HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held in the CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER / STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 9 September 2026

PRESENT: Councillor S W Ferguson- Chair.

Councillors T Alban, L Ascroft, M L Beuttell, A Bulat, M J Burke, S Bywater, S Cawley, S Claffey, S J Conboy, R Coogan, L Davenport-Ray, L Dewey-Beckett, S, J Francis, P Gammons, I D Gardener, J A Gray, J E Harvey, M A Hassall, P J Hodgson-Jones, S Hodgson-Jones, A Hunt, J Hunt, N J Hunt, C Innes, R Ioannides, D N Keane, J E Kerr, S Lancaster, C Lowe, K Maheshwari, R Martin, D McIlwain, B A Mickelburgh, D L Mickelburgh, S Mokbul, N Sarkies, G Seeff, L M Simpson, P Simpson, S Smith, W Smith, I P Taylor, H Tobias, R Tomlinson, N Wells, A Wood and M Young.

APOLOGY(IES): Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors A Blackwell, D Henly, J Neish and T D Sanderson.

38 Agenda

The Chair addressed the Chamber and proposed under Council Procedure Rule 13.1(c) that the order of business be varied with agenda Item 8 followed by Item 7 to be taken immediately after Item 3 and that the motions be considered at the end of the Agenda. Having being duly seconded, the chamber voted in favour of the motion to vary the order of business.

39 Minutes

Subject to the following changes:

Councillor L Davenport-Ray spoke to the motion, stating that it was premature and that its potential consequences had not been fully considered.

Councillor J Francis.

Councillor R Tomlinson.

the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 15th July 2025 and the Extraordinary Meeting held on 1st September 2026 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

40 Members Interests

No declarations were received.

41 Chair's Engagements and Announcements

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

42 Appointment of an Interim Monitoring Officer

With the assistance of a report by the Chief Executive (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Council were advised of the outcome of the Senior Officers Committee meeting held on the 12th August regarding the appointment of an Interim Monitoring Officer. Having noted that the recommendation of the Committee was unanimous, the proposal by Councillor B Mickelburgh was seconded by Councillor R Martin. Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED

hat Lee Gardener be designated as the District Council's Interim Monitoring Officer with effect from 9th September 2026.

43 Pre-Submission Local Plan to 2046 Sustainability Appraisal and Supporting Documents

The Executive Councillor for Economy, Regeneration and Housing, Councillor B Mickelburgh introduced the report on behalf of Councillor T Sanderson and thanked Members, stakeholders and officers for their contributions to the preparation of the Local Plan. The Plan was supported by extensive consultation and evidence and would provide a locally led framework for growth to 2046, helping to direct development and secure supporting infrastructure. Approval would enable submission of the Plan for consultation and independent examination. Failure to meet the Government's submission deadline could require the plan-making process to restart.

The Executive Leader, Councillor S Conboy seconded the motion and reserved her right to speak.

Councillor P Gammons stated that he could not support the proposed housing target of 32,200 additional homes by 2049, which he considered excessive and above the national average. The scale of growth proposed would place unacceptable pressure on local infrastructure. He believed the Plan did not reflect the views of many residents and would have a detrimental impact on local communities and infrastructure.

Councillor D McIlwain supported the delivery of homes, jobs and investment, but had concerns about the scale and location of growth and about whether the necessary infrastructure could be delivered. The Plan prioritised housing delivery ahead of infrastructure provision, particularly in relation to transport Growth should only proceed where there was clear evidence that it was sustainable, deliverable and supported by the necessary infrastructure and community facilities.

Councillor D Keane acknowledged the need for new homes but questioned whether the Plan had the right approach to delivering growth. He also questioned the benefits of progressing the plan through the current process in light of recent changes to the national planning framework and raised concerns about the long-term robustness of viability and delivery assumptions. The decision would have long-term implications for the District and its communities.

Councillor N Wells referred to the Infrastructure Readiness Report, stated that the A141 and St Ives improvement schemes should be delivered before substantial development took place. He sought assurance that the proposed development at Giffords Farm would be regarded as substantial development and therefore be subject to the same infrastructure requirements.

Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance, Councillor N Hunt, emphasised the need for additional housing for young people. He argued that, without a Local Plan, growth would be imposed through speculative development, reducing the Council's ability to shape development and secure supporting infrastructure. Community feedback had influenced a number of policy changes. The Plan provided the opportunity to deliver necessary growth, secure infrastructure, and protect the district from unplanned development.

Councillor K Maheshwari stated that growth should only take place where the necessary infrastructure, public services and funding were in place. Housing pressures varied across the country. I Investment and job creation should be directed towards less prosperous areas rather than concentrating development in areas such as Cambridgeshire.

Councillor S Hodgson-Jones stated that she could not support the Local Plan in its current form. The 14 proposed development sites within her Ward would have a significant cumulative impact on the character, identity and infrastructure of local communities. She had concerns over the disproportionate concentration of development within rural areas. Further work was required to produce a Plan that met housing needs while treating rural communities fairly and sustainably.

Councillor A Bulat acknowledged residents' concerns that housing growth had not always matched improvements to infrastructure and local services. She also had concerns regarding the affordability and type of housing that would be delivered through the Plan.
She was disappointed with to the Plan's environmental ambitions and affordable housing provision. On balance, having a plan in place would provide policy protection and control over future development.

Councillor J Francis stated that he could not support the Local Plan in its current form. Key infrastructure requirements remained dependent on future funding, investment and regulatory approvals. Sustainable communities required infrastructure to be provided in parallel with housing development.

Councillor R Ioannides stated the plan did not provide sufficient assurance that necessary improvements infrastructure would be delivered when required. A stronger infrastructure-first approach, with clear and enforceable triggers was required. He also raised the need for greater transparency around housing

targets, protection of productive agricultural land, and recognition of the continued importance of private car travel in rural areas. In addition, the Plan should do more to address the housing needs of serving military personnel, veterans and their families where a need had been identified..

Councillor H Tobias also identified concerns regarding affordable housing provision for military personnel and their families, the reliance on evidence being provided by the Ministry of Defence to demonstrate need.

Councillor L Davenport-Ray welcomed measures relating to infrastructure delivery, environmental protection, water efficiency and carbon reduction, but expressed concern that some policies lacked sufficient ambition, particularly regarding affordable housing, biodiversity and renewable energy. While national housing targets limited local discretion, the Council needed to identify appropriate locations for growth.

Councillor M Hassall expressed support for achieving a sound, deliverable and legally robust Local Plan but questioned whether Members had sufficient opportunity to consider the recommendations and supporting information. While acknowledging assurances provided by the Monitoring Officer that appropriate governance processes were in place, he still had concerns and requested that further information on safeguards, engagement, evidence and delivery dependencies be made available before the Council considered submission of the Plan.

Councillor P Hodgson-Jones considered that the Plan did not provide sufficient protection for rural communities. Drawing on feedback from parish councils and local residents, Councillor P Hodgson-Jones argued that it would be preferable to amend the draft Plan and bring forward a stronger version, even if this resulted in delays. Progressing the plan in its current form could limit opportunities to secure improvements and leave rural communities vulnerable to excessive development.

Councillor R Martin stated that, while the Local Plan may be capable of progressing through examination, he did not believe that this alone justified supporting it. The Plan placed too much reliance on current national housing policy and assumptions that could change in the future. It was less ambitious than previous versions in areas such as affordable housing, environmental protection and safeguarding green spaces. He also questioned the length of the Plan period and suggested that a shorter-term approach could provide greater flexibility in response to future policy changes. Councillor R Martin further raised concerns regarding the inclusion of housing development at RAF Wyton, which he believed could conflict with ambitions for the site as a defence technology cluster.

Councillor R Tomlinson expressed concerns about significant differences from earlier versions of the Plan, including those affecting sites in Little Paxton. He questioned the use of Council communications to promote the Plan ahead of the meeting.

Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene,
Councillor J Kerr, referred to the fact that securing the necessary investment from utility providers was dependent on growth being identified through the Local

Plan. A replacement plan could not be produced quickly, as moving to the new planning system would significantly delay adoption. Without an adopted Plan, the District would be vulnerable to speculative development proposals that were not aligned with the Council's preferred strategy..

Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce, Councillor S Claffey argued that growth should be managed through an up-to-date, evidence-led Local Plan. The Plan would help shape decisions on housing, employment, infrastructure, environmental protection and future planning applications. It would still be subject to further scrutiny through the Regulation 19 consultation and independent examination process.

Councillor S Lancaster stated that he had concerns about the loss of green spaces between towns and villages, which he considered important in maintaining the distinct character and identity of local communities. He questioned whether the scale of growth proposed in the Plan was appropriate and expressed concern about the significant level of development planned over the next 20 years. Councillor S Lancaster also questioned the basis of the housing targets being applied to the District and raised concerns about the extent to which they reflected local needs and priorities.

Executive Councillor for Governance and Democratic Services, Councillor L Dewey-Beckett highlighted the importance of the Local Plan in providing a robust policy framework for determining planning applications and protecting communities from inappropriate development. Local planning policies gave residents and councils meaningful grounds on which to influence planning decisions and challenge proposals that did not align with local priorities. The draft Plan had been developed through extensive consultation over a number of years, allowing residents, parish councils and councillors significant opportunities to contribute to its content.

Councillor R Martin raised a point of personal explanation in response to comments made during the debate. He had engaged with and made representations on the Local Plan throughout its development, including submitting consultation responses and holding discussions with senior officers. He therefore rejected any suggestion that he had not contributed to the process.

Executive Leader, Councillor S Conboy commented that Members were seeking to act in the best interests of their residents. Similar concerns had arisen during earlier plan-making processes. Without an adopted Local Plan, the District would remain vulnerable to speculative development proposals, including sites not identified within the current Plan. Some matters would require continued engagement with government and other agencies.

Deputy Leader, Councillor B Mickelburgh acknowledged the concerns raised by Members regarding housing growth and infrastructure provision but emphasised that the housing requirement was determined by the Government's standard methodology.
Infrastructure providers required certainty about future growth before committing investment. The Local Plan provided the framework needed to support funding and delivery of infrastructure. The Plan was an effective means of managing development and securing infrastructure investment. He therefore urged Members to support the recommendations.

Meeting adjourned at 8.35pm
Meeting resumed at 8.40pm

The Chair advised that, after careful consideration, he would uphold a point of order that had been raised regarding voting eligibility. Wherey Members who had missed part of a debate were not permitted to vote on the item under consideration. Councillor J Gray, having not been present for part of the debate, was advised that he would not be permitted to vote on the item.

A Motion for a recorded vote having succeeded, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 the following Members voted for, against or abstained from a vote on the Pre-Submission Local Plan to 2046 Sustainability Appraisal and Supporting Documents

For the Motion (25) – *Councillors Ascroft, Bulat, Burke, Claffey, Conboy, Davenport-Ray, Dewey-Beckett, Ferguson, Harvey, A Hunt, J Hunt, N Hunt, Innes, Kerr, B Mickelburgh, D Mickelburgh, Mokbul, Sarkies, Seeff, S Smith, W Smith, Taylor, Wells, Wood, Young*

Against the Motion (17) – *Alban, Beuttell, Bywater, Cawley, Francis, Gammons, Gardener, P Hodgson-Jones, S Hodgson-Jones, Ioannides, Keane, Lowe, Maheshwari, Martin, McIlwain, P Simpson, Tomlinson*

Abstentions (5) – *Coogan, Hassall, Lancaster, M Simpson, Tobias*

Having been put to the vote, the Recommendations 1.1 – 1.7 of the Pre-Submission Local Plan to 2046 Sustainability Appraisal and Supporting Documents was declared to be CARRIED.

19:38 during the discussion Councillor J Gray entered the meeting.

44 Questions by members of the public

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10.1, the following Public Question was presented to the Council –

There are a number of inter-related issues regarding transport and parking, but there does not appear to be any co-ordination.

1. **The Council launched a survey regarding its parking strategy, closing on 16 August, but only notified parish and town councils on 30 July.**
2. **The day after this survey closed Capital and Centric held "events" regarding three well-used town centre car parks without indicating how those parking spaces will be replaced.**
3. **The Combined Authority wants to provide an hour's free parking rather than use the funds to improve the local bus services, instead it is reducing them.**
4. **The speed limit on the busway imposed whilst the drawn-out installation of fencing takes place has lengthened journey times and**

reduced passenger numbers, which now has resulted in a reduced frequency.

Why is there no joined-up thinking, why have a short consultation period during summer holidays, what on earth is going on with your existing car parks and why does it appear that nobody is talking to each other?

All these issues matter to those living outside the three main towns in the district.

The Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene, Councillor J Kerr, advised that two phases of public engagement had informed the Parking Strategy: a district-wide survey in December 2025 and a further survey in summer 2026 on the emerging Strategy. The communication sent to town and parish councils on 30 July 2026 was intended to encourage promotion of the survey rather than seek formal responses. The Parking Strategy and town centre engagement work were separate exercises. No decisions had been taken on the redevelopment of any sites, and any future proposals would include consideration of parking provision and potential replacement or relocation of spaces. Transport funding and bus service decisions fell within the remit of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, while responsibility for the Guided Busway rested with Cambridgeshire County Council. Although the District Council was not responsible for these matters, it continued to work with partners and raised residents' concerns where appropriate. In conclusion, Councillor J Kerr acknowledged residents' concerns regarding coordination across transport and parking matters but emphasised that each authority had distinct statutory responsibilities and consultation processes, with the Council continuing to engage with partners on issues affecting Huntingdonshire residents.

Laura Gosling – read by the Chair.

To the Leader of the Council. If there is currently no Leader, then my question is to the Cabinet member responsible for Country Parks.
Hinchingbrooke Country Park has increased the number of activities available for visitors. The new inflatable obstacle course on the lake really concerns me.

I have seen the Press Release published by the Council in June which says that "Ecological assessments have informed the project from the outset." Why is the Environmental Impact report not available to be viewed by the public?

The Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene, Councillor J Kerr, stated that the Council recognised the importance of transparency regarding environmental matters and the public interest in the ecological assessments undertaken for the proposed Aqua Park at Hinchingbrooke Country Park. Following Cabinet approval of the Parks and Open Spaces Commercial and Sustainability Plan, ecological consultants were commissioned in March 2026 to undertake a preliminary ecological appraisal and ecological impact assessment. This work informed the project design and identified mitigation measures, including the retention of reed beds and marginal habitats, locating the facility away from sensitive areas where practicable,

implementing biosecurity measures, and considering protected species. The Council had considered requests to release the ecological reports under the Environmental Information Regulations but had concluded that publication was not appropriate at this stage due to the ongoing nature of the project and the commercially sensitive information contained within the documents. Premature disclosure could prejudice the Council's ability to manage the project and protect its commercial and operational interests. Relevant information would be considered for publication at an appropriate stage in the future.

45 Questions to Members of the Cabinet

Councillor S Bywater requested a written response from the Executive Councillor for Planning regarding planning consent 24/02252/3. The consent was granted on 25 February 2025 and remained within the two-year implementation period but the Council had subsequently indicated it could not, or may not, be lawfully implemented. He asked the Council to clarify the current legal status of the consent and, if its status had changed, to identify the legal mechanism and date on which that change occurred. He further requested confirmation that residents should be provided with this clarity before further public or private resources were committed to related applications.

The Executive Leader, Councillor S Conboy, thanked the Member for submitting the question in advance and assured him that a written response would be provided.

Councillor S Bywater clarified that the question did not relate to land ownership, access rights or independent legal advice. He asked whether the consent remained legally valid and enforceable, and, if not, requested details of the legal mechanism by which it had ceased to have effect and the date on which this occurred.

Councillor L Davenport-Ray referred to efforts made, while serving as Cabinet Member for Climate, to arrange a screening of *The People's Emergency Briefing*, a non-party-political film addressing climate change and associated risks. Despite the Council’s declaration of a climate emergency and objectives within the Corporate Plan relating to carbon reduction, a screening had not taken place. Councillor Davenport-Ray asked whether a commitment would be given to screen the film in Council buildings so that residents could learn more about the challenges posed by climate change.

The Executive Leader, Councillor S Conboy, advised that, as advance notice had not been received, a detailed response could not be provided at the meeting. Further advice would be sought before a response was provided.

Councillor L Davenport-Ray also sought clarification as to why the position taken locally appeared to differ from that of Liberal Democrat representatives elsewhere when parliamentary Liberal Democrats and other Liberal Democrat-led councils had supported screenings.

The Executive Leader indicated that she had not been aware that the film was being shown by other Liberal Democrat-led councils or supported by Liberal Democrat parliamentarians. The matter would be revisited, including the advice

previously received, and confirmed that a response would be provided in due course.

Councillor D McIlwain again sought information regarding 4G and 5G mobile coverage in his ward and elsewhere in the district. Councillor K Maheshwari highlighted the importance of this matter. Councillor S Conboy apologised and undertook to provide a response.

Councillor R Tomlinson referred to the Capital & Centric project and his concerns regarding project governance, financial control and Member oversight within the regeneration portfolio. Other major projects, including the Priory Centre project in St Neots, were experiencing delays and increased costs. He asked what steps had been taken since the Executive Councillor assumed responsibility for the portfolio to assure himself that projects were not affected by the same issues.

The Executive Councillor for Economy, Regeneration and Housing, Councillor B Mickelburgh advised that he had assumed responsibility for the portfolio at the end of May and that one of his first priorities had been the Priory Centre project. He had visited the site and reviewed the project, including its programme, timescales and ongoing communications with the Town Council, including discussions had taken place with the Town Clerk. A further review had been scheduled for the end of September to assess progress, project timelines, and communications.

Councillor R Tomlinson then asked whether the Executive Councillor was satisfied that projects were operating under appropriate governance arrangements and financial controls. The Executive Councillor stated that, in light of the issues raised, it would be prudent to undertake a further review of the projects before reaching a final conclusion.

Councillor S Mokbul referred to the significant work undertaken by Officers and Members in preparation for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), and the subsequent announcement that the process had been paused. She asked the Executive Leader how disappointed she was that the preferred Option E might not proceed.

The Executive Leader expressed disappointment that there was still no decision on LGR, particularly given the significant work undertaken by officers and Members and highlighted the uncertainty this delay created for staff and stressed the need for clarity from Government as soon as possible.

Councillor A Bulat sought clarification on the decision to defer consideration of the Parking Strategy In response, it was confirmed that the Parking Strategy was an Executive function and therefore did not require approval by Full Council. As such, it would not be submitted to Council for determination.

Councillor A Bulat then asked whether the Cabinet Member was confident that the CPCA free parking scheme aligned with the Administration’s objectives for the Parking Strategy and its wider public transport ambitions. Executive Councillor, B Mickelburgh advised that the Parking Strategy was scheduled to be considered by Cabinet next week and that the CPCA scheme was not directly relevant to the Strategy. The Strategy intentionally avoids matters relating to parking charges or pricing, which are considered to be operational issues.

Councillor J Gray asked the Executive Leader whether she would consider dismissing any Cabinet Member found to have made a false statement in relation to the Capital & Centric matter. The Executive Leader stated that she did not believe any Cabinet Member had made a false statement. She acknowledged that individuals were entitled to their own recollections and advised that differing accounts existed in relation to the Capital & Centric matter. She would consider any further details provided by Councillor J Gray before reaching a view on the issue.

In response to a supplementary question by Councillor Gray on whether the Executive Leader would apply the same standard to herself when considering whether any Cabinet Member's recollection differed from the established facts regarding the Capital & Centric matter, the Executive Leader stated that the same principle applied to herself

Councillor T Alban thanked those involved in responding to the recent fires at Holme, highlighting the contributions of the fire service, local volunteers, the community, Ramsey Town Council, and Council officers. He asked whether the Executive Leader would write to the Chief Fire Officer to convey the Council's thanks and requested that Members' appreciation also be extended to officers for the updates provided to Members during the incident. He praised the strong sense of community resilience demonstrated throughout the response.

The Executive Leader acknowledged the efforts of officers, emergency services, local organisations, councillors and residents during the Holme fires. She had requested her thanks be passed on to those involved while the incident was ongoing and would formally write to the Chief Fire Officer and others involved. She also placed on record the Council's appreciation for the work of all those who supported the response and recovery efforts, noting the significant bravery and commitment shown throughout the incident. The Chair also undertook to write to those involved in the response. Having recently visited Woodwalton Fen and subsequently travelled through Holme Fen, he commented on the scale of the devastation caused by the fires and praised the bravery of the fire service.

Meeting adjourned at 9.18pm

During the recess, Councillors C Lowe and I Gardener left the meeting.

Meeting resumed at 9.35pm

46 Representation of Political Groups on District Council Committees and Panels

A report was submitted by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) relating to the principles and proportionality to be applied to the appointment of Committees and Panels in accordance with Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and Part II of the Local Government Act 2000. Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the allocation of seats on District Council Committees and Panels to political groups and non-aligned Members be determined as set out in the report now submitted.

47 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority - Update

The Council received and noted with the contents the decision summaries of recent meetings of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Copies of the decision summaries are appended in the Minute Book.

Councillor R Coogan referred to a recent briefing on a proposed project and the scale of the investment involved. He expressed concerns about the proposal, particularly the route affecting St Ives, and called on the Council's representatives on the CPCA to undertake further scrutiny and explore alternative options which he believed would provide a better outcome.

In response, the Executive Leader advised that the project had been under development for approximately 12 years and had now reached the business case stage. The current proposal had evolved significantly and would be subject to scrutiny through the relevant Overview and Scrutiny processes and offered to discuss the matter further with Councillor Coogan outside of the meeting.

Councillor L Davenport-Ray referred to decisions taken by the CPCA Transport Committee regarding reductions to bus services and asked the Executive Leader whether the Council would accept any additional CPCA funding for parking initiatives if funds allocated for bus services were not fully utilised. The Executive Leader stated that she was not aware of any additional funding being offered by the Mayor. She advised that the Mayor wished to continue discussions regarding the use of funding already identified but that it did not form part of the transport budget.

48 Outcomes from Committees and Panels

A copy of the list of meetings held since the last meeting of the Council held on 15th July 2026 is appended in the Minute Book and Members were advised that any issues or questions could be raised in relation to these meetings.

No questions were raised.

49 Variations to the Membership of Committees and Panels

On the recommendation of Councillors S Conboy, R Martin, R Coogan, J Kerr and L Davenport-Ray, it was

RESOLVED

a) that Councillor S Claffey be appointed to Cabinet as the Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce.
b) that Councillor I Taylor be appointed to the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny (Environment, Communities and Partnership) in place of Councillor S Claffey
c) that Councillor M Burke be appointed to the membership of the Corporate Governance Committee in place of Councillor S Claffey.

d) that Councillor N Wells be appointed to the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny (Environment, Communities and Partnership) in place of Councillor J Francis
e) That Councillor S Lancaster be appointed to the membership of the Licensing Committee

50 Notices of Motion

The Chair proposed suspending Council Procedure Rule 14.8(e) for the remainder of the meeting to avoid reading amended motions in full, citing the length of motions and to assist the efficient conduct of business. The proposal was seconded and approved by Council.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer reminded Members of the legal and constitutional framework governing consideration of motions. The Council may express views and make recommendations, but cannot override legal obligations, predetermine future decisions, or exercise functions reserved to Cabinet or delegated officers. Members were advised to avoid comments relating to liability, misconduct, contractual matters, or issues that could prejudice future statutory decisions, and were reminded of their obligations under the Members' Code of Conduct. Any recommendations arising from motions would be considered by the appropriate decision-makers in accordance with legal, governance and statutory requirements.

The Chair advised that significant amendments to the motion had been submitted and sought Council's consent to accept them. On being put to the vote the amendments were accepted and incorporated into the substantive motion.

Motion from Councillor R Coogan
Capital & Centric Regeneration Schemes, Accountability and Protection of Public Funds

This Council notes that:

1. Huntingdonshire District Council has committed public resources to regeneration work undertaken with Capital & Centric in relation to:

- Tebbutts Road car park, St Neots;
- Princes Street bus station and car park, Huntingdon; and
- the former cattle market square and gatehouse, St Ives.

2. Regeneration is important to the future prosperity of Huntingdonshire's towns. However, regeneration involving public money and publicly owned assets must be founded upon clear objectives, a robust business case, demonstrable public benefit, value for money, proper scrutiny and meaningful engagement with the communities affected.

3. Members who previously supported progression of this work have subsequently expressed publicly that the proposals which emerged were not what they understood the Council had sought or expected from the process.

4. Those concerns create a legitimate need to establish, as a matter of fact, what services, outputs and deliverables were commissioned, what was subsequently authorised, what has been delivered and what public money has been expended.

5. Where a council commissions work from an external organisation, residents are entitled to expect that the Council will satisfy itself that the services and deliverables paid for were provided in accordance with the contractual arrangements, approved instructions and agreed objectives.

6. Equally, no conclusion that any contractor, consultant or development partner has failed in its contractual obligations should be reached without examination of the evidence, contractual documentation and appropriate professional legal advice.

7. Money already spent must never, of itself, become a justification for spending further public money. Decisions about future expenditure should be based upon the current merits, costs, risks and likely public benefits of proceeding.

This Council therefore resolves to:

1. Protecting taxpayers' money is a fundamental responsibility of this Council.

2. Regeneration should enhance town centres, support existing and future businesses, improve accessibility and confidence, and deliver identifiable benefits for the residents whose assets and money are being used.

3. Where the objectives of a publicly funded project have materially changed, have not been delivered, or no longer represent sufficient value for money, the Council should be prepared to stop, reassess and, where necessary, change course.

4. Where professional examination establishes that services or deliverables paid for by this Council were not provided in accordance with contractual obligations, the Council should pursue every proportionate and lawful avenue available to protect the public purse and recover money properly due to it.

5. Such decisions must be based upon evidence and professional advice, rather than political preference, retrospective disagreement with a design proposal, or assumptions about contractual performance.

6. Residents should be able to see clearly what public money was spent, what was commissioned, what was delivered and what action has been taken to protect their interests.

This Council therefore resolves to:

1. State that Full Council does not support the further progression of the current contract, and disengages with Capital & Centric completely including work started on:

• Tebbutts Road car park, St Neots;
• Princes Street bus station and car park, Huntingdon; and
• the former cattle market square and gatehouse, St Ives.

2. Request that Cabinet takes all lawful and contractually permissible steps to bring the Council's participation in the current proposals for those sites to an orderly conclusion, having full regard to the Council's contractual, procurement, financial and statutory obligations.

3. Request that no further discretionary expenditure, commission, instruction or material officer resource is committed to developing the current proposals, except where such expenditure or action is:

• required by an existing legal or contractual obligation;
• necessary to protect the Council's legal or financial position; or
• specifically authorised following consideration of a clear and evidenced financial justification.

4. Request that the Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer and other appropriate senior officers undertake, or commission where independence or specialist expertise makes this appropriate, a comprehensive contractual, financial and governance review of the Council's relationship with Capital & Centric in relation to the three schemes.

5. Request that the review establishes, so far as the evidence permits:

- the original objectives approved for each scheme;
- the services, outputs and deliverables commissioned;
- the contractual basis upon which those services were commissioned;
- all material instructions subsequently issued by or on behalf of the Council;
- any changes to scope, objectives or deliverables and the authority by which those changes were approved;
- all payments made and liabilities incurred by the Council;
- what services, work products and deliverables were actually received;
- whether those outputs complied with the relevant contractual requirements and authorised instructions;
- whether any material service, output or deliverable was omitted, altered or not provided;
- whether any contractual variation was properly approved and
- documented;
- whether there is evidence of non-performance, defective performance, breach of contract, overpayment or any other matter capable of giving rise to a financial remedy;
- what termination, dispute-resolution, warranty, indemnity, repayment or other contractual protections are available to the Council;
- whether any recoverable loss has been suffered by the Council; and
- the reasonable prospects, likely costs and proportionality of pursuing recovery.

6. Request that, where the review identifies a proper legal basis and a proportionate financial case for recovery, Cabinet and the appropriate officers take all reasonable and lawful steps available to protect the Council's position and recover taxpayers' money, including where appropriate:

- contractual repayment or reimbursement;
- recovery of overpayments or sums otherwise due;
- negotiation;

- formal contractual dispute procedures;
- mediation or other alternative dispute resolution;
- enforcement of contractual warranties, indemnities or other remedies; and
- where necessary, proportionate and supported by professional legal advice, civil proceedings.

7.Request that where professional legal advice identifies a claim with reasonable prospects of success and a potentially material recovery for the Council, any decision not to pursue that claim is supported by a documented assessment of the legal, financial and commercial reasons for that decision.

8. Request that the review also considers whether the Council's own governance, commissioning, contract-management or decision-making arrangements contributed to any failure to achieve the originally approved objectives, so that responsibility is established fairly and lessons are learned regardless of where any failure occurred.

9. Request that the findings are reported to Cabinet and the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel, subject only to those redactions genuinely necessary to protect legal professional privilege, commercially confidential information, personal data or the Council's position in any potential proceedings.

10. Request that the report includes, as a minimum:

- total public expenditure incurred on each scheme;
- contractual commitments and liabilities remaining;
- any potential termination costs;
- the services and deliverables commissioned;
- the services and deliverables received;
- any sums considered potentially recoverable;
- the proposed course of action to protect the Council's financial position;
- an assessment of whether value for money has been achieved; and
- recommendations for improving the governance of future major regeneration projects.

11. Request that, subject to legal and commercial restrictions, sufficient information is subsequently published to allow residents to understand what money was spent, what the Council received in return and what action has been taken to protect the public purse.

12. Require that any future proposal for substantive regeneration of these three sites is supported by a robust and transparent business case before significant public resources are committed, including:

- clearly defined objectives and measurable public benefits;
- economic impact;
- impact upon existing businesses and town-centre vitality;
- parking, transport and accessibility implications;
- financial costs and funding assumptions;
- risk and sensitivity analysis;
- consideration of viable alternative options;
- the consequences of taking no action;
- clear governance and accountability arrangements; and
- meaningful consultation with residents, businesses, relevant town councils and other affected stakeholders.

13. Reaffirm that this Council supports ambitious and appropriate regeneration across Huntingdonshire, but that ambition must be accompanied by accountability, sound financial management, proper scrutiny and demonstrable benefit to the communities whose money and assets are being used.

In presenting the motion, Councillor R Coogan outlined concerns raised by residents, businesses and Members regarding the regeneration proposals and questioned whether the outcomes reflected the original commission. The motion sought to protect the Council's contractual and financial interests, establish what had been delivered through public expenditure, and provide for a review of the project, including governance and decision-making arrangements. He supported future regeneration proposals, provided these were based on a clear business case and meaningful public engagement. The motion also called for further discretionary expenditure to cease pending review.

Councillor H Tobias seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor P Hodgson-Jones proposed an amendment to the amended motion.

Meeting adjourned at 9.53pm
Meeting resumed at 9.55pm

Councillor P Hodgson-Jones moved an amendment to the motion, stating that its purpose was to achieve a compromise while ensuring the matter was progressed in a lawful and effective manner. The amendment removed elements which could be inconsistent with the Council's constitutional and legal framework, while retaining the objective of understanding what had occurred, identifying lessons learned, protecting the Council's interests and securing an independent reviewIt would provide a clear and pragmatic way forward through the Council's governance and scrutiny processes, without restricting the discretion of future decision-makers.

Councillor R Coogan opposed the amendment, arguing that it removed several key provisions from his motion, including requests for professional legal advice, reporting arrangements to Cabinet and the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel, and the disclosure of total public expenditure incurred. This information was important for both Members and the public and weakened the motion's ability to secure transparency and accountability.

Meeting adjourned at 10.01pm
Meeting resumed at 10.08pm

The Council's Legal Adviser referred Members to Council Procedure Rule 14.8 concerning amendments to motions, under which amendments may omit, insert or add words, provided they do not negate the original motion. Having reviewed the amendment the legal advice was that, although the amendment altered the wording and broadened the drafting, it did not negate the substantive effect of the original motion. The amendment was therefore considered procedurally valid and capable of being debated.

Councillor J Gray seconded the proposed amendment to the motion and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor L Davenport-Ray commented that the amendment, incorporated concerns raised by Members from across the Council, and included arrangements for an independent review and the involvement of the Local Government Association.

Councillor G Seeff emphasised the importance of ensuring that any review was conducted through appropriate governance arrangements and in a manner that was independent, transparent and capable of commanding public confidence.

Councillor R Martin stated that the amendment retained the key objectives of the motion while ensuring its provisions were lawful and achievable within the Council's constitutional and legislative framework. He argued that some actions contained within the substantive motion were matters for officers or executive decision-makers rather than full Council. The amendment focused on actions within the Council's powers while supporting transparency, accountability and an effective review.

The Executive Leader, Councillor S Conboy sought clarification substantive whether the motion was capable of implementation. The Legal Adviser stated that elements of the motion sought to direct actions that fell within the Executive's responsibilities rather than those of full Council. While full Council had responsibility for certain reserved functions, many operational decisions were executive functions. The Legal Adviser also highlighted the role of Overview and Scrutiny in reviewing Executive decisions and requesting further information or investigation where appropriate.

The Executive Leader, Councillor S Conboy, then raised a point of order regarding the proposed involvement of the Local Government Association (LGA). While expressing support for the principle of seeking external input, she questioned whether it was appropriate for the motion to suggest that the LGA assess Member and officer conduct and sought clarification on whether this was within the LGA's remit. The Legal Adviser advised that the motion constituted a request only, and that any decision to seek support from the LGA would be taken by the appropriate officers in accordance with their legal powers and responsibilities. If such an assessment fell outside the Local Government Association's remit, it would not be pursued.

Councillor J Gray stated that the amendment retained the key principles of the substantive motion while reflecting the Council's governance arrangements and avoiding unnecessary prescription. He emphasised the importance of transparency and accountability, stating that the review should establish what had been commissioned, what had been delivered, how public money had been spent, and what lessons could be learnt.

Councillor R Coogan opposed the amendment, arguing that it weakened the substantive motion by replacing specific actions and outcomes with broader requests. The original motion sought clear answers and accountability in relation to the project, whereas the amendment reduced the level of scrutiny and created scope for matters not to be fully addressed. Councillor Coogan maintained that the original motion already enabled scrutiny through the Council's governance processes while providing greater clarity and specificity.

Councillor M Hassall raised a point of order, seeking clarification on whether the legal advice meant that the motion could not be voted on in its original form because aspects of it were not valid within the Council's constitutional arrangements. The Chair clarified that the implications for the substantive motion would be determined following the vote on the amendment.

Having been put to the vote, the amendment was declared to be CARRIED.

The amendment became a substantive motion.

Councillor R Martin expressed concern about the Capital & Centric project, arguing that greater transparency was needed regarding the expenditure incurred, the work delivered and the decisions taken. He questioned how the project had developed from its original objectives to the proposals presented for consultation and called for a thorough review to establish the facts and lessons learned.

Councillor A Bulat emphasised the importance of transparency, accountability and robust scrutiny in relation to the project. She expressed concern that considerable time had been spent seeking information and argued that lessons needed to be learnt from the project's development, consultation and expenditure.

Councillor J Gray argued that the Corporate Governance Committee and independent internal audit arrangements would provide a robust mechanism for investigating the matter and ensuring transparency. He emphasised that the review process was already underway and would be subject to public oversight through the Council's governance framework.

Councillor P Hodgson-Jones reiterated that the amendment's purpose was to ensure there was a thorough, independent and effective. He emphasised the distinct roles of Corporate Governance and Overview and Scrutiny, arguing that both should be involved in examining the matter. The review should focus not only on understanding what had occurred, but also on strengthening governance, contract management and decision-making processes for the future. He was committed to working with Members, officers and auditors to ensure that a robust review was undertaken.

Councillor S Conboy expressed support for an independent review and welcomed the work already underway to facilitate this. She emphasised the importance of a robust and transparent process, both for public confidence and for staff involved, and welcomed the involvement of independent internal auditors. There was a shared commitment to openness, transparency and learning lessons from the project going forward.

Councillor L Davenport-Ray expressed disappointment at the circumstances that had led to the motion and stated that information emerging about project expenditure, project progression and approved budgets reinforced the need for transparency.

Councillor R Ioannides expressed the view that the amended motion was preferable to taking no action. Residents expected a robust response to the issues raised.

Councillor R Tomlinson expressed support for the amended motion, stated that it was important to establish the facts surrounding the Capital & Centric project and ensure that relevant information was made available to Members and the public. The review should identify lessons learnt.

Councillor H Tobias stated that the review must be demonstrably independent, given that Members of the political group leading the review process had been involved in scrutiny of the project. He stressed the importance of ensuring that the investigation was conducted in a fair and transparent so that residents could have confidence in the findings and understand how public funds had been spent.

Councillor R Coogan expressed concern that the amended motion reduced the scope of the original proposal and limited Council's role in directing the response to the issues raised.

Meeting adjourned at 10.53pm
Meeting resumed at 10.55pm

Having been put to the vote, the Motion as amended was declared to be CARRIED.

51 Adjournment

Councillor L Davenport-Ray moved that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded.

Having been put to the vote, the Motion was declared to be CARRIED.

Meeting adjourned at 11.02pm

Chair