

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CABINET held in the CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER/STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 10 December 2024

PRESENT: Councillor S J Conboy – Chair.

Councillors L Davenport-Ray, S W Ferguson, J E Harvey, B A Mickelburgh, T D Sanderson, S L Taylor and S Wakeford.

APOLOGY: An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor B M Pitt.

52 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12th November 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

53 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor S Wakeford declared a Non-Registerable Interest under Minute No. 24/54 as a resident of Brampton.

Councillor T D Sanderson declared an Other Registrable Interest under Minute No. 24/56 by virtue of the fact that he was a Member of Huntingdon Town Council.

54 BUSINESS RATES - RURAL SETTLEMENT LIST

See Members' Interests.

With the aid of a report prepared by the Revenues and Benefits Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet reviewed and determined boundaries of rural settlements to facilitate the award of Rural Rate Relief in accordance with s42(b) of The Local Government Finance Act 1988, as amended by The Local Government and Rating Act 1997.

In introducing the report, the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance advised the Cabinet that settlements with a population of less than 3,000 were defined by the Government as rural and those with populations exceeding this were regarded as urban. It was a requirement of the Council that boundaries were reviewed, set and published each year by 31st December. The review had resulted in the reclassification of Buckden and Diddington, The Stukeleys and Fenstanton into urban settlements with one business being affected in the latter Parish. Members were assured that contact would be made with them in due course pending the Cabinet's approval of the recommendations.

Having been acquainted with the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships), the Cabinet's attention was drawn to a proposed recommendation suggesting the separation of the villages of Buckden and Diddington, defining Buckden as an urban settlement and Diddington as a rural settlement. Having duly moved and seconded the proposed additional recommendation, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) to approve Huntingdonshire District Council's Rural Settlement List for publication by 31st December 2024, to facilitate the award of Rural Business Rates Relief for the financial year commencing 1st April 2025;
- (b) to delegate authority for approval of future Rural Settlement Lists to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance; and
- (c) that the two villages of Buckden and Diddington be separated on the Council's Rural Settlement List, defining Buckden as an urban settlement and Diddington as a rural settlement.

55 AFFORDABLE HOUSING DELIVERY

A report by the Regeneration and Housing Delivery Manager was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) advising Members of the work undertaken by the Strategic Housing Team and providing an update on the delivery of affordable housing in Huntingdonshire.

Following an introduction by the Executive Councillor for Economy, Regeneration and Housing, the Cabinet were informed of the progress made to deliver affordable housing within the District and acknowledged the numerous economic challenges faced by the authority in delivering this key action within the Corporate Plan. Executive Members' attention was then drawn to the Affordable Housing Advice Note which provided advice and guidance to developers on what the expectations were for Huntingdonshire. The views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) were then discussed. Panel Members had primarily sought clarification on a number of points raised within the report which had been responded to at the meeting.

The Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Waste and Street Scene questioned why the percentage levels of the delivery of affordable housing were lower on larger sites such as Alconbury Weald and Wintringham Park, particularly when compared to the smaller ad hoc sites which were achieving 40% delivery overall. Cabinet Members were informed by the Executive Councillor for Economy, Regeneration and Housing that each site was unique with different levels, scales, needs and infrastructure requirements. Examples of the latter referred to at the meeting included schools, roads and decontamination levels from ex-military sites. Significant investment in these areas were required which factored into the agreed number of affordable housing to be delivered on each site. In response to subsequent questioning, it was agreed that further information around Wintringham Park and Alconbury Weald would be circulated to Cabinet Members outside of the meeting. The Chair suggested that the decisions of the Development Management Committee at the time should also be included in the

Officer response as this would provide further clarity on the agreed affordable housing delivery targets at each site.

In response to a question raised by the Executive Councillor for Planning, the Cabinet were informed that the Local Housing Needs Assessment would be completed within the next year and that a specific timeframe would be known in due course and communicated to Members further.

Having commended Officers for their efforts in contributing towards the delivery of 703 new affordable homes in 2023/24 and in acknowledging the importance of this priority in the prevention of households going into crisis and moving from temporary to permanent accommodation, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report and Appendix now submitted - the Affordable Housing Advice Note - be received and noted.

56 MARKET TOWNS PROGRAMME - WINTER UPDATE

See Members' Interests.

The Cabinet received and noted a report by the Regeneration and Housing Delivery Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which provided an update on activity across all strands of the Market Town Programme.

The Executive Councillor for Economy, Regeneration and Housing delivered a comprehensive update on all strands of the Market Towns Programme which included the Ramsey Town Centre enhancement, Cattle Market Living Wall in St Ives, Cromwell Museum expansion in Huntingdon, Shop Front Grant Scheme and Digital Information Screens across all Market Towns. He then went on to report upon the various projects being undertaken in St Neots which included the Priory Centre, Energy Feasibility Study, Old Falcon, Town Centre Improvements, Performance Stage and Public Art.

Attention was then drawn to the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) where much discussion had been held on the provision of a stage within St Neots Market Square and the revised plans for the Priory Centre, together with the ongoing discussions that were being held around the lease for the building.

Executive Members commended the work which had been undertaken to complete the first half of the St Neots Market Square, with new bedding and revised positioning of the monk statues. Reference was also made to the high quality of the work undertaken by Taylor Woodrow, the contractors appointed to complete the works. In response to a question which had been raised by the Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce, it was confirmed that plans for a celebratory event to mark the completion of the Market Square project had not yet been considered but that he would be happy to receive any suggestions outside of the meeting.

Whilst there had been some negativity expressed around the design of the Market Square and the delays experienced with the project thus far, Cabinet Members acknowledged the difficult decisions which had to be made and the ongoing financial challenges which remained. Members were of the view that despite this, the project would benefit the residents of St Neots for decades to come. Furthermore, comment had been made by the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance that he was now hearing positive comments about the project from the local community.

Cabinet Members also expressed their support for the projects relating to the Cromwell Museum in Huntingdon and the Cattle Market Living Wall in St Ives. Additionally, the Chair commented that it was encouraging to see the tangible outputs that were now being delivered across the Market Towns Programme and that a strong sense of civic pride was now emerging from communities as projects developed.

Having thanked the Executive Councillor for Economy, Regeneration and Housing and Officers for their hard work and efforts to date, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report and delivery progress concerning the Market Towns Programme for Winter 2024 and related activities be received and noted.

57 HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP MINUTES

The Cabinet has received and noted the Minutes of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group held on 15th November 2024.

The Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Waste and Street Scene made reference to the impact of recent flooding events upon the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park development project and the postponement of the Wild about Huntingdonshire event, the appointment of a new Commercial Manager post and the various festive events that would be taking place at the Country Park in December 2024. In terms of the former, Cabinet Members were encouraged to note that whilst the flooding had resulted in some delays, it would not impact upon the planned completion date of the project which was still on track.

The meeting concluded at 7:54pm.

Chair