

**AT A MEETING OF THE BOROUGH COUNCIL held in the Desborough Suite -  
Town Hall on Tuesday, 25th January, 2022**

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

Councillors Clive Baskerville, Christine Bateson, Gurpreet Bhangra, Simon Bond, John Bowden, Mandy Brar, Catherine Del Campo, David Cannon, Stuart Carroll, Gerry Clark, David Coppinger, Carole Da Costa, Jon Davey, Karen Davies, Phil Haseler, Geoff Hill, David Hilton, Maureen Hunt, Andrew Johnson, Greg Jones, Lynne Jones, Ewan Larcombe, Sayonara Luxton, Ross McWilliams, Helen Price, Joshua Reynolds, Julian Sharpe, Shamsul Shelim, Gurch Singh, Donna Stimson, Chris Targowski, Helen Taylor, Amy Tisi, Leo Walters and Simon Werner

Officers: Andrew Durrant, Adele Taylor, Emma Duncan, Duncan Sharkey, Karen Shepherd, David Cook and Alysse Strachan

46. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors W. Da Costa, Knowles and Rayner.

47. COUNCIL MINUTES

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2021 be approved.**

48. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In relation to Motion on Notice b) Councillor Del Campo stated that her daughter had been a member of Phoenix Gym until its closure. She had taken advice and could take part in the debate and vote.

In relation to Motion on Notice b) Councillor Tisi stated that her daughter was currently a member of Links Gymnastics. She had taken advice and could take part in the debate and vote.

In relation to the item 'Petition for Debate' Councillor Hunt declared an interest as she owned property near the Town Hall.' She would leave the meeting for the duration of the debate. The Monitoring Officer advised that this did not constitute a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, therefore Councillor Hunt could remain and take part in the debate.

In relation to Motion on Notice b) Councillor Coppinger stated that his granddaughter had been a coach at Phoenix Gym.

49. 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.

50. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

**a) John Sewell of Boyn Hill ward asked the following question of Councillor Coppinger, Cabinet Member for Planning, Environmental Services and Maidenhead:**

Why aren't all the house building companies required to put solar panels on the roof of every single new build? Just think how much this could contribute to the National Grid! It would also appeal to potential buyers.

*Written response: Addressing energy use within the borough is one of the key themes of the Council's adopted Environment and Climate Strategy and this includes the need to reduce energy demand, decarbonise supply and increasing renewable energy generation.*

*The Building Regulations look at the overall outcome rather than the contribution from individual technologies. As such they mandate a level of performance for the final building, which can be achieved in a variety of ways, rather than mandating the use of specific technologies. The approach remains largely the same in the amended Part L building regulations which are due to come into force later this year, although the measures and targets have changed alongside some other significant changes.*

*A holistic approach is required to secure the best overall outcomes based on a balance of considerations and through the Council's Interim Sustainability Position Statement it seeks that the design of new buildings minimises energy use so far as possible that 12% of the building's energy needs are met through renewable technology. While this often involves the installation of solar pv this is not always the most appropriate technology to utilise.*

*That said the Council of course recognises that maximising the installation of solar panels on buildings is an effective way to make efficient use of land and contributes to the generation of renewable energy within the borough. As the Council seeks to further develop its response to the need to reduce carbon dependency within the borough and promoting sustainable energy generation, it will keep its policies under review to ensure the most appropriate response to securing the objectives in the set out within the Environment and Climate Strategy and in line with national policy frameworks.*

The Mayor read out a supplementary question on behalf of John Sewell:

*'I see the target is 12%. What have we achieved over the last 3 years and are we proud of that figure?'*

Councillor Coppinger responded that he did not have the exact figure therefore it would be provided to John Sewell in writing.

**b) Ed Wilson of Clewer and Dedworth West ward asked the following question of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council:**

What is the economic outlook for Windsor in 2022 and how will it influence RBWM's approach to Windsor?

*Written response: Windsor is showing positive signs of recovery from the pandemic with footfall performing better than the South East and UK as a whole and has nearly returned to pre-pandemic levels. December footfall and trade across the town was affected by the Omicron strain of Covid-19 and the resulting Plan B restrictions. The pandemic has accelerated shifts in consumer behaviour away from traditional bricks and mortar retail to experience led spending including increased demand for food, drink and leisure experiences. The hospitality sector has faced challenges in recruiting staff locally with available jobs being higher than demand for jobs.*

*Current vacancy rates in the town centre are higher than pre-pandemic but still below the national average however there have been several new businesses opening in the town and more in the pipeline. The trend has been towards food and beverage businesses rather than retail which is following national trends. Centre for Cities data has suggested that smaller cities and towns are more likely to attract leisure spend at weekends/night time reflected in the cities tracker data that shows that the weekend and night time economy bounced back faster than weekday activity which is also reflected within RBWM data.*

*RBWM's current approach will be to continue to implement the RBWM support and recovery strategy adopted by the Council in September 2020 and to work with businesses to understand their needs and help signpost to available support. The borough's economic growth team was formed during the pandemic and will be working on developing an economic development strategy for the borough as a whole including plans for supporting our town centres. The team will be working closely with businesses and other stakeholders across the borough to ensure that the strategy is developed collaboratively.*

*In 2022 there will be a particular focus on Windsor due to the Platinum Jubilee with celebrations taking place in the town throughout the year. In 2022 we hope to see a return of international tourism and the team have been working with the sector to ensure the borough is best placed to welcome visitors back.*

By way of a supplementary question, Ed Wilson commented that it was true that the economy was bouncing back but there were still too many empty shops in Windsor. He asked if the Leader would write to the national and independent retail groups and independent retailers to invite them to invest in the beautiful town.

Councillor Johnson responded that he would because like Mr Wilson he believed that continued investment in Windsor and all retail centres in the borough was a prime objective of the council. It was pleasing to note the increased footfall and increased interest in the town but there was a need to go further and faster in generating those areas that had suffered as a result of covid. He was very pleased by the recent announcements that would boost that investment given the planning consent for Bray Studios and the associated infrastructure. All had to play a part in marketing the borough as a desirable economic and social location.

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

Will the lead Member update residents on the progress being made at the Vicus Way car park?

Written response: *Construction of the new car park is proceeding well with the main contractor, Buckingham Group, on programme and budget. The car park will open as planned in September 2022 following completion of the construction contract and the installation of the car park's management systems.*

By way of a supplementary question, Ed Wilson commented that with many Maidenhead residents returning to the office, did the Cabinet Member consider the original business case for Vicus Way was still achievable?

Councillor Clark responded that there had clearly been a number of disruptions to the business life of towns across the country but significantly that was now returning with the covid threat manageable and the economy growing. He was confident that the business case still stood.

**d) Hari Sharma of Furze Platt ward asked the following question of Councillor Clark, Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Digital Connectivity:**

The National Bus Strategy for Green industrial revolution states 'Green public transport, cycling and walking supported by £5 billion which would create a further 3000 jobs and bring 4000 zero-emission vehicles on the road, 12% of local bus fleets in U.K. by 2025'.'

What actions or initiatives have been instigated to achieve these ambitious plans for our residents?

Written response: *In response to the National Bus Strategy, the council published its Bus Service Improvement Plan in October 2021, which set out an ambitious range of initiatives to improve services and grow the number of people using buses to help make them more financially sustainable. It is dependent on a future announcement from Government on specific funding allocations to local authorities but it will enable the council to trial a range of measures, working closely with bus operators through our new enhanced partnership. We are also developing a new local cycling and walking infrastructure plan that will set out our priorities for investment in infrastructure. As a signal of our commitment, the draft capital budget for 2022/23 that will be considered at Council in February includes proposals for £1.5M of investment in walking and cycling projects.*

By way of a supplementary question, Hari Sharma asked if the Cabinet Member would raise the issues of a reasonable or cheaper bus fare and a demand response service when he next met with the bus operators.

Councillor Clark responded that the bus service improvement plan was a wide-ranging document looking at how services could be improved. A whole range of changes were embraced including technology, integration of services and ticketing. The promotion of joined up thinking was key in terms of ticketing to ensure value and simplicity could be offered to residents. The development of services would be in association with stakeholders, the council and the operators. How quickly the services could be developed was reliant upon partners, the vision in the plan, and the funding that was awaited from central government.

**e) Hari Sharma of Furze Platt ward asked the following question of Councillor Clark, Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Digital Connectivity:**

The borough is blessed with Windsor Castle, Ascot Racecourse, Bisham Abbey and Legoland attracting millions of tourists from around the world. Cleaner and greener transport can make a huge difference to enhance air quality for residents.

Will he agree to propose the “first electric bus town” in the country and write to the Transport Secretary to fund this scheme?

Written response: *The council is committed to taking action to tackle climate change and improve the local environment, as one of the priorities of our recently adopted corporate plan. As set out in our environment and climate strategy, driving down transport emissions is one of the four key themes. To support this we are developing a new local transport plan with key elements having recently come forward through our Bus Service Improvement Plan. The primary objective of this is to improve services and grow the number of people using them, which will deliver the greatest benefit in terms of reducing overall transport emissions and tackling local air quality as well as helping to make services more financially sustainable. We will also be working with operators through our new enhanced partnerships to set out a roadmap to bring in new cleaner buses and manage the transition to electric buses.*

By way of a supplementary question, Hari Sharma asked if Councillor Clark would include the passenger forum in the discussions with stakeholders.

Councillor Clark responded that engagement with stakeholders was key to the enhanced partnership model, to ensure user priorities were taken into account.

51. PETITION FOR DEBATE - TOWN HALL

Members debated the following petition:

*We the undersigned petition RBWM to retain the world famous Maidenhead Town Hall, to use it as its primary civic building, and waste no further council tax on plans to sell or relocate the civic and community heart of Maidenhead*

Melanie Hill, lead petitioner, addressed the meeting. She explained that she was both a resident and a performer and therefore wanted to save the Town Hall and keep it within the public domain. The Town Hall was both historic and at the heart of the town; it had been used as a vaccination centre for over a year. The report said that there was no evidence of the building being special or unique that the council was aware of. On the contrary, from a performer’s point of view the theatre was a great asset to the community and beyond. It was hired by many local theatrical groups, dance schools and more as it was the perfect space. It could accommodate the many performers and audience members that other spaces could not. A lot of these events raised funds for local charities and the wellbeing of the local community was important post-pandemic. It was vital that the local theatre remained central and accessible by all. Norden Farm had professional events that would affect a week-long booking. Braywick had sporting and other events. In any case the space was just a sports hall not a theatre and therefore had many flaws. Schools had other events which limited availability.

For over 25 years the Desborough Theatre had been the home of the real Maidenhead pantomime. The building had been opened by the Queen in 1962. It was last refurbished in 2014 so if the refurbishment was not good enough to last a decade Melanie Hill suggested the council seek compensation from whoever undertook the work at the time. She also questioned why more taxpayer money should be spent on consultants and consultations. The report

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stated that the Town Hall required an additional £377,000 spend on the fabric of the building over the next five years. She felt that was surely enough to secure its future versus spending millions on a new building.

The fireworks at the Christmas lights switch on were talked about across the counties. The lantern parade and Remembrance service had the Town Hall as their central backdrop. 1500 residents who valued the Town Hall and all it enshrined had signed the petition. It was unfair that those living outside the borough who used the Town Hall could not have their say in whether it should survive another day because they were unable to sign the petition.

Melanie Hill highlighted that the meeting was taking place in the theatre space. Upstairs was a magnificent Council Chamber perfect for that use. She referenced recent social media statements by Councillor McWilliams that residents wanted to see the heritage of the borough protected. Heritage included the local thriving film industry. For the community wellbeing, the heart of Maidenhead should remain in the iconic Town Hall.

Councillor Johnson highlighted that at Cabinet on 29 April 2021 it had been made clear that there were no plans to sell off or demolish the Town Hall. However it was sensible to explore the future investment requirements to enable the council to continue its corporate functions at the Town Hall and decide if that represented a fair deal for the taxpayer. The office space needed to reflect the impact of the pandemic. Investment was needed to meet climate change objectives and to reflect emerging national policy that had not been in place at the time of the last refurbishment in relation to energy performance and sustainability. The third element was the likely level of resource needed and the ability to fund from a capital perspective.

At the Cabinet meeting it had been explained that all options would be explored before significant amounts of taxpayer money would be invested. A report would follow in due course on the proposed strategy. The report before Members reflected the current position. The building clearly had a great attachment for many residents which was recognised but it was also not appropriate to write blank cheques without due regard for the impact on the delivery of services and the taxpayer. The plan was clear, to continue the work to ascertain the long-term cost to meet the energy efficiency requirements and the other climate change objectives set by the council. It was also important to deliver a high-quality working environment for the hard working and much valued staff.

Councillor Johnson thanked the lead petitioner and reassured her that no final decision had been taken. Work would continue to ascertain costs and then Members would be presented with a range of options and a suggested way forward. Doing nothing would not be in line with the council's statutory responsibility to deliver value for money and the legal requirements relating to energy efficiency, nor would it align with the council's own climate change objectives.

Councillor Stimson highlighted the need for careful consideration of what to do with council buildings in line with requirements relating to energy efficiency. The Town Hall had lots of embedded carbon in it therefore there was a need to assess the situation. She made a plea for collaboration and careful consideration before any decisions were made and to be creative in plans, for example the use of green architects. The Town Hall was something personal to residents and should not be used as a political football.

Councillor Singh thanked the lead petitioner Melanie Hill, who like many residents was passionate about saving what was left of the town's heritage. This included the iconic Town Hall and the attached Desborough Suite which hosted many arts and community functions, like the annual pantomime which had been going strong for over 40 years, but also more formal events such as the naturalisation ceremonies, registry office for births and marriages, Mayor's parlour, meetings in the council chamber, offices for council staff, and a café which had previously been housed on the ground floor. It was also used for

the day to day running of the borough activities. The building was custom built for its purpose only 60 years previously and to the latest specification at the time, however, had been modernised and fully fitted out a few years ago with open plan offices and a complete roof of solar panels.

The petition arose after the issue was picked up by the local and national media, with headlines of 'all options open' over the building's future. A figure of nearly £14m to modernise the building was suggested; concerningly no money had ever been allocated or budgeted for the works. Residents in St Marys were very concerned about the issue, many of whom had chosen to live and work within proximity to the Town Hall, including officers and council staff who were looking for certainty. So were investors and partner organisations as the borough had sold off offices, car parks and public land surrounding the Town Hall which had been redeveloped and were currently being marketed for sale or phased-in to be built-out. People needed to know what the concrete plans were as it had been nearly a year since the news story initially broke and 8 months since Cabinet met in June to discuss the Asset Management Strategy for the borough's properties, including the Town Hall. Councillor Singh asked, since June what further detail could be provided to Members and what further asset plans had been drawn up for the Town Hall and its future maintenance. He also asked what cost had been incurred for the review to date. Members and the public had not had sight of the work undertaken thus far and Councillor Singh felt that deals were being done in the back rooms away from the public eye. The conversations should be in public or at least with all Members involved.

There was also concern of the location of where a new civic building would be and why this had not been planned for when the masterplan was recently drawn showing the area as being the civic quarter. Judging by the desire to build flats on every parcel of available land within the ring road the concern was where the location of a new Town Hall would be, for example would it be in the town centre in Maidenhead, or Windsor or even Slough. Councillor Singh asked if all options were still open or could certainty be provided to residents.

Councillor Singh proposed the following amendments to the motion:

*ii) Asserts that the Cabinet resolution of 29th April 2021 relating to the Town Hall, the recognition both that the Town Hall cannot meet the Council's Climate Strategy and that it would not be economically viable to adapt it to meet future operational requirements was premature*

*iii) Further authorises the Chief Executive, in exercising the authority delegated to him by the aforementioned Cabinet resolution to also appraise options that include retaining the current Town Hall as a civic building*

The Monitoring Officer advised that neither amendment was valid. The first sought to negate the original motion and the second was not within the power of full Council.

Councillor Singh proposed an alternative amendment:

*ii) Requests that Cabinet reconsiders the authority delegated to the Chief Executive by the aforementioned resolution and recommends that this authority is expanded to require the Chief Executive also to undertake an alternative detailed review and business plan for retention of the Town Hall as a civic building.*

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The Monitoring Officer considered the additional wording '*the Chief Executive also to undertake an alternative detailed review and business plan for retention of the Town Hall as a civic building*' to be a valid amendment.

Councillors Johnson and Hilton did not accept the amendment to their motion. The amendment was seconded by Councillor Werner and Members began debating the amendment.

Councillor Werner commented that 20 years ago he had been in the same place, opposite the then Leader of the Council who had stated there were no plans to knock down the Town Hall. Within weeks, detailed plans were produced to show that he had the intention to knock down the Town Hall, he had just not had plans written down in detail to do so. Councillor Werner was concerned that as Councillor Johnson had used the phrase 'there were no plans', there may be no detailed architectural plans or a planning application but the intention to knock it down or sell it on was there, although invisible to others. The amendment asked for Councillor Johnson to do what he had said in his speech. He said he had no plans to do it so presumably this meant no intention to do it, which would allow the Chief Executive to put forward a study of retaining the Town Hall as a civic building. The arguments in relation to climate change seemed a misnomer as the Borough local Plan was still going through the system which would build houses that were not carbon neutral. Councillor Werner highlighted that previous Masterplans had included the Town Hall remaining in a civic centre.

Councillor Bhangra commented that the amendment was not clear and he was disappointed it had not been explained properly. The report was clear that the Town Hall would not be knocked down.

Councillor Larcombe commented that he had been around 20 years ago therefore felt a sense of déjà vu. The Town Hall was a symbol of authority and should be looked after for the community. It would be important to look at all the opportunities rather than demolishing the Town Hall.

Councillor Walters commented that he too had been around 20 years ago. He assured Councillor Werner that there were no parallels with the current situation. He agreed that it was important to retain historical buildings. The Leader had made a genuine attempt to explain the situation in the changing circumstances such as climate change.

Councillor Hill commented that in relation to the EPC ratings being brought forward by the government the report had it the wrong way round. The intention of the government was to upgrade existing buildings and make them more energy efficient. The logic to demolish the Town Hall and repurpose it elsewhere, sell the land and build some more 'prison blocks', was fatally flawed. It was not the intention of the government otherwise all public buildings of some age would be at risk such as Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle. If the logic was pursued across the country it would generate more carbon and the job would never end. The amendment was perfectly in order to upgrade the Town Hall which is what the government wanted to happen.

Councillor Davey commented that if the borough wanted to be a world-famous movie making location then paragraph 2.5 of the report seemed to push the Desborough Suite right out the door. In the considerations of the future of the building, he suggested offering the theatre to the community at a peppercorn rent as had been done previously for Norden Farm and the Fire Station. He suggested revisions to CIL could provide the funding.

Councillor Johnson stated that he could not support the amendment because the premise was included within the body of the report. He felt that not all Members had read the report which made it clear that work would continue to investigate all options and report back to Members with a recommendation which by default included the potential cost for investing in the building. That figure would need to be benchmarked against other options that would give



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greater value for the taxpayer. The council's climate change and carbon obligations in relation to its own corporate buildings seemed to have been swept aside by the Opposition. He also commented that buildings such as Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle were exempt from the new government regulations as they were considered historic buildings.

Councillor Singh commented that it seemed all options were open other than saving the Town Hall. He asked the Leader to calm residents' and officers' concerns.

The amendment was voted on by a show of hands. 15 Councillors voted for the amendment; 21 Councillors voted against the amendment. The amendment therefore fell and Members returned to debating the substantive motion.

Councillor Baldwin commented that the Town Hall was a totemistic building. In ways he did not necessarily understand there was an enormous emotional attachment to it for residents in Maidenhead and across the borough. The report was full of speculation and contestable figures. When the time came the assertions and figures would be tested. One thing that would not change would be the residents' affection for the building. There would come a time when that could no longer be ignored and the obsession with town centre development and concreting over the cultural heritage of Maidenhead and the Royal Borough would no longer be acceptable.

Councillor Bhangra stated there would be no sale or demolition of the Town Hall but it would also be important to see how to achieve sustainability and value for money.

Councillor Del Campo referred to the Extraordinary full Council meeting held in January 2018 where Councillors had voted on the York Road development plans including the Heritage Centre being moved to a purpose-built venue and a heritage hub. Now it seemed all the town's cultural assets were being pushed out and open spaces replaced by tower blocks. Residents were right to be worried about the Town Hall and to ask what had happened to the York Road vision.

Councillor Hilton commented that the report presented by Councillor Johnson made it very clear that there were no firm plans for the Town Hall, certainly no plans for demolition. However, rather than dealing with maintenance issues as they arose, a planned maintenance programme was being developed. It was already known that over the next five years the fabric of the building required an investment approaching £400,000 and anticipated that a full electrical and mechanical survey would add considerably to that.

The paper explained what was already known, that the building was inflexible and there would be significant remodelling costs for it to support modern office working and further costs if the building was to meet energy performance standards and remain an office location for the next 25 years. There were other issues as Covid had changed the council's working practices. It was likely that less space would be required so it would need to be decided how to manage spare capacity, and ensure that staff were based in suitable accommodation that worked well for them. The Desborough Suite was part of the Town Hall and also required considerable investment but would be competing with the new purpose-built Baylis Theatre at the Braywick Leisure Centre.

Against this backdrop the council was not about to stop work considering the future of the Town Hall, it would continue work to create an evidence base that would allow a conclusion on the Town Hall's future. This would be complex and require substantial investments.

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The report helpfully set out a high-level timeline so the council had a plan with key milestones giving some certainty over what would happen when.

Councillor Hilton concluded that the outcome must result in a sustainable low or no carbon civic centre and operational base for the council for at least the next twenty-five years. The preferred option must be fit for purpose, affordable and importantly represent long term value for the taxpayer. The petition told the council to stop spending money on considering the future of the Town Hall. The programme outlined in the paper could lead to the Town Hall being made fit for purpose whereas anyone supporting the petition would be asking for work to stop and condemned the Town Hall to longer term decline.

Councillor Johnson concluded that the report and recommendation was self-explanatory. He had been shocked to hear the council's climate change obligations being so easily dismissed by those who not so long ago had been urging the council to go hard and further on those targets. The Town Hall was one of the largest buildings in the council's portfolio therefore needed a greater focus. There would be no fire sale of the Town Hall or any other asset although understandably there would be developers circling as ever. There were no plans to relocate staff to Slough which he felt was a ludicrous suggestion. He questioned the assertion that groups have been pushed out to the fringes. The Maidenhead Community Centre had a good location in the heart of the town at Marlow Road. The proposal was about explaining the options for investment in the building so a decision could be taken that delivered value for money whilst also meeting the corporate responsibilities of delivering services.

It was proposed by Councillor Coppinger, seconded by Councillor Hilton, and:

### **RESOLVED: That full Council notes the Petition and:**

#### **i) Agrees to continue to investigate the situation and report back to Members when appropriate for decision**

The vote was taken by a show of hands. 27 councillors voted for the motion; 1 councillor voted against the motion.

#### 52. PETITIONS

No petitions were presented.

#### 53. REFERRALS FROM OTHER BODIES

There were no referrals for consideration.

#### 54. 2022/23 PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS

Members considered the 2022/23 programme of meetings.

Councillor Johnson proposed the recommendation in the report.

Councillor Price thanked officers for the inclusion of Equality Impact Assessments for this and the previous items.

Councillor Del Campo commented that Cabinet and full Council were often in quiet quick succession which she felt had an impact on officers.

Councillor Johnson responded that the issue could be considered for future programmes.

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

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That full Council notes the report and:**

- i) Approves the programme of meetings for the 2022/23 Municipal Year, attached as Appendix A**
- ii) Agrees the split of virtual meetings/in-person meetings agreed at full Council in September 2021 should continue for the 2022/23 municipal year.**
- iii) Notes that a further review of in-person/virtual meetings would take place if and when legislation is enacted to allow decision making meetings to take place virtually**

55. APPOINTMENT OF RETURNING OFFICER AND ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER

Emma Duncan, Monitoring Officer, left the room for the duration of the debate and vote on the item.

Members considered the appointment of returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer.

Councillor Johnson proposed the appointment in the absence of Councillor Rayner.

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

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That full Council notes the report and:**

- i) Appoints Emma Duncan, Deputy Director of Governance, Law and Strategy as Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer for the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead with effect from 14 February 2022 until further notice.**

56. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

Members considered the appointment of Vice Chairman of the Maidenhead Development Management Committee.

Councillor Johnson proposed the appointment. It was confirmed that Councillor McWilliams had stepped down from the Committee.

Councillor Baldwin commented that he was delighted by the suggestion to have an informed, experienced Vice Chairman on the Committee. He felt that if his advice had been taken earlier, it would have avoided the disastrous impacts residents had felt about the effectiveness of planning decisions.

Councillor Haseler commented that Councillor Walters was an experienced and knowledgeable member of the council, especially on planning matters. He fully supported his appointment as Vice Chairman.

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

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That Councillor Walters be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Maidenhead Development Management Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.**

57. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

**a) Councillor Davey asked the following question of Councillor Clark, Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Digital Connectivity:**

How is RBWM ensuring that new 5G Masts are not exceeding ICNIRP guidelines once installed?

*Written response: The council is required to deal with the planning, installation and operation of new telecommunications equipment in line with legislation and policy as set out by central Government. Those seeking to install and operate electronic communications infrastructure are required to self-certify that their installations will comply with the ICNIRP guidelines. We are not permitted to set health safeguards or require additional information beyond this through the planning process. Monitoring and enforcement powers sit with OFCOM as the regulator and therefore the council has no powers in this regard. As the Cabinet Member for this issue alongside the responsible officers I would be happy to meet with any local residents who have concerns about specific sites to understand the concerns and consider what we can do as a local authority. Where appropriate we can request surveys to be undertaken by Ofcom to assess the compliance with ICNIRP guidelines.*

Councillor Davey thanked the Cabinet Member for agreeing to meet with residents who had concerns and being willing to invite Ofcom to review 5G sites as appropriate. There was a great deal of social media bullying around the topic with 5G fans shouting "conspiracy theorist" at anyone who dared to show a modicum of concern online. This means many intelligent, free-thinking, open-minded residents did not put themselves in the firing line.

Councillor Davey would share the news with residents and a meeting could be arranged to discuss some of the current concerns.

**b) Councillor Haseler asked the following question of Councillor Carroll, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health:**

The pandemic has caused serious challenges across all sectors and despite the excellent performance and ratings across our services, I'd like to know how the Children's and Adult Social Care Services have been sustained during this incredibly challenging time throughout the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead.

*Written response: Thank you for your question. Looking first at Adult Services, staff within Optalis have worked hard throughout the pandemic to continue to provide*

*support to adults at risk and to support the NHS, particularly in relation to timely discharge from hospital. From the beginning of the pandemic, we have ensured staff who can work from home do so and have access to the equipment they need to do this. We made sure adequate supplies of PPE were available when this was an issue early in the pandemic and have supported staff with accessing vaccinations achieving a high level of concordance.*

*Staff have been incredibly flexible and resources have been re-organised where needed in the short term to ensure continuity of service delivery. Staff wellbeing has been, and continues to be, a focus throughout the pandemic. There have undoubtedly been challenges and we are very conscious that our residents' need for support and services continues to increase.*

*The fact that adult social care services overall have been sustained is also testament to the quality of providers in the borough, with the majority inspected as good or outstanding by the Care Quality Commission, the dedication of their staff and the close partnership working they have with the Council, Optalis, the NHS and the CQC. The Royal Borough, in partnership with the NHS, had an existing Care Home Quality Programme, and following the onset of pandemic this was enhanced with:*

- *Supportive phone calls to providers*
- *A teleconference to provide support, guidance and to answer questions, now hosted by Berkshire Care Association*
- *A care home hotline staffed by clinically trained staff to access Infection Control support including out of hours*
- *A newsletter summarising new guidance*
- *Co-ordination and provision of PPE supplies*
- *Testing provided for staff and residents prior to the roll out of the testing programme nationally*
- *Training to all providers on infection control measures*
- *Financial support to all CQC registered providers through government grants*
- *Weekly COVID care governance meetings (attended by the three local authorities, the NHS and Care Quality Commission) across East Berkshire to target support to providers in need*

*Turning to Children's Services, during the early stages of the pandemic, the council acted quickly to accelerate the change of ICT provision for Children's Services from a desk-based, thin client model to providing laptops and mobile phones for all staff which enabled all to work from home. Some short-term national relaxations in regulations allowed the adoption of a risk-based approach to face to face meetings which help staff feel supported, along with PPE when visits were required.*

*The vaccination rollout started back in January 2021 with a specific element which included front line health and social care staff. Through the tremendous efforts of the East Berkshire health team and the volunteers, many children's social workers and health visitors were able to secure a first vaccination before the national regulations reverted to pre-pandemic times.*

*It is widely recognised that there has been an increased number of contacts to the single point of access (SPA) since the start of the pandemic, along with increased*

*levels of complexity. During 2021/22 the service has increased the number of front-line staff in the SPA team and have recently approved further short-term cover in light of absences due to the Omicron wave. In addition to the statutory roles, the service is committed to early intervention where possible and additional staff will be joining the early help teams for the remainder of the current school year to deal with the increasing number of families and young people asking for help to avoid a crisis situation.*

*When compared to other parts of the country and other local authorities, our performance has been outstanding and our contribution to the pandemic response and follow up has been excellent. As Cllr Haseler says, it has been challenging across all sectors, and I want to thank each and every member of the children's and adult services teams for their resilience and commitment to working with our vulnerable residents during the pandemic.*

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Haseler asked if his thanks could be conveyed to the lead member and the council officers working extremely hard to deliver the critical services.

Councillor Carroll confirmed this would be done.

**c) Councillor Larcombe asked the following question of Councillor Stimson Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside:**

How is the 'wildflower verge' project progressing please?

*Written response: Eleven local verges have been chosen as a trial for creating 'roadside reserves'. These verges will have a different cutting regime with either one or two cuts per year. This will include an early spring (cut only) and a late summer (cut and collect). The late summer grass cut and collect is the most essential to reduce the nutrients in the soil and reduce the dominance of the grasses in order for a greater diversity of wildflowers to become established. The maintenance regime will be under review depending on the variety of plant communities that emerge. This may take a few seasons to assess but these verges will quickly become important wild spaces that can also provide some colour and interest for local residents to enjoy.*

*Signs saying 'Growing Wild - do not mow' are placed on the verges to highlight the change in maintenance to both residents and our contractors. These verges will take time to improve in biodiversity but we will assess them on a regular basis. The new Natural Environment Team based at the Braywick Nature Centre will be identifying further verges this coming year to expand the scheme. Officers have undertaken engagement with communities on some of the local wildlife verges including a bug hunt with families in August 2021.*

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Larcombe commented that he was unsure if any verge in his ward had been considered however a number of verges there had suffered from parking leaving no grass and ruts. He felt they would be ideal candidates for a wild verge. He would be delighted to send the Cabinet Member some photographs.

Councillor Stimson responded that she would be delighted to receive photographs and she would forward them to the relevant officer for consideration.

**d) Councillor Singh asked the following question of Councillor Clark, Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Digital Connectivity:**

I have concerns relating to changing the illuminated bollards to non-lit ones, although these work well during the day, the concern is the bollards have in areas around the borough become dirty and poorly maintained which at night can seriously diminish their effectiveness. Is a regular safety check and cleaning contract in place? If so, how often are they inspected?

Written response: *The Borough replaced the traditional bollards with TMP non illuminated ones around 5 years ago, to reduce energy and lower CO2 emissions. These new bollards are fully compliant for use on the highway. All streets are subject to a visual inspection on a set frequency dependent on road category, with the busiest routes being inspected monthly and smaller roads either every three, six or twelve months as scheduled. If any safety defects; including signage, bollards or road markings are detected, a works order is raised and actioned. In addition, we carry out an ad-hoc annual programme in the summer months to clean signs and non-illuminated bollards, on routes that are subjected to heavy traffic flows, where signage becomes particularly soiled.*

Councillor Singh stated that he did not have a supplementary question as he had not seen the answer to his original question.

58. MOTIONS ON NOTICE

Motion a

Councillor Davey introduced his motion. He explained that he wished to amend his motion following discussion with a number of parties, to remove the wording 'every 6 months'. The amended motion therefore read:

That his Council, in the interests of residents' safety and in line with the ICNIRP Guidelines, will:

- i) Actively monitor new and existing telecom masts and other "small cells" installations to ensure they are in line with current guidelines
- ii) Insist the relevant telecommunications company takes the appropriate remedial action if found to be exceeding legal limits

Councillor Davey explained that before Christmas he had forwarded to officers a specification sheet relating to a 5G Mast application in a neighbouring borough that showed that the antennae had the ability to generate 84,000 times the legal limit. He had requested a specification sheet before Christmas for a new 5G application validated on 14 January for Tinkers Lane, Windsor in his ward and still awaited details from the agent. He had also asked officers if he had been right in thinking that if the council accepted the telecom company's self-certification then any liability would then fall on RBWM's shoulders.

The UK used the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) Guidelines to determine human safety with regards to telecoms installations. The UK National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which determined planning law,

stated in Paragraph 117 that applications for an addition to an existing mast or base station must include a self-certification that the increased capacity will not exceed ICNIRP guidelines on non-ionising radiation protection. The telecom companies were allowed to self-certify their own installations and with this power they were happy to put in an application that could potentially push out 84,000 times the legal limit. He asked if this sounded ok. ICNIRP said a safe level of exposure was 1mW/cm<sup>2</sup> for 6 minutes. The 6 minutes allowed for an engineer to approach a mast and fix a problem.

Councillor Davey explained that the Inverse Square law applied to normal phone masts where the power for 4G, 3G, etc dropped off over distance. However collimated microwave beams, which was how 5G worked, did not obey the inverse square law and could maintain their power intensity over miles. Unlike 3G and 4G the umbrellas of EMF were very likely to overlap, increasing the EMF smog.

China had a maximum legal limit 100 times lower than the UK. A civilised society that had concerns for the health and wellbeing of its residents would ensure the installations met the legal requirements and take the appropriate measurements to ensure the 5G Mast outputs were within legal limits and if found to be exceeding these limits then insist on remedial action.

Councillor Davey had asked officers and currently RBWM did not have the required equipment or skills sets in-house to evaluate the current 5G installations. Apparently, based on Councillor Clark's response to his earlier question, this was because he believed officers had no power. Information Councillor Davey had read and shared with officers would seem to suggest councils ultimately had to take responsibility and do their own research. He was relieved Councillor Clark was willing to explore residents' concerns further.

Councillor Davey proposed that as the 5G network expanded the council should start measuring the outputs on a regular basis around the borough and ask the relevant telecom companies to make adjustments based on the council findings. Ofcom could be invited to measure for £1,000 a time in the short term and the council should look to purchase its own kit, as resources allowed and have the council's own officers do regular checks.

Councillor Hill seconded the motion.

Councillor Hilton explained that demand for radio spectrum continued to increase, driven by the development of new technologies opening up new services and applications and allowing the use of spectrum in higher frequency bands. Against this background, some people, including Councillor Davey, had raised concerns around the safety of Electromagnetic Field emissions particularly from 5G technologies.

Ofcom was responsible for managing the radio spectrum and licence users. They had consulted on measures to require compliance with international guidelines for limiting exposure to electromagnetic fields. Public Health England (PHE) took the lead on public health matters associated with radiofrequency electromagnetic fields, and their advice to government was that Electromagnetic Field exposure should comply with the ICNIRP guidance. Guidance on enforcement was published in May 2021 and applied to licensees that were subject to an Electromagnetic Field condition in their spectrum licence.



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Ofcom's main role with regard to Electromagnetic Field Emissions had been in measuring emission levels around mobile phone base stations. Ofcom had said that in all cases, including recent measurements near 5G-enabled base stations, they had recorded measurements well within the levels for general public exposure and that the highest level measured was approximately 1.5% of the levels identified in the commission's guidelines. The guidance included amongst many other requirements, Electromagnetic radiation limits, assessments, record keeping and enforcement.

Councillor Hilton highlighted that this was therefore a highly regulated area and he did not propose that the council should take on responsibilities already assigned to statutory authorities and he would therefore not support the motion.

Councillor Haseler explained that he had researched the issue on the Ofcom website. He referenced extracts from the report 'Electromagnetic field (EMF) measurements near 5G mobile phone base stations' for April-October 2021, published in November 2021. The report contained results of 38 EMF surveys undertaken near 5G stations during that period. It was part of an ongoing programme of measurements to verify that 5G-enabled mobile base stations remained within the limits of the ICNIRP Guidelines. The report stated that 0.04% was the highest level recorded. The report explained that Ofcom had been carrying out radio frequency EMF measurements near mobile phone masts for many years and these measurements had consistently shown that that EMF levels near mobile phone stations were well within the internationally agreed levels.

As Councillor Hilton had referred to Public Health England and the UK Health Security Agency led on the matter. The deployment of 5G networks and the take up of 5G services was still at an early stage. The report explained that EMF measurements would continue to monitor the overall trends in the long-term including measurements in new areas and repeat measurements at a number of locations which had already been visited. It would continue to publish the measurements on the website as they became available.

Councillor Haseler asked if Councillor Davey had researched what equipment and training would be needed for council officers to undertake the tests, although he did not see the need when Ofcom already did so.

Councillor Clark stated that this was a very highly regulated and policed activity. Ofcom and the government had been very clear about the rollout and benefits of 5G and the safety standards to be followed. Where there were fears these could be breached, Ofcom had the power and obligation to monitor. Any circumstances the borough felt needed investigating could be requested. Based on all the evidence this was a non-problem but he was willing to meet with residents with concerns.

Councillor Werner commented that he did not pretend to understand all the science that had been quoted. However, going back to basics the council was very used to the role of monitoring in terms of environmental health and safety standards. With the change to the motion it did not seem ridiculous to be checking up on whether the masts were within the guidelines. At the moment this was based on self-certification which was not fool proof. It would be sensible for the council to be checking on a cycle.

Councillor Targowski referred to the website 'Fullfact.org' which undertook independent checks to counter bad information. Ofcom had carried out measurements

that consistently showed the amount of radiation around base stations was well below the internationally agreed limits. It was a waste of council taxpayer money if the council monitored this itself.

Councillor Hill stated that the technology was completely new and extremely powerful. The UK and US were planning to implement systems 100 times more powerful than the Europeans, Chinese and Russians. Nobody knew the effect on populations because it was all new. It was the non-ionising spectrum but the effect was not known. Some people switched off wi-fi at night to get better sleep and medical advice was to get all devices away from you as they emitted radiation. This background radiation would be there permanently. Councillor Hill felt there was a need to take the public health situation more seriously and not fall back on Ofcom saying it was ok. The motion would give people confidence.

Councillor Davey concluded the technology was very new. Public Health England solicitors, in papers he had sent to officers, had told government that councils could not rely on ICNIRP and they had to do their own investigations. Recently the US Court of Appeals on the DC circuit had ruled that the Federal Communications Commission must re-examine its health and safety guidelines for 5G and other wireless based technologies. This was a case brought by the Environmental Health Trust and the Children's Health Defence. Councillor Davey explained that 5G communications were going to be there, but questioned if the world wanted to be swamped with EMF or should it be controlled. He understood the council would be liable if issues were found.

The vote was taken by a show of hands. 14 Councillors voted for the motion; 21 Councillors voted against the motion. The motion therefore fell.

#### Motion b

Councillor McWilliams introduced his motion. He explained that over the last few months he had been on a tour of the borough's sporting facilities with the intention of putting together a sport and leisure strategy to guide the council's ambitions. As part of the tour he had held a number of meetings with local gymnastics providers. One of the hardest of these had been with the former trustees of the Phoenix Gym. He had pieced together the history; it was a sad saga and lots could have been done differently including better communications.

Councillor McWilliams stated that the borough was committed to having more residents, more active, more often. Some who had attended the gym had found support elsewhere but others had given up on training which was very sad. There was a clear demand for provision in the borough therefore the motion gave a clear commitment to work with existing providers on requirements and a third party on delivery. This would be the first step on a long journey. There would be an opportunity to develop Windsor Leisure Centre in due course.

Councillor Werner welcomed the motion and said he would do everything to support the upcoming strategy. However the Phoenix Gym had been a fabulous facility and its closure had been an incredible loss to the borough. Coaches had moved on and talent had gone elsewhere or given up. There was a feeling in the community that the council's lack of support had led to the closure and he stated it would be good to hear an apology for this. He hoped the council would learn some lessons and provide appropriate leadership.

Councillor Sharpe questioned spending more money on sporting facilities when millions had been spent on the new Braywick Leisure Centre and extending the Windsor Leisure Centre, and commented that there had been no new facilities in the south of the borough for a number of years. He suggested Councillor McWilliams should discuss with relevant ward members the possibility of locating any new facility in the south of the borough.

Councillor Haseler commented that there was a clear shortage of gymnastics provision compared to other sports in the borough. However it was not all about the Olympics; gymnastics could be taken up at any age and at any ability level with a variety of benefits. Councillor Haseler referenced targets in the Corporate Plan that supported the motion including reducing the number of Year 6 pupils who were overweight and increasing the number of adults undertaking activity.

Councillor Hill commented that he was surprised at the motion given the Lead Member could bring a report to Cabinet on the subject. Like Councillor Werner, he mourned the loss of the Phoenix Gym and other facilities such as SportsAble.

Councillor Taylor commented that all were aware, particularly after covid, that physical mental health was beneficial to all. There would be a high proportion of residents in the borough who may not be able to afford such facilities. She therefore suggested the motion be amended to include additional wording:

- i) Work with existing gymnastic providers to understand the facilities that are required to meet demand, including how existing facilities can be best used *and affordable for all.*

Councillor McWilliams responded that as any such facility would be run by a private company who would set their own prices, he suggested the wording therefore be changed to 'accessible to all'.

- i) Work with existing gymnastic providers to understand the facilities that are required to meet demand, including how existing facilities can be best used *and accessible to all.*

Councillors Taylor, McWilliams and Carroll agreed with the amended wording and therefore Members debated the original motion as amended.

Councillor Price highlighted that the Corporate Plan had been evidence based and Members were required to make all decisions based on evidence. She had not seen any evidence for the proposed motion. Before she was prepared to support it in its entirety she needed to understand the lessons learned from the demise of the Phoenix Gym including the breakdown in communications.

Councillor Coppinger explained that the Phoenix Gym had been in his ward as was the new site. His residents had contacted him to ask if he had been aware that the gym had started building a temporary construction and had all relevant safety checks been undertaken. Unfortunately this had not been the case and as both ward member and Cabinet member had had to ask officers to look into the situation. The council had tried hard to come up with ideas to support the gym but it had been too late as

they had made their decision. There was however a great demand for this type of facility in the borough.

Councillor Luxton commented that she was looking forward to the next leisure centre being built in the south of the borough. She asked for reassurance this would be progressed in the next few months.

Councillor L. Jones stated that she supported the motion because it asked for a commitment from the council to support delivery but obviously she would wish to see more detail about how it would actually work. She understood that any capital spend would need a business case and would have to support itself. As long as this was taken on board and the project was kept within financial boundaries, she could support the motion.

Councillor Carroll supported the motion which fitted well with the importance of mental health, physical health and wider social health. He felt that the idea that sport was dying across the borough was preposterous. The borough had the state of the art at the Braywick Leisure Centre and investment was being made at the Windsor Leisure Centre. The points around Ascot were vital and more was needed there. Councillor Rayner had asked him to note her support for the motion.

Councillor McWilliams concluded that he had looked at the history of the Phoenix Gym and it was clear that towards the end there had been a lack of communication which could and should have been better. The motion was designed to demonstrate the council was trying to do things differently. In relation to the south of the borough the council remained committed to developing the Oaks Leisure Centre. The loss of SportsAble was very sad. He had met with a number of the clubs including the Windsor Royals to discuss the issue. A number of different groups who had previously used the facility were now using the Braywick Leisure Centre for sessions and events including the swimming gala. The inclusion of facilities such as the lift in the swimming pool had helped with this. Evidence to support the motion was available but it had been worded to welcome a commitment rather than expect Members to approve an absolute commitment.

It was proposed by Councillor McWilliams, seconded by Councillor Carroll, and:

**RESOLVED: That this Council resolves to:**

- ii) Work with existing gymnastic providers to understand the facilities that are required to meet demand, including how existing facilities can be best used and accessible to all.**
- iii) Identify opportunities to work with third parties to finance, build and manage a new, purpose-built gymnastics facility**
- iv) Welcome a commitment in RBWM's forthcoming Sport & Leisure Strategy to support the delivery of a new, purpose-built gymnastics facility in partnership with a third party**

The vote was taken by a show of hands; 35 Councillors voted for the motion; 1 Councillor voted against the motion. Councillor abstained.

Motion c

Councillor Tisi introduced her motion. She explained that the Isis, Tamisis or the Thames, whatever the longest river in England was called, lay at the heart of the borough's towns and flowed through them like a silver thread tying them together.

There was evidence of human habitation by the Thames dating back to the Neolithic period. From Roman settlement to the building of Windsor Castle and the signing of the Magna Carta in the Middle Ages and on to the filth of the river in the 18th and 19th centuries which brought disease and the 'great stink'.

With the decline of heavy industry and the later improvement of water conditions, the Thames became a focus for leisure, from rowing at Henley and the university boat race, as well as the many pleasure crafts that were enjoyed by tourists and locals. Before the swimming baths were built in Windsor, many locals learnt to swim in the backwaters around Baths Island.

All had personal memories of the river; for Councillor Tisi it was one of her first dates with her husband picnicking and swimming in the river at Pangbourne. She stated that today it would be foolhardy to swim in the Thames as a chemical cocktail of sewage, agriculture runoff and road pollution combined to make a toxic environment, not only for humans but for the wildlife that depended on the river. Otters had been spotted near Windsor but they needed clean water to thrive.

Councillor Tisi welcomed the amendment to the Environment Bill, however there was more that could be done to regulate the water companies beyond progressive reductions in the amount they polluted. More substantial penalties needed to be enforced against those who continued to pump human waste, toilet paper and used tampons into the river. Self-regulation did not work. In 2020, the storm overflow at Ham Lane near Windsor spilled 114 times for a total of 1741 hours. It was clear it was time to turn off the tap against the filth.

Enforcement was dependent on the Environment Agency being able to investigate and robustly sanction offenders, something that was almost impossible when their budget has been cut so drastically that they could only currently enforce around 4% of pollution complaints. They needed to be able to inspect water companies and farms more regularly and penalise those who flouted the rules. Restoring the muscle of the EA was one of the most important ways rivers could be cleaned up.

Councillor Tisi commented that as she was sure that Members with a farming background would agree, people working in agriculture wanted to improve the natural environment, yet nutrient rich slurry and farming by-products were washed into rivers, causing imbalance and an overgrowth of algae, suffocating aquatic life. Farmers in Herefordshire were already working to reduce phosphate levels in the river Wye so it made sense to encourage local farming representatives to support their members to make similar efforts.

Cleaning up rivers, like many of the environmental issues faced, could seem like a monumental task and some might argue that it is not within the council's power to solve the problem. Councillor Tisi felt that the council had a duty to use its influence, to speak truth to power, to put pressure on those who could make a practical difference. The public outcry and concern from residents on this topic showed they were calling

out for this kind of leadership and it aligned with the aims the council's climate strategy and biodiversity action plan.

Councillor Davies seconded the motion and commented that Councillor Tisi had already very eloquently described the very special place which the River Thames had in the life of the borough. She very much welcomed the duty which the Environment Act 2021 placed on water companies in England to secure a progressive reduction in the adverse impact of discharges from their storm overflows. This was a very positive step towards cleaning up the sewage discharges blighting the Thames and other rivers in England, but there were many threats to plants, wildlife and to humans from other sources.

According to Surfers Against Sewage, 12 million tonnes of plastic were pouring into the world's oceans every year. Microplastics were a particular issue with one submission to the recent Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee's report 'Water quality in rivers' describing how microplastics affected wildlife both by causing animals to falsely sense they were full by eating plastic and by delivering chemical pollutants into their bodies and on into the food chain. Regulators did not currently monitor river water systematically for micro-plastics.

Household chemicals were another source of threat. Persistent chemicals, sometimes referred to as 'forever chemicals', were chemicals that did not degrade easily in the natural environment. In some cases, it took centuries for these chemicals, used widely in stain repellents, paints and polishes, to degrade. Removing these contaminants from rivers was extremely challenging.

Toxic pesticides found in flea treatments used on domestic cats and dogs had been detected at potentially harmful levels in English rivers. Researchers had found widespread contamination of two neurotoxic chemicals in 20 sampled rivers. Fipronil was found in 98% of samples, and the average level of its highly toxic breakdown product fipronil sulfone was 38 times above the recommended environmental safety limit. This had a neuro-toxic effect on insects and other animals.

Experts said that there was enough legislation in place; what was lacking was inspection, oversight and enforcement. Environment Agency funding had been reduced by 63% from £120 million in 2009 to £40 million in 2020. The Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee's report 'Water quality in rivers' had more than made the case for increased inspection and enforcement and for increased funding.

Councillor L. Jones commented that she welcomed the motion although this was not a new issue. Ham Island took all the sewage for the Windsor catchment area. Old Windsor Parish Council had commissioned a report on storm sewage overflows as part of its Neighbourhood Plan. That highlighted the number of overflows from the Ham Island facility during heavy rain, which was astonishing. Following discussions with Thames Water regarding their capacity they had finally upgraded the facility and stopped using their 'lagoons', lakes of polluted water that seeped into the Thames. With increased development planned in Windsor it was unclear if the facility would have the capacity moving forwards and this had been raised in the Neighbourhood Plan. Councillor L. Jones therefore supported the motion as she knew her residents would support increased oversight and enforcement.

Councillor Larcombe commented that Slough sewage treatment works were currently expanding including a 1.5m pipe across Dorney Common. Councillor Larcombe questioned whether fly tipping could be considered pollution, as it was not just farmers or water companies that were liable for the problems being discussed. At Aldermaston low level liquid radioactive waste had been poured into the Thames for 50 years, now perhaps they had a problem with the two pipes. Councillor Larcombe had reported a pollution incident to Thames Water he had been told to telephone it in but he questioned what had happened as there was then no record of it. The Royal Borough was a Lead Local Flood Authority and already had permissive powers for enforcement on ordinary watercourses. In his area, the watercourse was full to the brim with fly tipping and nothing had been done about it for years. The new legislation brought into play the Office for Environmental Protection which would have powers to not just take on the authorities but also to bring ideas for new legislation to the government.

Councillor Larcombe suggested removal of the words 'of water companies and farms' from the motion.

Councillor Tisi responded that she understood Councillor Larcombe's thinking but because the main thrust was about the water companies and farms being held to account she would prefer the wording was retained. She suggested adding the wording 'and other polluting sources' to the motion instead:

That this Council asks that the Leader of the Council writes to:

- i) The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and our local MPS to call for the Government to restore Environment Agency budgets to deliver the necessary oversight,
- ii) The Chairperson of the Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee to advocate for greater enforcement of existing regulatory powers through increasing the inspection regularity of water companies and farms *and other polluting sources* and rigorously prosecuting offenders through the Environmental Audit Committee and Ofwat.
- iii) The Regional Director of the National Farmers' Union requesting clarification on the action being taken locally by farmers to prevent nutrient run-off.

Councillor Tisi, Councillor Davies and Councillor Larcombe agreed the amendment and therefore Members debated the original motion as amended.

Councillor Stimson commented that it was a commendable motion but she was unsure it was the right place for it. She had attended a meeting the previous week with Chairman of Natural England and the Secretary of State for the Environment about the new Environment Bill. It was very fortunate that the council could work with someone from natural England who had been seconded to South East Water. As South East Water was so much bigger than Thames Water they could deal with them on behalf of the council. The motion would be under the purvey of Parliament at the motion rather than being dealt with at the local level. She understood the sentiment but felt it was tricky to put more on officers at the moment.

Councillor Johnson commented that he shared many of the sentiments and the overall need to improve water quality. Whilst he commended the laudable intent he

questioned whether it was the right format for such a discussion given the responsibility for regulation lay with national government. What was more concerning was the prospect of being asked to write to government based on a motion he had only been sighted on when the agenda had been published. If it had been discussed with him in advance he would have had time to consider it, read all the background to give a more considered reply than he was able to at this time. As such he was unable to support the motion as drafted despite supporting parts of it. He would raise the issue with the local MPs at the first opportunity given they were the ones who carried the weight at the national level to effect change.

Councillor Reynolds commented that he did not think Councillor Stimson had understood the motion, which did not ask officers to take on any extra responsibility. The motion simply asked for the Leader to write to three groups. One of the key roles of the council and the Leader of the council was to put pressure on government bodies to get the council's view across. Previous successful motions had requested letters be written by the Leader or a Lead Member to relevant government bodies. If Councillor Johnson did not agree with the wording he invited him to contact Councillor Tisi to agree wording for a future motion on the subject.

Councillor Cannon commented that all supported the rationale behind the motion, particularly riverside ward councillors, however he did not feel it was the right way to do it. Writing individually to MPs who represented all residents was the right thing to do as they were the people who had the power to take action. He suggested that discussing issues with Lead Members at a very early stage to getting wording all could support would be a far more sensible approach.

Councillor Brar commented that it was the sad truth that every river in England was now polluted beyond legal limits. The Environment Agency rated only 14% of rivers as 'good' in 2019. This chemical pollution was chiefly caused by sewage discharge from water companies. 36% of English rivers had been damaged by water companies. In England they released untreated human waste directly into the waterways over 400,000 times for a total of 3 million hours in 2020 alone. At the Little Marlow sewage works just up the Thames from Cookham, in just ten months of 2020 the sewer storm overflow spilled 15 times for a total of 151 hours. It was not just the River Thames; the Hurley sewage works discharged into Bisham Brook.

Government funding to the EA to monitor river quality and regulate water companies had dropped 75% since 2010/11. In 2020 just 3.6% of pollution complaints made to the EA resulted in penalties. The water companies were not inspected on a regular basis and water quality was rarely tested, and it seemed that water companies could pump raw sewage into rivers with virtual impunity.

The River Thames was central to life in Cookham, both for leisure activities such as rowing, boating and swimming and for businesses which owed their livelihood to those coming to Cookham to enjoy the river and riverside walks. Sir Stanley Spencer's last, unfinished, painting 'Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta' was not intended to include de-oxygenated water filled with effluent and fish filled with microplastics and poisoned by a cocktail of chemicals. Members owed it to all those who loved the River Thames and the other waterways around the borough and the wildlife to do everything in their power to protect them.



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Councillor Tisi commented that she had not been aware that she needed to 'share her homework' with the headteacher before she handed it in. Members had never previously been asked to share motions before they were submitted. It was perfectly standard to have a motion published a week before the meeting. In terms of asking or writing to MPs, that was what the motion said. Her MP had voted against the amendment to the Environment Bill so she was unsure what writing to him would do. Councillor Cannon had said this was the wrong way to bring a motion but she highlighted that this was her way to bring issues forward as an Opposition Member. She could not understand why some Members felt they could not support the motion. She was disappointed and felt that residents would be too.

A recorded vote was taken following a request by at least five Councillors. 16 Councillors voted for the motion; 20 Councillors voted against the motion. 1 Councillor abstained. The motion therefore fell.

<b>Motion on Notice b) (Motion)</b>	
Councillor John Story	Against
Councillor Gary Muir	Against
Councillor Clive Baskerville	For
Councillor Christine Bateson	Against
Councillor Gurpreet Bhangra	Against
Councillor Simon Bond	For
Councillor John Bowden	Against
Councillor Mandy Brar	For
Councillor Catherine del Campo	For
Councillor David Cannon	Against
Councillor Stuart Carroll	Against
Councillor Gerry Clark	Against
Councillor David Coppinger	Against
Councillor Carole Da Costa	For
Councillor Jon Davey	For
Councillor Karen Davies	For
Councillor Phil Haseler	Against
Councillor Geoffrey Hill	For
Councillor David Hilton	Against
Councillor Maureen Hunt	Against
Councillor Andrew Johnson	Against
Councillor Greg Jones	Against
Councillor Lynne Jones	For
Councillor Ewan Larcombe	For
Councillor Sayonara Luxton	Against
Councillor Ross McWilliams	Against
Councillor Helen Price	For
Councillor Joshua Reynolds	For
Councillor Julian Sharpe	Against
Councillor Shamsul Shelim	Against
Councillor Gurch Singh	For
Councillor Donna Stimson	Abstain
Councillor Chris Targowski	Against
Councillor Helen Taylor	For
Councillor Amy Tisi	For
Councillor Leo Walters	Against
Councillor Simon Werner	For
<b>Rejected</b>	

COUNCIL - 25.01.22

The meeting, which began at 7.00pm, finished at 9.50 pm.

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....