

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE TOWN HALL, HIGH STREET, MAIDSTONE ON WEDNESDAY 11 APRIL 2018

Present: Councillor Greer (The Mayor) and Councillors Barned, Mrs Blackmore, Boughton, Brice, D Burton, M Burton, Butler, Clark, Cox, Cuming, Daley, English, Fermor, Field, Fissenden, Fort, Garten, Mrs Gooch, Harper, Harvey, Harwood, Hastie, Mrs Hinder, Mrs Joy, B Mortimer, D Mortimer, Munford, Naghi, Newton, Perry, Pickett, Powell, Prendergast, Mrs Ring, Round, Spooner, Springett, Mrs Stockell, Vizzard, Webb, Willis and Mrs Wilson

130. MINUTE'S SILENCE

The Council stood in silence for one minute in memory of John Morrison, a former Member of the Council, and his wife Marina, both of whom died recently.

131. PRAYERS

Prayers were said by the Reverend Ian Parrish.

132. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Adkinson, Ells, Garland, Mrs Grigg, Lewins, McLoughlin, Mrs Robertson, J Sams, T Sams, Webster, de Wiggondene-Sheppard and Wilby.

133. DISPENSATIONS

There were no applications for dispensations.

134. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

135. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

136. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

137. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD ON 7 MARCH 2018

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Borough Council held on 7 March 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed.

138. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor updated Members on recent and forthcoming engagements, and thanked them for their support.

The Mayor said that he would like to take the opportunity to wish all the very best to those Members who would be seeking re-election in May and to thank those Councillors who would be standing down for their services over the years. The Mayor specifically thanked Councillor Derek Butler, a fellow Boxley Ward Member, and a former Mayor, for working tirelessly as a Councillor over the years.

The Mayor then called upon Councillor Harper who wished to pay tribute to John Morrison, a former Member of the Borough Council, and his wife Marina, who had devoted their time and energy to public service, and who had passed away recently.

139. PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

140. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

141. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL TO THE CHAIRMEN OF COMMITTEES

Question to the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee from Councillor D Mortimer

Councillor D Mortimer asked the following question of the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee:

Can the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee update Members on her recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on Permitted Development Rights?

The Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee replied that:

A few weeks ago, I went with David Jukes, the Leader of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, and Councillor Nick Heslop, the Leader of Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, to see Sajid Javid, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, specifically to discuss Permitted Development Rights. They are affecting several Boroughs quite

adversely in Kent, and Maidstone is one of the most severely affected at the moment.

We are losing office blocks in large quantities, especially in the town centre, to residential development, and this has a double effect. First of all we are losing the business rates, and increasingly we are having to rely on business rates and the local tax to cover the cost of our services, so we can ill-afford to lose office premises to residential development, and yet we are losing a lot.

The figures are compiled by Ward, and as High Street Ward is probably the worst affected, I have the figures for that. We have had 289 homes completed and we have another 300 under development at the moment in this area.

In addition to the loss of business rates, because it is permitted development, we are not getting the S106 contributions for infrastructure which would have been forthcoming under the normal development process.

I asked the Officers if they could give me a ball park figure for what that actually means, and if you take what has happened and what is in the pipeline, and compare that with a similar development under normal circumstances, the ball park figure for that 589 homes is £710k in S106 monies will have been lost for education, youth services, libraries and health services and that does not take into account contributions that would potentially also be forthcoming for highways, affordable housing and off-site open space.

That is the background as to why we thought it was really important to go to speak to Sajid Javid.

All three Boroughs have applied for the removal of Permitted Development Rights through the placement of an Article 4 Direction, and all three have been refused. We have got an additional issue in Maidstone in that London Boroughs which have been given additional funds to assist with their own homeless situation have managed to outbid Maidstone and are either purchasing or leasing many of these properties themselves without any of these additional monies being pass-ported to us here to assist with the infrastructure necessary to support these incoming families. So, you can imagine the strain that has been put on our already overstretched schools and health facilities such as doctors' surgeries.

Sajid Javid clearly sees Permitted Development Rights as a tool in solving the housing crisis, and he emphasised that in relation to infrastructure he had put in place the Housing Infrastructure Fund which is a capital grant programme totalling £5 billion for the country as a whole. Mr Javid had been well briefed about Maidstone in particular, and he acknowledged that we are one of the worst affected areas in Kent, if not the worst affected. All three Councils are now re-applying for exemption, and while not saying whether we would be successful or not, Mr Javid did say that he would do what he could to simplify and speed up the process.

How did we feel at the end of the meeting? We thought that it was better than we expected. Mr Javid had clearly been well briefed. He is not going to change his mind about the need for Permitted Development Rights, the Government does see it as a primary tool, but I think he was a little bit surprised at how in Tunbridge Wells, for example, it is not just losing the Council business rates, it is actually meaning that the price of office blocks is going up, making them unaffordable and pushing existing businesses out.

For us, we have that too, but the issue primarily is that office blocks are being converted to housing without any commensurate infrastructure to come in.

Mr Javid emphasised the Fund, and said that he would do what he could to speed up the process for exemption. I am keeping my fingers crossed that this time we will be successful because I feel that we have taken our full whack now and can ill-afford to lose many more office blocks under Permitted Development Rights.

Councillor D Mortimer asked the following supplementary question of the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee:

Regarding the planning and infrastructure you mentioned there, could you possibly elaborate on what the consequences will be for Maidstone probably in the fairly near future if we have to go down the line that they are proposing at the moment?

The Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee replied that:

The Officers have tried to hook into this wherever they can. So we did make a bid for Maidstone East to the Marginal Viability Fund stream. This funding stream within the Housing Infrastructure Fund is available to all single and lower tier local authorities with the specific purpose of providing a piece of infrastructure funding to get additional sites allocated for housing or unblock existing sites quickly. Unfortunately we were unsuccessful, but it has had one good result in that Homes England have become more engaged with the Maidstone East project.

What is of concern is that it is 100% clear that a bid to the Housing Infrastructure Fund will only be successful if it helps unlock new housing, so any bid attempting to sort out existing infrastructure problems will not satisfy the criteria. I do not think I need to spell out what that means in terms of easing existing pressures on schools, social services, health provision or the transport infrastructure.

All Kent District Leaders with one exception are spelling out the same message. This County is grinding to a standstill and there is a substantial shortfall in the funding needed to provide the necessary infrastructure to support its existing and growing population. The problem allied to this is that there is not joined up thinking. So, just to give you one example, when the consultation came out all Kent District Leaders with one

exception supported the need for the Lower Thames Crossing, but Highways England are only talking about the Crossing, not about how we access it, and it is quite clear that this will affect several Districts and Maidstone quite seriously.

We cannot put money into some of our forward plans for improvements and hope to get the money out of development unless they say there is a need for it, and all the Kent Districts are saying the same thing, so we have a problem in that the funding that is there is to unlock new homes, but we already have a serious situation with needing quite a lot of funding for existing situations, and Kent County Council has done a significant piece of work to say what the total is across Kent, and it is severe. We are grinding to a halt in Kent unless we get some funding. So really, I am saying we will use this Fund as much as we can, but if we are successful in a bid it means we will get more housing growth with it, and that is the issue.

142. CURRENT ISSUES - REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, RESPONSE OF THE GROUP LEADERS AND QUESTIONS FROM COUNCIL MEMBERS

Councillor Mrs Wilson, the Leader of the Council, submitted her report on current issues.

In presenting her report, Councillor Mrs Wilson said that she wished to thank the Mayor for his work over the past year and all Members and Officers who had worked hard to find common ground to move the Council forward. She also said that she would like to thank those Members who would not be seeking re-election in May for their contribution, and, in particular, to thank Councillor James Willis for his assiduous approach.

After the Leader of the Council had submitted her report, Councillor Perry, the Leader of the Conservative Group, Councillor Mrs Gooch, the Leader of the Independent Group, Councillor Barned, the Leader of the Independent Maidstone Group, and Councillor Harper, the Leader of the Labour Group, responded to the issues raised. They all wished to thank Councillor Mrs Wilson for her work as Leader of the Council over the last three years.

A Member then asked a question of the Leader of the Council on the issues raised in her speech.

143. REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING, SUSTAINABILITY AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE HELD ON 6 FEBRUARY 2018 - PLANNING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (PSIP)

It was moved by Councillor D Burton, seconded by Councillor Mrs Gooch, that the recommendation of the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee relating to changes to the Constitution arising from the Planning Service Improvement Project be approved. Councillor D Burton said that the changes related to the public speaking arrangements at meetings of the Planning Committee and the revised

wording would be included in the updated version of the Constitution to be reported to the Annual Meeting of the Council for adoption.

RESOLVED: That the Monitoring Officer be instructed to amend the Constitution to reflect the changes agreed by the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee, set out in Appendix 1 to the report of the Committee, effective from the new Municipal Year 2018/19.

144. REPORT OF THE COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE ACTING AS THE CRIME AND DISORDER COMMITTEE HELD ON 13 FEBRUARY AND 20 MARCH 2018 - 2013-18 COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP PLAN REFRESH AND 2018-19 STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

It was moved by Councillor Barned, seconded by Councillor D Mortimer, that the recommendation of the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee acting as the Crime and Disorder Committee relating to the adoption of the 2013-18 Community Safety Partnership Plan refresh and the 2018-19 Strategic Assessment for implementation by the Safer Maidstone Partnership and its priority sub-groups be approved.

RESOLVED: That the 2013-18 Community Safety Partnership Plan refresh and the 2018-19 Strategic Assessment, attached as Appendices A and B to the report of the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee acting as the Crime and Disorder Committee, be adopted for implementation by the Safer Maidstone Partnership and its priority sub-groups.

145. ORAL REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING, SUSTAINABILITY AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE HELD ON 10 APRIL 2018

There was no report from the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee on this occasion.

146. NOTICE OF MOTION

The following motion was moved by Councillor B Mortimer, seconded by Councillor D Mortimer:

In view of the recent press coverage of pot holes within the Borough of Maidstone, I am getting very upset, if not angry, that as a Borough Councillor, and I am sure that I speak on behalf of many other Borough Councillors and Officers, at many times we the Borough Council are blamed for the bad state of our roads, which as we are all aware is the responsibility of Kent County Council.

My motion is that we instruct Officers to investigate possible options which will include the Highway Act of 1980 Section 42, which could give us the ability to change the existing dire situation. Once that report is complete, it should be presented at the earliest opportunity to the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee and their recommendation should go to Full Council.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 17.4, the motion having been moved and seconded, was referred to the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee. The Mayor said that since the desired outcome at this stage was the preparation of a report, he did not consider that a debate was necessary.

147. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.35 p.m.