

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Council held on
Tuesday, 23 February 2021 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Dr. Douglas de Lacey – Chair
Councillor Anna Bradnam – Vice-Chair

Councillors: Henry Batchelor, John Batchelor, Ruth Betson,
Dr. Shrobona Bhattacharya, Tom Bygott, Dr. Martin Cahn,
Nigel Cathcart, Grenville Chamberlain, Sarah Cheung Johnson,
Gavin Clayton, Graham Cone, Dr. Claire Daunton, Clare Delderfield,
Sue Ellington, Peter Fane, Neil Gough, Bill Handley, Geoff Harvey,
Dr. Tumi Hawkins, Pippa Heylings, Mark Howell, Alex Malyon,
Peter McDonald, Brian Milnes, Dawn Percival, Judith Rippeth,
Deborah Roberts, Bridget Smith, Hazel Smith, Dr. Aidan Van de Weyer,
Bunty Waters, Heather Williams, John Williams, Dr. Richard Williams,
Eileen Wilson and Nick Wright

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| Officers: | Anne Ainsworth | Chief Operating Officer |
| | Rory McKenna | Monitoring Officer |
| | Jeff Membery | Head of Transformation |
| | Liz Watts | Chief Executive |
| | Rebecca Dobson | Democratic Services Manager |
| | Peter Maddock | Head of Finance |
| | Patrick Adams | Senior Democratic Services Officer |

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jose Hales, Steve Hunt, Tony Mason, Nick Sample and Dr. Ian Sollom.

Presentation

1. APOLOGIES

Councillors Joes Hales, Steve Hunt, Tony Mason, Nick Sample and Ian Sollom sent apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor John Batchelor declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 8, various budget reports, in that he was a director of South Cams Limited trading as Ermine Street; as the position was unremunerated, he would vote.

Councillor Peter McDonald declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda items 8(c) and (e), the Capital Investment Programme and Capital Strategy, in that he was an unpaid member of the Investment Partnership Board.

Councillor Heather Williams referred to the fact that those Members who were responsible for paying Council Tax should declare a pecuniary interest in relation to the Council Tax resolution.

In accordance with the advice of the Monitoring Officer, the Chair then made a declaration of non-pecuniary interest on behalf of all Members to this effect.

Councillor Sue Ellington declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to the item on Swavesey Byways rate, as although she did not pay the rate, she had been closely involved with this work in the past year.

Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to the Swavesey Byways rate as she was a Member of the Swavesey Byways Committee.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 26 November 2020 were agreed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments.

At Minute 10, in the last line of the first paragraph, the phrase “Waterbeach action project” to be changed to “Waterbeach access project”.

At Minute 10, in the first sentence of the second paragraph, the phrase “skills workshop” to be changed to “skills programme”.

At Minute 12(f), in the first sentence of the second paragraph, the phrase “due to the development on the aquifer” to be changed to “due to the effect of the development on the aquifer”.

4. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair made the following announcements:

VE and VJ Days

The Chair said he had planted a tree in December to mark these commemorations, which he was pleased to report was doing well.

Chair’s charities

The amounts raised for the Chair’s charities, the Trussell Trust and the Carers’ Trust, was £4920, and £745 had been raised for the Chair’s appeal for Christmas presents for Fulbourn Hospital patients. The Chair said he was grateful to all those who had donated.

Members expressed their appreciation for these fundraising achievements, with applause.

Councillor Douglas de Lacey said that this meeting was likely to be his last as Chair and as a Councillor, as he needed to spend more time with his wife and had decided to resign in March, in order to allow his seat to be contested in the forthcoming local elections. He thanked the Vice Chair, Councillor Anna Bradnam, the Leader, Councillor Bridget Smith, and all the Council’s officers, for their support during what had been a challenging time.

Councillor Bridget Smith, the Leader of the Council, said she was very sad at the prospect of Councillor Douglas de Lacey's departure. The role of Chair had been very difficult during the pandemic, and before then, the Chair and his consort had devoted much time to representing the Council at various engagements. She was grateful to Councillor Douglas de Lacey for his service as Chair of the Council, which had been fulfilled with great commitment and dignity. It had been a pleasure to work with him, and she would miss him.

Councillor Heather Williams expressed her thanks to the Chair, both personally and on behalf of the Conservative Group. She said Councillor de Lacey's attention to detail had been second to none, as had his dedication to the community. She wished him well for the future.

Councillor Nigel Cathcart, indicating his intention to comment, was unable to do so for technical reasons. [Minute 6c refers to his statement at the point he returned to the meeting.]

Councillor Deborah Roberts said, as Councillor Douglas de Lacey's fellow Independent Group Member, that whilst they had not always agreed, she was sorry that he was stepping down. He had worked hard for his ward and was a credit to the Council. She wished him and his wife well for their retirement.

The Chief Executive thanked the Chair for his enormous commitment to the Council and the support he had shown for officers.

5. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

5 (a) From Mr John Gaskell

John Gaskell asked the following question of the Lead Member for Planning Policy and Delivery.

Would the Council accept where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a developer and / or a housebuilder has sold new-build residential properties which have been built to a generally defective condition (for example breaches of building regulations and / or a poor standard of workmanship more generally and / or breaches of build warranties), that acting in the public interest the Council has a duty to thoroughly investigate the matter, and that contingent on its findings, the Council should suspend planning permissions until the miscreant developer / housebuilder has fully addressed all legacy defects and proven that it has put in place robust processes to prevent the same or similar problems moving forward, especially in respect of timber-framed properties that by the nature of their construction tend to present potential fire risks and / or breaches of Part M Regulations on disabled access rights?

The Lead Member for Planning Policy and Delivery, Councillor Tumi Hawkins, thanked Mr Gaskell for his question and sympathised with the issues he faced. She said that the specific development referred to was inspected for compliance with the Building

Regulations by an Approved Inspector, as opposed to the Local Authority Building Control Service. On that basis, the Local Authority Building Control team were unable to intervene in disputes about compliance with the regulations, which needed to be pursued with the inspecting authority. The requirements of the Planning Acts also meant that there was no basis in law to permit a local planning authority to suspend consideration of, or to refuse to receive or determine applications by a developer solely on the basis of the quality of previous developments delivered by that applicant.

John Gaskell asked a supplementary question, referring to recommendations of the Callcutt Review and asking what steps the Council had taken to set standards, protect the interests of new-build home buyers in its constituency, and ensure that local developers were delivering proper standards, especially in circumstances where the Council had worked with a developer on a local project, such as the Moorefield Road development in Whittlesford.

Councillor Tumi Hawkins said the Council had to follow planning law. The Council employed best efforts to influence planning at the early stages and to build commitments to standards into new projects. The Council's award-winning building control service could make recommendations to developers and applicants but could not compel them to follow those recommendations.

5 (b) From Mr Alexander Cox

Vasilis Tspidis asked a question on behalf of Alexander Cox as follows:

The district council recently decided to install outdoor gym and table tennis equipment a mere few steps away from residents' front doors at Pioneer Park, Northstowe. This is just a few months after the Pioneer Park was delivered to its residents. The plans for the park featured none of this equipment.

This council purports to be "a modern and caring council", yet in this instance, council officers and the local members for Longstanton, Oakington and Northstowe planned and orchestrated this controversial development project behind closed doors and carried it out with no meaningful public consultation whatsoever.

Since carrying out this development, officers and members of this council seem more concerned about avoiding another embarrassing judicial review than with actually doing what's right in terms of democratic engagement with the community.

Will the Leader of the Council ask officers to revisit this matter and instruct the Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development to mediate a discussion between local residents and the council members and officers responsible for this ill-advised development?

The Lead Member for Community Resilience, Councillor Bill Handley, thanked Mr Tspidis for the question. He had looked at this matter in detail and noted that a range of local engagement and consultation was carried out in 2019 to reach a decision to install an outdoor gym and tennis tables in Pioneer Park.

He referred to the ambitions for Northstowe to be exemplary in delivering positive health outcomes for its residents and that work had been carried out with partners and the community on what sport and recreation facilities were needed in the first phase of the development. The Northstowe Sports and Wellbeing Group, which is made up of residents of the town, had told the Council clearly that this type of facility in Pioneer Park was important to them. They had actively pressed the Council for installation of

equipment to help improve the health and wellbeing of local people, including young people growing up there. There was a long-established community forum at the town which the Council had updated on what was planned. The equipment was ordered before the Covid-19 pandemic, which had had a big impact on the pace of delivery of the park, including the installation of this equipment.

It was unfortunate that Mr Cox did not live at Northstowe when the project was under development and therefore could not take part in that process. However, very good engagement was carried out with the local community and it was important to the Council that it support communities, now more than ever, to have good access to facilities that were free to use for all, outdoors, and help improve people's health and wellbeing.

Vasilis Tspidis asked a supplementary question on behalf of Alexander Cox, asking why it was that the residents adjacent to the Park were not included in the consultation on that development. He said he had lived there for some time, and at the forums which he had attended no specific locations had been mentioned. If such items were required to be installed, why was this considered after the Park had been developed? It impacted on his property, and his democratic rights had not been heeded, as the paperwork served on him did not refer to the equipment, which occupied double the space originally provided on the plans.

Councillor Bill Handley said he would respond in writing after the meeting.

[The following response to the supplementary question asked on behalf of Alexander Cox was sent to both him and to Vasilis Tspidis, on behalf of Councillor Bill Handley:

Thank you for your question at the Council meeting on Tuesday.

Mr Tspidis helpfully asked your question on your behalf and I promised to write to you to answer the other questions he asked.

As I said at the meeting, a good deal of local engagement and consultation was carried out in 2019 to reach the decision to install the outdoor gym and table-tennis tables in Pioneer Park. We have huge ambitions for the town and want it to be exemplary in delivering positive health outcomes for its residents.

Importantly, we worked with the community to determine what they thought were the sport and recreation facilities needed in the first phase of the development. The Northstowe Sports and Wellbeing Group, which is made up of residents of the town, told us very clearly that this type of facility on Pioneer Park was important to them and, quite understandably, they were actively pressing us to install the equipment to help improve the health and wellbeing of local people, including young people growing up there.

It is unfortunate that you and Mr Tspidis did not live at Northstowe when the project was under discussion and therefore could not take part in that process. Although the engagement work was completed to agree the facilities to be delivered, and we think the facilities will be a big asset for the new town, we are sorry if you felt out of the loop.

Sadly, the community centre has been closed to the public for much of the year and all of the Northstowe Community Forum events had to be switched to an on-line format due to the pandemic. Online forums meant the usual informal information sessions which take place before the main forum presentations were not possible. Ordinarily this is where this sort of update on works starting would have been provided. If the pandemic had not restricted us to all but essential visits, we would have also provided a warning of

the installation to neighbouring homes so you would be aware of any additional noise whilst it was put in.

Officers have previously explained to residents that the equipment is far from a recent addition, the proposal for introduction of the outdoor gym and table tennis tables is not an after-thought; the location and mix of equipment determined early in 2020.

When the equipment was installed it was under the direction of L&Q's Project Director. I note that you still have concerns the equipment is not in the agreed location and does not correspond to the information we have already provided. We have looked at this ourselves but I am asking officers to check with L&Q the location of the equipment against the location plan in the licence agreement once more.]

5 (c) From Mr Daniel Fulton

Daniel Fulton asked his question as follows:

Last year, every pond except one in the village of Longstanton ran completely dry, and for the past six years, South Cambridgeshire District Council has refused to investigate residents' complaints about the environmental effects that the development of Northstowe has had on the hydrology of the aquifer that underlies Longstanton.

Instead of acting impartially as local planning authority, South Cambridgeshire District Council has done everything possible to facilitate the development of Northstowe regardless of the ecological impacts and has been more concerned about protecting itself from political embarrassment rather than with protecting the local environment.

Finally, last year the district council agreed to fund an independent investigation into the hydrological impacts of the Northstowe development to be carried out by HR Wallingford.

However, according to an email sent recently by HR Wallingford, Part 1 of the company's report was being withheld from publication subject to the approval of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

How can the HR Wallingford report be considered to be independent when the very officers who failed to protect the Longstanton aquifer are now responsible for signing off the HR Wallingford report?

Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins, Lead Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Delivery, thanked Mr Fulton for his question. She said that on behalf of Longstanton Parish Council, and with their agreement to the appointment, HR Wallingford had been commissioned to undertake a study into the matters surrounding the water levels in the Kingfisher Pond. The Council and Longstanton Parish Council had subsequently both received a draft phase 1 report from the consultants covering the conceptual model being developed to undertake the commission. Both the Parish and District Councils had been given until 24 February to offer any comments on that report. Following any comments from the Parish or District Council, she understood that the consultants would be working towards publication of their Phase 2 report drawing their conclusions from the investigation that they were undertaking.

Daniel Fulton asked whether in light of the forthcoming election for Longstanton and Northstowe councils the District Council would commit to release Phase 2 by that date so that it could be debated.

Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins said she did not have a specific date for publication, but

once available, it would be published.

The Chair thanked the public speakers for their attendance.

At this point, Councillor Nigel Cathcart having returned to the meeting following technical problems, the Chair invited him to continue his remarks under the Announcements section.

Councillor Nigel Cathcart thanked Councillor Douglas de Lacey for his chairmanship of the Council, which had been meticulous, perceptive and calm. He regretted his departure from the Council and wished him well for the future.

6. PETITIONS

No petitions had been received.

7. TO CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

7 (a) Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021-2026 (Cabinet - 7 December 2020)

Members considered a report on the medium-term financial strategy (MFTS) for the period to 2025/2026.

Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, presented the report. He thanked officers for their tremendous efforts in producing the suite of financial reports in difficult circumstances because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The MFTS refresh incorporated an updated financial forecast of the risks associated with Covid -19 and of the changes made, and intending to be made, by the Government to its support for local government, including changes to the Public Works Loan Board rules. He had included the 2021/22 financial year because of the effect Covid -19 had had this financial year and the material impact it could have on future year forecasting.

Councillor Williams referred to the Service Transformation Programme and said that due to savings and additional revenue from commercial investments, the sum which would be required in savings and additional income during the coming five years was £5 million, approximately the same as it was this time last year. The Council had a healthy General Reserve balance of around £16.5 million which would enable the Council to apply some of it as revenue contributions to capital outlay reducing its Minimum Revenue Provision. He continued to anticipate that the Government would carry out a major review of local government finance next year and he continued to plan for the worst-case scenario.

Councillor Bridget Smith, Leader of the Council, thanked Councillor Williams, and commended officers for their excellent effort in producing the budget reports, at a challenging time. The MFTS ensured the council would have sufficient income to enable it to make a difference to the residents of South Cambridgeshire.

Councillor Heather Williams acknowledged the hard work of officers in producing this report in what had been a difficult year. She expressed concern that the financial forecast was not realistic and that further increased budget pressures should be anticipated than those set out in the report. For these reasons she would not support the recommendations. Financial updates on a daily basis should be provided.

Councillor Nick Wright queried the trajectory on which the Council Tax provision was calculated.

Councillor John Williams responded to the above comments. He said meeting demands for jobs and housing led to growth, and income from Council Tax was secondary. The treasury management strategy addressed the points which Councillor Heather Williams had raised in relation to the need for reserves should circumstances require them. He assured her that liquidity was sufficient.

Councillor Heather Williams said, as a point of personal explanation, she had referred to a three month figure stated in the report, and her point was that a weekly or daily figure should be provided.

Councillor John Williams said he was confident the forecasting was accurate; there were occasions when decisions to borrow rather than using reserves had been taken in specific circumstances, but those were financial decisions, not because of lack of liquidity. If Councillor Heather Williams had any concern she could raise this at any time with the Head of Finance.

Councillor John Williams proposed and the Leader seconded the recommendations as set out in the report. A vote was taken and votes were cast as follows:

In favour (26):

Councillors Henry Batchelor, John Batchelor, Anna Bradnam, Martin Cahn, Nigel Cathcart, Sarah Cheung Johnson, Gavin Clayton, Claire Daunton, Douglas de Lacey, Clare Delderfield, Peter Fane, Neil Gough, Bill Handley, Geoff Harvey, Tumi Hawkins, Pippa Heylings, Alex Malyon, Peter McDonald, Brian Milnes, Dawn Percival, Judith Rippeth, Bridget Smith, Hazel Smith, Aidan van de Weyer, John Williams, Eileen Wilson.

Against (12):

Councillors Ruth Betson, Shrobona Bhattacharya, Tom Bygott, Grenville Chamberlain, Graham Cone, Sue Ellington, Mark Howell, Deborah Roberts, Bunty Waters, Heather Williams, Richard Williams, Nick Wright.

Abstain (0)

Council **RESOLVED** to:

- (a) Acknowledge the projected changes in service spending and the overall resources available to the Council over the medium-term.
- (b) Approve the refreshed Medium-Term Financial Strategy at Appendix A and updated financial forecast at Appendix B to the report.

7 (b) Localised Council Tax Support Scheme: 2021/22 (Cabinet - 3 February 2021)

Members considered a report on the Localised Council Tax Support scheme 2021/2022.

Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, presented the report. He said the Localised Council Tax Support scheme, introduced in 2019, was based on banded discounts to help those on Universal Credit. The scheme had worked well and

had proved its worth with the significant increase in uptake up this year from residents financially impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic. In the light of Covid 19 he intended to review the scheme in the Summer. Meanwhile the current scheme included provision to uprate it for inflation and he asked Members to support the recommendation to approve Option 1 in the report and adjust the scheme in line with the Consumer Price Index.

Councillor Hazel Smith said the administration of the scheme worked well.

Councillor Heather Williams said it was imperative to support people especially in the Covid 19 crisis. She agreed that Option1 was the best option.

Councillor John Williams proposed and Councillor Hazel Smith seconded the recommendation.

By affirmation Council **RESOLVED:**

to approve the adoption of Option 1, comprising the LCTS Income Bands scheme currently in operation, with an uprating of calculation figures in line with the Consumer Price Index.

7 (c) Capital Investment Programme (Cabinet - 3 February 2021)

Members considered a report on the Capital Programme for financial years 2021/2022 to 2025/2026.

Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, presented the report. He said that in light of the Covid 19 pandemic and the change to the Public Works Loan Board rules, it had been necessary to re-phase the Capital Programme significantly. The total gross capital budget for this financial year had been planned to be £119,270,000, but mainly due to the impact of the pandemic on the investment strategy, it had been revised to £48,621,000. The budget was further affected by the PWLB changes going forward to 2025/2026. The total forecast spend on investments was well within the £340million limit set by the Council. He asked Members to approve the recommendation.

Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins seconded the proposal. She thanked officers and referred to the impact of the pandemic which necessitated the changes set out in the report.

Councillor Grenville Chamberlain sought assurance as to the robustness of the desktop transformation programme and telephony project in light of current ICT issues.

Councillor Graham Cone questioned what appeared to be a lack of allocation to Planning after the year 2020/2021 and said the grants and contributions for this year seemed low.

Councillor Mark Howells asked whether the electric vehicles referred to in the report were eco-friendly and said the refuse collection figures for 2025/2026 were higher than for previous years.

Councillor Heather Williams said the level of capital investment was 27 times the Council Tax base figure. She did not support burdening the Council with that level of borrowing to fulfil the administration's political aspirations.

Councillor Deborah Roberts agreed with this comment, and said prudence was required.

Councillor John Williams responded to the points raised. He said after the current

financial year, it was not proposed to use Planning funds for capital projects. Regarding grants and contributions, the report reflected the position this financial year: there had been less financial growth due to the Covid 19 pandemic, and there had been an impact also from changes to the PWLB. Regarding the telephony project, there was no connection with the ICT system. Regarding refuse vehicles, the Council had purchased vehicles on a life expectancy of five years, and when replacement was due, electric vehicles would be procured. Regarding borrowing, the Council was not borrowing beyond its means and the MTFS approved earlier showed the Council could afford the capital programme.

A vote was taken and votes were cast as follows:

In favour (25):

Councillors Henry Batchelor, John Batchelor, Anna Bradnam, Martin Cahn, Nigel Cathcart, Gavin Clayton, Claire Daunton, Douglas de Lacey, Clare Delderfield, Peter Fane, Neil Gough, Bill Handley, Geoff Harvey, Tumi Hawkins, Pippa Heylings, Alex Malyon, Peter McDonald, Brian Milnes, Dawn Percival, Judith Rippeth, Bridget Smith, Hazel Smith, Aidan van de Weyer, John Williams, Eileen Wilson.

Against (12):

Councillors Ruth Betson, Shrobona Bhattacharya, Tom Bygott, Grenville Chamberlain, Graham Cone, Sue Ellington, Mark Howell, Deborah Roberts, Bunty Waters, Heather Williams, Richard Williams, Nick Wright.

Abstain (0)

Council **RESOLVED**:

To approve the revised Capital Programme outlined at Appendix A to the report.

7 (d) Treasury Management Strategy (Cabinet - 3 February 2021)

Members considered a report reviewing the Treasury Management Strategy and considering a refreshed version, recommended by Cabinet.

Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, presented the report. He drew Members' attention to changes in the borrowing rules for the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) which came into effect in November 2020, shown in red text on the report for ease of reference. These changes required the Section 151 officer to give an assurance when borrowing that the Council had reasons other than primarily for yield and that no other commercial asset was being bought for this reason, including from reserves, for the following three years. The Council's investment strategy enabled compliance with the new rules and by not pursuing Stream 1 investments he was confident the Council could take on board these rules going forward. The new rules were not retrospective so did not affect existing loans such as that to Ermine Street. Moreover, when need for refinancing arose, existing Stream 1 purchases would be eligible for PWLB support, even if the original money had been spent on property primarily for yield. The Medium Tern Financial Strategy required finding £5 million in the coming four years some of which would be found from new investments, and this aim continued to be achievable. The Investment Strategy was being revised accordingly and would be brought before Members in due course. Councillor John Williams asked Members to approve the updated Treasury Management Strategy.

Councillor Brian Milnes, Lead Cabinet Member for Environment Services and Licensing, seconded the proposal. He said the question of interest rates would become more prominent, including the prospect of negative interest rates, and it was important to be aware of the potential impact.

Councillor Sue Ellington said she was concerned that at a time of significant change in the national economic scene, the Council was investing and continuing to borrow at this level. The Council had once never borrowed; debt could burden the Council.

Councillor Heather Williams referred to liquidity and said the lesson from the pandemic was that cash was needed, for example, to pay staff. Borrowing should not be seen as a piggy bank. She asked what were the daily and weekly thresholds for liquidity.

Councillor John Williams said he was happy to provide Councillor Heather Williams with a list the Council's short-term liquidity, and she could have asked for any information before this meeting. The figure for three months was adequate at £7 million, and it was scaremongering to suggest otherwise.

Responding to Councillor Sue Ellington, Councillor John Williams said the table at annex B of the report set out the portfolio and external borrowing, and aside from the PWLB, the Council had no long-term borrowing at the moment, because it had used its cash reserves for commercial investments. There was a need to start borrowing but it was wrong to suggest this was beyond means.

Councillor Heather Williams said, as a point of explanation, she had asked for the liquidity target on daily and weekly basis three times.

The Chair said Councillor John Williams had offered to provide these figures.

A vote was taken and votes were cast as follows:

In favour (24):

Councillors Henry Batchelor, John Batchelor, Anna Bradnam, Martin Cahn, Nigel Cathcart, Gavin Clayton, Claire Daunton, Douglas de Lacey, Clare Delderfield, Peter Fane, Neil Gough, Bill Handley, Tumi Hawkins, Pippa Heylings, Alex Malyon, Peter McDonald, Brian Milnes, Dawn Percival, Judith Rippeth, Bridget Smith, Hazel Smith, Aidan van de Weyer, John Williams, Eileen Wilson.

Against (12):

Councillors Ruth Betson, Shrobona Bhattacharya, Tom Bygott, Grenville Chamberlain, Graham Cone, Sue Ellington, Mark Howell, Deborah Roberts, Bunty Waters, Heather Williams, Richard Williams, Nick Wright.

Abstain (1):

Councillor Geoff Harvey.

Council **RESOLVED** to

Approve the updated Treasury Management Strategy attached at Appendix A to the report which set the policy framework for the Council's treasury management activity, including (i) the Treasury Management Policy Statement, (ii) Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and (iii) Treasury Indicators.

7 (e) Capital Strategy (Cabinet - 3 February 2021)

Members considered the recommendation of Cabinet and report on the revised Capital Strategy.

Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance presented the report. He said the Capital Strategy was reviewed annually and for ease of reference the changes were shown in red. He highlighted the inclusion of references to climate emergency; a commitment to conducting asset condition assessments to inform the identification of capital replacements; to take account of the changes to the PWLB rules and to conform to the new leasing Accounting Standard. With these changes he proposed the recommendations.

Councillor Aidan van de Weyer seconded the proposal to approve the recommendations and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor Heather Williams referred to the estimates of capital financing requirement. She said this indicator set limits for the net external borrowing, and it was not “scaremongering” to ask whether the forecast capital requirement of £511 million in 2023/20242 would go up. The Council Tax base was £10 million. This figure was 51 times that base.

Councillor Aidan van de Weyer welcomed the updated Strategy. It was vital for the long-term health of the Council and for its ability to provide services in the long term to ensure a sound financial basis for capital strategy.

Councillor Heather Williams sought to speak on a point of order, which the Chair refused.

Councillor Aidan van de Weyer continued, saying it was the Council’s duty to raise funds in light of the government’s failure to do so, in order to provide services in as responsible way as it could.

Councillor Deborah Roberts said the money under discussion was not the Council’s money but that of the public, and the public would not run their own budgets in this way. It was an affront to blame the government.

Councillor John Williams said these were the borrowing limits and there was no intention to borrow that much. The limits were a matter for the Council to decide.

A vote was taken and votes were cast as follows:

In favour (24):

Councillors Henry Batchelor, John Batchelor, Anna Bradnam, Martin Cahn, Nigel Cathcart, Claire Daunton, Douglas de Lacey, Clare Delderfield, Peter Fane, Neil Gough, Bill Handley, Geoff Harvey, Tumi Hawkins, Pippa Heylings, Alex Malyon, Peter McDonald, Brian Milnes, Dawn Percival, Judith Rippeth, Bridget Smith, Hazel Smith, Aidan van de Weyer, John Williams, Eileen Wilson.

Against (12):

Councillors Ruth Betson, Shrobona Bhattacharya, Tom Bygott, Grenville Chamberlain, Graham Cone, Sue Ellington, Mark Howell, Deborah Roberts, Bunty Waters, Heather

Williams, Richard Williams, Nick Wright.

Abstain (0)

Council **RESOLVED:**

To approve (i) the updated Capital Strategy attached at Appendix A to the report which sets the policy framework for the development, management and monitoring of capital investment, and (ii) Prudential Indicators.

7 (f) General Fund Budget 2021/2022 (Cabinet - 3 February 2021)

Members considered the recommendation of Cabinet and report on the General Fund Budget for 2021/2022.

Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, presented the report. He said the proposed General Fund Revenue Budget for 2021/22 aimed to continue supporting residents and businesses in recovering from the pandemic. It also took account of the Government's local government financial settlement for the coming financial year, which was dependent on councils increasing council tax bills. The net expenditure for 2021/22 to be met from Government Grants, Business Rates and Local Taxpayers was estimated at nearly £21.7 million. The probable outturn figure for the current financial year was £25.2 million. To help bridge this gap Council Tax payers were being asked to pay an extra 10 pence a week for the average Band D property, bringing their annual council tax bill to £155.31. Nevertheless, the council tax bill would continue to be in the lowest 25 per cent of all district council taxes.

Councillor John Williams said that, due to the pandemic, business rate income had decreased and he had concerns that the long term effects of Covid 19 in terms of business failures and property devaluation might impact on Business Rate growth this coming financial year. The Council would continue participating in the Business Rates pooling arrangement with neighbouring district councils and the county council. This arrangement would deliver an estimated additional £1 million. The Council was not just relying on more money from council tax payers and had embarked on an ambitious four-year plan to transform Council service quality, better realign financial resources to business plan priorities and improve customer service. This would achieve a reduction in net expenditure of over £2.1 million. For Covid 19 the Council had set aside a contingency of a quarter of a million pounds and, as a result of a proposal by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, Councillor Williams was pleased to incorporate into the General Fund Revenue budget a two-year post for a Welfare and Visiting Advisor to support and enhance the work of the Housing Benefits team. There was more funding for homelessness at this time of economic hardship; for land drainage when there was record-breaking rainfall due to climate change and for staffing support to maximise investment opportunities, which was key to retain financial resilience to deliver place-making and income. Councillor Williams moved the recommendations.

Councillor Peter McDonald, Lead Cabinet Member for Business Recovery, seconded the motion.

The Chair said he understood the Leader of the Opposition wished to propose an amendment.

Councillor Heather Williams proposed an amendment as follows:

- 1. Establish extra Planning Enforcement Support*

The Council would establish an extra Planning Enforcement Officer, under a permanent contract.

2. Funding

It is proposed that the amount required of £41,600 be funded from a reduction to the budget within communications for the South Cambridgeshire magazine of £28,100, still leaving budget for 2 copies of the magazine to be printed and delivered each year and where more than one Special Responsibility Allowance is paid to a particular member, in future they receive one allowance. This will produce a saving of £13,500.

Councillor Heather Williams said those on Planning Committee were aware that planning enforcement had struggled to keep up with the need, despite best efforts. More resource was needed for enforcement. She was aware short-term provision was being made, but to restore faith, she proposed to fund this provision permanently. It would be right to reverse the decision to allow two special responsibility allowances, introduced 18 months ago, and therefore this amendment was fully costed.

Councillor Graham Cone seconded the amendment. He said the amount sought was not large but would make a big difference.

Councillor Sue Ellington spoke on the amendment. She said it was important that the Council was seen to enforce decisions, and the enforcement officers were under significant pressure.

Councillor Dr Richard Williams supported the amendment, stating that residents did not like to see lack of rules being enforced.

Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins, Lead Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Delivery, thanked Councillor Heather Williams for her concern regarding enforcement. Officers were to be commended for doing good work. However what residents thought should be done and what the law provided for were two different things. Currently she was looking at the Council's enforcement policy as part of an overall restructure being undertaken with the Greater Cambridge Planning Service. An area meeting with the parishes would take place so all could understand what was possible and what was not. Within the enforcement team there were seven posts, of which one was vacant. She did not consider there was a need for the amendment, as there was provision for staff to be in place.

Councillor Deborah Roberts said it would be disappointing if the amendment were not accepted. There was concern within parishes about this matter. Parishes and residents did not understand why expected enforcement action was not taken. She would support reducing the number of issues of the Council's magazine to contribute to funding extra resource, and the doubling of special responsibility allowances was not satisfactory.

Councillor Nick Wight said the enforcement team was clearly struggling and the whole point of joint planning arrangements was to make them more robust.

The Chair asked Councillor Gavin Clayton if he wished to speak, in view of his earlier internet connectivity problems. Councillor Clayton confirmed he had no comment.

A vote was taken on the amendment and votes were cast as follows:

In favour (13):

Councillors Ruth Betson, Shrobona Bhattacharya, Tom Bygott, Grenville Chamberlain, Graham Cone, Douglas de Lacey, Sue Ellington, Mark Howell, Deborah Roberts, Bunt Waters, Heather Williams, Richard Williams, Nick Wright.

Against (22):

Councillors Henry Batchelor, John Batchelor, Anna Bradnam, Martin Cahn, Nigel Cathcart, Claire Daunton, Clare Delderfield, Peter Fane, Neil Gough, Bill Handley, Geoff Harvey, Tumi Hawkins, Pippa Heylings, Peter McDonald, Brian Milnes, Dawn Percival, Judith Rippeth, Bridget Smith, Hazel Smith, Aidan van de Weyer, John Williams, Eileen Wilson.

Abstain (1):

Councillor Gavin Clayton.

The Chair declared the amendment to have fallen.

Councillor Gavin Clayton spoke on the substantive motion. He thanked Councillor John Williams for including provision for the Visiting Advisor for Welfare and Benefits, which the Labour Group had proposed. This support was important in view of current caseloads. He queried a savings figure for Planning which had been included previously.

Councillor Heather Williams said the Council had a year ago advised a cut to the budget for Planning was necessary. That cut should be reversed. Earlier, Councillor John Williams had stated the Council could fund the capital programme, there was a budget shortfall. This was not a fully costed budget. When would the £1 million which had been cut be restored?

Councillor Ruth Betson asked, given the fragility of this budget, whether the Lead Member for Finance would guarantee the Council Tax increase would not be over £5 and therefore subject to a referendum.

Councillor Sue Ellington referred to the amount of £150K to be given for land drainage. She said she was grateful for support for her ward areas, but questioned whether the funding was sufficient in view of the need for increase clearing due to lack of road sweeping and climate change.

Councillor Grenville Chamberlain asked why the table set out at paragraph 26 of the report, setting out movements from the 2020/2021 approved budget, had been substantially remodelled since the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at which it had recently been considered.

Councillor Mark Howell referred to a loss of £300K in the housing services provision and the rebalancing of collection rounds so that only one loader was involved. He asked for assurance that the loaders would not be expected to do the work of two people, and what would happen to any staff who were no longer needed as a result.

Councillor Dr Richard Williams referred to parish precepts and asked whether these were now fixed.

Councillor Nick Wright said in recent weeks applications for huge developments at Waterbeach and Bourn Airfield had come forward. It seemed the Council was reliant on housing growth to plug a financial black hole which the administration was making.

Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins said in response to the points raised by Councillor Heather Williams that over £1 million which had previously been allocated to legal services had been carried over, in anticipation of a number of challenges from planning agents. It was prudent to remove that provision rather than to class it as an underspend.

Councillor Brian Milnes, Lead Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Licensing, referring to Councillor Sue Ellington's query, said managing watercourses entailed collaboration with agencies to ensure water courses were dealt with as a whole. A new officer was in post and the team would be split into two in order to work on a scheme of collaboration with the county council and Anglia Water.

Councillor John Williams said the sum of £150K referred to by Councillor Gavin Clayton had been placed in the community and wellbeing head within the budget. Further details could be provided direct if Councillor Clayton wished. In respect of the rebalancing of the budget question from Councillor Heather Williams, it was a requirement to set a balanced budget, which this was. In previous years, surpluses had gone into reserves, and appendix A set out how these were being drawn on to achieve balance.

Regarding a referendum on council tax, this was out of the question.

Regarding the point raise by Councillor Sue Ellington, Councillor John Williams referred her to the environment agency.

Regarding the changes to the figures taken to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the meeting of the committee had been some weeks before and he had explained that there would be changes by the time of the Council meeting. The past 12 months had been unusual, and clearly it had taken immense effort to ensure that the budget submitted to this meeting was as good as it could be. He had introduced the summary table, which had not been provided in the past, to identify where there was increased or reduced spending, as a snapshot.

With respect to refuse rounds, Councillor John Williams said the transformation project had reviewed waste collections in order to maximise efficiency and value for money. Another area was litter-picking which was back in-house.

Regarding the parish precepts, these had now been set.

Regarding growth, there was a five year land supply based on the number of applications approved and the build out rate. Council Tax was based on this growth, which was driven by jobs and the need for new homes.

A recorded vote was taken and votes were cast as follows.

In favour (24):

Councillors Henry Batchelor, John Batchelor, Anna Bradnam, Martin Cahn, Nigel Cathcart, Gavin Clayton, Claire Daunton, Douglas de Lacey, Clare Delderfield, Peter Fane, Neil Gough, Bill Handley, Geoff Harvey, Tumi Hawkins, Pippa Heylings, Peter McDonald, Brian Milnes, Dawn Percival, Judith Rippeth, Bridget Smith, Hazel Smith, Aidan van de Weyer, John Williams, Eileen Wilson.

Against (12):

Councillors Ruth Betson, Shrobona Bhattacharya, Tom Bygott, Grenville Chamberlain,

Graham Cone, Sue Ellington, Mark Howell, Deborah Roberts, Bunty Waters, Heather Williams, Richard Williams, Nick Wright.

Abstain (0)

Council **RESOLVED**

To:

- (a) Take into account the detailed budgets presented at Appendix B, and summarised at Appendix A, with an estimated General Fund Gross Operating Expenditure for 2021/2022 of £71.917 million, estimated Gross Operating Income of £49.146 million and estimated General Fund Net Operating Expenditure of £22.771 million;
- (b) Acknowledge the key factors which have led to the proposed 2021/2022 General Fund Revenue Budget, with service pressures summarised at Appendix C and offsetting efficiency savings/policy options summarised at Appendix D;
- (c) Acknowledge that the 2021/2022 General Fund Revenue Budget gross expenditure is covered by forecast income sources (assuming no change in Government grant) and, therefore, any addition(s) to expenditure that are made by the Cabinet or Council will need to be met from the General Fund Balance;
- (d) Approve the 2021/2022 General Fund Revenue Budget taking into account the statement by the Chief Finance Officer on the risks and robustness of the estimates as required under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 (reproduced at Appendix F);
- (e) Set the Council Tax Requirement for 2021/2022 at £9,997,693;
- (f) Approve an increase in the District element of the Council Tax of £5 per annum, giving an average Band D Council Tax of £155.31, plus the relevant amounts required by the precepts of the Parish Councils, Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridgeshire Police & Crime Commissioner, and the Cambridgeshire Fire Authority;
- (g) Approve the estimates of the amounts required to be made under the Non-domestic Rating (Rates Retention) Regulations 2013 as set out in paragraphs 36 to 39;
- (h) Approve the acceptance of any grants made during 2021/2022 by the Government under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 in respect of Business Rates;
- (i) Approve the use of the additional income from the Business Rate Pool, estimated at £1,100,000 in 2021/2022, for transfer to the established Renewables Reserve for priority projects;
- (j) Subject to any changes to the recommendations above, Full Council approves that:
 - (i) The 2021/2022 General Fund Revenue Budget based on known

commitments at this time and planned levels of Service/functions resulting in a Budget Requirement of £21.722 million;

- (ii) The District Council Precept on the Collection Fund (Council Tax Requirement) of £9.998 million in 2021/2022 (based on the Local Government Settlement) and a Band D Council Tax of £155.31.

The Chair adjourned the meeting for a short break, from 4.20pm to 4.55pm.

7 (g) Housing Revenue Account Budget 2021/2022 (Cabinet - 3 February 2021)

Members considered the recommendation of Cabinet and report on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Capital Budget 2021/2022.

Councillor John Williams introduced the report. He said the HRA budget continued to be set in the context of a 30-year business plan. The estimated HRA balance at the end of this financial year would be just over £2.5 million and while this was adequate for HRA purposes it would not be prudent to let it fall much below that figure. Appendix B of the report set out how this level would be addressed. There was no alternative to increasing council rent levels if the Council was to maintain its drive to improve customer service to its tenants and grow its social housing stock. Rents would increase by 1.5 per cent in line with Government policy and this meant that the average social rent would increase to £106.02 per week. In line with rent legislation affordable rents would continue to be no more than 80% of the market rent. He was acutely aware that some of the Council's tenants were having financial problems, and current council rent arrears had increased significantly. However, the introduction of the new Orchard housing management system should allow for targeted review of tenants' arrears and collections. He anticipated this position would improve as the nation emerged from the pandemic and the HRA budget also included support for tenants receiving Universal Credit. As to the council house building programme, external funding from section 106 commuted sums and retained right to buy receipts would be utilised as identified in the Housing Capital Investment Plan. He moved the recommendations.

The Lead Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Hazel Smith, seconded the motion. She said the HRA revenue budget and capital programme has been scrutinised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, other than where changes which were not available at that time had been incorporated. The housing stock was in good shape and the aim was to achieve zero carbon by 2050. Regarding capital spending, some areas which had been budgeted for had required less, so there had been no need to borrow to fund home building. The document set out the numbers of new council homes which had been built. An area to monitor was the amount of council tax owed, as this had gone up since last year. Councillor Hazel Smith thanked officers for their hard work and commended the report to Members.

Councillor Mark Howell said this was a good report but questioned the lower figure for the percentage of the housing stock reported as decent, compared to the previous year. He asked how many such properties there were and whether they had fallen below the standard on gas checks.

Councillor Hazel Smith confirmed the gas checks compliance was 100%.

Councillor Nigel Cathcart said he supported the strategy. Council rents had increased significantly but below housing association and market level rents, so he was happy to support the recommendations. Arrears should be treated with a sense of humanity and

discretion. He declared a pecuniary interest as he rented a Council garage to store his car.

Councillor Grenville Chamberlain questioned whether this was the right time to increase rents for people on benefits.

Councillor John Williams responded to the above points. He was sympathetic to those in arrears and had had good feedback from Housing Officers regarding the early identification of tenants who were struggling.

It was **RESOLVED** by affirmation to

Housing Revenue Account (HRA): Revenue

- (a) approve the HRA revenue budget for 2021/2022 as shown in the HRA Budget Summary as presented at Appendix A;

HRA: Review of Rents and Charges

- (b) Approve that council dwelling rents for all social rented properties be increased by the Consumer Prices Index plus 1% (1.5%), in line with legislative requirements introduced as part of the Welfare Reform and Work Act, with effect from 1st April 2021;
- (c) Approve that affordable rents are reviewed in line with rent legislation, to ensure that rents charged are no more than 80% of market rent for 2021/2022. Local policy is to cap affordable rents at the lower level of Local Housing Allowance, which will result in rent variations in line with any changes notified to the authority in this level, effective from 1st April 2021;
- (d) Approve inflationary increases of 0.6% in garage rents for 2021/2022.
- (e) Approve the proposed service charges for HRA services and facilities provided to both tenants and leaseholders, as shown in Appendix D.

HRA: Capital

- (f) Approve the required level of funding for new build investment between 2021/2022 and 2025/2026 to ensure that commitments can be met in respect of the investment of all right to buy receipts currently retained or anticipated to be received by the authority for this period. This expenditure will take the form of HRA new build, with the 70% top up met by other HRA resources;
- (g) Approve the HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy forecasts as shown in Appendix B;
- (h) Approve the Housing Capital Programme as shown in Appendix C.

8. COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTION

Members considered a report on the Council Tax Resolution.

Councillor John Williams moved the recommendation and Councillor Bill Handley seconded the motion.

A recorded vote being required by legislation, a vote was taken and votes were cast as follows:

In favour (24):

Councillors Henry Batchelor, John Batchelor, Ruth Betson, Shrobona Bhattacharya, Anna Bradnam, Tom Bygott, Martin Cahn, Nigel Cathcart, Grenville Chamberlain, Gavin Clayton, Graham Cone, Claire Daunton, Douglas de Lacey, Clare Delderfield, Sue Ellington, Peter Fane, Neil Gough, Bill Handley, Geoff Harvey, Tumi Hawkins, Pippa Heylings, Mark Howell, Peter McDonald, Brian Milnes, Dawn Percival, Judith Rippeth, Deborah Roberts, Bridget Smith, Hazel Smith, Aidan van de Weyer, Bunty Waters, Heather Williams, John Williams, Richard Williams, Eileen Wilson.

Against (0)

Abstain (0)

Council **RESOLVED:**

That the Council Tax Resolution, detailed at Appendix A of the report, be approved.

9. SWAVESEY BYEWAYS RATE 2021/22

Members considered a report on the Swavesey Byways Rate.

The Lead Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Delivery, Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins, proposed a motion to support the recommendation of the Advisory Committee. She said the Council provided the materials for the work and that this kept costs low.

Councillor Sue Ellington said the situation had changed last year as there had been a need to identify people able to take on the work. Working with the parish council, a way forward had been agreed. She thanked all involved and seconded the motion.

Councillor Heather Williams commended Councillor Ellington's dedication and hard work.

Councillor Brian Milnes, Lead Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Licensing said he too supported Councillor Ellington's diligence. Any change to this anomalous situation would require a change in primary legislation which would be expensive, so the way forward which had been identified was appropriate.

Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins thanked all involved.

The Council **RESOLVED** by affirmation

To retain the level of the Swavesey Byways rate at £1.20 per hectare for land within the charge paying area for the period 2021/22 in order to fund the required level of

maintenance.

10. **CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2021/22**

Councillor Anna Bradnam, Vice Chair of the Council, thanked officers for their work in producing the forthcoming civic year's timetable of meetings, and moved the recommendation.

Councillor Aiden van de Weyer seconded the motion.

By affirmation Council **RESOLVED**

To approve the Calendar of Meetings 2021/22 as set out at Appendix A.

11. **CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY**

The Chair invited Members to note the reports on the work of the Combined Authority and to comment, if any Member wished to do so.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bridget Smith, pointed out that she was the Council's representative on the Combined Authority Board, rather than Councillor Neil Gough, as indicated on the report. She referred to the affordable housing budget and said the sum of £45 million had yet to be released, so representations had been made to the Minister. Other matters of note included the Mayor's plans for the Cambridge Metro, for which a special purchase vehicle company would be set up.

Councillor Grenville Chamberlain said the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had met on 27 November 2020, rather than 23 November 2020.

Council **NOTED** the report on the recent meetings of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.

12. **GREATER CAMBRIDGE PARTNERSHIP**

The Chair of the Council invited Members to consider the report summarising the business of the Greater Cambridge Partnership.

Councillor Neil Gough, the Council's representative on the Partnership's Executive Board, summarised the work of the Board, and said he welcomed the independent audit review which had been set up in relation to the Cambourne to Cambridge Better Public Transport Project, and an independent expert was in the process of being appointed.

Council **NOTED** the report on the recent meetings of the Greater Cambridge Partnership.

13. **MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND OTHER BODIES**

Members noted changes in membership made in accordance with the wishes of Group Leaders in respect of places allocated to their Groups on committees and other bodies.

The Chief Executive sought a correction to the agenda to enable Council to endorse, as well as to note, the change in officer membership of the Investment Partnership Boards.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bridget Smith, welcomed Councillor Sue Ellington

as the Vice Chair of the Grants Advisory Committee.

Council by affirmation **RESOLVED**

- (a) To note and endorse the following changes in appointments and memberships of committees and substitute arrangements:
 - (i) the election as Vice Chair of the Grants Advisory Committee of Councillor Sue Ellington, following the resignation of Councillor Clare Delderfield from that role;
 - (ii) the replacement of Councillor Clare Delderfield by Councillor Bill Handley as a regular member of the Grants Advisory Committee.
 - (iii) the replacement of Councillor Clare Delderfield by Councillor Steve Hunt as a substitute member of the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee;
 - (iv) The appointment of Councillor Ian Sollom to the Brexit Advisory Group, to fill a vacancy arising from the resignation of former Councillor Philip Allen.

- (b) To note and endorse that the Chief Executive has appointed the Head of Environment and Waste to the Officer representation on the Investment Partnership Boards, replacing the Chief Operating Officer.

14. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

14 (a) From Councillor Grenville Chamberlain

Will the Leader explain whether the recently introduced change of rules in respect of loans provided by the Public Works Loan Board would have impacted the Council's ability to borrow funds for the purpose of acquiring any of the recently purchased properties? If so, which ones?

Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, said the changes announced by the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) in November 2020 were not retrospective. However, had the rules been in force at the time of the Council's commercial property purchases from 2018 the Council would have been unable to fund certain purchases from PWLB borrowing. He listed the properties which would have been affected, which had been purchased from cash reserves. He referred to the criteria for PWLB support for re-financing where it was defined as a Treasury Management activity and explained that lending to Ermine Street, as set up by the previous administration, and described by that administration as having the single objective as generating income to protect council services, would have been affected by the new rules. Ermine Street had now been repurposed to deliver housing.

Councillor Grenville Chamberlain asked as a supplementary question, whether the Lead Cabinet Member for Finance could confirm a strategy in place regarding properties vacated as a result of the impact of the pandemic.

Councillor John Williams said that to his knowledge, vacancies had not changed significantly from levels at the start of this financial year.

14 (b) From Councillor Dr Richard Williams

Has the Leader, any member of Cabinet or any Senior Officer of the Greater Cambridge

Planning Service held any discussions, or had any other contact, with Hill Group and/or L & Q Estates (including their representatives or agents), concerning the proposed 'Westley Green' development near Six Mile Bottom?

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bridget Smith suggested that for future queries of this nature, a direct request be sent. She responded that no officers had met with the Hill Group, although it should be noted that it was recommended good practice to encourage early engagement with developers. She and Councillors John Williams, Aidan van de Weyer and Dr Tumi Hawkins had received a letter from the agent, in February 2021, and as this was from a former county councillor whom she knew, she had telephoned him regarding providing notification to the MP's office so that a press release could be issued. This was the extent of the conversation. Councillor John Williams had responded it was not appropriate for him to enter into discussion; Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins had not responded and Councillor Aidan van de Weyer had responded regarding the lack of warning prior to a press release being issued.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Dr Richard Williams said the proposed development concerned Hill Group, with whom the Council had entered a limited liability partnership. He asked the Leader whether the Council could give an assurance that its limited liability partnership would not be involved in these kinds of developments.

The Leader replied that there had been no conversation to which she was privy regarding Hill Group as part of that partnership with Westley Green. She said she could not predict what schemes the Council would get involved in in the future with Hill Group but the Council had no plans to enter into a partnership with Westley Green.

14 (c) From Councillor Shrobona Bhattacharya

Integration, equality, and diversity will face more difficulties in a "working from home" situation. What is Council doing extra to maintain the culture for equality and diversity in balance?

The Chair noted that Councillor Shrobona Bhattacharya had left the meeting and sought the advice of the Monitoring Officer regarding process.

The Monitoring Officer said the standing orders made no provision for a question without notice not to receive a response once it had been selected, despite the questioner no longer being present. A written response could be sent and appended to the Minutes.

The Chair asked that the question be set aside.

[The Leader's written response was sent after the meeting, as follows:

The Council has recently agreed and published its Equality Scheme for 2020 - 2024 which sets out our organisation's equality objectives and commitments. These enable SCDC to challenge discrimination, promote equality and help us achieve our corporate objectives. The Equality Scheme also outlines our commitments to help promote equality and raise awareness of equality issues, including actions around disability, mental health in new communities and in the workplace and support for Gypsy and Traveller communities in the district.

The Equality Scheme sets out an action plan which includes a number of measures relating to employment of our workforce including the formation of a staff led Equality

and Diversity Forum which will contribute ideas and help us to look at employment policies and working environments to ensure that they support all colleagues.

A number of events to celebrate culture and history as well as mandatory training on unconscious bias have been delivered to the workforce in the last 12 months and further events and awareness raising events are planned. All events have been online and made available to colleagues to view at a time to suit them.

In addition, the Council has signed up to the Disability Confident Scheme and has already achieved level 1 and has been continuing to work towards level 2 accreditation during the past 12 months.

Following a motion to Council in respect of Anti Racism, a Member Task and Finish group chaired by Cllr Sarah Cheung Johnson has made progress in reviewing a number of areas and a report with their recommendations will be presented to Scrutiny later this week.

Throughout the pandemic, the council has supported all officers to work from home and, when restrictions allow, to resume site and home visits. This has been achieved by following safe working practices and using risk assessments and applying safe systems of work which take account of specific requirements. Homeworking Display Screen Equipment training and assessment tools have been provided to help staff to work safely. The council engages with organisations which can help individuals with specific needs such as Access for Work. Adaptions to interviews have been made to support candidates with the online process if required. Twice weekly VLOGs from the Leadership team have also raised the importance of wellbeing, supporting colleagues and inclusion.]

14 (d) From Councillor Geoff Harvey

Last week, central government published a policy paper 'Planning for sustainable growth in the OxCam Arc.

Regarding the input by the Leader and the Chief Executive, how influential has this been in raising the profile of environmental considerations is this Government promoted major infrastructure project?

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bridget Smith, said at the inception of Arc, the environment was expressly discussed, but she had promoted its consideration and the Minister had agreed that this aspect should have a dedicated workstream. This work was developing environmental principles and she was pleased these were now given prominence in addition to the economy.

14 (e) From Councillor Sue Ellington

Members will remember that at November's full council meeting I asked a question about where the foul water from Cambourne West would be treated. On 28th January I was concerned to receive a written reply that it would be going to Uttons Drove treatment plant at Swavesey thus putting significant strain on Uttons Drove capacity but possibly more importantly on the open drainage system which carries that additional water and pumps it into the river. That open drainage system which runs around Swavesey places a great threat of flooding to the whole village. On further investigation the Swavesey Internal Drainage Board have expressed alarm at this news as they were not consulted and I have received an email from the Flood and Risk manager for the Environment

Agency Eastern Region asking me for further information as the Environment Agency were not consulted about this change.

Can the lead member explain how the decision was reached to change from Papworth to Uttons Drove without proper consultation?

The Lead Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Delivery, Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins, said the Council understood that Anglian Water had taken the decision that waste water from the Cambourne West development should be directed to Utton's Drove rather than to Papworth. This was an operational decision for Anglian Water and not one on which the Council or the Local Planning Authority had been consulted. Given that the Council had no role in the decision as to routing of the foul water from Cambourne West, she would advise that a discussion between Anglian Water, the Environment Agency and the Internal Drainage Board might be the most appropriate way to address any concerns.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Sue Ellington said she had been told that the outflow from Northstowe and Cambourne was one cubic metre per second and that pumping had been required around Swavesey. She asked whether the Lead Cabinet Member could convene a meeting for all parties.

Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins said she would support seeking a solution.

14 (f) From Councillor Gavin Clayton

Can the Lead Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Delivery please let us know who the officer is that is dealing with the application for Cambourne High St and agree to meet to discuss how we can progress the consideration of the planning application as soon as possible?

Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins said there was, to her knowledge, no planning application, but pre-application discussions had taken place. She offered to arrange a meeting.

Councillor Gavin Clayton asked whether following disinvestment on the High Street, the Lead Cabinet Member agreed that greater community involvement was needed.

Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins said she wished to support communities and the High Street. A case officer had now been assigned following the departure on maternity leave of the officer who had been dealing with this matter.

15. DURATION OF MEETING - TO CONTINUE

The Chair, having sought confirmation from the Monitoring Officer that it would be appropriate to do so, proposed that the meeting continue beyond four hours' duration in accordance with Standing Order 9.

Councillor Anna Bradnam, the Vice Chair of the Council, seconded the motion.

Council **RESOLVED** by affirmation to continue the meeting beyond four hours' duration.

16. NOTICES OF MOTION

16 (a) Standing in the name of Councillor Claire Daunton

Councillor Claire Daunton moved the following motion, as set out in the agenda:

“One of the many consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic is an increase in regular and frequent goods traffic through the villages of South Cambridgeshire. This traffic ranges from small delivery vans to large articulated lorries (HGV traffic)). The increase has come about at the same time as more of our residents are cycling and walking. It has also happened at a time when the government has put forward proposals to abolish the current weight restrictions.

A number of issues are linked to these developments. The increase in traffic, especially that of HGVs, has made the roads and pavements less safe for cyclists and pedestrians; and the air pollution, noise and speed has led to increased stress for residents, with consequent mental health problems. Further, the wider use of satnavs, which encourage drivers to take the shortest routes (often rural roads), is having a cumulative effect not only on the lives of residents but also on the state of our roads. Rural roads were not built for HGVs. Where weight restrictions are in place, they are little observed and the police have indicated they are not able to enforce.

We believe the way to tackle these issues is:

- a) to encourage local communities to report HGV infringement of current restrictions;
- b) to encourage the police to take action against persistent offenders;
- c) to encourage satnav companies to incorporate the County's advisory freight routes into their systems;
- d) to encourage firms to move towards hybrid or electric vehicles as ways of cutting emissions rather than relying on heavier, longer vehicles;
- e) to encourage the installation of appropriate 20mph speed limits, along with physical highway restraints, in the areas worst affected;
- f) to use planning conditions to prevent or mitigate the problems, as appropriate

This Council requests that the Leader write to the Secretary of State for Transport to request that the government take fully into account the effects of HGV traffic on rural communities, as set out above, when considering changes to current regulations on weight.

This Council requests that the Leader also write to the County Council to request that it facilitates the use of measures set out above to make our village roads safer and improve the daily lives of our residents.”

Councillor Eileen Wilson seconded the motion.

Councillor Graham Cone proposed an amendment to add the words “, and include supporting evidence of the increase referred to” to the penultimate paragraph, and to add the words “, along with supporting evidence of the increase referred to above” to the last paragraph of the motion.

Councillor Claire Daunton accepted the alteration to her motion.

Members debated the motion.

Councillor John Williams spoke in support of the motion. Trading Standards could enforce weight restriction orders, but environmental weight restrictions were difficult to enforce. This was due to the exemption for vehicles requiring legitimate access, for example, to deliver goods. Only the police could stop a vehicle, and it was difficult to restrict the movement of HGV's as they were permitted to use any classification of road

for access and deliveries. Legislation did not address whether the road leading to the delivery/pick up location was suitable. This motion was a first step but a very important one not only to protect the District's rural roads but also to make them safer.

Councillor Deborah Roberts disagreed with the motion, as this was a matter for the county rather than district council. Deliveries via HGVs were needed to supply goods to shops. She dismissed support for this motion as "woke nonsense".

Councillor Grenville Chamberlain expressed his concern that narrow lanes, used by cyclists as well as vehicles, lacked pavements and were dangerous. Development at Bourn Airfield should be postponed to address road safety. He hoped planning conditions would be used to mitigate problems and put road safety first.

Councillor Dr Richard Williams shared the concerns set out in the motion, but said the Council had recently approved two large planning applications. It should look to its own house. He asked whether there was a more practical action that could be taken, such as putting aside funds for parish councils to bid for highways initiatives.

In response to the Chair's enquiry, Councillor Dr Richard Williams confirmed he was not proposing an amendment, as there would be complexities, but it was a suggestion to consider.

Councillor Bill Handley spoke in support of the motion, stating it was not so much about vans and lorries as about strategic routes. An example of how rural life could be adversely affected was his own ward of Willingham.

Councillor Aidan van de Weyer said rat-running was a blight and was unsafe, unpleasant and damaging to communities. There was a need to be more imaginative, such as considering speed cameras.

Councillor Eileen Wilson said the village and rural roads were not built to accommodate HGVs. The possibility of increased heavy traffic was concerning. The Council had to do its best to provide for walking and cycling. People worried about the impact of HGVs shaking their houses. There should be 20mph speed limits.

By affirmation, with Councillor Deborah Roberts abstaining, **RESOLVED**

that:

One of the many consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic is an increase in regular and frequent goods traffic through the villages of South Cambridgeshire. This traffic ranges from small delivery vans to large articulated lorries (HGV traffic)). The increase has come about at the same time as more of our residents are cycling and walking. It has also happened at a time when the government has put forward proposals to abolish the current weight restrictions.

A number of issues are linked to these developments. The increase in traffic, especially that of HGVs, has made the roads and pavements less safe for cyclists and pedestrians; and the air pollution, noise and speed has led to increased stress for residents, with consequent mental health problems. Further, the wider use of satnavs, which encourage drivers to take the shortest routes (often rural roads), is having a cumulative effect not only on the lives of residents but also on the state of our roads. Rural roads were not built for HGVs. Where weight restrictions are in place, they are little observed and the

police have indicated they are not able to enforce.

We believe the way to tackle these issues is:

- a) to encourage local communities to report HGV infringement of current restrictions;
- b) to encourage the police to take action against persistent offenders;
- c) to encourage satnav companies to incorporate the County's advisory freight routes into their systems;
- d) to encourage firms to move towards hybrid or electric vehicles as ways of cutting emissions rather than relying on heavier, longer vehicles;
- e) to encourage the installation of appropriate 20mph speed limits, along with physical highway restraints, in the areas worst affected;
- f) to use planning conditions to prevent or mitigate the problems, as appropriate

This Council requests that the Leader write to the Secretary of State for Transport to request that the government take fully into account the effects of HGV traffic on rural communities, as set out above, when considering changes to current regulations on weight, and include supporting evidence of the increase referred to.

This Council requests that the Leader also write to the County Council to request that it facilitates the use of measures set out above to make our village roads safer and improve the daily lives of our residents, along with supporting evidence of the increase referred to above.

16 (b) Standing in the name of Councillor Pippa Heylings

Councillor Aidan van de Weyer, the Deputy Leader (Statutory), read out the motion of Councillor Pippa Heylings, as follows:

"In its meeting of July 2019, this Council recognised that we are facing both an ecological and climate emergency and, in response, adopted Doubling Nature as a vision with one of our aims being that 'the Council should be an exemplar for the landscape scale restoration of the natural environment'.

As a Council, we own very little land directly and, therefore, our Doubling Nature vision depends ultimately on partnerships and the sharing of a vision with communities, landowners, farmers and developers. Parts of South Cambridgeshire lie within the proposed Fens Biosphere buffer and transition zones. A [Biosphere](#) is a special status awarded by UNESCO to a unique and valuable landscape, such as the Fens.

Biospheres connect people, economies and nature to secure a future where all can thrive. Following extraordinary, sustained and coordinated efforts by local (and national) stakeholder bodies, campaigners and enthusiastic members of the public, the proposed Fens Biosphere was awarded Candidate Status by UK Man and the Biosphere (UK MAB) on behalf of UNESCO in November 2019, opening the real possibility that the Fens Biosphere could become UK's 8th UNESCO Biosphere designation; one of 714 in 129 countries, and the only lowland Biosphere in the country.

Within the proposed Biosphere buffer zone, activities will be focused on linking people, science and conservation to support the core zone of sites of specific conservation value. Such activities could include trialling new agricultural crops and techniques, encouraging communities to develop new spaces for nature and looking at how water resources can be managed on a landscape scale. As a centre of excellence and focus for a united community effort across the region, it can bring significant social, economic and environmental benefits.

In order to leap the final hurdle to gain UNESCO Biosphere designation, the Biosphere initiative needs to demonstrate the widest level of local support, including that of the local authorities. Although several local authorities within the candidate area have voiced support, it is critical that the support is demonstrated through formal endorsement.

Senior proponents of the Fens Biosphere gave a passionate presentation to the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee in January along with a request for support, which was unanimously recommended by the Committee.

This Council

- recognises the value of the Fens Biosphere and formally supports its request for UNESCO Biosphere designation;
- authorises the Leader to write formally to convey its support;
- authorises the Leader and the Chair of CEAC to champion the Fens Biosphere initiative by writing to all relevant local authorities to encourage them to do the same.”

Councillor Aidan van de Weyer said Councillor Pippa Heylings had been involved in similar initiatives in other areas and had seen the increased value of these designations to tourism, jobs, research and education. In addition to the protection which would be afforded by this measure to wetland habitats, there were opportunities for research, a framework for investment and contribution to the initiatives for zero carbon and doubling nature. He asked Members to support the proposals and moved the motion.

Councillor Martin Cahn seconded the motion.

Councillor Heather Williams proposed an amendment as follows.

To add the words “and subject to public consultation” after the words “formally supports its request for UNESCO Biosphere designation” and to add the words “subject to public consultation after the words “to write formally to convey its support”, so that the final paragraphs would read:

“This Council

- recognises the value of the Fens Biosphere and formally supports its request for UNESCO Biosphere designation and subject to public consultation;
- authorises the Leader to write formally to convey its support, subject to public consultation;
- authorises the Leader and the Chair of CEAC to champion the Fens Biosphere initiative by writing to all relevant local authorities to encourage them to do the same.”

Councillor Heather Williams said long-term change needed public support, and whilst this motion was right in principle there were questions to address. There should be public consultation.

The Chair asked for confirmation as to whether the amendment was accepted.

Councillor Aiden van de Weyer said he did not accept the amendment.

Councillor Graham Cone seconded the amendment and said gaining people’s views would give the request for designation more weight.

Councillor Aidan van de Weyer said public consultation was built into the process and the aim at this stage was to get partners on board and support these measures democratically as a council. Public engagement would follow.

A vote was taken on the amendment and votes were cast as follows:

In favour (10):

Councillors Ruth Betson, Grenville Chamberlain, Graham Cone, Sue Ellington, Mark Howell, Deborah Roberts, Bunty Waters, Heather Williams, Richard Williams, Nick

Wright.

Against (22):

Councillors Henry Batchelor, John Batchelor, Anna Bradnam, Martin Cahn, Gavin Clayton, Claire Daunton, Douglas de Lacey, Clare Delderfield, Peter Fane, Neil Gough, Bill Handley, Geoff Harvey, Tumi Hawkins, Peter McDonald, Brian Milnes, Judith Rippeth, Bridget Smith, Hazel Smith, Aidan van de Weyer, John Williams, Eileen Wilson.

Abstain (0)

The Chair declared the amendment to have fallen.

Members debated the motion.

Councillor Deborah Roberts said all Members were likely to wish to see improvements in the quality of the place in which they lived, but the Council could not conquer the world. This motion was virtue-signalling and hypocritical in light of recent large planning application approvals.

The Chair asked Councillor Deborah Roberts to keep to the matter under debate.

Councillor Deborah Roberts said others had been permitted to speak more widely. She concluded by saying the Council took no notice of residents.

Councillor Martin Cahn asked Members to support the motion. There were three designated biosphere areas in the UK, and the Fens was an ideal candidate for such designation.

A vote being taken by affirmation, with one vote against (Councillor Deborah Roberts) and no abstentions,

Council **AGREED** the following motion:

In its meeting of July 2019, this Council recognised that we are facing both an ecological and climate emergency and, in response, adopted Doubling Nature as a vision with one of our aims being that 'the Council should be an exemplar for the landscape scale restoration of the natural environment'.

As a Council, we own very little land directly and, therefore, our Doubling Nature vision depends ultimately on partnerships and the sharing of a vision with communities, landowners, farmers and developers. Parts of South Cambridgeshire lie within the proposed Fens Biosphere buffer and transition zones. A [Biosphere](#) is a special status awarded by UNESCO to a unique and valuable landscape, such as the Fens.

Biospheres connect people, economies and nature to secure a future where all can thrive. Following extraordinary, sustained and coordinated efforts by local (and national) stakeholder bodies, campaigners and enthusiastic members of the public, the proposed Fens Biosphere was awarded Candidate Status by UK Man and the Biosphere (UK MAB) on behalf of UNESCO in November 2019, opening the real possibility that the Fens Biosphere could become UK's 8th UNESCO Biosphere designation; one of 714 in 129 countries, and the only lowland Biosphere in the country.

Within the proposed Biosphere buffer zone, activities will be focused on linking people, science and conservation to support the core zone of sites of specific conservation value. Such activities could include trialling new agricultural crops and techniques, encouraging communities to develop new spaces for nature and looking at how water resources can be managed on a landscape scale. As a centre of excellence and focus

for a united community effort across the region, it can bring significant social, economic and environmental benefits.

In order to leap the final hurdle to gain UNESCO Biosphere designation, the Biosphere initiative needs to demonstrate the widest level of local support, including that of the local authorities. Although several local authorities within the candidate area have voiced support, it is critical that the support is demonstrated through formal endorsement. Senior proponents of the Fens Biosphere gave a passionate presentation to the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee in January along with a request for support, which was unanimously recommended by the Committee.

This Council

- recognises the value of the Fens Biosphere and formally supports its request for UNESCO Biosphere designation;
- authorises the Leader to write formally to convey its support;
- authorises the Leader and the Chair of CEAC to champion the Fens Biosphere initiative by writing to all relevant local authorities to encourage them to do the same.

17. **STANDING IN THE NAME OF COUNCILLOR GEOFF HARVEY**

Councillor Geoff Harvey moved a motion as follows:

“Fossil fuel divestment was once viewed as a moral undertaking; now it is as much about reducing financial risk. In October last year, Cambridge University finally announced its aim to have no meaningful exposure to fossil fuels in its investment funds by 2030. A [University report](#) summarised the long-running debate and included this recollection from visiting American environmentalist, Bill McKibben that *Exxon built rigs to account for climate change-related sea rise while funding climate change denialism research (Oreskes and Conway 2010)*. He commented *“intellectual dishonesty on that scale would get you kicked out of Cambridge in a minute”*. But alongside the moral arguments, were those of sound finance: *‘Overall, there is little evidence to suggest that a global portfolio invested to exclude fossil fuels would underperform one that included them and such a portfolio might avoid the volatility that is likely to affect the fossil fuel sector in the coming years.’*

It has been calculated that were oil companies to extract all oil in their existing developed reserves (oil fields), this alone, when burnt, would use up the remaining available carbon budget before [breaching 1.5 degrees Celsius global temperature rise compared to preindustrial levels](#). Yet oil companies continue with oil exploration. Last year, [BP announced a £14billion asset write-down](#) acknowledging a shift towards renewable energy. There is a real risk of remaining invested in assets that will become *stranded assets*; the ownership of oil reserves that will now have to remain in the ground. [In 2015, UK local authority pension funds lost nearly £700million](#) when the market for coal collapsed. [Mark Carney, the governor of the Bank of England, issued a blunt warning in 2015](#) that investors, like pension funds faced *“potentially huge”* losses as action on climate change could make vast reserves of oil, coal and gas *“literally un-burnable”*. This Council has declared a climate and ecological emergency. We now know Investments in fossil fuels are not only harmful to the environment but also put the sustainable future of pensions at risk.

In December last year, the National Climate Change Committee released a paper ‘Local Authorities and the Sixth Carbon Budget’. It lists 9 *‘overarching priorities’* for local authorities and one of these relates to pensions schemes investments. *‘Local authority pension funds should disclose their approach to assessing and managing climate risks and should consider investing in Net Zero aligned schemes within their legal duties.’* This aligns with Clause 124 of the Pension Schemes Bill currently before Parliament where the Act is likely to mandate larger private sector pension schemes to manage climate change as a financial risk and to report publicly on how so.

We note from the Investment Strategy Statement of the Cambridgeshire County Council

Pension Fund, *'The Fund supports the principles of the [Financial Reporting Council] UK Stewardship Code and is working with the Fund's advisers with the intention to sign up to the Code.'*"

Councillor Geoff Harvey said Trinity College and others had announced the intention of divesting from fossil fuel investment recently. There was a debate on the plane of both morality and finance. Research showed oil investment did not confer particular advantage and was in fact a risk. He asked Members to support aligning moral, fiduciary and legal obligations under climate change legislation by voting for this motion.

Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, seconded the motion. He said the UK's biggest pension fund had begun divesting from fossil fuels, as had a number of others. This was not easy to do, but that should not deter the Council from setting the ball rolling. It was in the financial interest of future local government pensioners that local authorities start divestment and he asked that Members support this first step.

Councillor Dr Richard Williams said a good case for divestment had been made but the motion should have the courage of its convictions and call for divestment of the pension fund.

Councillor Deborah Roberts said she was at a loss as to what the Council intended. There were two sides to this matter, morality was a distraction and it was not as simple as being more green and, as shown in places such as Texas, the world was not ready for oil divestment. Trinity College had been bullied into divestment. The real problem was population level, which had been recognised by China.

The Leader, Councillor Bridget Smith, objected to what appeared to be a derogatory reference to Chinese people.

The Chair accepted this objection and said Councillor Deborah Roberts had run out of time to speak.

Councillor Deborah Roberts clarified she had not spoken of the Chinese in derogatory terms.

Councillor Gavin Clayton said Trinity College was unlikely to succumb to bullying given its wealth and position. He agreed with the motion and also with the point that it should go further in calling for the pension fund to divest from fossil fuel investment.

Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins said objections raised to the motion were disappointing; the question of divestment could be put; and reference to Texas was not a like comparison. She supported the motion.

Councillor Brian Milnes said the Council's recognising that the pension fund should divest would give a strong signal on behalf of residents. The antediluvian views expressed were not representative.

Councillor Martin Cahn said the pension fund committee had a green orientation but needed the support of participant local authorities. It had a duty to its pension holders, so this motion was appropriate for this council to endorse. He agreed that the motion should include a call to divest.

Councillor Heather Williams said she supported the motion but agreed it should call for divestment. She added that not everyone agreed but everyone who wished to express

an opinion should be able to do so.

The Chair said there were rules of debate and all were free to express themselves as they wished elsewhere.

Councillor Anna Bradnam, Vice Chair, asked whether Councillor Geoff Harvey should be invited to change the wording of the motion.

Following consideration of options to amend the wording, Councillor Geoff Harvey agreed to wording suggested by the Chief Executive to add the words “including the issue of divestment,” to the last paragraph of his motion. Councillor John Williams as seconder agreed to this alteration.

A vote being taken by affirmation, with one vote against (Councillor Deborah Roberts),

Council **AGREED** the following motion:

Fossil fuel divestment was once viewed as a moral undertaking; now it is as much about reducing financial risk. In October last year, Cambridge University finally announced its aim to have no meaningful exposure to fossil fuels in its investment funds by 2030. A [University report](#) summarised the long-running debate and included this recollection from visiting American environmentalist, Bill McKibben that *Exxon built rigs to account for climate change-related sea rise while funding climate change denialism research (Oreskes and Conway 2010)*. He commented “*intellectual dishonesty on that scale would get you kicked out of Cambridge in a minute*”. But alongside the moral arguments, were those of sound finance: ‘*Overall, there is little evidence to suggest that a global portfolio invested to exclude fossil fuels would underperform one that included them and such a portfolio might avoid the volatility that is likely to affect the fossil fuel sector in the coming years.*’

It has been calculated that were oil companies to extract all oil in their existing developed reserves (oil fields), this alone, when burnt, would use up the remaining available carbon budget before [breaching 1.5 degrees Celsius global temperature rise compared to preindustrial levels](#). Yet oil companies continue with oil exploration. Last year, [BP announced a £14billion asset write-down](#) acknowledging a shift towards renewable energy. There is a real risk of remaining invested in assets that will become *stranded assets*; the ownership of oil reserves that will now have to remain in the ground. [In 2015, UK local authority pension funds lost nearly £700million](#) when the market for coal collapsed. [Mark Carney, the governor of the Bank of England, issued a blunt warning in 2015](#) that investors, like pension funds faced “*potentially huge*” losses as action on climate change could make vast reserves of oil, coal and gas “*literally un-burnable*”. This Council has declared a climate and ecological emergency. We now know Investments in fossil fuels are not only harmful to the environment but also put the sustainable future of pensions at risk.

In December last year, the National Climate Change Committee released a paper ‘Local Authorities and the Sixth Carbon Budget’. It lists 9 ‘*overarching priorities*’ for local authorities and one of these relates to pensions schemes investments. ‘*Local authority pension funds should disclose their approach to assessing and managing climate risks and should consider investing in Net Zero aligned schemes within their legal duties.*’ This aligns with Clause 124 of the Pension Schemes Bill currently before Parliament where the Act is likely to mandate larger private sector pension schemes to manage climate change as a financial risk and to report publicly on how so.

We note from the Investment Strategy Statement of the Cambridgeshire County Council Pension Fund, ‘*The Fund supports the principles of the [Financial Reporting Council] UK Stewardship Code and is working with the Fund’s advisers with the intention to sign up to the Code.*’

We further note: this Code requires ‘*Signatories systematically integrate stewardship and investment, including material environmental, social and governance issues, and climate change, to fulfil their responsibilities.*’

The Pension Fund Committee, in partnership with Investment Sub Committee and Local Pension Board decides pensions investment strategy. Nevertheless, SCDC staff pensions are part of a Defined Benefits scheme, meaning that SCDC has a financial interest in the long-term efficiency of the fund since any future shortfall, including by failure to recognise any risks (or investment opportunities) associated with climate change, would be set against a balance sheet liability. Fiduciary obligations are aligned with the UK’s legal obligation to meet its climate goals. As [a UK’s Pension Minister said of the Climate Change Act](#): “*This legislation commits the UK to a path that pension funds must play a massive role in*” which means no longer helping fund oil production and exploration and keeping within the remaining carbon budget.

This Council

- Asks the Chief Executive to write to the Pension Fund Committee, Investment Sub Committee and Local Pension Board jointly, to request how they, on behalf of SCDC as an employer, intend to manage the effects of climate change as a financial risk to their investments, including the issue of divestment, and how this will be reported.

18. CHAIR'S ENGAGEMENTS

Council noted the Chair’s attendance at the engagements as set out on the agenda.

The Meeting ended at 7.11 p.m.
