

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE WIGSTON RESIDENTS' FORUM HELD AT THYTHORN HILL COMMUNITY CENTRE, GEORGEHAM CLOSE, WIGSTON, LE18 2HZ ON WEDNESDAY, 14 FEBRUARY 2024 COMMENCING AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT

G A Boulter Chair



Meeting ID: 2594

COUNCILLORS

L A Bentley
M H Charlesworth
J K Ford
C S Gore
K J Loydall
C J R Martin

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

PC G Morgan Leicestershire Police
M Smith Community Safety & Youth Officer

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

50. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Item 45, Billy Cox's Shop: The Civic Society did not apply for the shop to be listed with Historic England but as an asset of Community Value. The Historic England applicant is an architect living in St. Ives, Cornwall.

Minutes were declared true and accurate with the above alteration.

51. POLICE UPDATE

PC G Morgan noted that from a policing perspective the Christmas period was 'fairly successful' with a reduction in burglaries noted in the Borough following arrests made.

Social media posts have been circulating regarding care homes potentially neglecting their duties with individuals going missing. Some residents have been offered compensation in respect of the impact of this on them.

Shoplifting around Bell Street remains high but underreported, Sainsburys hired additional security over the festive period.

ASB is maintaining with the Police and Partners keeping a close eye on hotspot areas and reports received.

Residents raised queries around cameras on houses and how far they can legally view. The law highlights that cameras can not intentionally be aimed at a neighbouring property;

in practice however cameras have quite wide lenses however and neighbouring properties are likely to be captured as 'collateral'. The intention of the camera is what affects its legality, with there being no expectation of privacy in a public space. The resident clarified that they were referring to a camera mounted on a property that they believe has line of sight to a school playground; if this were to be reported to the Police then a neighbourhood officer may be assigned to look into it.

52. COUNCIL BUDGET 2024-25

OWBC finds itself in a difficult financial situation with costs to the Council having risen more over the last 12 months than expected, including the pay increase, cost of living, and homelessness related expenditure. 62 families are currently in temporary accommodation which has cost approximately. £600k that was not budgeted for. Rough sleepers have to be accommodated by the Council when the temperature drops to a certain level which has also been the case this year. The Council has a statutory obligation regarding homelessness but the money the Council can receive to support property rental in regards to this tends to be, on average, £200 lower than current market rental rates. The Council has also had to pay for Bed and Breakfast accommodation for some families which is not ideal for them, as well as increasing costs to the Council, due to a lack of available properties. Some of the Council's owned properties are having to be utilised as temporary accommodation. The Chair also noted the difficulties this causes the Council's Housing Teams in the decisions they are forced to make.

The Council has little choice but to make tough decisions in respect of its budget in order to avoid having to issue a 114 notice stating the Council bankrupt. If this were to occur then inspectors would take over control of the council and increase council tax by up to 10%, cut services, and move bin collections to a fortnightly basis. The Council has to legally produce a balanced budget. In previous years the Council has used its reserves to do this but they are now at too low a level to utilise for this. Thurrock Council is known to be raising Council Tax by 15% under the direction of the inspectors.

Car parking charges, green waste collection charges, fortnightly bin collections, are all required in order to produce a balanced budget. It is known this will upset residents.

By 2026 every Council will be required to do a weekly food waste collection; originally central government would part fund this but it is now expected to be fully funded by OWBC. The Council is also required to reduce its carbon footprint which fortnightly collections will enable. Electric waste wagons are not very effective and cost a large amount to purchase. Hydro-fuels are also being considered as a future option.

Central government will also be implementing a standard recycling service nationally which may change how the service operates locally. All recycling currently goes to CasePak, with OWBC being the collection agency and LCC being the disposal agency in charge of the contract. If this contract changes there may be additional charges for OWBC. By law no waste can be left in the wagons overnight so they must be emptied the same day.

POPS (soft furnishings) can no longer be picked up by the existing wagon and must be picked up by a dedicated vehicle that goes to an alternate disposal site.

The cost of white goods collections have increased but the cost is aimed to be competitive to prevent fly-tipping. Garden waste collections now cost £60 per year; this is middle of the range for the charge across the County.

By making these changes the Council will not be declared bankrupt.

Central Government provides the Council 1 year's settlement which makes forecasting for budgets a difficult process. With elections coming up there is no clear picture on how or if this will change.

With the increase in car parking charges residents queried as to whether there would be a surcharge on their existing permits from April; it was confirmed this wouldn't be the case. Residents were also concerned that to park in each town centre additional permits are required at an extra cost. The Chair noted that many Councillors felt that residents parked in their own town centres the majority of the time and that the payment machines provide flexibility for parking in other areas.

Residents raised concerns around the size of their existing bins with the changes to fortnightly collections. The bins are bought through the Council's capital budget whereas the collection service is funded through the revenue one. Fortnightly collections would be introduced from September in order for officers to consider all elements of this decision and planning for it. Residents believe that bin collections will be household waste one week and recycling the next, and queried as to could it be both bins on the same fortnightly collection for ease. Council officers have yet to fully decide on the collection rotation. The refuse workforce is also likely to be reduced.

Cllr. Gore highlighted that some of the car parking machines are not working and these are discouraging residents from parking in the Council's car parks. The Chair noted that the machines are currently being upgraded from both a software perspective and to a hardwired electricity connection.

The amount of work expected of Council Officers has also increased as staffing levels are reduced.

All local authorities have to have a statutory external audit which was previously supported in cost by central government at £65k per year. This cost has now increased by 151% and has to be funded by OWBC which has further added to the budget pressures. This is the same for all authorities.

The Police are also facing reductions of around 200 employees. The Police precept of Council Tax is increasing by £13.00, which is 14% higher than the previous precept in Council Tax bills.

Resident raised the point that the media tends to not report on the pressure Central Government is placing on local authorities through the budget cuts they are implementing. Councils are expected to raise the majority of their funds through other routes. Covid had a large impact on Council budgets with Council's having been asked to spend whatever was necessary to make communities safe on the proviso that the money would be paid back; the money was never paid back however.

The Police's wage increase of approx. 6% also had to be funded out of a budget that was not going to receive an increase from Central Government. This was the same for local authorities with the pay award for employees, and pay rises for NHS staff.

This information is publicly available but not widely known by residents; this means that residents are not always aware of where their complaints are best placed when the Council

has to cut services or increase charges.

Cllr. Loydall raised as a point of accuracy that, through his role on the Police and Crime Panel, he is aware of significant changes in the role the Police are expected to play in preventing crime and disorder, including a focus on cybercrime and other emerging priorities. The Police target is 2298 new officers, the current rate is 2242 officers, this is a net reduction still in police officers from the initial cuts several years ago. Council Tax funds 257 Police Officers from collections from residents, not additional funding from central government.

Residents expressed frustration that central government is reducing this funding without necessarily explaining why to the public.

Residents asked what happens with the funding raised from the sale of Bushloe House. The building is sold subject to contract, with planning permission being sought. Funds raised through this enter into the Council's capital budget which will pay for the cost of the new Brocks Hill offices.

Residents asked if the Council has been in touch with any authorities that have already issued 114 notices to see what measures they have been asked to implement by inspectors. Most authorities belong to the Local Government Association who have been lobbying for additional funding for several years to no avail.

53. COUNCIL TAX 2024-25

County Council will not be meeting until next Wednesday to set their Council Tax rates. OWBC will be meeting next Wednesday. LFRS are meeting today to set their budget for 2024-25.

LFRS will increase by £6.60 per year, OWBC £7.38, Police £13.00, and LCC £71.80. OWBC's maximum limit of increase is 2.99%. These prices are for a Band D property.

Residents noted these increases are on top of the Severn Trent increases of around 13% on water bills.

54. FORUM FUNDING REQUESTS UPDATES

Agreed at the Council's PFD Committee meeting on Tues, 6 February;

- Guide Rooms' Shed - £400.00
- Gate at Wigston Cemetery - £350.00

55. SAFER STREETS GRANT

Cllr. Loydall introduced himself as the Chair of the Community Safety Partnership, and M Smith as the Lead Officer.

The Borough was selected as a 'Safer Streets' eligible area by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner in line with Home Office guidance. This enabled the OPCC to submit a bid, developed with input from the Oadby & Wigston Community Safety Partnership, for

Home Office funding to address crime and disorder, with a specific focus on Burglary, in the area. The OPCC highlighted an area of Oadby in the Brocks Hill Ward where a large percentage of this initiative will be focused.

Residents in eligible areas will be able to apply for 'Target Hardening Packs' consisting of items such as video doorbells, CCTV cameras, socket timers, and window shock and contact sensors free of charge under the Safer Streets scheme. Details of how to apply will be shared shortly through the Council's Comms channels and via the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. Previous victims of burglary will be eligible for a 'Cocooning Pack' through Leicestershire Police and will be contacted directly by local officers.

The Safer Streets funding has also enabled a significant enhancement to the redeployable CCTV systems utilised by the Community Safety Partnership, with 15 extra units having been ordered, and works to take place to allow identified street light columns to host the units. Additionally two ANPR equipped speed indicator display units have also been ordered for deployment around the Borough to both combat speeding vehicles in hotspot areas and to detect vehicles linked to crime traveling through the area.

M Smith noted that the CCTV can be live monitored if need be, but the units themselves retain footage for 30 days. The impact of the cameras and signage on ASB cannot be individually quantified due to numerous workstreams, but overall ASB is reducing on average in the Borough year on year from 2015-16.

It was queried as to whether the ANPR will interface with the Police's PNC; there is likely to be a link but as part of the purchase a DVLA plug in has also been optioned.

56. **CHAIR'S UPDATES**

OWBC Local Plan: The plan dictates where houses will be built in the Borough over a specific period of time. 240 houses have to be built within the next period including 52 houses from Leicester City Council who will not meet their required build levels. This is decided under the 'Need to Cooperate' amongst Council's. OWBC has a target of 180 properties and is currently at 140 properties. Land for housing developments needs to be identified for the next 5 years and public input is required. This will be out for consultation shortly and must be agreed by 2025.

D-Day 80th Anniversary Celebrations: Events will take place on 6 June in the Borough. A beacon will be lit at 9:15 at Brocks Hill and entertainment will be present from local schools. Church bells are also hoped to be rang at the same time.

Spion Kop: At some point this will be demolished and another bridge built in a process that could take up to 6 months. A 7.5km detour will be in place for vehicles but a pedestrian footbridge will be provided. There is no agreed start date for these works but it is hoped this would be during the school holidays. No application has been made to LCC as yet for a road closure notice. The detour is expected to be right out to the Pork Pie Island via Pullman Road, West Avenue, Aylestone Lane, and to Saffron Road. Local residents are expected to utilise more direct routes known to them rather than the longer detour. There will be no bus between Wigston and South Wigston.

57. **ITEMS RAISED BY RESIDENTS**

Bus Timetables: Residents complained about the new bus stops and buses not running to the published timetables. The placement of the bus stops in some locations is thought to be dangerous by some residents, and their placements don't make sense. A lot of the work is being directed by the City Council and the bus companies. Cllr. Charlesworth will seek further information on this.

Customer Service Excellence Awards: Some residents were 'amazed' that the Council managed to win an award for its customer service. The 'inaccessibility' of Brocks Hill is one reason why residents are surprised by this, and with the closure of the Customer Service Centre in Bell Street. The Appointment Hubs are not believed by residents to be accessible either as they must be booked by telephone and are at a fixed location on specific days. It was thought that the Brocks Hill reception is not open to the public every day but Members confirmed that it is; there is currently a half hour period where it is closed due to the officer's break but this is being changed so that it can open for the full day. Home visits for individuals by Council Officers can also take place where necessary. The details of the Appointment Hubs were shared with residents who were also provided with a leaflet; this information is also on the Council's website. Most queries made by residents can be answered on the phone. It was confirmed that phone calls for officers who are working remotely go through as if they were in the office itself. The hold music on the Council's phone was noted to be "dire". Accessibility to Brocks Hill for non-drivers was raised as a major concern for residents.

Paddock Street Car Park: The 'no left turn' signage on exiting the car park is not adequate and the road markings require repainting. This was raised with LCC Highways yesterday by the Chair.

Planning Applications appearing in the Weekly Lists: When applications are looked up when the list is published the documents are not always readily available. This has been looked into by the Council already and will be raised again. There are some known delays within the service with documents being uploaded at the same time as the list is being published.

Hawthorn Building on Paddock Street: Unclear what the current works are but permission has been granted for the development of 14-15 supported living units. The current building is thought to be being demolished. Cllr. Bentley will look into this matter.

Nautical William: Planning has been granted for the development of 9 properties on the site.

Spion Kop Railings: The railings are in a poor state and require replacement. A temporary fence has been affixed to one section of them currently. A tree recently fell which has buckled the fence and, whilst the tree has been cleared, the railings are protruding onto the footpath. The Chair noted that the railings belong to Wigston Academy as part of the original site; the Chair has previously spoken with the Executive Head of the Academy about this. Residents hoped that the railings could be replaced during the bridge closure but the Academy previously noted they did not have the funds for this. Network Rail may be able to provide some support with these as a 'goodwill gesture' during the bridge works.

Pavement Parking: A van parked on the pavement on Homestead Avenue is obstructing the view for turning vehicles. There are other vehicles present but the van is the concern. The Police will look at this.

Network Rail Compounds: These were supposed to be removed when the works are completed. The road was opened up to allow lorries to avoid Little Hill. As part of the planning conditions the temporary road and compound should be removed as soon as the bridge works have been completed. The Council will monitor this.

58. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Updates from LFRS requested.

The meeting times of 6:30pm for the surgery and 7pm for the meeting start need to be noted on the Agenda and the forum promotion.

59. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Wednesday, 22 May 2024 – 19:00 – Thythorn Hill Community Centre, Wigston

THE MEETING CLOSED AT 8.26 pm