

Droitwich Spa Town Council

MINUTES of the meeting of Droitwich Spa Town Council held in the Council Chamber at St Richards House on **Monday 18 December 2023** at 6.00pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs K Fellows (Mayor)
Councillor Mrs C Bowden
Councillor E Bowden
Councillor SJ Brazier
Councillor M Brook
Councillor GR Brookes
Councillor P Clements
Councillor DI Davidson
Councillor RCC Deller
Councillor GA Duffy
Councillor N Franks
Councillor J Grady
Councillor RP Hopkins
Councillor VP Humphries
Councillor AL Key
Councillor AM Sinton

NOTES

(1) Webcasting Members of the Council are reminded that meetings of the Council are Webcast on the Internet and will be stored electronically and accessible through the Council's Website. Members of the public are informed that if they attend this meeting their images and speech may be captured by the recording equipment used for the Webcast and may also be stored electronically and accessible through the Council's Website.

(2) This Meeting will be webcast and live streamed on the Internet. It is anticipated that all Full Council and Committee Meetings will be live streamed from June 2023 onwards.

APOLOGIES for absence: Councillor RJ Morris

PUBLIC QUESTIONS SESSION

There were none.

Prior to the Start of the Meeting the Mayor asked Elected Members to Stand. The Town Clerk explained that before Prayers, there would be a moment of poignancy and reflection in memory of former Councillor AH Laird who had recently passed. It was added that the Memorial Service for Sandy had taken place one week previously at St Andrews Church. The Town Clerk asked Councillor GR Brookes and then Councillor GA Duffy to read aloud their words of tribute to former Councillor AH Laird. Reverend Laura Handy then read a further tribute and concluded with prayer and a blessing [*Memorial Statements attached*].

District Councillor Gregory Wilkins was in attendance for the meeting.

225. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor AM Sinton declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 9 for the Community Legacy, for the reason that he is a co-opted Member of the Wychavon District Council – Communities & Funding Advisory Panel.

226. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF COUNCIL HELD ON 25 SEPTEMBER 2023

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of Council held on 25 September 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

227. MAYORS ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor Mrs K Fellows updated on various Civic engagements since the last Full Council Meeting on 25th September 2023.

Mayor's Announcements 18.12.2023

Special Mention was given to the following engagements,

11th & 12th November 2023- Armistice and Remembrance Sunday

21st November 2023- The Melting Pot Theatre Company production at the High School for the John Heminge 400th Anniversary Year.

25th November 2023- Commemorative Plaque unveiling for the John Heminge Anniversary Year at St Peters Church and the Towns Christmas Lights Switch On Event.

13th December 2023- Hosting the traditional Christmas Lunch for the Heritage Centre & Museum Volunteer Team at the St Andrews Town Hotel.

The Mayor thanked all Elected Members for their support during the past year and wished everyone at Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

RESOLVED That the information be noted

228. MAYORS CHOICE ANNUAL AWARD

Pursuant to minute reference 144- 2023/2024 of the Meeting of Full Council held on 25th September 2023 and draft minute reference 190- 2023/2024 of the Community & Amenities Committee meeting held on 6th November 2023, to receive an update on the arrangements and criteria. To note that nominations for the Scheme will require finalisation in time for the January 2024 meeting of Full Council for sufficient timescales to be included for presentations as part of the AGM on 13th May 2024.

The Town Clerk updated that Councillor RJ Morris had recently met with the Head Teacher from the High School Mr Jon Brook and that a senior leadership officer had now been recruited (Maisie Truman). The new Role is responsible for leading on all High School activities in the Community, including awards, charity work and recruitment of senior leadership. Councillor GA Duffy added that Maisie will be supporting the resurrection of the Youth Council from January 2024 which will include High School and the two Middle Schools (Witton and Westacre) being represented. The youth Council approach is to be finalised at the next High School pyramid meeting on 16th January 2024 and it is anticipated that regular updates at Town Council meetings should then resume. The link from the Youth Council to the Mayors Choice Awards is important and will help shape the criteria and nominations for young people during the New Year.

The High School had acknowledged peoples patience and understanding whilst time had been taken to progress these arrangements and to complete the new role recruitment process.

RESOLVED That the information be noted

229. POLICING IN DROITWICH SPA

The Town Clerk explained that Sergeant Catherine Atkinson had been expected to attend the meeting and had also provided her report. The Report was circulated at the meeting in Cathy's absence. The Town Clerk explained the format of the report which was presented in the layout of the Safer Neighbourhoods Team Newsletter with categories. The Town Clerk made reference to the section for anti – social behaviour issues and specifically the update about the former Raven Hotel site, including the interventions and additional security measures currently being taken forward by different Agencies. The Town Clerk asked that any questions be referred to Cathy direct or through the Office.

There were no questions arising from Elected Members present.

RESOLVED That the information be noted

230. HIGH SCHOOL

Brandon represented the High School Senior Student Team and updated on activities and news of recent weeks. Mock exams had taken place this month for Years 11 & 13 which help towards indicative and predicate grading. UCAS applications are progressing for those students mindful towards moving on to University next year. Charities week in October had been a record breaking success surpassing the £4K raised in 2022. This year the beneficiary Charities are the Droitwich Spa Food Bank (local), Cancer Research UK (National) and the Red Cross (International). Funds raised for 2023 are approximately £7,850, comprising £5K from the Schools activities week donations, £1K from connected online “go fund me” contributions and £1,850 match funding from Nat West Bank. A new innovation this year had been a card payment facility at the school enabling payments to be made in exchange for redeemable tokens which helped overcome any cashless environment obstacles on the school campus. Additional support is being coordinated with the Droitwich Spa Food Bank to assist families enduring hardship during the Christmas Season.

The Mayor thanked Brandon for his comprehensive report and congratulated him on all of the Charity Fund Raising work. All Elected Members endorsed this appreciation with a round of applause. There were no questions arising.

RESOLVED That the information be noted

231. YOUTH COUNCIL

To note that the Youth Council updates will resume in the New Year. To cross reference with the update for Minute Reference 228 above.

RESOLVED That the information be noted

232. COMMUNITY LEGACY

(a) To receive a short presentation from representatives of Salwarpe, Martin Hussingtree & Hindlip Parish Council and the WDC, Droitwich Spa - Place Board with regard to a possible collaborative project for Community Legacy.

The Town Clerk updated that Salwarpe, Martin Hussingtree & Hindlip Parish Council had relayed an email message on 12th December 2023 following publication of the Agenda that they had decided that they no longer wished to proceed with a collaborative application for

a Community Legacy project. To this effect their representatives would not be attending to present this evening.

(b) Pursuant to Draft Minute reference 191-2023/2024 of the Community & Amenities Committee meeting on 6th November 2023 **to consider application options to proceed for the next tranche of funding opportunities.** As updated the Town Council are entitled to submit 2 Stage One (Expressions of Interest) applications for initial consideration by Wychavon District Council in the period open from 8th January 2024 to 19th February 2024. To note that applications are assessed on merit and are subject to competitive bidding. Preference is also given to Councils which have not submitted applications for previous editions of the funding stream. Successful applicants for Stage 1 will then be invited to proceed with full second stage applications with supporting detail and evidence of public consultation in the period up to 30th May 2024.

The Town Clerk reminded Elected Members that the Heritage Managers had presented the Museum refurbishment options in advance for consideration at the Community & Amenities Committee meeting on 6th November 2023 and the details had also been emailed on 7th November 2023. It was noted that there were no additional project suggestions put forward for consideration.

Councillor AM Sinton abstained from the Voting for the reason that he had declared a non-pecuniary interest as a co-opted Member of the Wychavon District Council - Communities & Funding Advisory Panel.

RESOLVED That the Town Council supports a mandate to proceed with a Community Legacy Scheme application for the St Richards House Heritage Centre & Museum refurbishment project. This is outlined in the full business case and indicative costing presentation covered by the Heritage Managers Team on 6th November 2023, through the Community & Amenities Committee and circulated to all DSTC Elected Members thereafter.

233. ARMED FORCES COVENANT- Pursuant to minute reference 76/2023-2024 of the Meeting of Full Council on 19 June 2023, the draft Armed Forces Covenant for Droitwich Spa has been submitted to the Ministry of Defence following resolution and signature at Full Council on 25th September 2023. A Senior Representative has confirmed that they will attend at the next Meeting of Full Council on 22 January 2024 to enable a countersignature ceremony by way of affirming their full acceptance.

The Adoption of the Armed Forces Covenant automatically qualifies the Town Council to register for the Bronze Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS). The Registration process has been completed on 26th October 2023 through the Town Clerk. Details are attached and page 17 of the "Making the Most of Your Armed Forces Covenant" brochure refers. The Town Council are now entitled to display the Armed Forces Covenant and the Bronze Award ERS motifs on the Town Council website [*for information*].

To note that a formal photograph will be included as part of the Ceremony and this will also provide the opportunity for the Official Annual Mayoral and Council photos to be arranged on the same evening. The Town Clerk explained about the Bronze Employee Recognition Scheme (ERS) and confirmed that Colonel Andrew Wadland would be the Senior MOD Representative attending Full Council on 22nd January 2024 to undertake the countersigning ceremony for adoption of the Armed Forces Covenant.

RESOLVED That the information be noted

Council Minutes 18.12.2023

Initials.....

234. Annual Governance & Accountability Return for the Year Ended 31 March 2023- Notice of Conclusion of Audit.

To confirm that the Notice of External Auditors Report & Certificate 2022/23 was received on 20th September 2023. The Notice of conclusion of audit was posted on the same date including attachment with the statutory documents to the Town Council website [*report and Notice attached with Agenda for information*]. There were no questions arising.

RESOLVED That the information be noted.

235. Interim Internal Audit Visit & Report 2023/2024

To confirm that the Internal Auditor visited on Tuesday 7th November 2024 to undertake the Interim Review Visit for the current 2023/2024 period. The report is provided for information [*Report attached with Agenda for information*]. There were no questions arising.

RESOLVED That the information be noted.

236. Annual Renewal of Insurance Policy – To confirm that the Town Clerk reviewed the Insurance policy and cover arrangements with the Provider on 1st & 15th November 2023 in advance of the annual renewal scheduled for 1st January 2024. Arrangements have also been made to carry out separate Valuations of both premises for insurance purposes, updating of owned assets and to support index linking. The renewal documentation is attached with Agenda papers for information including LTA terms of 1 year and 3 years discounted. To consider the Insurance renewal information as presented.

The Town Clerk explained that the renewal quotations considered options for the existing £1 million fidelity insurance cover threshold and the higher bracket of £2 million. It was recommended that the consideration for some reserve balances expenditure from January would enable the existing £1 Million threshold to be sufficiently maintained for cover at renewal. This consideration provides due reference to the recommendations highlighted by the Internal Auditor at his Interim Visit and report dated 7th November 2023.

Councillor DI Davidson commented on the accident cover aspect of the insurance policy which extends cover to serving Elected Members on Town Council business.

There were no questions arising.

RESOLVED That the information be noted. To renew the Insurance arrangements as presented in the outlined Insurance Renewal proposal from the Provider dated 23rd November 2023 (originator - Mr Jonathan Meiseles, Zurich Municipal). Cost £12,773.09 including taxes based on discounted 3 year agreement option from 01.01.2024. To maintain Fidelity Guarantee at existing level of £ 1 Million.

237. Annual Review of Bank Mandate Signature Arrangements – The Internal Auditor has recommended as part of the Interim Review 2023/2024 completed on the 7th November 2023, that the Bank Mandate signing arrangements are reviewed and recorded as a separate minute item by Full Council each year. To note that the established authorised signatories are the Chairmen of the three Standing Committees, the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor, as well as the Town Clerk / RFO. The signing arrangements are any two of the aforementioned Elected Members with the Town Clerk for all payment authorisations - (cheques and regular automated payment arrangements). The authorised signatories for Members are amended with the Bank on the occasions of any changes to the Standing Committees Chairmanship and the annual

arrangements for Mayor and Deputy Mayor. These positions are generally reviewed as part of the AGM Agenda each May *[for information]*. There were no questions arising.

RESOLVED That the information be noted for the Bank signing arrangements as outlined.

238. Wychavon District Council – Tagwell Ward Polling Station Review – To note the attached letter with agenda notifying the review of polling station arrangements for Tagwell Ward. Any comments are requested to be submitted direct to Wychavon District Council Electoral Services by 12th January 2024. Information attached and previously circulated to DSTC Elected Members on 16th November 2023*[for information]*.

RESOLVED That the information be noted

239. NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN (NDP) PROJECT REPORT – To receive an update report from Councillor GR Brookes in his capacity as the designated Town Council Member with responsibility for the project, including Communications & Liaison and the Steering Group. The previous report was included as part of Full Council on 25 September 2023 - Minute Number 153/2023-24 refers. The next Steering Group Meeting is expected in January 2024 to interpret and progress the consultation results from October. Key points for the overall NDP project at present include,

- Completion of the Design Guidance & Codes Report working in collaboration with AECOM. This work has been in course from March and has been signed off for final AECOM approval on 2nd November 2023. The final document will be integral to the emerging NDP once conformity has been is finally confirmed by AECOM.
- Circulation of the questionnaires for the Residents Survey and Business & Commerce Consultation both for the duration of October. Response rates and feedback have been very encouraging and the output is currently being analysed and tabulated for detailed interpretation. The Residents Survey has confirmed approximately 800 completed responses as at 6 November 2023. This includes many detailed verbatim comment responses (approximately 400 separate statements) which are currently being formatted as part the review process.
- Site Assessment Work for possible additional housing allocations. Discussions took place between Senior Wychavon Planning Officers, The Consultant, Councillor GR Brookes and the Town Clerk at a meeting on 27 September in Pershore.
- Updating of information on the Town Council website.

Councillor GR Brookes stated that,

“I am very pleased to present the update to our Neighbourhood Plan as printed with the Agenda. We have now completed the initial stages of plan preparation around evidence gathering and community engagement. We are now ready to move into drafting the Neighbourhood Plan itself. The Steering Group will meet next in 18th January so that we can start to look at what policies are appropriate to include in the plan”.

Councillor RP Hopkins commented that he would like to know how many of the questionnaire responses were from Droitwich residents or from neighbouring parish areas for the reason that the Plan should be for residents only? Will the response data be available to be shared to Councillors? How will the NDP benefit residents?

Councillor Val Humphries asked what considerations had been made for disabled people filling in the questionnaire. Requested that the Accessibility Audit commissioned by Wychavon

District Council in summer 2023 for the Droitwich Spa, Pershore and Evesham Town centres be included within the NDP considerations.

Councillor RP Hopkins expressed an opinion that there was a movement towards voting against the NDP at referendum stage.

Councillor N Franks commented that local infrastructure provision within the NDP should include safe cycling routes. He mentioned disappointment that WCC had not responded to his enquiries on this subject and asked that the Town Clerk help take this forward.

Councillor GR Brookes, Councillor GA Duffy and the Town Clerk clarified that,

- The Questionnaire circulation of approximately 15K residential properties by Royal Mail extended to postcodes WR9 (4 sub sectors -7, 8, 9 & 0) which included several areas on the periphery of the Town. These areas included parts of Hadzor, Wychbold, Copcut Rise and rural towards Ombersley, with others) This follows the professional guidance of the Consultant for inclusion of neighbouring communities within the input for people who reside in , work in and use the services & infrastructure of Droitwich Spa on a regular basis.
- The questionnaire flyer mailing was despatched centrally by Royal Mail Distribution over two weeks commencing 2nd October 2023. Work Stations and public displays had been available for printed copy questionnaires at the Library Building and Heritage Centre for six weeks commencing mid- September. The response return ratio included a significant amount of paper questionnaires which had then been manually transferred to the digital Survey Monkey function. Online availability of the Questionnaire had been live for six weeks from mid- September. It was noted that Councillor AM Sinton and others had reported non- receipt of the flyer mailing which has been be relayed as feedback to the Distributor (Royal Mail).
- Stakeholders had been engaged to publicise the questionnaire including charitable connections and networking through WDC Communications.
- That the Survey is anonymous and protected by GDPR principles. For these reasons it is not possible to differentiate which questionnaire responses originate solely within the Neighbourhood Area for the NDP itself.
- Only Droitwich Spa residents will be able to vote on the Neighbourhood Plan when it reaches the Referendum Stage, for which defined protocols apply.
- Benefits of the NDP will be aligned to and shaped by the policies to be included. The stage to start considering which policies to include begins next month through the Steering Group.
- The data from the questionnaire responses will be published on the Town Council website with all of the other NDP work when analysis and collation is fully completed. This conforms with the transparency for all of the NDP project work.
- The next Steering Group Meeting takes place on 18th January 2024 and all Elected Members are welcome to join and/or attend.

RESOLVED That the information be noted

240. To receive and consider the Minutes of the under-mentioned meetings:-

1. Planning Committee – 9 October 2023 [*previously provided*]
2. Resources Committee- 9 October 2023[*previously provided*]
3. Planning Committee- 6 November 2023 [*previously provided*]
4. Community & Amenities Committee – 6 November 2023 [*attached with agenda*]

5. Planning Committee –4 December 2023 *[attached with agenda]*
6. Resources Committee- 4 December 2023 *[attached with agenda]*

There were no questions arising.

RESOLVED That the Minutes of all of the listed Committee meetings be accepted on block.

241. VOLUNTEER/ WYCH BARGE SEATING IN VINES PARK -Following discussion at the last “Droitwich Matters” Meeting, Councillor GA Duffy has requested consideration towards a proposal option for temporary removal of the Volunteer Barge Seating at Vines Park, whilst the repairs are undertaken. The suggestion includes removal of the temporary herras safety fencing and installing an interim noticeboard to inform upon the repairs and renovation work currently in course. This is conducive towards improving the ascetics and the environment of the Park whilst the various permissions and repairs progress. It is noted that the historical significance of the Park ground necessitates conditional covenants to be adhered to, which are factors towards the elapsed timescales and the repair work being completed.

Councillor GA Duffy shared details from Wychavon District Council outlining the scope of proposed improvements to the site layout, fixtures and seating and arrangements in the Vines Park *[diagrams and plan attached]*. He suggested that Elected Members may wish to consider a statement of support for these proposals to be sent to the WDC Parks Team.

Councillor N Franks asked that the proposed edging to sleepers and bench fixtures were within the correct depth tolerance for disability access. Councillor Val Humphries commented on the colour contrast of adjacent ornamental stones on the site so that they are suitably considered for the requirements of partially sighted people. Councillor AM Sinton added that accessibility for all is an important consideration for the proposals. Councillor S Brazier asked that a question for the indicative timeline for completion of the works be included in the statement to be sent to the WDC Parks Team.

RESOLVED That the information be noted. For the Town Clerk to send a statement of support to WDC Parks Team on behalf of the Town Council , for the outlined proposals to improve the Wych Barge seating area at Vines Park and to include the three aforementioned additional points raised by Councillors Franks, Humphries and Brazier.

242. WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL – DROITWICH SPA PLACE BOARD UPDATE

To receive an update on Place Board project work from Councillor AM Sinton *[for information]*.

Report on Droitwich Spa Place Board Work and Projects, as at December 2023 – Full Council Update 18.12.2023.

The Place Board meets monthly and is currently engaged in taking forward the following projects,

1. Lido Park and Pool Improvements- 4 different options have been received and appraised during the autumn from Designers & Architects commissioned for feasibility and scope through Wychavon District Council. The details are commercially sensitive and are subject to final consideration and costings by WDC. Wider discussion and very positive engagement continues with key stakeholders including Wychavon Leisure and Sobb’s. It is hoped to advance the vision and confirm public engagement statements shortly when all aspects have been finalised and fully agreed. The initial consensus is that the proposals being considered are ambitious and exciting.

2. High Street public realm improvements. Grant funding opportunities to enhance shop frontages and ascetics for businesses. Festoon lighting arrangements to enhance the Town Christmas Lighting scheme and remain in place through the year. Expected to be installed week of 11th December 2023.
3. Following the success of the underpass public art mural project and trail – consideration for additional street art murals in the Town Centre. Peter Rose from Tiller Consultancy has been commissioned to lead on the design and roll of the project.
4. Details of the Place board work and its Membership are available on the Wychavon District Council website.

<https://www.wychavon.gov.uk/business/droitwich-spa-place-board>

RESOLVED That the information be noted

243. COUNTY COUNCIL MATTERS

Councillor GR Brookes had nothing further to report for WCC matters on this occasion.

The Town Clerk updated the following on behalf of Councillor RJ Morris,

-Following requests from businesses and their employees he had helped to engage with WCC and Wychavon, working together with First Bus to introduce a new bus service 153. This helps with connectivity and public transport for the Berry Hill Industrial Estate area.

-Two new canal bridges are set to be installed in January including new surfacing of pathways in the area of Ploughman’s Piece.

-The Worcestershire Local Recovery Strategy Issues and Options document will be released for consultation in the New Year. This is a Government Commitment to support Communities end the decline in nature and help boost recovery of habitats.

RESOLVED That the information be noted

244. DISTRICT COUNCIL MATTERS – Councillor GA Duffy updated the following report.

Wychavon update December 2023

Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill became law on 26 October. Measures in the act should:

- Make it easier to put local plans in place and require design codes that set out where homes will be built and how they will look.
- Require developers to deliver vital infrastructure. Further details on these measures will be set out shortly.
- Rebalance the housing and land markets – giving councils the power to increase council tax on empty homes and reforming compensation for compulsory purchase orders.
- Encourage developers to build – giving communities updates on the progress of development and councils the chance to consider slow build-out rates when approving planning.
- Give councils the powers to work directly with landlords to bring empty buildings back in to use by local businesses and community groups through high street rental auctions.

Measures will also make it faster for councils to permit hospitality businesses to use outdoor seating.

The government will publish its response to last December’s National Planning Policy Framework consultation in due course. This will set out how planning policies in England are expected to be applied to help deliver the right homes in the right places.

There are a number of measures in the Act and the proposed revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework that will have implications for the South Worcestershire Development Plan Review and our emerging design codes.

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) night shelters were open from 24 – 25 November to protect our vulnerable people without homes during extremely cold weather.

Please encourage residents to report if they see someone sleeping rough: call Streetlink at 0300 500 0914 or report on their website: <https://thestreetlink.org.uk/>

Remember, if the person is in immediate danger, under 18, or needs urgent care, please call 999 immediately.

Local Democracy Day

The second Local Democracy Day took place on the morning of 15 November 2023 at the Civic Centre. The aim of the day was to raise awareness about local democracy, how we operate, how an election takes place and how people can get involved in the decision-making process. The district's high schools were invited to take part, those attending brought along five Year 9 students (age 13-14) each. Tracy Perkins, Engagement Officer, who arranged the event, welcomed everyone to Wychavon. The panel consisting of Vic, Councillors Chris Day and Emma Kearsley and Leonie Silk, Social Mobility Officer, introduced themselves and explained their roles at the council.

As an icebreaker and to get the pupils warmed up, we started with an “agree” and “disagree” warm-up exercise, answering questions on sustainability, employment and democracy.

Students from each school then gave a five-minute presentation to the panel on a local issue they felt strongly about. In advance of the day, they had already devised a petition and written a letter about their subject and what action they want us to take. The panel judged each school on several factors including the layout and contents of the letter and petition, the delivery, structure and content of the presentation and how they answered questions.

The District Councils Network Update

A useful summary has been provided of the key points of interest to councils from the network's Autumn Statement.

Housing and homelessness

- Local Housing Allowance rate to be increased the 30th percentile of local market rents from April 2024.
- £450m for a third round of the Local Authority Housing Fund to deliver an additional 2,400 homes and temporary accommodation for Afghan refugees.
- ‘Thank you’ payments for Homes for Ukraine sponsors extended into a third year. These will remain at £500 per month.
- £120m new funding for local authorities in England and the devolved administrations to invest in homelessness prevention, including to support Ukrainian households who can no longer remain in sponsorship.

Planning and nutrient neutrality

- Ability for Local Planning Authorities to recover the full costs of major business planning applications in return for accelerated decision dates. However, there will be “fee refunds” wherever these accelerated decision dates are not met.
- £110m Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund to support Local Planning Authorities to deliver schemes to offset nutrient pollution, unlocking planning permissions that are otherwise stalled. The Government has said that this will unlock an estimated 40,000 homes over the next five years. Additional £32m across housing and planning to unlock thousands of homes. This includes £5m additional funding for DLUHC's Planning Skills Delivery Fund for Local Planning Authorities to target application backlogs.
- New Permitted Development Right to enable one house to be converted into two homes.

Devolution and levelling up

- Four new devolution deals and an intention to expand Level 2 devolution to eligible councils across England that represent a whole county or functional economic area. They include a Level 3 deal with Greater Lincolnshire and a Level 2, non-mayoral, deal with Lancashire.
- The Investment Zones programme and its associated financial incentives will be extended from five to ten years.
- The period to claim Freeport tax reliefs will be extended from five to ten years.

Business rates

- For 2024-25, the small business multiplier in England will be frozen for a fourth consecutive year. The standard multiplier will be updated by September's rate of CPI.
- The current 75% relief for eligible Retail, Hospitality and Leisure (RHL) properties is being extended for 2024-25.
- The Government has said that “English Local Authorities will be fully compensated for the loss of income as a result of these business rates measures and will receive new burdens funding for administrative and IT costs.

Wychavon Rural Fund

Do you know an organisation in a rural area that has an exciting project to improve your community? Do they need funding for it?

If yes, then please encourage them to apply for help from the Wychavon Rural Fund. We are offering grants of up to £25,000 to support a range of projects that will make a difference to rural areas.

Parish councils, village hall trusts, community organisations, public sector organisations, museums, arts venues and other heritage organisations can bid for money.

The types of projects we will support include:

Carbon reduction measures including, but not limited to:

- The installation of green technologies such as solar panels and air source heat pumps.
- Creation of community EV charging points.
- Insulation installation.

Creating or improving green spaces, including but not limited to:

- Community gardens and orchards.
- Community play areas.

Encouraging active travel measures including, but not limited to:

- Improvements to footpaths.
- Installation of secure cycle storage.

Create or improve community cultural, heritage and tourism assets including, but not limited to:

- Museums, arts venues, exhibition centres, theatres, libraries and film facilities.

Organisations must be able to provide up to 30% of the total cost of your project from either your own funds or other sources. The deadline to submit an expression of interest is 5 January 2024. Those chosen to go on to the next stage will then be asked to submit a full application. More information and the online application form can be found at www.wychavon.gov.uk/rural-fund

Platform Neighbourhood Walkabouts 2023-2024

Here is a list of planned neighbourhood walkabouts for the rest of 23/24 in the Wychavon area.

Walkabouts give you the chance to meet with local people, neighbourhood officers, Police and other community partners to walk around your neighbourhood, including communal areas and gardens, highlighting any issues or concerns you may have..

Why do Platform carry out Neighbourhood Walkabouts?

- To ensure that our properties, open spaces and communal areas are being maintained to a good standard.
- To ensure that our neighbourhoods are safe places to live.
- To offer our customers the opportunity to engage with their landlord and community partners, on neighbourhood and community matters.
- To identify areas and themes for future Communities connected projects or activities.

Future Dates:

17 January 2024 Chawson, Droitwich, Padgewell Hill / The Tynning / The Rye Lea / The Butts / Bower Hill, Meeting Padgewell Hill WR9 8SQ, 10.00 Mandy Edghill

13 March 2024 Highfield Close, Droitwich WR9 8JZ 10.00 Mandy Edghill

Changes to postal and proxy voting

Anyone wanting to apply for a postal or some types of proxy vote can now do so online following a change in the law. New identity verification checks have also been introduced for those choosing or unable to vote in person.

The change brings absent voting in line with voting in person in a polling station where photo ID must now be shown. To make a new application for a postal or proxy vote, residents just need to follow the links to the Government registration system from Wychavon's website. They will need to already be registered to vote and provide their full name, address and National Insurance Number. This is the same as the information required when registering to vote in person. They will also need to provide a copy of their signature which can be scanned or photographed and uploaded to the system.

Postal voters will not need to provide photo ID when applying. Proxy voters will also not need to provide their own photo ID when applying, but the person they send to the polling station to vote on their behalf will need to have valid photo ID. People who registered to vote by post before 31 October 2023 will need to reapply under the new system by 31 January 2026 at the latest. They will then need to reapply every three years.

Wychavon's elections team will be contacting registered postal and proxy voters directly to inform them of the changes and what they need to do. As part of the changes people can now only act as a proxy for two people

living in the UK. The changes apply to all UK and English elections including next year's West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner election and the expected General Election.

Links to register to vote or apply for a postal or proxy vote application are available at www.wychavon.gov.uk/elections. People can still register for a postal or proxy vote using paper forms. For a paper form or more information contact the elections team on 01386 565437 or email elections@wychavon.gov.uk.

New scheme lights up Droitwich Spa

A new lighting scheme has been installed in Droitwich Spa high street, as part of efforts to improve the look and feel of the town centre. The overhead chain of festoon lights starts at the Parish of Droitwich Spa Church and zig zags across various buildings before ending at Ace Essentials.

Although they have been installed just in time for Christmas - to add some extra beauty to the high street while shoppers hunt for festive bargains - they are a permanent addition to the town and will be used throughout the year. During the winter, they will be on from 3pm each day and go off at 10pm.

The project has been delivered by Droitwich Spa Place Board, working with Wychavon, and funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. An overhead lighting scheme forms part of the Droitwich Spa Investment Prospectus, funded by Wychavon to help the town continue to thrive in the future. It is the first part of a larger project to improve the town's nighttime economy.

Councillors call for change to rules on communication poles

Wychavon councillors have called for the Government to toughen up the regulations around the installation of communication poles to prevent blighting communities. Councillors from all political groups unanimously backed a motion at Full Council on Wednesday (6 December) to lobby the Government to give more power back to councils to control how and where communication poles are installed.

Councillors specifically want the Government to change The Electronic Communications Code (Conditions and Regulations) Regulations 2003 so communication companies are forced to share apparatus. The code currently only gives the first operator in an area permission to share its apparatus with another 'where practicably possible' but it does not require it to do so. The move follows the installation of communication poles against the wishes of communities in Broadway, Droitwich Spa and other parts of the district. In Broadway the police had to be involved due to the strength of the protests and one man was hospitalised. Similar protests have been made across the country as more and more poles are installed to support the rollout of faster broadband infrastructure.

Unfortunately, Wychavon does not have any power to stop communications companies from installing poles or to force them to share apparatus, as they are classed as permitted development, meaning they do not need planning permission. The Government's intention to provide access to faster broadband speeds, particularly in rural areas, is the right one and is to be applauded. But communities and local councils up and down the country need more of a say and control over how this infrastructure is installed.

Councillor AM Sinton asked what was happening with any progress for the Raven Hotel site? In general discussion various comments were put forward.

Councillor DI Davidson referenced the point made within the Police Report (minute reference 229) which confirmed additional measures being put in place for the security and public safety at the site.

The Town Clerk recommended as a point of order that no further speculative comments were made for the reasons that,

- The Raven Site itself is not an Agenda Item for consideration at this meeting.
- The Planning process is still subject to various stages and in part commercial sensitivities.
- Further discussion over speculation is not appropriate in the forum of a live stream and recorded Council Meeting.

RESOLVED That the information be noted.

245. ACCOUNTS FOR PAYMENT

Creditor Payments were presented to the Council totalling £759.51 and supplementary payments listed of £6,798.85.
(Total expenditure = £759.51 + £6,798.85= £7,558.36). There were no questions arising.

RESOLVED That the statement of accounts for payment be received and the expenditure of £759.51 + supplementary payments of £6,798.85 ,totalling £7,558.36 be approved and duly passed for payment. (Total expenditure = £7,558.36).

The Meeting Closed at 7.28pm

Chairman of Council -----
22 January 2024