

18th March 2024

Minutes of the proceedings of the **CIVIC COMMITTEE** meeting held on this day in **the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Wokingham** from 19:25 to 21:20pm.

PRESENT

Chair: Cllr A Mather (Chair)

Councillors: A Betteridge, R Bishop-Firth, W Dixon, M Gee, A Jones (Vice-Chair) and K Malvern.

IN ATTENDANCE

Civic Officer

Mayor's Attendant David Dunham

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr P Cunnington.

MEMBERS' INTERESTS (Agenda Item 2)

Cllr A Jones asked for it to be noted that he is a member of the Wokingham Lions Club, in relation to agenda items 5c,10 and 14a.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OR PUBLIC (Agenda Item 3)

No questions were received.

CIVIC COMMITTEE MINUTES (Agenda Item 4)

It was proposed by Cllr A Mather and seconded by Cllr A Jones and it was

**RESOLVED
30795**

that the Minutes of the Civic Committee meeting held on 20th November 2023 (pages 16867 to 16871), be received as a true and correct record and that they be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

MONITORING REPORT (Agenda Item 5)

The Monitoring Report dated 29th February 2024 was received and noted.

a) Purchase new badge and ribbon for Mini-Mayor

This has now been received and will be removed from the monitoring report next time.

b) To consider the purchase of a new mayoral badge and chain of office at some point in the near future.

A request was made to the Finance and Personnel Committee to put aside £2,000 per year, over the next 5 years for the provision of purchasing a new mayoral chain and badge of office.

A decision was made at the Finance and Personnel meeting on 21st November 2023 to move £8000 from general reserves into an earmarked reserves so that this doesn't have to be considered again in this term of the council.

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To consider options in due course.

Beating the Bounds walk

A request was made to the Finance and Personnel Committee for £4,000, to offer to the Wokingham Lions Club to manage and co-ordinate this.

A decision was made at Finance and Personnel meeting on 21st November 2023 to support this financial request and for it to be taken from general reserves.

See information item 14a.

c) Wokingham Remembers Website

A request was made to the Finance and Personnel Committee for £1,500 as a one-off cost to take on the ownership and hosting of the website, to preserve its history.

A decision was made at the Finance and Personnel Committee on 21st November 2023 to support this one-off cost and for WTC to take on the ownership of this website. Discussions will now begin to take place about this transition and this will be removed from the monitoring report.

d) Consider opportunities at Remembrance to make the wreath laying ceremony more visible to a wider audience

See agenda item 8.

e) Consider other opportunities for Councillors to wear their robes and be more visible in public.

See agenda item 11.

f) To consider an update to the Civic Award criteria, following last year's Civic Award selection process

See agenda item 13.

COMMITTEE'S BUDGET (Agenda Item 6)

A report on the Committee's budget expenditure to 29th February 2024 was received and noted.

A significant underspend was identified in the budget and the Civic Officer shared that the main reason for this is that the Council has not yet completed any work to apply UV to its windows to protect its historic items.

The Civic Officer explained that officers are challenged due to a lack of response from Wokingham Borough Council's Conservation Officer, and it is keen to receive their steer and approval before this work is done to ensure it is not breaching any rules around the look and the feel of the building given its grade II* listed status.

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Councillors advised that officers should escalate this to George Framalitto at WBC, who is the Director responsible for that portfolio, and copy in Cllr Ian Shenton, the Executive Member for this area too, to try and move this forward.

ACTION: Civic Officer

CHRISTMAS MUSIC EVENT (Agenda item 7)

The committee received the Civic Officer's report for information which outlined details of how Morearts co-ordinated and delivered a successful event for the Council, including a breakdown of their costs.

It was agreed that the Civic Officer would continue working with Morearts to determine what the model would look like for this year including exploring the idea of holding it at All Saints Church. However, with less money available to spend, it was suggested that Morearts should be a little more financially astute about how the budget is allocated and consideration should be given to what is necessary.

Suggestions were also made to consider having advertising space on the flyers for this event to help mitigate the costs, and to share the details of the event with Radio Berkshire to ask them to share details about the event.

ACTION: Civic Officer

CONSIDER OPPORTUNITIES TO WIDEN WREATH LAYING CEREMONY (Agenda Item 8)

The committee received the Civic Officer's report, following conversations at the previous meeting and a request to discuss this further.

Councillors have suggested the idea of taking the wreath laying ceremony outside to widen its audience. The Civic Officer noted, in their report, that this presents the following challenges:

- a) There is no war memorial outside for wreaths to be laid at.
- b) If it is to be taken outside, where would this take place? The most practical place to take it may be in the Market Place itself but where would wreaths be laid?
- c) A temporary structure has been suggested to lay wreaths at. However, would a temporary structure be well received? What might it look like? What might it cost? Where would it be placed? How long might it stay out for? Where would it be stored? Whilst this would resolve the issue of limited access to the existing memorial, the crucial element here could be community consultation as the creation of war memorials seems to have traditionally been organised locally with its people. Seeking the views, from residents, for a temporary one feels no less important.
- d) Would it be right if wreaths are not laid at a place where the names of the fallen are engraved? Is it appropriate, how would this be perceived?
- e) WTC does not want to attract any undue criticism. War memorials and Remembrance are extremely emotive subjects, and any significant change can be controversial and needs to be handled sensitively.

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An alternative proposal was suggested by the Civic Officer to trial in November 2024 as an interim step; this was at the Act of Remembrance at 11.00am on Remembrance Sunday when a two-minute silence is observed, for the Mayor to announce they are laying a wreath at the inside memorial and if people wished to follow they would be more than welcome. The Mayor would then lay the same wreath in the afternoon at the more formal ceremony. Whilst this would not widen its audience as much as if the wreath laying was outside, this would give more people the opportunity to pay their respects at the memorial and it could start to give the Council an indication whether our residents have an appetite or not for wanting to be more involved, albeit on this scale or larger.

Councillors discussed all the details in the report including this proposal, and views were mixed. Comments included:

- As a matter of principle, it should be a public event to make it more appropriate for the town rather than the ceremony to only include invited guests, and we can make this happen for November if we want to.
- A question was asked 'what demand is there for this from the public?' However, the public may not know this takes place.
- There are too many organisations that lay wreaths already; the numbers have increased over the years.
- There is a reason why the war memorial is there and that's because it was agreed by the people of Wokingham hundred years ago and that is the place that we should be laying our wreaths at.
- The laying of wreaths on the ground could be perceived as disrespectful and not the way forward.
- There is a sensitivity issue. All the elements of Remembrance are because people died and because of the sacrifice they made. If it was outside, we wouldn't have the names of people on any structure.
- There is already a poppy mosaic on the Market Place where the Act of Remembrance currently takes place.
- Although the Council has taken on the co-ordination of Remembrance events in Wokingham because there is no longer a local branch of the Royal British Legion, it is the Royal British Legion who have traditionally led Remembrance activities more widely.

It was agreed that further views should be sought from others outside of the meeting, primarily including those from the Royal British Legion. The Council shouldn't proceed in any direction that the public wouldn't be happy with.

It was agreed that Cllr Betteridge and Cllr Jones, together with David Dunham, with his connections with the Royal British Legion, should make contact with the RBL to get their views on the Council's idea of taking the wreath laying ceremony outside to see if this could be achieved. It was agreed that the Parade Marshal should also be involved in these discussions.

In response to the above proposal suggested by the Civic Officer, the Chair advised that this was a good attempt by the Civic Officer, but it doesn't answer the basic question and it is too comprised. However, if the Council is unable to

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achieve taking the wreath laying ceremony outside, this may be useful to consider as a plan B.

ACTION: Cllr Betteridge, Cllr Jones & D Dunham

RAISING AWARENESS OF TOWN HALL MEMORIAL/CONSIDERATION OF NEW OUTSIDE WAR MEMORIAL (Agenda Item 9)

The Committee received the Civic Officer's report, recognising the advantages of having a war memorial inside the Town Hall as it is protected from the elements and vandalism.

However, it is also acknowledged that there remains a lack of awareness of where it is.

Over the years, the Civic Committee has discussed suggestions of having a new outdoor war memorial on numerous occasions.

Whilst related conversations have been taking place, it felt prudent to determine whether there really is an appetite for this amongst Councillors and residents and whether or not it is achievable.

The Civic Officer researched this and included information in their report for Councillors to consider including the following:

- a) Guidance notes from the War Memorials Trust about new war memorials
- b) A note that the funding, erection and maintenance of war memorials is not usually met from public funds. Rather, it is met from private donations or public subscription.
- c) Some information gathered from Woodley Town Council following the installation of their war memorial in 2014 which included a note that Woodley's resident community group raised £20,000 for the war memorial itself, and Woodley Town Council funded additional costs totalling £68,000.

It was proposed by Cllr Dixon and seconded by Cllr Bishop-Firth and it was

**RESOLVED
30796**

that the Civic Committee do not wish to explore this further at the moment, until it has made some decisions about what the wreath laying ceremony looks like.

REQUEST FOR A PLAQUE (Agenda Item 10)

The Committee received the Civic Officer's report, noting a request from the Wokingham Lions Club as one of their initiatives to mark their 50th anniversary this year.

Wokingham Lions Club proposed a new plaque to be laid in the pavement where wreaths could be laid, which could include the Wokingham Lions emblem, the Town Council Coat of Arms, and maybe the Royal British Legion emblem if they wanted it included. The President is keen to gain a view from the Council to establish if the idea is supported in principle. If it is supported, they are keen to pursue a donation of this to the town and to seek advice on how to take this forward.

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Councillors discussed all of this, and views were mixed. Comments included:

- The idea was a good one.
- A preference for a plaque would still be on a wall but it was recognised this is not easily achievable.
- It would offer an external focus.
- There is already a Poppy Mosaic, already in the Market Place, where the Act of Remembrance currently takes place
- Would it be disrespectful if it is on the floor?
- Whatever is done needs to fit in with the plan that is made for agenda item 8.
- It could be possible to engage further with Wokingham Lions in due course, to include them in our discussions as well as talking to them about the idea of helping to support a war memorial, either temporary or permanent.

The Civic Officer was asked to respond positively to the Wokingham Lions Club, thanking them for their proposal, advising them that the Council is currently considering how it can manage the wreath laying ceremony differently and they would be kept updated of any plans that are made.

ACTION: Civic Officer

CONSIDER OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR COUNCILLORS TO WEAR THEIR ROBES AND BE MORE VISIBLE AT EVENTS (Agenda Item 11)

The Committee received the Civic Officer's report. At previous civic meetings, Councillors indicated they would like to look for opportunities to wear their robes more and be more visible at its own Council events and those which it offers financial funding to via its grant process. The Chair suggested that this discussion is revisited again to further discuss which events would be practical to attend.

Councillors reviewed the list of events that they could be more visible at and recognised that the robes were not appropriate attire for all occasions.

As the Beating of the Bounds event is being co-ordinated this September, Councillors agreed that this occasion would lend itself very well to Councillors wearing robes, being present outside the Town Hall to welcome people taking part and it would be a great opportunity to see how well this is received.

MAYOR'S SUNDAY LOCATION (Agenda Item 12)

The Committee received the Civic Officer's report, following a request that was made to explore using the Wokingham Leisure Centre as a new location for the Mayor's Sunday ceremony with a view to making it more of a public event.

Councillors all agreed that upon looking more closely at this, Wokingham Leisure Centre does not seem like a suitable venue.

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However, Councillors discussed the idea of holding it in All Saints Church as this would feel a more dignified venue. There would be no religious element, and it would be led by our outgoing Mayor and then incoming Mayor as it is done in the Town Hall. This could also lead to a possibility of re-incorporating a parade again.

The Civic Officer was asked to:

- a) Seek the view of all the Councillors to gain a wider view because even though the service was secular, the ceremony would be taking place in a religious venue.
- b) Contact All Saints Church to determine if they would be open to the Council holding this ceremony as a secular event and to find out any further required information.

ACTION: Civic Officer

CIVIC AWARDS (Agenda Item 13)

The Committee received the Civic Officer's report with a suggestion from the Civic Awards Selection Committee about it should make a change to its criteria to allow individuals to receive an award more than once.

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It was proposed by Cllr Gee and seconded by Cllr Bishop-Firth and it was

that the criteria for the Civic Award process should be updated to allow a previous recipient of an award to be re-considered after a five-year period, provided their latest nomination is for a substantially different reason than for the original award.

ACTION: Civic Officer

INFORMATION ITEMS (Agenda Item 14)

The following was noted:

- a) The Beating the Bounds event will be organised for WTC, by Wokingham Lions Club, on Sunday 8 September 2024, to mark the 50th anniversary of both the Town Council and Wokingham Lions. This also falls within the timeframe for Heritage Open Days of 6-15 September.
- b) The national theme for Heritage Open Days 2024 is Routes - Networks - Connections
- c) The Town Council's annual newsletter is starting to be prepared. This will be delivered to all Wokingham's town residents from 13 May 2024.
- d) Interviews were planned and took place on Monday 18 March with students who have applied to join WTC for a summer internship to support the engagement element associated with the Museum Accreditation work.

COMMITTEE INFORMATION (Agenda Item 15)

There were no information items.

- a) No information was raised by members.

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- b) No information was identified for marketing purposes. However, it was hoped that in due course there may be opportunities for the Council to share further details about how some of its civic occasions will be made more open to the public.

**RESOLVED
30798**

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC (Agenda Item 16)

It was proposed by Cllr Mather and seconded by Cllr Mrs Bishop-Firth and it was

that in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, i.e. awards, it was advisable in the public interest that the press and public be temporarily excluded and instructed to withdraw.

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PART II

HONORARY CONSTABLE ROLES (Agenda Item 17)

- a) The committee members received notice of resignation from David Ashley-Down as Honorary Constable, after almost 29 years of service. The Civic Officer advised that David will be thanked at Mayor's Sunday by the outgoing Mayor and presented with a gift from the Council.
- b) The Civic Officer advised that the Council has been approached by a gentleman, who has expressed an interest in becoming an Honorary Constable. A meeting has been held with him, together with the Town Clerk and it has been agreed that he will be elected as a new Constable at Mayor's Sunday for the forthcoming year.

The Committee expressed a view that if there are any vacant honorary roles, they should be made more publicly available to offer the opportunity more widely.

The Civic Officer was asked that David Ashley-Down is thanked on behalf of the civic committee.

CHAIR'S SIGNATURE _____

CHAIR'S INITIALS _____

