

High Wycombe Town Committee Minutes

Date: 20 January 2015

Time: 7.00 - 8.48 pm

PRESENT: Councillor A R Green
(in the Chair)

Councillors M Hussain JP, K Ahmed, I Bates, Mrs L M Clarke OBE, R B Colomb, C A Ditta, R Farmer, S Graham, M Hanif, A E Hill, M Hussain, M E Knight, S F Parker, B E Pearce, C Shafique MBE and T Snaith

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Z Ahmed, A Hussain, Ms R Knight, Ms P L Lee, Miss S Manir and Ms J D Wassell

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor A Slater

29 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman declared an interest in minute 33 (Special Expenses Budget 2015/16) in view of his chairmanship of the High Wycombe Town Twinning Association, which received funding from the Special Expenses budget. The Chairman remained in the Chamber throughout discussions.

30 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2014 be agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

In relation to the action point noted in minute 27 (Devolution of Services Information Sheet) the Chairman reported that a representative from Buckinghamshire County Council had declined to attend the meeting and had recommended that questions be directed through the LCP. Members noted that the relevant portfolio holder at the County Council may also be approached to obtain a response to questions.

31 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CIL PANEL (VERBAL REPORT)

The Cabinet Member for Planning & Sustainability attended the meeting to update Members on the work of the CIL Panel, which had reviewed all of the proposals for allocation of CIL receipts and had made recommendations in relation to these. It was noted that some of the recommendations which the Committee had previously made to Cabinet in relation to the 15% local allocation had not been endorsed by the Panel.

The Cabinet Member for Planning & Sustainability responded to Members' questions in relation to the individual projects which had been recommended by the Committee but not supported for progression by the Panel within the current year. It was noted that a final decision on the allocation of CIL funds would be taken by Cabinet in February.

The Committee expressed concern that its recommendations, which had been made following due consideration and discussion, had not been accepted by the Panel and it was

RESOLVED: that the Committee endorse its original recommendations made at the meeting of 16 September 2014 in respect the 15% local allocation of Community Infrastructure Levy funding for 2015/16, and recommends that Cabinet approve these unamended.

32 HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN CENTRE - UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS

John Callaghan, Team Leader (Environment and Infrastructure) was welcomed to the meeting and provided an update on the different workstreams which are underway, or planned, to support the regeneration of High Wycombe town centre in both the long and the short term. The presentation covered the masterplan vision for High Wycombe town centre; progression on the implementation of the Alternative Route; Paul's Row / St Mary's Street improvements; Frogmoor improvements; and creation of opportunities to enjoy the River Wye by remaking the river.

The Committee heard that the vision for the town centre aimed to create a thriving economic centre; a focus for investment; a more pedestrian friendly town centre less dominated by roads and more connected; to create high quality public spaces; and create a feature of the River Wye.

In discussion Members welcomed the improvements which had been achieved so far, particularly the A40 Rye Crossing and the improvements to Paul's Row, and supported the future workstreams. It was noted that smaller scale projects included building out Bull Lane to connect Frogmoor to the town centre, the 'Frogbox' initiative, and 'greening' the town centre through strategic landscaping. Members heard that the ultimate removal of the Abbey Way flyover remained a future aim and this was supported. Members also highlighted the need to ensure that the physical environment of the town centre, particularly pavements, are well-maintained, and recommended that consideration be used to making better use of the Chiltern Centre in order to bring about further improvement to Frogmoor.

The Chairman thanked John Callaghan for his presentation and it was noted that updates would continue to be brought to the Committee.

33 SPECIAL EXPENSES BUDGET 2015/16

The Committee considered a report which set out the details of the 2015/16 Special expenses Budget and which explained the Council Tax precept. Victoria Green, Senior Accountant, explained that there had been an increase in the Council Tax

base for the High Wycombe town area for 2015/16, leading to an increase in the precept despite the reduction in the Band D Council Tax rate.

Members noted that, if council tax was maintained at current rates, the continued increase in the number of households in the area would result in an increase in income. Various options had been costed for Members' consideration which would keep the tax rate at or below 2014/15 levels, enabling the Council to qualify for the Government's freeze grant.

In discussion Members sought clarification on whether a proportion of the freeze grant was able to be rebated back into the Special Expenses reserves. The Senior Accountant undertook to check this point.

A proposal to reduce Council Tax precepts by 4% was put to the vote but fell, and on a further vote it was

RESOLVED: That:

- (i) Option 2 in the report in respect of the Special Expenses council tax setting for 2015/16 be recommended to Cabinet which would see the precept reduced by 0.84% and the charge for a Band D property reduce from £17.80 to £17.65;
- (ii) a working group be established to consider expenditure of reserves.

34 HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN COMMITTEE - FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee's draft work programme, looking ahead to September 2015 was presented for review.

It was noted that two presentations were currently scheduled for the March meeting and it was agreed that one of these should be deferred to a subsequent meeting, with the presentation by Thames Valley Police to be given precedence.

It was agreed that an item to consider the possibility of producing a town committee newsletter be added to the work programme.

RESOLVED: That the forward work programme be noted.

35 INFORMATION SHEETS

RESOLVED: That Information Sheet 01/2015 Community Support Grants be noted.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

Miss C MacKenzie

Principal Democratic Services Officer

Ms E Lund

Senior Democratic Services Officer

Mr J Callaghan

Team Leader (Transport and Environment)

Mrs Victoria Green

Senior Accountant