

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 September 2024

PRESENT: Councillor S J Conboy – Chair.

Councillors L Davenport-Ray, S W Ferguson, J E Harvey, B A Mickelburgh, B M Pitt, S L Taylor and S Wakeford.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor T D Sanderson (via Zoom) (Minute No.28 refers).

26 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16th July 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

27 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

28 EAST PARK SOLAR FARM

At 7:05pm, during discussion on this item, Councillor S Wakeford took his seat at the meeting and did not vote on this item.

Consideration was given to a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) proposing a new solar farm and energy battery storage scheme located to the north-west of St Neots, straddling the Huntingdonshire District, Bedfordshire (Bedford Borough) and Cambridgeshire County boundaries. The scheme proposes a connection to the National Grid at the existing substation at Eaton Socon.

By way of background, the Executive Councillor for Planning reported that the proposal would seek to generate and export more than 50 megawatts of renewable energy, therefore meeting the threshold to be a solar National Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) as opposed to it being determined by the Local Planning Authorities. Determining such applications therefore rests with the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero. The Cabinet were informed that the project had been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate and was presently at pre-application stage. In his concluding remarks, the Executive Councillor for Planning advised that due to the statutory timings associated with the National Significant Infrastructure Project and the Development Consent Order process, a short window of time had been given for the consultation documentation to be considered and responded to by specialists across the Council.

The Cabinet then discussed and received the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth).

The Executive Leader informed the meeting that the Executive Councillor for Planning would not be voting on any of the items being considered by the Cabinet at this meeting owing to his virtual attendance. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet delegate authority to the Chief Planning Officer, in consultation with the Leader and Executive Councillor for Planning to take all associated action necessary in the interests of the efficient and timely conduct of the Council's compliance with the East Park Solar Farm Development Consent Order procedures including but not limited to:

- (a) preparing the Council's responses to any written questions from the Examining Authority during the Development Consent Order Examinations and to submit those to the Examining Authority;
- (b) settling the content of and submit any Written Representations to the Examining Authority;
- (c) negotiate, settle and complete any legal agreements relevant to secure the granting of a Development Consent Order pursuant to the applications;
- (d) settling and the submission of the Statement of Common Ground to the Examining Authority;
- (e) the instruction of witnesses and legal advisors throughout the Examination process if required; and
- (f) the discharge of Development Consent Order requirements made under any Development Consent Order granted by the Secretary of State.

29 FURTHER ISSUES AND OPTIONS 2024 ENGAGEMENT PAPER FOR THE LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

A report by the Chief Planning Officer was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) presenting an engagement document outlining options on potential strategy and policy areas for inclusion in the Local Plan Update.

In introducing the report, the Executive Councillor for Planning outlined the statutory requirements placed upon the Council during Local Plan preparation and drew attention to the other two agenda items being considered at the meeting, namely, Land Availability Assessments and Sustainability Appraisal for the Local Plan Update Further Issues and Options and Land Availability Assessments. The Executive Councillor for Planning advised that a communications plan had been prepared which comprised a multi-channel approach in engagement with residents, organisations and businesses.

Attention was then drawn to the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth) and in doing so, the Executive Councillor for Planning advised that a formal briefing note would be prepared and circulated to colleagues and Members by the end of the week. He then went on to state that he was keen to receive feedback from the Town and Parish Councils on the Further Issues and Options 2024 engagement document.

Matters that were discussed by the Cabinet included whether any feedback had been received from the Local Plans Advisory Group on the content of the questions proposed in the engagement document and the need to ensure proactive engagement with the over 75 year old age group owing to the identified need for more specialist and supported housing in future years. In response to the latter, the Executive Councillor for Planning advised that all sectors of the District's community would be targeted for engagement on the proposals.

Having commended the Local Plans Advisory Group for their hard work, efforts and contributions in the development of the proposals thus far, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet

- (a) endorse the content of the Further Issues and Options 2024;
- (b) agree that the Further Issues and Options 2024 paper be published for public engagement for ten weeks between 18th September and 27th November 2024 under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012; and
- (c) grant delegated authority to the Chief Planning Officer, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Planning to make any necessary typographical or other minor changes to the Report prior to its publication for consultation.

30 LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENTS

With the aid of a report prepared by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet gave consideration to a report setting out the purpose and content of the Land Availability Assessments and seeking approval of its publication for public engagement for a period of ten weeks from 18th September 2024 to 27th November 2024.

The Executive Councillor for Planning reminded the Cabinet of the requirements of the Council to adhere to the National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance. The Council had issued a Call for Sites between 29 March 2023 and 7 June 2023 with an ongoing Call for Sites also running for those that might have missed the initial call. The Executive Councillor for Planning reported that the sites had been assessed and drew attention to section 5 of the report. In doing so, it was noted that 369 sites had been assessed of which 39 did not pass the fundamental constraints, 34 did not pass the detailed Land Availability Assessment, 104 sites had been considered unsuitable after the results of the sustainability appraisal had been taken into account and 192 sites had been considered potentially suitable for development.

A number of questions were raised and responded to by the Executive Councillor for Planning and the Corporate Director (Place). These included whether positive responses had been received from applicants where sites had been deemed unsuitable together with the level of ongoing discussion with them about other types of potential development that might be acceptable on such sites. In response, the Corporate Director (Place) confirmed that the Council had responded to what applicants had applied for but that the Council would be open to continuing discussions about unsuitable sites with applicants as necessary. Discussion then took place on the importance of residents, partners and stakeholders engaging in the consultation process where it was acknowledged that developers also had a key part to play in their own consultations with the community.

Having commended the Chief Planning Officer and her team for their hard work in reviewing the sites to date the Cabinet then discussed the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth). Mention was then made of the Local Plans Advisory Group whom also played a pivotal part in reviewing the sites as part of the process.

Following comment made by the Executive Councillor for Economy, Regeneration and Housing that whilst a number of sites had been identified at this stage, it was not necessarily the case that every site would be utilised for development. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet

- (a) approve the contents of the Land Availability Assessments;
- (b) agree that the Land Availability Assessments be published for public consultation for ten weeks between 18 September and 27 November 2024; and
- (c) grant delegated authority to the Chief Planning Officer, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Planning to make any necessary typographical or other minor changes to the document prior to its publication for consultation.

31 SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL FOR THE LOCAL PLAN UPDATE FURTHER ISSUES AND OPTIONS AND LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENTS

A report by the Chief Planning Officer was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) setting out the initial draft of the Sustainability Appraisal which would accompany the Local Plan Update throughout its preparation. The report also sought the publication of the Sustainability Appraisal for public engagement alongside the Further Issues and Options 2024 engagement paper and the Land Availability Assessment.

By way of background, the Executive Councillor for Planning reported that the Sustainability Appraisal was an iterative process running across five required stages. Stage A was completed last year, with this stage being the first iteration

of Stage B which sought to develop options and appraise effects. Having been informed that consultation on this was proposed to be held over a ten week period from 18th September 2024 until 27th November 2024 and having had their attention drawn to the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth), the Cabinet placed on record their thanks for the hard work and efforts of all Officers and Members involved in the process to date.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet

- (a) endorse the content of the Sustainability Appraisal 2024;
- (b) agree that the Sustainability Appraisal be published for public engagement for ten weeks between 18 September and 27 November 2024 under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012; and
- (c) grant delegated authority to the Chief Planning Officer, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Planning to make any necessary typographical or other minor changes to the document prior to its publication for consultation.

32 COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WEALTH BUILDING STRATEGY AND DELIVERY FUND

With the aid of a report by the Corporate Director (People), the Cabinet gave consideration to a proposed Community Health and Wealth Building Strategy and the creation of a supporting Community Health and Wealth Delivery Fund. The report also sought support for an enduring programme of “Community co-production” which would support the delivery of the proposed strategy and fund.

In introducing the report, the Executive Councillor for Communities, Health and Leisure outlined the background to the proposed strategy which aimed to improve the quality of life for local people, the Council’s first priority in its Corporate Plan. The proposed objectives of the Strategy were noted as follows:

- to improve physical and mental health via supporting an increase in physical activity;
- to support social connection and sense of community;
- to support economic resilience via a focus on employment and skills and barriers to this.

The Executive Councillor for Communities, Health and Leisure then went on to provide detail on the community co-production sessions which had been held over the summer with further sessions scheduled in September and planned for October 2024. The views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities & Partnerships) were then discussed which were largely in support of the proposals.

In response to a question raised by the Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene regarding the means by which the Strategy would be evaluated, the Executive Councillor for Communities, Health and Leisure commented that work was yet to be undertaken in this respect but that focus would be placed upon delivering key tangible outcomes. The Corporate Director (People) commented upon the duty of the Council to be accountable and transparent to its residents and stakeholders and assured the Cabinet that all projects would be monitored going forward. In noting that the Council would continue to engage with key partners, stakeholders and communities to deliver the objectives of the Strategy, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) to support the proposed Community Health and Wealth Building Strategy;
- (b) to support the creation of a Community Health and Wealth Delivery Fund to support the delivery of the Community Health and Wealth Building Strategy, subject to approval of a detailed proposal on the detailed operation of the fund; and
- (c) to support the continued community engagement and co-production activity to inform the delivery of the strategy.

33 3C ICT SHARED SERVICE REVIEW

The Cabinet received and noted a report by the Chief Operating Officer and Lead Officer for 3C ICT Shared Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which provided an overview of the review of the 3C ICT Service, the key options to address the concerns and meet the ICT and digital requirements of the three partner Councils and the receipt of sufficient data and analysis to enable the three partner Councils to jointly agree a preferred option.

In introducing the report, the Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce acquainted the Cabinet with the background history to the shared service and advised that a number of options had been presented to all three partner Councils for consideration by Triple Value Impact, the consultants appointed to undertake the review. Appendix 1 detailed all options proposed (a copy of which is appended in the Annex to the Minute Book) including a high level overview of the impacts against risk, operational cost, digital costs, implementation costs, complexity and timescales. It was further reported that all three partner Councils had reached a consensus to recommend Option 1, whilst also proposing an increase to the budget from £8.1m to £8.4m.

Executive Members acknowledged the complexities with negotiating the new agreement and the extent of work undertaken by the Chief Executive, Corporate Director (People), Chief Operating Officer and the Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce to reach a conclusion amongst all partner authorities.

Having expressed support for the proposals, the Cabinet's attention was then drawn to the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth). Cabinet Members concurred with the comments made in respect of reviewing

performance of the shared service annually together with the governance arrangements that would be in place.

The Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene indicated that she wished to raise a question in respect of Appendix 1. In doing so, the Chief Executive advised that the meeting would need to move to private session.

34 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees or, or office holders under, the authority.

35 3C ICT SHARED SERVICES REVIEW

The Cabinet discussed a range of matters in relation to Appendix 1 of the report (a copy of which is appended in the Annex to the Minute Book). Questions raised were responded to at the meeting by the Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce and Chief Executive.

36 RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the public be re-admitted to the meeting.

37 3C ICT SHARED SERVICE REVIEW

Having commended Officers and Partner Councils for their efforts in reviewing the arrangements for 3C ICT Shared Services, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) to note the final report submitted by Triple Value Impact (TVI), as attached at Appendix 1 in the Annex to the Minute Book; and
- (b) to agree to the recommended Option 1 (redesigned 3C ICT and Digital, Lead Authority remains HDC) and to delegate the responsibility for finalising the scope and detailed nature of the new agreement and associated activities to the Chief Executives and respective Portfolio Holders for each partnership council reporting on progress through the revised Member Board.

38 2024/25 FINANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT - Q1 FORECAST

The Cabinet received and noted a report by the Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) presenting details of the Council's financial performance for 2024/25.

The Chief Finance Officer reported that at the end of quarter 1, there was a revenue forecast underspend of £444,000 and a capital forecast underspend of £1,218,000. She then went on to report that these underspends were attributed to a number of factors including the Bank of England base rate changes, higher than anticipated green waste subscription income, reduced utility costs at Pathfinder House and Eastfield House and increased rental costs at Pheonix Court. However, some of these were offset by increased costs such as National Insurance. The Cabinet were advised that the Internal Drainage Board levy continued to increase and currently was £50,000 over budget. This had now been included in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Other areas of note in respect of overspends relating to the revenue budget included the establishment of a Community Health and Wealth Delivery Fund, the budget associated with the Customer Transformation Director service and business continuity improvements.

Having regard to the capital forecast, Executive Members noted that the rephasing of the budget largely related to underspends at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park and ICT projects together with overspends relating to the Community Infrastructure Levy and Salix projects.

The Financial and Treasury Accountant then delivered an overview of the Council's treasury management position covering the economic position at the end of quarter 1, interest rate forecasts, Annual Investment Strategy, borrowing and compliance with treasury and prudential limits.

Having been advised by the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources that the Local Government Association had set up a special interest group to tackle the issue with Internal Drainage Boards, the Cabinet's attention was then drawn to the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth) which were received and noted. In terms of the former, the Chief Executive advised that the issue was one which had been recognised and that a quarterly meeting had been set up for the District's Internal Drainage Board Members to come together and share intelligence and that there was a pressing need to plan for capital investment. Members were also advised that a site visit to St Germans Pumping Station at Kings Lynn would also be arranged for Members.

Other matters that were discussed and responded to at the meeting included the reasons for the increase in the number of working age Council Tax Support claimants and the Council's investment property statistics.

Having expressed their thanks to Officers for presenting the report and in acknowledging the challenges and unavoidable pressures which remained within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) to consider and comment on the revenue financial performance for the financial year 2024/25 Quarter 1, as detailed in Appendix 1 and summarised in paragraph 3.2 of the report now submitted;

- (b) to consider and comment on the capital financial performance for 2024/25 Quarter 1, as detailed in Appendix 2 and summarised in paragraph 3.3 of the report now submitted; and
- (c) to consider and comment on the prudential and treasury management indicators for 2024/25 Quarter 1, as detailed in Appendix 3 of the report now submitted.

39 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT, QUARTER 1 2024/25

With the aid of a report prepared by the Assistant Director (Strategic Insights and Delivery) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet received an update on delivery of the Corporate Plan during quarter 1 of the 2024/25 financial year.

In introducing the report, the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance drew attention to a number of performance indicators where performance levels had been achieved. He then went on to report that new measures had been introduced in respect of fly tipping and acquainted the Cabinet with the latest position in respect of Disabled Facilities Grants. The Cabinet were pleased to note the performance levels achieved by the Call Centre in responding to customer calls within 2 minutes against the target of 5 minutes which had been achieved at the time of launching the green waste subscription service.

Having received and noted the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth), it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet note the progress and performance made during Quarter 1, as summarised in the Corporate Performance Report attached and detailed in Appendices A and B of the report now submitted.

40 HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP MINUTES

The Cabinet has received and noted the Minutes of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group held on 12th July 2024.

In noting the retirement of Judith Arnold, Countryside Services Manager over the summer, the Cabinet placed on record their best wishes to her for a very long, healthy and happy retirement.

The meeting concluded at 8:54pm.