

High Wycombe Town Committee Minutes

Date: 11 September 2018

Time: 7.00 - 9.33 pm

PRESENT: Councillor M Clarke (in the Chair)

Councillors K Ahmed, Z Ahmed, H Bull, Mrs L M Clarke OBE, R Farmer, S Graham, A R Green, M Hanif, M A Hashmi, A E Hill, M Hussain JP, A Hussain, M Hussain, M E Knight, R Raja, S K Raja, N J B Teesdale and Ms J D Wassell,

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Asif, Ms A Baughan and B E Pearce

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors D Barnes (Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio-holder for Engagement & Strategy), Mrs J Langley (Cabinet Member for Housing) and Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council), Mr I Thomas (Senior Parking Officer – Transport for Buckinghamshire) and Mr J Shaw (Managing Director – Chiltern Rangers CIC (Community Interest Company)).

9 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors A Hill, R Raja & N Teesdale all declared in relation to the presentation on temporary accommodation item (Minute 13) that they were all members of the Council's Planning Committee which may consider a planning application in due course. Each indicated that they would stay in the chamber during that item and listen to the debate but not take part nor vote on the item.

10 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the High Wycombe Town Committee held on 12 June 2018 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

11 ON-STREET PARKING AND PARKING ON VERGES

The Meeting received an extensive and comprehensive presentation by Mr Ian Thomas (Senior Parking Officer – Transport for Buckinghamshire) in respect of On-Street parking and parking on verges in the High Wycombe Town wards.

Members made a number of points and received clarification from Mr Thomas on a number of issues and queries as follows:

- It was confirmed that County Council parking officers could only enforce where double yellow lines were in place, or single yellow lines were in place

but then only during the operational times and where verge-parking restrictions had been made. Only the Police could enforce elsewhere without restrictions.

- Where verge parking was prohibited in the Wycombe District by a District Council byelaw, County Officers (or to be precise their appointed contractors NSL) did not enforce. The District Solicitor agreed to inform members what parking byelaws were in place.
- It was confirmed that larger vehicles mini-buses / vans / small lorries were not subject to any additional restrictions than the family car. Further restrictions only related to HGV's (Heavy Goods Vehicles).
- Grass-Crete was often a viable option where verge parking was permitted and occurring to prevent grass being cut up and mud ruts being created. Members were welcome to make bids via the County Council's LAF (Local Area Forum) for such to be considered for viability.
- Mr Thomas confirmed that Buckinghamshire County Council Parking Services had a rota of visiting schools during school run times; with the current staffing this would take 3 months to visit all the schools across Buckinghamshire. Members could contact NSL on their telephone number if a specific school was experiencing a particular extensive problem, to seek to arrange a prioritised visit by officers.
- It was confirmed that Buckinghamshire County Council did not utilise CCTV cars, although Reading and Slough Councils did; these were seen as a very efficient and cost effective means of reducing problem parking areas. It was also confirmed that Reading Town unitary area had the same number of parking operatives as BCC had spread across the entire county of Buckinghamshire. Berkshire had effectively 5 times the number of operatives compared with Buckinghamshire.
- As with the Grass-Crete above, applications for the installation of yellow lines or verge parking restrictions had to be made through the LAF. If BCC funded the project it would only be 50%, match funding being required from the appropriate District or Parish/Town Council; in effect this would mean Wycombe District Council matching the funding.
- Parking Officers at BCC were happy to scope any planned restriction before implementation to test its viability / practicability.
- The ownership of land by various parties (in Micklefield certain roads had verges owned by Wycombe DC, Bucks CC and Red Kite Housing) and the issues in gaining the agreement of all parties was noted.
- Effective residents' parking schemes with timed permits utilised in Chesham were referred to.

- Evening/night time enforcement was carried out, but it was more expensive (by darkness operatives have to be paired) so was not carried out as extensively as would be liked.
- Advertising of cars for sale was permitted individually by members of the public. Businesses could do likewise, but could not advertise more than two vehicles within a specified distance (500 metres). Contravention enforcement was within the remit of the County's Trading Standards officers.
- No further particular legislation was available to prevent parking which restricted access to fire hydrants.
- It was confirmed that in theory parking enforcement might be delegated to a school care-taker but the appropriate training would need to be given and the appropriate uniform worn.
- Community Infrastructure Levy bids were noted as a possible means of match funding restriction projects put forward by Members.
- Members queried whether the points and specific locations raised at this evening's meeting could be referred to County Councillor Mark Shaw (Cabinet Member for Transportation) in respect of the ongoing BCC transportation study. It was however suggested that their site-specific nature made the LAF conduit more appropriate to ensure resolution.

Mr Thomas was thanked for his attendance and his extensive update on these important issues.

A motion to set up a specific Task and Finish Group to investigate and explore parking issues was seconded but on being put to the vote was not passed. It was however agreed that it would be appropriate for the Committee Chairman to write specifically to the LAF listing the issues raised at this meeting.

RESOLVED That the Committee Chairman write to the Buckinghamshire County Council Local Area Forum outlining the issues in respect of on-street parking and verge parking, raised at this meeting and emphasising the urgency required in resolving them.

12 CHILTERN RANGERS UPDATE

The Committee was given a verbal update on the work of the Chiltern Rangers particularly focusing on the Town wards, by Mr John Shaw (Managing Director of Chiltern Rangers CIC (Community Interest Company)).

The key points outlined by Mr Shaw were as follows:

- The Rangers had just celebrated their 5th birthday as a CIC and were very proud to have recently received the Queen's award for voluntary service.

- With many changes afoot at National and Local Government level and economically, the Rangers wanted to be best placed with these challenges to continue to deliver their services.
- A key forthcoming challenge was their relocation; there had always been the aspiration to leave the old WDC Kingsmead depot. A mixture of CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) funding bids, sponsor support and lottery funding was being assembled to finance a new environmentally friendly community hub to share with other local social enterprises. The location was yet to be confirmed.
- Tree planting was crucial but tree watering and the maintenance of trees was just as, if not more, important; this principle underpinning a lot of the Company's schemes.
- Involvement with Red Kite Community Housing in their Castlefield Project was outlined which tied in with work done at the Chairborough Nature Reserve.
- A similar project with Cressex Business Park to make key environmental gains in what was viewed as a run-down public realm at the Park was explained.
- Other projects involving Desborough Castle Hillfort, Thames Water sponsored River Wye volunteer work, Gomm Valley, the old Wycombe Summit site and the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs initiative were referred to.
- 7,500 volunteer hours over the last year, carried out by 2,000 volunteers, was commended.
- A particular scheme, the delivery of a sensory garden by vulnerable young adults at Harlow House, had been a particular success.
- A question relating to Horse Chestnut trees experiencing premature leaf browning following the hot summer and possible reasons were remarked upon; it was noted that the worrying challenge of Ash die-back was far more pressing and a concern to the organisation.

Mr Shaw was thanked for his comprehensive and interesting update on the Rangers' operations, and his enthusiasm was commended by Members.

13 PRESENTATION ON TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

The meeting was addressed by Councillor Mrs J Langley (Cabinet Member for Housing) assisted by Mr Brian Daly (Housing Services Manager) on the current position. Mr Nigel Dicker (Head of Housing & Environment) was also present.

The history of the project to date and the requirements of various statutes in respect of homelessness were explained. The provision of more units of accommodation than was currently the case was seen as a key way of delivering improvement in the living conditions of those most in need of housing support in the District.

The presentation noted that the scheme was seen as key in responding to the as yet unknown challenges of the new Homelessness Reduction Act, recently brought into force. Universal Credit had also now been introduced locally. A public consultation in respect of the temporary accommodation project was anticipated during November, with planning permission to be sought thereafter.

Members raised a number of points and received responses in respect of various questions as follows:

- The closure of Saunderton Lodge was seen by speakers as overdue. However the siting of an alternative in Desborough Road was questioned.
- The area was viewed as experiencing considerable anti-social behaviour and the suitability of the environment for vulnerable families to be placed in was questioned.
- The availability of town centre school places was challenged.
- The potential loss of the important car parking in Desborough Road including its potential loss to users of three places of worship was referred to.
- The extent of site options considered and the fact this extended only to include sites owned by the District Council was questioned and the potential availability of the Buckinghamshire County Council offices at Easton Street was referred to.
- Officers confirmed that no site other than the Desborough Road Car Park had been considered.
- The availability of parking for a town centre site was questioned and it was pointed out that homeless persons may well have vehicles, as may their visitors.

Following a proposal which was seconded, the following resolution was carried by eight votes with no contrary vote (members of the planning committee having been reminded that they may wish to abstain from participating in the vote):

RESOLVED That the Cabinet Member for Housing be requested to review the proposed siting of the new Temporary Accommodation unit in Desborough Road, considering other sites in the District including those not in District Council ownership, subject to such consideration not delaying the closure of the existing Saunderton Lodge.

Councillor Mrs Langley, Mr Dicker & Mr Daly were thanked for their helpful input into this update.

14 INFORMATION SHEETS

RESOLVED: That Information Sheet 1/2018: High Wycombe Town Financial Quarter 1 Outturn Position for 2018/19, be noted.

15 HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN COMMITTEE - FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee's draft work programme looking ahead to September 2019 was presented for review.

It was agreed that the scheduled item in respect of HWBidCo be postponed from the November 2018 to January 2019 meeting, as a new Town Centre Manager had just been appointed by HWBidCo taking up the post in early November.

RESOLVED: That the forward work programme be noted subject to the amendment above.

16 URGENT ITEM - CUTTING OF GRASS, CLEARING OF WEEDS

In accordance with the Council Standing Order 21 the Chairman agreed to the inclusion of an urgent item in respect of Grass Cutting and Clearance of Weeds in the Town area, not featured on the published agenda. The reason for this inclusion was stated to be the urgency of resolving this increasing problem across the town wards which had been noticed by Committee members and their constituents.

Members noted that there were only three operatives employed by the County Council to grass cut in the Town Wards (unparished area), and it appeared that the removal of weeds was not in their remit. Footpaths and rights of way did not seem to be being visited and tidied either.

Reference was made to CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) monies being utilised to provide further grass cutting, weed and right of way / path clearance and that the Council was not obliged to utilise BCC as the contractor. It was noted that Cabinet will consider a report at its next meeting in relation to CIL expenditure and further noted that that this decision was a matter for Cabinet.

The poor state of said footpaths, rights of way, road gutters and overgrown junction visibility splays and site lines was re-iterated by Members. No resolution was proposed nor was any vote taken upon the item. The Chairman closed the meeting.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

- Ms S Bolter - Corporate Director (Growth & Regeneration)
- Mr B Daly - Housing Services Manager
- Mr N Dicker - Head of Housing & Environment
- Mr P Druce - Democratic Services
- Ms J Openshaw - District Solicitor