
COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 20 September 2017 from 7.00pm - 8.35pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart, Bobbin, Monique Bonney, Tina Booth, Lloyd Bowen, Bowles, Roger Clark, Mike Cosgrove, Mike Dendor, Duncan Dewar-Whalley, Mark Ellen, Paul Fleming, Mick Galvin, June Garrad, Sue Gent, James Hall, Nicholas Hampshire, Harrison, Mike Henderson, Alan Horton, James Hunt, Lesley Ingham, Ken Ingleton, Nigel Kay, Samuel Koffie-Williams (Deputy Mayor), Gerry Lewin, Padmini Nissanga, Prescott (Mayor), Ken Pugh, George Samuel, David Simmons, Ben Stokes, Roger Truelove, Anita Walker, Ghlin Whelan, Mike Whiting, Ted Wilcox and John Wright.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Katherine Bescoby, Chris Lovelock, Donna Price, Mark Radford and Nick Vickers.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Sarah Aldridge, Andy Booth, Derek Conway, Richard Darby, Peter Marchington and Bryan Mulhern.

237 PRAYERS

The Mayor's Chaplain said Prayers.

238 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedures.

239 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 July 2017 (Minute Nos. 140 – 153) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

240 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

241 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor welcomed Councillor Tony Winckless to the meeting, and drew attention to the tabled update.

The Mayor referred to the recent Dedication Service, and advised that photographs were available to purchase on disk for £3, with proceeds being split between the charity and the photographer.

The Mayor advised that he had agreed to the inclusion of an urgent Motion, copies of which had been tabled, and advised that this would be considered as the next item.

242 URGENT ITEM - MOTION

Councillor John Wright proposed and Councillor James Hunt seconded the following Motion, advising that they wished to amend the wording of the Motion to include consideration of Option 4 or Option 10, as set out below:

“This Council agrees that the proposed Junction M2/A249 improvements Option 12a will not provide a long term solution to the issues faced here by many drivers and businesses as it still impedes traffic flow along the A249 with traffic lights and the impractical crossover at the roundabout is not a sustainable scheme for the future of Swale. It urges Highways England and the Government to fund Option 4 or Option 10 which provides a long term sustainable solution to cope with the growth anticipated in the future not only in Swale, but with the extra traffic from the Lower Thames Crossing and other districts”.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor John Wright gave concerns about option 12a in terms of the lack of traffic modelling; that there was no through route for traffic travelling from the Isle of Sheppey to Maidstone without impedance; referred to the volume of accidents and queues; and the need to future proof the junction and to consider the environmental impact on the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). He considered that Option 10 was his preferred option, but Option 4 should also be considered, and that the option suggested was a short term measure that would not work.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor James Hunt agreed that Option 10 was his preferred option but Option 4 should also be considered, although he had some concerns regarding the impact on Oad Street and the traffic on the A249. He urged Members to support the Motion, referring to the need for bigger infrastructure; that the amount proposed to be spent on the improvements was not enough; and Swale had been given the cheapest option. He referred to the lost business hours from businesses, commuters and in particular freight sitting in traffic; the growth taking place in the Borough; and the need to provide an option that was sustainable for the future. Safety also needed to be considered as the road was in the top 50 national casualty locations, and he urged the Council to support the Motion.

The Mayor invited other Members to take part in the debate, drawing attention to the thirty minute time allocation for this item, as set out in the procedure rule.

Councillor Nicholas Hampshire welcomed the Motion but advised of additional concerns in terms of ‘rat-running’ in rural areas and additional traffic in Borden, and the impact on bus service provision, and proposed the following amendment to add additional words:

“.... and fails to address rat-running in surrounding rural areas and indeed may increase it, and threatens the future of bus service provision along Chestnut Street and Danaway with key urban centres”. The amendment was seconded by Councillor Mike Baldock. The proposer and seconder of the original Motion agreed to accept the amendment.

The Leader endorsed the Motion and said the proposed scheme was not fit for purpose. He encouraged all Members to support the Motion to show that there was unanimous opposition and that Highways England needed to think again.

The Leader of the Labour Group spoke in support of the spirit of the Motion and agreed that the proposed scheme was not fit for purpose; it would not solve current problems or be sustainable for future growth, referring to additional housing development and the impact of the Lower Thames Crossing. He was not questioning the expertise of professionals but considered that Highways England were working with an insufficient budget, and suggested that there should be a cross-party meeting involving the Minister and local MP so that something was done about it.

The Leader of the UKIP Group spoke in support of the Motion and expressed concerns in terms of 'rat-running'; lack of consideration of the impact of the Lower Thames Crossing; and the impact on local roads, in particular Oad Street, Chestnut Street and Danaway.

Other Members gave their views on Option 12a, speaking in support of the Motion and the need for Highways England to reconsider. Comments centred on the following themes: the volume of accidents; the impact on the junction from growth at Sheerness Docks, Eurolink, the Science Park and investment in housing; the need to future proof it to ensure good economic viability; it was a main through route to the Channel Tunnel; the traffic congestion already at the junction and the impact of the proposed traffic lights; and the need to future-proof the junction and to ensure it took account of the Local Plan; the need to send a clear message that Swale would not accept this and for Kent Districts to unite in support for properly funded schemes; the need for infrastructure improvements to have a reasonable cost; and the suggestion that widening the number of lanes on the M2 could be done at that stretch when the works were undertaken.

During the debate the Mayor agreed to extend the time limit to allow for four more speakers and the Proposer to sum up.

In summing up, Councillor John Wright thanked Members for their support and referred to the difficulty in condensing all comments into one motion. He was hopeful that the transport modelling would highlight the issues. He encouraged all Members to respond to the consultation and to lobby and write to the MP and Secretary of State for Transport, and asked them to encourage their residents to do the same.

The Motion was then put to the vote and agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

(1) That this Council agrees that the proposed Junction M2/A249 improvements Option 12a will not provide a long term solution to the issues faced here by many drivers and businesses as it still impedes traffic flow along the A249 with traffic lights and the impractical crossover at the roundabout is not a sustainable scheme for the future of Swale and fails to address rat-running in surrounding rural areas and indeed may increase it,

and threatens the future of bus service provision along Chestnut Street and Danaway with key urban centres. It urges Highways England and the Government to fund Option 4 or Option 10 which provides a long term sustainable solution to cope with the growth anticipated in the future not only in Swale, but with the extra traffic from the Lower Thames Crossing and other districts.

243 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

The Mayor advised that two questions had been received. Written answers had been provided, which had been circulated, published on the Council's website, and attached as Appendix I to these Minutes. The Mayor invited members of the public to ask a supplementary question.

Question One

Mr Peto asked the Cabinet Member if he was completely confident that the position regarding Gypsy and Traveller sites was sufficiently robust for the next 12 years?

The Cabinet Member for Planning said 'yes'.

Question Two

Mr Tutt said that there were other litter problems, not just caused by cigarette butts, such as problems at Gate Services with lorry drivers leaving bottles of urine. He asked if there was going to be a proper clean-up in places where lorries were leaving rubbish and waste, which was causing a real problem for some parts of the Borough?

The Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities said that nationally, cigarette butts accounted for over half of litter problems, and that he expected fines to be increased to reflect this. He agreed to investigate the issues raised by Mr Tutt.

244 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS

The Mayor advised that four questions had been submitted by Members, the answers to which had been provided, can be viewed on the Council's website and are attached as Appendix II to these Minutes.

The Mayor invited Members to ask a supplementary question.

Question One

Councillor Roger Truelove asked if the Cabinet Member agreed if it would be better for the Government to make the Local Plan require the provision of affordable housing, and for Councils not to waive policies on affordable housing?

The Cabinet Member for Housing advised that social and affordable housing was part of the Local Plan, and so the more houses built, the more affordable housing should be provided.

Question Two

Councillor Roger Truelove thanked the Cabinet Member for his answer, and asked if enough resource was given to this area of work (one part-time officer), referring to the perception that the level of hate crime was higher than reported.

The Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities considered that the Community Safety Partnership had the right level of resource and provided a first class service. He referred to the complex issue around recorded crime and perceived crime, and drew attention to the community event being organised, namely the Fusion Festival, at the end of October 2017.

Question Three

Councillor Mike Baldock thanked the Cabinet Member for his response, and asked the Cabinet Member if he could look to provision of a service in future years, where residents could be offered a service to travel to other parts of the borough, for example Faversham to Sittingbourne; Sittingbourne to the Isle of Sheppey, etc?

The Cabinet Member thanked the Member for his support, and advised that the service would be reviewed taking into account feedback from this year's service. He expressed disappointment that it had not been possible to provide a park and ride facility in Sittingbourne despite best efforts.

Question Four

Councillor Mike Baldock asked the Leader if he would convey thanks to Dunkirk Parish Council for alerting the Council to the threat to ancient damaged woodland?

The Leader said he would be happy to convey thanks to Dunkirk Parish Council.

245 LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Leader introduced his Statement which gave an update on Mid Kent Services (MKS) Recruitment; Sittingbourne Town Centre; Changes to Cashless Parking; and Environmental Awards.

MKS Recruitment Update

The Leader of the Independent Group, who was also the Chairman of the Member Development Working Group, asked if it was possible for Mr McGuiness to attend the Working Group, rather than send a representative, which the Leader agreed to follow up.

Sittingbourne Town Centre Update

The Leader of the Labour Group referred to Phase One of the project, and asked if it was possible when Phase Two was reached, for that phase to progress more quickly without the encumbrance of one development partner. The Leader anticipated Phase Two would not begin before 2019 and so this would be a matter for the administration at the time.

Another Member asked for more information to be provided on the Council's website, in particular regarding road closures, and the Leader agreed to follow this up. He referred to the current edition of the Council's magazine that was currently being distributed and press releases that had been issued, but there was no control over how much information the press included in their newspapers.

Changes to Cashless Parking

Members asked questions on the new service, referring in particular to charges that they had experienced in other Boroughs. The team was congratulated on negotiating a contract to remove a convenience charge for customers, and a suggestion was made that the detailed press release should be re-issued, as the press had not included all of the information in their coverage.

The Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities and the Leader praised the new service and the Team for negotiating a good deal. In response to a question about machines not working in car parks, the Cabinet Member confirmed that customers would not be penalised if they wished to pay by cash, but the machine was out of order. He advised that many busy car parks had more than one machine and a good service level agreement was in place to rectify any problems quickly.

Environmental Awards

The Leader of the UKIP Group congratulated all concerned on the TIKPAK initiative and asked if there were any plans to expand the scheme? The Leader advised that he hoped the scheme would continue but he could not make any budget commitments.

The Leader of the Independent Group congratulated all concerned for their achievements, but asked if there would be an update on Housing in a future Leader's Statement?

A Member welcomed the recognition of the work, and asked if there was any action being taken regarding the recent muck spreading that had an adverse impact on residents? The Leader advised that Environmental Health were working with the Environment Agency to ensure that national legislation was being followed, and there had been no examples of any breaches when he had last made enquiries.

A Member asked if the Leader was aware that Swale was the first District Council in England to introduce the TIKPAK scheme and that did he agree that officers should be thanked sincerely for their innovative idea? The Leader endorsed this comment and congratulated officers and the Cabinet Member. Another Member commended the officers for being awarded the RSPCA Gold Footprint Award for the eighth consecutive year. In response to a question as to whether there were any plans to remove cigarette butt bins, the Leader agreed to ask the Cabinet Member to look into this.

246 POLITICAL BALANCE CALCULATION AND APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES

The Leader introduced the report which set out the revised political balance calculation, following the Milton Regis By-election on 3 August 2017, and proposed the recommendations.

The report advised that as a result of the new calculation, some changes were required to seats on committees, and the Leader advised that Councillor Mike Dendor would no longer sit on the Planning Committee due to work commitments. The Leader of the UKIP Group advised that Councillor Adrian Crowther would no longer sit on the Licensing Act 2003 Committee. The Leader of the Labour Group's changes to committee membership were set out within the report. The Leader of the Independent Group thanked the Leader of the UKIP Group for gifting a seat to his Group on the Policy Development and Review Committee, which would allow Councillor Monique Bonney to continue to be a member of that Committee.

Resolved:

(1) That the political balance calculation as set out in Appendix I to the report be approved.

(2) That the Council notes the changes to the appointment of Members to Committees, as advised by Group Leaders.

247 APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS

The Leader introduced the report, which asked the Council to agree to the appointment of two Independent Persons. He advised that satisfactory references had been received and so he proposed amendments to the recommendations set out in the report to reflect this.

The Council did not discuss the content of the confidential appendix, therefore there was no need for the Council to resolve to exclude the press and public. A Member drew attention to some typographical errors in the confidential appendix. In response to a question, the Leader confirmed that one of the Independent Persons was a resident of the Borough.

Resolved:

(1) That the Council approves the appointment of Christopher Webb and Patricia Richards as the Council's Independent Persons for a period of four years until 30 September 2021.

(2) That the Council records a vote of thanks to Sally Pirie, the outgoing Independent Person for her service over the last five years.

Chairman

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

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