

WINDSOR FORUM

Thursday 9 November 2023

Present: Councillors Alison Carpenter (Chair), Amy Tisi (Vice-Chair), Helen Price and Mark Wilson

Present (virtually): Councillor W. Da Costa

Also in attendance: Lautaro and Louella, Councillors David Buckley, Richard Coe, and Karen Davies

Also in attendance (virtually): Stephen Hedges

Officers: Laurence Ellis and Kirsty Hunt

Officers (virtually): Paul Roach

Apologies for Absence

The Chair, Councillor Carpenter, welcomed everyone to the meeting. Forum members then introduced themselves.

Apologies were received from Councillor Knowles. He was substituted by Councillor Price.

Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

Minutes

The Chair went through the actions from the last meeting:

<u>ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS</u>	<u>UPDATE</u>
A motion to be forwarded at Full Council to change the name of Windsor Town Forum to 'Windsor Forum'.	COMPLETED – A motion was passed at Full Council on 26 th September 2023 in support of the name change.
Vision for Windsor to return to the next Forum meeting in November 2023.	Vision for Windsor was added to the agenda but the presenting officer, Chris Joyce, had to pull out before the meeting. As a result, the item was not covered in the meeting.
ACTION: Shasta Parveen to forward answers to the following queries on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whether the new technologies would decrease the likelihood of latencies (delays) in wireless connection, for example, in the garden or certain parts of a house.• Investigate any works on improving broadband connectivity on Park Street and Prescott Street as part of the Digital Adoption Strategy.	COMPLETED – Answers were provided in the Q/A sheet attached to the agenda.

- Internet access for a local business near the B Road off Dedworth Road.
- Whether the Local Enterprise Partnership could anything to encourage service providers to offer shorter-term contracts in regard contracts in rental properties which do not cost a fortune.
- Whether there was any work being done to address the issue of internet capacity and whether signal blockers around Windsor Castle played a role in this.
- Which streets in Windsor would be prioritised for the roll out of FTTTP and when this would happen.
- What areas of Windsor would the roll out of FTTTP be implemented, whether the Town Centre or wider Windsor, and including the rural areas of Eton.

The Chair notified the Forum that Chris Joyce, Assistant Director of Infrastructure Sustainability and Economic Growth, was unable to attend the meeting nor provide a written update on the Windsor Vision. He was also unable arrange for someone else to substitute him to present the item as well. As a result, the Vision for Windsor item would not be covered in the meeting. She hoped to the item would return to the meeting in January 2024.

ACTION: Vision for Windsor to return to the next Forum meeting in January 2024.

Councillor W. Da Costa raised a couple of points relation to the minutes. He first stated that the minutes should state that he would work with officers to search for funding for the Forum rather than doing it himself only. He said he had not heard from any officers and that he made contact with Louise Freeth, Assistant Director of Revenues Benefits Library and Resident Services, to chase up about where the Forum could acquire finance for community activities and that he would continue to push this forward.

Councillor W. Da Costa's second point was in relation to Andrew Durrant, Executive Director of Place Services, to investigate opening the coach park to improve access from Footbridge to The Arches through the use of Welcome to Windsor. He expressed disappointment with the response from Andrew Durrant whereby there were no further plans at the moment because the focus was to deal with the dilapidated state of the Footbridge and lift. Councillor W. Da Costa added that he had spoken to some of the businesses under The Arches and stated that they were willing to help fund any opening of the Coach Park which would then shorten walking distances. He stated that he would chase this up with Andrew Durrant and potentially discuss with Paul Roach, Windsor and Eton Town Centre Manager.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meetings held on 19th September 2023 were a true and accurate record.

Busy Buttons CORE Charity

Lautaro and Louella shared a presentation which explained the charity in which they founded, Busy Buttons CORE Charity, located at Windsor Yards. They described the charity as "an inclusive charity helping each child find their unique potential through creativity and imagination". While the charity was known more for its community projects and creative courses for young people, the charity provided other services.

According to the NHS, 1-in-5 children in the UK suffered from mental health problems, which lead to school avoidance, isolation, self-harm, anti-social behaviour and criminality. Lautaro conveyed that anxiety was not a personality disorder, but a response to a situation. These may include special needs, such as autism, ADHD and dyslexia (in which they refer to as superpowers), as well as bullying and domestic abuse.

Lautaro stated that Busy Buttons was started in response to a first-hand experience of the results of mental health problems. Louella explained the background: she and Lautaro were attacked by a group of young people in a park in London but managed to escape. The assailants were a group of 20 young people aged from 15-to-21-years of age who “worked like clockwork”. After receiving counselling, Louella and Lautaro wondered about the frame of mind of the assailants, namely their lack of empathy and having nothing to lose. They speculated that the attack gave the assailants a sense of empowerment, and that they had no mentoring and no sense of responsibility. From this, Louella and Lautaro decided that these types of young people required positive feeling through more positive experiences and by contributing to the community rather than causing trouble.

The Charity believed in early intervention whereby young people were presented with a passion at a young age to prevent them from going down alternative routes. They gave a case study whereby an anxious child with selective mutism became more cheerful and sociable at Busy Buttons.

Lautaro informed that Busy Buttons provided a weekly one-to-one support to families to challenge emotional-based school avoidance by their children. From this, Busy Buttons received referrals from CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), social services, early help, local schools, adoption services and domestic abuse charities. Since this programme was launched, there was a positive response of 55% of young participants returning to school.

After submitting children’s artwork, Busy Buttons was selected as the best art school by Craft Council UK and received a Yinka Ilori Designer’s Award. Three young people from Busy Buttons were selected to display their work at the Royal Academy of Arts, out of 1,500 nationwide entries.

Lautaro stated that this showed the positive impact of early intervention, creative opportunities, and positive experiences. He explained that young people were invited to join programmes with other young people once they gained enough momentum and confidence. These include holiday programmes, such as Creative Wellbeing Camps, Creative Skill-based Courses, Theatre Productions and Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.

Attending the meeting with Lautaro and Louella, the Youth Ambassador from Busy Buttons then shared his own story. He explained that he was doing his Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme (which Busy Buttons was directly licensed towards), in which he decided that he was going to volunteer to tutor a child to play the piano. This had reached the stage that they would perform the piano at Busy Button’s Christmas Fair on 10th December 2023.

Louella added that all of Busy Button’s programmes and the Duke of Edinburgh Award at Busy Buttons were free for low-income families.

Lautaro explained that community engagement projects were very important as they involved not only Busy Buttons’ children but other children, local schools and other organisations in which they worked with. He explained that these events were important for families who had been isolated as it made them feel part of something, such as Christmas light switch-on and other events in Windsor. It also made those families feel part of the wider community. Louella added that children’s work being put on display at events created a sense of being part of the larger project and community as well as boost their confidence.

Lautaro requested support from the community and RBWM. The most pressing issue at the moment was Windsor Yards being redeveloped which meant Busy Buttons would lose its base of operations (which it had been for the last seven years), and that it needed to find a new location. Louella informed that there needed to be greater awareness for the charity as many people did not realise what it did, stating that Busy Buttons focused on celebrating the children's activities and achievements rather than their problems.

To conclude his presentation, Lautaro shared a two-minute video which showed the charity's activities.

Jim, a resident, asked if the charity was based entirely in Windsor or the wider south-east of England. Louella replied that Busy Buttons received children from outside of Windsor as well, including Slough, Ascot, High Wycombe, Bracknell and Staines; but the sole location of the charity was Windsor.

Councillor Price asked if Busy Buttons had another location to move to in midst of the redevelopment of Windsor Yards. Lautaro replied that they did not have a new location at the moment and that Busy Buttons were actively looking, but they had to balance their search with their volunteering work in delivering the programmes and new referrals. He welcomed any ideas and support.

Councillor Buckley suggested that some material (e.g., a screenshot or presentation) could be shared with Councillors who could then share it on social media and to residents, stating that he was more than happy to promote the charity in his Borough ward (Datchet, Horton and Wraysbury). He also commended the charity's work as "mind-boggling". Lautaro appreciated the offer.

Councillor Wilson praised and appreciated the work of Busy Buttons, having recently visited their exhibition and viewing their celebration of neurodiverse was fantastic. He took note of the location issue and that he would take this into account with some work he was doing.

When asked by the Chair, Lautaro confirmed that there was a Christmas Fair arranged by Busy Buttons on 10th December 2023 as well as attend the Christmas fair in Dedworth on 26th November 2023.

Parish and Town Councils - Powers and Responsibilities

The Chair introduced Stephen Hedges, Clerk to Cox Green Parish Council, who was doing a presentation on the powers and responsibilities of parish and town councils. Councillor K. Davies, Lead (Cabinet) Member for a Windsor Town Council, was also invited to the Forum meeting and would be leading on the consultation on a town council for Windsor. The Chair informed that a town council in Windsor would not replace the Borough local authority; instead, it was an extra layer of authority.

Stephen Hedges explained that parish councils were a tier of local government which were the closest to communities, varying in size from the small village or hamlet to larger communities of over 130,000. With a variation of facilities and services provided, the budgets of parish councils could have a large range from less than £1,000 to over £4 million. Parish councils were generally referred to as 'local councils', differentiating them from principal councils, namely district and county councils. There were around 10,400 local councils across England and there was no 'one-size-fits-all' description.

In terms of naming, alongside 'Parish Council', a local council may call itself from any of the following:

- Town Council
- Village Council
- Community Council

- Neighbourhood Council

In spite of the different names, their powers and duties were the same as the legislation applied to all local councils.

Stephen Hedges highlighted that there were eight city councils which could be confused with the higher tier principal councils. For example, Manchester City Council was a principal council whereas Wells City Council was a local council. He also highlighted that the Chair of a town council could be referred to as 'Town Mayor'.

Stephen Hedges explained that an area may have one, two or three tiers of government with each possessing their own responsibilities which apply to the area which they cover. RBWM had a unitary authority which incorporated local authority tiers one (County Councils) and two (District, Borough and City Councils). Local (parish/town) councils were tier three; if there was no parish-level authority, then the district-level authority would carry out those functions. Each local authority tier was its own independent authority in its own right, whereby they were not subservient to any other authority; however, certain permissions may be required from a relevant authority carry out certain works or actions, such as highways works.

Stephen Hedges then explained the power and duties of local councils. He informed that a 'power' was the legislation which allowed a council to do something, while a 'duty' was a requirement imposed upon it (e.g., the duty to consider the crime and disorder implications of its actions and functions). Local councils had a duty of providing allotments if there was a demand. All the work and the actions of a council had to have a lawful basis; therefore, they needed to flow back to a relevant power. All the powers and duty of a local Council apply to all local councils, including newly created ones; therefore, they would have all the powers from day one, whether they exercise them or not.

Powers which local councils may possess include subsidising a community bus service, establishing and maintaining a car-sharing scheme, taxi fare concessions, traffic calming, creating public rights of way, dealing with litter and graffiti (such as issuing fines), tourism and publicity, provision of market by-laws, and more.

Parish/Town council may manage facilities which derive from the powers available to local councils. These may include cafes, visitor centres, public toilets, markets, museums, community centres, community shops, natural reserves, open spaces and play areas, swimming pools and sports facilities (e.g., courts, pitches), entertainment venues, and laundrettes.

The main source of funding for parish/town councils was usually the precept levy (part of the Council Tax bill), which was collected by a principal authority; in this case, RBWM. In fact, the Borough had a duty to collect it on behalf of all the precepting authorities, including the police and crime commissioner and fire authority. Currently, a local council's precept was not capped, though the Secretary of State regularly reviewed this and could apply a cap if they consider increases to the precept as excessive. There was direct no central government funding for local councils or any mechanism to provide this.

Alternative sources of funding for local councils include market and pitch/grounds fees, car parking and services charges, allotment rents, lease income, grants and CIL/Section 106. Essentially, all parish/town council funding was locally derived.

In Berkshire, there were 104 civil parishes across six unitary authority areas; three of the unitary authorities were fully parished, Reading had no parishes, Slough had three, and RBWM had 15 (13 parish councils, one town council and a parish meeting) with the Windsor and Maidenhead being unparished.

Stephen Hedges then highlighted the salient points for consideration for consideration and to add context ahead of any governance review, asserting that it did not imply what a town council would look.

Using statistics for unparished areas of Windsor and the tax base, Stephen Hedges highlighted that a potential town council for Windsor encompassing the unparished areas of Windsor would be a large parish-level authority, highlighting that it would need to be considered in this context. Based on the tax base, a potential Windsor Town Council would be the 35th largest local council in England (out of 10,400) and the third largest within Berkshire (out of 105).

Within Berkshire, the closest comparative council was Newbury Town Council with a similar population and tax base and provided the same type of services and facilities. He highlighted that he provided Newbury's budget report document (which was attached to the meeting agenda) for comparison.

A tier-two district authority had powers to carry out concurrent functions: services and facilities which were usually provided by parish/town councils elsewhere. There was legislation which allowed concurrent functions being delivered by a tier-two council to be separately charged, known as special expenses. This provided a mechanism which could be considered fair if the charges were applied to the Council taxpayers of the areas in which those services were delivered. RBWM undertook concurrent functions within the Borough, and it applied this charging regime in a limited way to the unparished areas only. This was referenced in Borough reports as SAE (Special Area Expenses).

The powers which were currently a concurrent function with RBWM but could be carried out by a town council included car parks, sport pitches, cemeteries, markets, allotments, playgrounds, museums, open spaces, grit bins, public toilets, venues for hire and tourist facilities. Stephen Hedges highlighted that delegated functions were not something which a community governance review could consider. Rather, it was something that local and principal councils could enter if they wish.

Stephen Hedges then showed the allotments and recreational open spaces and play areas which were currently being maintained as a concurrent function.

Stephen Hedges concluded his presentation by conveying that what a Windsor Town Council would look like would be determined only by the Town Council and its councillors, its assets and finances and ultimately the residents of Windsor.

Jim, a resident, asked how the precept levy was negotiated with RBWM. Stephen Hedges replied that there were no negotiations with this as they were their own separate level of government. Instead, parish/town councils set their own budgets for their own priorities, services and facilities. Once the net requirement was summed up (taking into account parish/town council income), the precept levy was imposed on the borough council as part of the Council Tax bill, having no say about this.

Jim then followed up by asking whether parish/town councils had more independence in terms of arranging markets, festivals and other social events. Stephen Hedges suggested to look through the [documents he provided](#) before the meeting, namely the House of Commons document on parish and town councils as it contained information on their powers and responsibilities. He also suggested to look at Newbury Town Council's website, notably its strategy and overview document which gave an idea and comparison of what a large town council would do. He added that the actions of parish/town councils were restricted in the powers and responsibilities it possessed, in contrast to this being held by another authority; for example, parish/town councils did not have the power to provide social or care services as these were legally provided by a tier one- or two-level (district or county) authority.

Steve Lowe, a resident, asked about the next steps in establishing a town council for Windsor. Stephen Hedges replied he did not work for RBWM, who were managing the Community Governance review. Councillor K. Davies suggested that any questions for Stephen Hedges should go first before she received any questions on the Borough's procedure for a Windsor town council.

John Webb, a resident, asked about the options in terms of a parish/council, their offices and clerks, wondering whether these facilities could be shared with another local council. Stephen Hedges informed that there was 'grouping', which he speculated would not be considered under the Borough's Community Governance review. On the sharing of offices and officers with another local council, he suggested that this would not be considered for a potential Windsor town council due to its likely size (based on geography and the tax base) and therefore would require its own dedicated staff.

After thanking for the presentation, Nigel Griffin, a resident, asked whether local councils had the opportunity to comment on planning matters. Stephen Hedges confirmed this, elaborating that, in its representative role, local councils were able to give representations and submit comments to consultations of planning applications from tier one or tier two authorities (in this case, RBWM) as they were the local planning authority. While parish/town councils were not statutory consultees, they had a statutory right to be informed of planning applications. In addition, there was a long-standing convention within the Borough and across all local planning authorities whereby parish/town councils could contribute to planning applications. In regard to the planning/design in an area, this was managed under a neighbourhood plan, which would then become part of the local development framework. While a local council was able to forward comments to a planning authority, this had to be within valid reasoning of planning legislation and policy rather than on the simple grounds that it did not like it.

After thanking Stephen Hedges for the presentation, Councillor W. Da Costa conveyed that many residents who lived in his Borough ward of Clewer and Dedworth West in Windsor lived under the jurisdiction of Bray Parish Council and therefore were not encompassed under the previous Community Governance review for a Windsor town Council. He then asked Councillor K. Davies, as the Lead (Cabinet) Member for a Windsor Town Council, for assurance that the maps in Stephen Hedges's presentation were only for illustrative purposes and that his ward residents (and other residents) would not be excluded from this process.

Stephen Hedges replied that the previous Community Governance review encompassed the unparished areas only; and that a separate review of parished areas would need alongside a review of the unparished areas. From his understanding, only the unparished areas would be reviewed and therefore provided the basis of the map in his presentation.

Councillor K. Davies, who would chair the Community Governance review, thanked Stephen Hedges for his presentation and time, explaining that it was intended to provide insight of parish/town councils as Windsor residents did not have the experience of this. She then went on to answer the earlier question from Steve Lowe on the timeframe, explaining that the Borough was working on the back of ensuring that the Borough would be ready for a potential council to be elected during the next local elections in May 2027 (providing that there was a desire for a town council). She added that Kirsty Hunt, Service Lead for Electoral and Democratic Services, would lead the review from the officer side.

Once the process started, Councillor K. Davies explained, Kirsty Hunt would write a terms of reference for review, with one area of consideration (in answer to Councillor W. Da Costa's earlier question) being whether the Community Governance review would do a review of only the unparished areas of Windsor (like previously) or another review taking place concurrently on where the boundary between Bray and potentially Windsor would be. Under the previous review, it was decided that the Borough would establish a town council in Windsor first before considering whether the residents of Bray wanted another Community Governance review on whether they wanted to be part of a Windsor town council or continue to be part of Bray Parish

Council. Essentially, the work at the moment was to make the preparations from the officer side, particularly the terms of reference.

Councillor K. Davies informed that the decision to conduct a Community Governance review took place at the Full Council meeting in July 2023, adding that the preparatory work was not being rushed to ensure it was being done adequately as well as the sufficient time to reach the deadline of May 2027. She also informed that once the terms of reference was completed, the community governance review needed to be completed within 12 months.

John Webb asked whether a single town council would be considered or whether there was scope for consideration for two parish-level councils in Windsor: one for the Town Centre and another for West Windsor. Based on her recollection of the previous governance review, Councillor K. Davies answered that there would be two consultation periods. The first one would be on the terms of reference; following from this, the second consultation would be on the model, whether a single town council or two parishes in Windsor. This would then go to consultation again which would seek more substantial response.

Pointing out that the establishment of a town council for Windsor was years away in 2027 and believing that Windsor residents were not receiving the benefit from the current precept, John Webb requested for the Forum to approach Cabinet for a resolution whereby money in the budget would be set aside for the Forum to:

- Purchase Christmas lights for Dedworth Road in the Clewer and Dedworth West and Clewer and Dedworth East wards, as well as to fund the replacement of lampposts (consider unsuitable) for supporting those Christmas lights).
- Fund the ongoing provision of hanging baskets and flower displays along Dedworth Road.

The Chair asked Stephen Hedges if he had any input. While he advised that confirmation from RBWM officers would be required, Stephen Hedges informed that there was currently an unparished precept charge on the Council Tax bill which raised for the services and concurrent functions being carried out in Windsor. While the Borough Council could raise this precept, it had to take into account that it would be capped by legislation. He added that resolutions for special expenses to the Borough council could be put forward, albeit under a complex process.

Stephen Hedges added that he would “thoroughly endorse” the timescale being for 2027. Based on his experience at Cox Green Parish Council, which was the newest parish council to be created in Windsor and Maidenhead, Stephen Hedges strongly advised that this sort of timeframe would be required as there would be a huge amount of work to be done, such as to identify the services and costs, stating that the previous community governance review only touched on the subject. He strongly advised against doing this process quicker as the Borough would only receive knee-jerk reactions.

Richard Endacott, a resident and Chair of the Windsor Town Council Steering Group, asked whether satisfaction surveys across the parish councils within RBWM or the larger town and city councils across England where data could be collected. Stephen Hedges replied that the best guide to a satisfaction survey would be the local elections every four years, whereby residents could vote out local councillors if they were unsatisfied with the way things were being managed. He informed that parish/town councils, due to being very local, tended to be attuned to the views of residents. He added that larger parish/town councils sometimes carried out satisfaction surveys on specific issues, such as a ground maintenance or street light services.

When Nigel Griffin requested that the Forum ask for some money to get some stuff done, the Chair replied that it would be investigated on what could be done.

Sue, a resident, asked whether the extra level of governance would lead to the increase in the community charge to cover the extra expenditure. The Chair replied that this would be agreed

with a town council. At the moment, as Windsor was an unparished area, there was unparished precept as part of the Council Tax. She suggested that this unparished precept could be increased to provide further money in Windsor. Under a town council, the costs of the services that the town council would manage would be examined, which would then determine the precept.

Councillor K. Davies explained that, if a town council were to be established, the first year of its existence (2027-28), the Borough Council would determine the responsibilities in which the parish/town council would take over for the first year. It would start small and work its way up, such as managing allotments and parks and play areas. Once the parish/town council had been elected and councillors had been elected, a budget would be set accordingly whereby the money in which the Borough would have spent on would be transferred to the new town/parish council. In subsequent years, the parish/town council and its new councillors would then be able to set their own precept, and also negotiate with the Borough on any further responsibilities it would like to take on.

Councillor K. Davies added that there was no separate money for Windsor at the moment which was not being spent already. Instead, the money went into the general budget. The Chair mentioned that funds needed to be requested, citing the Forum's terms of reference.

In regard to Borough Ward borders, Councillor Buckley asked whether there would be consideration to bring all borders between Windsor's unparished areas and neighbouring parished areas under review, namely Old Windsor and Bolton, rather than Bray only to ensure fairness. Councillor K. Davies responded that Bolton was under the Old Windsor Borough Ward but was not under Old Windsor Parish Council. Because of this, Bolton would be included in the community governance review as an unparished area. She added that there some houses in the Clewer and Dedworth West Ward which were under Bray Parish Council but in a Windsor Borough Ward.

Responding to Sue's question on additional costs to running a town council, Councillor Price stated that there would be some costs, such as employing a parish clerk, but believed the budget would be "quite miniscule".

Councillor A. Tisi, Vice-Chair, thanked Stephen Hedges for his presentation, stating that it put into context the potential size of a town council to encompass Windsor as well as the work needed to create one.

Jim commented that the deadline for 2027 was not too far away to make the preparations, pointing out that it would take a year to do the community governance review and consultation (and arrange one), and then determine the direction of the parish/town council. He suggested that communication with residents should be "stepped-up".

Lautaro (from Busy Buttons CORE charity) asked how residents could get involved in influencing the idea of a town council for Windsor. The Chair pointed out that there was the Windsor Town Council Steering Group, which was composed of residents and chaired by Richard Endacott (who was in attendance).

In spite of the long distant 2027 deadline, Councillor K. Davies reassured that the process had already started as there was much preparatory work to do within the Borough. She added there would be much more engagement with residents, and that there was an exploration of opportunities to encourage engagement beyond those who were already interested in a town council, such as using social media.

Jim conveyed that more residents could be engaged through the use of, for example, social media. He added that there could be emotive-based responses in contrast to being financial or political, and therefore suggested the Borough should consider the emotional content in terms of talking to people. Councillor K. Davies responded that there would be engagement with

residents without any predetermined outcomes. She added that there was a legal process to follow as well.

John Webb wondered whether the core functions could only be the cemeteries and allotments and then the “nice things” could be added, with the taxpayers deciding whether to fund, for example, hanging baskets and Christmas lights in contrast to parks which could be left with the Borough to manage. Councillor K. Davies replied that it was not the case that parish/town councils could only do nothing but hanging baskets and other “nice things”, stating that they would have to take on some level of function.

Stephen Hedges confirmed that parish/town council had the responsibility with allotments under legislation, but this was currently handled by the Borough in Windsor as it was unparished. In regard to the services being managed by a town/parish council in Windsor, Stephen Hedges conveyed the question which needed to be asked amongst Forum members and residents was why a town council would not be providing the services for its residents, particularly if it was raising the funds for those services. He also informed that this was a long and complex process and would require the Borough to expend some resources as it may need to change some of its internal practices. He conveyed that the parish/town council’s functions and responsibilities was not exclusively about the “nice things”, and strongly advised against creating a Windsor town council on these grounds as parish/town councils had certain responsibilities and would need to deliver services in the local area.

Steve Lowe conveyed that RBWM would need to use all of the channels available as part of building awareness and educating residents, stating that social media cannot be relied on (or at least a single platform). Councillor K. Davies reassured that RBWM would be using a variety of methods and platforms as part of this process.

(Kirsty Hunt left the meeting at 7:37pm)

Town Manager Update

Paul Roach, Windsor and Eton Town Centre Manager, presented his Town Manager update. With the average footfall count, the figures for 2022-23 were slightly above the figures for 2018-19 (pre-Covid). Paul Roach highlighted these were general average figures of the movement of people through Peascod Street rather than actual figures, showcasing a general trend. Illustrated by the graph in the presentation, there was usually a peak in footfall at around July and August, followed by a decline as summer holidays end and school reopen. The footfall in September 2023 was higher compared to September 2019.

Paul Roach then gave the headline data up to the week commencing 29th October 2023:

- Total number of visitors to Windsor Town Centre External for the last 52 weeks was 7.4 million (3.5% increase compared to 2022).
- The total number of visitors in 2023 so far was 6.1 million (3.9% increase compared to 2022).
- Total number of visitors to Windsor Town Centre External in the week commencing 23rd October 2023 was 139,000.
- The busiest day in the week commencing 23rd October was Saturday 28th October 2023 with 22,293 visitors.
- The peak hour of the week was 15:00 on Sunday 29th October 2023 with footfall being 3,270.

Car parking in September 2023 had decreased by 18% (in contrast to the error of 40% in the presentation) with the total number of users being around 77,283 users. It was usually expected for car parking usage to decrease at around September of each year. Meanwhile, coach parking had increased of 120% (1,311 users), an increase in comparison to 2022 (595 users).

In terms of Vacancy Rates, the national average had increased by 13.9%, compared to 13.8% in the last Forum meeting in September 2023. In spite of this, the vacancy rate in Windsor was static at 9.4% with a lack of movement compared to the last Forum meeting. In terms of movement:

- The recently vacated units in the last month included Neal's Yard Remedies and FG Pymm and Son Funeral Director. Paul Roach was uncertain of the context for the sudden closure of the Neal's Yard Remedies unit in Windsor, as they were still operating in other towns and cities, whether it was only restricted to their Windsor branch or a wider consolidation.
- The recently opened stores included Card Factory and French Kiss (formerly Madame POSH) in Peascod Street. Coffee Gallery was about to open in the former Coral unit.
- The units which were offered or under development were Halifax, Newlook (Mango), Patisserie Valarie, Coral, and Cath Kidston.

Paul Roach then explained the Christmas programme within the Borough. The Christmas campaign was launched on 1st November 2023 with the use of the hashtag #MyFestiveRoyalBorough being encouraged by RBWM's partners, providing a central base for people to reflect, add or support some of the Borough's work. The hashtag was usable across multiple social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram.

Similar to last year, an electronic copy of the Christmas brochure (designed by a business partner) was available alongside hard copies being distributed at the Visitor Information Centre, most of the libraries and all public buildings. There was encouragement for residents to use the digital copy of the brochure. The brochure contained many activities which were scheduled to take place across not only Windsor but across the whole of the Borough.

The activities scheduled to take place outside of Windsor included:

- 25th November 2023, Peascod Street: **Windsor Christmas Vegan Fiesta.**
- 26th November 2023 (10:30am), Pinder Hall, Cookham: **Cookham Christmas Market.**
- 26th November 2023 (1:00pm), Clewer Memorial Recreation Ground: **Clewer and Dedworth Christmas Fair**
- 3rd December 2023, Roux at Skindles Brasserie: **Roux at Skindles Brasserie Christmas Market**
- 8th December 2023, Cookham Dean Village Hall: **Cookham Dean Meter Market – Christmas Special**

The events scheduled to take place in Windsor itself were:

- 16th November 2023 (5:00pm), Eton High Street: **Eton Christmas Lights Switch-on**
- 18th November 2023 (1:00pm), Castle Hill, Windsor: **Windsor Christmas Lights Switch-on**
- 19th November 2023 (12:00pm), Sunninghill High Street: **Sunninghill Street Fayre**
- 25th November 2023 (11:00am), Maidenhead Town Centre: **Maidenehad Christmas Lights Switch-on and Christmas Market**

Paul Roach highlighted to residents that they could go to the [Visit Windsor website](#) and download the programme.

Other big events included:

- 11th November to 24th December 2023, Whitmoor Forest, Ascot: **LaplandUK** (sold out).
- 16th November 2023 to 2nd January 2024, The Savill Garden, Windsor Great Park: **Windsor Great Park Illuminated.**

- 17th November 2023 to 7th January 2024, Alexandra Gardens, Windsor: **Windsor on Ice.**
- 18th, 19th, 25th and 26th November and 2nd, 3rd 16th and 24th December, Daniel Department Store, Windsor: **Santa's Grotto Experience.**
- 10th, 17th, 19th and 24th December 2023, St Mary's Church, Maidenhead: **Carol Services at St Mary's Maidenhead.**
- 10th December 2023, The Old Court: **The Nutcracker.**
- 12th December 2023, Norden Farm Centre for the Arts: **The Albion Christmas Band.**
- 13th December 2023, Norden Farm Centre for the Arts: **Maidenhead Concert Band.**
- 13th to 17th December 2023, Holyport Memorial Hall, The Snow Queen, Maidenhead Drama Guild: **The Snow Queen, Maidenhead Drama Guild.**

There were opportunities for late-night shopping in the coming weeks. Paul Roach also highlighted that Christmas trees could be bought at the Crown Estate.

Paul Roach informed that printed copies of brochures could be requested from him. In addition, brochures would be distributed in public areas. He also informed that only 5,000 copies were printed to reduce the wastage of paper.

Referring to a question from a resident on an update in regard to Windsor Yards, Paul Roach informed that the Windsor Yards development, approved at the Planning Committee in April 2023, was a complex development as it was a mixed-use site, including elements of a hotel, a retail, leisure space, cinema and car park improvements. As a result, there were multiple landowners which were linked to the area or located near it. Because of this, the Planning and Legal Teams were going through a lengthy process in ensuring that the legal documents and the set conditions for development as it progressed were correct. While April 2023 was a while ago, Paul Roach conveyed that this was not uncommon for a development on this size. He did not possess a date for when the works would be completed; but reassured that the Planning and Legal Teams were working as quickly as they could, adding that there was a balancing process which acquired approval from developers and RBWM.

Paul Roach highlighted that Windsor Yards was a sensitive part of Windsor with some sensitive issues around some of the landowners and parts of the development. He also added that there was a large service road underneath which needed to be maintained and kept open as it was used by people who did not use Windsor Yards (i.e., properties on Peascod Street) alongside those who did.

(Councillor Buckley left the meeting at 8:24pm)

Donald, a resident, asked why information on train usage in Windsor and Eton Riverside and Windsor and Eton Central station was not published in contrast to information on cars and coaches. While having asked them for regular footfall data, Paul Roach replied that the train stations were only able to provide annual data at the moment due to the methodology in how they collected them which made it difficult for them to forward monthly updates.

Donald then asked if there was any intention to improve the street lighting on Thames Street and the High Street, particularly around The Ivy Windsor. Paul Roach answered that there was a general upgrade of street lighting taking place across the Borough, including Windsor. However, he was uncertain about the two lantern lights near The Ivy (as well as those near the Guildhall and Windsor Parish Church) as the whole lantern would need to be replaced. He stated that he would take this question away and investigate.

ACTION: Paul Roach to investigate information on any improvements to lantern lights in Windsor.

John Bowden, a resident and former RBWM Councillor, asked how coach park usage was measured, namely whether it was based on tickets being bought. Paul Roach confirmed that it was based on the number of tickets being bought, whether bought in advance or when the services were being used. He added that the Town Management Team could not monitor coaches which simply dropped off and drove away without parking, whether based on arrangements or to avoid the coach parking fee.

John Bowden then highlighted that some coaches avoid parking charges and there was no way to monitor this. He also highlighted the pollution being produced by the large diesel coaches within residential areas. He also raised that some coaches were not conforming to road regulations on not turning right into Arthur Road or coming in from Clarence Road and then cause traffic jams at those junctions. Paul Roach was aware of this issue, stating it was a "constant problem". He stated that considerable work had taken place to direct and communicate with coach drivers to use the Alma Road direction into and out of the coach park. However, a few coaches sometimes took the roads which they were not supposed to drive on as a short cut to the M4 or to take a different direction. While reassuring that most coaches follow the road regulations, it was difficult to have an individual enforce the regulations every day.

When John Bowden suggested the use of barriers or ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition), Paul Roach replied that the Transport Team were potentially trialling ANPR and that some work needed to be done before being implemented.

Councillor Price asked a series of questions:

- Whether free parking was being offered on any nights to encourage Christmas shopping.
- Whether there was any record of what people were spending, hearing that people were spending less than before due to the cost-of-living crisis.
- What were the percentages of visitors who were from overseas.
- Were visitors tending to stay overnight or were the majority of visitors daytime, stating that she heard that there was a strategy to encourage more people to stay overnight.

Paul Roach replied that there were no plans for free Christmas-period car parking outside of the current offer for Borough residents of free parking during the first hour, speculating that the Borough was not in a financial position to afford anything beyond this (though added that he would need to confirm this with the Parking Team). In regard to the number of visitors, overseas spending and overnight stay, he stated that he would need to refer to Julia White from the Visitor Marketing Team, on the details. In terms of spending, especially with retailers, there had been a mixed range depending on the sector, from coffee shop to jewellery retail, adding that retailers were sensitive about spending and how well they were doing. Paul Roach suspected that, while the situation was not terrible, some retailers were not getting as much as they expected and that they hoped to get more from visitors. He added that he had not received any negative feedback from retailers on not achieving their targets. On overnight stays, he stated that he would take this away and investigate the answer.

ACTION: Paul Roach to investigate information on visitor overseas spending and overnight stays.

Councillor A. Tisi asked whether a more sensitive footfall system was being used in the Town Centre, as he previously mentioned at the last Forum meeting, and whether this was presenting any extra useful data. Paul Roach confirmed that the new footfall system was being used. He suggested that he could present the new visitor insights at the next Forum meeting, stating that new system reported in the millions (in contrast to the previous hundreds of thousands). He explained that the new system effectively picked up almost everyone who came into the Town Centre in a much wider catchment, covering people who walked by the River Thames, by Windsor-Eton Bridge, in green spaces, Alexander Gardens and Bachelor's Acre; adding that the footfall count in which he generally presented was on Peascod Street only. While there were football counters in the shopping centres, such as Windsor Yards and

Windsor Royal Station, this new system would cover these areas as well the coach park. The new system provided more credible data as it captured everything.

Lautaro (from Busy Buttons) asked whether charities could advertise events and activities for locals as part of the Christmas programme, or whether this was purely commercial, or a fee had to be paid. Paul Roach replied that the programme was not purely commercial and that it included non-profit community activities, such as lights switch-on being arranged by local community associations and Eton Town Council. He informed that requests for the programme would be sent out in July to acquire information as soon as possible, particularly as the programme had grown larger. He also informed that most hotels had confirmed their Christmas activities at around April/May annually; and that the Town Management Team sought to receive programme information at around that time. While there was no restriction on who could be added to the programme and the Team sought to fit in everyone, Paul Roach informed that the brochure had a page limit (around 24 pages). He advised that interested parties needed to forward their information as early as possible in the year.

Lautaro followed up by asking where organisations could reach out to raise awareness of events. Paul Roach advised that the main place to go to would be the [Visit Windsor](#) website, whereby events and activities could be added and shared. He also pointed towards the #MyRoyalBorough, which was designed to support businesses by using social media to promote particular events.

Vision for Windsor

(Chris Joyce, Assistant Director of Infrastructure Sustainability and Economic Growth, was unable to attend the meeting. As a result, this item was postponed.)

Resident Questions and Item Suggestions for Next Forum

Sue asked about the projected final cost for the road resurfacing outside Henry VIII Gate at Windsor Castle. Uncertain about the answer, the Chair suggested that the answer could be investigated.

Sue elaborated by wondering if the Council believed the project had been a worthwhile and justified expenditure. While it was a historic decision, Councillor A. Tisi believed that much of the costs had been paid for by the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). She invited John Bowden, as a former RBWM Councillor, to explain as the project was decided under his watch.

As far as he was aware, John Bowden explained that the Local Enterprise Board, which was funded by central government, provided £1 million to the costs, with £300,000 added from the community investment levy (Section 106).

Sue then asked whether there was a particular justification for spending money for the block paving near the Henry VIII Gate. John Bowden replied that this part of a necessity for security outside Windsor Castle, in addition to the barriers at Park Road, Sheet Street, Thames Street and Victoria Street, for the changing of the guard and people congregating outside the Castle. He referred to the terror attacks in 2018 (e.g., Nice, France) which involved the assailant driving a vehicle into crowds. He highlighted that this was a national decision and that this was in a conservation area of national heritage.

While understanding of the barriers, Sue reiterated her query on the expenditure of road refurbishment in contrast to a less expensive solution, stating that the development had been going on for months and had caused disruption. She felt that this had been an “awful over-expenditure” of a development which could have been enhanced in a less expensive way.

John Bowden countered that he was informed by an infrastructure officer that the subsurface needed special attention whereby the drains, water works, and electricity cables were underneath. He added that senior individuals had made certain decisions which influenced the development, including a certain approach in securing the area as well as the Windsor Castle requesting that a certain material.

Sue then conveyed that it was “peculiar” that the road was laid with bricks, followed by three-to-four square feet being lifted out to install the barriers. She asked whether the barriers could have been installed first and then the bricks be laid. She also heard that the cost was £5 million and then asked where the addition money came from on top of the Borough’s original £1.3 million. The Chair suggested that the total costs could be investigated.*

**Post-meeting update: The whole project was £2.4 million, jointly funded between the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and RBWM with Castle Hill providing the bulk of this finance.*

Nigel Griffin stated that there was a large area of Windsor which had been underutilised in terms of development for seven to eight years. He asked whether the inhabitations to development of this area was caused by planning or by developers. After receiving clarification from Nigel Griffin that the aforementioned area was the site off Alma Road, Councillor Wilson responded that there was a planning application which had been validated and that there was another application being prepared for (though not in pre-planning stage). He speculated that the developers rather than the Planning Department were the cause.

Nigel Griffin then asked if something could be done, such as place pressure on the developers. Councillor A. Tisi informed that there was a public session at the Old Court where the developers had new plans which they were seeking to submit for a very large development, including housing for over-65s. She believed that the original planning permission was granted on appeal due to its unpopularity amongst locals, but this then had fallen away and had likely expired as this took place before Covid (pre-2020). She added that, while it had been stalled, developers would develop when they had the money and the will to do so.

Ian Hague, a resident, commented that the current plan was approved on appeal and the work had begun, but there had been no major development in the last few years, stating that this slow process was appalling. He added that new developers had come forward with alternative plans which would either go through the Old Courts or the Planning process. He stated that they would include an extra floor which would obscure green spaces.

Councillor A. Tisi mentioned that applications could be found on the [Planning Portal](#), and that residents could submit comments. Then the large developments would be put forward to the Windsor Development Management Committee (Planning) where parish councils, relevant bodies and residents could make comments and make representations.

John Bowden explained that the previous Imperial House had been demolished, which then left a vacant site that was then purchased by a freeholder, who then submitted a planning application in 2015 for three blocks of flats and a 7-900-foot office block. This was turned down by the Planning committee and then went to appeal. After around two years, he explained, permission was granted, in which 2017 was the year permission was granted and the developers had three years to do the development. He mentioned that a supplementary application for maintenance was added, extended the permission for an additional three years. Then the site was sold to another developer, who then notified at the Old Courts that they wished to develop several blocks of residential accommodation which was under the auspices of restrictions on whether any SIL money was being used to provide this because it was an age-related property.

John Bowden then informed that the site of the car park was seemingly purchased, and then an application was submitted for the development of four houses. Despite objections from

local residents, it was approved. He then stated that barriers appeared between Vansittart Road and Alma Road which were then knocked down due to a mysterious developer buying the land. He speculated that it would probably be used as an access road.

Councillor Price raised awareness that there was a consultation on [supported bus services on the RBWM website](#). She stated that there was a proposal that there would not be bus services in north-east and south-west of Dedworth and Vale Road. She recommended to spread the word and take part in the survey.

While appreciative of the [response to the consultation](#) being provided, Councillor W. Da Costa reiterated his request for an officer to attend the Forum to present and to then answer questions behind the context behind the response and how concerns from residents in regard to aircraft noise could be pushed forward.

Date and Location of Next Meeting

The Forum noted that the next meeting would be held on 11th January 2024 at 6:30pm at York House, Windsor. The subsequent meeting dates (all 6:30pm) were:

- 12th March 2024
- 8th May 2024

The meeting, which began at 6.31 pm, finished at 9.00 pm

Chair.....

Date.....