



EAST
CAMBRIDGESHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Agenda Item x

Minutes of the Meeting of East Cambridgeshire
District Council facilitated via the Zoom Video
Conferencing System at The Grange, Nutholt
Lane, Ely on Thursday 21 May 2020 at 6.00pm

PRESENT

Councillor Christine Ambrose-Smith	Councillor Bill Hunt
Councillor David Ambrose-Smith	Councillor Mark Inskip
Councillor Sue Austen	Councillor Alec Jones
Councillor Anna Bailey	Councillor Daniel Schumann
Councillor Ian Bovingdon	Councillor Joshua Schumann
Councillor David Brown	Councillor Alan Sharp
Councillor Charlotte Cane	Councillor Amy Starkey
Councillor Victoria Charlesworth	Councillor Lisa Stubbs
Councillor Matthew Downey	Councillor John Trapp
Councillor Lorna Dupré	Councillor Paola Trimarco
Councillor Lavinia Edwards	Councillor Jo Webber
Councillor Lis Every (Chairman)	Councillor Alison Whelan
Councillor Simon Harries	Councillor Christine Whelan
Councillor Julia Huffer	Councillor Gareth Wilson

Prior to the formal commencement of the meeting, the Chairman announced the recent death of former District Councillor Colin Fordham, Independent Member for Soham from 1999 to 2007 and 2011 to 2015.

Councillor Bill Hunt had the pleasure of knowing former Councillor Fordham in three different capacities, as a Councillor, through business and as a friend, all things he excelled at. He first met him through the former Care and Repair agency in Soham, which was responsible for aiding people to adapt their homes. Colin Fordham was always keen to help, doing repairs throughout the area. He spent his time on the Council as an Independent Councillor and owned Soham Joinery. He was a real craftsman, a Soham man through-and-through, very kind and generous and would be greatly missed.

Councillor Joshua Schumann echoed the comments made and declared Colin Fordham was like a stick of rock, if you checked inside you would find that Soham ran through him. He was greatly involved in the local community, was the heart-and-soul of the Soham Carnival, and was very active in many other projects to support the community. Soham mattered a great deal to him and he would often put its point of view across. He would be sorely missed and our thoughts went to his family due to his sad passing.

Councillor Gareth Wilson stated that Colin Fordham was a very ardent Councillor working for Soham. He would be sorely missed by his friends, family and the community of Soham. He had been an excellent Councillor.

There then followed one minute's silence, observed as a mark of respect.

1. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

The following questions had been submitted previously by Virginie Ganivet and were presented on her behalf by Conrad Lawrence.

- What are you doing to help eligible SEC residents with their Settled Status applications?
- What do you plan to do in the future,
- What have you done and what will you do to ensure eligible residents who are not registered to vote are aware of the necessity to apply, of the deadlines for doing so, and of any help available? We are particularly concerned about the elderly, carers, people receiving care, and people who are generally isolated.
- What can you do against the effects of the hostile environment, xenophobia and discrimination within our communities?

Mr Lawrence then explained the background to the questions, which related to the Government's intentions regarding the Settled Status of non-UK residents. Current residents would have to make a new application to remain in this country and until that was applied for they could not get a mortgage and could end up in limbo for ten months. Pre-settled status would not automatically convert to full status, so certain requirements could not be accessed and would make life more difficult. Settled Status letters would be issued but this related to people being on the electoral register, so it had to be ensured that the register was up-to-date.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Anna Bailey, thanked Ms Ganivet for questions and, in response, stated that the Council worked with the Rosmini Centre and Community and Housing Advice to register people and to provide services. It was hoped to bring some of that service in-house, as one member of staff had already been trained and it was expected that others would too. The electoral registration process for these people was the same for everyone. This involved getting people to apply to go on the electoral register, and several attempts were made to encourage this. Information about this was available via the Council's website. An Annual Canvass was also undertaken to update the register and some lengths were taken to achieve that. When elections were due to be held the deadlines for people to register were always published and the Electoral Services team would always assist with any queries.

With regard to the fourth question, the Council was heavily involved in tackling those issues. It promoted both national and local campaigns, held parish conferences, inviting the Police and Crime Commissioner and Police representatives to attend, to raise issues. The Council had adopted a vulnerable people strategy so it could respond to issues raised. The Think Communities

programme was also driven locally, to help communities. The Council would review its single equalities scheme, was also involved with the Community Safety Partnership, would promote the 'Eyes and Ears' campaign with parish councils, would help train its partners so a consistent approach would be taken and it also supported inter-faith initiatives. So there was a lot going on.

2. **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN 2020/21**

Councillor Lis Every was duly nominated and seconded as Council Chairman for 2020/21. There being no other nominations:

It was resolved:

That Councillor Lis Every be elected as Chairman of East Cambridgeshire District Council for the municipal year 2020/21.

Councillor Every then read out the Declaration of Office for Chairman of Council.

3. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies for absence were received.

4. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of Interests were made by Councillors.

5. **MINUTES**

Councillor Bailey clarified the information under minute 56, in that although the Council was committed to keeping the Housing Recycling sites open, the District Council did not own them, and pointed out a minor typographical error on page 29. It was agreed to revise the minutes to make those amendments.

It was resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2020, as amended, be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

6. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN 2020/21**

Councillor Alan Sharp was duly nominated and seconded for the office of Council Vice-Chairman for 2020/21. In being nominated it was stated that he would be very able to support the Chairman and would do a fantastic job as he was a statesman and gentleman.

Councillor Gareth Wilson was also duly nominated and seconded for the office of Council Vice-Chairman for 2020/21. In being nominated it was explained that the people of East Cambridgeshire would expect the Councillors from all parties

to work together and electing a Vice-Chairman from another party would be a symbol of that. The nominee had excellent qualities and would do a good job.

A secret ballot was then held in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.2.1, resulting in Councillor Sharp being duly elected.

It was resolved:

That Councillor Alan Sharp be appointed as Vice-Chairman of East Cambridgeshire District Council for the municipal year 2020/21.

Councillor Sharp then read out the Declaration of Office for Vice Chairman of Council.

The Chairman looked forward to working with the new Vice-Chairman and thanked the previous Vice-Chairman, Councillor Sue Austen, who was one of the best Ward Councillors ever. They had worked well together and it had been a really good partnership.

7. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no Chairman announcements.

8. **PETITIONS**

No petitions had been received.

9. **NOTICE OF MOTIONS UNDER PROCEDURE RULE 10**

Rebuilding from the Coronavirus Pandemic

In proposing the Motion, as set out in the agenda, Cllr Charlotte Cane acknowledged and agreed to amend it in line with the amendment by the Conservative Group, which had been previously circulated, in accordance with Council Constitution rule 12.6.1.

Revising the original motion to the amendment circulated previously would be a way of encouraging cross-party working, via the setting up of a working party, for the benefit of the district.

All had been affected by COVID-19 and sympathy was offered to those who had lost family, friends or their livelihood because of it. Thanks were given to those people who had offered services during the pandemic, including the Council staff and the parishes.

Businesses were facing their toughest challenge and the Council should ensure community hubs survived. Some pubs had offered take-aways, some delivered and there had been one 'pop-up' shop to aid their communities. The Council also needed to ensure that quality housing was provided, so it must now invest

in, and increase the amount of, social housing in the district to attract new businesses to the area.

The environment also had to be protected and enhanced, by encouraging cycling and walking schemes in consultation with disabled groups. The green environment had to be improved, as the natural environment had benefited during the pandemic, so that people could continue to exercise, enjoy the green spaces and wildlife would benefit.

The Council had to capture all the benefits it could, including the community spirit engendered during this time. There had been an awful lot of community engagement and the Council must help that continue.

The working party and Council had to come up with answers and must work cross-party for a sustainable area.

In response, the Leader thanked Councillors Cane and Inskip for bringing this motion forward, applauding the spirit of co-operation when accepting the amended motion.

A lot of work was already going on to aid the recovery from this pandemic. Social recovery was being led by the County Council and the economic recovery led by the Combined Authority. Positives had emerged during this period and the Council had to enhance these. It would be good to build on the community spirit, including a well co-ordinated response from parish councils and community groups, which had to be supported. The Council had continued to run its day-to-day services, despite the massive changes that had been required.

The Council had to be realistic when considering cycling and walking schemes, and it was already noted that traffic levels had already increased recently. There was a massive opportunity to do something about this and the current transport consultation would help provide solutions. Funding would be available across the Combined Authority area for suitable schemes. With regard to house building, costs could expect to rise but appropriate infrastructure would still need to be delivered.

Other Council Members also appreciated the acceptance of the proposed amendments to the motion, as it reflected how the community had stepped up to support its more vulnerable members. The Council should endeavour to utilise this impetus to continue the good work done. A great deal of energy at grass roots level had been generated in the midst of this crisis, which could last a long time.

Bus services were already being looked at and some had already adapted to the current situation. The Council was keen to recognise what had been done and to build on it for the future. Caution was urged when requesting information on this issue, so Council officers did not get swamped. The Bus Working Party was a good example of how the different political groups should work together to better good results. Clearly working together would enable the Council to help

see us all out of the current situation. Social distancing and working from home had helped.

Councillor Mark Inskip, in seconding the amended Motion, explained that it had been brought forward as it was important to look ahead so the Council could help deal with the worst world health emergency in living memory and its impact on the economy. Sympathy was expressed for those who had been affected by deaths of family or friends. Gratitude was offered to the key workers, including Council staff, who had maintained services during this period. It was astonishing and pleasing to see the reaction of local communities, which had generated a great community spirit. The Council needed to work together to make a difference, including looking at the services available. Last October the Council had acknowledged a climate emergency, so it also needed to consider how traffic reduction had benefited air pollution. The amended Motion suggested some areas that a working party could look at and consider how to engage with community groups. There would be more challenges ahead for housing and the rural area.

It was resolved:

That the Motion, as amended, be agreed.

10. **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS**

Questions were received and responses given by the Leader of the Council as follows:

Questions from Councillor Charlotte Cane:

Background:

In the ECDC Covid-19 Update on 15 May we were informed that:

“Risk assessments have been produced for both sites by our independent H & S advisers”. (Referring to Palace Green Homes’ sites at Haddenham and Ely).

We were further informed that on 7 May the Corporate Management Team and the Service Leads had logged their decision that:

“Palace Green Homes sites at Ely and Haddenham will re-open on 11/05/20.”

Questions:

1 - What are the legal implications of ECDC’s H&S advisers producing Risks Assessments for work to be carried out by ECTC Limited T/A Palace Green Homes?

2 – What are the legal implications of ECDC’s Corporate Management Team and the Service Leads taking decisions about when ECTC Limited T/A Palace Green Homes will re-open its sites?

3 – In particular, are our legal advisers confident that we have not put ourselves at risk of being seen to have impaired ‘the veil of incorporation’ by actively

engaging in the provision of advice and the decision making for ECTC Limited T/A Palace Green Homes?

Response from Leader of the Council:

It was confirmed that the H&S advisers had not provided any risk assessments, but the Trading Company had taken advice before proceeding. This decision was taken by the Trading Company and not by the Council. The Briefing did not make this clear, so in the future it was to be made apparent who was making the decisions.

Question from Councillor Mark Inskip:

Question to the Leader of the Council:

Prior to the COVID-19 office working restrictions, how many members of staff had been given permission under the Home Working Policy to work from home? And in the light of the successful experience of working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, will the Council review its current Home Working Policy to encourage more staff to take advantage of the option to work from home some or all of the time?

Responses from Leader of the Council:

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak the opportunity to work from home had been offered to all staff members but only 89 staff members sought and were granted permission, though not all took up the opportunity. Since the pandemic 98% of staff were now working from home. The Chief Executive and Service Managers were looking at this, to consider extending the scheme.

Question from Councillor Alison Whelan:

Eleven months ago at the special full council meeting held on 19 June 2019, the Council resolved that "the Chief Executive be instructed to bring forward proposals to increase the level of affordable housing above statutory Planning requirements for Phase 2 of the MOD site, Ely."

Could the Leader of the Council update the Members on the progress towards developing these proposals and confirm when they will be presented to members for review?

Responses from Leader of the Council:

Up to now the focus had been on Phase 1, but the Trading Company was working on proposals for Phase 2 including the planning process. The Section 106 Agreement aimed to secure more than 30% social housing, but this would have to show 'additionality' to achieve the higher percentage. Once the planning application had been achieved then discussions would take place with a proposal coming to full Council.

Question from Councillor Christine Whelan:

Mayor and the Citizens' Advice office

What communication has taken place between ECDC officers and/or members and the Mayor, Combined Authority officers and/or members in the last twelve months regarding the use or occupation of the premises used by Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire in Market Street, Ely?

What is the current state of discussions between the district council and the Combined Authority regarding these premises?

Responses from Leader of the Council:

No formal discussions had taken place, though an informal enquiry had been made by the Mayor of the Combined Authority. The Council would market the site and would inform the Combined Authority.

11. **LEADER AND DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, GROUP LEADERS AND DEPUTY GROUP LEADERS**

Council considered a report V1, previously circulated, that detailed the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council; Political Groups; and Group Leaders and Deputies for the forthcoming year.

It was resolved:

That the details of the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council; Political Groups; and Group Leaders and Deputies for the forthcoming municipal year, as reported at the Annual Council meeting be noted.

12. **POLITICAL PROPORTIONALITY**

Council considered a report V2, previously circulated, that detailed the political balance of the Council and the implications for the allocation of seats on Committees, Sub-Committees and other Member Bodies.

No alternative proposals were made, therefore

It was resolved:

That the details of the political balance of the Council as set out in Appendix 1 be noted and the allocation of seats on Committees, Sub-Committees and other Member Bodies as set out in Appendix 2 be approved.

13. **MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEE AND SUB-COMMITTEE (INCLUDING SUBSTITUTES) AND OTHER MEMBER BODIES 2020/21**

Council considered a report, V3 previously circulated, setting out appointment of Members and Substitutes to Committees, Sub-Committees and to other Member bodies for 2020/21.

It was resolved:

That the membership of Committees, Sub-Committees and other Member bodies for 2020/21 attached at Appendix 1 be approved.

14. **CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY – MEMBERSHIP AND OTHER APPOINTMENTS**

Council considered a report, previously circulated, setting out the list of appointments to be made to the Combined Authority for 2020/21.

The Democratic Services Manager advised the Council that notification about the memberships had been received from the Combined Authority but there were some discussions continuing about the overall proportionality of that Authority. This could affect some of the membership places and was expected to be resolved at that Authority's June meeting. If any changes resulted from that then it was recommended that the Chief Executive be authorised to make any necessary amendments to the Council's membership, in consultation with Group Leaders.

Members questioned the overall proportionality of the Combined Authority, as Independent Members had been excluded from the calculations and main opposition parties from other areas had also been excluded.

It was explained that the exclusion of Independent Members was due to legal processes and a ban on some other parties.

As the report stated that a second Substitute Member was permitted for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Liberal Democrats Group would notify the Council at its next meeting who their second Substitute would be.

It was resolved:

- (i) That the Leader of Council be appointed to act as the Council's appointee to the Combined Authority and the Deputy Leader to act as the substitute member;
- (ii) That Councillors Alan Sharp and Lorna Dupré be appointed as members to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Councillors David Ambrose Smith and Charlotte Cane be appointed as substitute members, for their relevant parties, to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;

- (iii) That Councillor David Brown be appointed as a member to the Audit and Governance Committee and Councillor David Ambrose Smith be appointed as the substitute member, for their relevant party, to the Audit and Governance Committee;
- (iv) That the Chief Executive be authorised to make any amendments to the appointments to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Audit and Governance Committee in consultation with the Political Group Leaders, if the political balance is amended by the Combined Authority between now and the next Council meeting.

15. **COMBINED AUTHORITY UPDATE REPORTS**

- a. **Mayoral Decision-Making Meeting 25th March 2020**
- b. **Overview & Scrutiny committee 24th April 2020**
- c. **Combined Authority Board 29th April 2020**

Council received reports on the activities of the Combined Authority from the Council's appointees.

It was resolved:

That the reports on the activities of the Combined Authority from the Council's appointees be noted.

16. **THE MAKING (ADOPTION) OF THE WITCHFORD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

Council considered a report, V4 previously circulated, the Witchford Neighbourhood Plan for formal adoption as part of the Development Plan for East Cambridgeshire.

Council Members offered congratulations and expressed their support for the Plan which had been achieved by the work and hard effort of the people of Witchford. Mr Ian Allen was complimented on the volume and quality of work achieved, for which Witchford should be proud. The need for a General Practitioner and dentist was agreed. Witchford residents were encouraged to respond to the bus and walking strategy consultation, which could prove very useful for the village.

The Plan was an excellent document though the mention of the failure to control land supply and delivery of housing was actually something this Council could not control and was a matter of circumstance. The Council had given permission for over 7000 houses throughout the district which had yet to be built. Although the Council could not make developers build houses it also had a duty to stop uncontrolled development.

The Plan had identified traffic issues and funding had been achieved to update the roundabout at Lancaster Way, via a small upgrade. Further improvements

would be championed, including the roundabout at the A10/A142 junction being part of the A10 upgrade. Funding for this had received support in the Chancellor's budget. There was also the possibility that the A10 could be re-aligned to take traffic away from that area.

To achieve affordable housing for young people, it was urged that the Community Land Trust be resurrected, so it could re-look at that provision.

The Plan gave the community the opportunity to develop the village and gave other ideas for initiatives. The Council needed to encourage other parishes to undertake their own Plans.

Appreciation was expressed to the Council's Elections department for conducting the Plan Referendum under very difficult circumstances. This had allowed Witchford residents to show their support for the Plan. The turnout was good and 90% of those voting had approved the Plan.

It was resolved:

- That Witchford Parish Council be congratulated on its preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan and a successful referendum outcome, becoming the third parish council to do so in East Cambridgeshire;
- That the Witchford neighbourhood Plan (as attached at Appendix 1) be formally made part of the Development Plan for East Cambridgeshire with immediate effect.

17. **COVID 19 UPDATE**

Council considered a report, V5 previously circulated, updating the Council's response to COVID 19.

The Chief Executive advised the Council that the report did not really do justice to the amount of work undertaken by the Council and its staff. Paragraph 3.1 of the report outlined the work done, with paragraphs 4.1 to 4.5 providing more details. Some of the issues were complex and an attempt had been made in the Appendix to summarise these. Paragraph 4.7 set out details of the recovery process.

The Infrastructure & Strategy Manager advice the Council that 1321 businesses had been identified to receive a grant, with £12million paid out to local businesses. New funding was now available and details would be circulated before being paid out.

A Member questioned what the Council had 'amended, in response to the COVID-19 crisis', whether the procedures for aiding parish councils would be reviewed and whether the performance of the Anglia Revenue Partnership (ARP) would be reviewed given its poor response to requests from businesses for action. The response from the community had been excellent but at the

start of the crisis businesses had difficulty in getting a response from ARP, although it had been slow to start with its performance had improved. Remote meetings did have advantages, as it cut down on lots of long journeys, and should be retained to keep its benefits.

In response, the Leader advised that 'amended' should read 'worked'. ARP were late in receiving data from some businesses, due to their details not being up-to-date, e.g. premises details or old tenants still being listed. So this took ARP some time to get this sorted out and the Council had asked ARP to prioritise businesses. The Infrastructure & Strategy Manager and her team had done a magnificent job in supporting business, though it was never going to be 100%. Other local authorities had issued pay outs without concluding a verification process but this Council had, as it involved public money. Looking forward, technology guidance or a funding scheme could be offered for smaller businesses and capital grants from the Combined Authority could become available.

Cambridgeshire had rallied massively and had fared fairly well. Its citizens had responded very well but they needed to be encouraged to continue carrying on with fortitude. This was a truly unprecedented situation and the Council staff had risen to the challenge. The Council had kept its services running, had got grant payments out and were supporting the vulnerable.

This Council was significantly financially better off than some other authorities. It had a sound financial base, with a balanced budget over the next two years, and did not have problems with rough sleeping/homelessness or drops in car parking income. However, some matters could become an issue, such as less income from business rates or a decrease in planning and licensing fees. More details would be proved at the next Council meeting.

Other Members warned that the pandemic was far from over. Returning to work would be a slow process, as experienced by other countries. The Government expected people who could to continue to work from home.

Members asked when the Council would produce a 'road map' for recovery and share it with Members. The Council's trading companies were separate entities, so why were they included when considering Council's business continuity?

In response, the Council was informed that the Council was following Government guidelines and were starting to prepare its plans. This would include looking at accommodating staff in the Council offices and communal areas so people could operate safely. The offices were also to undergo a 'deep clean'. Once a plan had been drawn up it would be shared with Members. It was considered appropriate to include the trading companies in all discussions to ensure a consistent approach.

It was resolved:

- (i) That the impact of COVID 19 on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy including recommendations arising from revisions to the ECTC and ECC Business Plans 2020/20 be noted;
- (ii) That the implementation of the Council's recovery plans in line with Government guidelines be noted;
- (iii) That the revisions to the agreed 2019/2023 Corporate Plan in light of the impact of COVID 19 be noted.

18. **ACTION TAKEN BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE ON THE GROUNDS OF URGENCY**

Council considered a report, V6 previously circulated, setting out the action taken by the Chief Executive on the grounds of urgency.

It was resolved:

That the action taken by the Chief Executive on the grounds of urgency be noted.

The meeting concluded at 7:56pm.

Chairman.....

Date