

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY,
KIDDERMINSTER

25 SEPTEMBER 2024 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: J F Byng (Chairman), P Harrison (Vice-Chairman), J Aston, B Brookes, L Carroll, V Caulfield, G Connolly, N J Desmond, R Drew, H E Dyke, P Dyke, K Gale, N Gale, J Griffiths, M J Hart, K Henderson, D Little, N Martin, M McDonnell, S Miah, D Morehead, F M Oborski MBE, T L Onslow, M Rayner, C Rogers, D Ross, D Russell, A Sutton, L Whitehouse, N Wilson and P W M Young.

C.36 Prayers

Prayers were said by Rev Simon Harry of Bewdley Baptist Church, High Street, Bewdley.

C.37 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: E Bourne and I Hardiman.

C.38 Declarations of Interests by Members

In respect of agenda item 10 – notice of motion 2, for openness and transparency, the following members declared that they had received the winter fuel allowance:

Councillors: J Aston, J Byng, R Drew, H Dyke, P Dyke, J Griffiths, P Harrison, K Henderson, D Little, M McDonnell, F Oborski MBE, M Rayner, C Rogers, D Ross, D Russell and P Young.

C.39 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C.40 Public Participation

There was no public participation.

C.41 Chairman's Communications

The Council received a list of functions attended by the Chairman or Vice-Chairman since the Council's last meeting. The Chairman announced

that he was holding a charity quiz night on Saturday 26 October at St George's Hall, Bewdley and a carol service at 4pm on Sunday 8 December at St Anne's Church, Bewdley.

C.42 Leader of the Council Announcements

The Leader of the Council referred members to his tabled report. A copy of the announcements is available for viewing on the Council's website.
https://forms.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/council/docs/doc59813_20240925_council_report.pdf

C.43 Policy And Budget Framework – Matters which require a decision by Council

(a) Recommendations from the Licensing & Environmental Committee, 5 August 2024

Pavement Licensing – The Business & Planning Act 2020

The former Chairman of the Licencing & Environmental Committee, Councillor C Rogers presented the recommendations and formally moved them for approval.

Councillor T Onslow seconded the proposals.

Upon a vote, the proposals were unanimously agreed.

Decision: Council AGREED that the fees with effect from 1 October 2024 shall be £350 for a renewal application and £500 in any other case.

C.44 Questions

Twelve questions had been submitted by members of the council in accordance with standing orders.

1. Question from Councillor M Rayner to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

Please can the relevant cabinet member tell us how negotiations with the environment agency are progressing with the reinstatement of the bridge in Springfield Park?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

The District Council are not in negotiations with the Environment Agency with regards to the reinstatement of the bridge at Springfield Park. The asset is owned by Worcestershire County Council and the project is being led by them.

Supplementary question

If you remember, you previously mentioned that the bridge would be done during the autumn. We are now nearly four weeks into the autumn, there seems little progress has been made, and it seems to be a protracted

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period to replace this bridge properly. What is your contingency plan if the bridge is not reinstated to maintain the safety of residents and visitors to the park because last winter, people were sliding on the mud on the other unlocked bridges over the river, which was particularly full due to the excessive rain we had, it left people in a highly dangerous situation?

Supplementary answer

I don't particularly need a contingency plan because I am very confident that work will be underway during October. However, we will continue to do what we did last year and make sure that improvements are made to the other path to ensure it is as safe as possible.

2. Question from Councillor L Carroll to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Well-being

Do you support more social housing in Wyre Forest?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Well-being

I am sure Councillor Carroll is fully familiar with our Local Plan, as adopted, and in particular policy SP 10 which relates to social housing and affordable housing provision. In the last five years, up to March 2024, a total of 651 affordable homes have been delivered at an average of 130 dwellings annually. This means that the average has been exceeded by some 44% over the first 5 years.

Supplementary question

There is a difference between affordable and social housing. Are you willing to work with the Government in meeting their new targets for social housing and ensuring that every resident has a right to a home?

Supplementary answer

Basically, no, we do not agree with the methodology at all. I am sure you will have noticed the notice of motion one on tonight's agenda. We do not agree in any way, shape or form with the methodology in the National Planning Policy Framework proposed by His Majesty's Government.

3. Question from Councillor S Miah to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure, Arts and Community Safety

Could the cabinet member set out the District Council's view on the importance of the Remembrance Sunday parade both to remember the veterans of the wars but also for community engagement?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure, Arts and Community Safety

I had an uncle who I was extremely fond of who was involved in the Normandy landings in June 1944, so remembrance has always been very important to me personally, as I'm sure it has to many people. The first Remembrance Day commemorations were in 1919 to commemorate the ending of WW1 a year earlier. The commemorations evolved out of an armistice day banquet held at Buckingham Palace on 10th November which ran over into the 11th. The commemorations have continued to this day, both in the UK and across the Commonwealth particularly, but also in countries across the world. Services are held at most war memorials

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across the UK, including our own here in Wyre Forest. Events are usually organised by the Royal British Legion, but they don't have to be, and they can include wreath laying and bugle playing which, until I was reading up on it, I hadn't realised originated from acts to guard the dead of the war. The Royal British Legion website encourages local and regional communities to carry out remembrance commemorations of their own, it suggests, but does not prescribe what should be included or how it should be run. It also makes no reference to government legislation, but it urges communities to make remembrance their own, however communities choose to remember. Any commemoration led by the people for the people that has gone on across the UK for in excess of 100 years is a testament to just how extremely important this event is to all communities, including our own, and the fact that our own commemorations here in Wyre Forest are so well-attended and you have probably noticed that year on year they are getting even better attended, is a visible sign of how strongly our residents feel about remembrance across Wyre Forest.

Supplementary question

How do you reconcile those views with the fact that the District Council is going to be charging people, both attending and taking part in the parade, on the car parks. Will you consider suspending car parking charges for a few hours on Remembrance Sunday?

Supplementary answer

Car parking falls under the remit of my colleague Councillor Brookes, but with his indulgence I will respond to the best of my ability. Firstly, I think it is important to note that we do not intend to make any changes to last year unless Councillor Brookes knows differently to me. There has been no free parking on Batemans Yard because it was felt, and I think it was actually under the previous administration which I think you were part of at one point, that free parking was offered at the Depot in Green Street instead, which it is this year as well. Unless I am wrong, I do not recall any budget amendments that were about putting in free parking, but perhaps that's one that you will do for this year. Finally, I would advise that although Remembrance Sunday would be classed as one of the biggest parades, I would caution that we have commemorative events and parades throughout the year which may not be as big as Remembrance Sunday but certainly carry the same depth of feeling for those involved. So, I am not sure how you would pick out which ones are worthy enough to get free car parking and which ones are not.

4. Question from Councillor V Caulfield to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Well-being

Across the country there is widespread concern about the state of our rivers, what can we as a council do to protect and restore the health of our local rivers?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Well-being

Watercourse pollution matters are overseen by the Environment Agency. There is also a role for OFWAT as well, who monitor performance and capital infrastructure spend on water companies, including Severn Trent Water. Watercourse pollution can also occur by runoff from fields and

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roads into our watercourses. The Council can have some positive impact by managing its own land and watercourses sensitively through the activities of the North Worcestershire Water Management Team. This team comments on planning applications to reduce the impacts of new developments, they work on flood mitigation schemes and incorporate ecological benefits wherever possible. They promote water issues through social media and work with partners, for example, the County Council, Severn Trent Water, the Environment Agency and the Wildlife Trust to encourage sustainable water management.

Supplementary question

Do you think we could do more? Do you think we could work more with those agencies both to raise awareness and also work more with the local group Communities Against River Pollution (CARP), as I think there might be more we could do?

Supplementary answer

We do work with the agencies that I have stated. There is probably always more that we can do. With close work we hope that we will cover all the bases as far as we possibly can and whenever opportunities arise, we will obviously attempt to do more.

5. Question from Councillor P Young to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

The previous administration was looking into the possibility of arranging the collection of food waste for re-cycling. What is the current position please?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

The current position is that the Government have legislated for Councils to align their household waste and recycling services with the new "Simpler Recycling" requirements by 31st March 2026. We already meet many of these requirements, but we are working with the other districts across the county to provide the food waste collection scheme.

Supplementary question

Is it possible that we can look at some other councils? I believe there is at least one in Worcestershire that already does food recycling, and it is going on in a number of other councils outside of the county?

Supplementary answer

March 2026 is when we have to do it currently so that is the date we will be working towards with the other districts in the county. There aren't any other districts in the county that are collecting food waste, Wychavon have stopped doing it, but now have to do it again as mandated by Government. We are working collaboratively with them and speaking with many other districts in collection authorities across the country to ensure that we get the best service for our results.

6. Question from Councillor H Dyke to the Leader of the Council

Can the Leader of the Council confirm whether he and the Conservative administration still support the practice of the "No Surprises" protocol please?

Answer from the Leader

Yes

Supplementary question

My supplementary is based on the fact that I have personally come across some anomalies to that protocol on both ward based and corporate based 'no surprises'. Can I ask the Leader if he would be prepared, please, and I have taken this up with officers, to renew any training or any strategies that need to be put before officers to make sure that this continues in the way it was meant to in its original state?

Supplementary answer

I will ensure that, and I would be interested to hear the two specific examples that you refer to, perhaps you can tell me after the meeting.

I have seen examples, as I tend to get copied into messages as Leader, when officers of this Council do want to let ward members know about no surprises, let's say there's some tree felling work at the Burlish Top nature reserve, they will notify the Leader, the Cabinet Member and all of the ward councillors and sometimes the neighbouring ward councillors as well. So, I see clear evidence of that on ward issues. It is always going to be a judgement as to when something is minutiae or operational such as the moving of a litter bin, or whether it's major tree-felling, as to whether it necessitates a no surprises message. So, there will probably always be that grey area, but I fundamentally agree with you. I quite often will say to officers, for example, with a change in Cabinet Member this Monday, I was insistent, and I know that officers fully support this, that members are notified before the press release goes out etc. So, it's a very long-winded way of saying yes, absolutely, and we will do our best to do even better.

7. Question from Councillor F Oborski MBE to the Cabinet Member Economic Regeneration, Planning and the Green Agenda

Is the Cabinet Member aware of the impact that delays in completing the work on the former Magistrates Court Complex has had on the neighbouring Boars Head pub?

Answer from the Cabinet Member Economic Regeneration, Planning and the Green Agenda

Whenever the Council is undertaking works of this nature, we would want to ensure that the impact is minimal on any businesses or residents. The delays to this project have been out of the Council's control, but there is support available for businesses.

As Council will be aware the previous Government bought in the retail, hospitality and leisure rate relief scheme, which applies for the financial year, 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025 for properties, including restaurants, cafes and drinking establishments, and the rate relief is 75% of business rates that would otherwise be payable for the financial year subject to the cash caps and subsidy rules. Furthermore, where premises are affected by local disruption, such as nearby building work or roadworks, they may also get a temporary reduction in their business rates through the Valuation Office Agency. I would encourage the owners to do this if they have not

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done so already. In the spirit of economic regeneration and the halo effect that we aspire to see from bringing buildings such as this back into use, we would all hope that once these works are complete and the building is occupied again, they would see a benefit of increased trade in the medium to long term, and we remain on track for completion in December this year.

Supplementary question

When the road works were started the pub was told the road would be closed and reopened again in March, please could the Cabinet Member and officers ensure that the relevant advice is available to the landlord of the pub, because they do not appear to be aware of the availability of business rate relief?

Supplementary answer

Yes.

8. Question from Councillor M Rayner to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

Please can the relevant cabinet member tell us how much household waste is recycled?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

The current recycling rate for the district is around 34%.

Supplementary question

I have had several residents question me about household recycling as they have, from various sources, been informed that there is no proper household recycling actually taking place. Please can you reassure and tell us the strategy you are going to employ to increase the household waste recycling and reduce scepticism from residents?

Supplementary answer

I can assure residents that proper recycling is taking place. I have visited a recycling plant with Councillor Ross, and we have visited the area in which the recycling takes place. I am not going to stand here and come up with a strategy on the hoof, so I am certain we can work with officers to ensure that recycling rates increase.

9. Question from Councillor H Dyke to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

Can the Cabinet Member responsible for Operational Services advise if there has been any effort to reduce the amount of glyphosate used by this council over the past 12 months?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

We have introduced a number of initiatives, including animal grazing, which particularly tackles the Himalayan balsam, and we are now also tackling the ragwort by removing it by hand.

Supplementary question

I do know about the animal grazing because it has happened in our ward. I just wonder if it would be possible to let other members know about these

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initiatives and let us know of any plans you may have for next year to look at reducing the use of glyphosate further?

Supplementary answer

We are always happy to communicate with everybody and find answers to this problem, so yes, very happy to communicate.

10. Question from Councillor M Rayner to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

Can the relevant cabinet member tell us how and when the roads are swept across the district?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

All the road sweeping is conducted via mechanical sweeping machines. This is also supplemented by some manual sweeping and clearing. The town centres are swept daily, the main highway routes are swept two to three times a year and the pavements are swept on a 12-week cycle.

Supplementary question

I have residents who raise concerns with me about how frequently the roads and pavements are swept. They perceive there seems to be long periods of time lapse between the sweepings. Is it possible to inform residents of when their roads are being swept?

Supplementary answer

I am not quite sure by what mechanism we would do that, but I am sure you will be able to keep the residents in your ward aware of anything that does take place.

11. Question from Councillor H Dyke to the Leader of the Council

In the recent council press release concerning the government's plans for future housebuilding numbers, the cabinet member commented "our current local plan was adopted in 2022 which means we are well placed for now" and the Leader at the last Council meeting stated "Wyre Forest benefits from an up to date Local Plan". Taking these comments into account would the Leader of the Council now agree that the then Administration made the correct decision to propose and vote for the Local Plan in April 2022 with the aim to protect our Greenbelt as much as possible?

Answer from the Leader

The journey for the current Local Plan that was adopted on 26th April 2022 kick started in 2015 when I became Leader of the Council. I would expect nothing less of an administration and the Leader of that administration to propose, vote for and defend their Local Plan. I think there is common ground that I do not quarrel with 90 to 95% of the Local Plan that was presented. The quarrel for myself and the Conservative Group at the time, which is why not one member of the Conservative Group supported the proposed Local Plan, was the amount of allocation within the green belt. Not wishing to pre-determine any planning application that might go before Planning in respect of either the second phase of Lea Castle or indeed Woven Oaks, the reality is those were strategic releases from the green

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belt that would levy the necessary funding for infrastructure that we all so desire and our communities desire. I had absolutely no objection to those, but our quarrel was the oversupply, the extra percentage provision, and we just felt there were probably three to 500 more plots within the green belt that need not be allocated, so yes, you were absolutely right to propose a Local Plan but not quite right on some of the site allocations. However, democracy is about having your say, not always your way.

12. Question from Councillor H Dyke to the Cabinet Member Economic Regeneration, Planning and the Green Agenda

Could the Cabinet member responsible for the EVC roll out please advise if everything is going to plan as per the press release issued by this council a while ago?

Answer from the Cabinet Member Economic Regeneration, Planning and the Green Agenda

As the Leader referenced in his announcements, Flowbird who are the approved contractor, have been working with multiple agencies and this has taken longer than initially expected due to some adjustments in the programme. However, they have continued to work on installation and site surveys, and they will share the confirmed installation programme with us as soon as possible. We are expecting a start date on installation in October.

Supplementary question

Will we be notifying the public when it is going to happen, or will we just be sliding them in slowly and hoping nobody notices the delay?

Supplementary answer

As soon as we have that final information, we will tell you all the exact programme and the roll-out, car park by car park, where they will be going.

C.45

Motions Submitted under Standing Orders

Three motions had been submitted in accordance with standing orders.

1. Notice of Motion by the Conservative Group

Councillor D Morehead presented the motion and formally moved that a named vote be held. Councillor M Hart seconded the proposals.

Councillor Morehead outlined the reasons for the motion. A robust debate ensued, and a number of members spoke in favour of the motion.

Councillor P Dyke left the meeting at 6.54pm and returned at 6.55pm.

Several members spoke against the motion and outlined the reasons why they were unable to support the proposal and urged members to vote against it.

Councillor L Whitehouse left the meeting at 7.08pm and returned at 7.10pm.

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Councillor N Martin left the meeting at 7.20pm and returned at 7.22pm.

A named vote on the substantive motion was recorded as follows and was agreed:

For (28)

Councillors: J Aston, B Brookes, J Byng, V Caulfield, G Connolly, N Desmond, R Drew, H Dyke, P Dyke, K Gale, N Gale, P Harrison, M Hart, K Henderson, D Little, N Martin, S Miah, D Morehead, F Oborski MBE, T Onslow, M Rayner, C Rogers, D Ross, D Russell, A Sutton, L Whitehouse, N Wilson and P Young

Against (3)

Councillors: L Carroll, J Griffiths and M McDonnell.

Decision: The Notice of Motion by the Conservative Group be agreed:

This Council expresses great concern at the Government's proposals to change the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Whilst this Council agrees the need for more housing and in particular more affordable housing this Council opposes these top-down housing figures.

Whilst this Council agrees that a standard methodology for setting housing figures has its merits and is clear and transparent, we do not support the methodology proposed.

We believe that the standard methodology should be based on household projections, in line with the approach used to develop the Council's current adopted local plan.

This Council totally opposes the proposed methodology which would see Wyre Forest District's requirement to deliver annual dwellings per annum increase from 276 to 617.

This Council resolves to maintain its commitment to defending the Green Belt and not to build one more house in the Green Belt than is necessary.

This Council endorses the response agreed by Cabinet on 10th September and acknowledging the official consultation closed at 11:45pm on 24th September, resolves to request that the Chief Executive formally writes to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government expressing our objection to this proposal.

This Council further resolves to request that the Chief Executive write to our Member of Parliament Mark Garnier to notify him of this

Council's position and request that he do all that he can to oppose the proposals and lobby the Government accordingly.

2. Notice of Motion by the Conservative Group

Councillor M Hart presented the motion and moved an amendment to incorporate some of the wording from the third notice of motion listed on the agenda. He also moved a motion to request a named vote. Councillor D Ross seconded the proposals.

Councillor M Rayner left the meeting at 7.33pm and returned at 7.36pm.

Councillor Hart outlined the reasons for the motion. A robust debate ensued, and several members spoke in favour of the motion and explained why they would be supporting the motion. A member asked for a further amendment to be accepted to work with partner agencies to ensure maximum take up of Pension Credit. This was accepted by Councillors Hart and Ross.

A named vote on the motion, as amended, was recorded as follows and was agreed:

For (28)

Councillors: J Aston, B Brookes, J Byng, V Caulfield, G Connolly, N Desmond, R Drew, H Dyke, P Dyke, K Gale, N Gale, P Harrison, M Hart, K Henderson, D Little, N Martin, S Miah, D Morehead, F Oborski MBE, T Onslow, M Rayner, C Rogers, D Ross, D Russell, A Sutton, L Whitehouse, N Wilson and P Young.

Against (3)

Councillors: L Carroll, J Griffiths and M McDonnell.

Decision: The Notice of Motion, as amended, by the Conservative Group be agreed:

This Council deplores the Labour Government's decision to remove the universal Winter Fuel Allowance payments to all old age pensioners.

This Council believes that this will lead to many thousands of pensioners who are amongst the most vulnerable in our society across Wyre Forest having to decide whether to heat their homes or eat this winter.

This Council expresses outrage that this key decision affecting circa 10 million pensioners nationally and 21,810 in Wyre Forest has been taken arbitrarily and was not in the Labour Party's Manifesto for the 4th July General Election.

This Council is appalled that, when an increase in Gas and Electricity

Charges has been announced, HMG has chosen to spitefully punish thousands of pensioners by withdrawal of the Winter Fuel Payment.

This Council Is concerned that several thousand pensioners with pensions just above Pension Credit Level, often by only £10-£15 will suffer severe hardship from this spiteful cut.

This Council believes that it is completely unacceptable for any pensioners to have to choose between heating and eating this winter.

This Council agrees that this is an act of bad faith and it will unfairly punish and adversely affect the many pensioners just above the threshold that can claim pension credit at a time when energy costs are set to rise again this winter by at least 10-15%.

This Council resolves to request that the Chief Executive writes on behalf of the Council to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to request that this decision is reversed with immediate effect.

This Council resolves to Work with partner agencies such as Registered Social Landlords to ensure maximum take up of Pension Credit.

This Council further resolves to request that the Chief Executive write to our Member of Parliament Mark Garnier to notify him of this Council's position and request that he do all that he can to lobby the Government to reverse this decision.

3. The motion submitted by Councillor Oborski was withdrawn as it dealt with the same subject as the second motion that had been approved.

C.46 Emergency Motions submitted under Standing Orders

There were no emergency motions.

C.47 Any other business

Appointment of Chairman of the Licensing and Environmental Committee

The Leader advised that Councillor C Rogers had resigned from the position of Chairman of the Licensing and Environmental Committee prior to his appointment to Cabinet.

The Leader nominated Councillor I Hardiman as Chairman of the Licensing and Environmental Committee. This was seconded by Councillor P Harrison.

Decision: Councillor I Hardiman be elected as Chairman of the Licensing and Environmental Committee for the remainder of the municipal year 2024-2025.

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There being no further business, the meeting ended at 8.27pm.

The meeting is available for viewing on the Council's website.

<https://wyreforestdc.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcasts>