

## Windlesham Parish Council Meeting – Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023 Update for the residents of Bagshot, Lightwater and Windlesham from the Chair of Council - Councillor Alf Turner

A summary of the recent Full Council meeting is presented below. All comments on this report are welcomed and you are invited to contact the Council either directly or through local councillors - see the links below for contact details.

### 1. Public Question Time

A Windlesham resident raised concerns that the Council had not made adequate provision regarding equal access to the Council meetings. In particular, there were no adjustments to facilitate accessibility for the hearing impaired.

As Chair I acknowledged that it's important to ensure equal access to Council meetings and that addressing acoustics issues in the meeting room was crucial for creating an inclusive and transparent democratic process. Council takes concerns of this nature very seriously and following the last meeting had arranged for audio amplification and a hearing loop to be in place. It was also acknowledged that a more permanent solution was needed, which formed part of a discussion later on the agenda.

### 2. Key Points from the Meeting:

- **Council Communications & Engagement:** Given recent concerns about Council communications on social media we have formed a new Communications & Engagement Committee, Chaired by Katia Malcaus Cooper, with Cllr Pat Lewis as Vice Chair. The Full Council ratified a recommendation from this Committee to employ a Part Time Communications & Engagement Officer to drive improved communications and community engagement. This role will be advertised in the coming weeks.
- **Reports from Surrey County Council (SCC) and Surrey Heath Borough Council (SHBC):** The Full Council received a report from SHBC outlining recent decisions and actions across the Borough. A report from County had not been sent from SCC due to consideration on whether the Parish Council wanted to continue to receive such reports. In the following discussion the Parish Councillors expressed concerns that such reports were neither formal ones provided by the officers of these bodies, nor representative of cross-party views. As the Parish wanted to be a-political it was decided to no longer receive SCC and SHBC reports.
- **Cemetery Finances:** Following the discussion on Windlesham Cemetery last month and at the EGM, there was a consideration as to whether the cemeteries in each of the 3 villages should have separate financial reports with any surplus transferred into a general Cemetery reserve at year-end. The RFO provided a report outlining the complexity of administering this setup which would result in an additional cost to residents. It was also noted that all 3 cemeteries operate under the Parish Council acting as a single burial authority. Furthermore, indicative figures provided by the RFO, demonstrated that when fully costed, the cemeteries operate at a loss rather than a surplus. Following discussion, it was agreed to maintain current arrangements for the time being and reconsider this when the cemeteries review is completed next year.
- **Biodiversity Policy:** The Council adopted the draft biodiversity policy as presented, which will apply to new and existing habitats, pesticide and herbicide use, bird nesting, removal of non-invasive plants, and Parish grasslands, shrub and flower beds, ponds, hedges and woodland and single trees, play areas and allotments.

- **Council Chamber Refurbishment:** the Parish Council Chamber located next to Lightwater Cemetery has not been used for several years due to its very poor condition. This means that the Parish Council incurs costs by having to hire rooms and makes it difficult to comply with public access requirements such as hearing loops. As a result, it was agreed to refurbish the chamber to bring it back into full use from early in the new financial year. The cost is estimated to be approximately £42K which will be funded from reserves.
- **Building Condition Surveys:** As with the Council Chamber above there has been concern for some time amongst Councillors that Parish Buildings are not being maintained. Delaying repairs and putting off ongoing maintenance can result in a more substantial cost in the future. It was therefore agreed to proceed with a full RICS survey of Parish Buildings to establish their status, cost of repairs and then ongoing maintenance.
- **Grants:** The Parish Council awarded £300 to Surrey Heath Neighbourhood Watch to support the printing costs of their quarterly newsletter. This was allocated from Lightwater and Bagshot village committee funds with a further £150 available from Windlesham committee should they decide to make a contribution.
- **Greenspace Contract:** a full paper is to be presented to the Full Council next month. However, village committees have completed their work on future service requirements and recently came together to recommend how to approach this subject going forward. In summary it is planned to retender the contract in 2024 by each of the 3 villages with 3 main components covering maintenance of Cemeteries, Greenspace & Playgrounds, and other items such as graffiti and fly tipping removal. A Company tendering in one village, say for example for a cemetery, could also bid for all 3 cemeteries across the Parish.
- **Meeting Venues & Access:** There was further discussion on the issues above and it was agreed the Parish Council will only use venues equipped with a hearing loop and that accessibility in general will be considered when booking venues.

#### Next meeting & Events:

- 15<sup>th</sup> November – Planning Committee Meeting 11 am at All Saints Church Hall
- 28<sup>th</sup> November – Planning Committee Meeting 6:30 pm at St Annes Church Centre, Church Road, Bagshot
- 28<sup>th</sup> November – Next Full Council Meeting 7:15 pm at St Annes Church Centre, Church Road, Bagshot

Full details of Council meetings will be on the Windlesham Parish Council Website before the meeting with a link as follows: [Home - Windlesham Parish Council \(windleshampc.gov.uk\)](http://windleshampc.gov.uk)

#### Contact details:

[Bagshot Councillor contact details](#)

[Lightwater Councillor contact details](#)

[Windlesham Councillor contact details](#)

If you would like to contact Jo Whitfield, Clerk to the Council or visit the office please use the link below to view the office opening hours and contact details:

[Contact Us - Windlesham Parish Council \(windleshampc.gov.uk\)](http://windleshampc.gov.uk)

Alf Turner

Chair of Windlesham Parish Council

6<sup>th</sup> November 2023