

WINDSOR TOWN FORUM

THURSDAY, 13 JANUARY 2022

PRESENT: Councillors John Bowden (Chairman), Samantha Rayner (Vice-Chairman), Christine Bateson, David Cannon, Jon Davey, Karen Davies, Amy Tisi, David Hilton, Julian Sharpe and Carole Da Costa

Also in attendance: Councillor Donna Stimson, Jeffrey Pick, Lauren Walton, David Pugh, Zoe Macavoy, Simon Kerr

Officers: Laurence Ellis, Paul Roach, David Scott and Oran Norris-Browne

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Price and Councillor Shelim, with Councillors Carole Da Costa and Shelim acting as substitutes respectively.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Carole Da Costa wanted to share that the charity that she worked with made referrals to Food Share, which was being discussed at item 9.

MINUTES

APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 16th November 2021, be a true and accurate record.

THAMES VALLEY POLICE UPDATE

Jeffrey Pick, Community Engagement and Resilience Officer, Thames Valley Police began by stating that the crime statistics for December 2021 were not as bad as expected over the Christmas period, the report had been shared in advance of the forum. He had also asked all neighbourhood teams to study the most recent figures with a focus on cars being entered by unknown means. Lots of recordings had been seen on doorbell cameras of persons walking past and shining torches into cars and trying to open cars. 3 reports had been made of car thefts on the same road in Ascot, with the owner of one of the cars claiming they were positive that it had been locked, only to find the car door open in the morning.

Jeffery Pick stated that PCSO's had been told to photograph cars with valuables left inside, to warn the public of the risks of doing this. These campaigns were seen to be occurring 3 or 4 times per day and he added that these campaigns would commence soon.

Councillor Davey asked about an incident that was posted on Facebook at the Pirate Park recently abusing commuters. He asked if there was a police employee who monitored social media constantly to prevent incidents like these from occurring in the future and what was the best way forward. Jeffery Pick responded by stating that the police could only register on Facebook community pages if they lived in that specific area as a local resident. He added that currently any disturbances that were reported went down as a suspicious incident. This would then be passed onto the neighbourhood team, who would then investigate. He reiterated that it was important for residents to report incidents at the time of the event, and that this could be done easily via the front page of the Thames Valley Police website.

Councillor Rayner asked about the status of bikes that had been recovered and if there were plans to distribute these out. Jeffery Pick said that there were currently none left and had all

been distributed through various means. He said that it was difficult to re-distribute recovered bikes as technically they were not the police's property to give away. He noted that this issue had been escalated to see if a solution could be identified. He also encouraged all residents to photograph their bikes and note down the serial number in case they were stolen, as too many people who have their bikes stolen were unable to describe or identify their bike accurately.

Councillor Bateson asked for clarification on what road Jeffery Pick was referring too in Ascot where the 3 cars were broken into. Jefferey Pick confirmed that this road was called Royal Victoria Gardens.

Councillor Tisi asked if it was possible at the next forum meeting to get an update on violent crime. Jeffery Pick said that Sergeant Catherine Griffiths dealt with this and that he would invite her to the next forum meeting.

ACTION: Sergeant Catherine Griffiths to update forum on violent crime at next meeting.

Councillor Carole Da Costa said that it was important that residents reported crime in the right places and not on social media. She pleaded with her fellow members to encourage residents to report crimes in the correct manner. Jeffrey Pick and Councillor Cannon both agreed with this and reiterated that the correct process should be followed.

Councillor Cannon asked why the 101 number asked residents for numerous pieces of personal information when reporting a crime. Jeffrey Pick replied by stating that this was a requirement of the Home Office and not Thames Valley Police to assist with the monitoring of diversity and equality issues.

Councillor Sharpe asked for comparisons of crime seen in Windsor compared with neighbouring areas of similar size. David Scott, Head of Communities said that the overall headline position was that Windsor compared favourably, however he added that residents should not become complacent because of this.

ACTION: David Scott to investigate what ways there are to compare the borough's crime statistics to neighbouring locations.

The Chairman asked about Smart Water crime prevention material and if it could be brought into areas such as Windsor. Jeffrey Pick replied by saying that the Deputy Area Commander purchased £15,000 of Smart Water in 2021 and that key roads that were most targeted for theft and burglary had been offered this and that this initiative was ongoing.

TOWN MANAGER UPDATE

Paul Roach, Windsor and Eton Town Manager, gave a presentation on town management to the forum.

On car and coach parking, the use of car parking in 2021/22 was seen to be looking a lot more favourable since September 2021 compared to 2019/20 figures. As such, while figures had improved, it was not at the desirable level compared to the previous year.

On footfall rates, there was an increase in footfall from September 2020, surpassing 2019 figures. Paul Roach mentioned that the Economic Development Team had promoted Windsor through social media and website channels. As such, Paul Roach stated footfall was significantly better than expected compared to last year. 5.7 million people were seen to visit Windsor for the year to date, 29.5% higher than in 2020.

In terms of vacancy rates, Windsor Town Centre had a vacancy rate of 10.4%, which was better than the national average of 14.5%. Clewer, Dedworth and Ascot had also performed very well with little-to-no vacancy rates. He also noted that January and February 2022 would

be key months for the vacancy rate as it would show which businesses had survived after the Christmas period.

Regarding businesses, recently vacated business units within the last 3 months included Revital Health Food Store, Royal House of Windsor, and War Hammer. Stores recently opened in the last 3 months included Love Brownies Windsor, MooBoo, Gregory and Taping and Leo Mancini. New upcoming business in Windsor included Five Guys, Bovingdons Estate Agents and Estetica dental clinic.

Paul Roach then discussed the festive events that occurred during the Christmas period. He stated that there had been significant attendance across all Christmas events in the borough, with a rough 20% uplift compared to normal figures. These events included the Christmas Lights Switch On, the Reindeer Parade, Living Advent Calendar and Windsor on Ice. These were all very popular with up to 8,000 people attending the Windsor Christmas Lights Switch On, 2,000 attending the Eton Lights Switch On, 6,000 attending the Reindeer Parade, over 2,000 visits to the Living Advent Calendar and around 49,000 visitors to Windsor on Ice. Paul Roach wanted to put on record his thanks to the volunteers who aided in running all of the events across the town centre without which they would not have taken place.

Paul Roach moved on to discuss what was planned for the upcoming Platinum Jubilee with the various events scheduled to take place throughout 2022 starting from 6th February with the Accession Day Service at St. George's Chapel. An Officers Working Group had also been set up to address any issues that needed rectifying such as things needing a touch of paint or supporting people in obtaining hanging baskets. The colour theme being endorsed was purple and white.

The Chairman asked for an update on the business premises that were currently vacant, specifically in Windsor Dials and the one on Victoria Street. Paul Roach said that InterContinental Hotels were taking up Windsor Dials with the building being handed over shortly. As for Victoria Street Thames Court development, InterSystems had gone into that development. Paul Roach believed they had not moved their whole office because they own offices on Francis Road and Eton High Street at the current time. He also believed that they were not planning to close the Eton office but suspected they will close the Windsor one to relocate to the Victoria Street unit. Paul Roach added that he was led to believe that the whole building would be moved.

The Chairman added that there was a period about 2 to 4 times a year whereby commercial businesses had to pay their rent to the premise leaseholders, with February being one of those periods. He speculated that this would influence business decisions.

Councillor Davies asked what was being done about the selling of bird food due to some concerns from residents regarding Windsor's swans.

Paul Roach replied that there was a declaration of avian bird-flu in Windsor with a 3-kilometre exclusion zone covering Windsor, Datchet, Eton, Dorney and the Long Walk. Businesses which sell bird food had been informed to stop selling bird food and to inform the public about this. Signs had also been placed to further inform the public regarding bird food as well as keeping dogs on leads. The primary aim was to prevent birds from flocking together. Paul Roach also stated after a confirmed death of a bird that there had to be 21 days with no new deaths in order for the exclusion zone to be lifted.

Councillor Tisi asked what support there was for struggling businesses and whether the Council could provide more support, as well as what factors were attributing to the increase in vacancy rates. Secondly, Councillor Tisi requested that Clewer and Dedworth had their own Living Advent Calendar events, to ensure all of Windsor was covered. And finally, Councillor Tisi asked if streets were able to come together as neighbours and request hanging baskets for their streets.

Paul Roach replied that there was an announcement of grants of up to £6,000 for business. In addition, businesses could apply for the retail hardship grant which allowed a reduction in business rates. Support through social media was also provided, including training programs and free seminars to support businesses and individuals.

With regards to the Living Advent Calendar event, Paul Roach stated he had sent out an invitation to businesses to act as hosts for a similar event in Dedworth.

On hanging baskets, Paul Roach mentioned that he would need to ask about whether non-business orders would be accepted, he speculated it would be accepted for local residents to make their own purchases. He also added that the Darling Buds of May were offering a Platinum Jubilee themed basket.

Councillor Tisi asked a follow-up question regarding any rules on where hanging baskets could be attached, such as on lampposts. Paul Roach replied by saying that it was fine if lampposts already had their own bracket, but he advised against residents placing their own brackets on lampposts due to weight and wind resistance. He said that he would raise this with his officers' group.

Councillor Rayner announced that shops and stores were satisfied with the turnout of visitors in Windsor in December 2021. In relation to business support, Councillor Rayner confirmed the success of business grants as well as continued use of the advantage card discount and business training courses.

Councillor Davey asked about the time frame of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

Paul Roach replied that the celebrations would take place throughout the year, starting with the Accession Day Service taking place at St. George's Chapel on 6th February with other events taking place all the way through to December 2022.

Councillor Hilton confirmed the business rate discount from July 2021 to April 2022 mentioned by Paul Roach. Councillor Hilton also added that there were more discretionary grants to further support businesses, including support for the advantage card and encouraging more businesses to adopt it as well as giving grants of £10-25,000 to help businesses with training and digital transition.

The Chairman concluded by stating that everyone needed to be mindful of the security coverage and implications surrounding major events, namely those relating to Platinum Jubilee events as well as the Changing of the Guard.

The Chairman then discussed misinformation regarding a no-fly zone over Windsor promoted on social media and various news organisations. The truth was that no aircraft was to fly below 2,500 feet above mean sea level within a circle radius of 1.25 nautical miles. This did not apply to any aircraft approaching or departing from Heathrow Airport whilst under the control of London Terminal Control. In other words, commercial aircraft to and from Heathrow would continue as normal.

Paul Roach added that in regards to safety and security, major events would go through a review with the Council safety advisory group.

COVID-19 UPDATE

David Scott, Head of Communities and Covid Coordinator for the Borough, gave a presentation on the current situation with COVID.

In summary, infection rates had recently increased and remained high with infections spreading across all age groups. Omicron had become the dominant variant of COVID. In spite of this, according to data available, the RBWM was in a far more favourable position compared to the rest of England. In terms of COVID testing, the borough had seen a higher

level of testing compared to neighbouring boroughs but experienced a slight reduction by 2% in overall testing levels recently.

Despite higher infection rates, hospitalisations due to COVID had remained low but it had a rough 3-time increase in volumes from August 2021 to January 2022 compared to the May to August 2021 period.

In schools, infections in the first week of term were roughly twice as high compared to the end of last term. In addition, COVID outbreaks had been identified in 10 first/primary schools as well as in 8 Middle, Secondary and Upper schools. It was too early to tell on how the return to school would affect wider infection rates in the rest of the community.

When looking at cases by area, Clewer East had the highest infection rates out of the 19 wards of the Borough when compared to the case rates by percentage of the ward's population.

Regarding vaccinations, vaccine rates had been consistent in terms of comparison to the borough's Berkshire neighbours, with "third-equals" placings for RBWM in first, second and third doses.

The advice to reduce infections was to continue following the core advice, such as continuing with testing, wearing face coverings in busy places and to avoid crowded places as well as remembering that fresh air reduces the risk of infection. David Scott also brought attention to the very recent change in the number of days required for self-isolation after a positive lateral flow test. This had changed from 7 to 5 days subject to two clear Lateral Flow Device Tests, after a positive test, with one on day 5 after the initial positive test, and a subsequent one 24 hours later, and as long as no symptoms were apparent.

Councillor Davey asked if there were any signs to an end of restrictions. David Scott replied by saying that this was still uncertain due to the Omicron variant's infectious nature and other potential variants. While Omicron was more infectious, the increase in vaccinations had decreased hospitalisations. While The forum was advised that restrictions would not be lifted by the end of March 2022, although if the current trends continued, the Borough would continue to be in a stronger position when compared to some of our near neighbours. David Scott also added that there should be a continued exercise in caution as the pressure on NHS system and impact on NHS staff was still a cause for concern.

Councillor Carole Da Costa added that people still needed to exercise caution after stating that she read medical reports which gave the consensus that the pandemic may be far from over. The Chairman expressed agreement.

LEGOLAND WINDSOR RESORT UPDATE

The forum was addressed by Lauren Walton, Head of PR at Legoland Windsor Resort and David Pugh, Consultation Adviser to Legoland Windsor Resort.

Lauren Walton said that the resort introduced the need for guests to pre-book their tickets at the start of the pandemic and that they continued to do this. This allowed them to control visitor numbers, improve the guest experience and manage highway services better. She acknowledged that 2021 had been a challenging year similarly to 2020, and that staff recruitment had proved difficult. They encouraged local residents to apply for roles at the resort. 2021 saw the resort celebrate its 25th birthday and the launch of Lego Mythica. Local NHS workers and their families were offered tickets to enjoy this new experience.

Lauren Walton outlined the events that had occurred during the season. These included Brick or Treat in October, the Fireworks Spectacular in November and Legoland at Christmas in December. 2022 would include events such as the Explorer Escape Weekends in January,

February and March and then Brick Week in February half-term. The 2022 season would then commence from March onwards.

Lauren Walton then explained some of the resort's key goals and aims. These included:

- Spreading visitor numbers more evenly throughout the year.
- Encouraging more overnight stays (on and off site).
- Shifting more arrivals / departures to off-peak times.
- Getting more people to spend time in the local area.
- Promoting Windsor as a destination for families.
- Improving public transport connectivity.
- Supporting the Royal Borough's Environment & Climate Strategy.

David Pugh acknowledged that some of the forum members were present in 2018 where the proposed plans presented by Legoland Windsor Resort were voted through by 11 votes to 2. A judicial challenge occurred and in December 2021, this was quashed with the plans allowed to continue. David Pugh then shared with the forum some images of the planned holiday cabins that had been approved to be built and he also shared some figures on employment and visitor impacts that the new plans would have on the borough.

David Pugh said that due to the long-term plan delays, separate proposals for investment were in need of being brought forward. This included a Lego Adventure Golf, to be situated in one of the current Western car parks at the resort. This was planned for Spring 2023 onwards. David Pugh then discussed the benefits that this would have to the borough including more jobs both permanent and seasonal, it would attract more visitors to the borough, and it would encourage more off-peak visit throughout the year.

Councillor Davey asked if there were any plans to have a direct road link from the M4 motorway to Legoland Windsor Resort. David Pugh responded by saying no and that this was near impossible, but they were aware of the traffic that occurred from visitors to the resort. He added that he would like to see more visitors use public transport when visiting the resort, and that they were working on ways to encourage this.

Councillor Davey then asked if it were possible for the resort to minimise the amount of ancient oak trees that it cut down when building at the resort. David Pugh confirmed that these were being protected during the development and that the resort was also undertaking the planting of further trees.

Councillor Rayner acknowledged Legoland Windsor Resort as being a vital partner to the borough and recognised them as being a large employer of staff within the borough. She hoped that the borough's close relationship with the resort would continue for a long time.

Councillor Carole Da Costa asked about plans for electric buses from the Windsor train stations to the resort. David Pugh responded by saying that discussions had taken place with RBWM officers about this, and he acknowledged that the Council had put in its submission to the government for its bus service improvement plan. Flexible bus services had been discussed as a potential idea, which would see services monitored depending on demand. David Pugh also discussed the idea of having an integrated ticketing system, which would see resort tickets coupled with a transport ticket.

GREEN EARTH CIC

Zoe Macavoy, the Founder and Director of Green Earth Plan CIC gave a presentation to the forum.

Zoe Macavoy began by stating that this was a non-profit organisation with an aim of bringing about positive environment change. Zoe Macavoy said that a project called 'Green Up Our Street' was launched and in its early stages, this was a community driven urban greening initiative. The main aim of the project was to create connections with Local Councils, housing associations, businesses and other community led groups to maximise funding opportunities

and leverage networks to bring about the work seen. Educational knowledge would be provided to communities about urban greening with an aim of starting a local movement towards this.

Zoe Macavoy then discussed some of the work that had already been carried out by the group. The Community Orchard was one of these, along with a new biodiversity and wildlife area, which was based at Sawyers Close. In summer 2021, a birdbox building event occurred with the help of a local organization and resident donations.

Zoe Macavoy then discussed some spin off community engagement projects that had occurred at Sawyers Close once the Orchard had been made. Work had been carried out closely with Youth Service groups on various endeavours, including the painting of a blank white brick wall with some bright graffiti art. She acknowledged that the volunteers had been key in allowing these projects to develop and go ahead.

Zoe Macavoy said that the National Lottery had offered a small pot of funding to kickstart some projects for 2022. She appealed for any community volunteers to come forward to help with upcoming projects planned for the coming year.

Zoe Macavoy then discussed the 'Green Up Duncroft' project that had been identified as the 1st of 10 communal spaces across Windsor to receive some funding and support. She added that residents expressed a desire for these projects to get underway before the Jubilee celebrations in June 2022 and had come forward to identify some areas to be focussed upon.

Zoe Macavoy outlined some RBWM Community Network Meetings that began mid-way through 2021 and were continuing through 2022. 2022 was focused upon the physical environment and that it was open to anybody to attend including residents and community groups.

WINDSOR FOOD SHARE

Simon Kerr, Windsor Food Share began by giving thanks to the borough for grants that had been awarded. He also thanked Councillor's Davey, Tisi and Carole Da Costa for their support.

Simon Kerr explained that the Windsor Food Share was set up in 2013 and that it worked off of a voucher system and referrers. The vouchers lasted for between 1 to 4 weeks and were obtained from referrers such as the West Windsor Hub, the Homeless Project and local schools and charities. A commonly agreed criteria is set out on whether people are eligible or not and this will then allow a person to qualify for these vouchers if they meet the criteria.

Simon Kerr explained that they gave people 4 days' worth of food, this now included eggs. He also acknowledged that they now spent £225 a week on fresh fruit and vegetables. Bread is also obtained from 3 local bakeries and sanitary products are distributed weekly too. Personal hygiene and household cleaning products are also provided once a month.

Donations are accepted at Tesco in Dedworth and also Waitrose in Windsor, where there are boxes behind the tills, which are collected on Wednesdays. Sorting of the food occurred on Wednesdays and Thursdays to ensure all food is safe and has not gone past its expiry date. In the past people would come along to collect their food, be given a hot beverage and have a chat. However due to the pandemic this had now changed, with people given a time slot to arrive and having to queue up outside, collect their food and then go home.

Simon Kerr identified past clients as being members of mental health services or the addiction services locally, however it was now increasingly members of certain sectors that had been negatively affected by the effects of the pandemic, such as members of the hospitality sector. He noted that a change in government legislation around Universal Credit had a negative effect. The demand currently was also now outweighing the supply of collections. He gave

thanks to both Bray Studios and Legoland Windsor Resort for their kind donations in recent times.

Councillor Carole Da Costa said that as her role as a referrer she has seen a huge increase in demand having referred the same amount of people in a week as she would usually have done within a month. She thanked Simon Kerr for the evening slots that were available to make the scheme more inclusive for working people.

Councillor Tisi asked if it was being encouraged for residents to collect donations together and to pass them on to Food Share themselves. This could then perhaps encourage more donations as there would be no need to travel to the supermarkets mentioned. Simon Kerr thanked Councillor Tisi for this suggestion and encouraged people to do this through various methods such as WhatsApp groups of local residents.

WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Tisi asked for electric car charging points to be added to the agenda for the next meeting. The Chairman agreed to this.

Councillor Davey discussed the idea of flagpoles as being added to the agenda considering the Platinum Jubilee Celebrations. Councillor Tisi said that some space should be left for residents to add any topics that they felt should come to the next forum. The clerk agreed with Councillor Tisi and stated that he would contact forum members prior to the meeting as always to ask for any suggestions that they may have. He also added that residents were invited to join the forum meetings and suggest items to discuss via social media posts prior to meetings.

Councillor Davey discussed the possibility of having an Ascot Town Forum. The Chairman said that this could not be done as Ascot had its own parish council, unlike Maidenhead and Windsor. Councillor Hilton and Councillor Cannon further supported the Chairman's comments.

WINDSOR CONSULTATIONS

The forum noted any consultations.

DATES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

The forum noted that the next meeting would be held at 6:30pm on 8th March 2022.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 9.20 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....