

MINUTES of a meeting of the COUNCIL held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on TUESDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER 2021

Present: Councillor V Richichi (Chairman)

Councillors R Boam, E G C Allman, R Ashman, R D Bayliss, C C Benfield, D Bigby, A S Black, R Blunt, A J Bridgen, J Bridges, R Canny, J Clarke, D Everitt, T Eynon, M French, J Geary, L A Gillard, S Gillard, T Gillard, D Harrison, B Harrison-Rushton, M D Hay, G Hault, J Hault, R Johnson, J Legrys, K Merrie MBE, R L Morris, 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: Mrs B Smith, Mr J Arnold, Mr A Barton, Mr D Bates, Miss E Warhurst, Mrs M Long and Mrs C Hammond

30. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

31. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillors D Bigby, R Boam, J Bridges, D Everitt, S Gillard, J Hault, R Johnson, J Legrys, R Morris and N Smith made the following statement in relation to their membership of the Planning Committee:-

“I am here tonight to contribute to the debate on the Capital Programme and a confidential item in relation to Cropston Drive/Waterworks Road.

Item 15 – Waterworks Road/Cropston Drive – to consider the recommendations from Cabinet and the proposed method of disposal.

Item 11 – the Capital Programme Update, which references the Marlborough Centre in the Regenerating Coalville section of the report - to make a decision on the budget for the project.

The recommendations are set out in the reports on the agenda. I note that both of these reports have been considered by the Cabinet and Scrutiny before this evening. I recognise that as a member of the Planning Committee, I may be asked to determine a planning application in relation to these sites through that committee at a later date. In the event that I participate in that decision-making process, I will do so with my planning hat on and having regard to all the advice and material before me at that time and having regard to the discussion and debate at that meeting. I will not let my participation tonight predetermine any decision I may make at that Planning Committee. My comments tonight will be to inform Council to make a decision on the recommendations in the reports. In the event that I participate in the decision-making process at Planning Committee, I will be making my own decision on the matter before me at that time”.

Councillors A Black, M French, J Windram and M Wyatt declared that they would leave the meeting for the consideration of item 15 - Waterworks Road/Cropston Drive as they continued to strongly oppose the development.

Councillors A Bridgen and T Eynon declared a non- pecuniary interest in Item 15 – Waterworks Road/Cropston Drive, for reasons of having been lobbied on this matter.

Councillor K Merrie declared a non- pecuniary interest in Item 15 – Waterworks Road/Cropston Drive, in his capacity as a County Councillor, for reasons of the site being located in his county division.

Councillor J Simmons declared a non- pecuniary interest in Item 15 – Waterworks Road/Cropston Drive, for reasons of her being a member of the Planning Committee, subject to the outcome of a later agenda item.

Councillor D Harrison declared a non- pecuniary interest in Item 15 – Waterworks Road/Cropston Drive, for reasons of being a substitute on the Planning Committee.

Councillor R Canny declared a non- pecuniary interest in Item 12 – Review of the Constitution, for reasons of having been lobbied on the issue relating to the planning call-in process.

32. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman made an impassioned speech about the need for all councillors to work together over the rough times ahead and felt that the Council's constitution should not revolve around 'egotistical' members and officers. He added that all members of the Council should consider how they are perceived by the general public when representing the Council. He advised that there had been much speculation following words which had been said at the last meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee, one of which he felt he must dispel. He expressed very strongly that any accusations had made in no way referred to any current members of staff or councillors and he conveyed particular thanks to Councillor Wyatt for the enthusiastic way in which he conducts himself as a councillor.

The Chairman invited a minute's silence after announcing the sad death of ex councillor Pam Clayfield. He advised that Pam was a Labour councillor for just over 17 years which included representing the Holly Hayes ward and, following a district boundary review taking effect in May 2003, she represented the Thringstone ward. She was elected in May 1995 and retained her seat until December 2008 when she stepped down. She was re-elected in May 2011 and chose not to re-stand in May 2015 due to ill health.

After a minute's silence was observed, Members were invited to say a few words.

Members spoke fondly of Pam and recalled some of their favourite memories of her.

33. LEADER'S AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader of the Council, Councillor R Blunt, announced that, due to heavy workloads, he had introduced a new Portfolio role to pick up responsibility for the planning function and had made a few changes to the portfolio area which previously had responsibility for planning, the full details of which were set out in the additional papers circulated ahead of the meeting. He welcomed Councillor K Merrie as a member of Cabinet. The Leader also spoke about the long awaited and welcome opening of Newmarket this week and encouraged members to go along and see it for themselves, adding that this was not a direct replacement of the previous market but something new and different. It is a place to meet and to socialise as well as offer opportunities to local businesses and it contributes to the Council's aim to make Coalville a vibrant and friendly town. Finally, the Leader referred to the demolition works which had been commenced on the site of the Belvoir Centre to allow a new access point and move the Centre into the 21st century.

The Chairman invited comments. Congratulations were extended to Councillor K Merrie on his new role, concern was raised about the lack of a cinema and the difficulties experienced in relation to Marlborough Square; and news about the works having commenced at the Belvoir centre was welcomed.

Councillor Woodman, Community Portfolio Holder announced that he had attended the Awards for Excellence in Recycling and Waste Management in London which sought to celebrate and recognise the achievements of those working in the recycling and waste industry. This Authority was runner up in the 'Best Local Authority Recycling Initiative'

category for the successes and progress of the council's Recycle More plan including the recycling trolley trial, food waste collection trails, introducing battery and mobile phone collections but also the increase in our recycling rate – which has climbed to 46.3%, one step closer to the goal of 50% by 2023.

Councillor Woodman further advised that the Council had set up a Zero Litter Taskforce to help stamp out littering across the district in the best way possible. To date the Council has:

- Introduced a new litter picking procedure for communities to litter pick safely and have their hard work collected by the council in blue bags;
- Distributed over £6,000 of litter picking kit to 23 town/parish councils and individual litter pickers.
- Investigated 40 littering cases and issued 22 fines for littering.
- Issued three fines for fly tipping.
- Held educational talks with workers at Tulips, Coalville to advise them not to drop cigarette ends during breaks.

The Chairman invited comments. Concern was expressed about the use of plastic bottles which had been introduced to minimise the use of shared contact with water jugs and glasses during the Covid pandemic. Members asked that the jugs and glasses be reintroduced.

Councillor Bayliss, Housing Portfolio Holder announced that he was saddened to watch the tragic situation in Afghanistan develop over recent weeks and that it was clear that there are many Afghan people in urgent need of our support and assistance in this their greatest hour of need. He advised that as a Council we should do what we can to help in this humanitarian crisis. It was noted that, through the successful participation in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, nine families had been welcomed into our communities, with support offered through our partnership working with Charnwood Borough Council who have been leading this work across Leicestershire, and other agencies. Councillor Bayliss further reported that, in response to the current crisis, there are two Government schemes to assist people who will be resettling in the UK.

The first scheme is already up and running and is providing resettlement to Afghan Locally Employed Staff and their families who worked with our troops in Afghanistan providing interpreting services. Through this scheme, the Government has pledged to provide resettlement to 5000 interpreters and their families by the end of August. The Government has recently confirmed the financial aspects of this scheme, and they are more than adequate to meet the initial needs of the arriving families, thus avoiding any direct burdens on local budgets.

The scheme was established before the recent escalation in events in the country and the Council has already pledged and offered one Council property, and we are awaiting details from the Home Office of the family to whom it has been allocated. Once we have this, the preparations to support their arrival will be made in detail, to ensure we make their transition to this country as smooth and positive as it can be.

As the situation has escalated more recently the Government has announced a second wider scheme, details of which we are anxiously awaiting to ensure we can fully contribute to wider national response. This new scheme is expected to mirror the Syrian resettlement scheme and provide resettlement to 20,000 Afghans over a 5-year period. With these situations, there is always a balance to be struck between continuing to assist our own communities by providing affordable housing for those in need and helping on the wider international stage.

Councillor Bayliss advised that he was sure that members would agree with him that we must do as much as we can to help those being forced to resettle here from Afghanistan.

This may be through working with local private landlords, our Housing Association partners, or using our own Council accommodation. He advised that he would keep members informed of developments regarding this new scheme, particularly regarding the number of properties we will be pledging to make available, as details of the scheme are confirmed.

The Chairman invited comments and the statement was welcomed by members although disappointment was expressed that the Government had opted to take 5 years to take in 20,000 refugees which equated to only one or two per town in the UK.

34. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

There were no questions received.

35. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

A question was received from Councillor D Bigby addressed to Councillor T Gillard as follows:-

“Ashby Tourist Information Centre (TIC) has been closed during the Covid restrictions and staff deployed to other duties to assist with Covid recovery. I have been told by officers and the portfolio holder that:

- It will NOT be re-opened this year
- NWLDC is currently reviewing the future of Ashby TIC and a report to Cabinet is being prepared
- it will not be re-opened unless the report recommends this.

The walk-in TIC at Ashby Library has made, and can continue to make, a valuable contribution to the local economy through providing the following important local services,

- promoting Ashby as a developing tourist destination
- furnishing visitors to Ashby with up-to-date information on local facilities, events and tourist attractions across the District
- providing a warm and friendly welcome to visitors
- providing local businesses and community groups with a means of publicising events and selling tickets to the public and visitors
- promoting the National Forest.

Does the portfolio holder agree with me that the permanent closure of Ashby TIC would represent a loss of the important local services listed above, would be highly detrimental to the local economy and replacement by an improved website would not constitute an adequate substitute?”

Councillor T Gillard replied as follows:-

“The council should be proud of the way that it responded to the Covid 19 Pandemic. We have had to make difficult decisions to cease or change the way we offered our services and redeploy staff to critical areas to make sure we continued to deliver priority services to the public, such as the Community Hub, waste services and distributing government grants to businesses. The TIC was closed and, as Cllr Bigby says, staff were redeployed. They were providing vital support to businesses to help them reopen and begin to grow again.

Cabinet continues to recognise the importance of the Visitor Economy to our district and after a horrendous 2020 and a bumpy 2021 we hope our tourism businesses will bounce back in 2022. We are working closely with businesses in the sector to help them “build back better”.

What we must ensure is that our investment remains relevant, delivering both value for money and positive impacts on the performance of the district as a tourist destination. Officers have been tasked with evaluating the impact of our cultural services, including through engagement with sector stakeholders. The outcome of the Service Review exercise will be reported later this year.

In summary, I thank Cllr Bigby for his question but would suggest that he waits until the Service Review has concluded and we have an opportunity to debate the findings”

Councillor Bigby was invited to ask a supplementary question. Councillor Bigby replied

“I thank Councillor Gillard for his reply to my question. I note that he has given us no reassurances whatsoever on the future of Ashby Tourist Information Centre and has not answered my question.

In a letter of 23 July he stated to me that, and I quote;

“Of course, if the TIC were able to become self-supporting this would likely have a major influence on the recommendations made to Cabinet. If you have any ideas how this might be achieved I would be excited to hear them.”

In my reply of the same date, I said, “if you should wish to send me the detailed accounts for the Ashby TIC, I would be happy to peruse them and consider whether I can make any suggestions for increasing its income. I would be particularly interested in comparing footfall, costs and income before and after the drastic reduction in opening hours that was implemented a couple of years ago when the Library changed its hours and entry systems.”

Over six weeks have now elapsed and I have received no response to my request, so my supplementary question is;

Will the Portfolio Holder furnish Ashby members with a set of detailed accounts for the Ashby TIC covering the last 4 years, in order to allow us to assess its costs and income and provide positive suggestions for improving its viability before the Cultural Services Review is produced?”

Councillor Gillard advised that he did not have the information to hand and apologised for any delay in responding, but he reiterated that, as the matter was currently being looked at as part of a service review which would find its way to Scrutiny and Cabinet, comments and observations could be made on the recommendations as part of this process.

36. MOTIONS

Council considered and debated the following motion received from Councillor Legrys:

“This Council believes planning works best when developers and the local community work together to shape local areas and deliver necessary new homes; and therefore calls on the Government to protect the right of communities to object to individual planning applications”.

Councillor Legrys introduced his motion which received cross party support but concern was expressed by one member who felt that planning policies over recent years had failed to address the need for community involvement.

It was moved by Councillor J Legrys, seconded by Councillor R Ashman and

RESOLVED THAT:- The Government be called upon to protect the right of communities to object to individual planning applications.

37. PETITIONS

No petitions were received.

38. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2021. It was moved by Councillor V Richichi, seconded by Councillor R Boam and subsequently

RESOLVED:- That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2021 be approved as a correct record.

39. COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN

Councillor R Blunt presented the report to members.

The report was widely supported by members but there were a number of concerns around the lack of transport links and infrastructure including coach parks, the lack of a Neighbourhood Plan in non parished areas, the challenges around obesity, the low number of affordable homes, and the inability to assess the outcomes with intangible and moving targets. Clarity was sought on whether reference to 'days' referred to calendar or working days. A request was also made for a council carbon emission target to be written into the Plan, to ensure it showed where we are against the backdrop of the national figure.

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

RESOLVED:- That Council approves the Council Delivery Plan for 2021/22 and 2022/23.

40. CAPITAL PROGRAMME UPDATE

Councillor N Rushton presented the report to members.

The report was fully supported but with some reservations around rising costs and overspends, and reference was made to the fine print and the need for larger fonts in statistical tables. Assurance was sought that contingencies were in place to safeguard the taxpayers against further rising costs.

RESOLVED:- That Council approves the changes to the General Fund Capital Programme as detailed in the report.

41. REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION

It was moved by Councillor D Harrison and seconded by Councillor R Canny and subsequently

RESOLVED:- That officers consider that the press and public should be excluded during consideration of the following items in accordance with Section 100(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 as publicity would be likely to result in disclosure of exempt or confidential information. Members are reminded that they must have regard to the public interest test and must consider, for each item, whether the public interest in maintaining the exemption from disclosure outweighs the public interest in making the item available.

Councillor N Rushton presented the report to members.

The debate centred on the need for early engagement with officers and the Chairman of the Planning Committee together with attendance at the planning technical briefings. As

the newly appointed Portfolio Holder, Councillor Merrie offered his support in an operational capacity.

It was moved by Councillor N Rushton, seconded by Councillor J Bridges and subsequently

RESOLVED:- That Council

- a. notes the comments made by the Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting on 21 July 2021;
- b. adopts the proposed amendments to the Constitution, as set out in the report;
- c. adopts the proposed amendment to the planning call-in process as set out in paragraph 3.1.3 of the report.

42. APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES

Councillor T Gillard presented the report to members.

Nominations for those seats which could be contested were set out in the additional papers.

A request was made that the vacant seat for the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee be given to an opposition member.

It was moved by Councillor N Rushton, seconded by Councillor J Bridges and subsequently

RESOLVED:- That

- (1) Councillor R Morris be appointed to replace Councillor K Merrie on the Community Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the 2021/22 civic year;
- (2) Councillor J Simmons be appointed to replace Councillor K Merrie on the Planning Committee for the remainder of the 2021/22 civic year;
- (3) Councillor J Simmons be appointed to replace Councillor K Merrie on the Local Plan Committee for the remainder of the 2021/22 civic year;
- (4) Councillor L Gillard be appointed to replace Councillor K Merrie as a substitute on the Corporate Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the 2021/22 civic year;
- (5) Those listed in the substitution table as set out in the additional papers, be appointed as additional substitutes to the Committees as shown.
- (6) Councillor J Hoult be appointed Chairman of the Community Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the 2021/22 civic year;
- (7) Councillor R Morris be appointed Deputy Chairman of the Community Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the 2021/22 civic year;
- (8) Councillor R Morris be appointed Deputy Chairman of the Local Plan Committee for the remainder of the 2021/22 civic year;

43. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Having been moved by Councillor V Richichi and seconded by Councillor R Boam it was subsequently

RESOLVED:- That officers consider that the press and public should be excluded during consideration of the following items in accordance with Section 100(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 as publicity would be likely to result in disclosure of exempt or confidential information. Members are reminded that they must have regard to the public interest test and must consider, for each item, whether the public interest in maintaining the exemption from disclosure outweighs the public interest in making the item available.

Councillors A Black, M French, J Windram and M Wyatt left the meeting ahead of consideration of the following item having declared a pecuniary interest.

44. DISPOSAL OF NWLDC LAND HOLDING IN CROPSTON DRIVE/WATERWORKS ROAD

Councillor R Bayliss set out his report which outlined an alternative approach to the disposal of the Council's land holding at Cropston Drive/Waterworks Road.

Having been moved by Councillor Bayliss and seconded by Councillor N Rushton, it was subsequently

RESOLVED:- That the recommendations, as set out in the report, be agreed.

A recorded vote having been requested the vote went as follows:-

Motion to agree the recommendations as set out in the report (Motion)	
Councillor Virge Richichi	For
Councillor Russell Boam	For
Councillor Elliott Allman	For
Councillor Robert Ashman	For
Councillor Roger Bayliss	For
Councillor Carl Benfield	Against
Councillor Dave Bigby	Against
Councillor Angela Black	Conflict Of Interests
Councillor Richard Blunt	For
Councillor Alexander Bridgen	For
Councillor John Bridges	For
Councillor Rachel Canny	For
Councillor John Clarke	For
Councillor David Everitt	Against
Councillor Dr Terri Eynon	Against
Councillor Marie French	Conflict Of Interests
Councillor John Geary	No vote recorded
Councillor Louise Gillard	For
Councillor Stuart Gillard	For
Councillor Tony Gillard	For
Councillor Dan Harrison	For
Councillor Bertie Harrison-Rushton	For
Councillor Michael Hay	Against
Councillor Gill Hout	For
Councillor Jim Hout	For
Councillor Russell Johnson	Against
Councillor John Legrys	Against
Councillor Keith Merrie MBE	For
Councillor Ray Morris	For
Councillor Nicholas Rushton	For
Councillor Tony Saffell	For

Councillor Carol Sewell	Against
Councillor Sean Sheahan	Against
Councillor Jenny Simmons	For
Councillor Nigel Smith	For
Councillor Jake Windram	Conflict Of Interests
Councillor Andrew Woodman	For
Councillor Michael Wyatt	Conflict Of Interests
Carried	

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.50 pm