

## Council Minutes

Date: 21 October 2019

Time: 6.30 - 8.08 pm

**PRESENT:** Councillor P R Turner (in the Chair)

Councillors Mrs S Adoh, K Ahmed, Z Ahmed, M C Appleyard, M Asif, D H G Barnes, Ms A Baughan, S Broadbent, H Bull, M Clarke, Mrs L M Clarke OBE, A D Collingwood, C Etholen, R Farmer, R Gaffney, S Graham, A R Green, G C Hall, M Hanif, M Harris, C B Harriss, M A Hashmi, A E Hill, A Hussain, M Hussain, M Hussain JP, D A Johncock, M E Knight, Mrs J D Langley, A Lee, N B Marshall, H L McCarthy, I L McEnnis, B E Pearce, G Peart, S K Raja, R Raja, S Saddique, J A Savage, D A C Shakespeare OBE, N J B Teesdale, A Turner, Ms J D Wassell, D M Watson, C Whitehead, R Wilson, L Wood and Ms K S Wood

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs J A Adey, Miss S Brown, D J Carroll, D Knights, Mrs W J Mallen, Ms C J Oliver, R J Scott and Mrs J E Teesdale & Honorary Aldermen J M Blanksby, Mrs K Peatey and R Pushman.

### **36 MINUTES**

Councillor Sarfaraz K Raja asked that the minutes of the previous meeting (19 August 2019) be amended in respect of Minute Number 35 'Adoption of the Wycombe District Local Plan 2013-2033' in that he had specifically objected to the Plan in respect of the land adjacent to Glynswood within his ward and he wished this omission to be corrected.

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 19 August 2019, subject to the above correction, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

### **37 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There we no declarations of interest.

### **38 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman then reported on his recent engagements carried out;

- Attendance at two Buckinghamshire New University graduation ceremonies for 'Health & Social Work' and 'Nursing', at which he had been amazed at the excitement and enthusiasm of the students graduating;
- Attending the Action for Youth 'Big Night Out' event at Aylesbury;

- Seeing the Wycombe Neighbourhood Watch association receive their Queen's Award for voluntary service from the Lord Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire;
- Similarly attending the award of the Queen's Award for Enterprise to local company Oxford Instruments at their premises on the Cressex Industrial Estate; and
- The Sport Aid lunch; Sports Aid being a fabulous charity enabling young and disabled persons' sports both nationally and locally.

The Chairman remarked that this was effectively a snapshot of some of the many achievements in the Local Area, to be much applauded, he hoped that such good news stories would be picked up by social media and local press coverage.

### **39 LEADER'S STATEMENT**

The Leader of the Council reported that following a recent motion at Buckinghamshire County Council highlighting the current issues in Kashmir, she had discussed with Councillor Arif Hussain about holding a similar debate at Wycombe District Council. However whilst Buckinghamshire County Council's constitution allowed for a debate on the issue, the constitution at Wycombe District Council's stated that a motion or debate on anything that the Council had no control over could not be held. Therefore this was the case with the issues and events in Kashmir, as they were outside the remit of the Council.

Since then, the Leader reported, that she had held discussions with Conservative colleagues; Councillors Zia Ahmed, Arif Hussain, Mahboob Hussain, Maz Hussain, Sarfaraz Khan Raja and Saeed Saddique regarding the situation in Kashmir. They had explained to the Leader how the events in Kashmir were directly affecting the wellbeing of people who lived there, including their friends and family members.

The Leader shared her fellow Councillors' concerns and so indicated that she was committing to the outcome of the motion passed at Buckinghamshire County Council and writing personally to the local Members of Parliament to make known Members' concerns. Councillor Ms Wood reported that she would ask local MP's to listen to these concerns and raise them, as appropriate, with the Foreign Secretary.

### **40 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

#### **a) Question from Mr R Colomb to the Cabinet Member for Community**

When I left the Council in May 2015 plans were progressing smoothly to utilise the S106 funds available from the Wellesbourne Development to create a Community Centre for the residents of Terriers and Amersham Hill Ward on the site of the Sports Pavilion at the Recreation Ground off Walton Drive.

Why does there appear to have been no progress in bringing this much needed project to fruition in the last four and a half years?

**Verbal reply given by Councillor G Peart BEM (Cabinet Member for Community).**

Following two community consultation workshops undertaken in 2016 residents' preferences for improved community and open space facilities led to a significant programme of improvements to the range of open space facilities at Totteridge Recreation Ground. This project, investing £399k in the site was completed in February 2019 and incorporated 7 of the 10 suggestions from residents including a new cricket square , a perimeter pathway with new fitness trim trail of gym equipment , outdoor all weather table tennis tables , rebound ball wall, new seating and benches and an in-ground trampoline . This has seen a real improvement to the site with the fitness trail proving a very popular addition. Totteridge Rec is one of Wycombe's hidden gems.

A new community building was also suggested, however as the Council does not embark on community building projects without a partner to take on the operation of the facility Council Officers pursued this with further meetings at the time. Meetings were held with 2 potentially interested groups, Widmer End Football Club and Terriers Playgroup and at that time 2016/17 neither felt in a position to take on such a commitment and responsibility or that the scale of a modest community building would actually be able to meet their respective needs. The project paused at that point.

Officers will now revisit the potential for this facility with any interested parties from the community or an alternative which would still meet the Section 106 conditions.

**Supplementary Question**

Can I take it that the Section 106 monies will not be lost?

Are they time limited?

50% of the public houses in the area have closed and been replaced by residential units, there are now a thousand plus more housing units as whole in the area, community facilities for this larger population will be vital.

**Supplementary Response**

The Section 106 monies are secure at the present time. We hope to have a viable management plan in due course in respect of proposed community facilities.

**b) Question from Mr A Thompson to the Leader of the Council.**

Closed for some four years, the King William IV public house is a Grade II listed building, within the Conservation Area of Speen.

Like many pubs, the King William was a valued community asset and a focal point of social activity and cohesion for the village. The pub is currently an unkempt eyesore in the centre of the village.

The community have made several funded offers to buy the pub, at above open market value, however these have all been rejected by the owner. The community of Speen have grave concerns that our pub could be lost forever. Several local authorities have been proactive in protecting important community assets such as village pubs by making or threatening a Compulsory Purchase Order and through a back to back agreement, transfer ownership to a community group.

Would Wycombe District Council be prepared to use its CPO powers to facilitate the reopening of village pubs where all other means have failed?

**Verbal reply given by Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).**

In 2015, Government tightened the statutory powers for local authorities to acquire specifically Assets of Community Value 'where there is a compelling public interest' to do so.

Compulsory Purchase Powers may also apply to listed buildings and important buildings in Conservation Areas if they have been deliberately damaged or allowed to deteriorate.

It is also worth noting that any change in a pub's planning use class, or if there is a desire to demolish it, requires planning permission and this will afford an opportunity for the community to comment.

The number of community pubs in the UK continues to decline and the government has responded to this by strengthening the tools and powers available to protect them. In general, the Council is prepared to consider making use of the powers available to it and furthermore it is willing to work with any community group to protect assets of community value, and it will consider cooperating with groups that have developed strong business cases to facilitate the reopening of any community, or village pubs.

**Mr Thompson did not have a Supplementary Question.**

**41      QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS**

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

Would the Leader of the council like to tell us what specific preparations have been undertaken by WDC to deal with the aftermath of Brexit?

## **Verbal reply given by Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).**

Our Acting Chief Executive has been nominated as the Council's Brexit lead officer, and the Head of Housing, Environment and Community Services is deputising on day-to-day Brexit matters.

In preparation for a possible 'no deal' Brexit on October 31<sup>st</sup>, Wycombe has been involved as a full participant in local and regional planning processes and exercises. This work has featured internal arrangements at Wycombe and has also involved joint working with partners in the Local Resilience Forum such as the Police, Fire Brigade and Ambulance services, as well as colleagues from the County Council and the other districts.

The Council is taking part in a Buckinghamshire wide task and finish group on Brexit where information and plans are shared among the four district councils and the County Council. This group has two weekly telephone conferences, and will continue to meet for as long as is needed. This process supports a coordinated approach across Buckinghamshire.

The council is part of the working and reporting arrangements put in place by the government to enable any problems that might arise to be identified and addressed quickly by the right agencies. Frequent reports are made to central government, as we are effectively their presence on the ground. This situation reporting regime will intensify as 31st October draws nearer and will continue for as long as it is deemed necessary.

In the face of an upcoming possible 'no deal' Brexit deadline, the Council's existing business continuity plans are central to its response and preparedness, and these plans have been reviewed recently. The plans have been tried and tested in the past, and already provide a response to the most likely modelled no deal Brexit scenarios. These plans are intended to ensure that the Council can continue to deliver services to residents and so it can also play its role in supporting the community and other agencies.

## **Supplementary Question**

I am pleased to hear this, but are we actually informing our residents and business leaders of this and making them aware of what we are doing? What if there is a Brexit deal?

## **Supplementary Response**

As part of the Buckinghamshire wide task and finish group, Wycombe is talking to its third sector partners and is prepared to assist them if need be in the run-up to, and in any aftermath of a 'no deal' Brexit, as they provide invaluable support to vulnerable communities. 'Bucks Business First' is supporting businesses by offering a voucher scheme to enable them to access funding to pay for professional advice and to implement critical changes to ensure businesses understand the effects of Brexit and to help them prepare.

Finally, the Council already operates a ‘Gold’ rota of senior managers and that will obviously continue as 31<sup>st</sup> October approaches and passes. Around 31st October and the following weekend, a special rota will be in place and we will have a small team on hand to receive information and coordinate any responses, as a precaution.

I do hope that there is a deal, but of course there would then be a transition period thereafter.

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

Earlier this year Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick asked each local authority to designate a Brexit lead to work with central government and local stakeholders to plan for leaving the EU.

Could you summarise the work that Wycombe District Council has done to ensure our council services and business community will be resilient to the upcoming changes, particularly given the possibility that we may leave the EU without a deal?

**Councillor Knight indicated that his question had been adequately answered by the response to the previous question, however he did wish to submit a supplementary question:**

I would like to know what specific steps had been taken by the Council to reassure residents originating from the EU states, that Council services would still be available to them post Brexit, particularly in respect of housing and benefits.

**Supplementary Response**

Things will not change, I will find out more detail for you and report back. I can reassure you such services will still be available.

**c) Question from Councillor B Pearce to the Leader of the Council**

You would no doubt agree with me that the Wycombe Rural Forum and the Wycombe Rural Forum Farm Visits are an exceedingly useful tool for local Councillors and the local farming community.

Is it possible for this Forum to continue one way or another after the introduction of the Unitary Authority?

**Verbal reply given by Councillor D Johncock (Cabinet Member for Planning).**

Thank you for your question Cllr Pearce. The Council has been holding the Rural Forum for over 20 years and is the only Council in Bucks to do so. I am keen that that the forum continues when the new Council is vested and both our officers and I are discussing how it would best continue. This includes consideration of whether there is more than one forum, given the new Council’s geography, the varying

nature of rural issues across Buckinghamshire and how it integrates with other community forums. Needless to say we will be emphasising the importance of the forum and the role it plays in providing a way of linking councillor's, farmers and rural businesses.

Moving forward we will be holding the October forum this week and the March forum and farm tour next year, to which we are inviting the members of the Shadow Exec.

**Councillor Pearce had no supplementary question but thanked the Cabinet Member for his encouraging response.**

**d) Question from Councillor A Hill to the Cabinet Member for Environment**

Since the new road layout in Queen Victoria Road, Easton Street, High Street and Crendon Street, what is the increase in pollution in these areas?

**Verbal reply given by Councillor G Hall (Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment).**

Traffic modelling of the proposed new road layout in Queen Victoria Road, Easton Street, High Street and Crendon Street was carried out during the planning phase of this project and this suggested that there would be less congestion and a reduced travel times through the area. These factors generally result in improved air quality.

Since completion, it has been subjectively noticed that the predictions appear to be correct, as less traffic appears to be travelling along streets with relevant human exposure (Easton Street being particularly less congested).

Air quality monitoring is only carried out on one site actually within the new road layout area. A monitoring tube is located on Easton Street because this is the only street with relevant human exposure to Nitrogen Dioxide. It is currently too early to report any measured air quality effects of the new road layout as we only have two months of as yet unverified results (monitoring tubes are left out for one month before being sent for analysis). The raw data for these results need to be bias adjusted (calibrated) at the end of the year.

We also have a continuous monitoring station located quite nearby, but not actually within the area of the new road layout. Again, we do not yet have a long enough period of monitoring with the new road layout in place to enable us to provide useful, verified and audited data.

For a true comparison between the new road layout and the old road layout we need to compare the last full calendar year results for both scenarios. Officers will of course make this comparison when they have the data available.

## **Supplementary Question**

We are well aware that idling cars produce more fumes, but at 20mph (which cars are travelling through this revised junction) are not even more fumes emitted?

## **Supplementary Response**

Only standing traffic produces the worse pollution. You may have noticed 'no idling' signs have been put up around the town, this we hope will encourage drivers to effectively reduce pollution. As said we are monitoring the pollution over the year and will come back with the results thereafter.

### **e) Question from Councillor M Hanif to the Cabinet Member for Community**

The latest statistics show that rates of hospital admissions for alcohol remain high and authorities struggle to manage issues as anti-social behaviour and vulnerability related to licensed premises.

The LGA has published a handbook that gives an overview of licensing legislation and examples of best practice. Of course, councils cannot address these complex challenges alone but the handbook explores the tools councils have to manage some of these issues.

What tools are being used at WDC to deal with these challenges?

### **Verbal reply given by Councillor G Peart BEM (Cabinet Member for Community).**

Wycombe District Council has employed a team of Street Wardens to patrol the town centre to address issues of Anti-social Behaviour.

These Wardens and the Police have delegated authority to issue fixed penalty notices for breaches of the Public Spaces Protection Order. In practice, this means that the Wardens require anyone with an open container of alcohol to surrender that item or they will receive a fixed penalty notice. These orders include supportive conditions such as a requirement to engage with alcohol rehab services.

I can confirm that the Public Health Team at BCC is the statutory consultee under Licensing Act 2003, accordingly they are sent application for premises licences in accordance with the legislation.

The BCC led Health and Wellbeing Board, on which I sit as the WDC representative, has responsibility for overseeing public health strategy in the county. Excessive alcohol consumption and also smoking have been identified as significant factors leading to poor health in a significant minority of the population.

We have worked with County and other local authorities that led to the publication of report entitled Reducing Alcohol Misuse in Buckinghamshire, in April 2013. This report set out the stark statistics for alcohol consumption and made seven

recommendations for action to reduce alcohol consumption including using publicity in the workplace, social media etc.

Finally, we use our enforcement powers under the Licencing Act 2003 to conduct unannounced visits to licensed premises and to respond to complaints from the general public, intelligence from police and other agencies.

### **Supplementary Question**

The House of Lords Select Committee has identified poor practices by Licensing Committees, and recommends the transfer of licensing to authorities' Planning Committees. Are there plans to do this at Wycombe District Council?

### **Supplementary Response**

Licensing comes under the auspices of Councillor Mrs Adey's Environment Portfolio, I cannot speak for her. I will ask for the information to be given to you.

### **f) Question from Councillor Ms J Wassell to the Leader of the Council**

During recent heavy rain several of my residents experienced flooding. When I followed the advice for Sandbags on the WDC website, I was given the number for a weather forecast. Would you agree with me that these sandbags need to be delivered promptly to residents if required?

### **Verbal reply given by Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).**

The Wycombe District Council webpage on sandbags gives comprehensive advice to residents and businesses regarding when and how sandbags will be issued.

The page also directs residents to the Environment Agency so that they can see any existing river or groundwater flood warnings, and should local information be available, this will specifically be placed on the Wycombe webpages and also on the Council's Twitter account.

In respect of the provision of sandbags, the webpage advises that the Council will provide sandbags free of charge for householders as a last resort during an emergency - for example, when property flooding is imminent.

Under all circumstances, emergency sandbags would be dropped off at specified locations for collection by affected residents, not at individual properties.

In an emergency situation, the webpage advises residents to call 01494 461000.

A more detailed sandbag policy is published on the Wycombe.gov website.

In light of the above, in a flooding emergency, I am satisfied that suitable arrangements are in place to assist residents.

## **Supplementary Question**

I'm not satisfied with this in that a resident of my ward, who had water cascading into their kitchen, dialled the number only to get an answerphone message?

## **Supplementary Response**

I will look into the telephone numbers and check this out and come back to you.

### **g) Question from Councillor S Graham to the Cabinet Member for Environment**

The media summary of 20 September 2019 reported that a number of Wycombe eateries are failing to meet basic hygiene standards; it appears that almost one in seven Wycombe businesses which handle food are failing the hygiene standards according to the food hygiene standards agencies.

Would the Cabinet member for the Environment agree with me that this is unacceptable and bad for business as it damages the public's trust in Wycombe's food outlets and would she please tell me what steps have been taken to ensure that the businesses which have failed to meet the hygiene standards so far are able to comply with the basic hygiene standards, to protect the public?

### **Verbal reply given by Councillor G Hall (Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment).**

The press release issued by the Food Standards Agency in September 2019 related to the year 2018-2019 not the present year.

We take food hygiene very seriously. Currently 93% of all rated premises in Wycombe have a rating of 3 or more (i.e. are compliant with food safety requirements), an increase on last year. The national average is 95%.

The food hygiene rating issued by inspectors at the time of inspection reflects the standards of hygiene and management observed at that time. The responsibility for ensuring food safety at these establishments lies with the Food Business Operator. Inspectors always work with businesses to improve standards where there are issues and offer low-cost food safety training for food handlers. Where there is little improvement or an imminent risk to health, inspectors do not hesitate to take the appropriate enforcement action which ranges from issuing written warnings (434 last year) to closure and prosecution so as to secure compliance. Ensuring food safety remains our priority.

## **Supplementary Question**

Have you ever visited any of these food establishments and seen food preparation for yourself?

## **Supplementary Response**

As a Councillor I am not qualified to speak on environmental health matters such as food preparation, we employ expert officers who carry out these roles.

### **h) Question from Councillor Ms A Baughan to the Cabinet Member for Housing**

Some families in our Ward have recently received letters confirming that their Homechoice Band has changed to a Band B. This has been really welcomed and is a positive situation for many residents.

Could you kindly explain how changes will work in practical terms?

#### **Verbal reply given by Councillor Mrs J Langley (Cabinet Member for Housing).**

The Buckinghamshire wide Bucks Home Choice allocation policy changed recently following full consultation and Member approval in March 2019. This policy has been adopted by Wycombe, Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern and South Bucks Districts. The new policy reflects changes in legislation and case law, including the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which came into force in April 2018. The main changes are aimed to assist in preventing homelessness and has meant that some households have benefitted from the changes with an increase in band priority.

Therefore, in practical terms applicants who are overcrowded are likely to have a higher banding than before, whereas some applicants will either no longer qualify or will receive a lower priority banding, such as people who own their own homes or who have the means to resolve their own housing need, and those that have owned a home but have disposed of it without making reasonable housing arrangements.

As in any policy change, there will be perceived winners and losers, however we along with our partners across Bucks have worked hard to ensure that the system is as fair as possible and meets the need of our residents.

I might add, should the need occur we can make direct nominations under the policy, for example in cases where we are trying to prevent long term residency in temporary accommodation.

**Councillor Ms Baughan had no supplementary question**

### **i) Question from Councillor K Ahmed to the Leader of the Council**

Our local MP, Steve Baker and our Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, have made it clear that they want to leave the EU at the end of October regardless of a withdrawal agreement being in place.

Does the Leader think Wycombe District Council is adequately prepared for a no-deal Brexit?

**Verbal reply given by Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).**

Yes I do.

**Supplementary Question**

The Government's own report known as Yellow Hammer states 'a No-Deal Brexit could result in rising food and fuel prices, disruption to medical supplies and public disorder on Britain's streets'. Can the Leader assure me that WDC has adequate contingency to safeguard the people of Wycombe against these, and if so how?

**Supplementary Response**

I believe you are quoting an old version of Yellow Hammer, it has been considerably updated, as we are day to day updating our plans. Officers are working on it as the situation continues to change.

**j) Question from Councillor B Pearce to the Cabinet Member for Planning**

As I am sure you are aware, many of the very large flower troughs that are situated in the central reservation of Oxford Road and West Wycombe Road are damaged (almost every other one).

I'm sure that you will agree with me that this is a great shame as these large wooden cladded containers looked quite attractive and made quite an impressive visual improvement to this area but that with the damage, the area now looks almost run down.

Could you please inform us who is actually responsible for maintaining these containers and is there any programme in place, to repair them?

**Verbal reply given by Councillor D Johncock (Cabinet Member for Planning).**

Thank you for your question Cllr Pearce. You will hopefully recall that a similar question was raised by Cllr Ahmed at the Council meeting that was held on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 – only just 6 months ago. At that time, our Leader advised, and I quote that "The Councils have been exploring the options for repairs to the planter. Whilst a repair would achieve a short term fix, works to repair or replace the planters require an overnight road closure and diversions whilst experience suggests that the planters would remain open to further damage. Hence we are considering options that would achieve a more enduring solution."

Cllr Miss Wood went on to say that "My Cabinet Member for Planning & Sustainability is meeting with the Cabinet Member and officers from

Buckinghamshire County Council before the end of April to consider those options and I anticipate a decision will be made, for implementation after that.”

I am pleased to say that those meetings have taken place and that a solution has now been agreed. Moreover, action is now in-hand through the County Council to implement it. However, to manage expectations, this could take up to 6 months as they will need to go out to competitive tendering before letting a contract.

Yes, this has all taken much longer than I personally would have wished but I can assure you that I have raised the topic at every conceivable meeting I have had with Highways officers over the last few years and I am pleased that my continued pressuring has at long last borne fruit.

All that said, we do need to keep this in perspective and acknowledge the transformation that has taken place along the alternative route and on this approach into the town centre. It is already clear from the development taking place along the alternative route, that this project has been a catalyst for regeneration, with the Aldi and Centre Square developments being just two examples of projects that are bringing life to this area that has needed investment for some time.

The link through the old Gas Works will be complete I hope by the end of October or the beginning of next month, and this will allow traffic to fully use the alternate route for the first time. What we have recently done to Queen Victoria Road and Easton Street has definitely shown excellent results in improving traffic flows and, with the opening of the alternate route, there will undoubtedly be further benefits to the town – an achievement that we can and should be rightly proud of.

**Councillor Pearce** thanked Councillor Johncock for his comprehensive response, but added that further deterioration of the planters had occurred since April.

**Questions 11 to 18 were not put as the 30 minutes time period had expired. In accordance with Standing Orders, a written reply would be sent to the questioner by the appropriate Member within 10 working days, and would also be appended to the minutes of the meeting.**

## **42 PETITIONS**

No petitions were received prior to the deadline of 5pm Monday 14 October 2019.

## **43 CABINET**

### **Minute 21 – Joint Waste Contract Procurement**

A Member commented on the rise in the number of complaints re the waste Contract especially in respect of communal areas, 7 complaints had been received by the Councillor in the last month.

The Leader acknowledged these problems with communal area waste and confirmed that officers were working on remedying them.

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet 27 August 2019 be received.

**44 CABINET**

**Minute 29 – Capital Refresh**

A Member commented that they were delighted to see the recommendation in respect of the Keep Hill footpath. When would this be in operation?

On this the Leader agreed to report back with a date.

**Minute 28 – Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Charter**

A Member thanked Cabinet for the adoption of the Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Charter to which the Leader indicated that a small article would appear in respect of this in the next edition of 'District Times'.

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of 16 September 2019 be received, and the recommendation as set out at minute number 29 be approved and adopted.

**45 CABINET**

**Minute 36 – Cabinet Response to the River Wye Task & Finish Group Recommendations**

A Member felt that the West side of town did not need to generate more footfall, the one opportunity to de-culvert the River Wye had not been taken at the time of the development of Eden. Regeneration efforts would be better concentrated on the eastern, more historic side of the town centre.

The Leader assured Members that the Council had a far more positive vision of town centre re-development as a whole and wished to pass this onto the new Unitary Authority. There was a passion for High Wycombe and it was envisaged that those Members who found themselves on the new Council would very much take Wycombe with them.

In response to another Member's description of the Future High Streets Fund award as 'good news', the Leader advised that that was one of the questions that had been unable to be put and the answer would therefore be available after this meeting.

**Minute 37 – High Wycombe Town Centre Masterplan and Public Realm Improvements**

In respect of the Masterplan a Member again questioned the success of the improvements already carried out namely the planters shared space set up in

Oxford Road / West Wycombe Road and the new Queen Victoria Road / High Street junction.

In response the Leader emphasised that the release of £500K was an ideal opportunity to effect changes here and now, whilst the Council still existed.

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of 21 October 2019 be received.

**46 PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meetings of the Planning Committee of 26 June 2019, 24 July 2019, 21 August 2019 and 18 September 2019 be received.

**47 REGULATORY & APPEALS COMMITTEE**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Regulatory & Appeals Committee 31 July 2019 be received.

The Chairman of the Regulatory & Appeals Committee: Councillor J Savage confirmed that the next scheduled meeting of the Committee, which had been the following day (Tuesday 22 October 2019) had as advised, been postponed. The new date for which was still to be decided; Councillor Savage was due to meet officers shortly to organise this new date.

**48 HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN COMMITTEE**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the High Wycombe Town Committee 10 September 2019 be received.

**49 IMPROVEMENT & REVIEW COMMISSION**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Improvement & Review Commission 11 September 2019 be received.

**50 PERSONNEL & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Personnel & Development Committee 17 October 2019 be received.

**51 AUDIT COMMITTEE**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee 17 October 2019 be received.

## **52 NOTICE OF MOTION**

To consider the following Notices of Motion submitted by the deadline.

The following Notice of Motion was submitted by Councillor R Raja and seconded by Councillor K Ahmed.

**World leaders are at last taking an interest in the potential devastation caused by global warming and climate change. Climate Science Experts from around the world tell us that unless we switch away from fossil fuels within the next 12 years, we will be unable to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. We face a Climate Emergency. Reducing energy use and switching to clean energy will increase our energy security, improve our air quality, minimise fuel poverty, boost our local economy and provide jobs and training.**

**Wycombe District Council is prepared to play its small part in this big debate by declaring a climate emergency and committing to being carbon neutral by the year 2030. This move will raise the profile of this vital issue with our residents and enable us to secure additional external support and funding. WDC also agrees to sign up to the covenant of Mayors, to track our progress and link itself with Towns around the world who are engaged in cutting emissions.**

**Councillor R Raja** in proposing the motion described the climate emergency as more important than Brexit.

The planet was truly in the grip of an emergency and an environmental catastrophe was unfolding before us. The environmental collapse was already affecting people around the world ranging from natural disasters and extreme weather events (heavy rains, unprecedented flooding and severe droughts) whilst the higher levels of Carbon Dioxide were reducing the polar ice caps and melting glaciers; reducing the flow of life giving water for billions of people in the coming decades.

It may not have been the unanimous view of scientists around the world, but the overwhelming majority were of the view that human activity was contributing to a rise in the world's temperature and this was being caused by increased levels of CO<sub>2</sub>. The world community appeared to have agreed that although it was going to be challenging we needed to be Carbon Neutral by 2030. (Indeed most of the world was signed up to a Carbon Neutral world by 2050).

In addressing what was CO<sub>2</sub>? Councillor Raja explained that Carbon Dioxide was a greenhouse gas which occurred naturally in the atmosphere. It was natural and harmless in small quantities but as levels rise it can be dangerous to human health. CO<sub>2</sub> was produced for example by the air we exhale.

CO<sub>2</sub> was an essential ingredient in photosynthesis, the process by which plants make food and energy. Levels of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> had increased since the Industrial Revolution and the primary causes were deforestation and the burning

of fossil fuels such as coal. As CO<sub>2</sub> levels had risen, so had its effects on air pollution. Carbon dioxide accounted for less than 1 per cent of the atmospheric gases and there was a delicate balance between carbon dioxide and other gases. Yet we had witnessed significant change in the levels of CO<sub>2</sub> over a relatively short period of time.

Carbon dioxide contributed to air pollution in its role in the greenhouse effect; it trapped radiation at ground level, creating ground-level ozone. This atmospheric layer prevented the earth from cooling at night; one result being a warming of ocean waters, which impacted upon the ability of the oceans to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Global warming was reducing the size of the ice caps in the Arctic and Antarctica and this melting of ice was already manifesting itself in a loss of shoreline and coastal wetlands. A number of islands in the Pacific and even places like the Maldives were slowly being submerged by rising sea levels.

CO<sub>2</sub> emissions impacted human health by displacing oxygen in the atmosphere consequently, breathing becomes more difficult as carbon dioxide levels rose. Further health complications were headaches, rapid heart rate, clumsiness, emotional upsets and fatigue. As less oxygen become available, nausea and vomiting, collapse, convulsions, coma and death could occur. All this was putting extra strain on already stretched health services.

One of the best ways to remove carbon from the atmosphere was to plant trees - responsibly.

Could not Wycombe District Council be prepared to play its small part in this big debate by declaring a climate emergency and committing to being carbon neutral by the year 2030?

In seconding the motion **Councillor K Ahmed** indicated that when speaking to residents of High Wycombe, the climate emergency came top of their priorities. For years climate experts had indicated that our planet was being destroyed and a better way must be found before it was too late.

Health, housing, highways, procurement, planning; everything we do must be subject to review to make sure we are moving towards carbon neutral targets.

Councillor Ahmed added that we needed to be led by our young people in these matters, many were most engaged with the challenge of climate change. Wycombe District Council needed to lead the way to a carbon neutral future.

The Leader of the Council rose to speak, stating that she had indeed felt climate change to be a priority for the District. Unfortunately the Council would no longer exist after April 2020 she suggested that the motion be referred to Cabinet under **Standing Order 12.6** where more detailed thought could be effected and suitable recommendations for the new Unitary Authority could be developed.

This was duly seconded by Councillor D Barnes.

Upon enquiry from the Chairman of Council, it was confirmed that this matter would be referred to Cabinet, and that the Leader of the Council would confirm with Members at which Cabinet meeting the matter would be considered. The item would then be added to the Cabinet Forward Plan for Cabinet. The mover of the initial Motion, Councillor R Raja, confirmed he was happy with this approach.

In accordance with Standing Orders, a report back from Cabinet to Full Council would be forthcoming by way of recommendation from Cabinet as to whether or not to adopt the motion or give any such other advice as was appropriate.

**53     QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 11.2**

There were no questions submitted under Standing Order 11.2

**54     COMMITTEE CHANGES / APPOINTMENTS**

The change to membership of the outside body as set out in the summons as follows was duly noted.

**South Eastern Employers**

Councillors S Broadbent & L Wood to serve as standing deputies.

Members also noted the recent change of party name registered with the Electoral Commission in respect of the East Wycombe Independent Party, in that this party was now known as the **Wycombe Independent Party**.

The party currently having 3 Members on the Council: Councillors Ms A Baughan, M Knight & Ms J Wassell.

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Chairman

**The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:**

- |             |                               |
|-------------|-------------------------------|
| Peter Druce | - Democratic Services         |
| John East   | - Acting Chief Executive      |
| Ian Hunt    | - Democratic Services Manager |

# Minute Item 41

## COUNCIL

**Monday 21 October 2019**

### **Agenda Item 7**

#### **Questions from Members**

##### **Unanswered Questions – Responses sent subsequent to Meeting**

###### **11. Question from Councillor M Hanif to the Cabinet Member for Housing**

Tackling rough sleeping needs both health and care solutions to help those most in need and reverse the long term trend of rising number of people living on the streets.

In a new publication for councils, the LGA says this is the best way to support the government Rough Sleeping Strategy and achieve its target of halving rough sleeping over the course of this Parliament.

Prevention, Intervention and Recovery are the focus of the strategy.

What is WDC strategy and are we likely to meet this target?

Thank you for your question. Our Conservative Government has recognised the vital importance of addressing the issue and have allocated funding.

I would like to meet the Target of at least halving the number of people rough sleeping and one of the actions planned is the emergency bed provision, tenancy sustainment for former rough sleepers and proposals for an enhanced severe weather provision this winter.

Not all of those on the street are homeless. Begging is an easy way of making money.

We work very closely with our colleagues at Wycombe Homeless Connection, Wycombe Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme, Connections, Outreach and many others to prevent and relieve all forms of homelessness, not least rough sleeping.

A key factor for me and my officers is ensuring the excellent work done here continues with the new unitary.

I would also like to take this opportunity to encourage you and other Members to attend the seminar next week Tuesday 29/10 which will give a more informed idea of the work being done.

###### **Question No. 12 from Cllr Ms J Wassell to the Cabinet Member for Planning was withdrawn before the Meeting.**

###### **13. Question from Councillor S Graham to the Cabinet Member for Community.**

The main entrance to the Hilltop community centre and the Wycombe Badminton Club is badly in need of repair, whilst the main car park mainly serving the Hilltop community Centre is in need of resurfacing .On top of this the emergency parking bays need to be repainted and a couple of disabled bays need to be provided.

All the above had been submitted to the appropriate Department back in September 2018, yet nothing appears to have been done.

Would the Cabinet Member responsible please say whether community organisations and their facilities need to be kept up to standard like other public facilities, and if so, can I expect some action in this area please?

Thank you Cllr Graham for raising the issue of the car park that is used by both the Badminton Centre and Hilltop Community Centre.

This year Council officers have undertaken a number of repairs, all agreed with you, to some of the doors and windows of the community centre and also the external footlights. I am aware that the repair of the surface of the car park has been raised before but this has not been something that has been prioritised for funding.

There is a programme of works that the Council carries out each year as part of both its planned and reactive maintenance across a large portfolio of facilities. Condition surveys inform this work, enabling urgent and essential work to be undertaken.

Whilst there is not funding allocated to the car park at this time, Council Officers are continuing to review the ongoing programme of work for the remainder of the year and the car park at Hilltop Community Centre will of course be part of that process .

**14. Question from Councillor M Knight to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Regeneration.**

At the end of August it was announced that High Wycombe had been chosen to receive money from the government's Future High Streets Fund to bring improvements to our town centre.

Could we have an update on how this is progressing?

We were delighted to receive the news on August Bank Holiday that High Wycombe had been chosen as one of the additional 50 towns to go through to the second stage of the Future High Street Fund process.

From a strategic point of view, the future of our town centres, especially enhancing the vibrancy and vitality of High Wycombe is a key strand of the Regeneration Strategy tabled this evening. In the Buckinghamshire context the importance of the town centres of High Wycombe and Aylesbury is also a strand of the Local Industrial Strategy developed by the Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership that was adopted in the summer.

This strategy framework developed with input from Members and partners sets a clear direction and foundation to build our Future High Street business case on.

Since the announcement on an operational front, we have received preliminary guidance on the process that will need to follow to develop our business case and been allocated a Delivery Manager at the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government who will be our guide through the process.

Officers had an initial telephone call with our Delivery Manager on the 16 October and an Inception Meeting in London will be arranged in early November. This will help us focus in on the schemes most suitable to take forward.

We were also told this month that the submission timeline has been changed and we will be working to submit a draft business case by the 15 March (previously 15 January) and a final business case by the 20 June 2020 (previously 28 April).

This is a competitive process and our application will be considered alongside 99

other towns. If we are successful we will be told in summer / autumn 2020.

We have a strong track record of making positive change to the town – especially through our Recycling Retail Units Fund (RRUF) that has enabled us to buy and refurb vacant units and this is one of the programmes, as identified in our Regeneration Strategy work, that we will look to repeat with this funding opportunity.

## **15. Question from Councillor R Raja to the Leader of the Council**

Would the Leader of the Council like to give us an update as to where exactly in the ‘pipeline’ is the recommendation of the Remaking of the River Wye Task and Finish Group, for the River Wye to be brought to the surface in the Town?

As you attended Cabinet you will be aware that the Cabinet response to the task and finish group were fully discussed and voted on and subsequently went through Full Council so I hope that your question was in fact answered. I am providing the response here for your information. That:

- (i) *the response to the recommendations of the Improvement and Review Commission 28 November 2018 concerning the River Wye is noted; and that in any future plans, strategies, schemes or bids which Buckinghamshire Council may pursue for the town, that they take the report and response into account;*
- (ii) *the work to develop a strategy and action plan for the Future High Streets Fund takes the IRC report and the Cabinet responses into account; and*
- (iii) *the new Buckinghamshire Council is encouraged to adopt a clear strategy and action plan in its first year for the improvement and regeneration of the town centre which includes making a feature of the hidden asset of the River Wye.*

## **16. Question from Councillor K Ahmed to the Cabinet Member for Housing**

Since the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act in April 2018, does the cabinet member feel that it has served its purpose so far in reducing homelessness?

It is very difficult to assess the successes of the new Act as homelessness can be considered to be subjective with outcomes subject to individual circumstances and the expectations of applicants. I would be wary of calling the new Act a success as yet, however the statistics can support this view in Wycombe in one respect.

Since the introduction of the Act, the number of households in temporary accommodation has reduced significantly down by approximately 33% between April 2018 and October 2019 as it would appear, more households have been prevented from becoming homeless. However, rough sleeper numbers have increased both nationally and locally since the introduction of the Act for a number of reasons which we do not believe are attributable to the new Act.

In terms of rough sleepers, officers have been working hard to assist those rough sleeping in the district including successfully applying for, and using over £250,000 worth of Government funding for emergency beds, tenancy sustainment for former rough sleepers as well as the provision of enhanced severe weather provision which we aim to again provide and improve this winter.

To answer the question posed, has the Act served its purpose I would reply that the evidence suggests that the Act **is** meeting its purpose however more work is required to continue to meet the need of those who need our help.

**17. Question from Councillor Ms J Wassell to the Cabinet Member for Planning.**

Please can you advise me about the progress with the Bassettbury Park home scheme as I get many questions about this from members of the public?

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

Bassettbury Triangle, as the site is now known, has been openly marketed, via specialist agents active in the park homes sector. Prospective residential park home developers have been shortlisted. The site had been marketed on the basis of the Council undertaking both on-site 'enabling works' (capping), and off-site 'embankment works' (improvements to the adjacent footpath).

However, the bidding process resulted in a preference on the part of the prospective developers to undertake the groundworks themselves. So they have been asked to re-bid on this basis, with a bid deadline of 14th November 2019.

In the meantime a decision on the planning permission for the proposed 'embankment works' is awaited (the main site already having the benefit of consent). It is estimated that construction works will start early in 2020, so we are hopeful we will see new park homes arriving by next summer. If people wish to register interest, then please use WDC Estates' email: [EstatesServices@wycombe.gov.uk](mailto:EstatesServices@wycombe.gov.uk)"

**18. Question from Councillor Ms J Wassell the Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources**

With the arrival of Universal Credit, can you inform us about the impact on our benefits department particularly in regard of housing costs?

Universal credit, as opposed to Housing Benefit, is administered by the Department of Work and Pensions and will ultimately replace the current system of Housing Benefit that is administered by Local Councils. The current impact is a slow reduction in caseload from 7,400 in April 2018 to 6,000 in October 2019. It is estimated that overall Housing Benefit expenditure will reduce by approximately £7m from £43m in 2018/19 to £36m 2019/20. The transfer of claimants to Universal credit has been slowed by the Government for review purposes.

Despite the reduction in caseload, the number of changes dealt with by the Benefit Team has increased as the DWP are sharing more data electronically. In 2017/18 there were 91,000 changes, increasing to 151,000 in 2018/19. This figure is set to increase further in the current year. These changes are managed by a team of only 16 staff.

The Government will set a timeline to transfer residual caseload from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit at some point in the future but Pensioners in particular will remain on Housing Benefit for many years to come. In the meantime Benefit Officers continue to work closely with the Citizens Advice Bureau and Council's Homelessness Prevention team to support claimants who need extra help. The Benefit team includes a dedicated officer to prioritise Homeless claims and this ensures claimants in need are given the highest level of support.