



# Buckinghamshire Council

## Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee

### Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GROWTH, INFRASTRUCTURE & HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 20 JULY 2021 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, HP19 8FF - AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 2.00 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 4.20 PM

#### MEMBERS PRESENT

D Carroll, T Hunter-Watts, M Smith, A Baughan, S Rouse, M Bracken, S Chapple, I Darby, C Poll and D Town

#### OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

N Naylor, M Tett and G Williams

#### Agenda Item

##### 1 CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chairman welcomed all Members to the meeting and invited them to introduce themselves.

##### 2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

The constitution allowed for the Chairman to appoint the Vice-Chairman for the upcoming year.

**RESOLVED: That Cllr C Poll be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Growth, Housing & Infrastructure Select Committee for the ensuing year.**

##### 3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/ CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs N Brown, Q Chaudhry, C Etholen and T Hogg.

##### 4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr S Rouse declared a personal interest as a Managing Director of PeoplePlus Group Ltd.

Cllr D Carroll declared a personal interest as a member of the Red Kite Board.

##### 5 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the meetings held on 25 March and 26 May were agreed as a correct record.

##### 6 PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

Cllr M Tett, Leader, introduced his portfolio and highlighted the following priorities:-

- Two key partners for economic development were the Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Buckinghamshire Business First, which would continue to support the business community grow and thrive.
- The Buckinghamshire Growth Board was in ongoing discussions with the Government around economic recovery post-Covid 19 and was exploring opportunities to work with the Department of Work and Pensions in reducing unemployment.
- During the pandemic, businesses had been supported with Government business grants which had been administered very efficiently by the Council.
- The Welcome Back Bucks programme had been established to support high street business by making town centres attractive and vibrant.
- The development of strategic infrastructure would be key with priorities including the South East Aylesbury Link Road and the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) projects at Princes Risborough Southern Road Links and Abbey Barn Lane Improvement Scheme.
- Lobbying was ongoing for the Aylesbury Spur of the East West Rail Link.
- Bids had been submitted recently for the Government's Levelling Up Fund and Major Road Network Fund.
- Improvement of broadband coverage and speed in Buckinghamshire would also be a priority although progress in improvements would be dependent on the Government's Project Gigabit.

In response to questions, the following points were noted:-

- The Government's Shared Prosperity Fund replaced the European Regional Development Fund. The Government scheme was currently being trialed with the funds more likely to be allocated to more deprived areas in the UK.
- The Council had requested major projects, such as HS2, to use suppliers in Buckinghamshire where possible in order to boost the local economy.
- Lobbying was ongoing for East West Rail to repair highways that had been damaged due to construction work.
- Larger businesses were supported through the three Enterprise Zones in Buckinghamshire: Silverstone, Woodlands and Westcott.
- In response to concerns raised by residents about traffic implications in Buckinghamshire if Luton Airport continued to expand, it was noted that the historic planned expansion of Luton Airport had included a new rail link and transit system which would assist with the extra capacity. The current status of these plans would be investigated further.
- Buckinghamshire had 96% broadband premises coverage however the speeds were outdated for modern usage. The Council was working on a number of projects to improve coverage as well as lobbying for Government funding.
- The shortage of local affordable housing and the lack of key infrastructure would challenge the Leader's priorities.
- In response to a request from the Chairman, it was agreed that the Leader would consider issues that the Select Committee could focus on that would assist in the delivery of the portfolio's priorities.

Cllr G Williams, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Planning & Regeneration, introduced his portfolio. Due to the wide-ranging nature of the portfolio, the Cabinet Member had two Deputy Cabinet Members that would assist: Cllr G Hall, Enforcement, and Cllr J Towns, Town Centre Regeneration. The Cabinet Member highlighted the following priorities:-

- The development of the new Buckinghamshire Local Plan for adoption in 2025. In the interim, the Aylesbury Vale Local Plan was expected to be adopted later this year.
- A call for brownfield sites had already been carried out. A second call for brownfield sites

would be undertaken later this year.

- Supplementary Planning Documents were being developed which would provide more detailed guidance beneath the Local Plan.
- Parish and Town Councils were being supported in their preparation of Neighbourhood Plans.
- Planning enforcement would continue to be supported and was performing well compared to other local authorities. A Team Leader had recently been recruited to service the north of the county.
- The Development Management Team had received a 30% increase in applications compared to the previous year. Around 1,300 planning applications were being received every month.
- Town centre regeneration was focused on the large urban centres of Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Chesham. Specific work was being carried out in relation to the Aylesbury Garden Town masterplan and the Future High Streets Funds from Government for Wycombe.
- A strategic regeneration framework was being developed which would include various towns across the county including Amersham, Buckingham, Princes Risborough and Marlow, as well as the large villages.
- The delivery of green growth and more energy efficient new developments would also be a key consideration for the Council.

In response to questions, the following points were noted:-

- Community Boards would have a focus on economic recovery which could help to boost their respective village centres.
- It was important to manage residents' expectations with the planning and enforcement system. The key message was that decisions were being made locally. Members had a role when speaking with their residents and should refer them to the relevant area's Team Leader.
- Around a third of suggested brownfield sites were viable for various reasons. The legacy councils also had land which may be taken into account for allocations.
- A shortage of planning officers was a national issue. Buckinghamshire becoming a unitary authority had led to the council being one of the largest planning authorities which attracted applicants due to the opportunities of career progression and variety. The Council had also recently been awarded £50,000 by Government to pilot a new local design guide for housing development.
- Buckinghamshire had different area planning committees made up from Members based in the locality. The Cabinet Member would consider the suggestion that each Committee had a reserve list of local Members to allow localized substitutes in the case of absence.
- The planning service was meeting its Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). It was suggested that the Select Committee may want to consider these and put forward other KPIs in future.
- The planning IT infrastructure of the legacy councils was still in place and required significant work to unify.
- There were 17 planning enforcement officers that had around 1,500 open cases. The enforcement induction for Councillors following the local elections had been well received and it was a priority for that communication with Members should be improved.
- The Cabinet Member would consider how the Select Committee could help with his portfolio. One potential suggestion was investigating best practice from other councils on planning's communication with residents.
- As part of high street regeneration, a Wycombe masterplan was being refreshed.

Recently, the Council had purchased a vacant lot that was important strategically in Wycombe town centre. The Council was also looking to encourage independent SMEs and market traders to set up outside the Charter Market building.

- Members of the Committee reiterated the importance of communication between the planning service and local Members.
- Feedback was positive on the recent planning training for Members.

Cllr N Naylor, Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness & Regulatory Services, introduced his portfolio and highlighted the following priorities:-

- Actively assessing surplus public sector land for possible development of housing that is affordable.
- Private developments would be required to include affordable housing for local people and key workers.
- Focus on the virtual elimination of rough sleeping in the county following the success of the Everyone In initiative. Officers were developing plans to move on the 90 rough sleepers still being accommodated.
- A new Homelessness Action Team would be introduced across Buckinghamshire.
- In 2020/21, 507 new build affordable homes had been delivered in the county.

In response to questions, the following points were noted:-

- A Member queried if empty housing could assist with accommodation. A wider policy was being developed which would take empty homes into account.
- Households added to the Bucks Home Choice allocation system were prioritised based on need.
- The Select Committee may have a role in assisting with the identification of public sector land for housing that is affordable. This work would be part of the wider Homelessness and Housing Strategy.
- It was noted that the Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness & Regulatory Services and the Cabinet Member for Planning & Regeneration would need to work together to deliver housing that was affordable for Buckinghamshire residents.
- Good quality Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) could assist with housing needs however HMOs needed to be well-regulated and sometimes enforcement was required.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Members for attending the meeting and sharing their priorities for the year ahead.

## **7 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman requested that Members emailed work programme ideas so that they could be considered at the next meeting. The Leader and the Cabinet Member for Planning & Regeneration would also provide suggestions for topics that could assist the work within their portfolios.

Topics that had been raised at the meeting included:-

- Planning and planning enforcement including communication with stakeholders
- Town centre regeneration
- Identifying public sector land for housing
- Rough sleepers

## **8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be on Thursday 14 October at 10am.