

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held in Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 19 October 2016.

PRESENT: Councillor P L E Bucknell – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, T D Alban, K M Baker, Mrs B E Boddington, D Brown, G J Bull, E R Butler, R C Carter, S Cawley, Mrs S Conboy, J E Corley, S J Criswell, J W Davies, D B Dew, Mrs A Dickinson, Mrs A Donaldson, Mrs L A Duffy, M Francis, R Fuller, I D Gardener, L George, D A Giles, Mrs S A Giles, J A Gray, R Harrison, T Hayward, R B Howe, B Hyland, P Kadewere, Mrs R E Mathews, D J Mead, J P Morris, J M Palmer, M F Shellens, L R Swain, Mrs J Tavener, Mrs S L Taylor, R G Tuplin, D M Tysoe, D R Underwood, D Watt, R J West and J E White.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors B S Chapman, S Greenall, D Harty, Mrs P A Jordan, P D Reeve, Mrs D C Reynolds and K D Wainwright.

### **32. PRAYER**

The Reverend A Milton, Vicar of All Saints and St. Mary's, Huntingdon, opened the meeting with prayer in the absence of the Right Reverend Dr David Thompson, Bishop of Huntingdon, who had not been well enough to attend.

### **33. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman presented to the Council an account of the activities both he and the Vice-Chairman Councillor R J West had attended since the last meeting. In so doing, he referred to the attendance by some Members at the recent funeral of former Leader and Councillor R H Turpin OBE and the funeral of former Councillor J Williams.

Attendance at events had included the St Neots dragon boat race, the centenary celebrations at RAF Wyton, US Air Force 69th Birthday Reception at RAF Alconbury with the issuing of medals and a further event to celebrate the Queen's 90th birthday with the Lord Lieutenant at Great Staughton.

Members were advised of forthcoming events in the Chairman's diary, including the Battle of Britain on the 31st October 2016, Remembrance Service with the Royal British Legion on the 7th November 2016 and the Chairman reminded Members of the Carol Service scheduled for the 12th December 2016 that would include a school choir this year.

The Vice-Chairman presented details of his attendance on behalf of the Council at an evening with Luminus, flag raising at Merchant Navy Day, St Neots Annual Civic Service at the Parish Church and an evening with the Mayor of Peterborough at a sausage supper.

**34. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 27th July 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**35. MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

No declarations were received.

**36. MOTION ON NOTICE**

Councillor T Hayward moved and it was duly seconded by Councillor Mrs B E Boddington that

- (a) Network Rail (NR) has previously examined proposals for the closure of all level crossings on the East Coast Main Line (ECML) from Kings Cross to Doncaster, including all those within Huntingdonshire. Following a feasibility study and formal consultations, these were considered by Cabinet in March 2015 when it was resolved that the District Council would support the project. The proposal was greeted with relief by many, particularly by the residents of the villages of Buckden and The Offords which are separated by this busy level crossing.

Following a strategic review of NR's Investment Programme, it was confirmed that project would not proceed in totality. NR indicated that it would consider all crossings separately, trying to integrate any closures with other schemes in the area.

Following this decision, a Regional Working Group was created by NR to develop an East Coast Route Study between London and Edinburgh. This will set the strategic direction for this route and future investment priorities. It would include the new InterCity Express programme and, possibly, new long distance services to other regions passing through our District. Stuart Bell, our Transportation Officer, attends these meetings on the Council's behalf.

This Council believes that the cancellation of the plans to close this level crossing between Buckden and The Offords (with a bridge replacement) will result in the continuance of existing delays to traffic flow on this busy route, especially when the A14 or A1 are closed.

During an average week, the crossing is used by over 20,000 vehicles, 560 cyclists and 100 pedestrians and this number is often exceeded if other roads are closed due to accidents. The approach to the level crossing is difficult from both directions. On the Offords side, there are frequent occasions when the traffic tailback reaches a considerable distance in both

directions. On the Buckden side the approach to the level crossing is more hazardous. The road is narrow and one way traffic in places due to the three River Ouse crossings, dangerous corners and negligible sight lines. There is also a road safety problem for cyclists and pedestrians brave enough to use the road. This current situation is bad but could be compounded when the new A14 is completed as current proposals indicate that there will be a marginal increase in traffic movements on this crossing.

- (b) Therefore, this Council calls on the Executive Leader and Executive Councillor for Planning Policy, Housing and Infrastructure to work with their fellow Members and Officers to:
- Press the National Rail Regional WG and Government to accelerate the removal of this crossing by whatever means and at the earliest opportunity, possibly in conjunction with the now approved A14 scheme, and emphasise that this would be in line with the NR suggestion that closures could be integrated with other schemes in the local area; and
  - Press our local MP to contact the relevant Minister of State to lobby for the closure of this crossing at the earliest opportunity, possibly in conjunction with the A14 scheme.

Councillors M F Shellens, D B Dew, T D Alban and Mrs S J Conboy declared their support for the motion and Councillor Mrs Boddington referred to the plans as displayed obtained from NR and the growth in the surrounding villages that had exacerbated the problems in the volume of traffic using the crossing. In so doing she explained that following some lobbying of NR they had agreed to relocate the road and junction to the north.

Councillor G J Bull, Executive Councillor for Planning Policy, Housing and Infrastructure endorsed the views of the Members and outlined his support for the issue. He undertook to write to the MP for Huntingdon and MP for North West Cambridgeshire both representing villages with level crossings in the affected areas of Buckden and Holme.

Whereupon, on being put to the vote, the motion was declared to be CARRIED.

### **37. CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE**

In conjunction with a report by the Managing Director (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was attached the full feedback report from the Local Government Association (LGA) following a Peer Challenge that they had conducted at the Council in June 2016, Councillor D Brown, Executive Councillor for Strategic Partnerships and Shared Services acquainted the Council with a summary of the Corporate Peer Challenge. A copy of Councillor Brown's PowerPoint presentation is also appended in the Minute Book.

Members were advised of the main purpose of the Peer Challenge

designed to be improvement-focused and provide feedback as critical friends. The Team involved representatives from a cross-section of similar other authorities and LGA representatives and considered five core components addressed by all corporate Peer Challenges, as well as the capacity and capability for transformation and maximising engagement at all levels.

Having been acquainted with the process of the challenge, Councillor Brown drew Members' attention to the observations that emerged from the Peer Challenge, including modernisation, vision and partnership working, together with the 12 recommendations made by the LGA that would form the basis of an Action Plan to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Customers) and the Cabinet in order to agree the future direction of the Council. Members noted that an update on progress would be provided to a future meeting of the Council.

In response to a question from Councillor J White on benchmarking the Council against other authorities, Councillor Brown explained that the Peer Challenge had not scored the Council but suggested that it compared favourably to the other authorities in Cambridgeshire.

The Executive Councillor, R B Howe, referred to the Agenda that he had set out as the new Leader in comparison to the recommendations identified in the Peer Review and explained that there were very few gaps that symbolised that the policy programme and strategic direction was more aligned to deliver services in line with customer requirements.

Arising from a question by Councillor J P Morris on the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Councillor R Harrison explained that the Agenda had been re-designed with the LEP and partners had been working closer together to achieve the same goals, which had become even more critical with the forthcoming decision on the Devolution deal.

In response to a question from Councillor Mrs A Dickinson on the recommendations identified as part of the Peer Review, Councillor Brown explained that a number of policies had overlapped with the recommendations including the transformation agenda and partnership working with Town and Parish Councils.

Councillor D A Giles queried recommendation 4 of the Peer Review report of 'using all Members' democratic position, as ambassadors of the Council, to engage and influence partners and forms of partnership working' as to how this would evolve, whereby Councillor S J Criswell, Executive Councillor for Community Resilience explained that under the new Executive Leader, Councillor Howe had recognised the importance of the relationship with Town and Parish Councils. Members' attention was also drawn to a Town and Parish Council conference scheduled to be held on 18th November 2016 to identify how such relationships can improve.

Councillor D B Dew requested that Overview and Scrutiny be fully engaged with the Action Plan by way of task and finish groups, whereby Councillor Brown explained that this had formed part of the Action Plan going forward. Whereupon, it was

## RESOLVED

- (a) that the contents of the LGA Peer Review Challenge Feedback be noted; and
- (b) that the Managing Director be authorised to devise an Action Plan, in consultation with the Executive Leader and Executive Councillor for Strategic Partnerships and Shared Services.

### 38. EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR PRESENTATIONS

#### (a) **Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources**

Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources, addressed the Council on an update of the capital programme and investment. In so doing, Members were advised of the potential to achieve greater certainty and confidence by way of a four year budget settlement. It was reported that the Council had submitted a four year strategic efficiency plan to the Secretary of State which was designed to allow for further savings and benefits for the local community.

Members' attention was drawn to the updated 'Plan on a Page' and the principle of reducing the previously forecast budget gap of £3.6m in 2020/21 to £700k through income generation and efficiency savings.

It was noted that although Council Tax had been frozen for the fourth consecutive year, it was suggested that an increase in Council Tax would enable the Council to meet its corporate priorities but would be reflective of local affordability.

Councillor Gray updated Members on commercial investments since approval of the Commercial Investment Strategy Business Plan in December 2015 and acquisition of assets totalling £12.5m with a net yield of 7%. Reference was also made to proposals for introducing a Differential Charging Policy to enable further income generation.

In respect of efficiency savings, Members were advised that following completion of the Zero Based Budget exercise that had identified savings in excess of £5m, it was expected that further operational budget changes could be made to reduce the Council's net budget by £700k.

The continued sharing of services with the Council's strategic partners Cambridge City Council and South

Cambridgeshire District Council was expected to achieve a further £74k of savings and it was anticipated that a further £50k of savings could be achieved through commercialisation of some external facing services, such as the Document Centre and CCTV.

Reference was made to the transformation project that was being taken forward by Councillor S Cawley which was designed to look at a different way of delivering business to ensure that customers get what they want.

In concluding, Councillor Gray referred to the forthcoming decision to be taken on the Devolution deal and the plan to continue to provide improved services to the Council's customers through the most effective and efficient means.

In response to a question from Councillor M F Shellens on car parking charges, business rates and inclusion of inflation on the four year plan, Councillor Gray explained that the increase in car parking charges had been placed in the approved budget but reliance on business rates had been removed with greater emphasis being placed upon becoming more independent from government grants and clarity needed to be sought on whether the four year plan would be updated to reflect inflation.

Councillor J D Ablewhite referred to the sustainability of the plan and commended the Council with the work undertaken on income generation and commercial investments to date.

**(b) Councillor G J Bull, Executive Councillor for Planning, Housing and Infrastructure**

Councillor G J Bull, Executive Councillor for Planning, Housing and Infrastructure addressed the Council on a planning update. A copy of Councillor Bull's PowerPoint presentation is appended in the Minute Book.

Councillor Bull welcomed Ms C Kerr, Development Management Team Leader, to the meeting to support him in his presentation. Members received an update on the Local Plan timeline with expected public consultation commencing in May/June 2017 and submission to the Planning Inspectorate in November 2017 and final adoption estimated mid-2019. The Council were appraised with further detail of the key challenges identified prior to submission, including demonstrating deliverability, identification of sites sufficient to provide five years' worth of housing against need and the provision of infrastructure with the accompanying funding to support the growth package.

Members noted that key supporting evidence was still required prior to its submission, importantly the Strategic Transport Study being jointly commissioned with Cambridgeshire County Council and the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, both reports not expected until early 2017.

Councillor Bull paid tribute to Ms Kerr and her Team of Officers working on the Local Plan.

The Council received an update on the Neighbourhood Plans in the District and attention was drawn to the Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan where discussions were still being undertaken following receipt of the Examiners Report.

In concluding, Councillor Bull provided a summary of the average officer caseload in dealing with planning applications which represented an increase of 254 total applications compared with last year and statistics in relation to Development Management.

In response to a question from Councillor M F Shellens on any such contingency plans for the five year supply of housing and the timescale for the Strategic Transport Study (STS), Councillor Bull explained that alternative sites were currently being investigated and a full time person had been appointed to ensure the timescale for the STS would be achieved.

Councillor J P Morris raised a question in relation to the provision of investment in cycling infrastructure in future years and the ability to improve the provision across the District to increase the number of young people cycling to school. In response, Councillor Bull explained that the Council had previously financially partnered Cambridgeshire County Council with the delivery of a number of walking and cycling schemes across the District until the capital budget was removed in 2012. Work was still being undertaken with the County Council in the development of the Strategic Transport Study to support the Local Plan and it was understood that the County Council would be developing a Transport Strategy for the District in 2017 to replace the existing Market Town Transport Strategy, both covering cycling and walking needs across the District.

Councillor Bull referred to Councillor J M Palmer, Executive Councillor for Leisure and Health to provide a further response, whereby he explained that from a healthy lifestyle perspective the One Leisure Active Lifestyle Team was committed to increasing physical activity across the District and referred to the Pedals Project delivered at Hinchingsbrooke County Park using adaptive cycles for individuals with physical difficulties, as well as a significant investment on the Cyclone indoor cycles at One Leisure to encourage people to start cycling.

In response to a question from Councillor D A Giles on the number of planning applications not determined within the prescribed timeframe, Ms Kerr reported that the figure was likely to be very low and undertook to provide an answer following the meeting.

**(c) Questions to other Members of the Cabinet**

In response to a question from Councillor P Kadewere on parking of non-residential vehicles on land located near to the OakTree Centre, Huntingdon, the Executive Leader, Councillor R B Howe reported that he had met with the resident on site the previous day and had asked Democratic Services to assist with the identification of the ownership of land to establish whether 'residents only parking' signs could be erected in this area.

Arising from a question from Councillor Mrs S A Giles on the removal of the bollards at the Riverside Car Park, St Neots that had caused problems with the use of the car park as a race track, Councillor D M Tysoe, Executive Councillor for Operational Resources explained that discussions were currently being undertaken with the Police and the new Head of Operations had been tasked to address problems in this car park when it is not in use.

In response to a question from Councillor J White on the integration of the Economic Development Strategy with planning, Councillor R Harrison, Executive Councillor for Business, Enterprise and Skills explained that the Economic Development Team had been re-located from the Corporate Office to the Development Team to work more closely together and referred to a recent example of a commercial application on the Enterprise Zone that did not fulfil the strategic aims of the Enterprise Zone for a highly skilled workforce, whereby the Team worked with the Planning Team to develop a strategy for the inclusion of an apprenticeship scheme prior to the company taking ownership of the building.

Arising from a question from Councillor Mrs S J Conboy on concern with a number of car parking sites being identified for housing development, whereby Councillor D M Tysoe, Executive Councillor for Operational Resources, explained that the Council would be undertaking a strategic review of all car parking provision in the District and such issues as this would be addressed.

A question was raised by Councillor Mrs B E Boddington on the Council's approach to the testing undertaken of drivers of Heavy Goods Vehicles within the Operations Division when employing all drivers, including foreign nationals, whereby Councillor R C Carter, Executive Councillor for Environment, Street Scene and Operations, explained the process undertaken by the Operations Division from interview, driver assessment and medical through to driving licence checks undertaken every six months.

**39. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

In conjunction with a report by the Internal Audit and Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Councillor M Francis,



Chairman of the Corporate Governance Committee, presented the Sixth Annual Report for work of the Corporate Governance Committee for the year ending 30th September 2016 that outlined the work that had been undertaken by the Committee over the previous year. Members' attention was drawn to their recent meeting with the Council's new external auditors Ernst and Young who had issued an unqualified value for money statement that the Council had proper arrangements in place to achieve value for money.

In thanking the Chairman and Members of the Corporate Governance Committee for their work Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources, reiterated the sentiments of Councillor Francis and stressed the importance of their role in ensuring that the Council was acting both fairly and appropriately in the way that it conducted its business. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Annual Report 2015/16 of the Corporate Governance Committee be received and noted.

**40. OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEES AND PANELS**

A copy of the list of meetings held since the last meeting of the Council held on 27th July 2016 is appended in the Minute Book and Members were advised that any issues or questions could be raised in relation to these meetings.

**41. VARIATIONS TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS**

On the recommendation of Councillor G J Bull, it was

RESOLVED

(a) that Councillor Mrs B E Boddington be appointed to the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Customers) in place of Councillor D Harty; and

(b) that Councillor R Fuller be appointed to the Electoral Boundary Review Working Group in place of Councillor T D Sanderson.

The meeting ended at 9.00pm.

Chairman