communities of Cox Green, Oldfield, Woodlands Park, Boyn Hill, and beyond with the new state of the art Braywick Leisure Centre, rugby and athletics clubs, cemetery, nature centre, schools, mini golf and restaurants.

Conversely it would provide an accessible route from Holyport and Bray to parks and schools in Cox Green, Oldfield and Boyn Hill. Taking a broader helicopter view it would also provide a link via the Causeway to Bray village, Maidenhead & Bray Cricket Club, Monkey Island Lane, Bray Lake Watersports activity centre and the M4 motorway path leading to the Thames path and the world renowned Dorney Lake.

A safe walking and cycling route along Harvest Hill Road was a vital infrastructure upgrade that would encourage sustainable modes of transport, positively contributing to the declared climate emergency, whilst at the same time increasing residents' safety and enjoyment of the outdoors, making a myriad of community facilities more accessible.

Councillor Haseler strongly urged the Council to put the matter on the infrastructure upgrade agenda and to consider options for its implementation at the earliest possible opportunity.

33. REFERRALS FROM OTHER BODIES

There were no referrals for consideration.

34. COUNCIL MEETING ARRANGEMENTS

Members considered meeting arrangements for the remainder of the municipal year.

Councillor Rayner explained that since March 2020 the council had needed to change the way it held meetings, due to the global pandemic. Moving to virtual meetings had allowed decisions to continue to be taken but had also kept residents safe and protected the borough. Technology had become a central tool to which all had adapted. Live streaming of council meetings had improved accessibility. Due to the recent expiration of the legislation allowing virtual decision-making meetings, there had been a return to some in-person meetings. It was now time to reflect on the benefits of virtual meetings and the opportunities for more transparency. Virtual meetings had increased engagement and had been welcomed by many participants. Travel requirements had reduced making it easier for all to conduct council business. Virtual meetings also allowed flexibility for those with caring responsibilities, a disability, or other commitments. The review took into account these benefits but also acknowledged the positives of in-person meetings to enable the council to serve residents. The report highlighted the importance of enabling hybrid meetings to take place and technology to ensure this approach could continue was being investigated.

Councillor Werner commented that all would agree they had come to see the benefits of virtual meetings. The council had been able to continue to make decisions and the public had seen more clearly how this was done. Virtual meetings also had important benefits in the fight against climate change and the current fuel supply issues. Virtual meetings were the family friendly option to enable individuals from all backgrounds to be councillors. The problem was that the government had failed to recognise the reality and had stopped decision making meetings taking place virtually. He asked the council to continue to lobby the government on this issue and he asked the Leader to write to confirm the council's support.

Councillor Werner commented that the hybrid option was the best way forward, He felt that officers had worked hard to get to this point but had not been given the tools needed. He referenced a Council motion in 2019 on the subject. Councillor Werner stated that he would like to see a clear timetable for improving the AV equipment; he felt Christmas would be a reasonable deadline.

Councillor Hilton held the view that had been proven that decision making meetings were best held face to face. He had attended three meetings in council premises: they had been easier to Chair, generated better responses and provided a better environment for debate. He set aside any personal inconveniences as being inconsequential. However he agreed that it was appropriate for some meetings to continue to be held virtually. He had no comments on the AV arrangements as he felt they worked well for him.

Councillor Knowles stated that he supported the paper. The working environment had advanced 20 years in a short period of time, however he now found online meetings tortuous after attending so many in the last 18 months. Councillor Knowles commented that since he had been elected he had experienced issues with the

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acoustics at council meetings. He had spoken to officers who had tried various solutions but not resolved the issues. In comparison, fully virtual meetings had perfect audio quality and the ability to connect hearing aids via Bluetooth. The current system was far better than Periscope but was a step back in terms of audio quality. The issue of hybrid meetings still needed to be addressed.

Councillor Bond commented that he had attended council meetings before he had been elected and found that members of the public sitting under the overhang in the council chamber found it difficult to hear the Members speaking. He recommended all participants in a public meeting should be conscious of this fact and speak as though they were in a public meeting.

Councillor Davey commented that online meetings worked very well for increasing transparency and the engagement of residents. They were more inclusive and better for officer time as well. However the current audio quality was abysmal. Viewing figures had dropped by 50% since the return to in-person meetings. For full Council the reduction was 75%.

Councillor Davey questioned the need to attend meetings in person if reports were simply going to be 'nodded through'. In this case he felt he would be a better option for him to join virtually so that residents could hear him properly, as his vote was meaningless anyway. If the issue was meatier then he understood the need to be in the room to debate and stand his ground. He felt it should be a councillor's individual decision to attend in person or not.

Councillor Price commented that she felt proposing some non-decision-making meetings that could continue to be held virtually should now be face-to-face went against what the council was trying to achieve in relation to climate change. She was also concerned at the short notice for meetings in the following week that would have a change of venue.

Councillor Hill commented that Zoom meetings had worked well but the in-person broadcast did not. Most councillors had laptops or other devices in front of them and therefore he suggested a trial of an in-person meeting using individual devices to join a Zoom meeting. However, he was unsure whether there would be sufficient bandwidth.

Councillor Taylor commented at a previous meeting a central camera that spun round had been used and she suggested this may be a better option than a single fixed camera.

Councillor Baldwin expressed concern about the security of meetings such as the Corporate Parenting Forum being held in a virtual capacity.

Councillor Johnson commented that overall the shift to virtual meetings had been a great success in terms of increasing transparency and resident engagement. However it was also important to reflect what it had not provided, which was the human factor. Many people were tired of online meetings and it was genuinely nice to engage with others face to face. He was not suggesting that there should be a return to all meetings being face to face but as many people returned to work and communities started to return to some sense of normality it was only right that some meetings should go back to face to face. He did not feel it was too onerous to expect

an overview and scrutiny panel to meet four times a year in person. Virtual meetings did add value to the Town Forums, officer briefings, task and finish groups and other events.

Councillor Johnson highlighted that the council was one of the first to show leadership by contacting the Secretary of State to press for the retention of the ability to hold hybrid meetings. His administration had proposed a motion to invest in the AV facilities to improve resident engagement, however this had been overtaken by a global pandemic which required officers to focus on frontline priorities. Only now were the pieces being picked up and therefore a slight delay could be forgiven in terms of the council's hierarchy of priorities.

Councillor Rayner commented on the important conversations that took place in exchanges before and after meetings that were only possible when an in-person meeting was held. Officers were investigating options to improve the AV equipment, but implementation timescales would depend on the results of the investigation. Councillor Rayner clarified that all Part II confidential meetings were held via Teams, which had better security than Zoom.

It was proposed by Councillor Rayner, seconded by Councillor Johnson, and:

RESOLVED: That full Council notes the report and:

- i) **Agrees the split of virtual meetings/in-person meetings for the remainder of the municipal year as detailed in Appendix A.**
- ii) **Notes that a further review would take place if and when legislation is enacted to allow decision making meetings to take place virtually.**

The vote was taken by a show of hands. 31 Councillors voted for the motion; 2 Councillors voted against the motion. 1 Councillor abstained.

35. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

- a) **Councillor Larcombe asked the following question of Councillor Cannon, Cabinet Member for Public Protection and Parking:**

The Jacob's Report dated September 2014 identified the need for maintenance works on the Wraysbury Drain. Significant RBWM expenditure (about £150k) failed to cure the problems. As designated lead local flood authority RBWM has repeatedly failed to ensure riparian maintenance. By what date will the problems be fixed please?

Written response: There are a number of workstreams for maintenance of the drain, including liaison with riparian landowners, enforcement action, direct works, and the Environment Agency partnership for Datchet, Horton and Wraysbury, and Old Windsor wards. Each workstream has in common the goal of ensuring maintenance of the Wraysbury Drain is carried out. As each has its own timeline and parties responsible for carrying out works, it is not possible to provide a definitive date by which problems will be fixed.

Current activities include:

- *Enforcement activity commenced in July 2021 in line with the council's Land Drainage Enforcement Policy under advice from the Legal Services team.*

- *Site investigations have taken place to identify blockages and works are programmed to take place in October/November on sections of the watercourse*

Officers will continue to provide regular updates on the Wraysbury Drain, including at the quarterly meetings of the Flood Liaison Group. The next update will be provided at the FLG on 13 October 2021.

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Larcombe thanked Councillor Cannon for his predictable reply. He imagined the long-term failure of RBWM to ensure maintenance of the land drainage infrastructure was actually due to legislative shortcomings.

After the 2007 floods and the Pitt Review, the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 clearly identified the newly created Lead Local Flood Authority as the body responsible for ordinary watercourses, surface water and groundwater and with appropriate permissive and enforcement powers.

Unfortunately there was no legal duty on the authority to monitor the condition of the ordinary watercourses or to use the available powers.

An ancient watercourse had ceased to flow properly and RBWM had failed for years to fix this problem. There was no joined up thinking here and public money had been poured down the drain. He would now go to the Ombudsman but invited the Cabinet Member to respond.

Councillor Cannon stated that he had not heard a question to which he could provide a response.

b) Councillor Larcombe asked the following question of Councillor Cannon, Cabinet Member for Public Protection and Parking:

Channel One of the River Thames Scheme (Datchet to Teddington) was removed from the project after RBWM was unable to meet the partnership funding contribution requirement. My view is that the Environment Agency demand for partnership funding was ‘ultra vires’ and consequently invalid. What do you think?

Written response: *“Ultra vires” is a legal term which means that a person or body corporate has acted beyond its legal power or authority.*

The Environment Agency derives its authority from the Environment Act 1995, and its specific flood risk management powers come from section 6(4) of that act:

“The Agency shall in relation to England ... exercise a general supervision over all matters relating to flood and coastal erosion risk management, in accordance with Part 1 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010.”

The River Thames Scheme itself, sponsored by the Environment Agency, clearly falls within its statutory flood risk management function. The funding of the River Thames Scheme was approved not simply by the Environment Agency itself, but by its sponsoring department, DEFRA, and by HM Treasury.

It is therefore difficult to see on what basis Councillor Larcombe claims that the Environment Agency has acted outside its powers in seeking partnership funding. If he

has continued doubts about the funding of the scheme he should direct his enquiry to the Environment Agency.

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Larcombe commented that it had been suggested that he should direct his enquiry to the Environment Agency but this returned to the old conundrum of 'who polices the policeman'?

The Environment Agency demanded a £230m partnership funding contribution from Surrey and £50m from RBWM towards the River Thames Flood Alleviation Scheme. Surrey agreed to pay but RBWM was unwilling/unable to contribute.

After ten years of significant expenditure on development in July 2020 Channel One was removed from the project leaving Old Windsor, Datchet, Horton and Wraysbury at continuing and increasing risk of flooding.

An Environment Agency objective was to maximise partnership funding receipts. Consequently: no partnership contribution; no flood alleviation scheme.

Councillor Larcombe thought that RBWM should satisfy themselves by confirming that the EA demands for partnership funding were legitimate. If he had not been removed from the Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee that would have been precisely the question he would have been asked at the meeting.

Councillor Cannon commented that he had not heard a question, and referred Councillor Larcombe back to the original question raised and the legal response received.

36. MOTIONS ON NOTICE

Motion a)

Councillor Stimson introduced her motion. She stated that the council faced significant resource challenges with tackling environment and climate change and sustainability efforts. Those involved knew the council needed to go faster and involve more groups, more businesses, and more individuals.

The 6th Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report released in August 2021 confirmed that the world was warming faster than previously predicted, and that humans were causing it, without question. Added to that the pandemic of the past 20 months had created heartache for many, increased mental health issues, and the need for everyone to be able to get to a green space, and safely.

However the pandemic had also created an opportunity to reset, and to no longer do things the same way simply because they had always been done that way. From a climate change and sustainability perspective there was a need to break free from the current constraints, engage businesses, civic society, and resident groups. On 30 September 2021 she would present to Cabinet a proposal for a climate partnership. The council and officers would continue to deliver the actions of the environment and climate strategy related to the council.

Councillor Stimson explained that it was in this context that she was proposing her motion. During the past year, whilst wrestling with how to reach net zero as a borough, the officers and resident groups had been doing some incredible work. Over the next two months, the council planned to showcase that work to coincide with the

UNITED Nations Conference of Parties (COP26) in Glasgow between 1 and 12 November 2021.

The plan was to organise a Local COP26 Environment & Climate online series of podcasts for residents of the Royal Borough. There was so much to celebrate, and the event would help with building the Climate Partnership. The CEC were also organising 'COptober', and the council hoped to work together with them.

There would be a virtual event consisting of a series of pre-recorded panel events on key COP26-aligned themes and topics, that were also aligned with the climate strategy. In the last few days a shop in the Maidenhead area and one in Windsor had been offered for use as Climate Hubs to be staffed by volunteers to improve public engagement.

Councillor Stimson highlighted a number of issues that could be celebrated:

- LED lights in school buildings
- 500,000 Local Authority Delivery Scheme home efficiency grants
- A heat decarbonisation feasibility funding to the remainder of schools, libraries and the town hall
- Carbon literacy training for officers, residents and members
- Maidenergy, Draftbusters
- A Panel to advice on how residents could contribute to tackling climate change: Filling Good, the Repair Cafe, Windsor and Maidenhead Plastic Free, the Good Gym, The Thames Hospice
- A Panel of schools and young people: RBWM's youth parliament, a representative from Eton, Altwood and All Saints on their sustainable projects, BCA and Windsor schools' Green Skills College, Cumberland Lodge, Berkshire Schools EcoNetwork
- A Panel on Sustainable Transport: Maidenhead and Windsor Cycling Hubs, Hitachi on the latest in sustainable travel,
- Maidenhead waterways, Heal Rewilding, The Wilds Green earth plan

There was a very active group of residents who were determined to work towards reaching net zero. Now that the council had a sustainable community officer, and a great team, Councillor Stimson felt it was time to celebrate what everyone was doing to support the climate agenda.

Councillor Davies stated that she would vote for the motion because it was good to take advantage of any opportunity to raise awareness of the climate and environmental emergency and the great work being done by local climate groups. The key was to extend this awareness beyond the usual suspects. Councillor Davies felt that a town centre presence would be very helpful and she asked how the podcasts would be marketed to ensure the online element would not simply be an echo chamber.

However, as she and Councillor Bond had identified in their response to the draft corporate plan, more was needed to promote awareness. There was a need to ensure all decisions made improved, maintained, and thereby created a clean, low carbon, sustainable, and biodiverse environment. She would be keen for any events held in the Borough during COP26 to do a lot more than highlight the work that had been done and was ongoing. She would like them to be ambitious in challenging others and

the council in what still needed to be done in order to meet the stated target of achieving net zero carbon well before 2050.

Councillor Davies felt it was disappointing that Members were debating the motion, worthy as it was, when there was a much more significant report on establishing a local Climate Partnership which was coming to Cabinet on Thursday and not being debated by all Members at full Council.

Councillor Davies concluded that she would vote for the motion, but she would like reassurance that the content of any events would have a robust focus on what still needed to be done.

Councillor Larcombe highlighted the Maidenhead Waterways Project which had cost millions of pounds. He had read a newspaper report that said 30 tonnes of weed had had to be removed to make the channel viable. He questioned why there was an issue with weed and algae in a new facility. It would be there forever if changes were not made.

Councillor Hill stated that it was a good motion that he would support. However he felt he needed to raise the very real concern that the administration said one thing but did another. He referenced the destruction of 132 acres of virgin countryside on the golf course site. The members of the club had decided to take the offer as a result of what had been described as bullying tactics. The proposals for the site would kill countless species, cut down hundreds of trees, and generate more traffic.

Councillor Taylor voiced her support for the motion; she felt it was one of the areas the council did well cross-party. She echoed the comments from Councillor Davies and was keen to ensure the housing associations were involved.

Councillor Price welcomed the motion but asked what resources and budget would be required to deliver it to the high standard that was desired.

Councillor Coppinger commented that he was concerned with earlier comments by Councillor Hill. There was a need to build houses including affordable homes. The golf course site chosen was the best in terms of climate change and the effect upon it. The alternative would be to build the same number of houses across the borough on green belt land without the benefits of being able to walk everywhere, meaning far more car journeys and pollution.

Councillor Hill requested a personal explanation. He stated that it was a deception to suggest that affordable housing could not be built elsewhere on brownfield sites, and it would not generate more car journeys.

Councillor Knowles commented that the motion built on cross-party support for the timetable to get to carbon neutral. He hoped all would be willing to be open and honest about what still needed to be done. The borough did not have an environmentally friendly public transport system. There were not enough electric charging points, particularly on the Windsor side.

Councillor Johnson commented that he was cognisant that there would be a debate on the Climate Partnership at Cabinet later in the week. In relation to the golf club, he stated that a fair and reasonable offer of £16m and a two-year extension had been made. The offer had been accepted by a margin of 246 to 46. The council was not the only party developing in southwest Maidenhead. The club itself had a development

interest on the wider AL13 site allocation. Of the 2000 new homes on the site 40% would be affordable housing. The suggestion that 2000 homes should be crammed onto brownfield sites would just lead to over-densification, particularly in Maidenhead. If the development did not go ahead all sites previously put forward and withdrawn would be back in play.

Councillor Johnson agreed that it would be a good idea to include the housing associations who were key partners given the housing stock they held. Private landlords also had a role to play along with the owner-occupier sector. He looked forward to eco-homes that were truly affordable coming forward in the Maidenhead area.

Councillor Davey commented that he was pleased to hear about the shop units. Podcasts would be pre-recorded therefore they would have a set agenda whereas face to face interaction allowed for questions and answers. Councillor Davey highlighted that the introduction of 5G would require more masts and more computers. He also referenced the issues with changes to bin collections and that recycling levels were at 44% when the target for 2025 was 50%. The target could have been reached if the council had stuck to its guns. He would like to see more resident engagement including meetings arranged on specific topics.

Councillor Werner commented that he felt the motion was virtue-signalling and did not talk of the future or how to speed up the efforts. Eco-houses had been mentioned but the Borough Local Plan barely even acknowledged climate change. The Corporate Plan also lacked focus on the issue. There were fine words but no action other than by community groups.

Councillor del Campo highlighted that she had previously brought a motion to full council bring 730 empty homes back into use which had been unanimously rejected by the administration. There had been little action on the issue other than a tacit nod in the Housing Strategy.

Councillor McWilliams highlighted actions by the housing team to take forward the climate change strategy. Under the housing strategy, the council worked with providers to retrofit stock. A joint bid was being put together with Abri and Housing Solutions to the social housing decarbonisation fund, to focus on properties with the lowest EPC ratings.

Councillor Carroll commented that climate change and the environment was an important consideration across his portfolio. Lots of initiatives were underway with local schools. The Health and Wellbeing Board had placed climate change and the environment as one of its key considerations in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The NHS was one of the largest partners and had made a substantial commitment to the agenda and to work collaboratively.

Councillor Rayner highlighted the Surfers Against Sewage Award Windsor had received in January 2021.

Councillor Singh commented that he had read in the press that all options were open in relation to the future of the town hall. He referred to an e-petition that had so far gathered 1309 signatures calling for a debate and discussion. He hoped the issue would be debated at the climate summit.

Councillor Sharpe commented the combination of audio and real-life activities proposed in the motion would help people in the borough to engage.

Councillor Stimson concluded the debate. She confirmed that the council was already working with the housing associations on decarbonisation. The town hall was the subject of a heat decarbonisation and feasibility study which would also look at the remainder of schools and libraries to identify the best way forward. The Empty Homes Action Plan was currently being refreshed. Councillor Stimson confirmed that there was no budget for the activities planned although £1500 had been raised through sponsorship. She would continue to raise funds to allow it to happen. She looked forward to sharing details of the Climate Partnership.

It was proposed by Councillor Stimson, seconded by Councillor Sharpe, and:

RESOLVED: That this Council, in acknowledging the work that is being done across the borough by the council and residents alike to mitigate against climate change and encourage sustainability, and to increase the participation of businesses, civic society and residents alike, agrees to hold a Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead COP26 online Summit during the UN COP event in Glasgow. This will highlight the work that has been done, and is currently ongoing within the borough in the areas of climate change and sustainability.

The vote was taken by a show of hands. 33 Councillors voted for the motion. 1 Councillor abstained.