



WINSLOW ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Town Council Chairman's Report 2023

The Council has benefitted throughout the year from a full complement of 12 Councillors. I wish to begin by thanking them, individually and collectively, for their support and their hard work.

The Council met 10 times during the year. Most of the business conducted was of a routine nature, as recorded in the minutes of the meetings. The more important decisions and events are described below.

The most conspicuous of the Council's projects was the extension and refurbishment of the Public Hall. We began with a building showing its age, in terms both of its style of architecture and of its wear and tear. Of necessity the structure of the building is much as it was when it was built in the 1970s, but an extension containing a little-used bar and storage area was removed and replaced by a new extension containing what is now the main entrance lobby together with toilets, a cloakroom and a ticket office for paying events. The new section also includes a professional standard kitchen provided in order that catered events can be accommodated, though it is also suitable for simpler purposes such as making tea or sandwiches. The old kitchen has been removed to create an improved smaller meeting room in the south-eastern corner of the hall, with a small refreshment-making room. Some of the storage cupboards which were within the body of the hall have been moved or replaced to provide a larger open floor area. The stage area has been altered to make it safer and more convenient for performers, with improved changing rooms. The heating system has been modified in order to make it much quieter than was previously the case.

Externally, what was a partly paved and partly muddy area to the western and southern sides of the Hall, used as a passageway and for unauthorised casual parking, has been transformed by paving and the installation of new lighting, marker bollards, bike racks and planters. Solar panels have been installed on the south-facing roof in order to make the Hall at least partly self-sufficient in electricity. The Hall's previous main entrance, at the edge of the car park, has been retained both as a fire escape and in order to allow access to the smaller meeting room without the need to pass through the main hall.

The Hall was handed back to the Council at the beginning of April and is now available again for bookings.

The Council is grateful to its architects, PCMS of Long Crendon and to its contractors, Jet Construction of Milton Keynes, who managed to deliver the project within budget.

The second of the significant events of the year was the referendum in which the majority of those voting approved the proposed modifications to the 2014 Winslow Neighbourhood Plan. The modifications were the culmination of several rounds of consultation designed to identify the wishes, concerns and ideas of the town's residents and businesses. The modifications were necessary if Winslow was to continue to influence planning decisions affecting the town, as

the 2014 Plan would otherwise be overridden by the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan made in 2021; a more recent Plan prevails over any earlier Plan. It is to be hoped that the modified Neighbourhood Plan will serve the town well until a new Buckinghamshire Local Plan is made in 2025. I express my gratitude to the steering group which oversaw the modification, and in particular Cllr Roger Slevin, who spent many hours collating and analysing the consultation responses as well as writing much of the text of the modified Plan.

Much of the Council's work is undertaken by its four committees. Most councillors are members of two committees.

The Amenities Committee normally meets six-weekly, though its members also meet others, such as contractors working for the Council and local groups, on a frequent basis. The Committee is responsible for the maintenance of the Council's assets such as Tomkins Park and Arboretum, and in particular the many trees within it, the playground and outdoor gym, the allotments and the Burial Ground, for the replacement as necessary of waste bins and benches throughout the town, and it also keeps grass verges and hedges in good order pursuant to a contract between Winslow Town Council and Buckinghamshire Council. Most of the Committee's activities are of a continuing nature, but of note in the past year are the allocation of an allotment to a community project which is growing food for the Winslow Food Cupboard, and the repair and improvement of the pergola and footpath in the Burial Ground, a project made possible by financial support from the Community Board. Several new trees have been planted, mainly in the Park, and East West Rail is kindly providing twelve new bird boxes for installation in the Park.

The Development Committee generally meets at three-weekly intervals to satisfy the planning system timescales, and there have been 17 meetings of the Committee during the past year. Winslow Town Council is consulted about every planning application affecting the town, of which there have been 56. The majority of applications are not opposed, and the predominant reason for objections when they are raised by the Committee is that insufficient off-street parking has been proposed. The Committee has also been able to persuade Buckinghamshire Council to take enforcement action when a breach of planning rules has been detected, the most notable during the year being the unauthorised use of land adjacent to the allotments, which has now ceased.

The Committee deals with a number of matters which relate to planning only in the wider sense. It secured the extension of the 30mph speed limit from its former starting point, entering the town from the north, opposite Sir Thomas Fremantle School to a position on the Buckingham side of Furze Lane (signage should reflect this soon). It has engaged with East West Rail on the re-opening of footpaths and is attempting to secure improvements to those paths which have deteriorated due to non-use or the recent heavy rains. I am also pleased to be able to say that the Council has agreed with Bloor Homes that Bloor will improve the surface of the footpath which runs around the edge of the rugby field and the Winslow Centre site.

The Committee had the pleasurable task of deciding on the names to be given to the streets in the forthcoming development to the east of Great Horwood Road. The Committee has held several constructive meetings with the developers of the site in order to secure agreement on a number of matters, in particular the provision of adequate facilities for cyclists, the safety of vehicular access to and from Great Horwood Road, the distribution of affordable housing and the retention of as much as possible of the hedgerow separating the site from Great Horwood

Road. David Wilson Homes, who are developing part of the site, have agreed to include a footpath to the edge of their land which others can continue under Network Rail's bridge, to end at the Spinney, much improving pedestrian connectivity within the town.

There were two disappointments during the year. The first was that permitted development rights allowed for the conversion of the former TSB building in the Market Square into flats, despite there being no associated parking provision. This led the Council, together with a group of concerned traders and residents, to persuade Buckinghamshire Council (as Local Planning Authority) to include Winslow in a pilot programme of removing permitted development rights for the conversion of commercial premises in the town centre to residential, making a formal planning application necessary in each case. The implementation of the pilot is awaited.

The second was the successful appeal by Thrive Homes Limited against the refusal of outline planning permission for the residential development of the vacant land adjacent to Sir Thomas Fremantle School and the new railway station. Winslow Town Council opposed the original application and the appeal because the land is allocated in both the 2014 Neighbourhood Plan and in the modified Plan for light industrial or commercial use, and it remains the Council's position that the site is ideal for the location of much-needed employment opportunities but not suitable for residential development. It must, however, be assumed that housing will appear on the site within the next few years.

The Events Committee is unusual in that two of its members are not councillors, and I extend my thanks to them for their contribution. The Committee is also unlike the others in that it cannot function at all without close engagement with residents and traders. It promotes regular events, in particular the monthly Farmers' Market, which has recovered extremely well since the pandemic restrictions were lifted, and the Christmas Fayre, a joint venture with Winslow Lions. The latter is always a well-attended event; in 2022 as many as 264 local children received presents from Father Christmas. Perhaps less well-known, but as important to those who benefit from them, are Play Around the Parishes, providing play facilities for children during school holidays, and the Bucks Arts Week, hosted in the Council's offices.

The Committee also promotes or facilitates occasional events, of which by far the most important was the celebration of the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee, a celebration led by the Winslow Big Society. More than a thousand people attended the Picnic in the Park event in Tomkins Park and Arboretum and a similar event is planned for the forthcoming Coronation weekend.

The Council has added a What's On diary to its web site to promote the many community-based events and activities that are taking place within the town or for the benefit of its residents.

The Finance and Resources Committee (formerly known as the Finance and General Purposes Committee) meets four times each year, though much of its work is undertaken in out-of-meeting discussions. Its most important function is to oversee the Council's finances and, in conjunction with the Clerk (who is the Responsible Financial Officer), to recommend the following year's budget to the full Council. As part of that process it determines, with the other committees, what financial resources are required – for maintenance or replacement of equipment, for example – in order that each committee can function properly. The Committee is responsible for major acquisitions and for the recruitment of staff and determination of

salaries, and it also decides what grants are to be made from the War Memorial Trust or from Council funds. In the 2022-23 year the following grants were made:

Winslow Lions, North Bucks Bike Ride	£500
Citizens' Advice Bureau	£3,000
Winslow Guides	£1,800
North Bucks Breathe Easy Group	£1,000
Autism Early Learning Support	£1,000
Winslow Players	£610
Community Bus	£5,000
Contribution to upkeep of Closed Burial Ground	£6,500

In addition the Committee has agreed to the continued use of the Council's offices, free of charge, by the Community Bus, the Winslow Food Cupboard, the TSB 'pop-up' bank and (while they are displaced from the Medical Centre by the refurbishment works) various NHS staff.

In the year 2023-24 the Council expects to continue to work much as it has in the past. It will be particularly concerned about the impact on the town of the development to the east of Great Horwood Road, both as the building work proceeds and as the houses come to be occupied. It will continue to promote regular events such as the Farmers' Market and the Christmas Fayre, as well as the Coronation celebrations already mentioned, and it will pursue its policy of maintaining the green spaces within the town and other facilities to a high standard. It will continue to engage with Buckinghamshire Council on that Council's proposals for the Winslow Centre and rugby field sites and for the promised Sports Hub. It will respond to consultations relevant to the town, in particular those relating to the forthcoming Buckinghamshire Local Plan and to proposed changes to the manner in which developers make contributions for infrastructure improvements and community purposes (contributions which have funded, among other things, the Public Hall refurbishment and are expected to fund, for example, the proposed skate park at the Sports Hub). The Council will also continue to explore the possibility of installing electric vehicle charging points in the Public Hall car park, for the use of visitors to the town and those residents who cannot install charging points of their own.

The Council, and the town as a whole, owe great thanks to the Council's staff, without whom the Council would be quite unable to function at all. Those who have been with the Council for the year are Charles Loch, our clerk; Sean Carolan, the deputy clerk; Tony Perkins, our estates manager; and Derry French, our groundsman. They have all served us extremely well. We were sorry to see our administrator, Charlotte Bench, leave for other opportunities during the year, but wish her well in her new role. She has recently been replaced by Ellie Griffiths, to whom all the councillors extend a warm welcome.

Cllr Colin Bishopp
Chairman, Winslow Town Council

April 2023