

## RURAL FORUM

Tuesday 14 November 2023

Present: Councillors Mark Howard (Chair), Mandy Brar, Richard Coe and Karen Davies.

Present (Virtual): Councillor George Blundell

Also in attendance: Councillor Helen Price, PI Stuart Hutchings

Officers: Will Ward, Laurence Ellis, Andrew Durrant, Jason Mills, Jesal Dhokia and Sumayyah Zeib.

### Election of a Chair for the Forum

Councillor Brar nominated Councillor Howard as Chair. This was seconded Councillor Davies. No other nominations were received.

**AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: Councillor Mark Howard to be Chair of Rural Forum.**

### Chair's Introduction

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Meeting attendees then introduced themselves.

### Apologies For Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor K. Singh and Parish Councillor Barbara Story.

### Declaration Of Interest

Councillor Coe declared that he was a member of the Marine Management Organisation.

### Minutes

**AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2023 were a true and accurate record.**

### Update on action points of last meeting

The Chair read out the actions from the last meeting, asking for updates.

For the first update, the Chair asked about the clerk to look into alerting the agenda. Laurence Ellis, Democratic Services Officer and clerk of the previous meeting answered that the agenda had been changed, and that it would be discussed at the present meeting of the Forum. Chair in response stated that they would move item 9 to item 6.

The second update was for the officer to formulate action plans for farm visits. This was addressed in the third point.

The third action point was for Vice-Chair William Emmett and Nick Philp to correlate farming data and forward to Jason Mills, Natural Environment Manager. Jason Mills responded by

stating that a farming questionnaire had been sent out to farmers, and that they were awaiting responses. Although some farmers attending the Forum stated that they had not seen a questionnaire, it was decided to send the questionnaire out to all farmers on the Borough's contact list.

**ACTION: Send out farming questionnaire to farmers of the borough.**

The fourth action point was for members of the Rural Forum to be invited to the Community Safety and Crime Summit. Andrew Durrant, Executive Director of Place, stated that all members of the Rural forum were invited to participate.

Maria Evans was invited to speak to the Forum by Councillor Davies on a local solar panel scheme in First Platt. Maria Evans stated that over £250,000 was raised for the scheme, and that it was one of the most successful in the Borough. The Chair in response asked if Maria Evans could be invited back to talk in greater detail about the scheme at the next Forum meeting. Councillor Davies also stated to the Forum that she had possession of a Climate Supplement document. This document detailed the councils plans, to improve the environment going forward. It was decided that this document would be shared with members of the forum.

**ACTION: An update on solar power, with link to climate supplement document, to be added to the next Rural Forum meeting.**

Future Direction of Rural Forum

A presentation on the World Café and Innovation Fund was delivered by Sumayyah Zeib, Community Engagement Officer, to the Forum. Sumayyah Zeib explained that World Cafes are informal networking events where residents were invited to discuss what their priorities and concerns were in their local area.

A World Café event was held in every single ward across the Borough:

- **19** events held across 14 months.
- In total, **739** residents attended.
- Average **8.8** rating for events by residents

An evaluation and outcomes report would be written up after each event, summarising key themes, feedback from residents and stakeholders and an overall rating of each event.

Alongside the World Café programme, £100,000 of Innovation funding was made available from a joint pot between RBWM and NHS Frimley to any health-related project ideas emerging from the World Café events. Any interested applicants would be required to submit an application to access the Innovation Fund.

As of the meeting, there were 29 community-led projects funded across the Borough; 23 projects were ongoing, and 6 groups were on Community Lottery.

Further information Innovation Fund could be found on the [RBWM Together webpage](#).

Sumayyah Zeib then went through the prominent World Café themes which came out of each Borough ward based on the reports as well as some of the projects which were taking place. They included:

- **Ascot and Sunninghill**
  - World Café Themes: Transport and active travel, social isolation, and access to information.
  - Projects: All Souls Church – Ascot
- **Bisham and Cookham**
  - World Café Themes: Social isolation, mental health, cost of living and Cookham community

- Projects: Odd One Out
- **Bray**
  - World Café Themes: Transport and active travel, mental health, and physical environment
  - Projects: Walking Cricket – Holyport Cricket Club
- **Datchet, Horton and Wraysbury**
  - World Café Themes: NHS accessibility, transport and active travel, community and road safety, and social isolation.
  - Projects: Datchet, Horton and Wraysbury Health Hub
- **Eton and Castle**
  - World Café Themes: Cost of living and social isolation
  - Projects: Eton Community Association; St John the Baptist Church Community Activities – Eton Wick
- **Murley and Walthams**
  - World Café Themes: NHS accessibility, community and road safety, social isolation, and access to information and support
  - Projects: Jolly Codgers Lunch Club
- **Old Windsor**
  - World Café Themes: Cost of living, access to information and support
- **Sunningdale and Cheapside**
  - World Café Themes: Social isolation and transport and active travel

There was an additional £50,000 of seed funding through the Innovation Fund, which would be split by £2,500 per Borough ward and Councillors were encouraged to help promote this. Sumayyah Zeib then concluded that anyone with any project ideas could be signed posted to the [RBWM Innovation Fund webpage](#)

Geoffrey Copas stated that while the work of the innovation and World Café were important, the forum in his opinion should be focused on issues affecting farmers, not on issues affecting the local rural communities.

Councillor Davies asked Jesal Dhokia, Strategic Lead for Communities, what the overwhelming themes were coming out from the research conducted in the wards, especially in relation to future items for the agenda. Jesal Dhokia stated that there would probably be items for future agendas.

**ACTION: Share the report with Forum attendees.**

Councillor Brar thanked Jesal Dhokia and Sumayyah Zeib for the presentation, Councillor Brar asked the Chair if social isolation, mental health, and transportation could be added to the next agenda. The Chair agreed with Councillor Brar.

**ACTION: Social Isolation, Mental Health and Transportation to be added to next agenda.**

Geoffrey Copas stated that while he understood the importance of mental health and other issues related to that, he reiterated that he did not think the Rural Forum was the appropriate place.

The Chair responded by reading the terms of reference, highlighting that “(ii) Provide a local Forum for discussion about the aspirations and concerns of farmers, rural businesses and other representatives from the rural community of the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead District; (iii) Provide a networking opportunity amongst a variety of rural interests; (iv) Act as a consultative, information sharing/gathering arena’.”

Councillor Davies stated that the Forum did not want to exclude farmers but expand to wider issues facing the rural community going forward.

Vice Chair William Emmett commented that the Forum had done good work, but it was important to expand the Forum to other rural issues.

Speakers from the public gallery emphasised that discussions should also include landowners.

Councillor Coe stated that the Forum needed to include all members of the rural community of RBWM and not only farmers.

### Biodiversity Action Plan

Jason Mills, Natural Environment Manager, reintroduced the Forum to the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), a Borough-wide plan adopted by RBWM Council six months prior. The BAP included habitat action plans (HAPs), which included grasslands, woodlands etc. After some feedback and consultation through the Rural Forum, the farmland HAP was re-reviewed. From this, Jason Mills believed that the actions which would be expected in a farmland HAP were already covered by national schemes, such as many farms being engaged in the Countryside Stewardship Schemes. Based on this, it was decided that no need in replicating on what was already going on at a national level. Instead, the BAP was to facilitate support to farms with these schemes, such as signpost volunteers to help on farms, to help achieve the overall targets of the BAP.

The Chair concurred with Jason Mills, stating that it was important that the BAP was tailored to RBWM needs.

James Copas stated that Copas Farms were working with Wild Cookham already and the local community. Other members of the public attending the Forum added that they would be willing to help with the Biodiversity Action Plan.

Councillor Brar expressed her support for the idea of people volunteering to help farmers.

Robert Miles, from the National Trust, stated that while they have volunteers, they would like to encourage more volunteers to help at Clifton House.

Vice-Chair William Emmett asked if it would be possible if a volunteer list could be shared with framers. The Chair agreed and asked the Clerk to do so.

**ACTION: Share the volunteer list with farmers.**

### Update on Rural Crime

Police Inspector Stuart Hutchings, Thames Valley Police (TVP), gave an update to the Forum on rural crime in the Borough. He emphasised how important it was for farmers to report incidents to the Police so that they could keep track of crime in the local area. He also told the Forum that rural crime was increasing, not decreasing, and that the situation was likely to continue to deteriorate. He emphasised to attendees that it was important to properly register their farming equipment with local police forces, especially the serial number of the equipment.

PI Stuart Hutchings emphasised that engagement with the local rural community was important but that the police could only respond to crime if it is reported by the local community, and that the police were trying to use new technologies, such as WhatsApp, to engage with farmers.

Nick Philp thanked PI Stuart Hutchings for his attendance at the Forum. He commented that he had worked with the police recently due to incidents taking place on his farm. He took note that many officers were slow to respond. This was primarily because they had to report into their local stations before coming to his farm. He expressed concern that because of the large

area which Thames Valley Police covered, there was a lack of local knowledge around the Maidenhead area, in particular in relation to rural crime.

PI Stuart Hutchings responded by stating that TVP used a wide variety of methods to tackle rural crime, and that the officer who dealt with rural crime had extensive experience.

Alan Keene asked about the promise of the previous administration to fund additional officers. Councillor Coe stated that this would not be taken forward due to the financial situation.

Vice-Chair William Emmett welcomed PI Stuart Hutchings statements on more police engagement with the farming community. He did however state that many farmers found it confusing who to call in the event of a crime in progress. PI Stuart Hutchings clarified that the best response for a crime in progress was 999.

Paul Rinder, a farmer from Holyport, stated that he had seen drones flying over his farm and that he was unsure of what number to call in cases which were non-emergency. PI Stuart Hutchings advised to report such incidents on 101 as TVP could then record such incidents.

The Chair thanked PI Stuart Hutchings and asked the clerk for Thames Valley Police to be invited again to the next Forum meeting in March 2024 and present another update on rural crime.

**ACTION: Invite Thames Valley Police to give update on rural crime at next Rural Forum meeting in March 2024.**

#### Update From The Farming Community

Nick Philp delivered the update from the farming community to the Forum. In his presentation, he summarised the activities of local farmers and challenges which they were experiencing.

Nick Philp detailed what finished products were produced by farms in the Maidenhead area, this included cereal flours, rapeseed, and linseed oils, malting barley, and oats.

Nick Philp similarly detailed what livestock were kept by farmers in the Borough, including bovine (i.e., cattle), equine (i.e., horses) and sheep. He highlighted that the Borough only had one active dairy herd.

Nick Philp detailed the type of poultry that was farmed in the Borough, this included turkeys, chickens and ducks. He also went on to detail what vegetables were grown in the Borough which included strawberries, kale and raspberries.

Nick Philp also explained about diversification efforts from farmers, such as 'pick your own', and clay pigeon shooting. He also noted that the UK government was supporting such diversification efforts.

Nick Philp stated that farmers needed more support from the Council in their efforts to diversify. He also highlighted how farmers were helping to protect the environment, by cultivating wildflowers. Nick Philp then highlighted issues faced by farmers, these included Bovine TB, vandalism, and issues around rights of way.

Councillor Davies asked what future items could be included on the agenda in relation to the farming community. Nick Philp stated that the Planning process and the issues surrounding it was a major issue. Both the Chair and Councillor K. Davies suggested to invite the head of Planning to the next meeting.

**ACTION: Invite RBWM Planning officers to the next Forum meeting in March 2024.**

Any Other Business

Councillor Price informed the Forum about the Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy, inviting farmers to participate.

Dates Of Future Meetings

The Chair confirmed that the next meeting of the Forum would be on the 19<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

The meeting, which began at 5.30 pm, finished at 7.00 pm

Chair.....

Date.....