
COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Virtual Meeting held via Skype from 7.00pm - 11.33pm held on Wednesday 17 June 2020.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart, Monique Bonney, Lloyd Bowen, Derek Carnell, Roger Clark (Deputy Mayor), Simon Clark, Richard Darby, Steve Davey, Mike Dendor, Mark Ellen, Simon Fowle, Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, James Hall, Ann Hampshire, Nicholas Hampshire, Angela Harrison, Alan Horton, James Hunt, Ken Ingleton (Mayor), Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Denise Knights, Peter Marchington, Benjamin Martin, Ben J Martin, Lee McCall, Pete Neal, Padmini Nissanga, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin, Ken Pugh, Ken Rowles, Julian Saunders, David Simmons, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen, Bill Tatton, Eddie Thomas, Roger Truelove, Tim Valentine, Ghlin Whelan, Mike Whiting, Tony Winckless and Corrie Woodford.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Jayne Bolas, Martyn Cassell, David Clifford, Janet Dart, Philippa Davies, Heather Elliott, Janet Hill, Chris Lovelock, Julie May, Jo Millard, Patricia Narebor, Bob Pullen, Nick Vickers and Emma Wiggins.

697 INTRODUCTION

The Mayor explained that the Cabinet meeting would be conducted in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panel (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 No 392.

In welcoming all Members and members of the public, the Mayor explained which Swale Borough Council officers were in attendance.

698 PRAYERS

The Mayor's Chaplain said prayers, including prayers for recently departed Members and staff.

699 TRIBUTES

The Leader paid tribute to the Chief Executive of Swale Borough Council (SBC), Mark Radford, who sadly passed away recently. He gave a history of Mark's thirty-three year career at SBC and spoke of the many tributes received from other Kent authorities, the Local Government Association and from the local community. The Leader said that if there was ever a history of SBCI, Mark would feature as a major influence over several decades.

The Leader of the Conservative group also paid tribute and spoke of Mark's dedication to public service, his commitment to residents and to staff and Members and said he would be missed by all.

The Leader paid tribute to Human Resources Assistant Carol Thomason who sadly passed away in May 2020. The Leader said that everyone would remember Carol

as a lovely colleague who was always ready to go out of her way to be helpful, and she would be sorely missed.

The Mayor paid tribute to former SBC Director of Development Services, Dick Harman who sadly passed away in April 2020. He said that Dick was well respected and was responsible for Swale's development plan which helped to rebuild the area after the loss of its major industries. The Mayor said that Dick had helped shaped Swale into the fastest improving economy in Kent.

Councillor Angela Harrison paid tribute to Honorary Alderwoman Val Dane who sadly passed away recently. She said that she was known to be a real character and a 'community Councillor' who always did the best for the people she represented, regardless of the politics. Councillor Harrison said that Hon. Alderwoman Dane would be very sadly missed.

Councillor Ben J Martin paid tribute to Honorary Alderman Bernie Lowe who sadly passed away recently. He said he was a kind-hearted person who was always ready, willing and able to help anyone, was an influential member who still had a keen interest in Swale, despite moving out of the area, and he would be sadly missed.

Councillor David Simmons paid tribute to Honorary Alderman Bryan Mulhern who sadly passed away recently. He gave a history of his political career in Swale including his term as Mayor of Faversham and of Swale and said that it was cruel that he was not able to enjoy a long retirement after working so hard for so many years.

Councillor Mike Baldock paid tribute to Honorary Alderman Brian Woodland who sadly passed away recently. He gave a history of his political career and his encouragement of others, and said that the parish of Borden would have been a 'lesser place' if it had not been for his influence.

The Mayor led the silence in memory of those who had passed.

700 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 February 2020 (Minute Nos. 548 – 569) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

701 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Monitoring Officer advised that he was of the view that consideration of Members' remuneration did not amount to a disclosable pecuniary interest in this case. However, there were some arguments that it might be so he had issued a dispensation to all Members in respect of Item 11 – Review of the Members' Allowances Scheme.

702 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor thanked all staff for adapting to the new ways of working from home since lockdown and said that for many staff work loads had escalated. He said that

his own engagements had ceased but that work, emails and meetings had continued remotely.

The Mayor thanked the many volunteers who had continued their work and assisted others and he also thanked essential workers who had ensured that the public had all the services they required including health and food supplies.

He concluded by saying that in future there would be changes to working lives and interaction with each other, and a new normal would evolve.

703 MOTION - VAPING

Councillor Mike Whiting proposed the following motion:

“That this Council agrees to extend its Smoking at Work Policy so that it also applies to Members and to amend paragraph 3.1 of the Policy to read as follows:

3.1 This policy applies to all Members, employees and agency staff. It also applies to consultants and contractors whilst they are working for the Council. It also applies to visitors and members of the public whilst are in Council buildings or Council vehicles.”

In proposing the motion Councillor Whiting said the current policy which excluded Members was an oversight that should be corrected, Members were not more important than staff and the electorate, and that Members should be governed by the same rules.

Councillor Alan Horton seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

The Leader spoke against the motion and said that as this was the first Full Council meeting in a crisis, it should not be debated at the current time.

Referring to Council Procedure Rule 16 (19)(b), Councillor Richard Palmer moved that the motion be put to the vote. This was seconded by Councillor Monique Bonney. On being put to the vote, this was agreed.

The mover of the original motion was invited to speak. Councillor Mike Whiting explained that the motion had been carried over from the previous Full Council meeting had been cancelled. He said that no elected Member should give themselves privileges over and above public and staff and the proposed motion was to ensure parity, not for any political gain.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 19 (2) five Members requested a recorded vote, and voting was as follows:

For: Beart, Bowen, R Clark, Darby, Dendor, Ellen, Fowle, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Horton, Hunt, Marchington, McCall, Neal, Pugh, Simmons, Whiting. Total equals 17.

Against: Baldock, Bonney, Carnell, S Clark, Davey, Gibson, Harrison, Jackson, Knights, Benjamin A Martin, Ben J Martin, Nissanga, Palmer, Perkin,

Rowles, Saunders, P Stephen, S Stephen, Tatton, Thomas, Truelove, Whelan, Winckless, Woodford. Total equals 24.

Abstain: Gould, Hall, Ingleton, Jayes, Valentine. Total=5.

The Mayor advised that the vote was lost.

704 MOTION - LORRY PARKING

Councillor Monique Bonney proposed the following motion:

“As the district in Kent which suffers by far the greatest impacts from unofficial lorry parking in the County, Swale Borough council asks that the Department for Transport places a high priority on working with the Highway Authorities and other relevant Stakeholders to develop a County wide/South East England strategy which helps tackle the issue in a co-ordinated way, not just in Swale but for the whole county. This strategy must include an appropriately robust and resourced enforcement regime, which does not place additional pressure on already stretched local authorities and their local partners. Swale Borough Council cannot support ad-hoc proposals, for new lorry parking facilities such as those at Brenley Corner (Junction 7 M2) without understanding how this fits in with a Kent strategy and any planned future investment in the strategic road network”

In proposing the motion, Council Bonney said that an urgent upgrade of much of Kent's highway infrastructure was required, and she said that it was premature to consider a lorry park at junction 7 when significant junction improvements were required. She referred to the enforcement of lorry parking in the Borough and said that the £25 fine imposed, the same approximate cost of staying overnight at a lorry park, was not a deterrent and she highlighted the issues around collecting fines from foreign lorry drivers. Councillor Bonney highlighted the success of an experimental Traffic Regulation Order in Ashford and said that there needed to be more lorry parks, with better facilities. She said that the current regime was not fair or equitable and was harmful to communities.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Mike Baldock reserved his right to speak.

The Leader said that he supported the motion and said that a Swale-wide approach was a better approach than ad-hoc solutions.

The Leader of the Conservative group advised that he had not heard a significant amount of the proposer's speech and would therefore abstain from the vote, but added he would have voted against the proposal as SBC were responsible for assisting residents whose lives were affected by fly lorry parking, and SBC could assist in addressing the issue. He went on to say that he did not believe the motion was about lorry parking but about the administration's desire to generate housing, and he referred to the proposed development land opposite the proposed lorry park, and made an allegation of probable improper practices regarding private discussions about this land.

The Leader asked the Leader of the Conservative group to withdraw his allegation of improper practices. The Leader of the Conservative group said that similar

language had been used by the opposition to describe the work of his own group. In response, the Leader said that he personally had never used such language.

Councillor Mike Baldock proposed a motion that Councillor Alan Horton be ejected from the meeting for his comments. This was seconded by Councillor Richard Palmer who reserved his right to speak.

Councillor Mike Baldock said that standards were required at a Full Council meeting, and Councillor Alan Horton had not withdrawn his comments when given the opportunity.

In the debate that followed, Councillor Alan Horton accepted that his comments were inappropriate for a Full Council meeting, and he apologised to all Members, officers and members of the public. Councillor Baldock withdrew his motion.

Members then debated the substantive motion and raised points including:

- There was a shortage of lorry parks;
- a cohesive strategy was required;
- the proposals at junction 7 of the M2 would not solve the problems along the A2;
- collaboration with other districts, Kent County Council (KCC) and the Department for Transport was required;
- compared lorry parks in other parts of Europe;
- poorly worded motion;
- Cabinet had been asked to consider this before, writing a letter would not achieve much;
- KCC had already produced a strategy – Delivering Growth Without Gridlock 2016 -31;
- there should be joined up thinking;
- the motion wrote off any home-grown schemes;
- any opportunities should be supported;
- the issue could be resolved by providing adequate parking;
- SBC were responsible for on-street parking;
- SBC should provide enforceable parking; and
- there was no evidence that SBC had lobbied Central Government.

In response, Councillor Mike Baldock said that lorry parking had been an issue for many years and the objections to the motion were not reflective of what the motion hoped to achieve. He said that Swale did not want to attract lorries to the area if a park was over-subscribed and proper enforcement was required.

In summing up, Councillor Monique Bonney said that the previous administration could have taken action on this issue. She added that a proper joined up strategy and a good network of facilities was required, and solutions would be sought from Central Government and KCC.

The substantive motion was then put to the vote, and was agreed.

Resolved:

(1) That the Council asks the Department of Transport to place a high priority on working with the Highway Authority and other relevant Stakeholders to develop a County wide/South East England strategy to help tackle the issue of lorry parking in a co-ordinated way for the whole county.

(2) That the strategy should include an appropriately robust and resourced enforcement regime which does not place additional pressure on already stretched local authorities and their local partners.

(3) That Swale Borough Council could not support ad-hoc proposals for new lorry parking facilities such as those at Brenley Corner (Junction 7 M2) without understanding how this fitted in with a Kent wide strategy and any planned future investment in the future road network.

705 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from the public.

706 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS

The Mayor advised that 11 questions had been received from Members. Each Member was invited to put their question which was responded to by the relevant Cabinet Member. The questioner was then invited to ask a supplementary question. The Mayor advised that any questions not asked within the thirty minute time limited would receive a written response.

Details of the questions and response are set out below:

Question 1 – Councillor Mike Whiting

Would the leader join me in congratulating the Government on the unprecedented level of support it has provided in grants and business rate relief to local businesses here in Swale, and also to congratulate our officers for the magnificent job they have done in getting that financial help out the door to the businesses that need it during this coronavirus pandemic crisis?"

Response – Leader

Thank you for this question and the opportunity to acknowledge both the support from Government and the sterling work, with limited resources, by our officers.

If a global pandemic forces governments to lock down large parts of their economies for several months then they have little option but to make an enormous fiscal leap. Cllr Whiting properly cites grants and business rate relief to local businesses but I would add in too, the value of funding the furloughing of employees across the economy and the hardship fund to help less well-off council taxpayers.

Having said the government was driven down a path that does not fit into their usual ideological assumptions, I have to say the Chancellor of the Exchequer acted swiftly, clearly and with conviction and it is not surprising that opinion polls indicate that he enjoys much greater confidence with the general public than the rest of the cabinet

Our officers likewise acted swiftly and decisively, notwithstanding the considerable logistical difficulties of locating all the qualifying businesses. We have now distributed £25,978,000 of grants and are well set to distribute the second wave of discretionary grants.

I am sure the challenge of trying to sustain the economy is not over for either the Chancellor or this Council.

Supplementary question

Councillor Whiting thanked the Leader for his response and asked whether he was satisfied that the criteria SBC had set for discretionary grants was adequate or whether there would be new criteria, and whether he expected all the funding from the first round to be allocated?

In response, the Leader said that the criteria were mostly set by Government and he was satisfied that it was correct and he would give a follow-up response with more details on discretionary grants.

Question 2 – Councillor Alan Horton

Given that the country is in what has been described as the worse crisis since the Second World War, would the Leader explain to the thousands of Conservative voters throughout the Borough why he has chosen not to formally include the views of their representatives in his planning and preparation for delivery of services in this challenging time, despite being reminded on several occasions that the Emergency Committee is within the constitution for exactly that purpose.

It is clear that the Leader has chosen to work solely with his coalition partners and as he has done previously, restrict the opposition's involvement in the effective and efficient running of the council. Many residents will struggle to understand how his continued denial of a voice to the representatives of the largest party in the Borough is consistent with the coalitions corporate plan objective to 'diffuse decision-making power more widely among elected members and improve the transparency, responsiveness and public accountability of that decision-making'.

Response – Leader

Thank you for this question which raises an important point though I have to say I am disappointed by the tone of it.

All members will know that throughout the pandemic crisis I have regularly, twice a week initially, updated them on progress, because I deemed it important to do so during this period of isolation. Conservative members were free to respond to these updates and a few members did so; Cllr Hunt offering the sensible suggestion that

we should bring forward the members grants, which we did and for which I thanked him publicly. I was also e mailed by Cllr Whiting on a Saturday night asking me to avoid making partisan political points in my updates, notwithstanding I was only reflecting the views of other, mostly Conservative, leaders, across Kent, on funding support from Government to local authorities. I also received comments from Cllr Beart about ice cream vans, views I profoundly agreed with. Cllr Horton would also want to acknowledge that with my support he has regular briefings from the Director of Regeneration and that I had a one hour plus meeting with him and Cllr Simmons outlining a number of points and asking for feedback. Over the year I think I have had four such constructive meetings with both of them. I would just like to point out that in the previous 17 years, as an opposition Leader, I can only recall one attempt to consult with me, in a corridor and about the award of Freeman of the Borough to a relative of Cllr Whiting.

But I understand the Leader of the Opposition might feel that his party might have been involved in strategic planning. The reality is that all the strategic direction was handed down from Government and the role of this Council has been largely operational and significantly dependent on officers who have been outstanding in the crisis. Until very recently the Senior Management team has met every day. The role of the Cabinet has been to monitor operations which has been done on a daily basis and at weekly informal cabinet meetings. The Cabinet is the appropriate place to do that and if there was a Conservative Cabinet I would recognise that as the appropriate course of action.

He is right that he has mentioned the use of the Emergency Committee and I pursued that with officers. The advice I am given is that the Emergency Committee is there to deal with immediate emergencies where normal committee structures cannot be instantly summoned take decisions that only Council could otherwise take at times when Council cannot meet, but the need for this in an emergency situation is limited because in the immediate response phase most decisions will be executive ones. Having said this, this Emergency is not an instant one like a sudden fire or flood. It is sadly a long ongoing one, the recovery phase of which has to be managed by the elected administration with, I hope, the optimum degree of involvement from the whole Council. We will now be moving into this recovery stage and I hope the Conservative group will engage fully in this as we have a responsibility to all our communities to lead on this.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Horton thanked the Leader for his response and his acknowledgement of the contributions made by members of the Conservative group. He asked the Leader if he would accept an invitation from his group to work with the Leader as previous coalitions and partnerships at SBC had?

In response, the Leader said he would work with all members of the Council but said that under the Cabinet system, it had to lead.

Question 3 – Councillor David Simmons

Outline planning permission for 250 houses at Preston Fields (16/508602), Faversham, was granted by the Planning Committee on 5th March 2018, subject to

a suitably-worded Section 106 agreement following consultation with the Ward Members and the Planning Committee Chairman. By May last year the agreement was almost completed. Following the election this Administration took over and in July, the Cabinet appear to have instructed the Planning Department not to sign the agreement. Will the Cabinet Member for Planning explain why after more than a year into their administration it has still not been completed?"

Response – Cabinet Member for Planning

I would like to thank Cllr Simmons for his question, although I am a little surprised that he shares his colleagues eagerness to see housing spring up all over Swale as quickly as possible.

Firstly, I have to make it clear that there has been no Cabinet decision to withhold the signing of the S.106 agreement. I am not sure where he gets his information from, but this is simply nonsense. However, he is correct that this administration cares more about resident's need -both existing residents and those for whom the houses are being built - than perhaps was the case previously.

It is my understanding that following consultation with the Ward Members and the Planning Committee Chair and noting that proposals had started to progress regarding the potential development to the south east of Faversham, that the issue of a potential link road between Salters Lane and Ashford Road was raised as part of the S.106 planning obligations consideration given the wider benefits it would potentially deliver for the south eastern part of Faversham including:

- longer term improved transport connections with beneficial outcomes between the proposed urban extension at SE Faversham, Preston Fields, Perry Court and beyond;
- relief of traffic congestion at the A2/Ashford Road junction, which currently is under significant stress particularly for traffic attempting to enter onto the A2;
- an east-west link south of the A2 for pedestrians, cycles, public transport and private vehicles to promote permeability between developments south of the A2, all of which would otherwise rely totally on their own access points directly onto the A2;
- promote sustainable development that will help achieve the highest standards of master planning and placemaking, and which will help to revitalise the town as a whole;
- a valuable contribution to the future permeability of the southern extents of Faversham, enabling people to move easily between different places of residence and work, and social and community facilities; and

significant benefits for the future residents of the Preston Fields site and to the attractiveness of other possible new housing coming forward in the area.

Given these circumstances, it was considered that the Council would not wish for this opportunity to be foregone through the determination of the current planning application, which currently includes no provision for a future link road across the

site. Discussions and negotiations have been ongoing with the applicant to consider whether there is an opportunity either for the safeguarding of the land and/or the provision of the link road to be included within the proposals and associated S.106 agreement. These discussions have involved the ward members and the Planning Committee Chair and I have also been involved given my responsibilities regarding progress of the Local Plan review. We are currently awaiting proposals from the applicant on how they wish to proceed.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Simmons thanked the Cabinet Member for Planning for his response and asked him to confirm that senior Councillors in the administration had not been seeking to do deals with developers behind closed doors?

In response, the Cabinet Member for Planning confirmed that there were no such deals but that ongoing discussions were taking place with developers in order to progress negotiations.

Question 4 – Councillor Simon Clark

Can the Cabinet member tell me how many contacts we have made through the Community support hub and how this Council has supported voluntary and charitable groups in helping those most in need during the current crisis?

Response – Cabinet Member for Community

As at the end of last week we have dealt with 1,511 requests through our community support hub. These requests range from sourcing food, collecting prescriptions to wider support during these difficult times. We have worked with a huge number of established and newly created voluntary and community groups to help us respond to these requests and the great number of residents who have come forward to volunteer. We have directly funded those organisations who ran the food distribution hubs and we opened our Member Grant schemes early this year to enable organisations to apply for funding to support their services and promoted other funds available to them. A list of performance statistics and grants will be issued through members' despatch.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Clark thanked the Cabinet Member for Community for his response and asked whether the public needed to be better informed that money was available via the Members' grant scheme as he had only been contacted by one organisation?

In response, the Cabinet Member for Community said that the scheme was well publicised but suggested that Members could contact organisations directly to inform that money was available.

Question 5 – Councillor Steve Davey

Can the Leader outline the part that our Council has played in trying to enforce the original instruction to people to "Stay at Home"?

Response – Leader

The Council responded quickly to follow the Government requirements and whilst not exhaustive, below is a list of some of the changes we made;

- Staff were required to work from home from 17 March;
- Council run facilities were closed;
- Adaptations were made to our burial service;
- We closed car parks to our major open spaces;
- We monitored the use of our green spaces and seafronts.
- We relaxed parking restrictions across the Borough.
- We set up the 'community hub' team with Council staff.
- Cabinet and Senior Management have reviewed each of these changes and their impacts throughout the period of the pandemic and worked closely with the Police particularly on weekends to ensure that social distancing was not an issue.

The Leader advised that more information was contained in the Leader's Statement.

Supplementary Question

There was no supplementary question.

Question 6 – Councillor Steve Davey

Does the Leader think that the widely reported journey to Durham of the Prime Minister's adviser, Dominic Cummings, will have weakened public resolve to continue social distancing?

Response – Leader

Thank you for this question. The short answer is that we cannot tell but we can speculate in a reasonable way. To help me with this I would like to quote the MP for Maidenhead and Bray, the former Prime Minister Theresa May. In a letter to her local party she says:

"In the circumstances I do not feel that Mr Cummings followed the spirit of the guidance".

This is the nub of your question. Despite casuistic and legalistic attempts to excuse Mr Cummings, the majority of people including a large section of the Parliamentary Conservative believe that Mr Cummings did break the spirit of the guidance, that it caused offence to millions of people and ran the risk that some people would say that if he can do that, so will I. I sincerely hope people will continue to do what we

all know needs to be done and that they can dismiss the thought that Mr Cummings can be regarded as any kind of role model.

Supplementary Question

There was no supplementary question.

Question 7 – Councillor Corrie Woodford

Can the Cabinet Member give us his response to the Cleve Hill Solar Farm Appeal and outline what steps the council is planning to take in response?

Response – Cabinet Member for Environment

Thank you for your question. On 28th May the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy granted a Development Consent Order to Cleve Hill Solar Park Ltd to construct a 350MW Solar power station with battery storage on Graveney marshes. The application was processed under the procedure for a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project. Public hearings were conducted by the Planning Inspectorate. The Planning Inspector submitted a report to the Secretary of State who made the final decision. Swale Borough Council submitted representations and an impact assessment report but was not involved in the decision-making process.

The decision is extremely disappointing and a great shock to local residents. The development will industrialise a site the size of Faversham which is in a very sensitive location. It is in an area of high landscape value noted for its long-distance views and is adjacent to protected wildlife life sites of international significance. The site is used by wild birds including Marsh Harriers, lapwing, golden plover, curlew and brent geese. It is accepted that construction of the site will disturb these birds, but a mitigation area is to be provided. The proposal was opposed by local residents and many organisations including Graveney Rural Environment Action Team, Kent Wildlife Trust, the Campaign for Rural England and the Faversham Society.

In June 2019 Swale Borough Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency. We understand the need to generate renewable energy at scale. However we cannot address the climate emergency by continuing to advance the extinction of our natural flora and fauna, and by failing to protect our wild places. We believe that solar energy is best developed at a local and community scale. Solar panels belong on roofs of houses, commercial and industrial buildings, not in a local beauty spot.

Local residents have justifiable concerns about the safety of building the world's largest lithium battery storage facility in such close proximity to people's homes. There have been a number of fires in battery storage facilities around the world. A fire in a very large battery will be difficult to extinguish and will produce toxic fumes.

There is no appeal process. The only way to challenge the Secretary of State's decision is seek judicial review. To overturn the decision, it would be necessary to show that the decision was unlawful. We are currently seeking legal advice on the

prospects of a successful judicial review, and are liaising with community groups about this process.

Supplementary question

There was no supplementary question

Question 8 – Councillor Cameron Beart (due to technical issues, Councillor Simmons read out Councillor Beart’s question)

Since the current administration took office, the Local Plan Panel has been poorly balanced, both politically and geographically. The largest party on the council only holds one seat and there are no members from Sheppey on the panel. This has been described to the local press by a member of the coalition as "an oversight" that "hopefully will be rectified in the near future".

Could the Cabinet Member for Planning please explain how this "oversight" has occurred and confirm when and how he plans to rectify the situation?

Response – Cabinet Member for Planning

Obviously I cannot speak on behalf of unnamed and unreferenced comments alleged to have been made to the press, lacking in any detail or context, and consequently cannot comment on the premise of his question in the respect of any 'oversight' or future 'rectification', but I would like to make a number of points.

The Local Plan Panel is not a Committee subject to proportionality - it is an advisory Panel to offer advice to the Cabinet in formulating the Local Plan and places are appointed by The Leader. As the Conservative Party have demonstrated on many occasions that they are wedded to a Local Plan that will impose up to 15,000 houses in Swale, delivered largely by reliance on huge Garden Village proposals - a Local Plan approach that was comprehensively rejected by local people in the local elections last year but one which they continue to try and impose on local people through their connections in Government and KCC and in their public comments - it is difficult to see how they will be able to contribute much to the Administration's attempts to deliver a very different Local Plan with a totally different emphasis. However, The Leader still agreed to ask the Conservative Group to nominate a Conservative Councillor to this advisory Panel in order that they can be represented. I would remind you that all Councillors are entitled to attend the Local Plan Panels, offer their input and ask questions. It is only the voting that is limited to Panel members.

Cllr Beart claims the Panel is poorly balanced geographically, yet his own party - with 7 Councillors from Sheppey - would seem not to support his concerns as they nominated a Councillor from the mainland to represent them, rather than one of their Island members. Indeed just last week, at the most recent Local Plan Panel, when their representative was unable to make the meeting, they substituted him with yet another mainland Councillor rather than an Island member.

However, as we get closer to the submission of the Local Plan itself, I believe there is a need to look again at the make-up of the panel, and to allow a greater degree

of back-bench input into the Panel's deliberations for the Cabinet to consider. Consequently I have recently secured the agreement of the Leader to replace one of the Cabinet Members on the Panel with a non-Cabinet member of my group, and as it happens that member is from the Island.

However, I would remind Cllr Beart that Councillors when in Committee or on advisory panels have a duty to consider issues from a Borough-wide perspective. I am confident from the contributions made by all members of the Panel, including those from his Party colleague, that those currently on the Panel do exactly that. His question, however, casts some doubt on his own understanding of the responsibilities of Councillors and I would hope that he takes time to reflect on that.

Supplementary question

Councillor Beart reiterated that the Local Plan Panel was unbalanced and asked for more clarification on how this would be rectified?

The Cabinet Member for Planning drew attention to the response and suggested that the Conservative Group Leader needed to consider whether a representative from the Isle of Sheppey should replace a member on the panel.

707 LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Leader said that because he had kept Members regularly updated and there was such a detailed agenda, his statement would be concise.

He said that the previous Monday saw the reopening of non-essential retail in the high streets. SBC would receive £134,000 of European Funding and officers had been putting plans in place. He added that, for now, SBC would be focusing on the high streets in:

Sittingbourne;
Sheerness; and
Faversham;

as well as including Leysdown to ensure the increase in population over the Summer months was taken into consideration and managed effectively.

The Leader said that immediate actions had included:

Engagement with businesses and other stakeholders;
daily sanitising of assets in high streets, including car park ticket machines;
signage, banners and notices;
temporary one-way systems using floor stencils and other markings for social distancing; and
removing street clutter.

He added that SBC's communications and messaging centred on 3 key themes – stay safe, be kind, take your time, and that SBC were working in partnership with the Police, KCC and parish and town councils to ensure a joined-up approach and collective effort.

The Leader said that impact of opening would be assessed, and preparations made for the wider opening of pubs and restaurants outdoors from the 22nd June 2020. So far reports in the main had been positive and shops were managing social distancing and were happy with efforts being made.

The Leader said that linked to this was work done at short notice to respond to KCC's ask for project ideas towards the Active Travel Project. He said that they had received a first tranche of £1.6 million from the Department of Transport for temporary/ trial projects that enhanced safe cycling and walking, and that SBC's bid amounted to just over £100,000 for schemes such as pedestrianising the high streets, a 20mph zone in Faversham and realigning traffic crossing timings at pinch points.

The Leader said that SBC were waiting to see if it was successful in its bid and looking at alternative ways to fund and implement these ideas as part of its wider recovery, and reopening the high street project. This included using Emergency Road Traffic Orders to pedestrianise Sittingbourne, Sheerness and Faversham high streets between 10am - 4pm, Monday – Thursday, starting on the 25th June 2020, on a trial basis.

Referring to the Council's considerable response to the Pandemic Crisis, he said that there would be much more to do, and he was determined that SBC should have a robust Recovery Plan that all could buy into. The Leader said that central to any plan must be steps to give the local economy all the support it could muster, and that practical completion of the Spirit of Sittingbourne Phase 1 would give a stimulus to the Sittingbourne Town Centre.

The Leader said that the Council had responded very well to the demands made by government, whether through the community support hub, the support to businesses or in reinforcing social distancing and he gave the major share of the credit to officers who had responded with leadership and energy.

The Leader warned that the Council's resources, compared with other authorities, were severely stretched and some officers have had to embrace superhuman levels of work. He said that this was not sustainable, particularly in the challenging times ahead and he advised that the first step would be to appoint a Chief Executive for the Council as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Finally, the Leader said that support was being given to the 15 people from four households affected by the cliff collapse in Eastchurch. The family who had lost their home had been offered a property on the Isle of Sheppey and the three other households were in temporary accommodation. The Leader advised that specialist surveyors had carried out a geotechnical survey of the cliff and the results would be considered. Further decisions about the affected properties would be made as soon as possible.

The Leader said that he would take a response from the Leader of the opposition but hoped, subject to the Council agreeing, to make it possible for more members to respond to the statement, as long as it was time-limited and did not degenerate into the past grandstand which wasted so much time.

The Leader of the opposition thanked the Leader and praised the work carried out by staff. He supported the Leader's future proposal to include other Members to respond to his statement.

708 REVIEW OF THE MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME - REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

The Leader introduced the report and proposed that Members agreed to review the scheme of Members' allowances according to the recommendations made by the independent panel.

In seconding the recommendation, the Leader of the opposition reserved his right to speak.

In the debate that followed Members made points including:

- The review should be carried out in the Spring before an election and be static for the 4-year term unless there were major changes to a Council structure;
- Area Committee Chairman should be awarded one-tenth of the Council's Leader's allowance;
- the allowance for the Leader of the largest opposition group was inadequate and should match a Cabinet Member allowance ;
- could not support an increase in allowance in the current economic climate;
- support for improving diversity within the Council, in accordance with the principle of fair remuneration as at paragraph 4.15 of the report;
- welcomed the update to the Dependents' Carers' Allowance as at paragraph 4.40;
- acknowledgement of the panel's reference to how the IT allowance might be further considered as remote and flexible working evolved in the future;
- acknowledged that the recommendations offered solutions to some of the barriers to a diverse and representative local democracy;
- Members should accept the report or not, not cherry pick from within it;
- Members could choose to donate the allowance when received;
- supported the panel's recommendations which were fair and independent;
- a review at Spring before an election could politicise it; and
- needed to ensure that the scheme encouraged a wide range of candidates, not just for the wealthy.

The Leader of the opposition spoke in support.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 19 (2), five Members requested a recorded vote, and voting was as follows:

For: Beart, Bonney, Bowen, Carnell, R Clark, S Clark, Davey, Dendor, Ellen, Fowle, Gibson, Gould, Hall, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Harrison, Horton, Hunt, Jackson, Knights, Marchington, Ben J Martin, McCall, Neal, Perkin, Pugh, Rowles, Saunders, Simmons, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Whiting and Winckless. Total equals 37.

Against: Baldock, Darby, Jayes, Benjamin A Martin, Palmer, Tatton and Woodford. Total equals 7.

Abstain: Ingleton. Total equals 1.

Resolved:

(1) That Members agree to review the scheme of Members' allowance according to the recommendations made by the independent panel, as set out in the report.

709 AMENDMENTS TO CONSTITUTION: AREA COMMITTEES

The Cabinet Member for Planning introduced the report and proposed the recommendation which sought changes to the constitution in order to enable the establishment of four Area Committees.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Eddie Thomas said the Area Committees were long over-due and would give residents a greater say in decisions in their area.

The Leader gave his support.

The Leader of the opposition group was critical of the consultation and said that similar Committees had not worked well in the past, but he would not stand in the way of progressing the proposal.

In the debate that followed, Members raised points including:

- The recommendations from the Policy Development and Review Committee (PDRC) were not included;
- an additional Area Committee had been added, without consultation of the public;
- Councillors should be engaging with the public anyway;
- clarification on funding - was it allocated in addition to Member grants?; and
- why was Bapchild, located in the east of Swale, included in the Western Area Committee?

Councillor Mike Whiting proposed that West Downs be moved into the Sittingbourne Area Committee from the Western Area Committee. This was seconded by Councillor Mike Dendor.

Councillors Monique Bonney and Councillor Mike Baldock spoke against the amendment. Councillor Baldock said that putting West Downs into the Sittingbourne area Committee would be a highly inappropriate match.

In debating the amendment, other Members raised points that included:

- Concern that decisions on an area would be made by a Member out of the area;

- needed clear, set boundary areas;
- the areas were not set at PDRC;
- it made no sense to include Bapchild in the Western Area Committee; and
- The Meads should be included in the Sittingbourne Area Committee.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

Members debated the substantive proposal and raised points including:

- Publicity of the proposed Area Committees was vital to encourage attendance by public, as previous similar Committees had low attendance;
- Sheppey Area Committees had previously been successful but had become too political;
- funding for Area Committees was in addition to Member grants;
- there should be a review after Area Committees were established and implement necessary changes;
- there should be bigger priorities for the administration than proposals for Area Committees;
- support for Area Committees;
- supported the principle of Area Committees but could not support the current proposal;
- supported more effective engagement of the public which Area Committees promoted;
- suggested parishing currently unparished areas would work better than Area Committees;
- the purpose of the Area Committees was to consider key strategic issues which had a stronger area focus than the whole Borough; and
- many parished areas might make the perspective too narrow.

In response, Councillor Mike Baldock referred to the Area Committee's Terms of Reference and clarified that Area Committees would consider strategic issues and have some financial powers. He confirmed that funding was in addition to Member Grants and a review would take place at the end of the year. Councillor Baldock said that in consulting the public, the preferred option was for four area committees.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 19 (2), five Members requested a recorded vote, and voting was as follows:

For: Baldock, Bonney, Carnell, S Clark, Darby, Davey, Gibson, Gould, Harrison, Jackson, Jayes, Knights, Benjamin A Martin, Ben J Martin, McCall, Palmer, Perkin, Rowles, Saunders, Simmons, P Stephen, S Stephen, Tatton, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Winckless and Woodford. Total equals 29.

Against: Ellen, Hunt, Whiting. Total equals 3.

Abstain: Beart, Bowen, R Clark, Dendor, Fowle, Hall, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Horton, Ingleton, Marchington, Neal, Pugh. Total equals 13.

Resolved:

(1) That the Constitution be updated to include the wording at Appendix 1 of the report.

710 INTERIM PLANNING POLICY FOR PARK HOME RESIDENCES

The Cabinet Member for Planning introduced the report which sought to provide the Council with a policy on park home sites should planning applications come forward in the future. He reminded Members that there was no policy in the current Local Plan and the policy would enable officers to set conditions and guidelines. He proposed the recommendation.

In seconding the proposal, Councillor Alastair Gould reserved his right to speak.

The Leader reminded Members that the policy was Borough-wide, would meet a need and diversify the Council's housing supply.

The Leader of the opposition expressed his concerns over the policy which he said was poorly thought through and had been rushed, with variations to the policy in a short space of time. He warned of unforeseen and unexpected consequences further down the line. The Leader of the opposition had concerns that significant support came from those that would benefit financially, and he drew attention to those who objected to the policy, mostly from the Isle of Sheppey, whose residents were not being listened to. He added that if a policy was to be introduced it needed to be properly thought through and properly examined by the PDRC.

In the debate that followed, Members raised points including:

- Supported the principle of a policy but had concerns over the wording in the policy and that existing holiday park owners would convert their sites to park homes sites;
- there was a desperate need for park homes for the elderly;
- the criteria to be met was strong;
- why did the original consultation only refer to holiday parks on the Isle of Sheppey if it was a Borough-wide policy?
- five out of six Parish Councils objected but were ignored;
- concerns it would open the floodgates;
- locations were not sustainable – retired people needed access to better infrastructure and facilities;
- concerns on the impact on tourism;
- this policy conflicted with other policies;
- more detail was required;
- concern that developers would take advantage of sites that would become sustainable, and apply for permanent housing;
- the policy did not remove the requirement to go through the usual planning process;
- the policy would not fill the 5-year housing supply gap;
- the policy should be considered as part of the Local Plan process; and
- suggested the policy should be referred to the PDRC.

Discussion ensued and Members were advised that a planning policy should not be considered at the PDRC but might be considered by the Local Plan Panel (LPP) again.

Councillor Mike Whiting proposed an amendment, that the Policy be re-considered by the LPP before being brought back to Full Council. Councillor Mike Dendor seconded the proposal.

Councillor Mike Baldock spoke against the amendment, and said that the policy had already been considered by the LPP.

In speaking to the amendment, Members raised points which included:

- The criteria set out in the Local Plan still needed to be met and was subject to Section 106 requirements for infrastructure;
- concerns were already raised at the LPP that there was not enough information to make a decision;
- the current policy under consideration was different to that considered at the LPP and the current proposal had not been debated;
- there needed to be more Member involvement and the policy should be-reconsidered;
- should take the time to get it right; and
- the policy was being made 'on the hoof'.

Councillor Mike Baldock disagreed that the policy was made 'on the hoof' and said that the minor changes made to the policy were reflective of the points raised at the LPP meeting.

On being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

Speaking to the substantive motion, Councillor Alastair Gould drew attention to the policy on pages 56 and 57 of the report and in particular sustainability. He said that SBC needed to bring forward a different strand to housing in the Borough.

Councillor Mike Baldock said that there was confusion about the policy initially but the current policy was about addressing park homes, and much of the Parish Council's opposition was directed at holiday homes. He said that it had always been a Borough-wide policy and estimated that there would be a few hundred applications coming forward in the initial phase and up to 800 applications through the lifetime of the Local Plan. Councillor Baldock stressed that there was currently no policy to set guidance for a planning application on park homes sites.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 19 (2), five Members requested a recorded vote, and voting was as follows:

For: Baldock, Bonney, Carnell, Davey, Ellen, Gibson, Gould, Harrison, Jackson, Knights, Benjamin A Martin, Ben J Martin, McCall, Palmer, Perkin, Pugh, Rowles, Saunders, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Winckless, Woodford. Total equals 26.

Against : Beart, Bowen, R Clark, Darby, Dendor, Fowle, A Hampshire, Horton, Hunt, Neal, Simmons, Tatton, Whiting. Total equals 13.

Abstain: S Clark, Hall, N Hampshire, Ingleton, Jayes, Marchington. Total equals 6.

Resolved:

(1) That the Interim Planning Policy as set out in paragraph 3.2 be adopted as a material planning consideration.

711 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPROVAL

Resolved:

(1) That Minute No. 633 from the General Purposes Committee held on 18 March 2020 be noted.

(2) That Minute No. 690 from the Cabinet Meeting held on 3 June 2020 be noted.

712 ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

The meeting was adjourned from 8:57pm to 9:10pm.

713 EXTENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

At 10pm, 10.30pm, 11pm and 11.30pm Members agreed to the suspension of Standing Orders in order that Council could complete its business.

Chairman

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