

## **South Cambridgeshire District Council**

Minutes of a meeting of the Council held on  
Thursday, 22 July 2021 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Anna Bradnam – Chair  
Councillor Peter Fane – Vice-Chair

Councillors: Henry Batchelor, John Batchelor, Paul Bearpark,  
Dr. Shrobona Bhattacharya, Tom Bygott, Dr. Martin Cahn,  
Nigel Cathcart, Graham Cone, Dr. Claire Daunton, Clare Delderfield,  
Corinne Garvie, Neil Gough, Bill Handley, Sally Ann Hart, Geoff Harvey,  
Dr. Tumi Hawkins, Pippa Heylings, Mark Howell, Alex Malyon,  
Tony Mason, Brian Milnes, Judith Rippeth, Deborah Roberts,  
Dr. Ian Sollom, Dr. Aidan Van de Weyer, Bunty Waters,  
Heather Williams, John Williams, Dr. Richard Williams and Nick Wright

Councillors Cllr Ruth Betson, Cllr Sue Ellington, Cllr Peter McDonald, Cllr Bridget Smith,  
Cllr Fiona Whelan and Cllr Eileen Wilson were in attendance remotely.

Officers:	Patrick Adams	Senior Democratic Services Officer
	Rebecca Dobson	Democratic Services Manager
	Rory McKenna	Monitoring Officer
	Jeff Membery	Head of Transformation
	Liz Watts	Chief Executive

### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Grenville Chamberlain, Sarah Cheung Johnson, Gavin Clayton, Jose Hales, Bill Handley, Steve Hunt, Dawn Percival and Nick Sample.

### **2. Declaration of Interests**

Councillor Peter Fane declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 17 as a member of Shire Homes Limited. He did take part in the debate and did not vote.

### **3. Register of Interests**

The Chair reminded Members that they should keep their register of interests up to date and that they should inform Democratic Services of any changes.

### **4. Minutes**

The Chair was authorised to sign the Minutes of the meetings held on 15 April as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Ruth Betson and Councillor Shrobona Bhattacharya as being present at the meeting.

The Chair was authorised to sign the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 May as a correct record

The Chair was authorised to sign the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 May as a correct record, subject to the amendment of MP to Mayor in the third paragraph of minute 26.

## **5. Announcements**

The Chair expressed her concern about the impact that Covid-19 was having on young people. To address this, she announced that Centre 33 was her chosen charity. This organisation provided practical help and emotional support for young people on issues such as housing, sexual health and mental wellbeing.

## **6. Questions From the Public**

In the absence of Mr Daniel Fulton, the Chair read out his question:

In order to meet the Government's housing targets, this council is set to approve 11,000 new dwellings at Waterbeach new town, 10,000 dwellings at Northstowe, and 3,500 dwellings at Bourn Airfield.

The chalk aquifer that feeds the River Cam and its tributaries is already over-abstracted, and this Council's plan is to continue to abstract all water from that aquifer to serve these additional 24,500 dwellings.

The council's role as local planning authority is to ensure that these developments are acceptable in planning terms. How is allowing the development of 24,500 dwellings with no sustainable water supply consistent with this council's promise to be "green to the core"?

Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins, Lead Cabinet Member for Planning, responded as follows:

The developments at Waterbeach, Northstowe and Bourn formed a central part of the 2018 Local Plan. The Council's Local Plan was subject to rigorous scrutiny which included an extended examination process. This included consideration of the site allocations above. The Planning Authority consulted the Environment Agency (EA) throughout the Local Plan process and also agreed a statement of common ground supporting the climate change and water conservation policies in that plan. The EA did not object to the allocation of the new settlements outlined in the plan.

Subsequent to the adoption of the Local Plan, the EA were again consulted on the supplementary planning guidance developed for Waterbeach and Bourn that were adopted in 2019. They did not object to the SPD.

The planning application processes for all three settlements involves consultation with the EA as part of the process. The Environment Agency are the statutory authority responsible for the permit process allowing water abstraction in the area

through a specific legal process. The EA have primary responsibility for managing the quality of the water environment – as well as the means of regulating such abstraction through the permit process. The EA recognise that further sources of new supply will be required to accommodate growth across Cambridgeshire but, noting that Northstowe is included within the Water Resources Management Plan for the area, they have not objected to the current applications or suggested that planned development across the district should cease.

The proposals for Northstowe, Bourn and Waterbeach will not result in 24,000 homes being built immediately. The current housing trajectory forecasts some 6,135 new homes being built across all three sites by 2031. The Council has raised the findings of its recently commissioned evidence with a range of agencies including Water Resources East, the Environment Agency, Cambridge Water and the MHCLG OxCam Team. It has highlighted to those agencies the conclusions requiring a reduced dependency on the aquifer to supply Greater Cambridge's water needs in the future. The Council has been advised that solutions to water supply are possible and expect to continue to press those agencies to bring forward early resolution of this issue.

## **7. Petitions**

It was noted that no petitions had been received for consideration at this meeting.

## **8. To Consider the Following Recommendation:**

### **8 (a) Civic Affairs Committee, 10 June: Babraham and Sawston Community Governance Review**

The Head of Transformation introduced this report detailing a recommendation from the Civic Affairs Committee to establish a new parish boundary between Sawston and Babraham. It was noted that both Parish Councils and the local members supported the change.

Councillor Brian Milnes, as a local member, thanked officers for their work on this project. He fully supported the recommendation in the report which would correct an anomaly.

Councillor Heather Williams thanked officers and the members of Civic Affairs Committee, including the former Chair, former councillor Dr Douglas de Lacey. She fully supported the recommendations which had received the unanimous agreement of the Civic Affairs Committee.

The Chair proposed and Councillor Milnes seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and by affirmation,

Council **Agreed** that

- A)** A new parish boundary between Sawston and Babraham (as proposed by Sawston Parish Council) be adopted (as presented at Appendix A).
- B)** A formal request be made to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to realign the district council ward boundary between Duxford and Sawston wards so that they remain aligned with the new parish boundary.

## **9. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority**

### **Combined Authority Board**

The Leader updated the Council on the work of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Board:

- The Combined Authority had passed its Gateway Review, which meant £100m of funding over the next five years, in five £20m tranches.
- A New Chief Executive, Eileen Milner had been appointed.
- Councillor Wayne Fitzgerald had been appointed as the Deputy Mayor.
- The Non-statutory deputy role had not yet been agreed.
- The Board had agreed the recommendations of the Climate Change Commission, which would receive £50,000 to ensure its implementation.
- The Board had strengthened its response to East West Rail, in line with the views of both this authority and the County Council.

### **Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Councillor Dr Aiden Van de Weyer reported that the Combined Authority Board's Overview and Scrutiny Committee had undergone a review of its scrutiny function which had recommended a more focussed in depth scrutiny of individual issues. Councillor Dr Van de Weyer thanked Councillors Grenville Chamberlain and Peter Fane for their work on this Committee.

## **10. Greater Cambridge Partnership Executive Board**

Councillor Neil Gough reported that the meeting of the Greater Cambridge Partnership Executive Board on 1 July had discussed the public transport link between Waterbeach and Cambridge and the independent audit's recommendations regarding the Cambourne to Cambridge project, which the Board accepted. The Board had endorsed the planning consent of the Cambridge South East Transport Scheme.

In response to questioning from the Chair, Councillor Neil Gough explained that the Board had only decided that the Waterbeach and Cambridge Central route option should progress to the next stage of assessment.

## **11. Update on the OxCam Arc**

The Leader explained that the Government had just announced that it was starting a 12 week consultation on the OxCam Arc framework. The Leader hoped that the consultation would highlight the importance of the environment and asked that Members encourage their parish councils and residents to participate

in the consultation. In response to questioning from Councillor Shrobona Bhattacharya, the Leader stated that the Council should promote the Government's consultation instead of setting up its own.

The Leader reported that the Government Minister had clarified that the OxCam Arc was about economic growth and not about the building of 1 million homes. It was noted that this affected a vast area, covering 10 Districts.

Councillor Deborah Roberts asserted that the Council should oppose the whole project, which was about housing development and not economic growth. The Leader advised that the Council should advise the Government on what we wanted to see in the project and only oppose it if our views were ignored.

Councillor Dr Richard Williams asked what local input there could be on the advisory panel. The Chief Executive explained that the Council did not have a place on the Board but had been invited to talk to it.

Councillor Heather Williams expressed her disappointment in the lack of detail in the report. She stated that it was unclear what the Council wanted from the project and how much influence the Council had with the Government. The Leader explained that the Council was still waiting for further details from the Government on what the project would entail. The Council was committed to telling the Government what matters to our residents.

Councillor Tom Bygott asked how open and transparent the decision making regarding the OxCam arc was. The Leader replied that this was a Government project and they had just launched a 12 week consultation on the project. The onus was on the Government to ensure that they were open and transparent and honoured their pledge to make this project sustainable and about jobs.

Councillor Nick Wright asked what the Council's vision was for the OxCam Arc. The Leader replied that it was to make the environment a priority and this had been included in the consultation. Councillor Wright stated that he wanted to know the administration's vision for the project, in particular housing development in South Cambridgeshire. The Leader explained that the Council's Local Plan would determine where housing would be built in the District. She concluded that the OxCam Arc's vision should be determined by the residents and stakeholders.

Councillor Nigel Cathcart welcomed the Leader's involvement with the OxCam Arc and asked how the Council would rise to the challenge of some many projects including the Local Plan, the East Rail and the Combined Authority's own involvement in developments. The Leader agreed this was a challenge and stated that the District was under more pressure regarding development than any other comparable area. In response, the Council had agreed to support parish councils who were dealing with multiple external pressures.

Council **Noted** the report.

## 12. **Appointments to Committees and other bodies**

## Council

- Endorsed** the replacement of Councillor Peter McDonald by Councillor Henry Batchelor as the Council-nominated member on the Investment Partnerships Boards.
- Noted** The replacement of Councillors Ruth Betson and Nick Wright by Councillor Sue Ellington and Mark Howell as substitute members of the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee.
- Noted** The replacement of Councillor Neil Gough by Councillor John Williams as substitute on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Board.

**13. Questions From Councillors****13 (a) From Councillor Peter Fane**

Homes that are empty for **2 years or more** are charged double the regular Council Tax, or an additional premium of 100% with effect from 1 April 2019. In some cases, the empty properties surcharge is applied to owners / part-owners of domestic properties for the period before the completion of the purchase.

Has the Council considered whether it is right to apply the empty homes penalty immediately to new owners, in some cases penalising owners for a period of non-occupation prior to the purchase of the property, thus holding them liable for the circumstances of the previous owner?

Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, explained that a strategy to bring empty homes back into use as quickly as possible will be coming to Cabinet in the autumn.

Councillor Williams stated that under existing legislation the Council had the discretionary power to reduce or remit Council Tax should a council taxpayer apply for assistance using this opportunity. He explained that empty homes could be let to Shire Homes for housing homeless families. The Council takes on the management of the property which can include minor repairs to return them to use and the owner receives a rent. This Council decided to charge the additional Council Tax for long term empty properties in January 2013, effective from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 in line with the length of time the property had been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 2012. Under the terms of this Act a property is a long -term empty dwelling on any day if for a continuous period of at least two years ending with that day. There is no provision for this period to be amended with a change of ownership as Councillor Fane asks.

Councillor Williams explained that the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (empty Dwellings) Act 2018 enabled the Council to increase the

additional amount charged and following a review of the long term empty properties, in February 2019 this Council agreed to increase the charges. The additional charges for long term empty properties were listed in the annual Council Tax advertisement, were published on our website and were detailed in the information leaflet that was supplied with a Council Tax bill.

Councillor Williams added that to put this in to context, as of November 2018 we had 180 properties attracting additional Council Tax charge out of a Tax Base of over 62,600, while this month the figure of long term properties had slightly reduced to 171 out of a 2021 Tax Base that had increased to over 64,400.

Councillor Peter Fane thanked Councillor Williams for his answer and he had no supplementary question.

**13 (b) From Councillor Bunty Waters**

How many privately-owned properties in South Cambs are empty and not in use, is Council Tax being collected from these empty homes and is there any assistance being given to the home owners to bring them back into habitable use?

Councillor John Williams replied that as of 20 July there were 706 privately owned empty properties which had been empty from between 1 day and 2 years. It was noted that this figure did not include the longer term empty properties that Councillor Williams referred to in his answer to Councillor Fane's question. Councillor Williams explained that Council Tax was collected from these homes, but the 706 did not include unoccupied properties where someone has died and their estate was going through probate.

Councillor Williams explained that the reasons for homes being unoccupied could be many and varied and this Council has not until now had a comprehensive strategy to deal with this. It was for this reason that he hoped to agree such a strategy shortly.

Councillor Williams repeated his reply to Councillor Fane, the Council had discretionary powers to help with Council Tax hardship which could provide financial easement to enable a property to be brought back into use.

Councillor Bunty Waters thanked Councillor Williams for his comprehensive answer and had no supplementary question.

**13 (c) From Councillor Tom Bygott**

Water levels in Kingfisher Pond in Northstowe have declined since work on building the new town began, and the pond has completely dried up on several occasions. Cracks have also appeared in All Saints' Church in Longstanton, a Grade I listed mediaeval building.

In May, an independent consultancy, HR Wallingford, released its Phase III

Report, the final instalment in its three part hydrogeological assessment of groundwater levels in Longstanton and Northstowe.

What has this Council done, or what is it going to do, to address the issues raised in the report?

Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins, Lead Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Delivery, replied that the report has been submitted to the District Council and the Parish Council, on whose behalf the Council commissioned HR Wallingford to explore this issue. Given the conclusions and recommendations in the report, the Council had developed an action plan which had been shared with Local Ward Councillors for comment and with the Parish Council. The Action plan sets out the measures that the Council proposes following the recommendations of HR Wallingford. Subject to the Parish Councils feedback on the action plan, the Council will then seek to progress with the measures outlined in that plan.

Councillor Tom Bygott stated that he looked forward to seeing the Action Plan. He asked why no Environment Statement had been provided, which was required as part of Northstowe Phase 2a. Councillor Hawkins replied that she would have to ask the relevant case officer to provide a response after the meeting.

**13 (d) From Councillor Heather Williams**

Does the leader regret the budget decisions the administration has made since 2018 in relation to planning?

Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins explained that the administration did not regret its budget decisions regarding Planning. The shared planning service, with the exception of last year when the Covid Pandemic significantly adversely impacted both developer confidence and development activity, has been able to operate inside the budget set by the Council.

Councillor Heather Williams stated that page 333 of the 20 February 2020 report included a figure of £851,000 on development management. She asked whether the administration regretted this figure, given that the planning section was under-resourced. Councillor Dr Hawkins said that she would investigate why the allocated money had not been spent. She added that whilst in the past the Council had found it difficult to recruit planning officers, she was pleased to report that the authority had recently employed new staff in this section. She was happy to discuss this matter further with either Councillor Heather Williams or Councillor Nick Wright.

**13 (e) Question from Councillor Dr Richard Williams**

The following question had been submitted before the commencement of the meeting, but later than seven clear working days before the meeting, in line with Standing Order 12.4(b):

Does the leader believe that the Council should take enforcement action where breaches of planning rules are identified following complaints from residents?



On behalf of the Leader, Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins explained that when the Council was notified of a breach it would then ascertain how the matter could be resolved. In some cases further action was not expedient. Each case was assessed on its merits and planning policy existed to guide the enforcement action that could be taken.

Councillor Dr Richard Williams stated that it took courage for residents to report alleged breaches of the planning rules and it was disappointing for them when no apparent action had been taken. He suggested that the Council should always write to those who had breached planning law and invite them to apply for planning permission. Councillor Dr Hawkins stated that the Council would strive to improve its communications.

#### **14. Notices of Motion**

##### **14 (a) Standing in the name of Councillor Martin Cahn**

This Motion was withdrawn.

##### **14 (b) Standing in the name of Councillor Heather Williams**

Councillor Heather Williams and Councillor Graham Cone accepted the following amendment proposed by Councillor Neil Gough

This Council recognises that the minutes relating to private meetings can be made available to the public if the grounds for exclusion of the meeting no longer apply. ~~This council will seek to share the minutes of meeting wherever possible and will only keep them confidential as an absolute last resort, recognising that it is to the public that we are accountable and it is in the public's interest that we are as open and transparent as possible.~~ **This Council recognises the importance of openness and transparency and will share the minutes of meetings wherever possible in accordance with the provisions of the law and the constraints of commercial confidentiality.**

Councillor Heather Williams explained that she was being pragmatic when accepting this amendment and she still supported the original wording. She expressed her disquiet at the increase in the number of meetings going into private session and saw no reason why minutes should remain confidential after the decision had been taken and implemented. Councillor Graham Cone echoed Councillor Williams' views and expressed his disappointment that the original motion had been "watered down."

Councillor Neil Gough thanked Councillor Williams and Councillor Cone for accepting the amendment. He agreed that the Council should be open and transparent but added that the authority needed to comply with the law. It was for this reason that he had proposed the amendment, to allow each case to be judged separately and ensure that the public interest was not harmed by publicly sharing minutes that included information that was still commercially sensitive.

Councillor John Williams explained that the increase in the number of investments made by the Council had necessitated an increase in the number of times meeting had gone into confidential session due to the commercial sensitivity of the decisions being taken. He added that a majority of the Councillors present had to agree to take the meeting into private session.

Councillor Deborah Roberts expressed her opposition to the amendment, which she felt negated the motion. She suggested that by keeping the minutes confidential the current administration could avoid publicising any mistakes made in their dealings with commercial developers when spending public funds.

Councillor Nigel Cathcart supported the amended motion which championed openness and transparency, whilst recognising the need to occasionally keep discussions confidential to allow officers and councillors to speak openly. However, he expressed concern that the wording was vague and implied that more meetings went into private session, when the vast majority of meetings remained in public session.

Councillor Tom Bygott supported the motion but expressed his disappointment with the amendments. He called on the Council's leaders to pledge to make all minutes public when they no longer needed to be confidential. This could assure the public that developers were being held to the terms that they agreed with the authority.

Councillor Heather Williams and Councillor Graham Cone accepted the following additional amendment proposed by Councillor Dr Richard Williams to add the words "of this Council and its Committees" after the words "private meetings" in the first sentence of the motion to ensure that the motion only applied to the Council's committees. In response to concerns that the motion would now apply to the Committee's sub-groups, the Deputy Head of Legal stated that in his opinion the motion would only apply to Committees of the Council as defined by the Local Government Act 1972.

Upon the motion being put, a vote was taken and were cast as follows:

**In favour (25):**

Councillors Henry Batchelor, John Batchelor, Paul Bearpark, Shrobona Bhattacharya, Anna Bradnam, Tom Bygott, Dr Martin Cahn, Graham Cone, Clare Delderfield, Peter Fane, Neil Gough, Sally Ann Hart, Dr Tumi Hawkins, Pippa Heylings, Mark Howell, Tony Mason, Brian Milnes, Judith Rippeth, Dr Ian Sollom, Dr Aidan Van de Weyer, Bunty Waters, Dr Richard Williams, Heather Williams, John Williams and Nick Wright

**Against (0)**

**Abstain (2):**

Councillors Nigel Cathcart and Deborah Roberts

Council **Agreed** the following motion.

This Council recognises that the minutes relating to private meetings of this Council and its Committees can be made available to the public if the grounds for exclusion of the meeting no longer apply. This Council recognises the importance of openness and transparency and will share the minutes of meetings wherever possible in accordance with the provisions of the law and the constraints of commercial confidentiality.

**14 (c) Standing in the name of Councillor Dr Ian Sollom**

Councillor Dr Ian Sollom proposed and Councillor Judith Rippeth seconded the following motion, with amendments to the motion in the agenda highlighted.

Council ~~deplores~~ **strongly disapproves of** the decision of the Government to remove the 'temporary' uplift in Universal Credit on 1st October.

Council agrees with the former leader of the Conservative Party and architect of Universal Credit, Sir Iain Duncan Smith, and five of his **ministerial** successors **at the Department for Work and Pensions** (Stephen Crabb, Damian Green, David Gauke, Esther McVey and Amber Rudd) that a failure to keep the uplift in place would 'damage living standards, health and opportunities [for those that] need our support most as we emerge from the pandemic [...] and the extra £20 [...] has been essential in allowing people to live with dignity'.

Council therefore resolves to ask the Chief Executive to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to request that the uplift be incorporated permanently into Universal Credit.

Councillor Dr Ian Sollom explained that the number of recipients of Universal Credit had more than doubled during the Covid-19 pandemic and they were all facing extreme hardship at the end of September, with single parents and ethnic minority families being disproportionately affected. He urged that the Council informs the Government that the removal of the extra £20 payment was wrong. Councillor Judith Rippeth agreed with Councillor Dr Sollom and asserted that to remove the payment when furlough was also ending was unacceptable.

Councillor Heather Williams agreed that a continuation of the £20 payment was best for the residents in the District and she was putting them before party politics by supporting this motion.

Councillor Deborah Roberts suggested that this was a pointless motion which would not change anything and that it would be more appropriate if individual councillors contacted their MP. She lamented the lack of supporting information and asked what the financial implications of agreeing the motion would be. She stated that fortunately the number of Covid cases appeared to be dropping.

Councillor Nigel Cathcart supported the motion, which argued for the retention of a vital safety net for the most vulnerable. He suggested that an increase in

taxation could cover any increase in costs.

Councillor Dr Sollom explained that the Council had a responsibility to make representations to Government on matters of vital importance. The cost was £6m and so was affordable.

A vote was taken and with one abstention (Councillor Deborah Roberts), Council by affirmation

**Agreed** the following motion

Council strongly disapproves of the decision of the Government to remove the 'temporary' uplift in Universal Credit on 1st October.

Council agrees with the former leader of the Conservative Party and architect of Universal Credit, Sir Iain Duncan Smith, and five of his ministerial successors at the Department for Work and Pensions (Stephen Crabb, Damian Green, David Gauke, Esther McVey and Amber Rudd) that a failure to keep the uplift in place would 'damage living standards, health and opportunities [for those that] need our support most as we emerge from the pandemic [...] and the extra £20 [...] has been essential in allowing people to live with dignity'.

Council therefore resolves to ask the Chief Executive to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to request that the uplift be incorporated permanently into Universal Credit.

#### **14 (d) Standing in the name of Councillor Pippa Heylings**

Councillor Pippa Heylings proposed and Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins seconded the following motion:

The recent consultation by the Government on "Changes to the planning system" received over 2,300 responses, including responses from the cross-party Local Government Association and our own Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service.

The proposed reforms mean that in future local voice in planning will happen at the Local Plan making stage. The responses expressed strong concerns that this means that communities will not be able to influence individual applications in the same way as they do now which could further alienate communities.

Section 106 agreements are the primary route through which council housing is currently delivered. The proposed new Infrastructure Levy lacks detail as to how it will maintain existing levels of funding for affordable housing especially if threshold is raised to 40/50 for onsite requirement. It would also bypass Parish Councils and communities.

Last month the House of Commons with cross party support from MPs called on

the Government to protect residents' rights to object to individual planning applications in their own neighbourhood area if the area is zoned for growth or renewal.

This Council

- believes planning works best when local communities are empowered to work together with developers to shape local areas and deliver new homes that are affordable to live in;
- asks the Leader of the Council to call on the Government to protect the right of communities to have a voice on individual planning applications; and to ensure that any changes to the S106 system lead to an increase in the supply of affordable housing.

Councillor Heather Williams proposed that the words "work together with developers" be removed, as planning worked best when local communities were empowered and their views were heard by the local planning authority. The proposed amendment was seconded by Councillor Deborah Roberts, who supported most of the motion, but was concerned that it empowered developers instead of local residents.

Councillor Pippa Heylings explained that whilst she understood their concerns, she could not accept the amendment, as the focus of the motion was to prevent the Government's reforms from taking power away from residents and local authorities in their dealings with developers. The amendment could confuse the main point of the motion.

Councillor Nick Wright expressed his alarm at the desire to work with developers, as they were supportive of the Government reforms and answered only to shareholder and to profits. He explained that only a tiny percentage of applications were decided by councillors and to pledge to work with developers would further dilute the influence of our communities in the decision making process.

Councillor Dr Aidan Van de Weyer suggested that those supporting the amendment misunderstood the need to empower communities in their discussions with developers in the planning process. To agree the amendment would reduce the weight of the original motion.

Councillor Dr Richard Williams stated that the developers had no incentive to talk to communities and he supported the amendment which was in keeping with the original motion.

Councillor Brian Milnes was surprised to hear Conservative councillors complaining about the role of developers in the planning process. The purpose of the motion was to express concerns about the new legislation and this amendment added nothing to that debate.

Councillor Ruth Betson welcomed the amendment as in her experience the local

community was marginalised in matters regarding local development, as was the case with Cambourne Town Council and the proposed development on Cambourne Business Park.

Upon the amendment to the motion being put, a vote was taken and were cast as follows:

**In favour (8):**

Councillors Shrobona Bhattacharya, Tom Bygott, Graham Cone, Mark Howell, Deborah Roberts, Dr Richard Williams, Heather Williams and Nick Wright.

**Against (16):**

Councillors Henry Batchelor, John Batchelor, Paul Bearpark, Anna Bradnam, Dr Martin Cahn, Nigel Cathcart, Claire Daunton, Neil Gough, Sally Ann Hart, Dr Tumi Hawkins, Pippa Heylings, Tony Mason, Brian Milnes, Judith Rippeth, Dr Aidan Van de Weyer and John Williams.

**Abstain (1):**

Councillor Peter Fane

The amendment was declared **Lost**.

Councillor Nigel Cathcart expressed concern that the words “to have a voice” were not strong enough to ensure that Local Authorities continue to decide applications. The Chair explained that the 30 minutes allowed for motions had expired and so the motion would now be put to the vote, which were cast as follows:

**In favour (25):**

Councillors Henry Batchelor, John Batchelor, Paul Bearpark, Shrobona Bhattacharya, Anna Bradnam, Tom Bygott, Dr Martin Cahn, Nigel Cathcart, Graham Cone, Claire Daunton, Peter Fane, Neil Gough, Sally Ann Hart, Geoff Harvey, Dr Tumi Hawkins, Pippa Heylings, Mark Howell, Tony Mason, Brian Milnes, Judith Rippeth, Dr Aidan Van de Weyer, Dr Richard Williams, Heather Williams, John Williams and Nick Wright

**Against (0):**

**Abstain (0):**

Council **Agreed** the following motion:

The recent consultation by the Government on “Changes to the planning system” received over 2,300 responses, including responses from the cross-party Local Government Association and our own Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service.

The proposed reforms mean that in future local voice in planning will happen at the Local Plan making stage. The responses expressed strong concerns that this means that communities will not be able to influence individual applications in the same way as they do now which could further alienate communities.

Section 106 agreements are the primary route through which council housing is currently delivered. The proposed new Infrastructure Levy lacks detail as to how it will maintain existing levels of funding for affordable housing especially if threshold is raised to 40/50 for onsite requirement. It would also bypass Parish Councils and communities.

Last month the House of Commons with cross party support from MPs called on the Government to protect residents' rights to object to individual planning applications in their own neighbourhood area if the area is zoned for growth or renewal.

This Council

- believes planning works best when local communities are empowered to work together with developers to shape local areas and deliver new homes that are affordable to live in;
- asks the Leader of the Council to call on the Government to protect the right of communities to have a voice on individual planning applications; and to ensure that any changes to the S106 system lead to an increase in the supply of affordable housing.

## **15. Chair's Engagements**

Council **Noted** the Chair's engagement.

## **16. Exclusion of Press and Public**

The Deputy Head of Legal explained that if Council wished to discuss the figures included in the business case, as detailed in the confidential appendix to the report, the meeting would have to go into confidential session.

### **16 (a) Cabinet, 22 March 2021: Ermine Street Housing Business Plan**

Councillor John Batchelor, Lead Cabinet Member for Housing, introduced this report, which sought the agreement of Council to receive the Business Plan for the Ermine Street Housing company. He explained that the Council reviewed the market rent company annually. Covid-19 had impacted on rent arrears, although this had significantly improved recently.

Councillor Peter Fane explained that he was a Director of Ermine Street Housing and so would not take part in the debate and would not vote.

Councillor Mark Howell expressed concern about the fact that the Company had residents outside the District, including some in Peterborough and now Leeds. Councillor John Batchelor explained that the small number of tenants in Leeds and Nottingham were sub-contracted to agents. The housing of homeless people was the responsibility of the housing department and not Ermine Street Housing. Councillor Mark Howell asked whether the dwellings were inspected and what the process was for raising concerns about the tenants renting the homes. It was agreed that answers to these questions would be provided outside the meeting.

Councillor John Batchelor explained that he was a Director of Ermine Street Housing but he resigned when he became Lead Cabinet Member of Housing. Councillor Nick Wright suggested that the business case should be presented by the Directors of the Company.

Councillor Deborah Roberts explained that she had opposed the setting up of Ermine Street Housing six years ago, but she now accepted that she was wrong. The Conservative group should be congratulated for taking the decision to set up the Company and resolving to purchase 500 units. Councillor Roberts expressed concern at the tenants in Leeds and Nottingham as the priority should be to benefit the District's residents.

Councillor Heather Williams stated that Ermine Street Housing was an example of a good investment made by the Council and she praised the officers who had made this happen. She also supported the decision to discuss this matter in open session.

Councillor John Williams thanked the officers who worked for Ermine Street Housing who made this such a success. He shared members' concerns about tenants outside the District, but this had been agreed under guidelines set up by the previous administration.

Councillor John Batchelor explained that the original objective of the Company was to deliver 500 homes, which would be achieved this year. Any future expansion beyond number this would need to be agreed by the Council.

Council, by affirmation

**Agreed** To receive the Ermine Street Business Plan for the period 2020/2021 to 2029/2030 for information.

---

**The Meeting ended at 5.00 p.m.**

---