

WINDSOR TOWN FORUM

TUESDAY, 8 MARCH 2022

PRESENT: Councillors John Bowden (Chairman), Samantha Rayner (Vice-Chairman), Christine Bateson, David Cannon, Jon Davey, Karen Davies, Shamsul Shelim, Amy Tisi and David Hilton

Also in attendance: Councillor John Baldwin, Mr Ed Wilson

Officers: Oran Norris-Browne, Rebecca Oates and Julia White

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Paul Roach, Windsor & Eton Town Centre Manager.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

MINUTES

The clerk noted that Councillor Sharpe substituted for Councillor Shelim, and therefore this needed to be amended.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2022 be a true and accurate record.

THAMES VALLEY POLICE UPDATE

Jeffrey Pick, Thames Valley Police, gave a verbal report to the forum on burglary dwellings, theft from motor vehicles, theft of motor vehicles and theft of bikes.

Jeffrey Pick stated that caution needed to be exercised when looking at crime statistics relating to burglaries due to the way that the statistics were recorded. There were four burglaries within the area, not nine as stated on the police website. Jeffrey Pick stated that it was very difficult to mount operations as the crimes were spread out. Additionally, the crimes were spread out throughout the borough rather than being focused within a small area.

Jeffrey Pick stated that car theft was a problem for the police at present, particularly for car owners with keyless fobs. Land Rover and Range Rovers were also being specifically targeted, with these cars being stolen using a relay signal, which magnified the signal from the keyless fob to the car. Advice was given to residents to install a tracking system fitted to the car, as thieves were able to disable the standard fitted tracker but would have had no knowledge of this tracker. Advice was also given to purchase an AirTag, which would enable the owner of the car to track their car should it be stolen.

Jeffrey Pick stated that Thames Valley Police were working with Windsor Bike Hub and Maidenhead Bike Hub to register bikes on the Bike Register. Maidenhead had registered about 50 in the past two weeks. Windsor Bike Hub hosted regular Saturday events to mark bikes and register bikes. Their aim was to work with young people to train them in bike servicing, maintenance, and restoration. Both bike hubs would like donated bikes to refurbish them and then sell to raise funds for the bike hub.

The Chairman asked about any odd or specific crimes within Windsor and Maidenhead that should be publicised to forum members and residents. Jeffrey Pick replied that fraud and scams were occurring regularly, particularly at cash points, as well as courier scams and extortions. All of these crimes targeted the elderly especially. Jeffrey Pick was trying to publicise these crimes at various events around the borough to inform those who may be most vulnerable.

Councillor Tisi commented on the Nottingham Knockers who had been seen in Windsor and stated that it was worth telling residents about them, as many people were still unaware of who the Nottingham Knockers were.

Jeffrey Pick replied that the Nottingham Knockers had been across the whole local police area, not just in Windsor. Jeffrey Pick also commented that many people were unaware on how the scam worked, but once it had been fully explained, people would understand why the Nottingham Knockers should be turned away. Jeffrey Pick stated that the Nottingham Knockers were in the area for around three days and that they expected to see a number of burglaries targeting the elderly.

Councillor Tisi stated that contained within the report were the details of the theft of loose change and sanitary towels from a vehicle. Councillor Tisi informed the forum that there were places people could go to for help such as the Windsor Food Share, the Baby Bank, and local schools.

Jeffrey Pick replied by stating that some people were now leaving vehicles unlocked to avoid windows being smashed. Jeffrey Pick stated that this could be done, but nothing should be left on display, and this could also become a crime attractor. Jeffrey Pick added that any single females could leave a man's hat within the car to deter potential criminals and give the impression that the female was not alone.

Councillor Davey implored Jeffrey Pick to visit supermarkets and speak to the elderly to spread the awareness around crimes which they could find themselves victims of.

Jeffrey Pick stated that PSCOs had been in a local supermarket on 8 March 2022. Additionally, the police held a community safety event in Dedworth which was highly publicised on social media, but it only had one attendant.

Councillor Hilton stated that Ascot had seen an increase in vehicles stolen, all of them high end, and emphasised the importance of keeping cars locked. Jeffrey Pick replied by saying that that it was important to keep keys in a faraday pouch which blocked the signal from keyless fobs. Councillor Hilton responded by stating that it was his belief that cars were being sold with faraday pouches, however people were not using them

Jeffrey Pick replied that the police had visited Jaguar Range Rover in Slough to ask about a database of members who had purchased cars to circulate this message but were told that they had no way of contacting previous customers.

Ed Wilson asked for any updates on the community speed watch programme. Jeffrey Pick replied by saying that the programme was supposed to go live on 26 December with funding provided by the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), but this never happened. The police were not permitted to do the community speed watch by the PCC who stated that it must be managed by the community, who could register online. Jeffrey Pick had tried to reach out to the PCC but had made no progress. He said that as soon as he receives any information, this will be publicised. Councillor Cannon offered to speak to the PCC directly to reinforce this.

Councillor Davey expressed concern regarding speed watch and its progress. Jeffrey Pick stated that he would be grateful for any help in getting the project up and running

Councillor Tisi asked whether an update on violent crime would be possible as mentioned at the January forum meeting. Sergeant Cathy Griffiths replied by stating that figures on violent crime in Windsor were available through the Neighbourhood Inspector's quarterly updates and via the Community Safety Partnership.

Sergeant Cathy Griffiths finished by stating that PC John Brookes would be the new Town Centre PC starting in the first week of April and that he would be a great asset to the force in Windsor.

TOWN MANAGER UPDATE

The Chairman gave a verbal report to the forum on behalf of Paul Roach, Windsor Town Manager who had sent his apologies.

The report stated that footfall remained strong in the town centres throughout Christmas and the New Year. Several stores closed within the town centre, but it was expected that a number of new brands would arrive.

The report contained an update on the Platinum Jubilee celebrations that would occur in Windsor from February to June 2022 to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee. A committee had been established to facilitate the events, and details of the website were given to view the events that were planned.

The Chairman stated that the Hello Lamppost scheme had seen 8,260 interactions with 1,593 unique users. Business trading in Clewer, Dedworth and Ascot remained good with business retention high compared to other parts of the Royal Borough. Ascot High Street had retained good business unit retention and very few occupancy units. Compared to the national average, Ascot, Dedworth and Clewer were operating well above those levels in other parts of the country.

The Chairman said that car parking between December 2021 and January 2022 continued to decrease, with anecdotal information received from businesses indicating that customers felt that parking in the town centre was too expensive and that the quality and amount of parking was poor. Coach parking had continued to significantly underperform due to international travel not yet returning to the UK. Footfall was up 141.4% on the previous year, with 417,575 visitors for the year to date.

The Chairman said that the vacancy rate of businesses had increased as a number of businesses coming out of Christmas and New Year sales were not able to sustain their businesses beyond February and March 2022, with the possibility of other businesses leaving the town centre before the end of March. Work was being done with local agents to understand the current view on future lets within the town centre and what could be done to support this. Bovington's Estate Agent had recently opened in the town centre, whilst Five Guys, Estetica, Ole Steen and Mama Mia were all undergoing development. Rush, White Stuff and Schuh had recently closed.

Councillor Davey asked for clarification on the nature of the Bandstand Live event in Alexandra Gardens. Julia White responded by stating that it was her belief that it was a programme of music through the summer at the bandstand on Sunday afternoons.

Councillor Tisi stated that the dates for the Clewer and Dedworth picnic in the park was wrong. The correct dates were 2 July and 3 July, not 9 July as stated in the report. The chairman thanked Councillor Tisi for her comments.

Councillor Davies stated that restrictions were still in place for the feeding of swans because of Avian Flu. Councillor Davies also stated that a single use plastic action plan meeting had been held by Plastic Free Windsor, Green Earth Plan and Sustainability Officers. Guidance was being put in place about good practice relating to the Jubilee celebrations and reducing single use plastic usage.

Julia White responded by stating that the Big Lunch being held on the Long Walk on 5 June was going to operate on a reserved basis, so there was an opportunity to send information about sustainable picnics to residents when emailing confirmation.

Ed Wilson inquired about the Hello Lamppost scheme and what was being done with user comments and interactions. Ed Wilson also stated that the resident discount parking scheme was being reintroduced in April, but very few businesses were promoting the scheme. Ed Wilson also asked about publicity regarding the parking discount scheme to raise awareness to residents.

The Chairman thanked Ed Wilson for his comments and asked Julia White to discuss this with Steph James, Service Lead for Economic Growth, and the communications department with a view to raise awareness. Jeffrey Pick added that he had been communicating the message to residents.

ACTION – Julia White to contact Steph James regarding the publicity of the resident discount parking scheme.

Councillor Davey asked about provisions for advertising aimed towards people who do not use social media. The Chairman replied by saying that libraries would contain the information needed for residents and that library staff would be happy to assist.

TOURISM IN WINDSOR POST-COVID

Julia White, Visitor Manager introduced her RBWM Place Marketing presentation to the forum.

Julia White began by giving a general outline of the UK's tourism industry as a whole. She stated that before the pandemic, inbound visits to the UK were increasing rapidly, however this was of course halted due to the pandemic. She said that travel was the UK's third largest service export, therefore the pandemic hit the industry hard.

Julia White then informed the forum on tourism levels pre-pandemic, which included 11% of the RBWM population being employed as a result of tourism. Julia White followed this up by showcasing the impact that this had on tourism in Windsor. International visitor numbers were down as much as 80%. She added that there was a high rate of furlough in Windsor compared to the rest of Berkshire due to the high levels of tourism that usually existed.

Julia White stated that 2021 saw a good post-pandemic recovery with a surge in leisure bookings for accommodation providers and weekend rail travel and a high footfall in Windsor high street. She added that the Omicron variant had caused a devastating effect on corporate Christmas parties, meetings, and rail travel.

Julia White said that the overall goal was to deliver real terms expenditure growth. She said that this needed to be done in a way that maximised the benefits of tourism for the local community, minimised the impact on the community and with an aim to create a sustainable destination with visits all year round. Julia White added that the main focus remained on getting overseas and domestic holiday makers to stay overnight within the borough.

Julia White then discussed the marketing strategy that had been adopted by the borough. This was labelled as Re-engage, Remind, Repackage and Re-present 'Windsor: Beyond the Castle'. The aim of this was to increase the volume and value of group visits and independent traveller bookings to the borough's attractions, events, tour guide and accommodation providers.

Julia White stated that the borough's primary market was identified as being London and other areas within 2.5 hours of Windsor. The secondary market was identified as being the UK nationally and international visitors.

Julia White then discussed a range of other focusses that the borough had when it came to tourism. These included things such as:

- Providing leadership for businesses who were looking to increase their exposure to the market.
- Develop a proposition that focussed on the domestic travel market.
- Providing relevant digital content and a digital strategy.
- Increasing exposure through various partnerships.
- Attending trade exhibitions, networking events and to deliver a programme of educational visits to travel, trade and media.

Julia White then informed the forum of the borough's plan for tourism moving forward. This included events such as the Platinum Jubilee and the Commonwealth Games. This also included increased social media activity, campaigns and a renewed focus on accessibility and sustainability.

Finally, Julia White concluded by stating that it was anticipated that it would be a mixed outlook for 2022. Currently there was a strong return of meetings, events, weddings and corporate bookings, an appetite from the travel trade to expand their itineraries to Windsor and that there was now an increase in visits from US visitors.

On the other hand, Julia White confirmed that it was predicted that tourism levels in the UK were not expected to return to pre-pandemic levels until at least 2025. Inflation and the effects that the current war occurring in Ukraine, were also things that could potentially have massive impacts on tourism going forward.

Councillor Rayner acknowledged the hard work that Julia White and her team had done throughout the pandemic when it came to tourism and projects that were being implemented. She added that the travel trade conference was a great occasion to put Windsor on the map and showcase it to other boroughs. Councillor Rayner added that there were lots of things occurring in celebration of the Queen's Jubilee. The Council themselves were hosting things along with facilitating additional events also. The Council was also imploring residents to attempt to be plastic-free during the celebrations.

Councillor Baldwin asked about the undertaking of a cumulative impact assessment of Windsor town centre and if Julia White was involved in any of the discussions around this new interdisciplinary group that was replacing the assessment and if she was, could she share any information with the forum. Julia White replied by stating that she was not involved in these conversations. The Chairman admitted that he had knowledge of this however stated that it was not appropriate to discuss at a public forum.

Ed Wilson asked if Julia White received regular comments from residents about the cost of parking in Windsor and when it came to accommodation. Julia White replied by stating that accommodation providers were encouraged to make it clear that they had no onsite parking and that they recommend visitors travel by train or other forms of public transport.

In 2017 a visitor survey was conducted, which included questions on the cost and availability of parking. Compared to neighbouring boroughs, the availability scored highly, and the cost scored low. The Chairman said that his recent trip to Exeter showed that parking costs were high, which suggested that this was a national issue.

Councillor Hilton asked about the grants between £10,000 and £25,000 that were offered to businesses during the pandemic and if there had been any noticeable changes. Julia White admitted that feedback had been very positive on this and that the help was massively appreciated by businesses.

Councillor Cannon addressed Councillor Baldwin's comments on the night-time economy strategy and said that conversations were ongoing and could be publicised in due course when an update could be provided. This was a borough wide night-time economy strategy.

Councillor Bateson asked if there was anything in place to ensure that when hotels in Windsor were at full capacity, would visitors be directed to other areas within the borough to stay,

rather than being forced to visit other areas such as Slough Borough. Julia White responded by saying that borough businesses would always be prioritised before visitors were offered accommodation outside of the borough but that the customers' requirements were the key factors in any booking or recommendation.

Councillor Tisi expressed her excitement that a budget hotel was to be coming to Windsor as she believed that this would encourage more visitors to visit the town centre. Families would also be attracted to the town when visiting Legoland Windsor also. Councillor Tisi also asked if there was any information on public toilets in Windsor and their availability.

Julia White said that from memory, visitor feedback on the cleanliness and availability of public toilets in Windsor, was rated quite highly in the 2017 public survey. A changing places toilet was also due to be installed in Windsor with additional temporary toilets being brought in for the Jubilee events on the Long Walk.

FLAGPOLES

Councillor Davey introduced the update to the forum by stating that the UK Government actively encouraged the flying of national flags on and around the home. These flags included ones such as the Union Jack, county flags and military flags amongst others. He encouraged residents to check the UK Government website for a full list of permitted flags and some national rules surrounding them.

Councillor Davey added that the rules were slightly different when it came to the flying of company or branded flags for example. These could only be flown or attached to buildings that were associated with that business. These branded flags could not be freely flown on the home for example, if not associated with the business the flag represented. He added that it was permissible for 2 flags to be flown on the same pole, but it was a courtesy to fly the Union flag at the top as the predominant one.

Councillor Davey emphasised that in the build-up to the upcoming Jubilee celebrations, it was important that residents knew the rules surrounding the flying of flags and that as long as the guidance already discussed along with what was stated on the UK Government website was followed, then there would be no issues. He added that it was of course essential that the flags and the flagpoles were secured and safe for use.

WINDSOR CONSULTATIONS

The Chairman began by just updating the forum on a few items. He stated that the Covid-19 update would no longer be an agenda item as restrictions had now been eased and that the information was readily available through the monthly Outbreak Engagement Board. This was a public meeting where both Councillors and members of the public could submit questions regarding Covid-19.

The Chairman said that electric vehicle charging points were being established in Windsor in both St Leonards Road and Albert Street as part of Government funding. The same was also occurring for Maidenhead.

The Chairman then gave warning to residents and forum members that works were going to be undertaken in Staines on a railway bridge, which in turn would cause disruption to trains coming in and out of Windsor & Eton Riverside station.

The Chairman said that he recently attended a site visit to Ascot's Heatherwood Hospital and that around 95% of the equipment had now been fitted. He stated that a soft opening would be occurring in the near future to the public.

The Chairman then stated that with the rising costs in energy prices, it could be expected that this could have a major impact on local retailers in the town centre.

The forum noted these updates.

WORK PROGRAMME

Ed Wilson asked for a future update on how the allocated £1.8 million was being spent on libraries within the local area. He also asked for an update on how money was being spent on the Guildhall moving forward. Additionally, he asked for an update on the Victoria Street Car Park at a future meeting.

Councillor Rayner said that the Guildhall was currently being assessed by the property team to identify what works needed to occur. The majority of the identified issues were mainly structural due to the age of the building. Councillor Rayner then added that the £1.8 million being spent on the local libraries was the revenue budget for the library services.

The clerk stated that Victoria Street Car Park had been discussed at the January 2022 Infrastructure Overview & Scrutiny panel and that officers had noted that improvement works were going to occur. An increased and improved cleaning regime was now in place. This was similar to the bridge over the railway line. Councillor Davey said that it would be good to get an update on what had been done to spruce up certain areas of the town ready for the Jubilee celebrations. The clerk would explore the possibility of adding this update to the next agenda for the May forum.

DATES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

The forum noted that the next meeting would be Tuesday 17 May 2022.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 8.20 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....