



Full Council meeting

Minutes

From the meeting at 7pm on Tuesday 5 September 2023

At St. Margaret's Hall, Bradford on Avon

Decision making

The **decisions** made by the Full Council at this meeting are at minutes [26](#), [29](#), [31](#), 32 and 33.

Minutes 32 and 33 note decisions taken in confidential business.

Present

Councillors:

- Kate Bessant
- Sam Blackwell
- Sarah Gibson
- Alex Kay
- Simon McNeil-Ritchie
- Alison Potter
- Tim Trimble
- Katie Vigar (Chair)
- Jack Vittles

Town Council Officers:

- Ian Brown - Chief Executive & Town Clerk
- Matthew McLaughlin – Communications Officer

Meeting clerk:

- Chris Stringer – Deputy Town Clerk
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Apologies

From Councillors unable to attend the meeting:

- Emma Franklin
 - David Garwood
 - Jennie Parker
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25. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

26. Minutes from the previous meeting of the full council

Proposed by Councillor Tim Trimble

Seconded by Councillor Alison Potter

Councillor Sarah Gibson abstained from voting because she wasn't at the meeting in July.

And with everyone else in favour it was **resolved**: that the minutes of the last full council meeting held on 4 July 2023 be accepted as a true record of the meeting.

27. Matters arising

None.

28. Agenda item 6 – Chair's update

The chair read out a statement providing an update on Becky Addy Wood. A copy of this statement is included at appendix B to these minutes.

The chair then highlighted that over 3,300 people signed the petition that was sent to Great Western Railway about the proposed changes to ticket offices, which could include ticket office closures.

29. Agenda item 7 – River crossing

Councillor Tim Trimble presented a set of slides that provided an update on this project (alongside the written report)

Councillor Trimble emphasised the importance of this project for the town.

He also explained that a river crossing would very likely be an expensive project – one that we would have to seek external funding for.

This would likely mean applying to central government for funding – which would necessitate having a strategic outline case in place.

Councillor Trimble then asked Duncan Laird if he wanted to add anything to this.

- Duncan is a town resident who works for the National Trust – and has significant experience of design in natural and built landscapes, including projects involving bridges.



Duncan introduced himself and explained that the approach being proposed is a very common one – and leads to an open and objective assessment of the different options.

By doing this, the best option is objectively identified – one that factors in social and environmental benefits whilst also assessing costs and constraints.

Councillors then discussed the project.

Councillor Simon McNeill-Ritchie was concerned that this project seemed to have come this far without ever having a council decision in place agreeing that a bridge was something the council should be working on.

Councillor McNeill-Ritchie also questioned the viability of the project – including the future funding.

Other councillors felt the bridge presented a significant difficulty to people walking in the town - and there were concerns about the safety of the bridge for pedestrians and cyclists.

And this meant it was important to identify options that could provide a safer and more pleasant way of crossing the river.

Councillors Alex Kay and Kate Bessant felt the timing of this step in the project wasn't thought through, however.

Councillor Kay wanted to wait for the findings and recommendations from the traffic modelling – and from Wiltshire Council's statutory work on air quality in the town.

Councillor Bessant also wanted to wait for the outcomes of the traffic modelling before committing such a significant sum of money to this project.

Councillor Katie Vigar commented that £20,000 of the sum needed was expected to come from the Wiltshire Towns Project – so the amount of money coming directly from the town council was less than the £30,000.

Councillor Vigar also highlighted the importance of having a project that was ready when funding opportunities become available. This was echoed by other councillors, including Councillor Trimble.



Councillor McNeill-Ritchie repeated his view that the project was wishful thinking – with no real prospect of ever happening without a plan to raise funds.

Proposed by Councillor Tim Trimble

Seconded by Councillor Sarah Gibson

For (6):

- Councillors Sam Blackwell, Alison Potter, Katie Vigar and Jack Vittles

Against (3):

- Councillors Kate Bessant, Alex Kay and Simon McNeill-Ritchie

And by majority it was **resolved** to:

1. Approve the decision made by the Sustainable Travel committee on 25 July 2023 to appoint consultant 2 to the project.
2. Allocate £29,930 of funding in line with consultant 2's quote.
3. Delegate responsibility to the Town Clerk & Chief Executive to appoint consultant 2 – and to agree a date for the strategic outline case to be finished.

30. Agenda item 8 – Twinning

The Deputy Town Clerk introduced a brief report providing information about twinning – and information about Bradford on Avon's twin towns (and its friendship with Tubas)

The report also highlighted the upcoming and planned visits to Bradford on Avon.

31. Agenda item 9 – Confidential Business

Proposed by Councillor Alison Potter

Seconded by Councillor Sam Blackwell

And with all in favour it was **resolved**: to go into confidential business.

34. Next meeting

The next Full Council meeting is planned for Tuesday 31 October 2023.



End of the meeting

The meeting finished at 9pm.

Appendix A: Comments and questions from the public

Allotments

There was a question and concerns about the upkeep and management of the allotment sites at Sladesbrook and Bancroft.

This was followed by a question asking where information about spending from the Colonel William Llewellyn Palmer Educational Charity could be found – since this trust should be used to pay for looking after these allotment sites.

Councillor Katie Vigar acknowledged that there had been some issues with the allotments – but actions were and are being taken by the council to address these.

Councillor Vigar also highlighted that the Colonel Palmer Charity's accounts – and other information – were available to view on the Charity Commission's website:

[Colonel William Llewellyn Palmer Educational Charity \(charity number: 1015681\)](#)

Becky Addy Wood

There was a statement and questions from Lisa Otter-Barry about Becky Addy Wood – including some conversation with Councillor Katie Vigar as the chair of the meeting.

The conversation also included a statement read out by Council Vigar on behalf of the council.

As such, this has been transcribed here:

Lisa Otter-Barry: Thank you first for putting Becky Addy Wood on the agenda, you know that's appreciated. We're just wondering, because it comes under the confidential business, whether it is something that that [sic] can be discussed while the members of the public are here or not. Cause it comes under the confidential business on the agenda.



Councillor Vigar: That means it is in the confidential section of the meeting, therefore the public will need to leave as we begin the confidential business.

Lisa Otter-Barry: So, 9, 10 and 11 are all confidential items, are they?

Councillor Vigar: So, 9 – we have to have a vote move into confidential business. Then items 10 and 11 are the items we're discussing in the confidential session.

Lisa Otter-Barry: I was just going to ask, if it was public, could it possibly come higher up the agenda but that's okay.

So, my question is without prejudice and it's about Becky Addy Wood (BAW)

Do councillors agree that the current BAW felling dispute is a tragedy which is creating a rift in the community and damaging friendships and working relationships in the town and local area. And that therefore, every effort must be made to resolve the situation as soon as possible.

Please, will the council, therefore, urgently reach settlement with the Friends of Becky Addy Wood (FROBAW)?

Councillor Vigar: Thank you for your question. In anticipation of questions on this subject, we have a prepared statement that I am going read out. Partly, in answer to questions and partly because, although, we do need to have discussions in private, we do want to keep the public involved as best we can as regards to the progress of the situation.

I will begin with some background because not everybody is as well versed with the history of the situation as perhaps people here.

The town council was served with a temporary injunction by the High Court on February 10 to prevent the council carrying out work in Becky Addy Wood. The work was to make safe trees affected by ash die back adjacent to the road and the public footpath. The work was being carried out in line with a management plan prepared following discussions with the Friends of Becky Addy Wood (FROBAW) and after sending them the plan with the request that they consult their members. No results from such a consultation were received by the town council.

The works that had been carried out by the town council were approved by the Forestry Commission in September 2022 under the terms of a Felling Licence. The Forestry Commission consulted with Natural England and Wiltshire Council



before granting the Felling Licence and took into account a number of objections raised by some of the members of FROBAW.

The council's approach was to promote the biodiversity and sustainability of the woodland, minimising felling as far as possible. And all work was conducted with an ecologist on site to ensure that wildlife was protected, and additional bird and bat habitat were being added. The plan was to replace trees lost with a wider variety of tree types to make the wood more resilient in the face of future tree disease.

The temporary injunction was served without the town council being represented in court. In order to seek a sensible resolution – and to limit legal costs – the town council suggested that a professional arborist and professional ecologist be independently appointed to draw up a management plan for the wood. This was accepted by the other party in May. Once the experts have reported, the expectation is that the High Court will lift the injunction.

Although this agreement has been reached, the other party has not withdrawn its claim that the council has breached the Memorandum of Understanding between the council and the Friends of Becky Addy Wood, for example by failing to partner with FROBAW in the production of a Management Plan for Becky Addy Wood.

This underlying claim will continue to trial unless either the claimants discontinue it – which they were invited to do – or terms of settlement can be reached. As the defendant, the town council cannot withdraw from the litigation. However, the council is taking every reasonable steps it can to reach an agreement in order to limit costs and avoid the case reaching to trial, if possible.

A case management conference was held yesterday involving the judge and legal teams for both sides. At the hearing, the judge set out a future timetable for the claim. If the case proceeds to trial, it is anticipated this will be sometime between 4 March 2024 and 13 May 2024 inclusive. The claimants are also required to notify those persons who they purport to represent and to ask them to confirm if they do wish to be represented or opt out and to tell the council who they are.

The claimants attempted to apply for an order capping costs in the litigation but this was unsuccessful. As such they have no special cost protection.



Due to the nature of legal proceedings, it has been necessary for members of the council to discuss the handling of the case under confidential business of Full Council meetings and at one Extraordinary Full Council meeting. However, it has done its best to keep the public informed, as far as possible, via our usual channels of communication as well as the website.

That's the information I am able to provide today in answer to questions.

Lisa Otter-Barry: [inaudible comment]

Councillor Vigar: You're welcome to but I am not prepared to say anything further.

Lisa Otter-Barry: [inaudible comment]

Just to say, I was at the case management conference, yesterday. And the application for cost capping was not actually made due to a technicality. So, I dunno whether the information has got scrambled but it wasn't actually made so we don't know whether it was postponed, that part of the hearing.

Erm, yeah, and apart from that I've been advised not to say anything further about what the judge said.

So, umm but, yeah I think the council knows very well what our position is and that there wasn't ever a management plan and we were not involved in making a management plan – we weren't involved in drawing that up – they know all the details. All we would ask is that – which I hope is going to happen through the management agreement from the 3 May – is that, and it has been agreed that the arborists that take on the wood will use an appropriate risk management system. Either Valid or QTRA – which we have been talking about for a very long time.

And, but crucially that there will be a proper footfall survey done. Unless the council would like to speed things up – there's two ways we could speed it up. Either they agree to use the footfall survey that was done over three weeks in June, May and June last year. And, or, we could do a footfall survey together with the members of FROBAW and members of the town council. To speed it up we could then give that footfall survey to the arborist, to allow that. And we have actually made that suggestion, so yeah.

Councillor Vigar: Thank you, Lisa.



Agenda item 7 – River crossing

There was a comment that it would seem irresponsible and absurd for councillors to agree to spend money on the feasibility study before the outcomes and findings of the traffic modelling are known.

Councillor Tim Trimble replied by saying that there was already synergy between the 2 pieces of work – and that Atkins (the company completing the traffic modelling) are aware of the project looking at the river crossing. The river crossing was also discussed in detail when it came up on the agenda.