

# AGENDA SUPPLEMENT (1)

**Meeting:** Council

**Place:** Council Chamber - County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, BA14 8JN

**Date:** Tuesday 21 February 2023

**Time:** 10.30 am

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**The Agenda for the above meeting was published on 13 February 2023. Additional documents are now available and are attached to this Agenda Supplement.**

Please direct any enquiries on this Agenda to Tara Hunt of Democratic Services, County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, direct line 01225 718352 or email [tara.hunt@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:tara.hunt@wiltshire.gov.uk)

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This Agenda and all the documents referred to within it are available on the Council's website at [www.wiltshire.gov.uk](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk)

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- 6 **Public Participation (Pages 3 - 6)**
- 10 **Budget 2023/24 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 - 2025/26 (Pages 7 - 10)**
- 13 **Cabinet Capital Recommendations 2022/23 Financial Year (Pages 11 - 14)**
- 18 **Members' Questions (Pages 15 - 22)**

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 20 February 2023
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**Wiltshire Council**

**Full Council**

**21 February 2023**

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## **Item 6 – Public Participation**

**From Felicity Courage**

**To Richard Clewer Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Military-Civilian Integration, Heritage, Arts, Tourism, Health and Wellbeing**

### **Question P23-06**

Considering the Government have stated that supporting Ukrainian guests into 'secure, safe, and sustainable accommodation' is a priority for using the money that has been given to Wiltshire Council to assist Ukrainian refugees, and as it has identified 'deposits, rent advances, rent top ups or furniture' as potential uses of the £10,500 per refugee provided to councils, will the council acknowledge that secure housing is a current, urgent and very real need for this community, and provide first months rent, deposits and, more importantly, guarantorship to help Ukrainian guests into the private rental sector.

### **Response**

We are reviewing the recent guidance from government and will share the outcome of this in due course.

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**Wiltshire Council**

**Full Council**

**21 February 2023**

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**Item 6 – Public Participation**

**From Graham Hill**

**To Cllr Ashley O’Neill - Cabinet Member for Governance, IT, Broadband,  
Digital, Licensing, Staffing, Communities, and Area Boards**

**Question P23-07**

Is this Council content with published terms of reference of Committees?

**Response**

The constitution including any committee terms of reference is kept under review, and any changes are considered by the Constitution Focus Group and the Standards Committee prior to going on to Full Council for determination. The Focus Group will be considering Part 3B which includes many terms of reference in 2023.

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**Wiltshire Council**

**Full Council**

**21 February 2023**

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**Item 10 – Budget 2023/24 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 - 2025/26**

**From Colin Gale, Chairman Rushall Parish Council**

**To Cllr Ashley O'Neill - Cabinet Member for Governance, IT, Broadband, Digital, Licensing, Staffing, Communities, and Area Boards**

**Statement**

RE: TOWN AND PARISH COUNCIL FOUR-YEARLY ELECTION CYCLE COSTS

References:

- A. Wiltshire Council email Director Legal and Governance/Monitoring Officer dated 9th January 2023
- B. Rushall PC letter of objection dated 29th January 2021.

Rushall Parish Council (RPC) strongly object to Wiltshire Councils declared intent to introduce the recovery of costs from Town and Parish Councils for the local elections starting in May 2025, reference A. This is a resurrection of Wiltshire Councils previous declaration of intent declared in 2021 which was subsequently withdrawn following parish complaints, reference B. RPC have initially formally declared their objection to Wiltshire Council Cabinet Meeting dated 31st January 2023.

RPC disagree with the Wiltshire Council response and believe the proposed decision to withdraw payment of local election costs by Wiltshire Council and directly charge Town, City & Parish Councils for local election costs is a 'Key Decision' as it is a total withdrawal of a service provided by Wiltshire Council. This change is not financially neutral as there will be a financial reduction to Wiltshire Council, a financial increase to the Town /Parish Councils and new financial costs to Wiltshire Council to invoice and recover the costs from the Town/Parish Councils. Effectively this proposed financial change to the local election service is a double charge to the 'electorate' who currently already pay for the local election services within their council taxes and now it is proposed that the electorate should pay again within precept charges. RPC also would have expected that a decision of this nature would have warranted a formal level of consultation with the Town, City & Parish Councils rather than just a stealthy like declaration of intent by Wiltshire Council to implement the change?

It is not clear from the costs identified in the email how much RPC might be expected to pay for their parish element of the overall elections as there are only indicative costs for uncontested elections and contested elections. It is also highlighted that these indicative costs are subject to inflation when implemented in 2025. The

indicative costs are further caveated because of the inability to predict the number of elections that may be held in any 4 year period.

RPC is a small parish and assuming worst case these costs could represent as much as 14% plus of the current parish precept if applied to one year. The email recognizes the financial impact on smaller parishes and the need to smooth the financial impact but Wiltshire Council has let this issue drift for 2 years since the original declaration in January 2021. It should be noted that precept budgets have already been set for 2023/24 by the time this notification was sent by Wiltshire Council. Offering to smooth the impact post 2025 puts parishes always on the back-foot with respect to planning for subsequent elections.

The Cabinet Officer response also advised that the clerks had been briefed by the Monitoring Officer in November 2022 and feedback welcomed. The following is the notes of the online 'Chit Chat' session:

*"Wiltshire Council has been undertaking detailed budget discussions across all areas of the business. The costs of delivering elections has been held by Wiltshire Council and early discussions with Councillors have indicated that this is likely to change. We appreciate this is a challenging message but are keen to ensure that councils have plenty of notice to effectively plan and precept. Perry will imminently be writing out to all town and parish councils with further information and an indication of what the respective election costs are".*

RPC consider it a stretch by any ones imagination to consider that the identification to parish clerks of internal WC discussions is a formal notification to parishes of such a significant change. It should also be noted that the notes also recognize that Wiltshire Council themselves recognize that the change is a withdrawal of a service ie 'The costs of delivering elections'.

### **Question P23-03**

- a) Since this is a withdrawal of a service provided by Wiltshire Council and is a 'Key Decision' will Wiltshire Council now reclassify the decision and advise what corrective actions they will take?

### **Response**

The council is not proposing to withdraw a service; it is proposing to introduce a charge for the service. The introduction of those charges from 2025 is a decision for Full Council within the broad matter of approval of the budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy, not an executive and therefore "key" decision. Please also refer to the response to Question 22-326 answered at [Cabinet on 31 January 2023](#).

- b) Why has there not been any consultation with the Town, City and Parish Councils especially via the Area Boards which is the appropriate forum for this kind of proposal. Can Wiltshire Council confirm that consultation action will be introduced if this proposal is going to proceed?

## **Response**

Please refer to the response to Question 22-326 answered at [Cabinet on 31 January 2023](#). There is no statutory requirement for consultation regarding this recommendation to Council. However, Town, City and Parish councils were briefed via their clerks by the Monitoring Officer in November 2022 and feedback welcomed. The Monitoring Officer subsequently wrote to all councils and invited questions in early January. The Council has responded to a number of queries on this issue.

## **Question P23-04**

Has Wiltshire Council considered the impact on democracy if this proposal is introduced and the possibility that small parishes may decide to avoid the election charges by not taking part in local elections?

## **Response**

We have been liaising with two comparator councils, Cornwall and Durham who implemented these changes some time ago. They assured us that there was not greater use of co-option or uncontested elections as a result of the changes. Concerns about the impact on democracy are therefore not borne out elsewhere.

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**Wiltshire Council**

**Full Council**

**21 February 2023**

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## **Item 13 – Cabinet Capital Recommendations 2022/23 Financial Year**

**From Melanie Boyle**

**To Cllr Nick Botterill – Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management and Strategic Planning**

### Background

Chippenham doctors and dentist surgeries are crumbling under the excessive housing being built in Chippenham:

- 1,000 houses just started at Rowden Brook
- 650 due to start at Rawlings Farm
- 340 just started at Langley Park
- 100 due to start at the old ambulance site
- 100 at the old college site
- 72 at Bluebells part built
- 450 at Hunters Moon part built
- 750 at Birds Marsh part built
- Many offices above shops empty and ideal for flats as Evolve and other businesses are planning.
- Numerous houses sat empty and/or derelict.
- There is no demand for Future Chippenham.

£12m of tax payers money has already been spent on the HIF project which is not going ahead.

### **Question (P23-01)**

If full Council approves the £.5m to carry on negotiations with neighbouring landowners, how much will be requested of tax payers money to finish the project?

### **Response:**

The capital allocation reflects the projected costs of promoting development on Council land to the South of Chippenham during 2023/24. This includes fees and professional services. Any further costs will be defined subject to allocation as part of the Local Plan process.

### **Question (P23-02)**

How can Wiltshire Council justify spending another £.5m of tax payers money on a non-urgent project (as Wiltshire Council has delivered 140% of government housing allocations for the last 4 years) in a cost of living crisis while vital services are being cut?

**Response:**

As a landowner the Council considers that its land holdings to the South of Chippenham have the greatest prospects of deliverability and achieving quality masterplanned development to meet housing need within the next Local Plan period if promoted with adjoining landowners. The Council as landowner working with other landowners to the South of Chippenham will need to convince the Local Planning Authority and the Government appointed Planning Inspector of the merits of their proposals to achieve allocations of sites under the Local Plan review.

**Wiltshire Council**

**Full Council**

**21 February 2023**

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**Item 13 – Cabinet Capital Recommendations 2022/23 Financial Year**

**From Nick Parry**

**To Cllr Nick Botterill – Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management and Strategic Planning**

**Statement**

Enough is enough not a penny more should be spent on this ill-conceived Future Chippenham project that the majority of the Chippenham residents who responded to your consultation were opposed to and should have been abandoned in July 2021.

Given the comments below and highlighted how can the council's influence with the Local Planning Authority not be seen, after all when the Future Chippenham consultation was carried out the Local Plan Emerging Spatial Strategy dated Jan 2021 conveniently had figures for Chippenham HMA to accommodate the housing!

Despite assurances in Cabinet meetings to the contrary, whilst the LPA is employed by Wiltshire Council and in the same building influencing will take place.

**Main Considerations for the Council**

12.To cover the unfunded costs of the Future Chippenham programme Cabinet recommends to Full Council to approve a sum of £1.848m to be funded by Future Capital Receipts. **These costs will likely not be abortive subject to the use of the paid for work being used to support a scheme if allocated as part of the Local Plan review.**

13.To continue to work with adjoining landowners to the South of Chippenham to masterplan and promote the sites as part of the Local Plan review process, Cabinet recommends an increase to the Capital Programme of £0.500m to be funded from borrowing.

**Question P23-05**

Given the statements above please advise what other landowner has access to in excess of £2.3 million of public money to promote housing development on their land?

**Response**

The Council does not hold this information.

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**Wiltshire Council**

**Full Council**

**21 February 2023**

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## **Members Questions Update**

### **Summary**

1. A total of three questions from Councillors have been received since the last meeting of Full Council on 18 October 2022.
2. Details of questions submitted and the order they will be received at the meeting are shown at Appendix 1. Responses are included at Appendix 2.
3. All three questions were received before the first deadline of 7 February 2023.
4. The Chairman will go through the questions and responses as is customary, take them as read and give the questioner an opportunity to ask one relevant supplementary question for each question submitted.

**Tara Hunt, Senior Democratic Services Officer**

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Appendix 1 – Councillor questions summary

Appendix 2 – Questions received

## Appendix 1 – Councillor Submitted Questions Summary

Questions will be received in the order listed below as specified in the Constitution.

Questions for Council (attached at Appendix 2)

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Date Received</b>	<b>Written or Verbal</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Cabinet Member</b>
23-01	Cllr Dr Brian Mathew	04/01/23	Written	Wiltshire Towns App	Cllr Richard Clewer
23-02	Cllr Dr Brian Mathew	04/01/23	Written	Wiltshire Towns App	Cllr Richard Clewer
23-03	Cllr Dr Brian Mathew	04/01/23	Written	Parking Charges Impact	Cllr Richard Clewer / Cllr Caroline Thomas

**Item 18 – Members’ Questions**

**From Cllr Dr Brian Mathew – Box & Colerne Division**

**To Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council**

**Question (23-01)**

- a) How much has to date been spent on the Wiltshire Towns App development? And how much is expected to be spent in total?

**Response**

The apps were approved as part of the wider Towns Programme – a press briefing was given at that time including outline budget. The Cabinet report for that is available here: [Wiltshire Council](#) Both apps were allocated an £80k budget.

The Heritage Trail app recognises one of the key marketing strengths for Wiltshire’s towns – their landscapes, heritage assets, and community history. The Heritage Trails app will highlight these stories and provide a free activity for people to use while visiting our towns with the aim of increasing dwell time within towns. The app is intended to be adaptable to allow seasonal trails and other special promotions by towns. It also allows local communities to be involved in developing trails. Spend thus far is £22,000.

The What’s on in Wiltshire web-app aims to bring together events being held across Wiltshire. This recognises that residents already have to check a number of sources to find out what is happening, including community Facebook pages, town websites and event advertisers such as Eventbrite. Given the number of towns, villages and parishes across Wiltshire, a lot of our events are under-advertised and not well known across our communities. The evidence shows that events and experiences are the primary reason to visit town centres, and as such the aim of this platform is to increase understanding of the number of events and activities available in Wiltshire. The scope for this work is currently being drafted for commission and as such there are no spend-to-date figures.

- b) What the expected returns are forecast to be?

**Response:**

In assessing returns we have considered similar models being used in other places.

The results for local discovery apps cited range from a 7 to 30% increase in footfall. This is likely dependent on the existing level of marketing in a settlement.

The results specifically on trails also showed a wide range of results, but all saw an increase in participation. In particular for economic returns, one trail on one weekend alone 1200 participants, whereby 80% of participants spent over £10 and nearly 10% spent over £50.

**Item 18 – Members’ Questions**

**From Cllr Dr Brian Mathew – Box & Colerne Division**

**To Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council**

**Question (23-02)**

- a) Whether there has been any attempt to link with ‘Visit Wiltshire.co.uk’?
- b) Given that Wiltshire already has a website for its Towns called Visitwiltshire.co.uk which is paid for by the various Town Council's Tourist information Centres can the Wiltshire Council version be described as an unneeded and unwarranted ‘vanity project’ that is actually damaging to Wiltshire’s market towns, because by the use of our scant funds raised from the residents of Wiltshire’s Council Tax, in this profligate way, it is discouraging residents and outsiders from visiting due to the parking charges which have seemingly been brought in to pay for it?

**Response:**

VisitWiltshire are aware of the development of the Towns Programme. In particular, we recognise that we are communicating with different audiences – VisitWiltshire seeks to support the tourism economy, while the Towns Programme targets a more local catchment area, in particular our own residents. Feedback from residents has been that they do not naturally check a tourism website, and they use a number of sources to find out what is happening, including community Facebook pages, town websites and event advertisers such as Eventbrite

We have discussed the outcomes of the Towns Programme with town councils and many of them have expressed a wish to increase their event marketing or enhance their branding to drive footfall. The programme is designed to respond to a shared understanding between Wiltshire Council and our town councils about what is required to support high streets.

The query around parking charges has been considered below.

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**Wiltshire Council**

**Full Council**

**21 February 2023**

---

**Item 18 – Members' Questions**

**From Cllr Dr Brian Mathew – Box & Colerne Division**

**To Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council / Cllr Caroline Thomas, Cabinet Member for Transport, Street Scene, and Flooding**

**Question (23-03)**

Lastly has there been any attempt to evaluate the effect of these increased parking charges on our market towns and their shops and has there been decreased footfall and sales as a result?

**Response:**

Wiltshire Council currently holds limited footfall data and is in the process of securing further data. On the basis of the current data, Sunday footfall has remained consistent at 10.2% of overall footfall over the past 2 years regardless of the change in pricing. Footfall has increased substantially in 2022 compared to 2021, but this increase must account for the measures taken in the pandemic. Nonetheless we can confirm calendar year 2022 saw a 34% increase in footfall compared to 2021, compared to a 31% increase across the UK, indicating a stronger footfall return in Wiltshire.

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