

MINUTES of a meeting of the COUNCIL held in the Forest Room, Stenson House, London Road, Coalville, LE67 3FN on TUESDAY, 13 MAY 2025

Present: Councillor K Horn (Chair)

Councillors R L Morris, M Ball, A Barker, C Beck, 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, 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 A Barton, Mrs C Hammond, Ms K Hiller, Mr P Stone, Mrs A Thomas and Mrs R Wallace

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillors A Barker, D Everitt, M French, J Geary, R Johnson, J Legrys, N Rushton and A Wilson declared an other interest in item 18, Pension Discretion – Proposed Introduction of a Salary Sacrifice Additional Voluntary Contributions Scheme (AVC), as members of the Leicestershire County Council Pension Scheme.

Councillor S Sheahan declared a registerable interest in item 10, Motions, due to the reference to HS2 and a property owner affected by the proposed route.

Councillors C Sewell and R Sutton declared an interest in item 10, Motions, as members of Kegworth Parish Council.

Councillor P Moulton declared an other interest in item 11, Petitions, as a signatory on the petition submitted.

3. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

Councillor K Horn said a few words regarding his year as Chair of the Council. He thanked all officers and Members for their support, particularly with raising money for his charity. He advised that the total raised was £17,000.

Nominations were sought for the Chair of the Council for the ensuing municipal year.

It was moved by Councillor R Blunt that Councillor P Lees be appointed as Chair of the Council for 2025/26. The motion was seconded by Councillor T Gillard.

It was also moved by Councillor A Morley that Councillor T Eynon be appointed as Chair of the Council for 2025/26. It was seconded by Councillor C Sewell.

As two nominations had been received, a vote was taken for each nominee in turn. It was

RESOLVED THAT:

Councillor P Lees be appointed Chair of the Council for 2025/26.

Councillor P Lees then took the Chair, received the Chair's chains and signed the Acceptance of Office. He then presented Councillor K Horn with his Past Chair of the Council badge.

Chair's initials

4. APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY CHAIR

Nominations were sought for the Deputy Chair of the Council for the ensuing year.

It was moved by Councillor R Blunt that Councillor J Simmons be appointed as Deputy Chair of the Council for 2025/26. The motion was seconded by Councillor T Gillard.

It was also moved by Councillor D Bigby that Councillor A Wilson be appointed as Deputy Chair of the Council for 2025/26. The motion was seconded by Councillor J Legrys.

As two nominations had been received, a vote was taken for each nominee in turn, the result of which was tied. Therefore, in accordance with the Council's Constitution, the Chair of the Council exercised his casting vote. It was

RESOLVED THAT:

Councillor J Simmons be appointed as Deputy Chair of the Council for 2025/26.

5. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair of the Council took the opportunity to thank Members for his appointment and announced his intentions for his year in office, particularly to represent the neuro-divergent community as an openly autistic Chair of the Council. Some information was provided in relation to neurodiversity and then it was announced that the Chair of the Council's chosen charity for the year as the National Autistic Society.

6. APPOINTMENT OF LEADER

Nominations were sought for the Leader of the Council for the ensuing year.

It was moved by Councillor T Gillard that Councillor R Blunt be appointed as Leader of the Council for 2025/26. The motion was seconded by Councillor K Horn.

It was also moved by Councillor P Moulton that Councillor J Legrys be appointed as Leader of the Council for 2025/26. The motion was seconded by Councillor G Rogers.

Before a vote was taken, in agreement with the Chair of the Council, Councillor R Sutton addressed the meeting in relation to his priorities for his constituents and the decision on leadership for Members to consider.

As two nominations had been received, a vote was taken for each nominee. It was

RESOLVED THAT:

Councillor R Blunt be appointed as the Leader of the Council for 2025/26.

Councillor R Blunt thanked Members for his appointment and said a few words regarding his plans for the forthcoming year.

7. LEADER'S AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader of the Council, Councillor R Blunt announced his appointments and delegations of executive functions for the forthcoming year as follows:

Leader – Councillor R Blunt

Deputy Leader and Community and Climate Change Portfolio – Councillor M Wyatt

Infrastructure Portfolio – Councillor N Rushton

Chair's initials

Planning Portfolio – Councillor T Saffell
 Finance and Corporate Portfolio – Councillor K Merrie
 Housing, Property and Customer Services Portfolio – Councillor A Woodman
 Business and Regeneration Portfolio – Councillor T Gillard

As in previous years, the executive responsibilities were to be delegated to the Cabinet to take decisions collectively.

Councillor J Legrys, Leader of the Labour Group, announced the Shadow Portfolio Holders as follows:

Leader, and Planning and Infrastructure Portfolio – Councillor J Legrys
 Housing Portfolio – Councillor A Morley
 Finance and Corporate Portfolio – Councillor S Lambeth
 Freeport Portfolio – Councillor C Sewell
 Community Services Portfolio – Councillor P Moulton
 Environment, Net Zero and Waste Management Portfolio – Councillor D Bigby
 Customer Services Portfolio – Councillor C Beck
 Business and Regeneration Portfolio – Councillor G Rogers
 Policy and Research Lead – Councillor S Sheahan

Councillor J Legrys thanked Councillor S Sheahan for his invaluable work in the previous years as Leader of the Labour Group. He also acknowledged Councillor N Rushton for his many years of hard work in leading Leicestershire County Council.

Councillor R Blunt then provided an update on the latest position with local government reorganisation and devolution. It was announced that during the summer, the Council would be engaging extensively with residents, businesses and stakeholders in preparation for the submission of the full proposals in November.

Councillor A Woodman, as Housing, Property and Customer Services Portfolio Holder, provided an update on the progress made to date in the Housing Service. He apologised to tenants who were still waiting for service but acknowledged improvements were being made. He thanked all staff involved for the transformation in the last 18 months.

8. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

There were no questions received.

9. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Four questions were asked which were circulated in the additional papers and are set out below with the responses. Each Member who asked a question was invited by the Chair of the Council to ask one supplementary question which is also set out with the response.

Question from Councillor Legrys

‘Can the Portfolio Holder please update me as Ward Member on proposals to modify/upgrade Stenson Square Coalville please?’

Response from Councillor R Blunt

‘Specialist “Place Making” Consultants have been appointed to undertake the next phase of the Stenson Square project. As part of this commission the consultants will build upon the previous concept proposals to draw up a planning application submission for the area in front of Stenson House. The consultants will shortly be arranging an engagement

meeting with local stakeholders (including councillors) which will offer an opportunity for all those interested in this project to help inform and refine the proposals.'

Supplementary question and response

Councillor J Legrys asked for a timeline for progressing the work. Councillor R Blunt explained that officers were working towards obtaining a certificate of lawful use and then work could begin to demolish the old council offices, therefore, progress was imminent. It was reported that meetings on the matter were being scheduled and Councillor J Legrys would be involved at every stage.

Question from Councillor P Moulton

'I would like to know with regard to timescales when, if at all The Oak public house at Whitwick is to be developed, given that it was purchased in 2021 and the costs of security, clearance and designs are increasing daily?'

Response from Councillor A Woodman

'The site is within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) property portfolio and was purchased some time ago as a prospective development site. The Housing Service's new build capacity has recently been increased through the use of external contractors to start to address outstanding sites. The development opportunities for each site are currently being assessed.

This particular site has an expired outline planning permission for a housing development and requires a detailed application to be developed in line with current social housing standards if it is to be taken forward for development. A feasibility study is currently being commissioned. This means that it is likely to be some months before a revised planning application could come forward. The earliest anticipated date for completion is therefore likely to be some years away.

In the meantime, the site is being managed, along with the other small number of sites the HRA controls, awaiting development. The ongoing regular costs amount to c£1000 per annum, plus ad hoc litter and or vegetation clearance, the cost of which varies by visit. These costs are being met from the HRA and are not funded by the General Fund. This is in addition to the combined purchase and costs for design work and site clearances, fencing etc to date of c£480,000.'

Supplementary question and response

Councillor P Moulton referred to the issues on site including overhanging trees to neighbours, vermin on the site and security required. He asked for an explanation on the impact of the costs on the financial stability and value for money position of the authority. Councillor A Woodman explained the costs if the site was part of the Housing Revenue Account rather than the General Fund and the two should not be conflicted. It was noted that the focus had been on improving the maintenance service, but things were now moving forward. The issues raised were noted and Councillor A Woodman would raise it with officers outside of the meeting.

Question from Councillor C Beck

'What can councils in Leicestershire do, to make sure that the list of independent persons is representative of the population?'

Response from Councillor K Merrie

'There has been a fair and open recruitment process for the Independent Persons in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and HR policies. From this, two new Independent Persons have been chosen due to their impressive applications and successful interviews. We have a pool arrangement with the other Leicestershire Councils. The benefit of this is it provides for a larger number of IPs which can be drawn from and does not limit this to having only one or two in the position. We are hopeful that this approach means the IPs will be better representative of the population, given the pool allows for a wider cross section of people to choose from and no limit on numbers – if someone meets the criteria and performs well in the interview, they can be offered the role.

The job advert for this recruitment was tailored to the role but in a way that could encourage a range of applicants, and for future recruitment exercises it can be ensured that a similar approach is taken.

The essential criteria were experience of local government or other aspects of public service and of the political process, and that the IPs either live or work in Leicestershire. Other essential criteria related to communication skills, the ability to assimilate information, having an understanding of legal requirements, understanding confidentiality requirements, being assertive, being open minded and using IT. There has to be a balance between ensuring the right people apply for the job, but not setting the requirements too stringently that no one can meet them. It is also important to note that it is an essential requirement that the IP either lives or works in Leicestershire, thus giving them a connection to the area within which they will be carrying out the role.

The role description also specifically requires the IP to be aware of the views of the local community on ethical standards, and to ensure they reflect views when carrying out the role.

The role was advertised by all the Leicestershire Councils, in order to ensure the advert had as wide a reach as possible.'

Supplementary question and response

Councillor C Beck asked how highly qualified and skilled women could be encouraged to take part in the recruitment process. Councillor K Merrie offered to meet with Councillor C Beck to discuss the matter further.

Question from Councillor J Geary

'Once again, our travelling friends paid us a visit a couple of weeks ago, this time setting up home on the London Road Park, so I again ask the question as to what progress is being made in finding the travelling community a suitable site within our district.

I last asked this question at the Council Meeting of the 18 June last. You replied by saying "I can confirm that Officers are currently investigating options for addressing the issue of transit accommodation in respect of both permanent and temporary sites as the Local Plan Review progress. The intention is for Officers to bring forward a report to members of the Local Plan Committee before the end of the year".

You went on to say "I have asked Officers to keep Cllr Geary updated on progress and to make him aware when the issue is to be reported to the Local Plan Committee", to date no such information has been forthcoming.'

Response from Councillor N Rushton

'Unfortunately, it has not been possible to make the progress we had hoped on this issue due to other important work in respect of the emerging Local Plan, including consulting upon additional housing and employment site allocations and addressing responses to the proposed policies consulted upon last year.

We have recently received some additional funding from the Government to support the preparation of Local Plans and we are looking to bring in some additional capacity to help address the gypsy and traveller's issue. Officers are aware that this is an important issue to be addressed in the preparation of the Local Plan and they will take a report to Local Plan Committee as soon as they are able.'

Supplementary question and response

Councillor J Geary asked that the matter be sent to a Scrutiny Committee so that it could be fully scrutinized, especially as there had recently been parcels of land removed from the Local Plan proposals which could be used for the much-needed transit sites for gypsy and travellers. Councillor N Rushton acknowledged the importance of the issue and as the new Portfolio Holder, invited Councillor J Geary to discuss the matter with him further outside of the meeting.

10. MOTIONS

The Chair of the Council referred Members to the motion as detailed within the agenda papers and amended in the additional papers, and invited Councillor M Ball, who made the submission, to speak.

Councillor M Ball spoke and then formally moved the motion. It was seconded by Councillor A Woodman.

A discussion ensued in which Members spoke in support of the motion.

The motion was put to the vote and was CARRIED.

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The Chief Executive write to the Secretary of State on behalf of the Council to request an explanation as to why the land in the district safeguarded by HS2 has not yet been released.
- b) The Chief Executive write to the Members of Parliament for North West Leicestershire and Bosworth requesting that they make representations to Government highlighting the blight HS2 continues to cause the district.

11. PETITIONS

The Chair of the Council referred Members to the petition as detailed within the agenda papers and additional papers and invited the Petition Organiser to come forward and speak to the petition.

Councillor T Gillard spoke in support of the petition and moved that the matter be referred to the next convenient meeting of the Local Plan Committee. The motion was seconded by Councillor A Barker.

Councillor N Rushton, the Planning and Infrastructure Portfolio Holder, addressed the meeting and raised the difficulties facing the Local Plan Committee in allocating sites and the Importance of agreeing the Local Plan in accordance with the proposed timeframe.

The motion was put to the vote and was CARRIED.

RESOLVED THAT:

The subject matter of the petition be placed on the next convenient meeting of the Local Plan Committee.

12. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2025.

It was moved by Councillor P Lees, seconded by Councillor J Simmons and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2025 be approved and signed by the Chair of the Council as a correct record.

13. APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES AND GROUPS, ELECTION OF CHAIRS AND DEPUTY CHAIRS

Councillor T Gillard, the Business and Regeneration Portfolio Holder, presented the report and directed Members to the nominations as circulated in the additional papers. The recommendations were moved by Councillor T Gillard and seconded by Councillor N Rushton.

As there was more than one nomination for the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, a separate vote on this appointment was required.

The appointment of the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee as circulated in the additional papers was put to the vote.

RESOLVED THAT:

Councillor R Sutton be appointed as Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee.

At this point, the Labour Group announced a change to their nominations. It was noted that the nomination for Deputy Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee be changed from Councillor D Everitt to Councillor P Moulton. There was no opposition.

The appointments for the remaining Committees and Groups, including the change as detailed above, was put to the vote.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1) The terms of reference of the committees and groups as detailed in appendix A be endorsed.
- 2) The appointments to the committees and groups as circulated in the additional papers be agreed.

- 3) The Chairs and Deputy Chairs for the committees and groups as detailed in the additional papers be agreed subject to the amendment to Deputy Chair of the Audit and governance Committee as detailed above.

14. SCHEME OF DELEGATION

Councillor R Blunt, Leader of the Council, presented the report to Members and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor K Merrie.

RESOLVED THAT:

The Scheme of Delegation in Part 2, Section G of the Council's Constitution be agreed.

15. APPOINTMENT OF REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

Councillor T Gillard, the Business and Regeneration Portfolio Holder, presented the report and directed Members to the nominations as circulated in the additional papers. The recommendations were moved by Councillor T Gillard and seconded by Councillor N Rushton.

During discussions comments were made regarding the lack of feedback, minutes or written reports from the Members who were appointed to the outside bodies, it was requested that this be done in the future. It was also reported that the MSV Donington Park Consultative Forum did not meet even though appointments were made to it each year. The Chief Executive reiterated advice previously provided relating to outside bodies and that there was no requirement for the Council to provide updates on their behalf. It was agreed for officers to contact the MSV Donington Park Consultative Forum to request that a meeting be convened..

As there was more than one nomination for the Charnwood Forest Geopark Charitable Incorporated Organisation, a separate vote was required.

The appointment of the representative for the Charnwood Forest Geopark Charitable Incorporated Organisation was put to the vote, the result of which was tied. Therefore, in accordance with the Council's Constitution, the Chair of the Council exercised his second and casting vote.

RESOLVED THAT:

Councillor M Wyatt be appointed as the Council's representative on the Charnwood Forest Geopark Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

The appointments for the remaining Outside Bodies as circulated in the additional papers were then put to the vote.

RESOLVED THAT:

The representatives be appointed to serve on the Outside Bodies as circulated in the additional papers.

16. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS 2025 - 2026

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

A request was made for an appropriate notice period for any cancellation of meetings to allow Councillors to better manage their time.

Chair's initials

RESOLVED THAT:

The Schedule of Meetings for 2025 - 26 be agreed.

17. CAPITAL UPDATE

Councillor K Merrie, the Finance and Corporate Portfolio Holder, presented the report to Members and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor M Wyatt.

During discussion the proposals were welcomed. Some concerns were shared in relation to the new vehicles as they were diesel rather than a greener option as originally proposed, officers were asked to put plans in place to consider green options when replacing these vehicles.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1) The supplementary estimates detailed in paragraph 2.2 of the report which were above £250,000 and externally funded be approved.
- 2) The revised capital programmes as detailed in appendices A and B be agreed.

18. PENSION DISCRETION - PROPOSED INTRODUCTION OF A SALARY SACRIFICE ADDITIONAL VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS SCHEME (AVC)

Councillor K Merrie, the Finance and Corporate Portfolio Holder, presented the report to Members and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor A Saffell.

During discussion, a concern was raised regarding the cost of administering the additional voluntary contributions and whether it could be reinvestigated at this stage. It was agreed to provide an answer outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED THAT:

The proposed revisions to the pensions discretions as detailed in appendix 1 of the report be agreed with effect from May 2025.

19. APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS

Councillor K Merrie, the Finance and Corporate Portfolio Holder, presented the report to Members and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor N Rushton.

RESOLVED THAT:

The Independent Persons listed in paragraph of 2.2 of the report be appointed for a term of office of four years until Annual Council in May 2029.

20. EVENTS LIST

Councillor M Wyatt, the Community and Climate Change Portfolio Holder, presented the report to Members and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor R Canny.

During discussion it was acknowledged that historical events were important, but it was also necessary to respect events that were currently happening and therefore should be monitored.

RESOLVED THAT:

The events list as detailed at appendix A of the report be adopted on an ongoing basis.

21. RENAMING OF OAKTHORPE AND DONISTHORPE PARISH COUNCIL

Councillor N Rushton, the Infrastructure Portfolio Holder, presented the report to Members and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor M Ball.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1) The change in name of Oakthorpe and Donisthorpe Parish Council to Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe and Acresford Parish Council be reaffirmed.
- 2) Authority to make any necessary legal orders and notifications to enact the above changes be delegated to the Head of Legal and Support Services.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.16 pm

Chair's signature