

MINUTES of a meeting of the COUNCIL held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on TUESDAY, 6 SEPTEMBER 2022

Present: Councillor R Boam (Chairman)

Councillors J Bridges, E G C Allman, R Ashman, R D Bayliss, C C Benfield, D Bigby, A S Black, R Blunt, J Clarke, D Everitt, T Eynon, J Geary, S Gillard, T Gillard, D Harrison, B Harrison-Rushton, M D Hay, G Houlton, J Houlton, R Johnson, J Legrys, R L Morris, V Richichi, N J Rushton, A C Saffell, C A Sewell, S Sheahan, J G Simmons, N Smith, J Windram, A C Woodman and M B Wyatt

Officers: Ms A Thomas, Mr J Arnold, Mr A Barton, Mr M Walker, Miss E Warhurst, Mrs M Long and Mrs C Hammond

21. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Bridgen, R Canny, M French, L Gillard and K Merrie.

Councillor A C Saffell joined the meeting at 6.50pm.

22. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no interests declared.

23. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman advised that the 11th of July is recognised internationally as the Remembering Srebrenica day. It was intended that a minute's silence be observed to pay respects at the nearest Council meeting which was to be on 21st June. Unfortunately, that meeting was cancelled so he invited all present to observe a minute's silence to remember Srebrenica.

The Chairman welcomed Allison Thomas, Chief Executive to her first Council meeting.

He then went on to report on some of the events he had attended since the last meeting of Council which included a police and fire service open day, the opening of the new Range store in Coalville, the Ashby Show, and a number of civic events hosted by neighbouring authorities.

24. LEADER'S AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader of the Council, Councillor R Blunt announced the Council's plans to address the cost-of-living crisis. He spoke about the uncertainty faced by all residents on what the future would bring in terms of the cost of living in the coming months, a situation which was instigated by the war in Ukraine.

Whilst accepting that there was nothing that could be done about the cause, there were steps that could be taken to manage the consequences which included the establishment of an internal task force which would identify the issues and see what could be done to address them. This would include the provision of additional funding to supplement the help already available, examples being access to the discretionary housing pot, help with applications for the housing support fund, and help to maximise access to the existing grants available such as the £150 council tax rebate. Help was already being offered to tenants to assist with debt recovery and easier access to food banks to ensure that this was aimed at those who needed it most. Our close working relationship with partners, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau would continue. Work was also ongoing when looking at council homes and what could be done to maximise energy efficiency. Whilst longer

term, energy efficiency would be vital in the coming months and years as it appeared that high energy prices could be with us for some time ahead. Sessions would also be held across the district which would enable residents to access advice and support. Communication would be crucial to advise how and when the support could be accessed. The Leader referred to a Communication Plan which would be commenced from today and was pleased to see that the Community Scrutiny Committee would closely consider the matter and he looked forward to seeing their report.

In response to comments and questions, Councillor Blunt advised that he shared members' concerns about what the future holds but we have got through some tough times in recent years and he was confident that collectively we would get through it. With reference to the 50th anniversary of the Council, it was recognised that this would occur in 2023 but after the elections so any initiatives to recognise this will fall to the administration at that time. Reference was made to Councillor Bridgen not being able to live and work in the district which is why he found it difficult to attend many meetings and his position as a councillor going forward was a matter for him and the electorate. On being asked if the council or its partners will be providing warm spaces for the public, the Leader confirmed that this would be the case with the Fire Service already having made an offer. He confirmed that he had responded to the complainant who referenced an article in the Leicester Mercury which likened Coalville to Beirut and agreed that a joint leaders' statement should be made to counter the comments in the said article. The Leader advised that this Authority was fortunate in that it has money available in reserves to help its residents through this difficult period which was a financial position that many other authorities were not able to claim. The Community Scrutiny Committee would be looking more closely at what measures could be implemented and would make recommendations for funding accordingly. Finally, the Leader advised that he would share with all members the Communication Plan on the steps to be taken by the Council to tackle the cost-of-living crisis.

The Housing, Property and Customer Services Portfolio Holder, Councillor R Bayliss, announced that nine S106 properties had been acquired at a new estate at the Coppice, Heather Lane, Ravenstone which added to the Council's property portfolio. These comprised a mix of two and three bedroomed homes and were handed over on Monday 22 August.

A member wanted to express his thanks to the Interim Head of Housing who dealt with a problem very quickly and wished for this to be recognised.

In answer to questions and comments, Councillor Bayliss echoed the views relating to Karen Connell, Interim Head of Housing. He was not able to confirm the rumour that the Council had bought the Leicester Inn adding that he certainly wasn't aware, but he could confirm the acquisition of the Oak which was currently going through the appropriate planning process.

25. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

There were nine questions asked which are set out below together with the responses.

Question by Claire Palmer

"How does not taking the opportunity to convert the many derelict sites in Leicester City into residential property but instead shifting this housing quota to decimate prime agricultural rural sites in NWLDC concord with the levelling up agenda?"

Response

"Leicester City Council through its Local Plan is seeking to secure the redevelopment of brownfield sites across the City, as required by government policy. However, government

policy has also significantly increased the amount of housing that the City needs to provide. This requirement is more than can be achieved on the brownfield sites in the City. The District Council is required by government policy to work with the other authorities in Leicestershire to address the unmet need. The distribution proposed in the Statement of Common Ground achieves this. The failure to agree a redistribution represents a significant risk to the Council's local plan which in turn would leave the district vulnerable to unwanted planning applications"

Question by Gerald Palmer

"In light of the conflict in Ukraine exasperating the issue, how will Britain ever be able to be sustainable for grain production if all our fields are built on?"

Response

"The District Council is required by government policy to work with the other authorities in Leicestershire to ensure that all of the Leicester and Leicestershire Housing Market Area housing needs are met. This includes agreeing how the unmet need in Leicester City can be accommodated elsewhere. A failure to do so represents a significant risk to the Council's local plan which in turn would leave the district vulnerable to unwanted planning applications. Even without the unmet need, it is inevitable that some agricultural land will need to be released for development. The amount of land that this entails represents only a very small proportion of the district".

Question by Simon Haggart

"If the housing need proposed for Leicester City is to address the expected population increase in Leicester City residents, how will this population be best served by housing them in a rural environment, lacking all urban amenities and disconnected entirely from Leicester City? (They won't want to live there and we don't want the housing here, destroying yet more Countryside)"

Response

"The District Council is required by government policy to work with the other authorities in Leicestershire to ensure that all of the Leicester and Leicestershire Housing Market Area housing needs are met. The distribution proposed in the Statement of Common Ground achieves this. The proposed distribution has regard to a whole range of factors, including not just the functional relationship of each authority area with Leicester City, but also the balance of jobs and homes in each authority area and deliverability of the distribution of development. It is the balance between jobs and homes that has driven the figure for North West Leicestershire rather than the functional relationship with the City. The failure to agree a redistribution represents a significant risk to the Council's local plan which in turn would leave the district vulnerable to unwanted planning applications".

Question by Paula Haggart

"Our district is already the only district in Leicestershire ear marked to lose significant rural land to HS2 despite being one of the few without access to a train station, any additional loss would be devastating so why is NWLDC being considered for such a disproportionately high 'quota' from Leicester City (an area with which we have no nexus)"

Response

"As previously stated, the District Council is required by government policy to work with the other authorities in Leicestershire to ensure that all of the Leicester and Leicestershire Housing Market Area housing needs are met. The distribution proposed in the Statement of Common Ground achieves this. The proposed distribution has regard to a whole range

of factors, including not just the functional relationship of each authority area with Leicester City, but also the balance of jobs and homes in each authority area and deliverability of the distribution of development. It is the balance between jobs and homes that has driven the figure for North West Leicestershire rather than the functional relationship with the City. The failure to agree a redistribution represents a significant risk to the Council's local plan which in turn would leave the district vulnerable to unwanted planning applications"

Question by Graham Budd

"With reference to Charnwood BC recommending building 56 new homes on 16 acres of farmland and justifying this against local's objections by saying they 'have a lack of useable land to meet their building quota' why are they then considering taking 1248 housing quota and 23 ha employment land from Leicester City Council and is this counterintuitive argument going to be mirrored here?"

Response

"Charnwood Borough Council is not able to demonstrate that it has a five-year supply of housing land. Therefore, in accordance with government policy its current adopted local plan is out-of-date. Therefore, unless it has very good reasons to reject a proposed site there is a presumption in favour of the development. This Council is able to demonstrate that it has a five-year supply of housing land"

Question by Jenni Budd

"Why are we considering building in NWLDC where such development would counteract multiple government policies such as sustainable transport (we have no train station stations and poor bus services), net zero (losing fields will reduce natural carbon sinks), biodiversity, woodland creation, green corridors - all these are undermined by greenfield development whereas Leicester city has ample brownfield sites available?"

Response

"Leicester City Council through its Local Plan is seeking to secure the redevelopment of brownfield sites across the City, as required by government policy. However, government policy has also significantly increased the amount of housing that the City needs to provide. This requirement is more than can be achieved on the brownfield sites. Government policies require that all of the Leicestershire authorities have to work together to ensure that all of the Leicester and Leicestershire Housing Market Area housing needs are met. The distribution proposed in the Statement of Common Ground achieves this. The proposed distribution has regard to a whole range of factors, including not just the functional relationship of each authority area with Leicester City, but also the balance of jobs and homes in each authority area and deliverability of the distribution of development. It is the balance between jobs and homes that has driven the figure for North-West Leicestershire rather than the functional relationship with the City. Achieving a better balance between jobs and homes will help to reduce the need to commute which in turn will assist with meeting zero carbon aims. The local plan review will not only need to identify suitable sites, but also the new infrastructure required to support development, such as improved public transport, walking and cycling as well as making provision for enhanced biodiversity"

Question by Anne Stafford

"If the housing need for Leicester City is to reflect, or ensure, Leicester City's increased prosperity, how is this objective achieved if housing is given to other authorities for whom taking it represents a diminishing of its very essence?"

Response

“Leicester City Council through its Local Plan is seeking to ensure that as much of its needs can be accommodated within its boundaries. However, government policy has significantly increased the amount of housing that the City needs to provide. This, coupled with the fact that the city boundary is already very tight, means that in accordance with other government policies all of the Leicestershire authorities have to work together to ensure that all of the Leicester and Leicestershire Housing Market Area housing needs are met.

The distribution proposed in the Statement of Common Ground achieves this. The proposed distribution has regard to a whole range of factors, including not just the functional relationship of each authority area with Leicester City, but also the balance of jobs and homes in each authority area and deliverability of the distribution of development. It is the balance between jobs and homes that has driven the figure for North West Leicestershire rather than the functional relationship with the City. The failure to agree a redistribution represents a significant risk to the Council’s local plan which in turn would leave the district vulnerable to unwanted planning applications”

Question by Kevin Anderson

“Why should NWLDC take any excess housing quota from the unitary authority of Leicester City as we are not geographically neighbouring nor do we have any connection in either classification or economy?”

Response

“The District Council is required by government policy to work with the other authorities in Leicestershire to ensure that all of the Leicester and Leicestershire Housing Market Area housing needs are met. The distribution proposed in the Statement of Common Ground achieves this. The proposed distribution has regard to a whole range of factors. This includes the functional relationship of each authority area with Leicester City as well as the balance of jobs and homes in each authority area and deliverability of the distribution of development. It is the balance between jobs and homes that has driven the figure for North West Leicestershire rather than the functional relationship with the City. The failure to agree a redistribution represents a significant risk to the Council’s local plan which in turn would leave the district vulnerable to unwanted planning applications”

Question by Fiona Anderson

“As Leicester City Council was asked to build 39,400 new homes between 2020 and 2036 after the Government announced that the 20 largest cities in England would need to increase their housing supply targets by 35%, why is it not doing so? [or telling the government it cannot, or won’t, manage it]”

Response

“Leicester City Council through its Local Plan is seeking to ensure that as much of its needs can be accommodated within its boundaries. However, government policy has significantly increased the amount of housing that the City needs to provide. The City boundary is very tight such that it cannot accommodate all of its needs within its boundary. Government policy requires that all of the Leicestershire authorities work together to ensure that all of the Leicester and Leicestershire Housing Market Area housing needs are met. The Statement of Common Ground achieves this”

Each of those who asked a question were invited by the Chairman to ask a supplementary question.

Claire Palmer asked if when the Mayor of Leicester speaks on this matter requesting that we take on the additional housing, this was a demonstration of local autonomy.

Simon Haggart asked whether these proposals would result in unwanted planning applications and if not, was that because sites had already been identified and if so, where were they?

Graham Budd asked if North West Leicestershire, which has produced a five-year Plan and are now looking at taking on additional housing, would have to revise its Plan and, if so, when?

Jenni Budd asked if there were plans for the additional infrastructure required as a result of all the additional housing, specifically an additional secondary school.

Anne Stafford asked where in the district were any brownfield sites to prevent building on the green spaces.

Kevin Anderson asked why NWLDC had been allocated the second largest allocation as opposed to other neighbouring authorities who are larger with better infrastructure in place.

Councillor Ashman responded by advising that we are bound by national legislation to ensure we deliver a Plan and if this Plan is seen as being unsafe or out of date it leaves open the opportunity for developers to build anywhere. Without it the Council would receive unwanted planning applications. The Plan sets out the areas for developers, which made it easier for the Planning Committee to reject applications if minded to do so. There was a duty to co-operate across the district and across the political spectrum. Any planning applicant had to consult with all statutory consultees, and they could insist that the s106 monies were used to fund schools etc. Without their support the application would likely be refused. All sites are considered whether it be brownfield or green sites but most of the brownfield sites have been built on and they cost a lot of money to make them good by having to have them decontaminated. The distribution and allocation were all part of the detailed discussion and the areas are where the employment growth has been identified.

Councillor Ashman offered to clarify any further points outside the meeting if requested.

26. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Nine questions were received, and these are set out below with the response. Each member who asked a question was invited by the Chairman to ask one supplementary question which is also set out below together with the response.

Question by Councillor Eynon

“What memorial events has this Council held in 2022 as part of the UK-wide Remembering Srebrenica initiative?”

Response by Councillor T Gillard

“The 11th of July is recognised internationally as the Remembering Srebrenica day. I had intended to propose that we take a minute to pay our respects at the nearest Council meeting which was to be on 21 June. Unfortunately, that meeting was cancelled. I am pleased however that we have been able to provide remembrance by marking a minute’s silence this evening.

In addition to Remembering Srebrenica there are a number of other memorial days which have relevance to the people of North West Leicestershire. I have asked our new Chief

Executive to produce a list of dates that this council may wish mark, with the intention of producing a corporate memorial calendar”

Supplementary question and response

Councillor Eynon asked whether a belated minute’s silences was the best way to recognise ‘Remembering Srebrenica’ day and, if there is to be a corporate calendar, how will this be communicated, and will it capture all the other commemorative days? Councillor Gillard advised that the silence at tonight’s meeting was done because the nearest meeting at which it could be done did not take place and this meeting was therefore the most appropriate. The corporate memorial calendar will capture all appropriate dates and will be communicated.

Question by Councillor D Bigby

“What is the estimated cost of repairs expected to be necessary to ensure Hood Park Lido remains open to the public for the medium to long term?”

Response by Councillor A Woodman

“The Council’s leisure partner, Everyone Active (EA), has identified a potential issue with the lido pool tank at Ashby Leisure Centre and Lido. Under the terms of the contract and the lease, EA has a responsibility to ensure facilities are maintained and kept open to the public, and they continue to do that. In order to understand the nature of the issues, EA has so far had one contractor visit site who has offered an opinion as to what the issue is, a potential solution and an indicative cost rather than a formal quotation. As this information has been supplied to EA by a contractor, the Council is unable to share it due to the commercially sensitive nature. EA is also seeing what alternative options may be available and so have engaged additional contractors to understand if the issue is as identified, and to fully understand any different solutions that could be considered”.

Supplementary question and response

Councillor Bigby asked whether the authority was confident that Ashby Lido can remain open next year and that the maintenance costs would not be passed on to the users either directly or indirectly. Councillor Woodman reiterated that the EA contract sets out that they are responsible for the maintenance and associated costs and that we as an authority are committed to make sure it remains open.

Question by J Legrys

“Can the Leader please provide an update on the progress on the Marlborough Sq Improvement project & if the Section 278 agreement with Leicestershire County Council has finally been agreed and signed?”

Response by Councillor R Blunt

“I’d like to thank Cllr Legrys for his continued interest in the Marlborough Square project. I’m aware that he has recently been briefed by the Head of Regeneration on the steps that need to be completed before construction can start and it is, therefore, pleasing to note that he recognises the criticality of obtaining Highway Authority consents. Section 278 agreements are notoriously complicated and time-consuming to obtain. Our officers have been submitting drawings, reports and information to Leicestershire County Council colleagues for the last 12 months and believe that with imminent submission of Designers Response to the Road Safety Audit, will have everything should in place to allow LCC to issue Technical Approval of the S278 works. Officers are encouraging their County Council colleagues to issue this approval by 30 September. Once we have the S278

agreement our contractor will then be able to confirm the programme for both starting and completing the works to Marlborough Square”.

Supplementary question and response

Councillor Legrys asked why the council didn't negotiate with Leicestershire County Council to suspend Highway Rights and if materials won't be ordered until the Section 278 Agreement is signed, does the figure relating to costs include a contingency for any potential increase? Councillor Blunt advised that all options were and continue to be considered and every possible scenario was explored. It would be foolish to order the materials before the Agreement is signed so there is an element of risk, but the relevant contingency was in place when the decision was made.

Question by Councillor J Geary

“Could I please be updated on the progress or lack of it on the provision of a Transit Site for the Gypsy / Travelling Community.”

Response by Councillor R Ashman

“Officers are in the process of seeking to identify a potential site for transit provision for gypsies and travellers. As soon as officers are able to, they will share information with members. In addition, the Council is awaiting the outcome from an update to the Gypsy and Traveller needs assessment. This will be reported to the Local Plan Committee when it is finalised”

Supplementary question and response

Councillor Geary referred to a number of occasions when he has asked this question and asked whether the Council has been wilfully neglectful in providing a transit site for the travelling community. Councillor Ashman advised that it is an incredibly complex process and needs to be dealt with sensitively as part of consideration of the Local Plan. Ward members will get a lot of public interest, so it is vital they are involved in the first instance.

Question by Councillor S Sheahan

“The Administration did not develop a bid for the Levelling Up fund this year. What needs to change in order for a bid to go forward next year?”

Response by Councillor R Blunt

“The production of funding bids to government is both expensive and consuming of officer time. The decision not to submit a Levelling Up fund bid for round 2 was tactical, following conversations with prospective bid partners. Discussions have already started with these partners in regard to whether bids should be submitted to round 3”

Supplementary question and response

Councillor Sheahan asked of the lack of reference in the response to the change of Government was also tactical? Councillor Blunt responded by stating that he did not believe a change of Prime Minister would make a difference in this case.

Question by Councillor C Sewell

“It has been reported in the local media that the Skylink bus service run by Trent Barton is to experience cuts to some routes, including the one linking Loughborough to Diseworth, Long Whatton, and Kegworth. The route between the logistics park at East Midlands Airport and Coalville will also be affected, with buses no longer running after 8pm.

Additionally, the no 9 Midland Classic which runs from Burton-on-Trent to the QMC, Nottingham is being axed on 5th September. This bus serves Ashby-de-la-Zouch and Diseworth.

Response by Councillor N Rushton

“We have recently become aware of the proposed service changes proposed by Trent Barton to the Skylink services. We are engaging with the company in order to better understand the likely impacts on residents of North West Leicestershire and how the company are justifying the changes. Only once we have these answers will it be possible to ascertain how the council might intervene. Officers have asked for a full update on changes to service provision to be discussed at the EMEG Access to Work Partnership meeting (Chaired by NWLDC) that is scheduled for 13th September 2022.

With regards to the proposed changes to the Airline 9 service operated by Diamond East Midlands (formerly Midland Classic) this service is no longer being withdrawn. Following conversations between the operator and members the EMEG Access to Work Partnership, it has been agreed to retain and extend the Airline 9 service for a further 12 months and to provide additional support to promote patronage and secure the long term commercial viability of the service. Through the EMEG Access to Work Partnership, the councils Economic Development team will continue to maintain regular contact with both of the bus operators as well as Leicestershire County Council and Derbyshire County Council to monitor changes in the bus service provision.

Supplementary question and response

Councillor Sewell asked what would be done to ensure the continuation of these necessary services. Councillor Rushton advised that a commercial decision was made following an impact assessment based on passenger usage data and effect on the local community whilst looking at alternative options. It often comes down to how much money it will cost to subsidise the bus route, but the matter is being taken very seriously. He did emphasise the importance of using the local buses as passenger data is used when making decisions; and it is often the case that those complaining about the loss of a bus service are not necessarily those who use it.

Question by Councillor M Wyatt

“Since the precinct owners removed the barriers at the entrance of the shopping centre we have seen a dramatic increase in anti-social behaviour, vandalism and burglaries within the town centre. We have also seen an increase in incidents of bad behaviour involving scooters and cyclists within the town and several incidents where pedestrians have been hit or harassed. Can I ask what steps the council are able to take to help address this problem including increasing CCTV coverage in the town so it's easier for the police to identify the perpetrators and take appropriate legal action against those causing criminal damage and advising the precinct owners to install appropriate CCTV and look at banning scooters and cyclist from their property?”

Response by Councillor A Woodman

“Officers are aware of one break-in and instances of windows being smashed recently as these have all been reported to the police. Other reports to the police consist of low-level vandalism incidents including the pulling up of the plants that have recently been installed. The suspects have been identified and dealt with by the police beat team. Officers are already working closely with the shopping centre owners looking at how the CCTV coverage can be made more effective. Both the Council and the police have concluded that at least one additional camera is required to provide the necessary coverage, and this is currently being looked into by the owners alongside the council's upcoming investment in cabling infrastructure to facilitate this installation. The Council provides CCTV surveillance to the shopping centre under a Service Level Agreement and a review of the

processes followed by the Council's CCTV operatives is currently underway with the objective being to increase efficiency, creating more time for the operatives to proactively monitor the cameras and increase communication with both shop keepers and the police through the radios. More resource is required in the shopping centre to respond to instances identified through the CCTV and officers are currently encouraging the shopping centre owners to increase their security presence in the centre to provide a visible deterrent and improve the ability to respond to an incident. Limited police resourcing levels means that they are unable to respond to every incident. The Council will also continue to respond to any request from the police for CCTV footage for crime and disorder purposes. The Council monitors the cameras between 10.30 and 18.30 Monday to Thursday and 10.30 to 03.00 on a Friday and Saturday. The hours of monitoring will be changing soon to provide better coverage early morning and on a bank holiday Sunday"

Supplementary question and response

Councillor Wyatt asked whether there was any more that could be done to address the issue of the dangerous use of scooters and cyclists. Councillor Woodman agreed to raise this with the police who have agreed to step up their patrols in the town centre; and he would see what more they can do to help, adding that it would have to be a very compelling case to ban their use.

Question by Councillor V Richichi

"It is noted that High 2 scenario with a minimum of 730 dwellings per year housing growth is considered to be appropriate and 'performs best' and 'provides a very significant degree of flexibility to help address the issues of unmet need' and 'would have the potential to provide a significant number of smaller sites which could benefit small to medium sized developers' and given that within the SoCG, NWL are now exposed in assisting with the unmet housing need arising from Leicester in addition to the high probability of some potential unmet housing need arising from HBBC - in the reassessment of the Council's five-YHLS being measured with the stated apportionment quantum of Leicester's unmet need in conjunction with the very latest 5 Year Supply Statement (April 2022). Would it be possible for you to inform me what the true five-YHLS position for NWL is?"

Response by Councillor A Woodman

"The National Planning Practice Guidance states:

"What housing requirement figure should authorities use when calculating their five-year housing land supply?

Housing requirement figures identified in adopted strategic housing policies should be used for calculating the five-year housing land supply figure where:

- the plan was adopted in the last five years, or
- the strategic housing policies have been reviewed within the last five years and found not to need updating.

In other circumstances the five-year housing land supply will be measured against the area's local housing need calculated using the standard method."

The adopted Local Plan was adopted within the last five years and so provides the basis for assessing the five-year housing land supply. The latest assessment (April 2021) shows that there was 13.5 years supply.

If Council agrees the Statement of Common Ground then this will provide the basis for the housing requirement to be addressed as part of the Local Plan review. The Local Plan review will need to ensure that there is a continuous five-year supply of sites throughout the plan period to 2040.

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council (HBBC) has not as yet declared an unmet need. Should they do so, then just like Leicester City they would need to demonstrate why they cannot meet all of their need and then the Leicester and Leicestershire authorities will need to agree how this would be met"

Councillor Richichi had no supplementary question.

Question by Councillor M Hay

“As an environmentalist I am 100% behind any initiative that makes renewable energy more accessible, especially in ways in which it can also reduce fuel poverty, which is an issue that will only grow in the current climate. The idea of a ‘bulk buying’ scheme that would give our residents an offer that is keenly priced and also vetted against quality sounds amazing in principle. However sometimes the principle does not match the reality. I have seen a few examples of the offers that have been sent to residents, all heavily using the district council’s branding and in at least one case with the name of an NWLDC officer on the bottom. So our reputation is very much on the line with this scheme. So it has to deliver quality systems at a market-leading price. I am also disappointed that the first I heard about it was when I saw an advert for it on social media. The information given to residents that had applied made it very difficult to understand exactly what was being offered, for example giving system size in “number of panels” instead of the power output of the system. This makes it very difficult to compare prices with others offers they may have received. That being said, there are installers in the market that seem to be offering big domestic systems (3.5-4.0kW – i.e. at the 16A limit suitable for most single phase domestic connections) for far less than that being offered by the winning bidder, sometimes 65-75% of the prices quoted by a scheme with our name on it (even when accounting for battery storage too – so comparing like-for-like as much as possible on the limited information provided). So this bulk-buying scheme does not, on the face of it, look like it is offering best value.

Whilst I understand that the scheme was county-led, given the risk to the council’s reputation if this scheme goes horribly wrong, please can the portfolio holder explain what involvement the district council had in the scheme before offers were sent out with our name on them (e.g. with regards the bidding process and any due diligence around the scheme or potential suppliers) and what, if any, involvement will the council have with the scheme going forward, especially if there is any dissatisfaction with the prices offered or systems installed?

Response by Councillor A Woodman

“An article was placed on the Member’s Hub on 9 May this year and the scheme was then reported to Corporate Scrutiny on 8 June as part of the Zero Carbon update which was then considered by Cabinet on 19 July.

There was lengthy scrutiny of the scheme before signing up to Solar Together which was led by Blaby District Council on behalf of the eight Leicestershire councils who are all part of the scheme. Blaby has the contract with Solar Together and will hold them to account under the contractual arrangement that is in place for any performance issues on behalf of the eight councils. iChoosr, the company who we have partnered with have worked with a number of local authorities across the UK with great success with large numbers of solar panels having been installed and significant private investment in renewables. A proven track record was also a key consideration for all parties and this Council along with Blaby, Melton and Harborough have also worked with iChoosr for a number of years on the Energy Switch Scheme which has helped 100’s of residents switch to green electricity and save money on their bills and so we have confidence in their ability to deliver an excellent service.

Climate Emergency UK cite the Solar Together Scheme as a good action for councils to join in order to bring about district wide emission reductions.

Regarding the cost of the proposed systems, it is difficult to say whether other companies would provide better value as it is important that when other quotes are obtained they are on a like for like basis. Residents wishing to join the scheme are not obliged to accept an iChoose quote and can gain other quotes. The scheme is very clear that customers are provided with a free, no obligation quote and robust product guarantees, warranties and technical accreditation are also provided. What this scheme does provide is a robust due

diligence and qualification process to ensure product quality and guarantees are in place and this is summarised as follows.

,In order to ensure that any installers entering the Solar Together auction can offer the required high level of service to a large group of customers in the required timeframe, iChoosr interrogates the experience, quality, stability and capacity of the installers beforehand through a rigorous qualification procedure.

The qualification procedure takes a number of weeks and is designed to ensure that only installers that can successfully execute the group-buying scheme can enter the auction, thus safeguarding the required level of quality. The qualification not only includes a review of all essential certifications and insurance policies, but also covers customer satisfaction and a detailed financial due diligence of the company.

The qualification procedure includes provision of:

- Evidence of MCS certification plus either HIES or RECC certification
- Evidence of a CRM system that enables them to manage a high volume of customers
- Evidence that the installer can realise an Insurance Backed Guarantee for workmanship
- Evidence of Insurance policies that cover liability, works and indemnity
- Annual Accounts
- Details Of Organisation and Employees
- Evidence of Customer Satisfaction Results

We use an independent expert third party organisation to conduct detailed financial due diligence investigation on all installers progressing through the process. iChoosr requests that installers submit a Method of Approach that demonstrates in detail how the installer will organise the process in order to successfully complete the project, this includes a full detailed project risk-analysis”

Supplementary question and response

Councillor Hay asked about the level of involvement by this Authority, and Councillor Woodman advised that he would check with officers, adding that it would be helpful if Councillor Hay could send some examples of the offers he had seen.

27. MOTIONS

No motions were received.

28. PETITIONS

No petitions were received.

29. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2022.

It was moved by Councillor R Boam, seconded by Councillor J Bridges and

RESOLVED THAT: Subject to the following amendment to the paragraph where Councillor Bayliss was providing a Portfolio Holder’s announcement

“This saves the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) £312 per annum in interest charges and is now available to the current and future HRA budgets” to read ““This saves the HRA £312k per annum in interest charges and is now available to the current and future HRA budgets”

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2022 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

30. LEICESTER & LEICESTERSHIRE STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND ON HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT NEED (JUNE 2022)

Councillor R Ashman presented the report to members.

There were mixed views across the Chamber with some members fully supporting the recommendations given the extensive level of cross-party consultation and consideration given to this matter; and others advising that they did not support the recommendations as it was felt that this authority was taking on a disproportionate increase when compared to neighbouring authorities. Reference was made to the lack of any connection with Leicester, specifically in relation to transport links and lack of transparency regarding the decision-making processes in reaching conclusions, the latter point being strongly disputed.

It was moved by Councillor R Ashman and seconded by Councillor R Morris.

It was requested that a recorded vote be undertaken which is detailed below.

RESOLVED THAT: Council approves the signing of the Leicester and Leicestershire Statement of Common Ground relating to Housing and Employment Land Needs, April 2022.

Motion to agree the recommendations as set out in the report (Motion)	
Councillor Russell Boam	For
Councillor John Bridges	For
Councillor Elliott Allman	For
Councillor Robert Ashman	For
Councillor Roger Bayliss	For
Councillor Carl Benfield	Against
Councillor Dave Bigby	Against
Councillor Angela Black	Against
Councillor Richard Blunt	For
Councillor John Clarke	For
Councillor David Everitt	Against
Councillor Dr Terri Eynon	Against
Councillor John Geary	Against
Councillor Stuart Gillard	For
Councillor Tony Gillard	For
Councillor Dan Harrison	For
Councillor Bertie Harrison-Rushton	For
Councillor Michael Hay	Against
Councillor Gill Houtt	For
Councillor Jim Houtt	For
Councillor Russell Johnson	Against
Councillor John Legrys	Against
Councillor Ray Morris	For
Councillor Virge Richichi	For
Councillor Nicholas Rushton	For
Councillor Tony Saffell	Against
Councillor Carol Sewell	Against
Councillor Sean Sheahan	Against
Councillor Jenny Simmons	For
Councillor Nigel Smith	For

Councillor Jake Windram	Against
Councillor Andrew Woodman	For
Councillor Michael Wyatt	Against
Carried	

31. CAPITAL PROGRAMME UPDATE

Councillor N J Rushton presented the report to members.

In relation to LED lighting in car parks, Councillor Sheahan sought an update on the position regarding Measham Library Car Park and whether works would be completed this year. He also asked for an update on the refurbishment of Queensway House and asked for a briefing on the regeneration works in Coalville. Councillor Rushton advised that he provide a written update on the first two points and questioned the reason for raising the last point given that as the Leader of the opposition group, briefings go without saying.

It was moved by Councillor N J Rushton, seconded by Councillor D Harrison and

RESOLVED THAT: Council approves the revised General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programmes as documented in appendices A and B.

32. ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2021/22

Councillor R Ashman presented the report to members.

The report was fully supported.

It was moved by Councillor R Ashman, seconded by Councillor R Blunt and

RESOLVED THAT: Annual Scrutiny Report 2021/22 be received and noted.

At the close of the meeting Members gave a round of applause to both Melanie Long and Louise Scott as this was the last Council meeting before they both retire.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.10 pm