

In Attendance

Councillor Tony Briggs – Mayor,
Olive O’Sullivan –Chief Executive Officer,
Cllr Simon Ward-Leader Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council,
Mary Watkins-Head of Finance,
Jessica Johnson – Projects Manager,
Becky Oldham – Projects Manager.

There were 45 members of the public and one member of the press present.

1 Welcome Address by Councillor Tony Briggs, Town Mayor

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting.

- [Welcome Address](#)

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolved that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16th May 2023 be signed as a true record.

3 Report on the work of Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council during 2023/2024

Councillor Simon Ward delivered a report on the work of the Town Council in 2023/24.

- [Report](#)

4 Open Forum

Members of the public were invited to ask questions and make comments.

- 1) A resident asked what plans the Council has for dealing with the problem of the homeless in our town.

The CEO thanked the resident for their concern and desire to improve the lives of the homeless or people living in poverty. The CEO responded that individuals that are homeless often have very complex issues and needs that require specialist advice and support and the kind of support needed is more appropriately provided by agencies other than town and parish councils that don't have the expertise and could do more harm than good.

If a person is homeless the Principal Authority, Birmingham City Council, must help them to secure suitable accommodation, this is known as the relief duty.

The Town Council supports local organisations working with those experiencing difficulties via the Community Grant Scheme, which has funded churches that provide food banks and welfare advice and support.

- 2) A resident asked if the Council would make it a priority to push for a consultation with Sutton Coldfield residents in respect of the future of the Police Station.

Cllr S Ward responded that strong views had been expressed at a Town Council meeting that the Police and Crime Commissioner attended last year. The Town Council acts as an advocate

for residents and would continue to push for a consultation once the election of a new Police and Crime Commissioner had concluded.

- 3) A representative of the Walmley Residents Association (WRA) raised concerns around the traffic impact from Langley development on the surrounding network and asked if the Town Council would look to engage expertise to review the traffic impact of Langley and Peddimore developments.

Cllr S Ward applauded the work of the volunteers at the WRA and confirmed that the Town Council uses a range of consultants to inform the Town Council's response as a Statutory Consultee to planning applications. The Town Council do have consultants that advise on transport issues and will get the expertise needed to represent the views of the town.

- 4) A representative from Eco Sutton asked about the criteria for selecting a Town Board and that noted that all decisions by the Board should be taken considering the need to respond to the climate crisis. A suggestion was made that membership of the board include voluntary groups on a rolling basis to ensure a broad range of views.

Cllr Ward responded that Government sets out guidance on the composition of the Town Board with specific requirements around the inclusion of certain elected representatives, including the MP and local councillors and a senior representative from the Police. Community engagement and evidence of community support for the projects to be funded is really important and there will be a range of opportunities for contributions from the vibrant voluntary and community sector across the Town to help to shape the vision and plan. Cllr Ward gave assurance that the request for decisions to be taken in light of the need to respond to the climate crisis, would be discussed by the Board from the outset.

- 5) A resident asked which assets were on the Town Council's wish list to be transferred from Birmingham City Council and specifically asked about the tennis courts behind the Town Hall which have gone to seed and currently lie unused.

Councillor Ward read out the 13 parks and public open spaces that are on the Devolution Deal proposal submitted to Birmingham City Council, the full report can be found on the Town Council website attached to the Strategy and Resources Agenda for July 2023.

The tennis courts and bowling green are operated by Tudor Community Sport Trust under leasehold from Birmingham City Council.

- 6) A resident asked about the Town Council's current funds held in reserves and what plans there were for it to be spent.

Councillor Ward responded that the balance sheet at the end of the financial year showed reserves of £4,315,074. This includes £569,464 kept in a general reserve to cushion the impact of uneven cash flows or in the case of unexpected events or emergencies and £3,745,610 held in earmarked reserves that have been built up by the Town Council to deliver future projects and activities and align with the priorities of the Strategic Plan.

The four largest earmarked reserves are the Devo Deal £694,259, Town Centre Regeneration £596,848, Heritage Restoration Works £500,000 and £470,000 for Park Enhancements. The Town Council is here to spend public money responsibly and wisely, there were challenges with progressing many projects as Birmingham City Council are refusing to play ball.

- 7) A resident raised issues around irresponsible parking on the pavements around Rectory Park and Rectory Road that regularly blocked entry for people accessing the hockey club.

It was suggested that this was due to users and staff of Good Hope hospital and that measures were needed to manage traffic and offer shuttle buses to take cars away from the hospital and into the town centre car parks for non-essential visits.

The CEO responded that it was her understanding that Good Hope is carrying out an internal review into a shuttle bus scheme that is available for hospital staff to park in Reddicroft car park and take a shuttle bus into Good Hope.

- 8) The CEO read out a comment from a resident that was unable to be in attendance. The resident raised concerns about drivers being impatient with people with a disability. The CEO reminded people to be more patient of people that were unable to move at pace.

- 9) A resident talked about the Gracechurch redevelopment which includes 700 flats and asked if the Town Council sees this as the best possible offer for the town.

Cllr Ward responded that the development is in the early stages and as a Statutory Consultee the Town Council will be consulted during the planning process and determine a formal position, and that the Town Council is here to stand up for and represent the residents of Sutton Coldfield.

- 10) A resident welcomed the investment in the Gracechurch Centre by BPG and SAV Group and sessions for residents to look at the early-stage proposals. She suggested that the plans could benefit from further development to emphasise the town's heritage, raised concerns over the proposed height of the buildings and asked if the Town Council would be willing to lobby the owners for a more ambitious design.

Cllr S Ward responded that the next stage would be about design and that the Town Council would continue to push for development of a design code that reflects the heritage and everything that makes the town special.

- 11) A resident welcomed the news of the Empire Cinema being brought back into use and asked if the Town Council would be doing anything to support the venture.

Cllr S Ward responded that the Town Council would be looking to practical ways to help, for example by encouraging active travel or improving the public realm.

- 12) A resident talked about the financial difficulties faced by Birmingham City Council (BCC) and asked if the Town Council had established a relationship with the Commissioners.

Cllr Ward responded that he had met with the Lead Commissioner for BCC, Max Caller, and had been clear on the challenges and opportunities, including sharing the recommendations of the LUC report into the future governance structure of Sutton Park. Engagement with the Commissioners had been positive but Max Caller had stated that the Commissioners are looking at raising funds and selling assets in the short term.

- 13) A resident asked for further detail around the build-up of reserves, if the Town Council is ready to take on potential assets that may close as a result of the current financial situation in Birmingham City Council and spoke in support of the idea of a trust for Sutton Park and asked what additional funding that would bring in.

Cllr Ward responded that details of the reserves are regularly reported to the Town Council's Strategy and Resources Committee and further detail is available on the Town Council website. The annual Town Council precept is currently around £1.8m and the taking on of assets would be a significant undertaking that could take the majority of those funds. The Strategic Plan consultation due to be carried out over the summer, will ask residents how they feel about the Town Council taking over some assets and the costs that would be involved. The proposed trust model for Sutton Park would involve several different bodies, further work is needed to come up with a plan that will work for the Park.

- 14) A resident raised concerns about inconsiderate parking on Boldmere Road by Chester Road that made it difficult to pass and asked if the yellow lines to restrict parking could be extended.

Cllr Ward responded that Birmingham City Council are responsible for the highways and that this would be best raised with their highways team.

- 15) A resident commented on the closure of Birmingham City Council's (BCC) plant nursery at Coleshill Road and asked if it would be reopened. There was also a suggestion that any excess produce from allotment sites be used to feed local families.

Cllr Ward responded that the news about Coleshill Nurseries was very disappointing and that the Ward Councillor from BCC is engaged with the City Council to try and get it back open and that the Town Council would be interested in utilising the space for the Town Ranger service and florals. Cllr Ward supported the idea of distributing excess produce and asked the Project Manager Communities to look at making links to food banks in the area.

- 16) A resident asked for feedback on the additional parking enforcement around school that was carried out at the end of last year and commented on the continuing parking difficulties in Rockingham Gardens and Anchorage Road that had improved with some parking enforcement.

The CEO responded that she was pleased the enforcement had made a difference and the situation will continue to be monitored. The parking enforcement around schools was carried out for the first term of the academic year and a full report on the results of this was taken to the Town Council's Planning and Highways Committee.

- 17) A resident spoke to advocate for more beautiful places and houses, with developments that draw on heritage, use local brick and have more curves on frontages.

- 18) A resident asked the Town Council to better communicate and consult with groups. He noted that there was a mention in the Annual Report of the Langley development within the Green Travel District but asked that further work was done to communicate with local action groups and asked that additional consultant resource be brought in for technical assistance.

The CEO responded that there were vacancies on the Officer Team, and discussions with a recruitment agency to assist with the recruitment of full time staff were ongoing. Cllr Ward

added that the Town Council was very ambitious and agreed that more capability was needed. The loss of a local newspaper had made it harder to communicate with residents, but the Town Council would be looking to do more of this.

19) A resident asked about the Town Council's commitment to save the Sutton Coldfield libraries.

Cllr Ward responded that there is a motion to Full Council next week that sets out the commitment of the Town Council to do all that it can. The Town Council already makes an annual contribution of £137,000 to Birmingham City Council to maintain Sutton Coldfield Library.

20) A resident commented that there is a responsibility on residents to be more engaged, attend meetings and contribute to Town Council meetings. A resident replied that not all residents knew how to find out about meetings.

Cllr Ward responded that all meeting agendas are published on the Town Council website and social media channels, there are e-newsletters sent to people that have subscribed and a Newsletter was sent via Royal Mail to each house in February 2024.

21) A representative from Our Place thanked the Town Council for Community Grant funding and acknowledged that it was difficult to sometimes get residents to engage and attend events. Our Place offers benefits and housing advice for residents, and it is difficult to get the message out that they are there to help.

The meeting ended at 7:37pm.