

**Minutes of a meeting of Council
held on Wednesday, 31st March, 2021
from 6.00 pm - 7.46 pm**

Present: C Trumble (Chairman)
M Belsey (Vice-Chair)

G Allen	J Dabell	C Laband
J Ash-Edwards	R de Mierre	Anthea Lea
R Bates	B Dempsey	J Llewellyn-Burke
J Belsey	S Ellis	A MacNaughton
A Bennett	R Eggleston	J Mockford
L Bennett	A Eves	A Peacock
A Boutrup	L Gibbs	C Phillips
P Bradbury	I Gibson	M Pulfer
P Brown	S Hatton	A Sparasci
H Brunsdon	J Henwood	L Stockwell
R Cartwright	S Hicks	D Sweatman
P Chapman	S Hillier	N Webster
R Clarke	T Hussain	R Whittaker
P Coote	R Jackson	
M Cornish	J Knight	

Absent: Councillors E Coe-Gunnell White, R Cromie, Andrew Lea, G Marsh, R Salisbury, S Smith, N Walker and R Webb

1. ROLL CALL AND VIRTUAL MEETING EXPLANATION.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. A roll call of Members present was taken. The Head of Regulatory Services provided a virtual meeting explanation.

2. OPENING PRAYER.

The opening prayer was read by the Vice-Chairman.

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

The following question was received from Ms de Lande Long:

I have noticed that some Council Members openly acknowledge that they don't feel well informed about climate change and sustainability and, worryingly, seem to feel fairly comfortable with this. Given that climate and ecological impacts now need to be factored in to all Council decisions, will the Council commit to ensuring that all Council Members and staff receive training and support in this important area? And could the Council work to achieve a sharing of information, training and expertise on these issues between councils across the county, in order to make the best use of these valuable resources?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Community, Councillor N Webster

Thank you for your question.

Climate change and sustainability is an important part of the Council's work. It touches all our services and is factored into council decisions.

The Council provides training and development for both councillors and officers.

Councillors receive training and development from their first months as a councillor in their induction and then throughout their role. The training programme for councillors is driven by councillors. The Member Development Working Group, chaired by Cllr Ellis, considers learning opportunities to support councillors in fulfilling their role. Identifying training needs is also a responsibility of Group Leaders who can request training.

Training has most recently included, in the last month, 'District Wide Design Guide SPD.' This specifically included key elements of sustainability in design and layout of developments. The Member Development Working Group will continue to review Councillors' training needs and I am confident this will continue to include the important issue of sustainability and climate change.

Officer training is reviewed regularly as part of our performance management framework. It includes learning on new policies, changes in government guidance and continuing professional development.

Our focus on this issue doesn't stop there. We will also shortly be speaking to the Parishes on Building Regulation Standards (particularly on energy efficiency) to brief them on the Government's plan to include new energy efficiency standards to lower carbon emissions.

Finally, it is normal practice for officers and councillors to share information across council boundaries locally, across the UK and internationally and to build on best and emerging practice. We will continue to do this to ensure our learning informs our decision making.

Ms de Lande Long's supplementary question sought confirmation of what the Council's expenditure has been this financial year on training for Members and Staff on climate change, sustainability and biodiversity loss and to what degree that training has been optional. The Cabinet Member agreed to provide a written response.

4. TO CONFIRM MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF COUNCIL HELD ON 3 MARCH 2021.

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 27 January 2021 were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

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

Councillors Hillier, Bradbury, Brunsdon and Liz Bennett declared an interest in item 8 as they are West Sussex County Councillors.

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

None.

7. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Leader thanked the Chairman for his distinguished 2 years service in the role and presented him with gifts on behalf of all Members.

The Chairman noted that it was his last Council meeting as Chairman and acknowledged the effect that the pandemic has had on all aspects of life for residents and for the Council during his term. He thanked Officers and the Vice Chairman for their advice and support, and also thanked Members, noting that it was a huge privilege and honour to serve the Council as Chairman.

8. HAYWARDS HEATH TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN - SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT.

Councillor MacNaughton moved the item, thanking the Scrutiny Committee for its involvement in shaping the document. He noted that it is a supplementary document that will be used to assess planning applications within the area to achieve the best possible outcome for the centre of Haywards Heath. This was seconded by Councillor Laband who reiterated thanks for the support given by the Scrutiny Committee.

A number of Members welcomed the document and the appendix 2 modifications. Discussion was held on traffic and bus provision, issues around cycle routes and the issue of addressing climate change and pollution. It was noted by the Cabinet Member that the Masterplan is for the centre of Haywards Heath and is not required to replicate policies that are governed by other areas. Items such as climate change and cycling networks are dealt with under separate strategies and projects, all of which are being developed and will be considered, along with planning rules and this supplementary document when planning applications are assessed.

It was noted that the Masterplan is a starting point and needs to be reassessed regularly, to adapt to changing circumstances as a result of the pandemic, and as a result of changes in retail habits. A suggestion was put forward to consider more town centre accommodation as people shift towards living, working and therefore shopping locally. A number of Members noted that the document was a signal to developers and investors that the Council has a clear vision and that the town offered opportunities for development in leisure, retail and accommodation.

The Chairman took Members to a vote on the recommendation which was approved with 38 in favour and 2 against.

RESOLVED

Council adopted the Haywards Heath Masterplan (attached in Appendix 1) as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for use in the consideration and determination of planning applications.

9. PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2021/22.

This item was withdrawn from the agenda. It was confirmed that committee meetings currently held virtually will cease as of 6 May 2021 as things currently stand.

10. STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2020.

Councillor Bradbury proposed the item as Chairman of the Standards Committee noting an increase in the work of the Committee over the past year. He noted that the Committee has considered Government proposals to improve standards and is awaiting further Government guidance, to be considered at the next meeting.

A Member expressed concern over the powers to hold Members to account when they are found to have made inappropriate comments on social media, and she cited a specific example. This concern was echoed by several Members who felt that there are insufficient penalties to deter bad conduct. It was confirmed that the Standards Committee has provided a response to the Government, that in common with other councils, Mid Sussex District Council believes there should be a broader range of sanctions for those who fail to uphold the highest possible standards.

Councillor Webster seconded the item, reiterating the Council's response to Government and acknowledging the issues around comments on social media which often hamper constructive and respectful debate between a wide variety of groups.

The Chairman took Members to a vote on the recommendation which was agreed with 42 in favour and none against.

RESOLVED

Council noted the report.

11. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT AND ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2021/22 TO 2023/24.

Councillor Pulfer moved the item noting that it has been robustly discussed at the Scrutiny Committee. Cllr Lewellyn-Burke seconded the item reiterating the Scrutiny Committee's input. In response to a query on why the Council is asked to approve the authorised limit of debt from £28m to £30m she confirmed that it is a legal requirement to have the appropriate level of debt and can provide the calculations if required.

The Chairman took Members to a vote on the recommendations which were agreed with 42 favour and none against.

RESOLVED

Council agreed:

(i) the proposed Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) for 2021/22 and the following two years,

(ii) the Annual Investment Strategy (AIS) and the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement (MRP) as contained in Sections 4 and 2.3 respectively of the report;

(iii) the proposed amendments to the specified and non-specified investment appendices;

(iv) the Prudential Indicators contained within the report.

12. TO RECEIVE THE LEADER'S REPORT.

The Leader noted that the Government's roadmap to reopen society and the economy is underway and the Council's attention is to the safe reopening of the local towns and villages, assisted by a £130k 'Welcome Back' Government grant. He also confirmed that from 1 April, Restart Grants of up to £18k will be available in Mid Sussex for the retail, leisure and hospitality sector. He confirmed that the vaccination programme is going well, and over 65,000 residents in Mid Sussex have had their first vaccination.

The Leader noted that the Government has not extended the legal powers for Local Authorities to continue to hold virtual meetings after 6 May, and that work is being carried out to consider the implications of this on the Council's decision-making abilities. A legal challenge is being considered by the High Court in April and further information will be shared with Group Leaders when available.

He concluded by noting that the Local Government Boundary Commission has commenced its first of two public consultations pursuant to the Boundary Review, based on a reduction to 48 District Councillors from 54. The consultation runs to 31st May with a further consultation later in the year.

13. REPORT OF CABINET MEMBERS, INCLUDING QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.1

Deputy Leader

The Deputy Leader noted that despite the ongoing pandemic, leases are continuing to be agreed in the Orchards Shopping Centre and smaller transactions continue to be processed such as work to retain the Stone Quarry Post Office for community local use. With regards to the Place and Connectivity transport infrastructure in Burgess Hill, the Council led schemes are progressing well with the town-wide connectivity programme at 35% complete and the Green Circle at 41% complete.

Cabinet Member for Economic Growth

The Cabinet Member noted that Officers continue to process a high volume of grant applications and acknowledged the work of the Cabinet Grants Panel where 42 businesses have been awarded £159k in Covid recovery grants, demonstrating the Council's significant commitment to the business community.

He noted that work is beginning to merge the sustainability and economy strategies and drew Members attention to a number of initiatives to support businesses out of recovery. This includes the pan West Sussex initiative to offer training and guidance to independent retailers, the Hot House project with the University of Chichester to support start-up and smaller businesses and partnership working with the Department of Work and Pensions to help younger people. The Cabinet Member also noted that 17 carparks in the District have been awarded their Park Mark following inspection and that work will be considered within the Parking Strategy

Action Plan to bring the remaining car parks up to standard. He concluded by noting that the Business Newsletter has restarted and been issued to 1000 businesses in February.

Cabinet Member for Customer Services

The Cabinet Member noted that the Revenue and Benefits team continue to ensure that business grants are processed and paid as soon as possible and noted that the deadline for some of the grants concluded on 31 March. She also noted that the Council Tax Support Scheme, Hardship Grant and Test and Trace support will continue. The Cabinet Member noted that Mid Sussex Matters had now been issued to residents and the Comms team remain focused on promoting business grants, rewilding initiatives and the benefit of the vaccination programme. She confirmed that the Full Fibre Broadband work around Burgess Hill will be completed by mid-April and the route from Haywards Heath to Horsham and Crawley by mid June. Therefore, residents and businesses should see the benefits by mid-summer.

In response to a question on compliments and complaints, the Cabinet Member agreed to provide a written response on how they are calculated, noting that they are assessed by department with each shared with the relevant Business Unit Leader.

Cabinet Member for Environment and Service Delivery

The Cabinet Member recently met with the SERCO team for discussion of how the waste service is operating and how it can be improved. He noted that the feedback from residents on the service during the pandemic has been very positive and thanked the team for their hard work.

Regarding parks, he confirmed that the consultants are finalising costings and plans for Victoria Park, Mount Noddy, St Johns Park and Finches Field as well as work on park masterplans being carried out to improve play areas in some other parks.

He noted that Leisure Centres are due to reopen on 12 April and more communication will be issued shortly.

He concluded by supporting the rewilding areas within the District noting that there are nearly 30 areas over Mid Sussex, as part of a wider national rewilding initiative. Following feedback he noted that that St Johns Park rewilding area has been removed and new places added. He agreed to provide a written response confirming the location of the areas, that can be shared with the Town and Parish Councils. He also acknowledged a Members request for Officers to engage with the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in relation to suitable planting options.

Cabinet Member for Community

The Cabinet Member acknowledged that despite the constraints of the pandemic, a total of 135 disabled facility grant completions have taken place compared to 137 in the previous year. He also recently met with the Chief Executive and Trustee of Citizens Advice West Sussex and discussed the Community Champions project for black and minority ethnic groups. Other topics of discussion focused on ways to better understand bereavement during the pandemic, domestic abuse, employment issues and mounting debt amongst young people and middle age men. The challenge of maintaining volunteer numbers was also discussed. He concluded by acknowledging the benefit of the Mid Sussex Partnership Board and thanked Councillor Bradbury for his chairmanship of the Standards Committee.

Cabinet Member for Housing, and Planning

The Cabinet Member thanked Members for their support in adopting the Haywards Heath Town Centre Masterplan Supplementary DPD.

He confirmed that after a delayed start, over 200 units of affordable housing units have been achieved. To clarify terminology, he confirmed that the units are social houses for rent or part equity that are provided to social housing landlords. He noted that the Planning Department continues to achieve targets and that the Site Allocations DPD is at the examination stage with information available on the Council's website. He highlighted that Officers are working on a call for sites in relation to the District Plan review and that CIL will be considered as part of this review. He noted that the Council is in a good position regarding delivery to meet the 3 year delivery test, with the vast majority of new houses being sold off plan.

As the Site Allocations DPD is with the Inspector, the Cabinet Member was not able to comment on a Member's query on a specific site in relation to transport issues.

14. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.2

None.

The meeting finished at 7.46 pm

Chairman