

## 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, 17 March 2026.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Conboy – Chair.

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

### **76. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2026 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **77. MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Councillor Harvey declared an interest in respect of Minute No. 25/79 regarding the application for the Huntingdon Sports and Health Hub by virtue of being the Chair of the Huntingdon & District Cricket Club, and she left the room during the discussion and vote on recommendation D.

Councillor Howell declared an interest in respect of Minute No. 25/79 regarding the application for the Huntingdon Sports and Health Hub by virtue of working for the NHS, however she was not in any position where she could influence any decisions, and she took part in the discussion and vote on the application.

Councillor Davenport-Ray declared an interest in respect of Minute No. 25/79 regarding the application for the Youth Centre, St Neots by virtue of having submitted a letter of support for the application and she knew the applicants, who were her constituents. In order to err on the side of caution, she left the room during the discussion and vote on recommendation J.

### **78. SIGNING OF THE HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL ARMED FORCES COVENANT**

A report by the Community Development Officer was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) seeking approval to sign the Huntingdonshire District Council Armed Forces Covenant, ensuring compliance with statutory duties and alignment with current best practice.

The Chair, Councillor Conboy introduced the report and acknowledged the supportive comments of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities & Partnerships). Reference was made to the importance of honouring and respecting serving Armed Forces personnel, veterans and their families, particularly in the current geopolitical situation.

Whereupon it was

## RESOLVED

that

- a) the Huntingdonshire District Council Armed Forces Covenant be approved, superseding the previous Covenant;
- b) the Council continues to embed Armed Forces Covenant principles across relevant policies, services, and employment practices, where appropriate and proportionate, be agreed;
- c) a member of Senior Leadership acts as strategic sponsor and that the Council's appointed Armed Forces Champion acts as Chair of the Armed Forces Covenant Working Group, to support effective coordination and governance, be agreed; and
- d) an annual progress report on delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) to provide assurance, transparency and ongoing oversight.

### **79. COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY SPEND ALLOCATION**

*See Minute No. 25/77 – Members' Interests.*

A report by the Head of Planning, Infrastructure & Public Protection was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) inviting the Cabinet to consider recommendations relating to infrastructure projects seeking funding of £100,001 or more in whole or in part from an amount of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) monies.

The Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor Sanderson introduced the report, drawing attention to the comments of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth), particularly the concerns that there was no provision currently in St Neots that provided a dedicated space for young people.

The Cabinet drew attention to the helpful supplement document circulated prior to the meeting setting out a breakdown of the CIL allocations to date, alongside growth data, and requested that it be shared with Town/Parish Councils. The Chair also requested that when that information was circulated, Town/Parish Councils be encouraged to engage early with officers and take advantage of their advice.

To allow for Cabinet Members to vacate the room during the discussion of the applications which they had declared an interest on, the debate and vote on each recommendation was taken in turn.

#### Recommendations A, B and C.

The recommendations were noted.

#### Recommendation D

*Councillor Harvey vacated the room.*

The recommendation was approved.

*Councillor Harvey re-entered the room and took back her seat at the meeting.*

#### Recommendation E

The Cabinet welcomed the funding as it was conducive to bringing young people into the construction industry.

The recommendation was approved.

#### Recommendation F

The Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance, Councillor Ferguson sought advice whether he needed to leave the room during the discussion and vote as he was Ward Councillor, however the Chief Executive advised that being the Ward Councillor did not give him a conflict of interest that was sufficient to require him to leave the room. Councillor Ferguson confirmed he had not campaigned on behalf of the application.

The Executive Councillor for Communities, Health and Leisure, Councillor Kerr also sought advice as Portfolio Holder, however the Chief Executive advised that this was her normal Portfolio Holder business and would not constitute a conflict of interest in terms of debating and making a decision.

The Cabinet commented on the potential of Paxton Pitts Nature Reserve as a tourist attraction, particularly with the uniqueness of its wildlife, and highlighted the health and welfare benefits for residents across Huntingdonshire that the improvements would bring.

The recommendation was approved.

#### Recommendation G

The recommendation was approved.

#### Recommendation H

The recommendation was approved.

#### Recommendation I

The Cabinet welcomed the opportunity the courses would help provide for local people as a result of the occupational skills training facility, and that it would draw more investment from other educational providers.

The Executive Councillor for Economy, Regeneration and Housing, Councillor Wakeford made reference to the funding which had been secured from the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) 'Cold Spot' capital investment to help build the Skills Centre Hub, and as the Council's representative on the CPCA'S

Skills Committee he had pushed on behalf of the Council, however he placed on record that he had not been involved with the CIL bid element and therefore felt comfortable participating in the discussion and vote.

The recommendation was approved.

#### Recommendation J

*Councillor Davenport-Ray vacated the room.*

The Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance, Councillor Ferguson advised that he would vote against the Officer's recommendation to refuse funding. He commented that despite its size and the scale of financial contribution from residents, provision for young people in St Neots was poor, with facilities limited and opportunities constrained. He also made reference to the comments made at the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth) which he agreed with, and commented that engaging with detailed, informed scrutiny was part of good governance. A youth centre was not a threat to vitality, it was a generator as it would provide footfall, life and activity, and reference was made to the fact that the retail unit had been vacant for the previous 3 years. Furthermore, he disagreed with the suggestion that St Neots had its growth needs met through S106 funding, which did not address the cumulative impact of growth across an entire town, advising that this was what CIL was designed for.

The Executive Councillor for Communities, Health and Leisure, Councillor Howell made reference to the Community Health and Wealth Building Strategy, particularly the feedback from the community co-production sessions in 2024 which included "make community use of empty units" and "local talent pathways and improved skills offer for young people". Making use of the vacant building in some way could help align with those sentiments.

The Executive Councillor for Finance & Resources, Councillor Mickelburgh commented that the biggest impact of Council funding since 2010 had fallen on youth service provision. His own experiences of youth sport and activity was how well young people responded and got involved in the community. Having the opportunity to be involved with such activities was an important part of development. As such, he was also minded to vote against the Officer recommendation.

The Executive Councillor for Economy, Regeneration and Housing, Councillor Wakeford also referenced the harm as a result of cuts to youth service provision. Whilst he was of the opinion that Cabinet would welcome funding, there was a question of approving a bid that had elements of work needing to be completed, including that St Neots Town Council had not engaged with the Council and there was not yet Planning permission. Though he had confidence it was a deliverable project, he expressed anxiety at endorsing expenditure that had not gone according to governance process, however he was open to persuasion as to how to solve that.

The Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor Sanderson

commented on the benefits of youth service provision, however further work needed to be done in terms of the bid. He also referenced the lack of Planning permission, and that St Neots Town Council had not yet engaged with the Council. However, he was open to ideas as to how to make the application work.

The Executive Councillor for Parks & Countryside, Waste & Street Scene, Councillor Kerr commented on the importance of finding a location young people could call their own and have a safe space to engage, and encouraged the idea of finding a way to work around the various elements of the bid needed in order to make it viable to approve funding.

The Executive Councillor for Governance and Democratic Services, Councillor Harvey was mindful of ensuring governance was followed, however as the bid stood, she was minded not to support going against the Officer recommendation.

The Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor Sanderson proposed Recommendation J, "to agree officer recommendation at Paragraph 4.9 to refuse funding for the reconfiguration of a retail unit to become a youth centre in St Neots", which was duly seconded by Councillor Wakeford.

In order to help clarify matters, the Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director (Place) advised that Cabinet were not bound by the recommendation in front of them. Officers had seen sight of the full bid as submitted and advised accordingly, however the Cabinet were at liberty to take a contrary view if minded. He noted the questions and comments regarding being able to make an approval conditional, and advised there were examples previously where decisions were taken to make bids contingent on certain factors. If Cabinet were minded to make an approval conditional, in practice it would be delegated back to officers with the conditions set out for the applicants and officers would only release funding in accordance with the subsequent agreements made with them. In other cases, where bids were considered lacking in areas, Cabinet had given a steer and a direction of travel had been given to applicants which had come back in front of Cabinet through the governance process.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director (Place) also clarified that the proposal in front of Cabinet, which had been seconded, was to refuse the application. That matter would have to be concluded to then seek an alternative recommendation. The Chief Executive further clarified that if the vote had a majority against the recommendation to refuse funding and therefore was not carried, there would then be an opportunity to put an amendment forward and be debated, that could then give the conditions Cabinet had questioned regarding whether the bid could be approved, subject to those conditions arising thereon. In the event Cabinet were unable to agree either to support the officer recommendation to refuse, and not have a majority decision on an amendment, that would suggest Cabinet did not have sufficient information before it to make a decision, therefore the logical outcome in that situation would be to consider deferment pending the points raised during the debate.

When put to a vote, the recommendation to refuse funding was

declared to be lost.

The Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance, Councillor Ferguson proposed the following additional recommendation:

- 1) to support the principle of the allocation of CIL funding towards a youth centre in St Neots;
- 2) to support in principle the allocation being for a maximum of £500k;
- 3) agree to a CIL funding award being made, based on 1 and 2, subject to:
  - a. securing ownership or arrangements to acquire the building, or a suitable alternative;
  - b. securing planning permission and any other necessary consents to facilitate the works needed to facilitate the youth centre;
  - c. securing a full commitment from the Town Council towards the proposed scheme; including the identification of and provision of necessary match funding and longer-term funding to ensure the proposal is viable now and in the future;
  - d. provision of additional information for the scheme to satisfy outstanding concerns such as choice of location, impact on the town centre vitality, assessment of provision of existing and future youth and community spaces, and demonstrate long term viability of the proposal;
  - e. sufficient information and clarification being presented to Officers to demonstrate satisfactory compliance with all other aspects of our established CIL governance; and
- 4) delegate the final decision to the Head of Planning, Infrastructure & Public Protection in consultation with the Corporate Director (Place), Leader, Executive Councillor for Finance, and Executive Councillor for Planning to approve a CIL funding award for this project, and determine the final level of CIL funding to be awarded.

The Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance, Councillor Ferguson further commented it would be sensible to put a reasonable timescale for the applicants to satisfy the conditions, and suggested 6 months may be appropriate.

The Cabinet were content with the additional recommendation, which satisfied some of the questions and concerns raised earlier in the debate. However, a concern was raised regarding the funding allocation being a "maximum of" £500k and being able to demonstrate best value for money. The Chair, Councillor Conboy sought advice on whether there was an automatic value for money test that would be helpful in allaying this concern.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director (Place) advised that it was helpful to set a maximum to work within a range, and in terms of doing due diligence over all bids, part of the assessment the team did was looking at the information to justify the figure that was finally settled on. In terms of responding to the bid and hearing the comments the Cabinet had made, there would be enough for officers to craft a response to the application to steer them that the figure was an upper limit, and applicants needed to demonstrate the need for the full costs being applied for. In terms of the final checks and balances, that would be delegated to Officers for a professional assessment of which value for money would form a part. Officers would also consult with Cabinet if concerns remained. . Officers would also write back to the applicants to replicate what had been discussed during the debate.

The Cabinet reflected on the contents of the report, commenting that there had been a fair amount of evidence of need in terms of letters of support, population data and public survey and the community interest. Comments were raised around whether there might be an opportunity to do something that might benefit young people in terms of helping them towards employment by giving them practical experience in a commercial setting as well youth facilities.

In response to comments from the Chair, the Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director – Place advised that the Cabinet could only consider what was before it.

The Cabinet were reassured that there would be officer oversight and the proposal would have to comply with CIL framework, so from a governance perspective there were enough safeguards in place.

Councillor Ferguson confirmed that the additional recommendation would also include a 6-month timescale for the applicants to satisfy the conditions. The additional recommendation was duly seconded by Councillor Howell.

When put to a vote, the additional recommendation was carried.

*Councillor Davenport-Ray re-entered the room and took back her seat at the meeting.*

#### Recommendation K

The recommendation was approved.

#### Recommendation L

The recommendation was approved.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that

- a) the updates on delivery in relation to the projects previously allocated or in receipt of CIL funding commitments (see

Appendix 1), be noted;

- b) any new allocated CIL projects for £100,000.00 or less approved by delegation on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2026 (see Appendix 2), be noted;
- c) the project to be approved in accordance with Stage 2 CIL governance review with the level of funding to be agreed in line with delegated authority as stated at para 2.5 of the report, be noted;
- d) the officer recommendations at Paragraph 4.3 to approve funding for 3 Padel Courts in Huntingdon, be agreed;
- e) the officer recommendations at Paragraph 4.4 to approve funding for a construction skills workshop in Huntingdon, be agreed;
- f) the officer recommendations at Paragraph 4.5 to approve funding for enhancements and improvements to Paxton Pits, be agreed;
- g) the officer recommendations at Paragraph 4.6 to approve funding for relocation of the 6<sup>th</sup> form college at Abbey College in Ramsey, be agreed;
- h) the officer recommendations at Paragraph 4.7 to approve funding for reconfiguration and refurbishment of the fire station in St Ives, be agreed.
- i) the officer recommendations at Paragraph 4.8 to approve funding for the SAPHIRE new constructional skills centre in St Neots, be agreed;
- k) the officer recommendations at Paragraph 4.10 to approve funding for the increase of two classrooms for Warboys Primary Academy, be agreed;
- l) the officer recommendations at Paragraph 4.11 to approve an extension of time for Wheatsheaf Road, be agreed; and
- m) it was agreed to
  - (1) support the principle of the allocation of CIL funding towards a youth centre in St Neots;
  - (2) support in principle the allocation being for a maximum of £500k;
  - (3) a CIL funding award being made, based on (1) and (2), subject to:
    - (a) securing ownership or arrangements to acquire the building, or a suitable alternative;

- (b) securing planning permission and any other necessary consents to facilitate the works needed to facilitate the youth centre;
  - (c) securing a full commitment from the Town Council towards the proposed scheme; including the identification of and provision of necessary match funding and longer-term funding to ensure the proposal is viable now and in the future;
  - (d) the provision of additional information for the scheme to satisfy outstanding concerns such as choice of location, impact on the town centre vitality, assessment of provision of existing and future youth and community spaces, and demonstrate long term viability of the proposal;
  - (e) sufficient information and clarification being presented to Officers to demonstrate satisfactory compliance with all other aspects of our established CIL governance;
  - (f) all matters being resolved within a period of 6 months (which may be extended by agreement); and
- (4) delegated authority for the final decision be given to the Head of Planning, Infrastructure & Public Protection in consultation with the Corporate Director (Place), Leader, Executive Councillor for Finance, and Executive Councillor for Planning to approve a CIL funding award for this project and determine the final level of CIL funding to be awarded.

## **80. EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY**

A report by the Private Sector Housing Officer was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) presenting the Draft Empty Homes Strategy 2026-2031.

The Executive Councillor for Economy, Regeneration and Housing, Councillor Wakeford introduced the report, advising that the report had initially gone through the Scrutiny process in January deliberately to allow time for reworking to take place following comments from the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth). The Strategy was one of several levers in helping the delivery of additional housing for residents. The Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance, Councillor Ferguson commented that the strategy aligned with two of the corporate objectives which were keeping people out of crisis and helping people in crisis. It was important to have enforcement action as a last resort.

In response to a question from Cabinet as to whether the Empty Homes Strategy and Homes for Ukraine scheme could be linked, officers would take this matter away.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that

- 1) the Draft Empty Homes Strategy 2026-2031 (Appendix 1), be approved; and
- 2) authority be delegated to the Corporate Director of Place and the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources (S151 Officer) in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Economy, Regeneration and Housing and Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance to initiate and progress enforcement action against the owners of long term empty properties where the property is:
  - Causing blight, nuisance or negative community impact;
  - The owner has failed to engage with the Council despite reasonable attempts to contact them; and
  - No credible plan has been provided to bring the property back into use within a reasonable timeframe.

## **81. PARKS & OPEN SPACES - COMMERCIAL SUSTAINABILITY PLAN**

A report by the Head of Leisure, Health & Environment was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) seeking the endorsement on the work undertaken by Officers and T3, an external consultancy in the development of a new Parks & Open Spaces – Commercial Sustainability Plan.

The Executive Councillor for Parks & Countryside, Waste & Street Scene, Councillor Kerr introduced the report and reflected on the positive input from the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships). She advised that the flexibility of the Plan meant that it could work around and not conflict with ongoing works and provided an assurance that the proposed Aqua Park would not adversely affect noise levels or overload the park as it would be used in phases.

In response to questions from the Cabinet, Councillor Kerr advised that the expansion of the car park was aimed to be completed in October 2026, however officers were finalising the construction programme, and this could be brought forward to the Summer of 2026. Regarding the ecological impact assessment, the decision on what level of environmental harm was deemed acceptable was delegated to the Head of Leisure, Health & Environment, but if there was negative ecological impact then he would use that delegation to mitigate that harm. An initial assessment had been completed, with the full report being awaited, however early indications were that work could proceed, with some considerations that would be built into the Plan. Furthermore, the aim of increasing the parking provision to improve income generation was to help facilitate and pay for the work done at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park (HCP).

The Cabinet reflected on the importance of the responsibility of taking on positive work handed down by previous administrations and continuing maintaining that work to hand down tranquil ecological spaces to future generations who used such spaces for various purposes. Councillor Kerr took these comments on board, and provided an assurance that it was important that the tranquil, safe nature of HCP was not lost.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that

- 1) the principles put forward in the T3 Commercial Opportunities Report (Appendix 1), which will be adopted in seeking to support activities to reduce the costs of the service to the Council and provide a commercially sustainable approach for the service, and which will continue to contribute to the Councils wider strategies and outcomes for the District, be endorsed ;
- 2) it be supported that the principles set out can be used in connection with the identified sites, but also applied in relation to other sites which the Council is or may become responsible for, including those falling within the remit of the Head of Leisure, Health and Environment to support wildlife and conservation, health and wellbeing, physical activity and the introduction of new commercial opportunities;
- 3) the outline recommendations put forward by T3 Commercial Opportunities Report (Appendix 1), by external consultants, the proposed Phase 1 capital investment plan and wider direction of travel as outlined within the report, be agreed;
- 4) the proposed Phase 1 programme of investment utilising the capital bids (£1m) which have been included within the 26/27 budget and which have subsequently been agreed as part of the Councils Capital Programme, be approved;
- 5) the Head of Leisure, Health & Environment be supported to continue to develop plans for Phase 2 and to submit capital bids as part of the 27/28 budget setting process – or earlier if possible and supported by the Corporate Director (Finance and Resources) and Section 151 Officer; and
- 6) authority be delegated to the Head of Leisure, Health & Environment to undertake all necessary activities required to deliver the capital expenditure plan (Phase 1), and within the agreed budgets enable the development, finalisation and delivery of new programmes, events and attractions which align with the principles agreed, and which will contribute to the commercially sustainable approach agreed.

A report by the Performance Coordinator and Business Performance and Insights Team Leader was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) presenting the Council's progress against the Corporate Plan Actions and Corporate Performance Indicators during Quarter 3 (October to December 2025).

The Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance, Councillor Ferguson introduced the report. Reference was made to the fact that three quarters of the Corporate Plan actions were on track, with none behind schedule which reflected how seriously delivery was taken and how hard officers had worked. He reflected on the record number of affordable homes delivered and praised the high-level performance of the Waste Service which had been recognised nationally at the APSE Performance Network Awards. There had been real progress made in terms of the Disability Facilities Grant Programme which helped support some of the most vulnerable people in the community, as well as improvements in the Active Lifestyles Programme and in the Planning Service. The progress made reflected well on the whole Council, and he had felt supported by the work of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth) which had set challenging targets and kept Cabinet accountable.

The Cabinet reflected on the record level of affordable housing delivery, leaving a legacy for the next administration, and echoed thanks to Officers who had worked hard on its behalf.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet considered and commented on progress and performance during Quarter 3.

### **83. VARIATIONS TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF WORKING GROUPS**

RESOLVED

- (a) that no changes were required to the Membership of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group;
- (b) that Councillors E Butler, K Gulson, J Neish, T Sanderson, M Hassall, C Gleadow and S Taylor be appointed to serve on the Local Plan Advisory Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year;
- (c) that Councillors T Alban, C Lowe, B Pitt, T Sanderson, J Harvey and J Kerr be appointed to serve on the Member Development Working Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year; and
- (d) that Councillors S Bywater, S Cawley, M Hassall, D Keane, S Taylor, S Howell and N Hunt be appointed to serve on the One Leisure Huntingdon Advisory Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

**84. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED

that the public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information relating to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

**85. AWARD OF CONTRACTS FOR THE PUBLIC ADVICE AND INFORMATION SERVICE AND INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORT TO THE COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR**

An exempt report by the Head of Communities and Operational Housing was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Annex to the Minute Book).

RESOLVED

that the recommendations (1) to (3) of the exempt report now submitted, be approved.

Chair