

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2021 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Esler (Chairman)

Cllr. Hunter (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Abraham, Ball, Barnes, Bayley, Bonin, Brown, Dr. Canet, Clack, Clayton, Penny Cole, Perry Cole, Coleman, Collins, Dickins, Dyball, Edwards-Winsler, Eyre, Firth, Fleming, Foster, Fothergill, Griffiths, Harrison, Hogarth, Hudson, Layland, London, Maskell, McArthur, McGarvey, McGregor, Morris, Nelson, Osborne-Jackson, Pender, Purves, Raikes, Reay, Roy, Thornton, Waterton and Williamson

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Andrews, Barnett, Carroll, G. Darrington, P. Darrington, Grint, Kitchener, Parkin and Pett

24. To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 20 July 2021

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of Council held on 20 July 2021 be approved, and signed as a correct record.

25. To receive any declarations of interest not included in the register of interest from Members in respect of items of business included on the agenda for this meeting.

No additional declarations of interest, were received.

26. Chairman's Announcements.

The Chairman announced that she had a couple of sad announcements to start with, including the loss of two former Councillors - Councillor and past Chairman, Frances Dick, and Councillor John Scholey who many would remember had the position of Portfolio Holder for Finance, had also sadly passed away. The Leader of the Council, shared some of his memories of his former colleagues, and joined the Chairman in a moments silence as mark of respect.

The Chairman congratulated Daniel Shaw and Gary Edmed from the Private Sector Housing Team who were recognised at the Energy Efficiency awards, for a mobile home insulation project. They had picked up a 'Highly Commended Award' for their work to insulate 48 park homes across the District. It was estimated the improvements would save the combined owners £200,000 on their fuel bills over the lifetime of their properties, not to mention some 1,000 tonnes of CO₂ gas, which contributed to Global warming.

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She further announced that as part of the Council's NetZero 2030 ambition, it was exciting that the Council would be working with KCC and Connected Kerb for 41 new public electric vehicle-Charging points. There would be a mixture of 7Kwh & rapid 50Kwh chargers to be installed in Sevenoaks, Swanley & Westerham Council owned car parks. Continuing with the NetZero 2030 ambition, the Chairman advised that it had been an honour to be involved with the tree planting of 3 oak trees for the Queen's Green Canopy, tree planting scheme to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee in 2022, celebrating 70 years of service. It had also been great to hear such positive feedback on the smart bins which were installed earlier in the year. The bins help reduce collections by around 90% as they hold more rubbish and will only be emptied when they were full, which was of benefit to visitors, residents and businesses.

Moving on to community news, on 1 October, The Chairman advised that she had the pleasure to help fund and co-host the Volunteers Thank You Event afternoon tea with SDC Communities Team, at which there was also alongside a magician and professional singer, this was held for the Care for the Community Volunteers who throughout the pandemic helped vulnerable residents obtain food and medicine as well as being a friendly voice to chat on the phone to. She gave a special thanks to Eliza from St. Clere Estate who allowed the event to be held in the beautiful grounds, and expressed her thanks to Kelly and the Team for organising such a wonderful event.

The Chairman took the opportunity to announce that the 'Making it Happen' voluntary and community awards would be taking place again on Wednesday 9 March 2022 at St. Nicholas' Church, Sevenoaks. These awards recognised residents and organisations in the District that go the extra mile. She encouraged Members to nominate people and organisations who stood out over the last year. Nominations must be submitted by Sunday 2 January 2022.

As mentioned at the last Council meeting, accompanied by Cllr Hogarth, they had visited a record number of entrants of nearly 80 gardens for the In Bloom awards, and it was a pleasure to present the awards at a prize giving ceremony in October. There were some fine examples of eco-friendly gardens and gardens that brightened up the District. The standard this year was particularly high, making the judging especially challenging, she reiterated her congratulations not just to the winners, but to everyone else who took part too.

To date over 200 invitations (covering the period May 2021 through to March 2022) had been received and 140 had been attended so far. Most invitations had been within the District. The Chairman advised that she had appreciated the opportunity to visit many voluntary organisations and schools within the district. Highlights had included support of various dementia cafes, social events for elderly residents, "pop up Sue" sessions and some interesting theatre and concert events. There had also been the occasional business-based event. Finally, there had been activity-based invitations to youth activities such as Westerham Sea Cadets and the Church Youth Club in Edenbridge.

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So far eight Chairman's Charitable events had been held including the well-attended Civic Service back in July of this year. Each of the Chairman's events have been held in locations that showcase some of the best, and least known, attractions the district has to offer. These have been well supported locally and by other Mayors from around Kent

The Chairman advised her charity Winter Ball '22 would be held on 22 January 2022, at Westerham Golf Club. All proceeds would be going to support the invaluable work carried out by DAVSS, and she would love to have as many of the Councillors there as possible. She advised that she would also be extending the invitation to the wonderful Staff and Officers as a way of expressing gratitude for all they have done and will do in the future.

27. To receive any questions from members of the public under paragraph 17 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution.

No questions had been received.

28. To receive any petitions submitted by members of the public under paragraph 18 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution.

No petitions had been received.

29. Matters considered by the Cabinet and/or Scrutiny Committee:

- (a) Christmas Parking 2021

Councillor Fleming moved and Cllr McArthur seconded the recommendation from Cabinet, which sought funding for free parking to be provided for two weekends leading up to Christmas in Sevenoaks town and Westerham in off- street car parks on Saturdays and Sundays, 11 & 12 and 18 & 19 December 2021.

Resolved: That the cost in terms of loss of income for free Christmas parking be met from Supplementary Estimates.

- (b) Farmstead Drive - Development Proposal

Cllr Fleming moved and Cllr Maskell seconded the recommendation from Cabinet, which sought the approval for the provision of £7,609,620 in the 2021/22 Capital Programme to deliver the scheme, which was to be funded as noted in the Financial Implications of the report.

Resolved: the provision of £7,609, 620 in the 2021/22 Capital Programme to deliver the scheme within the financial implications, detailed as (i) to (vi) below, be agreed:

- i. The scheme be intended to be funded (ultimately) from capital receipts from the sale of residential units in the scheme;

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- ii. A summary of the estimated scheme funding, based on feasibility to date;
- iii. 23 residential units would be disposed of in the open market and according to the Council's property consultant, which were expected to generate a sales receipt of £8.143m. The affordable housing units were expected to generate £1.172m and would be discounted to reflect development costs and were in line with current market practice for affordable housing;
- iv. Until receipts from the sales of the residential units were received, short-term external borrowing be used to fund the scheme. Potential financing costs were detailed within paragraph 18 of the report;
- v. The new retail unit would be retained by the Council, and let on market terms. The Community Hall be leased to reflect community benefit, but also to ensure future on-going liabilities be recuperated; and
- vi. Consideration be given to the VAT implications of the project, dependant on the use of some of the elements of the project may require specific VAT treatment and further VAT advice be sought.

(c) Stangrove Estate

Cllr Fleming moved and Cllr Dyball seconded the recommendation from Cabinet, which sought the approval of the capital funding of the scheme as outlined at paragraph 15 (project costs & funding), it be noted that the scheme would only progress subject to the funding gap being eliminated, and the development scheme for 7 sites within Stangrove Park, Edenbridge to provide 7 off-street, communal car parks, a new community shop, improvements to landscaping and 13 residential units at an estimated total project cost of £4,312,743, as set out at paragraph 15.

Resolved: that

- a) the capital funding of the scheme of £4,312,743 be agreed;
 - b) that the scheme would only progress subject to the funding gap being eliminated and planning permission being obtained, be noted;
 - c) subject to approval of the recommendation (a) the development scheme for 7 sites within Stangrove Park, Edenbridge to provide 7 off-street, communal car parks, a new community shop, improvements to landscaping and 13 residential units at an estimated total project cost of £4,312,743, as set out at paragraph 15, be agreed.
- (d) Quercus Housing - Increasing the Delivery of Affordable Housing in the Sevenoaks District

Cllr Fleming moved and Cllr Maskell seconded the recommendation from Cabinet, which sought approval of a revised 2021/22 Capital Programme that excluded the Property Investment Strategy Scheme, which would give the Council access to Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) borrowing to enable the scheme to progress; the draw-down of a loan from prudential borrowing (for example, through PWLB) for up to £1,050,000 which would then be loaned to Quercus Housing to progress the capital purchase and refurbishment of Abbey Court (West Kingsdown), subject to due diligence, to support the delivery of affordable housing in the district, and The terms of the loan be determined at the point of draw down by the Head of Finance.

The Leader responded to questions raised, and explained that due to the nature of the church land and covenants on it, the site would not necessarily be available for a normal developer to develop, which was why it was being sold as the Council could deliver a scheme which also met the Church of England directives to meet affordable housing in the area. It would be managed similarly to the scheme in Westerham for the residents of the District who the Council had responsibility for. It would be managed by agents but the Council would be in control of this.

Resolved: That the

- a) a revised 2021/22 Capital Programme (Appendix C) that excluded the Property Investment Strategy scheme which would give SDC access to Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) borrowing to enable this scheme to progress, be approved;
- b) draw-down of a loan from prudential borrowing (for example, through PWLB) for up to £1,050,000 which would then be loaned to Quercus Housing (as the Trading company) to progress the capital purchase and refurbishment of Abbey Court (West Kingsdown), subject to due diligence, to support the delivery of affordable housing in the district, be approved; and
- c) terms of the loan be determined at the point of draw down by the Head of Finance be agreed.

30. Matters considered by other standing committees:

(a) Licensing Gambling Policy

Cllr Clack moved, and Cllr Abraham seconded the recommendation from the Licensing Committee which sought that following consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Licensing Committee, delegated authority be given to the Head of the Licensing Partnership to make minor amendments to the Statement of Principles Gambling Policy, consistent with the Comments from the Gambling Commission and Members, as were considered appropriate, together with minor typographical and presentational amendments for adoption as of 31 January 2022.

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Cllr Clack spoke to the motion stating that the delegated authority would allow the policy to be updated, consistent with the comments already received which needed to be in place by 31 January 2022.

Resolved: That following consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Licensing Committee, delegated authority be given to the Head of the Licensing Partnership to make minor amendments to the Statement of Principles Gambling Policy, consistent with the Comments from the Gambling Commission and Members, as are considered appropriate, together with minor typographical and presentational amendments for adoption as of 31 January 2022.

31. To consider the following reports from the Chief Executive or other Chief Officers on matters requiring the attention of Council:

(a) Draft Calendar of Meetings 2022/23

Councillor Fleming proposed and Councillor Dickins seconded the report which sought approval for the draft calendar of meetings 2022/23.

Resolved: That the draft calendar of meetings for 2022/23 be approved subject to formal adoption at the Annual Meeting on Council on 10 May 2022.

32. To consider any questions by Members under paragraph 19.3 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution, notice of which have been duly given.

Two questions had been received from two Members in accordance with paragraph 19.3 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution.

Question 1: Cllr Purves

“What has the £60,000 per annum from the net zero budget since 2020/21 been spent on?”

Response: Leader of the Council

The fund created at full Council on 25 February 2020, was not to be spent on day to day expenditure. Its purpose was to get the Council to the starting line quickly, carry out a number of specific actions and projects and begin to make prudent provision against the capital costs that likely were ahead but the full extent of which was as yet unknown.

The Net Zero Transition Fund would provide an insurance or buffer ready to be an early adopter of new, environmentally friendly technologies as they became available. He advised that the alternative would be either postponing the introduction of such measures or having large, last minute growth items in the budget setting process which would have to be met by cuts elsewhere.

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The council had agreed a rolling set of actions to transition towards the commitment to become a net zero council by 2030. The actions covered the commitment made for the council and its assets, and its 2030 ambition to help communities within the district reduce their carbon emissions and to improve the overall climate resilience of the district. Initially the main focus had been understanding and reducing carbon emissions from the council and its assets, and had started working on a number of different projects to meet our overall aims and ambition for the wider district.

One notable project was, to help engage communities with the climate agenda, including ways to support climate resilience, was the Sevenoaks Wildlife Events which took place over the summer, and which were paid for from the Net Zero budget. For a small expense, resources had been produced by the Council's partners at the North West Kent Countryside Partnership which would be used in subsequent promotions and community engagement activities.

Climate change was a wide ranging issue which overlapped with many other areas, including sustainable transport, air quality, planning policy, housing and infrastructure. Officers had been working in partnership to deliver projects that had multiple benefits. These included a movement strategy, a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, delivering the Air Quality Action Plan, participating in a Solar Project and EV chargepoints with Kent County Council, thereby making the most of available funds and budgets rather than replicating work.

Supplementary question: Cllr Purves

Cllr Purves requested clarification on the £60,000 per annum which had been spent this year.

Response: Leader of the Council

The Leader referred to his earlier answer and advised that the fund was not just for expenditure on a day to day basis but rather ease out costs that would be coming in future years, such as replacement of the fleet.

In accordance with the Constitution, no further discussion was allowed.

Question 2: Cllr Clayton

“What opportunities has the Council identified for net zero investments which have a positive financial return?”

Response: Leader of the Council

Officers and Members had been working together to develop and deliver projects that have multiple benefits. As part of this, they were considering how our net zero ambitions could also bring financial benefits beyond the obvious efficiency savings. Such projects were being investigated and would first be tested for feasibility.

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The Leader went on to advise that the Council delivered exceptional value for money, high quality services to the residents and businesses served and returns that went beyond the financial investments held. At the heart of much of the work was the preservation and improvement of the environment, both natural and built. As an example, investment in Swanley saw a leisure centre built to BREEAM very good standard, incorporating state of the art air source heat pumps, as well as other energy efficient features such as water consumption monitoring, leak detection, flow control and responsible sourcing throughout the development phase.

It was an investment in the community, for the long term. From a financial perspective, that sustainable approach would yield savings over the life of the centre, as well as huge environmental improvements over its predecessor. Some of the steps on the council's journey to net zero would cost more but pay for themselves, such as the LED lighting installed in council owned buildings and car parks.

Some simple changes, like transitioning towards paperless, cost nothing more and deliver immediate benefits. Others bring higher costs but were the right thing to do, whilst others were prohibitively expensive or impractical now but would make sense in the future.

The Leader advised that the commitment to Net Zero and sustainability would remain undiminished, this included investments, however they would not, be reduced to a purely financial equation.

Supplementary Question: Cllr Clayton

Cllr Clayton asked whether the Council would be following Sussex County Council with the type of investments they had been making.

Response: Leader of the Council

The Leader advised that the Council was providing electric charging points in all its council owned car parks, as KCC was responsible as the Highways authority for off-street parking, and were working with the Council to look at how to move these type of projects on.

In accordance with the Constitution, no further discussion was allowed.

33. To consider any motions by Members under paragraph 20 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution, notice of which have been duly given.

No motions had been received.

34. To receive the report of the Leader of the Council on the work of the Cabinet since the last Council meeting.

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The Leader of the Council reported on the work that he and the Cabinet had undertaken in the period 5 July to 29 October 2021. The Leader took the opportunity to highlight the Volunteer's Thank you event at St. Clere estate which he attended and the amazing work of the volunteers who were simply wonderful for all their efforts throughout the pandemic.

35. To receive reports from the Chairmen of the Audit and Scrutiny Committees on the work of the Committees since the last Council meeting.

Members noted the report presented by the Chairman of the Audit Committee, Cllr McGarvey. He wished the Audit Manager every success in her new role at the London Borough of Bromley, and advised that a new Manager had been appointed.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.50 PM

CHAIRMAN