

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Council held on
Thursday, 26 September 2013 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor David Bard – Chairman
Councillor Sue Ellington – Vice-Chairman

Councillors: Richard Barrett, Val Barrett, Trisha Bear, Francis Burkitt, Jonathan Chatfield, Pippa Corney, Kevin Cuffley, Neil Davies, Simon Edwards, Alison Elcox, Roger Hall, Lynda Harford, Tumi Hawkins, Roger Hickford, James Hockney, Mark Howell, Clayton Hudson, Caroline Hunt, Peter Johnson, Sebastian Kindersley, Douglas de Lacey, Janet Lockwood, Mervyn Loynes, Ray Manning, Mick Martin, David McCraith, Cicely Murfitt, Charles Nightingale, Tony Orgee, Robin Page, Deborah Roberts, Neil Scarr, Ben Shelton, Bridget Smith, Hazel Smith, Jim Stewart, Edd Stonham, Robert Turner, Susan van de Ven, Bunty Waters, Aidan Van de Weyer, David Whiteman-Downes, John Williams, Tim Wotherspoon and Nick Wright

Officers: Patrick Adams Senior Democratic Services Officer
Alex Colyer Executive Director, Corporate Services
Jean Hunter Chief Executive
Fiona McMillan Legal & Democratic Services Manager and
Monitoring Officer

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tom Bygott, Nigel Cathcart, Andrew Fraser, Jose Hales, Steve Harangozo, Mark Hersom, Raymond Matthews, Alex Riley and Peter Topping.

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Simon Edwards declared a non-disclosable pecuniary interest in item 9, as a shareholder in an organisation that lets properties in the District.

Councillor Lynda Harford declared a non-disclosable pecuniary interest in item 9, as an employee of an organisation that has land and property interests in the District.

Councillors Roger Hickford, Sebastian Kindersley, Mervyn Loynes, Ray Manning, Tony Orgee, Susan van de Ven and John Williams all declared non pecuniary interests in item 12 as members of the County Council.

Councillor Mark Howell declared a non-pecuniary interest item 12 as he knew one of the landowners affected by the proposal.

Councillor Hazel Smith declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 12 as she knew residents on the Travellers' sites in the parish of Milton.

37. REGISTER OF INTERESTS

The Chairman reminded members that they needed to update their register of interests whenever their circumstances changed.

38. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 25 July 2013 were confirmed and signed

by the Chairman as a correct record.

It was suggested that comments made by local members should always be minuted and attributed to them. It was noted that councillors could request that a comment of particular importance be minuted.

39. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reminded members that training on the Code of Conduct would be held on Thursday 3 October from 10am to 1pm. It was suggested that training sessions should be held in the evening and that any relevant paperwork from the trainer be distributed to councillors.

The Chairman informed councillors that copies of the Council's Annual Governance Statement had just been distributed on the suggestion of the Corporate Governance Committee.

The Leader of Council reminded members that a special meeting of Cabinet would be held on Friday 4 October at 2pm to discuss the Council's responses to the Highways Agency's consultation to improvements to the A14.

40. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

41. PETITIONS

None.

42. ASSET MANAGEMENT POLICY (HOUSING PORTFOLIO HOLDER MEETING, 1 AUGUST 2013)

Councillor Mark Howell, Housing Portfolio Holder, presented this item which sought Council's approval for the adoption of a new Housing Revenue Account Asset Sustainability Policy. He explained that the policy would ensure that the Council had a consistent, but where necessary flexible, approach that in particular would support the development of new affordable homes in a commercial environment.

Minor amendments

It was noted that the last sentence of paragraph 4.1.1 of the report on page 19 of the agenda should be amended to read "£2M or more".

Councillor Howell requested that Councillor Douglas de Lacey send him his list of grammatical corrections and clarifications for the policy as laid out at Appendix A of the report. Council agreed that delegated authority be given to the Housing Portfolio Holder to make minor amendments to the Policy.

Provision of more affordable housing

In response to concerns that under this policy the Council could greatly reduce its housing stock by selling off its properties to a private provider, Councillor Howell assured members that the aim was to increase the amount of affordable housing provided by the Council.

In response to questioning Councillor Howell assured Council that the aim would always be to reinvest sale proceeds in the parish where the property was disposed of. The

policy used the wording “area” to allow flexibility, as the Council had three years in which to spend the proceeds and there might be no opportunities to reinvest it in the relevant parish.

Councillor Howell stated that inventive use of small plots of land could result in more affordable housing, for example the conversion of bed sits into flats.

Consultation

Councillor Howell assured Council that local members would always be consulted regarding disposals and acquisitions in their ward, but commercial factors might make it impossible for parish councils to discuss these matters before a decision was taken. However, he agreed that the relevant parish clerk should be informed before the decision was taken. Councillor Howell reminded members that parish councillors were always welcome to attend and speak at his portfolio holder meetings.

Sales

Councillor Howell stated that the policy had the flexibility to allow ransom strips to be sold below the market price to ensure that affordable housing could be delivered.

Councillor Howell expressed his confidence in the procedure for approving sales. It was noted that legal considerations were laid out in section 4.1 of the draft policy.

Staffing provision

In response to concerns regarding adequate staffing levels, Councillor Howell explained that the Council was planning to add to its housing stock and then review staffing provision.

A vote was taken and with 40 votes in favour and 6 against

Council

AGREED The adoption of the new Housing Revenue Account Asset Sustainability Policy (Disposals and Acquisitions), as set out in Appendix A of the report, with delegated authority being given to the Housing Portfolio Holder to make minor amendments relating to clarification and grammatical corrections.

Councillor Deborah Roberts asked that her vote against be recorded.

43. FILMING OF PUBLIC MEETINGS (CIVIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, 20 SEPTEMBER 2013)

Councillor Ray Manning presented this item which invited Council to consider the recommendation from the Civic Affairs Committee that the authority allow the public to film its meetings in line with the guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government in June 2013.

Council filming its own meetings

Councillor Manning explained that the Civic Affairs Committee had rejected the suggestion that the Council record or broadcast its public meetings on the grounds of cost, but it had agreed to review the matter in 12 months. Councillor de Lacey stated that the Council could record its own meetings relatively cheaply and he proposed, seconded by Councillor Deborah Roberts, that Council refer this matter back to the Civic Affairs Committee. A vote was taken and with 8 votes in favour and 38 against, Council **REJECTED** this proposal. On the suggestion of Councillor David Whiteman-Downes,

Council agreed to refer a decision on whether this authority should record its own meetings to the Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder.

Allowing the public to record the authority's meetings

It was noted that following the Government's guidance and the ease in which members of the public could make their own recordings, it made sense to alter the Council's Standing Orders in line with the recommendations from the Civic Affairs Committee.

A vote was taken and with 46 votes in favour and 1 abstention, Council

AGREED

To allow members of the public to film its public meetings in accordance with newly published guidance by the Department of Communities and Local Government entitled "Your council's cabinet – going to its meetings, seeing how it works".

That Standing Order 21.4 of the Council's Constitution (Recording of Business) be amended to read: -

"The recording in any format of any meeting of the Council, the Executive, or any committee or sub-committee of the Council or the Executive, is permitted, except: -

- a) Where the Chairman, or person presiding the meeting, rules that filming is being undertaken in such a way that it is disruptive or distracting to the good order and conduct of the meeting.
- b) Where the public have been excluded from the meeting in accordance with the Council's Access to Information Procedure Rules (Rule 10) during the consideration of exempt or confidential information."

Council further

AGREED That the matter of whether the Council should film or broadcast its own meetings should be referred to the Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio holder.

44. LOCALISED COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2013/14: REVIEW OF OPERATION (CABINET, 12 SEPTEMBER 2013)

Councillor Simon Edwards presented this item to Council, which reviewed the operation of the 2013/14 Localised Council Tax Support Scheme and recommended that Council continue with the current scheme for 2014/15. Officers were congratulated on doing an excellent job in mitigating the impact of the Government's reforms on our residents. It was hoped that the Council would clearly communicate its decisions on this matter to parish councils.

Council unanimously

AGREED To continue with the current Localised Council Tax Support Scheme for 2014/15.

45. MILTON AND WHADDON: IMPROVING EXISTING GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION (CABINET, 12 SEPTEMBER 2013)

Councillor Mark Howell presented this item, which invited Council to consider

establishing a budget to acquire an existing run down private site for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation, the acquisition of two existing Gypsy and Traveller sites from the County Council, and funding to complete a site refurbishment, at no cost to the local Council Tax Payer. Councillor Howell thanked both local members for Milton for their co-operation in this matter and paid particular tribute to Councillor Hazel Smith for her work in communicating the proposals to Milton Parish Council and the rest of Milton's residents.

Views of local members

Councillor Hazel Smith, local member for Milton, expressed her support for the recommendation in the report for the purchase of sites at Blackwell and Fen Road in Milton and supported a pro-active approach in explaining the situation to residents in the relevant wards. Councillor David McCraith, local member for Whaddon, stated that the Council had been successful in running the Travellers' site in Whaddon and he, fellow local member Nigel Cathcart and Whaddon Parish Council supported the proposal to purchase this site.

Provision of sites for other Travellers

Referring to the different groups within those described as Travellers there was a plea that the proactive work of the Council continues to include identification of land to provide for that group who will not benefit from this proposal.

Financing the proposals

In response to the suggestion that an external organisation should be considered to run these sites, Councillor Howell stated that such an organisation would be unable to access the £1.9 million funding from the Homes and Communities Agency. It was agreed that the Council had an excellent record in the running of Traveller sites.

In response to concerns about the financing of these proposals, Councillor Howell reiterated that there would be no cost to the Council Tax payer as a result of these proposals as any funding from the Council would come from the Housing Revenue Account and this money would be paid back in the form of rent. It was noted that the financial implications of this recommendation from Cabinet could be found on paragraphs 22-26 on the report.

Council unanimously (with one abstention)

- AGREED** That an initial financial contribution of up to £900,000 be established to achieve the transactions below, on a business case, with the Council investment being recovered through the income collected from the sites:
- i. The acquisition of sites at Fen Road and Blackwell, Milton and New Farm, Whaddon.
 - ii. The allocation of funds to refurbish the site at New Farm, Whaddon, to include the addition of two further pitches.
 - iii. The purchase of the site at Fen Road, Milton.

Council further

- AGREED** the delegation on the final decision to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder pending the completion of a full detailed business case that demonstrates financial viability.

46. QUESTIONS ON JOINT MEETINGS

None.

47. UPDATES FROM MEMBERS APPOINTED TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Council **NOTED** Councillor Bridget Smith's report on the meeting of the Adult Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12 September 2013.

48. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR CHARLES NIGHTINGALE

Councillor Charles Nightingale asked the Leader the following question: -
Could the Leader please inform this Council of any planning applications or licences that have been applied for to carry out Fracking in South Cambridgeshire? Could he also tell us if this Council will ever support any possible future applications for Fracking or Hydraulic Fracturing in South Cambridgeshire?

Councillor Ray Manning, Leader of Council, announced that the Council had not received any applications or licences for fracking or hydraulic fracturing in South Cambridgeshire and that any future applications would have to be decided on its merits.

49. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BEN SHELTON

Councillor Ben Shelton asked the Housing Portfolio Holder the following question: -
"Would the Portfolio Holder please update Members on any recent property purchases made by the Council?"

Councillor Mark Howell, Housing Portfolio Holder, stated that eight properties had been purchased recently, four of these were now occupied and the other four were expected to be occupied in October. In response to Councillor Shelton's supplementary question, Councillor Howell explained that the Council were always keen to add to its housing stock providing the units were viable and within the authority's price range.

50. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR TUMI HAWKINS

Councillor Tumi Hawkins asked the Planning Policy and Localism Portfolio Holder the following question:-

"Several residents have noted that the marketing information being put out to the public by the Council in relation to the on-going local development plan consultation, is worded in such a way as to imply that the selection of the new settlements, in particular, Bourn Airfield, is a done deal.

As such a lot of them felt that there was no point in giving their response or an opinion as it would not make any difference.

Will the Leader or Planning Policy Portfolio Holder please tell us if this indeed was the intention of the council to mislead the general public about the sites selected and the local plan process, and what the council will do before the consultation ends, to correct this 'misinformation'?"

Councillor Pippa Corney, Planning Policy and Localism Portfolio Holder, praised the article in South Cambs magazine, which in her opinion did not discourage residents from giving their opinions. She urged councillors to encourage all residents to respond to the Council's consultation on the Local Plan.

In response to Councillor Hawkins' supplementary question Councillor Howell clarified the fact that there had been a misunderstanding regarding the number of people who had applied for affordable housing, which was currently just under 4,000 and the different and naturally lower figure for the number of units needed to meet this demand which was estimated at just over 1,000. Councillor Simon Edwards assured Council that he been careful not to endorse any proposed development listed in the Local Plan in a recent radio interview.

51. NOTICES OF MOTION

None.

52. CHAIRMAN'S ENGAGEMENTS

Council **NOTED** the Chairman and Vice-Chairman's engagements.

The Meeting ended at 4.00 p.m.
