

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on
Monday, 22 March 2021 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor Bridget Smith (Leader of Council)
Councillor Dr. Aidan Van de Weyer (Deputy Leader of Council (Statutory) -
Strategic Planning and Transport)

Councillors:	Neil Gough	Deputy Leader (non-statutory) - Transformation and Projects
	Bill Handley	Lead Cabinet Member for Community Resilience
	Dr. Tumi Hawkins	Lead Cabinet member for Planning Policy and Delivery
	Peter McDonald	Lead Cabinet Member for Business Recovery
	Brian Milnes	Lead Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Licensing
	Hazel Smith	Lead Cabinet member for Housing
	John Williams	Lead Cabinet member for Finance

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

Farzana Ahmed	Chief Accountant
Anne Ainsworth	Chief Operating Officer
Peter Campbell	Head of Housing
Ryan Coetsee	Project Officer
Rebecca Dobson	Democratic Services Manager
Susan Gardner Craig	Head of HR and Corporate Services
Stephen Kelly	Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development
Kevin Ledger	Senior Policy and Performance Officer
Peter Maddock	Head of Finance
Jonathan Malton	Cabinet Support Officer
Liam Martin	AV Support Officer
Rory McKenna	Monitoring Officer
Jeff Membery	Head of Transformation
Trevor Nicoll	Head of Environment and Waste
Duncan Vessey	Head of Ermine Street Housing
Liz Watts	Chief Executive
Heather Wood	Interim Assistant Director of Housing (Statutory and Strategic Services)

Councillors Anna Bradnam, Sarah Cheung Johnson, Dr. Claire Daunton, Dr. Douglas de Lacey, Pippa Heylings, Judith Rippeth, Deborah Roberts, Heather Williams and Dr. Richard Williams were in attendance, by invitation.

1. Announcements

Councillor Bridget Smith, Leader of the Council, noted the one-year anniversary of the first lockdown in 2020, and thanked all Officers and the local communities

for work ongoing work during the pandemic.

2. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor Grenville Chamberlain, Chair of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Peter McDonald, Lead Cabinet Member for Business Recovery and Skills declared an interest, being a member of the South Cambridgeshire Investment Partnership Board.

4. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Cabinet **authorised** the Leader to sign, as a correct record, the public version of the Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 3 February 2021.

5. **Public Questions**

There were two questions received ahead of this meeting.

a) From Mrs. Jane Williams

In 2016, the Council granted planning permission for the development of Cambridge North Station at Chesterton sidings. As part of that planning permission, approximately 1.6 hectares of land was designated for ecological migration measures including the retention of existing trees and vegetation, the creation of a new area of wetland habitat, and the installation of new habitat areas for invertebrates. The site, which forms an important connector between the Bramblefields Local Nature Reserve and nearby habitat areas was deemed to be of near SSSI-quality and was in particular noted for its potential as a rich habitat for invertebrates and reptiles.

When the Council released its draft North East Cambridge Area Action Plan last year, this 1.6-hectare ecological site was inexplicably not included on the spatial framework maps, and the land was instead reallocated to provide for more profitable town centre, retail, and housing uses.

In the past several months, the entire site was clear-cut of all trees and vegetation in violation of the 2016 planning permission.

In its recently adopted "Doubling Nature" strategy, the Council says that it will "make the most of our direct influence on the natural environment as the local planning authority", but in this case, Greater Cambridge Planning has ignored its own designation of 1.6 hectares of land for ecological mitigation.

In light of the ecological devastation we have seen associated with Council-approved developments at Cambridge North and other sites, including Northstowe, how can the public have any confidence that the council actually cares about doubling nature and what measures will be taken to remediate this?
Response from Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins:

Firstly, I would like to re-iterate from the start that this council cares about

doubling nature and is taking steps within its control to do this.

Secondly, in respect of the specific matter you refer to - the land near Cambridge North Station where trees and vegetation have recently been cleared, the 2016 Planning Permission and condition which you identified as designating the land for ecological mitigation, was in fact not implemented.

Instead, subsequent applications were submitted in to and approved by both South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City. The land that has been cleared was included in these subsequent permissions which were implemented, and which had a condition that required the submission of a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP).

The Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) was submitted at the time and assessed by the City Council's ecologist who found the plan acceptable. The LEMP did not show landscape or ecological features to be retained within the area of the recent works. So, there was no requirement through those subsequent planning permissions to retain the vegetation in this area, there is no breach of condition, and as such no enforcement action can be taken.

I would remind you that removing trees and vegetation from land does not require planning permission (unless a TPO is involved). Therefore, in this case, the Council had no control over these works.

Thirdly, and hopefully to give you and the public the assurance that we are committed to our aim of increasing biodiversity and doubling nature in the District, as part of the work on the North East Cambridge Area Action Plan, the Council had already undertaken a biodiversity assessment (in June 2020) of the area. This will be used as a baseline for any future applications in the area where we expect proposals from developers to meet the National planning Policy Framework requirement for net gain and our own emerging policy objectives.

The draft Area Action Plan also provides significant opportunities for delivering the Council's biodiversity objectives through a wide range of new formal and informal spaces across the site and by maintaining existing habitat through design of sites that come forward.

We are demonstrating our firm commitment to doubling nature through recent planning decisions across the District and through the emerging policies. I hope you and our residents will recognise that commitment as those new consented permissions are built out.

At the invitation of the Leader, Mrs. Jane Williams confirmed she wished to ask a supplementary question

Mrs. Jane Williams expressed admiration for the doubling Nature Strategy but said she would like assurance as to how these aspirations would be brought forward. She was concerned about how, after planning had been approved, it translated on the ground, in matters such as parameter plans, such as land

profiling, ensuring that we were doubling nature and dealing with contamination. For large sites coming forward, she would like to have reassurances, as to ensure checks and balances would be applied, because of the implications on nature and the landscape.

Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins said she recognised the concerns expressed. A strategic sites team had been established, and she was working with that team to ensure permissions and conditions were considered in detail. If it would be helpful, she would be willing to invite Mrs Jane Williams to a more detailed discussion as to how the Doubling Nature Strategy would enable such consideration.

b) From Mr. Daniel Fulton

On 18 January the Portfolio Holder for Planning said that the Council's internal audit team would be undertaking an audit of the Q2 2020 PS2 planning performance return for non-major applications submitted to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Two months later, no report has been forthcoming. Could the Portfolio Holder please provide an update on the status of this report?

Response from Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins:

As you may appreciate the Council audit team has a work schedule so when additional work is required, it is fitted into the work stream as quickly as is possible.

The Council's internal audit team began the Audit of the Council Q2 2020 PS2 submission in February 2021 and I am advised by the Lead Audit Officer that the team expect to be in a position to report their findings to the Scrutiny Meeting on 20th April 2021.

The Leader invited Mr. Daniel Fulton to ask a supplementary question.

Mr. Daniel Fulton said he appreciated that reviewing the audit submission would involve the review of over 3000 individual documents associated with over 300 planning applications, which he realised took time. However, he said it took a team of relatively inexperienced team of volunteers, approximately two days to complete an audit so in his view, this matter needed to be progressed as quickly as possible.

The Leader of the Council responded that any audit would be taken thoroughly.

6. **Issues Arising from the Scrutiny and Overview Committee**

Cabinet **received and noted** a report from Councillor Grenville Chamberlain, Chair of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, and Councillor Judith Rippeth, Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, informing Cabinet Members about the discussions at, and recommendations from the Committee's meeting held on 25 February 2021.

The report related to:

- 2020-25 Business Plan
- Scrutiny and Overview Committee Anti-Racism Task and Finish Group
- Scrutiny and Overview Committee Covid-19 Response

7. **Scrutiny and Overview Committee Anti-Racism Task and Finish Group Recommendations**

Cabinet received the report from the Anti-Racism Task and Finish Group, initially convened by the Scrutiny and Overview. Councillor Sarah Cheung Johnson, Chair of the Task and Finish Group, introduced the report, noting the ongoing work of the Council and thanked Officers for their continuing work.

Councillor John Williams proposed the recommendations and Cabinet:

Approved the following recommendations:

- a) **Recommendation 1** – Key performance indicators relating to how the council responds to BAME employees at South Cambridgeshire District Council should be reported to the Employment and Staffing Committee on an ongoing basis.
- b) **Recommendation 2** – The Leader of the Council should assign the responsibility for equalities to the relevant Lead Cabinet Member.
- c) **Recommendation 3** – The Lead Cabinet Member with responsibility for equalities should investigate the establishment of an equalities advisory panel/group. It is suggested that this panel/group could follow the model of the Council's Brexit Advisory Group rather than requiring a formal committee to be set up. The Lead Cabinet Member should establish the most appropriate reporting route for the equality in employment report and whether this should be reported to the equalities advisory panel/group or the Employment and Staffing Committee.
- d) **Recommendation 4** – The new equality advisory panel/group should track the outcomes of the equalities staff forum.
- e) **Recommendation 5** – The suitable Lead Cabinet Member should liaise with relevant officers on street naming in South Cambridgeshire.
- f) **Recommendation 6** – The Council should produce an equalities toolkit for businesses, to help broaden their understanding of race inequality in the workplace and enable them to undertake Race Equality Impact Assessment on their employment practices. This is in line with work that has already been undertaken by Cambridge City Council. It is suggested that this toolkit should be developed by the Business Support Team. The group acknowledges that there may not currently be capacity for the team to undertake this work due to demands supporting businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic, so this work should be undertaken when capacity allows.
- g) **Recommendation 7** – Provision of training on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultural awareness for all councillors and officers. As well as requiring all councillors to attend a briefing on equality and diversity,

Cambridge City Council provided training on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultural awareness which was found to be beneficial. The task and finish group suggests the same training is provided for South Cambridgeshire district councillors and officers and that all should be required to attend.

- h) **Recommendation 8** – The Council should seek to collaborate with Cambridge City Council in its engagement with BAME community groups. Cambridge City Council has taken steps to enhance dialogue with BAME community groups, the Council and other public sector organisations. As there is overlap between City and South Cambridgeshire community groups, it is suggested that this Council seeks to collaborate with and support the work already being done by Cambridge City Council to avoid duplication.
- i) **Recommendation 9** – The Council should build links with local BAME community groups. The Council should seek to understand the concerns of BAME community groups and ensure that there is a way for them to engage with the Council on issues of importance and concern to them. This relationship should be monitored and maintained through the new equality advisory panel/group.

8. **Scrutiny and Overview Committee Covid-19 Response Task and Finish Group**

Cabinet received the report from the Covid-19 Task and Finish Group, initially convinced by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee. Councillor Bill Handley, Lead Cabinet Member for Community Resilience, thanked the volunteers for their efforts during the Covid-19 pandemic, and introduced the report, noting the recommendations from the Task and Finish Group.

Cabinet:

Approved the following recommendations:

- a) **Recommendation 1** – The Council should ensure adequate resource is allocated for community recovery and to support parishes with further development of their community response/emergency plans, so they are as well-equipped as possible for any future crises.
- b) **Recommendation 2** – The Council should host appreciation events to celebrate the success of the community response and to acknowledge the work of community groups and volunteers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

9. **Actions Taken under the Chief Executive's Delegated Powers**

Cabinet **received and noted** a report relating to the actions taken under the Chief Executive's Delegated Powers:

- Update to the National Lockdown Business Support Policy Addendum (Tier 4 and National Lockdown Business Support), decision taken on Friday, 5th February 2021.

10. **Quarter 3 Performance**

The Cabinet received the Quarter Three Performance report. The Deputy Leader, Councillor Neil Gough, introduced the report, noting the updates to the Key Performance Indicators for the third quarter of the year, covering the second national lockdown, and the performance against the Business Plan objectives for 2021.

The Chair of the Council noted the figures for the Council's contact centre, including the irregularities with short call lengths. The Head of Transformation responded that along with the introduction of a new call system, data from the Contact Centre would need to be analysed to ensure adequate resources would be available. The Deputy Leader mentioned an increase in calls at the end of 2020 was due to an increase in business related calls due to the Business Support Grants.

Councillor Heather Williams noticed an increase in time re-letting housing stock and the subsequent increase in expenditure in bed and breakfast accommodation, and wondered if this would be decreased. Councillor Hazel Smith, Lead Cabinet Member for Housing responded that Covid-19 pandemic has considerably slowed down the response time for contractors to re-let the properties. The Head of Housing also noted the pandemic had also reduced the number of tenants who were willing to move into new accommodation, along with a shortage of properties for single residents.

After a further discussion, Cabinet:

Reviewed and **noted** the KPI results and comments at Appendix A and progress against Business Plan actions at Appendix B.

11. **Review of the Business Plan**

The Cabinet received the Business Plan for 2021-2022. The Deputy Leader, Councillor Neil Gough introduced the report, thanking Officers for their work with updating the plan, and key areas of focus for the Council, notably the continued progress of the local plan, along with the ongoing implications of the previous year.

The Deputy Leader (Statutory), Councillor Dr. Aidan Van de Weyer, noted the continuity with the updated business plan and continued focus of the council's priorities.

After a further discussion, Cabinet:

- a) Recommended the proposed 2020-25 Business Plan at Appendix A (with the Action Plan primarily focused on delivery 2021-22) to Council for approval, with any amendments as required.
- b) Authorised the Chief Executive to make any minor wording changes required to final drafts, in consultation with the Deputy Leader.

12. **Waterbeach New Town Naming**

Cabinet received the Waterbeach New Town Naming Report. Councillor Bill Handley, Lead Cabinet Member for Community Resilience, Health and Wellbeing, introduced the report, noting the importance of a collaborative approach to identify a name for the 4,500-home Waterbeach New Town East development. This was approved at the South Cambridgeshire District Council's planning committee on Friday, 29 January 2021. Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins, Lead Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Delivery believed the name of the new town would be an important decision, and residents within the district should be involved.

Sam Foulder-Hughes from RLW Estates expressed his support for the consultation and desire to work with SCDC and Urban&Civic. He was also supportive of working with the residents of the surrounding villages, including young people. Rebecca Britton from Urban&Civic echoed Sam's support for the process and noted the importance of this consultation, and the heritage of the surrounding district.

After a further short discussion, Cabinet:

Agreed the engagement process that the two master developers will follow to gather feedback and opinion on the name of the new town north of Waterbeach, with a report coming back to Cabinet in order to take the final decision on the name of the new town.

13. **2020/2021 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring**

The Cabinet received the Revenue and Capital Budget monitoring report for 2020/2021. Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, presented the report for the third quarter of the fiscal year, noting the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on certain schemes, and the proposed capital program. Councillor Peter McDonald, Lead Cabinet Member for Business Recovery, thanked the Officers for distributing the business discretionary grants to businesses across the district.

Councillor Heather Williams noted the deficit in the budget for the planning department, and a decrease in the projected expenditure as part of the Investment Strategy. Councillor John Williams responded that the planning department would be working to resolve the deficit and mentioned the loss of income was due to changes in payments from central Government. The Joint Director the Planning Service mentioned the service operated at a net cost, and contingent on the number of applications, which had been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. In relation to the Investment strategy, Councillor John Williams also noted changes to the rules of the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) but mentioned further investments are being considered through the existing partnerships.

Councillor Heather Williams asked about the Council borrowing from the PWLB. Councillor John Williams responded, noting the Council was borrowing from the PWLB to cover the Council's cash flow, but not for previous commercial

investments.

After a short discussion, Cabinet:

- a) **Reviewed** and **noted** the forecast 2020/2021 revenue position against the approved revenue budget shown in Appendix B, the projected major variances with reasons for these variances at Appendices C1 and C2 and the action being taken to address the underlying issues.
- b) **Reviewed** and **noted** the latest Capital Programme 2020/2021 position as shown in Appendix D.

14. **Home-Link Allocations Policy**

The Cabinet received the Home-Link Application Policy. Councillor Hazel Smith, Lead Cabinet Member for Housing, introduced the report, noting the allocations process and associated Lettings Policy were scheduled for full review, following minor policy amendments in 2018, due to changes in legislation.

The Interim Assistant Director Housing introduced a short presentation on the Lettings Policy, offering reassurances the policy could be responsive to a variety of housing requirements, and to provide an update of the continued work the Home-Link team had provided during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Leader of the Council closed the discussion, expressed thanks to the Sub-Regional Home-Link Manager for her work on the policy, along with the wider team for their continuing efforts, and Cabinet:

Reviewed and **noted** the outcome of the allocations review, including the consultation feedback and **agreed** the subsequent revisions to the Lettings Policy.

15. **Ermine Street Housing Business Plan**

The Cabinet considered Ermine Street Housing Business Plan. Councillor Hazel Smith, Lead Cabinet Member for Housing, introduced the report, providing an update to the business plan, which included continuing to acquire stock as part of the Council's priorities.

The Head of Ermine Street mentioned the leases of the 36 additional Ministry of Defence properties, and lease extension for the properties in Brampton. Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance noted the Ermine Street Housing Company has been brought into the Council's Housing department and continued to provide housing within the district. Councillor Brian Milnes, Lead Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Licencing, was pleased empty properties were being brought back into use through the company.

After a short discussion, Cabinet:

Received and **noted** the Ermine Street Business Plan for the period 2020/2021 to 2029/2030 for information.

16. Exclusion of Press and Public

Cabinet **agreed** by affirmation that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of item numbers 17 in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) (exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act). Paragraph 3 refers to information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

17. Provision of 12 Affordable Homes at Boxworth End, Swavesey

Cabinet received the exempt report, with Councillor Hazel Smith noting this was part of the Council's ongoing Business Plan.

After a short discussion, Cabinet:

Agreed the options as detailed in the exempt report

18. Potential Property Investment Decision

[Withdrawn from agenda]

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