

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held in the Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 9 October 2019

PRESENT: Councillor R J West – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, B S Banks, Mrs M L Beuttell, G J Bull, E R Butler, S Bywater, B S Chapman, J R Clarke, Mrs S Conboy, J C Cooper-Marsh, S J Corney, S J Criswell, J W Davies, D B Dew, Ms A Diaz, Mrs A Dickinson, R Fuller, Dr P L R Gaskin, Mrs S A Giles, J A Gray, M S Grice, K P Gulson, M J Humphrey, Dr N Johnson, Mrs P A Jordan, P Kadewere, D N Keane, C J Maslen, H V Masson, L W McGuire, J Neish, J M Palmer, K I Prentice, T D Sanderson, Mrs P E Shrapnel, Mrs J Tavener, D Terry, D M Tysoe, D J Wells and Mrs S R Wilson.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors T D Alban, R E Bellamy, D A Giles, D J Mead, J P Morris, Mrs S Smith, R G Tuplin, S Wakeford and J E White.

28 PRAYER

Dawn Colley, RAF Wyton Padre, opened the meeting with Prayer.

29 MINUTES

Subject to the replacement of the word “temporary” with the words “B&B” in the eighth line of the thirteenth paragraph of Item No. 18, the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 24th July 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

30 MEMBERS INTERESTS

Councillors T D Sanderson, Ms P E Shrapnel, P Kadewere and Ms A Diaz declared non-statutory disclosable interests in Item No. 35 by virtue of their membership of Huntingdon Town Council.

31 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: SECTION 89 - GODMANCHESTER AND HEMINGFORD ABBOTS WARD

The Returning Officer reported that following a by-election in the Godmanchester and Hemingford Abbots Ward on 1st August 2019, Councillor Sarah Wilson had been elected to the District Council.

32 CHAIRMAN'S ENGAGEMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Council noted those engagements attended by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman since the last meeting (a copy of which is appended in the Minute

Book). In doing so, the Chairman drew particular attention to the Oxmoor Community Garden Groundwork Awards which had assisted unemployed individuals to improve their confidence and to find further employment.

33 MAYOR OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY

The Chairman welcomed the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Mr James Palmer, to the meeting. By way of introduction, Mr Palmer updated Members with details of the additional funding of £1.2bn for the Combined Authority that had been secured since its inception and welcomed the invitation that had been extended to him to provide responses to questions that Members had submitted in advance of the meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor J P Morris regarding investment in cycling and walking infrastructure, Mr Palmer explained that whilst it was not part of the strategic nature of his responsibility, the Cambridge Autonomous Metro (CAM) was being brought forward to encourage more walking and cycling and was intrinsically part of the single largest local government project in the UK. In addition, investment into cycling was an integral part of the masterplans for the four market towns within the District.

With reference to questions from Councillor D A Giles, Mr Palmer reiterated that the Cambridge Autonomous Metro was one of the most ambitious projects being undertaken. Members noted the business case had been outlined to the Board in July 2019 and a meeting of the Board had been set up tomorrow to see this through to the business stage. The project was designed to deliver a transport solution for all and encourage growth in and around Cambridgeshire, with St Neots directly benefiting. Mr Palmer also referred to a meeting he was attending tomorrow in Oxford on the East/West rail link to set out the Combined Authorities position on the proposals and explained that, although the District Council had indicated a preference for the northern route, the Combined Authority would be mindful of the needs of Huntingdonshire. Mr Palmer explained that he had been in consultation with Highways England in terms of how the plans for the upgrading of the A428 would affect the CAM and was keen to get the best possible solution.

Arising from a question from Councillor S Bywater on support for small businesses in Sawtry, Mr Palmer explained that the Combined Authority had provided business advice and grant funding to support existing businesses. He encouraged local businesses to get in touch to support the development of apprenticeships and jobs growth in the area.

Councillor J M Palmer raised a question in relation to his concerns that Ramsey had been overlooked from the Combined Authorities proposed Transport Strategy. In response the Mayor explained that the Strategic Bus Review had highlighted that the existing bus services were inadequate and work was ongoing with Homes England and Urban and Civic to look at the opportunities for the Metro to be extended from St Ives to Alconbury. An early stage report had also been funded into the potential of also extending the link to Ramsey. Members were reminded that the delivery of the Metro was about providing homes and the Mayor wanted to ensure that there was an opportunity to link up the entire County.

Mr Palmer responded to a question by Councillor Ms A Dickinson on the progress of the third river crossing and reported that given the growth in the area this was essential infrastructure and was open to a feasibility study.

Arising from a question by Councillor K Prentice on the proposed East-West rail line, Mr Palmer outlined his concerns should the preferred route fall to the south of St Neots. The Council was advised that work was ongoing with the Department for Transport and East West Rail to encourage the route as near as possible to enhance the town.

In response to questions from Councillor B S Chapman, Mr Palmer referred to his previous answer on the East-West rail route and explained that he was working with the District Council to ensure that delivery of major infrastructure would reflect local concerns. Should the preferred route fall to the south of St Neots, a solution would be needed to resolve the issues relating to access to the station within the town.

Mr Palmer went on to explain that housing growth remained one of the key projects for the Combined Authority. Members were reminded that a target had been set to deliver 1K low cost homes and £100k homes for first time buyers. Members were also reminded that £4.1m of investment had been committed to the St Neots Masterplan and work was ongoing with regard to post-16 education and adult education which it was hoped would provide further scope to re-train and take up opportunities across the area.

Mr Palmer responded to a question from Councillor P L R Gaskin on the investments which the Combined Authority has earmarked for St Neots and the surrounding villages. These included the reform of the bus services, the Cambridge Autonomous Metro and improvements to the A14 and A428. All of which demonstrated the massive investment that was being delivered to this part of the County.

Arising from a question from Councillor D Wells on the timescale for the Cambridge Autonomous Metro and the potential for the early implementation of a line from Cambridge to St Neots, Mr Palmer confirmed that the Combined Authority could deliver this.

Mr Palmer concluded his presentation by extending an invitation to all Members to contact him directly if they had any additional queries.

34 CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY

In conjunction with the decision summaries of the recent meetings of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Councillor G J Bull presented an update of their activities. (Copies of the decision summaries are appended in the Minute Book). Particular attention was drawn to the Combined Authority ongoing key projects, including the Huntingdon Third River Crossing, Cambridge Autonomous Metro (CAM) and the East-West Arc Infrastructure from Oxford to Cambridge.

Councillors D B Dew provided an update on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee and advised Members that the Committee had been focussing their attention on two to three key strategic items where they could add value, paying particular

attention to the Local Transport Plan, the CAM and the bus review. Members were also acquainted with their scrutiny of the viability of the University of Peterborough.

Finally, Members were provided with an update on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Audit and Governance Committee by Councillor L W McGuire. Councillor McGuire highlighted the concerns expressed by the Committee regarding the performance of the Auditors and the impact this had had on each constituent Council.

35 HUNTINGDON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Having regard to a report by the Planning Policy Team Leader (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the referendum of the Huntingdon Neighbourhood Plan held on 19th September 2019, the Managing Director acquainted Members with the results of the referendum with 87% voting in favour of supporting the making of the Neighbourhood Plan. As the result exceeded the 50% threshold, the Council was required to make the Neighbourhood Plan part of the statutory development plan for Huntingdonshire.

In moving the recommendation that was duly seconded by Councillor G J Bull, Councillor R Fuller thanked the Officers involved, the community and Huntingdon Town Council. Councillor T D Sanderson also commended Hayley Burns at Huntingdon Town Council for her work on the Plan. Whereupon, the Council

RESOLVED

that the Huntingdon Neighbourhood Plan as attached at Appendix 1 to the report now submitted be adopted with immediate effect to become part of the statutory development plan for Huntingdonshire.

36 POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW

Having regard to a report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Chairman of the Corporate Governance Committee, Councillor L W McGuire, acquainted Members with details of the outcome of a review of polling districts and polling places as required by Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Schedule of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2019 as appended to the report now submitted be approved.

37 APPOINTMENT OF INTERIM CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER AND SECTION 151 OFFICER

With the assistance of a report by the Managing Director (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding the legislative duty placed on the Council to appoint a Section 151 Officer, the Council were reminded that the designation was held currently by the Head of Resources who would shortly be leaving the Council's service. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that Claire Edwards, Finance Manager, be appointed as the Council's Chief Finance Officer/Section 151 Officer on an interim basis commencing on 14th October 2019 for a period of time not exceeding 12 months.

38 QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

(Councillor M Humphrey entered the meeting at 8.15pm).

Councillor D N Keane asked about the impact of online shopping and the need to ensure that the town centres remain a viable destination to visit for retail, possibly through the provision of free car parking. In response Councillor Ms M Beuttell, Executive Councillor for Operations and Regulation explained that there had been numerous studies around the provision of free car parking but there would always be the environmental, social or financial cost. She reiterated that the District Council's decision surrounding the new system of car parking charges enabled greater choice of flexibility for the shopper to encourage longer parking times.

Councillor P Kadewere raised a question regarding the impact of a no deal Brexit, specifically relating to the smooth running of schools and the contingency plans which the District Council had put in place should there be potential food, medicine or fuel shortages or an increase in safeguarding referrals. In response, the Executive Leader, Councillor G J Bull, explained that the District Council had the necessary plans in place, with key Officers liaising regularly with external agencies. He was confident that there would be mechanisms in place to be able to deal with any implications.

Councillor B S Chapman asked how increasing the car parking charges would aid and support the town centre economy. He asked how it was possible to reconcile the suggested contradiction that increasing the minimum stay times would increase the length of time visitors to the town centre remained and as detailed in the report to Cabinet on 14th February 2019 the new charges had been assessed on 10-30% fall in car park usage. In response Councillor Ms M Beuttell hit back at Councillor Chapman's claims and suggested that he had been spreading lies regarding the car parking charges, as well as abuse against her personally and the Managing Director on Facebook and Black Cat Radio, which suggested that she had circumvented the Council's Constitution to achieve the aim of increasing car parking charges. These were blatant lies and the proper procedures had been followed and scrutinised throughout. She further stated that Councillor Chapman had not produced any evidence of his suggestion that when he was Portfolio Holder that if the Council reduced car parking charges this would generate more revenue. The Chairman concluded the discussion on this question and stated that this had received full scrutiny with all Members fully briefed and party to the consultation on the development of the car parking strategy.

Councillor J M Palmer responded to a question from Councillor T D Sanderson on the parks and open spaces review and also provided an update on the negotiations with Cambridgeshire County Council on the redevelopment of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park. He explained that work was being drawn up with a consultant and a public consultation had recently been concluded on the District Councils Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.

Arising from a question by Councillor K Prentice on Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding for St Neots, Councillor R Fuller, Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Economic Development confirmed that the suggestions by another Member that CIL funding already agreed for St Neots Riverside Park was not in fact CIL funding were false. Councillor Fuller explained that the CIL funding for St Neots projects that had been agreed by the Cabinet was additional investment in the town that was not linked to previous Section 106, Combined Authority or County Council funding. Councillor Fuller reported that this Council had awarded nearly £500k for the new projects in the Riverside Park and the town centre and was keen to emphasise the positive benefits that these projects would deliver.

39 OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEES AND PANELS

A copy of the list of meetings held since the last meeting of the Council on 24th July 2019 is appended in the Minute Book and Members were advised that any issues or questions could be raised in relation to these meetings.

Councillor Mrs S J Conboy asked for reassurance with regards to the level of resources in the Internal Audit Team and the impact this may have upon the delivery of sound quality assurance processes and potentially the Council's reputation. In response, Councillor L W McGuire the Chairman of the Corporate Governance Committee reported that these issues were being addressed by the Internal Audit Manager.

40 VARIATIONS TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS

On the recommendation of Councillor G J Bull and Councillor Mrs S J Conboy, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that Councillor D B Dew be appointed to the Development Management Committee in place of Councillor R J West;
- (b) that Councillor K Gulson be appointed to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) in place of Councillor Ms A Dickinson;
- (c) that Councillor Mrs S Wilson be appointed to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Customers and Partnerships) in place of Councillor Mrs S J Conboy;
- (d) that Councillor Mrs S Wilson be appointed to the Corporate Governance Committee in place of Mrs S J Conboy.

The meeting ended at 8.20pm.

Chairman