
Policy and Resources Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 7 February 2024 from 7.00 pm - 9.50 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock (Vice-Chair), Monique Bonney, Derek Carnell, Tim Gibson (Chair), Angela Harrison, James Hunt, Mark Last, Rich Lehmann, Peter Marchington (Substitute for Councillor Mike Whiting), Ben J Martin (Substitute for Councillor Mike Henderson), Julien Speed, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Billy Attaway, Paul Casey, Martyn Cassell, Janet Dart, Lisa Fillery, Robin Harris, Jhilmil Kishore, Larissa Reed, Baljinder Sandher, Claire Stanbury, Philip Sutcliffe and Ceri Williams.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Joanne Johnson, Zoe Kent and Emma Wiggins.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY): Councillors Elliott Jayes.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Mike Henderson, Richard Palmer and Mike Whiting.

594 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

595 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 November 2023 (Minute Nos. 442 – 460) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair, subject to the following amendment to Minute No. 445 Constitution Amendment: Various:

That Recommendation (3) be amended to read:

(3) That amendment 3 be recommended to Council for incorporation into the Constitution subject to the following amendments 2.4.3.41: “The Licensing Committee shall have a General Licensing Sub-Committee comprising 3 members of the Council who have received training on the relevant areas of licensing law and 2.4.3.4 “The Licensing Committee...”

596 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Mike Baldock declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest with respect to Item 12, 2024/25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy, as he was a member of Borden and Bobbing Parish Councils.

Councillor Monique Bonney declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest with respect to Item 12, 2024/25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy, as she was a member of Rodmersham Parish Council.

Councillor Dolley Wooster declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest with respect to Item 12, 2024/25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy, as she was a member of Sheerness Town Council.

Councillor Ben J Martin declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest with respect to Item 12, 2024/25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy, as he was a member of Faversham Town Council.

Councillor Peter Marchington declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest with respect to Item 12, 2024/25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy, as he was a member of Queenborough Town Council.

Councillor Julien Speed declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest with respect to Item 12, 2024/25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy, as he was a member of Lynsted and Kingsdown Parish Council.

Larissa Reed (Chief Executive) declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest with respect to Item 12, 2024/25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy, as she was a member of Tunstall Parish Council.

597 **Proposed Bollard Removal at James Street, Sheerness**

Resolved:

(1) That the recommendation from 2 October 2023 Swale Joint Transportation Board Meeting be noted, and the recommended removal of the bollards in James Street, Sheerness be progressed.

598 **Corporate Equality Scheme**

Resolved:

(1) That the Draft Corporate Equality Scheme 2024 – 2028 goes out to public consultation.

599 **Pay Policy Statement 2024**

The Head of HR Shared Service introduced the pay policy report which met the requirements of section 38 of the Localism Act 2011 and required all authorities to prepare a pay policy statement for the financial year 2012/13 and for subsequent financial years to be agreed by Full Council.

Resolved:

(1) That the proposed Pay Policy Statement be agreed and publicised on the Council's website.

(2) That the information within the Pay Policy Statement be up-dated with the actual year-end figures before final publication.

600 **Procurement of Minor Maintenance and Cleansing of Public Conveniences Service**

The Chair advised that this item had been withdrawn from the agenda as it was being considered within Item 12, 2024/25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy.

601 Draft Planning Enforcement Strategy***Resolved:***

(1) That the draft Planning Enforcement Strategy be noted and that the draft plan goes out to public consultation.

602 Discretionary Rate Relief Policy

The Revenue and Benefits Manager introduced the report which proposed that backdating of discretionary relief, be awarded to those businesses that were eligible. She added that powers had been granted to Local Authorities under the Localism Act 2011, to allow the granting of discretionary relief to any premises where the Council felt that the granting of such relief would benefit the local community.

Councillor Angela Harrison commented on the list of organisations that would be eligible to the discretionary rate relief and thought that local ward Members would be able to provide officers with good local knowledge of which businesses would benefit the most from the discretionary relief rate. She proposed that a member working group be created to work with officers on ensuring the right local businesses were offered the discretionary rate relief. This was seconded by Councillor Mike Baldock and on being put to the vote was agreed.

Resolved:

(1) That the backdating of discretionary rate relief for a maximum period of 12 months be approved.

(2) That a review of the current Discretionary Rate Relief Scheme was carried out in 2024/25.

(3) That a cross-party working group be formed to support the review of the discretionary rate relief scheme.

603 Treasury Investment Strategy

The Head of Finance and Procurement introduced the report which had previously been agreed by the Audit Committee in January 2024.

Resolved:

(1) That the Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25 and the Treasury Management Indicators be agreed.

604 2024/25 Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy

The Director of Resources introduced the report which set out the Council's Revenue and Capital budget proposals for 2024/25, the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the Capital Strategy.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, which included:

- There was no budget for the Local Plan;

- it was important that the Local Plan work had a budget to work on;
- could the Committee propose an earmarked amount for the Local Plan before the budget went to Full Council?;
- recognised that it was difficult to allocate a budget to the Local Plan when the government were constantly changing their Housing Targets for Local Authorities; and
- had officers been told what the Internal Drainage Board funding was?

The Director of Resources responded by explaining to Members that all amendments to the budget would have to be proposed and seconded at Full Council in February 2024. She added that there had been no additional budget created for the Local Plan as currently there was a reserve balance of £212,000. If Members thought that there would be additional spend on the Local Plan above the reserve and annual base budget funding, then they would need to indicate where they proposed the extra expenditure would come from.

With regards to the Internal Drainage Board funding, the Director of Resources advised Members that only headline figures had been released but officers did not know the breakdown that the Council would receive. She hoped that the final figures would be ready for Full Council in February 2024.

Recommended:

- (1) That the Administration's 2024/25 revenue budget proposals be approved.***
- (2) That the proposed Council Tax Band D increase for 2024/25 to £200.70, or the maximum allowed should the cash limit be increased be approved.***
- (3) That the levy of 100% Long Term Empty Premium, for properties that had been empty for more than one year from 1 April 2024 be approved.***
- (4) That the levy of 100% Second Home Premium for properties from 1 April 2025 be approved.***
- (5) That the Medium-Term Financial Plan be approved.***
- (6) That the Capital Strategy be approved.***
- (7) That the Capital Programme proposals be approved.***
- (8) That the additional amount of Council Tax for Parish Precepts be noted.***
- (9) That the minimum revenue provision statement be approved.***
- (10) That delegated authority be given to the Director of Resources to adjust charge out rates within fees and charges as appropriate, where they were based on costs incurred and where legislation changes were made to centrally set charges in-year.***
- (11) That the use of the reserves statement as detailed in Appendix VI be approved, to ensure reserves were valid and supported the assumptions in the MTFs.***

605 Sheerness Marine Town Conservation Area Review

The Senior Conservation and Design Officer (Projects) introduced the report which contained the updated appraisal and some boundary changes to the Sheerness Marine Town Conservation Area Review and the re-design of the conservation area under section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990.

Members commented on the good work of the officers to get the area review completed and were pleased the Council could continue to review the other areas in the Borough.

Resolved:

- (1) That the content of the public consultation draft of the character appraisal and management strategy document produced for the review, and the representations made on this by interested parties, the details of which were set out in the report appendices be noted.***
- (2) That the changes to the review document proposed by officers in response to the representations received during the course of the public consultation be agreed.***

606 Sheerness Mile Town Conservation Area Review

The Senior Conservation and Design Officer (Projects) introduced the report which contained the updated appraisal and some boundary changes to the Sheerness Mile Town Conservation Area and the re-design of the conservation area under section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990.

Members commented on the good work of the officers to get the area review completed and were pleased the Council could continue to review the other areas in the Borough.

Resolved:

- (3) That the content of the public consultation draft of the character appraisal and management strategy document produced for the review, and the representations made on this by interested parties, the details of which were set out in the report appendices be noted.***
- (4) That the changes to the review document proposed by officers in response to the representations received during the course of the public consultation be agreed.***

607 Milton Regis Conservation Area Review

The Senior Conservation and Design Officer (Projects) introduced the report which contained the updated appraisal to the Milton Regis Conservation Area and the re-design of the conservation area under section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990.

A Member commented on the good work of the officers to get the area review completed and said that it proved Milton Regis had plenty of buildings with a rich history which

needed to be protected within the conservation area.

Resolved:

(5) That the content of the public consultation draft of the character appraisal and management strategy document produced for the review, and the representations made on this by interested parties, the details of which were set out in the report appendices be noted.

(6) That the changes to the review document proposed by officers in response to the representations received during the course of the public consultation be agreed.

608 Faversham - Preston Next Conservation Area Review

The Senior Conservation and Design Officer (Projects) introduced the report which contained the updated appraisal to the Faversham Preston Next Conservation Area and the re-design of the conservation area under section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, which included:

- It was good to see that the responses of the consultation had been listened to and the suggested change included in the final review;
- thought the Council could do more to the A2 hedgerows to improve the look of listed buildings along the London Road; and
- thought it was important that the news release about the new conservation area review needed to include that the public's comments on the review helped ensure the re-design of the conservation area was accurate.

The Senior Conservation and Design Officer (Projects) responded to say that officers could look at including more hedgerows along the A2, London Road to improve the visual impact on the listed buildings along that road.

Resolved:

(7) That the content of the public consultation draft of the character appraisal and management strategy document produced for the review, and the representations made on this by interested parties, the details of which were set out in the report appendices be noted.

(8) That the changes to the review document proposed by officers in response to the representations received during the course of the public consultation be agreed.

609 Forward Decisions Plan

Resolved:

(1) That the forward decisions plan be noted.

610 Recommendations from the Swale Joint Transportation Board meeting held on 4 December 2023

Resolved: That Minute No. 478 be approved.

611 **Recommendations from the Planning Transportation and Policy Working Group held on 25 January 2024**

Resolved:

(1) That Minute Nos. 577 and 578 be approved.

612 **Open Space and Play Strategy - Strategic Land**

The Head of Environment and Leisure introduced the report setting out the interim governance arrangements and criteria for determining strategic land and sought for guidance on officer's next steps for a piece of land.

Councillor Mike Baldock proposed an amendment recommendation 2, paragraph 2.11, second bullet point to read: it was considered to be part of a countryside gap between an edge of a town settlement and the start of a rural/village boundary. This was seconded by Councillor Monique Bonney.

The Chair invited Members to make comments on the amendment, which included:

- Thought the previous policy worked well;
- had concerns about changing a policy without knowing the possible financial implications;
- not adopting certain open spaces has caused the Council problems and conflicts in the past;
- recognised that we could not afford to take on every piece of land in the Borough;
- having some areas as Council-owned rather than developer-owned was sometimes easier to deal with and fix problems that residents had with the shared open spaces; and
- could an accurate audit of all Council owned open spaces be carried out to keep records up-to-date?

The Head of Environment and Leisure responded to the auditing of open spaces and said that currently he did not have the resources in-house to carry out audit work on the open spaces on a regular basis. He added that taking on more pieces of land would cost the Council more money in maintaining those pieces of land and this policy was a good way to ensure the Council did not keep unnecessary pieces of open space.

On being put to the vote the amendment was agreed.

The Chair invited Members to make comments on the report, which included:

- Paragraph 2.1 mentioned that this strategy could take up to 12 months but hoped this could be sooner to provide evidence for the Local Plan;
- could the cost of the external consultants be taken from the Local Plan reserve?;
- open spaces should be looked at constantly;
- the focus should be placed on the areas that affected the Local Plan the most;
- the strategy should be created in 6 months, not 12 months;
- the 2017 strategy just needed 'refreshing' rather than completely redesigned;
- could a timeline be introduced so consultants had something to work towards and

meet deadlines?;

- was an audit really needed before the work on the strategy took place?;
- if the Council were unable to conduct an audit of open spaces, the 2017 strategy along-side the Planning Policy information could help create a new strategy; and
- officers needed to look at the information available to them and carry out the necessary work which financially worked out best for the Council.

The Head of Environment and Leisure clarified with Members that once an audit had been conducted a review of the open spaces would take place to identify pieces of land that were no longer benefitted the Council. He added that the audit process followed the Planning Policy structure, which judged each piece of land by the quality and type, so that Planning Officers could work with developers to provide the Borough with the necessary open spaces. The Head of Environment and Leisure understood Members concerns about making sure the strategy was completed sooner rather than later and agreed to work with consultants to get work started on it as early as possible.

In response to the proposed timeline, the Chief Executive said that officers were unable to commit to that as it was an unknown market with an unknown cost. She added that an option was for officers to work with Members and report back to the committee when they knew more about which organisations could deliver on the plan, and how much it would cost for the work to be done quickly. The Chief Executive said that delegation could be given to the relevant officer to undertake the necessary audit work to get the evidence required for the Local Plan, within a budget of £35,000.

Councillor James Hunt proposed an amendment to recommendation (1), that delegated authority be given to the Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods to undertake the necessary audit work to satisfy the policy requirements of the Local Plan within and up to a budget of £35,000, in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader. This was seconded and upon being put to the vote, was agreed.

Resolved:

- (1) That delegated authority be given to the Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods to undertake the necessary audit work, that satisfied the policy requirements of the Local Plan, within and up-to a budget of £35,000, in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader.***
- (2) That the interim governance arrangements and criteria (paragraphs 2.9 and 2.11) for determining strategic land be agreed subject to the amendment as minuted.***
- (3) That the land discussed in the exempt appendix met the new strategic criteria and officers could proceed with the necessary next steps.***

613 Exclusion of Press and Public

There was no need to pass this resolution as the meeting did not go into confidential session.

614 Open Spaces and Play Strategy - Strategic Land - Exempt Appendix

This item was not discussed.

615 Adjournment of Meeting

The meeting was adjourned from 8.18 pm until 8.30 pm and 9.01 pm until 9.07 pm.

Chair

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All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel