

MINUTES of a meeting of the COUNCIL held in the Forest Room, Stenson House, London Road, Coalville, LE67 3FN on TUESDAY, 30 JANUARY 2024

Present: Councillor R L Morris (Chair)

Councillors K Horn, M Ball, D Bigby, M Blair-Park, R Blunt, R Boam, M Burke, R Canny, D Cooper, D Everitt, T Eynon, M French, J Geary, T Gillard, R Johnson, S Lambeth, P Lees, J Legrys, K Merrie MBE, A Morley, P Moulton, J Page, E Parle, G Rogers, N J Rushton, R Sutton, A C Saffell, C A Sewell, S Sheahan, J G Simmons, N Smith, A Wilson, J Windram, L Windram, A C Woodman and M B Wyatt

Officers: Mr J Arnold, Mr A Barton, Mrs C Hammond, Mr P Stone, Mrs A Thomas, Mrs R Wallace and Miss E Warhurst

56. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Barker.

57. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no interests declared.

58. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair drew Members attention to the commemorative candle burning in the centre of the Council Chamber to mark the recent Holocaust Memorial Day held on 27 January. Members were invited to join the Chair in standing and observing a one minute silence to remember all those who lost their lives during the Holocaust under Nazi Persecution and in the genocides which followed.

The Chair announced the death of ex councillor and former Chairman of the Council, Derek Howe who passed away earlier in the month. He had served as a Labour Councillor for the former Whitwick Ward for 42 years.

Several Members took the opportunity to say a few words in memory of Derek and spoke of his hard work and professionalism as a councillor. It was suggested and agreed that the plaque displayed at the old Council Offices in honour of the opening of the building by Derek when he was Chairman of the Council be presented to his family.

The Chair referred to the Remembrance Sunday Service last November and was pleased with the large attendance from all generations which was good to see.

The Chair reported on the Christmas shop front competition in Coalville and the high number of entries this year. Following conversations with the traders it was clear that they were enthusiastic about improving footfall in the town and the regeneration of the area was going well.

Under the Chair's initiative to celebrate the success of staff, he announced that he had recently presented the Chair's award to Karl Bassett who worked in the Economic Development Team.

The Chair informed Members of the annual Staff Star Awards held before Christmas to recognise staff achievements during the year. He announced that the Chair's award was this year presented to Clare Hammond, Democratic Services Team Manager.

Chairman's initials

Finally, the Chair announced the annual charity dinner event on 15 March 2024 and invited all to attend. He reported that it had been a very successful year of fundraising, and he would announce the amount raised so far at the next meeting.

59. LEADER'S AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor R Blunt, Leader of the Council, referred to the recent storms which had caused flooding issues in the District and highlighted the organisations working hard with the Council to support the residents affected. He emphasised the significance of the Council being aware of which houses had experienced flooding. This awareness enabled the Council to provide support and develop plans for future actions. It was reported that a debrief was planned to review what could be learnt following the recent storms. Members were urged to encourage residents to report to the Council if they have experienced flooding.

Councillor R Blunt also reported on the ongoing consultations, cross party discussions and public engagement on the draft budget proposals. He thanked people and organisations that had provided comments so far. It was confirmed that Cabinet would be considering the proposals the following evening.

Finally, Councillor R Blunt announced that further work would be undertaken to review the available options to improve the leisure provision in Ashby to ensure good facilities in the future.

Councillor A C Saffell, Planning Portfolio Holder, announced that the Council had successfully bid and received over £96,000 in government skills funding for the Planning and Development Team. This would enable an increase in skills in the team through six months of intensive support in the Urban Design Service, Conservation Service and validation process for planning applications creating a new technical support team.

Following a question from a Member, Councillor A C Saffell explained that the funding was not being used for the Planning Enforcement Team at this time as the team has recently been increased and a very experienced new team leader was now in post.

Councillor M B Wyatt, Community and Climate Change Portfolio Holder, announced the news that Hermitage FM and community café would be closing. He thanked Jon and Jan Sketchley for their hard work and dedication over the last 17 years in providing the community with the radio station and café and wished them a happy retirement. Several Members added their thanks for the service provided over the years and it was agreed to send a formal letter of thanks in recognition of their contribution to the community on behalf of the Council. Councillor R Blunt hoped that someone would take the opportunity to keep the service running and would provide support where possible.

60. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

There were no questions received.

61. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

There were four questions asked which are set out below with the responses. Each Member who asked a question was invited by the Chair to ask one supplementary question which is also set out together with the response.

Question from Councillor J Legrys

Chairman's initials

'Can the Portfolio Holder please inform me how much is it costing per month, to keep the old council offices since closure, secure, heated/ventilated and continue to enable staff access to items remaining in the building please?'

Response from Councillor A Woodman

'The Council continues to make low level use of the former Council Offices building such as to accommodate the town CCTV Server equipment. These systems are slowly being disentangled from the building and relocated. Much has now been completed to reduce holding costs. The current cost of retaining this building and the site it sits on is approx. £11k per month.'

Supplementary question and response

Councillor J Legrys shared his disappointment at the activity still occurring in the building and that demolition had not moved any further forward. He asked for the current timeline for the building. Councillor A Woodman stated that he would keep track of the progress and keep Members updated on the matter.

Question from Councillor P Moulton

'How much has the Council spent on defending the `Area of Separation between Whitwick and Coalville, including officer resources, appeals, and the high court judgement plus the cost of the five-day judicial review, which supported it`s retention recognising it`s importance?'

Response from Councillor K Merrie

'There have been two applications in the area of separation that have successfully been defended at appeal by the Council. The Stephenson's Green proposal was also successfully defended at judicial review.

The legal cost of defending the Stephenson's Green proposal (Application No. 10/01208/OUTM) was £33,433. (Note: made up of external legal fees - £31,600 and internal officer time - £1,833).

The legal cost of defending the Jelson's proposal on land to the rear of Hall Lane (Application No. 14/00800OUTM) was £15,506. (Note: made up of external legal fees - £12,075 and internal officer time - £3,431).

I am unable to advise what the cost of the planning officer resource in dealing with these applications was, but those costs would have generally been covered by the fees received for the planning applications.

I would also advise members that the land at Broom Leys Farm, agreed as a site allocation for the purposes of the Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation at Local Plan Committee on 17 January, was not part of either the Stephenson Green and Jelson's proposals successfully defended by the Council.'

Supplementary question and response

Councillor P Moulton reported that the Whitwick Action Group did not recognise the figures presented by the Portfolio Holder and asked why there was a discrepancy. Councillor K Merrie asked for the Whitwick Action Group's figures so that he could discuss the matter with officers. A response would be provided to Councillor P Moulton outside of the meeting.

Question from Councillor T Eynon

'The restoration of the Mother and Child Statue has been delivered as part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and its relocation in the Belvoir Shopping Centre has been agreed in principle.

Can the Portfolio Holder please provide an update on the project, in particular the terms of the licence agreed between this Council and the owners of the Belvoir Shopping Centre (Gylo) and the timetable for the reinstatement of the Mother and Child Statue in the Belvoir Shopping Centre's public space?'

Response from Councillor Blunt

'A lease arrangement to relocate the Mother & Child Statue into the Belvoir Shopping Centre has been drafted by Council Officers, working with legal services. This draft lease is currently being finalised with the owners of the Shopping Centre.

Once the lease has been completed, officers will submit a planning application for the necessary consents to relocate the statue. Subject to the granting of planning consent, officers will then be able arrange for the statue plinth to be completed and the statue to be installed.

I'm unable to provide more specific detail on the timetable, but I will ask officers to keep you updated on progress as part of our UK Shared Prosperity Funded projects, through the shadow portfolio holder briefings.'

Supplementary question and response

Councillor T Eynon asked why adequate planning was not carried out to allow residents to know what was happening with the statue. Councillor R Blunt explained that it was a very complex situation due to the relocation of the statue to land not owned by the Council, as well as the fact that the Council did not own the statue and were custodians only. As soon as it was brought to the Council's attention, plans have been put into place to preserve the statue, which it has now been, and things will continue to progress as soon as possible.

Question from Councillor S Sheahan

'On 23 March 2022, the Government published its Levelling Up Fund Round 2 prospectus. In an officer's email to a third party dated 26th April 2022, it was said that "it is unlikely that the Council will be submitting its own bid to round 2." Can the Leader please explain how the Council arrived at that position and why, for instance did it not submit an improved version of the round 1 bid?'

Response from Councillor R Blunt

'I understand officers have already provided a detailed written response on this matter and have met with you to discuss.

National Government regularly announces funding opportunities for various activities. This Council has bid to those where it believes there is a strong chance of success. There is no Council policy requiring that bids be made. To submit bids takes significant resource, both officer time and external specialist consultancy support.

Having already made two unsuccessful bids for Coalville, firstly for the Future High Street Funding and then to Round 1 Levelling Up - which was in effect the "improved version" it was considered that our available resource needed to be spent delivering funded regeneration projects in line with our Council Delivery Plan.

The Council did begin discussing a new bid (not in Coalville) for round 2 with a third party in 2022, considering that this may be more attractive for government to fund than another bid centred on Coalville. After providing initial advice and support it was decided by the third party that they were not in a position to bid and would prefer to wait until Round 3 Levelling Up.

Given this, no Round 2 bid was submitted as it was considered that any resubmitted bid for Coalville had a poor chance of success given the two failed attempts. Staffing resource was instead focused on deliverable projects.'

Supplementary question and response

Councillor S Sheahan asked if Councillor R Blunt would consider supporting Durham County Council in its call for a judicial review in Levelling up f Councillor R Blunt confirmed that he had no details on the matter and therefore it was difficult to volunteer support when circumstances may be different. He reaffirmed his disappointed over the Council's unsuccessful bids and asked officers to look into the matter and if relevant a decision can be taken on next steps. =

62. MOTIONS

No motions were received.

63. PETITIONS

No petitions were received.

64. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2023.

It was moved by Councillor R Morris, seconded by Councillor K Horn and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2023 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

65. ELECTORAL BOUNDARY REVIEW - COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION

Councillor K Merrie, Infrastructure Portfolio Holder, presented the report and highlighted the process currently being undertaken as part of phase one of the review process. As the recommendations within the report asked for a preference on the issue of single member wards, Councillor K Merrie moved the following:

- 1) That the council size submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on the future size of the Council as detailed at appendix three be approved.
- 2) That the Local Government Boundary Commission for England be informed that Council's preference is for the review to be conducted based on single member wards.

It was seconded by Councillor A Woodman.

Chairman's initials

Due to the separate issues of the two recommendations, Members agreed to debate and vote on each recommendation in turn.

The Chair opened the debate on recommendation one.

Councillor D Bigby referred Members to the additional papers in which summary information and an alternative recommendation for an increase in council size to 39 Councillors was provided as submitted by the Labour Group. This explained the position of the Labour Group on the matter and the recommendation that would be proposed should the current motion be lost.

A full discussion ensued in which Members spoke both in support and against the council size preferences as detailed within the report and additional papers.

The Chair put recommendation one as moved and seconded to the vote.

The motion was CARRIED.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1) The council size submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on the future size of the Council as detailed at appendix three be approved.

The Chair then opened the debate on recommendation two.

Several concerns in relation to single member wards were shared including the perceived split in communities due to boundary lines and less choice for the residents. Some Members felt that the multi member ward approach meant that bigger areas were easier to manage with better support for each other with case work when needed. However, some Members felt that single member wards were less confusing for residents and meant that a smaller 'patch' led to a better relationship with the community and more accountability for the individual Ward Member. Further discussions ensued both in support and against single member wards.

The Chair put recommendation two as moved and seconded to the vote.

The motion was CARRIED.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 2) The Local Government Boundary Commission for England be informed that Council's preference is for the review to be conducted based on single member wards.

66. TREASURY MANAGEMENT HALF-YEARLY REPORT 2023/24

Councillor N J Rushton, Corporate Portfolio Holder, presented the report to Members and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor T Gillard.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1) The Treasury Management Half-Yearly Activity report 2023-24 be noted.
- 2) The Prudential Indicators Half-Yearly Update 2023-24 be noted.

67. APPOINTMENTS TO COMMUNITY BODIES

Councillor K Merrie, Infrastructure Portfolio Holder, presented the report to Members and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by R Blunt.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1) Councillor R Sutton be appointed to serve as the Council's representative on the East Midlands Airport Independent Consultative Committee.
- 2) That Councillor N J Rushton be appointed as a substitute on the East Midlands Airport Independent Consultative Committee.

68. URGENT DECISIONS TAKEN BY CABINET

Councillor R Bunt, Leader of the Council, presented the report and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor A Woodman.

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.57 pm