

**Minutes of a meeting of Council
held on 28 February 2024
from 7.00 pm**

Present: R Jackson (Chairman)
J Henwood (Vice-Chair)

M Avery	J Dabell	J Knight
A Bashar	J Edwards	P Lucraft
R Bates	R Eggleston	M Miah
J Belsey	D Eggleton	J Mockford
M Belsey	A Eves	D Pascoe
A Bennett	S Ellis	A Peacock
K Berggreen	L Farren	C Phillips
P Brown	I Gibson	E Prescott
L Carvalho	S Hatton	A Rees
G Casella	S Hicks	J Russell
P Chapman	C Hobbs	D Sweatman
C Cherry	T Hussain	R Whittaker
R Clarke	J Hitchcock	C Wood
A Cooke	M Kennedy	G Zeidler
M Cornish	P Kenny	

Absent: Councillors A Platts, G Marsh, J Mockford, M Belsey

1. OPENING PRAYER.

The opening prayer was read by the Vice-Chairman.

2. TO RECEIVE QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 9.

Question received from Mr Faas

We are fortunate in Mid-Sussex to have fine ancient woodlands and meadows for public enjoyment. However, it is a huge challenge to protect them from man-made nuisances and to allow the spaces to develop and flourish through natural processes. On 2 December 2023 the council awarded a contract to Glendale Countryside Ltd. to manage our green spaces.

Have Glendale been requested to present a plan for how they intend to manage our green spaces to meet goals for biodiversity and nature recovery? If so, will this management plan be available to the public?

The following response was provided by the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Customer Services:

Glendale has been provided with a comprehensive set of requirements as part of the Green Spaces Management contract. These include the improvement, management and promotion of biodiversity and nature recovery. Biodiversity enhancement is a priority and the Council's countryside estate will be proactively managed to ensure it

can support a thriving ecology and also provide opportunities for local people to engage with the natural environment safely and respectfully. This will include, where appropriate, the development of site-specific management plans and, where these are produced they will be made available online.

Mr Faas asked the following supplementary question:

Establishing nature corridors linking wildlife areas and traversing built-up estates has been identified as a key requirement to reaching biodiversity and nature recovery goals as set out in the Environment Plan 2021. Moreover, West Sussex County Council has a statutory duty to facilitate the creation of such networks through the Local Nature Recovery Strategies. We are seeing considerable energy being put into these by nature charities and associations, most notably the Weald-to-Waves project spearheaded by Knepp Wildlife Trust.

What plans does MSDC have to facilitate the creation of local nature corridors within mid-Sussex, such as the Wilder Ouse project?

The following response was provided by the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Customer Services:

You are correct West Sussex County Council has a statutory responsibility for preparing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy which will be in place by summer 2025. I am pleased to confirm that Mid Sussex District Council is a Supporting Authority and as such, we are actively involved in the preparation of the Strategy. Policies in the draft District Plan will facilitate the creation of wildlife corridors such as, the Wilder Ouse project you refer to in your questions. Development will be required to protect and enhance existing biodiversity including ecological networks. (Policy DPN1: Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Nature Recovery). The draft District Plan also protects Green Infrastructure assets and corridors identified in Policy DPN3. These function as local nature corridors.

3. TO BE AGREED BY GENERAL AFFIRMATION THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 13 DECEMBER 2023

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS IN RESPECT OF ANY MATTER ON THE AGENDA.

Councillor Russell declared an interest in relation to item 7 and 8 as she is the West Sussex County Council Cabinet Member for Children, Young People, Learning and Skills.

Councillor Gibson declared that he is a Member of West Sussex County Council.

Councillor Dabell declared that he is a Member of West Sussex County Council.

5. TO CONSIDER ANY ITEMS THAT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AGREES TO TAKE AS URGENT BUSINESS.

None.

6. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Chairman highlighted recent engagements including the Hall and Woodhouse charity awards presentations, and the Holocaust Memorial Services in Haywards Heath and Burgess Hill. He also welcomed the number of nominations for Mid Sussex Applauds Awards, due to take place at the end of March.

7. DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN AND BUDGET FOR 2024/25

The Chairman exercised his discretion to amend the order of the agenda, agreeing to take both item 7 and 8 together as they are related to the Draft Corporate Plan and Budget.

Cllr Eggleston proposed the item noting that it should be seen in the context of the difficult financial position faced by the Local Authority Sector. He highlighted the pressures faced by the Council noting that although this budget will balance, it draws on the General Reserve which is unsustainable. To resolve the long-term deficit, the proposal is to increase Council Tax to the maximum allowed, and to raise the other income generated through fees and charges. At a time when some Local Authorities are cutting services, he confirmed that the balanced Budget protects and enhances services supports the vulnerable, values staff, invests in environment and community assets and enables the Council to be financially agile. Councillor Cooke seconded the item, thanks officers and the cross-party working group for their hard work in reaching consensus on the Budget.

Councillor J Belsey proposed the amendment as detailed under Item 8 in relation to parking charge increases and the introduction of differential parking. He proposed that a 10% increase across the board would be fairer for this year, and highlighted the lack of consultation with business, villages and Town Councils on the Strategy as well as the need for a refreshment of the Strategy, as scheduled for 2025. A proposal to reduce the reserve for the Food Waste trial was proposed as a way to offset the proposed parking increase. Councillor Russell seconded the amendment supporting the wish to keep fixed rates across all areas, highlighting the potential impact of differential parking to residents of East Grinstead.

Discussion on the amendment focussed on a potential financial burden on residents and the impact on local businesses if footfall reduces as a result in increased charges. Concern was raised that the differential rates could also cause division between the Towns.

Against this, a number of Members noted that the increased income generated can benefit residents with better investment in parking facilities. The increase is competitive compared to surrounding areas and is an evidence-based recommendation from an independent parking consultant, included in the agreed parking strategy. Concern was raised on the proposal to reduce the simpler recycling reserve as it would be contrary to the Council's commitment to change behaviour and policy to drive down climate emissions. The amendment would also not address the long-term requirement to fund the significant deficit in the budget over the next four years.

The Chairman took Members to a recorded vote on the amendment, which was lost with 17 in favour, 27 against and no abstentions.

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	For	Against	Abstain		For	Against	Abstain
Avery, Malcolm	Y			Hatton, Sue		Y	
Bashar, Abdul		Y		Henwood, Janice		Y	
Bates, Richard		Y		Hicks, Simon		Y	
Belsey, John	Y			Hobbs, Chris		Y	
Bennett, Alison		Y		Hussain, Tofo		Y	
Berggreen, Kristian		Y		Jackson, Rodney		Y	
Brown, Paul		Y		Kennedy, Mike		Y	
Carvalho, Lorraine	Y			Kenny, Paul		Y	
Casella, Graham	Y			Knight, Jim	Y		
Chapman, Peter	Y			Lucraft, Paul		Y	
Cherry, Chris		Y		Miah, Mustak	Y		
Clarke, Rod	Y			Pascoe, Duncan		Y	
Cooke, Anne-Marie		Y		Peacock, Adam	Y		
Cornish, Matthew		Y		Phillips, Chris		Y	
Dabell, John	Y			Prescott, Eric	Y		
Edwards, Jenny		Y		Rees, Alison		Y	
Eggleston, Robert		Y		Russell, Jacquie	Y		
Eggleton, David		Y		Sweatman, Dick	Y		
Ellis, Sandy	Y			Whittaker, Rex	Y		
Eves, Anne		Y		Wood, Cavan		Y	
Farren, Lee	Y			Ziedler, Geoff	Y		
Gibson, Ian		Y					
Hitchcock, John		Y					

Members discussed the main motion. Members welcomed the investment in staff, the commitment to become a Real Living Wage employer and the offer of apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers. Discussion focussed on investment in temporary accommodation and investment in sports provision, parks and open spaces, Council Tax requirements for second homes, and Council owned buildings as potential

financial assets. Concerns around the decision on differential parking charges were put forward as a reason for some Members not being able to support the main motion, despite acknowledging the other benefits of the Corporate Plan and Budget. Several Members welcomed the support and continuation of services. In conclusion, the Leader acknowledged that the Draft Corporate Plan and Budget goes some way towards prudent management in the face of a significant deficit faced by the Council and proposes a Budget to protect staff and the services provided to residents.

A recorded vote was requested taken on the main motion. The Chairman took Members to a vote on the recommendations as set out in the report which were agreed with 27 in favour, 3 against, 14 abstentions.

	For	Against	Abstain		For	Against	Abstain
Avery, Malcolm			Y	Hatton, Sue	Y		
Bashar, Abdul	Y			Henwood, Janice	Y		
Bates, Richard	Y			Hicks, Simon	Y		
Belsey, John			Y	Hobbs, Chris	Y		
Bennett, Alison	Y			Hussain, Tofo	Y		
Berggreen, Kristian	Y			Jackson, Rodney	Y		
Brown, Paul	Y			Kennedy, Mike	Y		
Carvalho, Lorraine			Y	Kenny, Paul	Y		
Casella, Graham			Y	Knight, Jim			Y
Chapman, Peter		Y		Lucraft, Paul	Y		
Cherry, Chris	Y			Miah, Mustak		Y	
Clarke, Rod			Y	Pascoe, Duncan	Y		
Cooke, Anne-Marie	Y			Peacock, Adam			Y
Cornish, Matthew	Y			Phillips, Chris	Y		
Dabell, John			Y	Prescott, Eric			Y
Edwards, Jenny	Y			Rees, Alison	Y		
Eggleston, Robert	Y			Russell, Jacquie			Y
Eggleton, David	Y			Sweatman, Dick			Y
Ellis, Sandy			Y	Whittaker, Rex		Y	

Eves, Anne	Y			Wood, Cavan	Y		
Farren, Lee			Y	Ziedler, Geoff			Y
Gibson, Ian	Y						
Hitchcock, John	Y						

RESOLVED

Council approved the draft Corporate Plan and Budget set out at Appendix A, and specifically approved:

- (a) The Revenue Budget of £23,078,868 as detailed in Sections 2 and 3, noting the need to rely on the General Reserve as detailed in the MTFP.
- (b) The Mid Sussex District Council element of the Council Tax be increased by 2.95% to £190.80, with no requirement to hold a local referendum in accordance with the Act.
- (c) The Capital programme of £10,310,000 for 2024/25, as set out in section 5.
- (d) Having considered Cabinet's budget proposals from their meeting of 5th February 2024, the Council Tax Resolutions as set out in section 7.

Council also noted:

- (e) The estimates for reserves and balances (see Section 4 for details) and the priority, as part of the sustainability of the financial robustness of the council, to increase reserves where possible.
- (f) The summary Medium Term Financial Plan to 2027/28 (see Section 2 for details).
- (g) The estimated surplus on the Collection Fund for Council Tax totalling £2,118,000 for the year ended 31 March 2024, of which the Mid Sussex District Council share is £262,900 (see Section 6 for details).
- (h) The estimated deficit on the Collection Fund for Business Rates totalling £3,025,270 for the year ended 31 March 2023, of which the Mid Sussex District Council share is £1,210,110 (see Section 6 for details).

8. MOTIONS ON NOTICE – AMENDMENT TO BUDGET – S151 OFFICERS ADVICE, IMPACT OF MOTION ON MOTICE

This item was discussed as part of item 7 above.

9. TO CONSIDER WHETHER TO EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC FROM THE MEETING DURING CONSIDERATION OF THE FOLLOWING ITEMS IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 100A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT INVOLVES THE LIKELY DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION AS DEFINED IN PARAGRAPH 1 OF PART 1 OF SCHEDULE 12A OF THE SAID ACT.

Members agreed to move into a confidential session at 8.33pm for discussion of item 10.

10. ABSENCE DUE TO ILL HEALTH

Discussion was held on the recommendation to agree an absence from meetings of the Authority by a Councillor, on the basis of ill-health.

RESOLVED

Council agreed the absence from meetings of the Authority by a Councillor due to a period of continuous ill health.

The meeting returned to open session at 8.37pm

The meeting finished at 8.38pm
Chairman