

Council Minutes

Date: 16 July 2018

Time: 6.30 - 7.10 pm

PRESENT: Councillor A R Green (in the Chair)

Councillors K Ahmed, Z Ahmed, M C Appleyard, D H G Barnes, Ms A Baughan, S Broadbent, Miss S Brown, D J Carroll, M Clarke, C Etholen, R Farmer, S Graham, M Hanif, M Harris, A E Hill, A Hussain, M Hussain, M Hussain JP, D A Johncock, Mrs G A Jones, M E Knight, D Knights, Mrs J D Langley, Mrs W J Mallen, I L McEnnis, R Newman, Ms C J Oliver, B E Pearce, G Peart, S K Raja, R Raja, S Saddique, J A Savage, R J Scott, D A C Shakespeare OBE, N J B Teesdale, Mrs J E Teesdale, P R Turner, D M Watson, C Whitehead, L Wood and Ms K S Wood.

Also present: Honorary Alderman R W Jennings.

11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ms S Adoh, Mrs J Adey, M Asif, Mrs L M Clarke OBE, R H W Gaffney, G Hall, M A Hashmi, T Lee, N Marshall & H McCarthy and Honorary Aldermen JM Blanksby, E Collins, M Oram, Mrs K Peatey, Mrs P Priestley & R C Pushman.

12 MINUTE'S SILENCE FOR LORD CARRINGTON

The Meeting held a minute's silence in respect of the recent death of Lord Carrington.

The Chairman confirmed that he had written a letter of condolence on behalf of the Council to Lord Carrington's son.

13 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 16 April 2018 along with those of the Special Council and Annual Council of 14 May 2018 be confirmed as true records and signed by the Chairman.

14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

15 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that he had attended a considerable number of events in his new role as Chairman of the Council. The most prestigious of which was his

attendance at a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace. Alongside this he had attended numerous local school prize giving ceremonies.

The celebrations regarding the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Royal Air Force had been marked at the recent Armed Forces Day events he attended along with his welcoming of the ‘RAF 100 baton relay’ to the District and an enjoyable evening at the Station Commander’s reception at RAF High Wycombe.

16 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

a) Question from Mr R B Colomb to the Leader of the Council

Will the closure in 2019 of the House of Fraser anchor store in Eden seriously affect the Councils share of the Eden rents and thus lead to a Council Tax increase for our residents?

Response from Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council)

The Council receives a ground rent from Eden based on a percentage of net income. The impact of the loss of the HoF rent is estimated to be approx. £80,000 p.a., excluding any Empty Property Rates liability.

‘Anchor stores’ rents tend to be relatively low, so the potential exists for Eden to ‘re-purpose’ the HoF building and in due course, increase the rental that the building generates. The Council is in discussion with Eden’s owners, on their ‘re-purposing’ plans.

The impact of any loss of rental income will be assessed as part of the routine annual budget setting process when all material risks and opportunities are considered along with any mitigating actions to manage the impact on the Council Tax requirement for the District. The Council Tax requirement will be considered after taking into account all changes to the budget as part of this process and will allow for more time for Eden to assess all the options.

Although footfall is likely to remain strong post the closure of House of Fraser, the Council analysed the loss of footfall that could follow the closure and its potential impact on rents.

Supplementary Question

Eden as a whole will suffer other drops in rental income with other tenants and new tenants negotiating tenancies. Whilst existing tenants will take the opportunity to force down rents. Will all of this be taken into account?

Supplementary Response

All such factors and mitigating factors will be fully taken into account in the Council tax setting process.

b) Question from Mr T Snaith to the Leader of the Council

I was pleased to see that on the Regulatory and Appeals (R&A) agenda of 2nd July a community Governance review of the unparished wards was to be discussed. This was instigated by the Chairman of High Wycombe Town Committee. I was disappointed to then find that the Chairman of R&A had removed the item giving reasons as “further work is needed and further review of the matter is needed”

Every part of Bucks has a Parish or Town Council except High Wycombe. What importance and urgency does this Council put on delivering a Community Governance review, for the unparished wards, which could lead to a town council for High Wycombe?

Response from Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council)

Thank you for the question Mr Snaith. This initiative has not been generated by the Executive, and I therefore feel it would be inappropriate for me to comment. You stated in your question that this is an initiative which has been instigated by the Chairman of High Wycombe Town Committee, and so I suggest you refer your question to him outside of this forum.

Supplementary Question

When I highlighted to the Chairman of High Wycombe Town Committee that the High Wycombe Community Governance Review item had been withdrawn from the Regulatory & Appeals Committee Agenda, he did not know.

Would you not agree that the High Wycombe Community Governance Review and the discussion of a town council needs to be on the next Regulatory & Appeals Committee Agenda, so that the people of the town are offered a Town Council should Unitary plans be effected or not?

Supplementary Response

I do not want anyone to fall under the misapprehension that I lead or influence the thoughts and deliberations of those bodies of the Council which work entirely independently of the Executive, therefore I reiterate that I will not comment on work in progress of either the Chairman of the High Wycombe Town Committee or the Regulatory & Appeals Committee.

I would also like to remind you that the High Wycombe Town Committee always does an outstanding job representing the unparished areas of High Wycombe, and has kept taxes for those residents low, whilst ensuring that they are put to good and cost-efficient use.

17 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

a) Question from Councillor R Raja to the Leader of the Council

Draft accounts for 2017/18 show that Bucks County Council ran a £52.8M deficit on provision of services and the other 3 District Councils in Bucks together ran a deficit of £10.1M, while WDC ran a surplus of £10.5M.

WDC's useable reserves are currently £74.4M, about the same as the other 3 District Councils combined. In the event of a unitary authority, WDC's useable reserves risk being consumed to fund deficits elsewhere.

What precautions is the Leader taking now to ring-fence these useable reserves to ensure they will be used for the benefit of Wycombe District residents?

Councillor D Watson (Cabinet Member for Finance) responded to this question at the Leader's request.

Councillor Watson asked that given the response was complex and lengthy could he have more than the allotted 3 minutes to answer, this was agreed by the Chairman of Council.

I think you may be confusing the accounting basis and the statutory basis for the production of local authority accounts but hopefully my response will answer your question.

WDC delivered a small surplus of £110k in 2017/18 and have useable reserves of £74m as you say. Useable reserves are those that the Council can use as opposed to the unusable reserves which are required to offset the impact of statutory accounting adjustments on taxpayers. The other three districts in Buckinghamshire delivered a combined surplus of £1m for 2017/18 on a statutory basis and had useable reserves totalling £133m as at the 31st March 2018.

Of the £74m, £49m are earmarked reserves for capital financing and will help support the delivery of our ambitious capital programme that will deliver economic development and regeneration to support our communities.

For WDC the General Fund reserve is just under £10m and is assessed on an annual basis to ensure we have sufficient resources to manage unforeseen and unexpected events. This assessment is carried out in the development of the annual budget setting process and as Cabinet have just approved the Medium Term Financial Strategy the work is just commencing on that cycle – as part of that assessment then the Council will in due course consider the impact of any developments, be that about a unitary or anything else and what options are available to us. As you can appreciate the impact on the residents of the District will be given due weighting.

WDC has benefitted from a decade or more of sound financial management and is thus in a good position when we consider the revenue reserves as it gives the council a number of options:-

The Council has a safety net to meet unforeseen events in net service expenditure - the so called "unknown unknowns" - typically 15% of net expenditure - approximately £2.1M.

The £7.5M of the revenue reserves is invested in an indirect property fund (CCLA) and is earning local residents about 4% whilst we consider options for the future.

We remain confident in a positive outcome following the submission of our representations concerning MLG. Options for the future might include the transfer of funds to support the ambitious capital programme in order to reduce the need to borrow, invest in a newly arising profitable local economic development opportunity should one arise, spend more in the short term in areas where the District Council has a responsibility or even return some of the reserve to the council tax paying public.

The overriding issue is that revenue reserves can only be spent once.

Supplementary Question

I would like to understand that we will be taking into account the needs of local residents. Can you reassure me that these monies will be ring-fenced and not end up funding deficits elsewhere?

Supplementary Response

I am not sure I can make that promise to ring fence those monies, but I will endeavour to optimise use of the revenue reserves for the benefit of local residents, but this is of course dependent on the Council structure operated.

b) Question from Councillor M Knight to the Leader of the Council

The government dictates how many new homes we should be building in our District, and will continue to do so through the revised National Planning Policy Framework.

Do you think this focus on the quantity of housing we should be delivering is helpful, or even necessary?

Councillor D Johncock (Cabinet Member for Planning) responded to this question at the Leader's request.

First, the government does not **dictate** how many homes we should build. It provides a common process that Local Planning Authorities across the country use to determine their individual housing targets. In the preparation of our new Local Plan, we have explained in detail both to Members and the members of the general public how we went about determining housing numbers and so, frankly, I'm surprised at your question tonight.

The fact is that there is a national shortage of new homes being built; a fact that is accepted by all the major political parties. In that context, a general emphasis on the quantity of housing is understandable. The process we have used in the development of our new Local Plan is likely to be replaced by a methodology which may increase numbers which is why we were determined to submit our new Plan before the end of March this year.

It is also a fact that WDC is constrained by AONB, and also has a considerable extent of Green Belt. This makes accommodating the growth a challenge, and we have had to work with AVDC for them to take the ‘unmet need’ that we were not able to accommodate. So the numbers of houses to be built within the District will be less than they would have been had we not been able to agree our arrangement with AVDC.

But can I emphasise that quantity does not mean that there should not also be high quality. WDC has always had a good track record of emphasising the quality of development, as has been evidenced through the preparation of the design briefs for the reserve sites. It is also worth noting that the government is also promoting the need for quality new housing. For example at the end of June this year the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government circulated a copy of ‘The Design Companion for Planning and Placemaking’, and has funded design and placemaking briefings to be run by the Design Network, which WDC members and officers will be attending.

Finally, as I said earlier, it is probably a bit late to be asking this question. As you know, the examination of our new Local Plan began this afternoon and we will see in due course whether the planning inspector thinks we got our sums right ?

Supplementary Question

I agree we need more homes, but my concern is about how we can facilitate the building of really good, sustainable communities.

It doesn't always seem to have been the case that community facilities and infrastructure are developed ahead of new homes. This means that we tend to end up with a deficit of community facilities and a vacuum in the development of healthy, sustainable community networks.

In my view we need to be focussing on building communities which promote high levels of wellbeing, health, social and economic opportunities, not just housing in numbers.

Do you agree that as we see an increase of applications coming in for large housing schemes we must require house builders to be integrating sustainable community facilities and infrastructure from the outset, and if so is our new Local Plan robust enough to do this?

Supplementary Response

Yes I do believe we can deliver this Local Plan, it will be materialised in the real world.

c) Question from Councillor A Hill to the Cabinet Member for Community

Can you please tell us when the correct wording is going to be put into place for our P.S.P.O. (Public Spaces Protection Order) to take effect in the town centre, as the problems seem to be escalating?

Response from Councillor G Peart (Cabinet Member for Community)

Members will be aware that work has been progressing in partnership with Thames Valley Police, to review and amend the current Public Space Protection Order which is in force in the town centre. This is intended to address activities that have had a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality. These issues have generally centred round alcohol, and the revised wording in the new Public Space Protection Order will prohibit the consumption of alcohol or having an open container of alcohol in the town centre.

As part of varying the PSPO, the Council needs to take into account the recent changes in legislation and also the Chief Constable's ability to delegate functions such as issuing Fixed Penalty Notices to the force's Police Community Support Officers. We await confirmation from TVP regarding their legal powers to issue Fixed Penalty Notices; once this is confirmed work to progress the variation of the PSPO will be finalised.

This will then provide a stronger tool in the armoury of the Council and TVP to combat antisocial behaviour in the town centre.

Supplementary Question

Surely 1 year is long enough for the Police and Wycombe District Council to finalise the wording. In the meanwhile there has been further deterioration in behaviour in these areas.

Supplementary Response

It is very important that we get the wording correct as if utilised to issue a Fixed Penalty Notice, it must stand up in court. We do not want to take people to court but want to utilise the deterrent of court. When we get the wording sorted it will immediately be back before Council for approval.

d) Question from Councillor M Hanif to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Regeneration

It's been torrid few days for our High Street as two more shops have closed or are about to close their doors to customers.

Our High Street has to contend with unfair planning regulations, war on motorists, unfair competition from on-line businesses who avoid their taxes, intense competition from the giant supermarket chains, post-Brexit slowdown in consumer spending and high inflationary pressures squeezing profit margins.

What measures do WDC have in mind to stop more boarded-up shops in our High Street?

Response from Councillor S Broadbent (Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Regeneration)

Before responding I would like to point out a number of factors re the economy in that Gross Domestic Product has in fact increased by 0.3% during May. Consumer Spending has been at its highest since 1950, whilst a low inflation figure underlies the positive economic situation nationally.

What we have been doing locally was featured in the following statement, in response to an inquiry from the Bucks Free Press:

The loss of Poundworld and relocation of Argos (to Sainsburys) reflect the challenge to discounters and consolidation in the retail market.

The council is in contact with the private owners of both properties via local commercial property agents. The former Argos unit is likely to go for non-retail use, subject to planning permission.

The council continues to actively work with potential businesses, property owners, agents and other parties to attract new independent traders, the most recent being 4 Cornmarket (adjoining Lunch) which is under offer for a business start-up. Such niche players are the key to success in the High Street.

Retail is shifting from a purely transactional focus towards giving customers experiences. Add to this the belief that the more people make isolated on-line purchases, the more they will still want social interaction – places to meet other people and to relax in a vibrant place. Our High Street is a mix of built environment. Upgrading its public realm needs to be a priority and helping property owners to re-purpose ground floors will be the way to retain its attractiveness. Add animation – sitting out areas and activities that entertain and give people a good experience – and the High Street will continue to adapt.

The Council has already intervened, where the market is failing, with initiatives like Mad Squirrel, Lunch 2 and The Works. It has facilitated Bucks Preservation Trust with their plans for the refurbishment of the High Street's oldest building. It will review postponed plans to enliven the undercrofts of the Guildhall and Little Market House. There's a challenge ahead, but I am confident that the town is resilient enough to meet it.

Supplementary Question

The retail withdrawal from then High Street is worrying, we hear your response but how can you convince Members that you will deliver what you outline.

Supplementary Response

I am passionate in my role in Economic Development and Regeneration and will work ceaselessly with local retailers, visitors and business. 'The Economist' in its

June edition commended High Wycombe on its High Street and its innovative mix of residential and commercial units.

As Mary Portas, the High Street guru, pointed out, Town Centres need to do what Amazon cannot do. I do very much ‘believe’ in delivering such for the District.

e) The Question from Councillor K Ahmed to the Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources featured on the Agenda was withdrawn prior to the Meeting.

18 PETITIONS

No petitions were received by the deadline of Monday 9 July 2018.

19 CABINET

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 4 June 2018 be received, and the recommendations as set out at minute numbers 7 and 10 be approved and adopted.

20 CABINET

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 9 July 2018 be received, and the recommendations as set out at minute numbers 17 and 18 be approved and adopted.

21 HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings of the High Wycombe Town Committee of 24 April 2018 and 12 June 2018 be received.

22 PLANNING COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings of the Planning Committee of 25 April 2018 and 30 May 2018 be received.

23 AUDIT COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee of 31 May 2018 be received.

24 STANDARDS COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 5 June 2018 be received, and

the recommendations as set out at minute numbers 4 and 5 be approved and adopted.

25 LICENSING COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Licensing Committee of 7 June 2018 be received.

26 PERSONNEL & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Personnel & Development Committee held on 20 June 2018 be received, and the recommendation as set out at minute number 4 be approved and adopted.

27 IMPROVEMENT & REVIEW COMMISSION

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Improvement & Review Commission of 20 June 2018 be received.

28 REGULATORY & APPEALS COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Regulatory & Appeals Committee held on 2 July 2018 be received, and the recommendation as set out at minute number 17 be approved and adopted.

29 JNC STAFFING MATTERS COMMITTEE

The JNC Staffing Matters Committee scheduled for 16 July 2018 was cancelled, subsequently no minutes were to be referred to Full Council.

30 QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 11.2

There were no questions submitted under Standing Order 11.2

31 URGENT ACTION TAKEN BY CABINET OR INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBER

The Individual Cabinet Member Decisions as set out in the summons were noted.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Peter Druce | - Democratic Services |
| Ian Hunt | - Democratic Services Manager |
| Karen Satterford | - Chief Executive |