

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF

Council



Listening Learning Leading

HELD AT 6.00 PM ON THURSDAY 20 JULY 2017

THE FOUNTAIN CONFERENCE CENTRE, HOWBERY PARK,
CROWMARSH GIFFORD

Present

Jeannette Matelot (Chairman)

Charles Bailey, Joan Bland, Felix Bloomfield, Kevin Bulmer, Nigel Champken-Woods, John Cotton, Pat Dawe, Anthony Dearlove, David Dodds, Stefan Gawrysiak, Elizabeth Gillespie, Will Hall, Tony Harbour, Paul Harrison, Lorraine Hillier, Elaine Hornsby, Mocky Khan, Sue Lawson, Lynn Lloyd, Imran Lokhon, Jane Murphy, Toby Newman, David Nimmo-Smith, Richard Pullen, Bill Service, Robert Simister, Ian Snowdon, Alan Thompson, David Turner, John Walsh and Ian White

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Steve Connel and Stephen Harrod.

Officers

Steven Corrigan, Susan Harbour, Margaret Reed and Mark Stone.

17 Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 18 May 2017 as a correct record and agree that the Chairman sign them as such.

18 Declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest

None.

19 Urgent business and Chairman's announcements

There were no urgent items.

On behalf of the council, the Chairman welcomed new councillors Mocky Khan and Ian Snowdon to the council following their election as the ward councillors for Didcot South and Didcot West respectively at last week's by elections.

The Chairman asked that the debate was listened to in silence and that mobile phones were switched to silent during the meeting.

20 Public participation

Diane Wyatt and Simon Hewerdine had registered to address Council on the petitions which they were presenting and would speak at the relevant item.

21 Review of political balance following Didcot South and Didcot West by elections

Council considered the report of the head of legal and democratic services on the review of the political balance following the Didcot South and Didcot West by elections.

Council agreed the allocation of seats to each political group, and the non-group councillor, as set out in the schedule attached to the report, subject to the allocation of an additional Planning Committee seat to the Opposition Forum Group.

No councillor voted against these proposals.

RESOLVED:

1. to appoint the below committees, joint committees and panels and to appoint the membership and substitutes, as indicated, to sit on them;
2. to allocate the vacant seat on the Joint Scrutiny Committee and the Community Governance and Electoral Issues committee to the Opposition Forum Group;
3. to allocate the vacant seat on the Appeals Panel to Paul Harrison (independent councillor);
4. to allocate one of the Conservative group's seats on the Planning Committee to the Opposition Forum Group (with no councillor voting against);
5. to authorise the head of legal and democratic services to make appointments to any vacant committee or panel seat and substitute positions in accordance with the wishes of the relevant group leader.

Names	Planning Committee, 11 Members
Conservative (9)	Opposition Forum Group (2)
Joan Bland	Mocky Khan
Anthony Dearlove	David Turner
Lorraine Hillier	
Elaine Hornsby	
Sue Lawson (Vice-Chairman)	
Jeannette Matelot	
Toby Newman (Chairman)	
Richard Pullen	
Ian White	
(seat given to Opposition Forum Group)	

Names	Planning Committee, 11 Members
Conservative (9)	Opposition Forum Group (2)
PREFERRED SUBSTITUTES	
Conservative (9)	Opposition Forum Group (1)
Charles Bailey	Stefan Gawrysiak
Kevin Bulmer	
Nigel Champken-Woods	
Steve Connel	
Pat Dawe	
Stephen Harrod	
Imran Lokhon	
Vacancy	
Vacancy	

Names	Scrutiny Committee, 9 Members
Conservative (8)	Opposition Forum Group (1)
Anna Badcock	David Turner
Steve Connel	
Pat Dawe	
Anthony Dearlove	
Elaine Hornsby	
Richard Pullen (Chairman)	
John Walsh (Vice-Chairman)	
Ian White	
PREFERRED SUBSTITUTES	
Conservative (8)	Opposition Forum Group (2)
Charles Bailey	Stefan Gawrysiak
David Dodds	Mocky Khan
Will Hall	
Stephen Harrod	
Lorraine Hillier	
Sue Lawson	
Toby Newman	
Vacancy	

Names	Joint Scrutiny Committee, 5 Members
Conservative (4)	Opposition Forum Group (1)
David Dodds	David Turner
Sue Lawson	
Richard Pullen (Co-Chairman)	
John Walsh	
PREFERRED SUBSTITUTES	
Conservative (4)	Opposition Forum Group (2)
Pat Dawe	Stefan Gawrysiak
Imran Lokhon	Mocky Khan
Toby Newman	
Ian White	

Names	Corporate Services Joint Scrutiny Committee, 2 Members
Conservative (2)	Opposition Forum Group (0)
Toby Newman	
Will Hall	
SUBSTITUTES: All other councillors from the relevant political group.	

Names	Joint Audit and Governance Committee, 4 Members
Conservative (4)	Opposition Forum Group (0)
Charles Bailey	
Kevin Bulmer (Co-Chairman)	
Toby Newman	
John Walsh	
PREFERRED SUBSTITUTES	
Conservative (4)	Opposition Forum Group (0)
David Dodds	
Joan Bland	
Richard Pullen	
Alan Thompson	

Names	Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee, 6 Members
Conservative (5)	Opposition Forum Group (1)
Charles Bailey	Mocky Khan
Steve Connel	
Anthony Dearlove	
Will Hall	
Ian White (Chairman)	
PREFERRED SUBSTITUTES	
Conservative (5)	Opposition Forum Group (2)
Anna Badcock	Stefan Gawrysiak
Joan Bland	David Turner
Toby Newman	
John Walsh	
Vacancy	

Names	Joint Staff Committee, 3 Members
Conservative (3)	Opposition Forum Group (0)
John Cotton	
David Nimmo-Smith	
Anthony Nash	
SUBSTITUTES	
Conservative	Opposition Forum Group (0)
The Leader may be substituted by another Cabinet member. Other members of the Committee may be substituted by any member of that councillor's political group (executive or non-executive).	

Names	General Licensing Committee, 12 Members
Conservative (11)	Opposition Forum Group (1)
Joan Bland	Stefan Gawrysiak
Nigel Champken-Woods	
Pat Dawe	
David Dodds (Chairman)	
Stephen Harrod	
Lorraine Hillier	
Imran Lokhon	
Anthony Nash	

Names	General Licensing Committee, 12 Members
Bill Service (Vice-Chairman)	
Alan Thompson	
Ian White	
NO SUBSTITUTES	

Names	Licensing Acts Committee, 12 Members
Conservative (11)	Opposition Forum Group (1)
Joan Bland	Stefan Gawrysiak
Nigel Champken-Woods	
Pat Dawe	
David Dodds (Chairman)	
Stephen Harrod	
Lorraine Hillier	
Imran Lokhon	
Anthony Nash	
Bill Service (Vice-Chairman)	
Alan Thompson	
Ian White	
NO SUBSTITUTES	

Names	Appeals Panel (NNDR and Housing), 5 Members
Conservative (4)	Non-Group Councillor
Nigel Champken-Woods	Paul Harrison
Elaine Hornsby	
Anthony Nash	
Bill Service	
PREFERRED SUBSTITUTES	
Conservative (4)	
Joan Bland	
Kevin Bulmer	
Sue Lawson	
Alan Thompson	

Names	Community Grant Panel, 9 Members
Conservative (8)	Opposition Forum Group (1)
Anna Badcock (Chairman)	Stefan Gawrysiak
Joan Bland	
Pat Dawe	
David Dodds	
Jeannette Matelot	
Anthony Nash	
Richard Pullen	
Bill Service	
PREFERRED SUBSTITUTES	
Conservative (8)	Opposition Forum Group (2)
Charles Bailey	Mocky Khan
Nigel Champken-Woods	David Turner
Steve Connel	
Stephen Harrod	
Elaine Hornsby	
Alan Thompson	
Vacancy	
Vacancy	

22 Petition - Wallingford Bridge

Diane Wyatt, the petition organiser, spoke on behalf of nearly 1700 petitioners from Wallingford or the neighbouring area. They were petitioning Council not to close the bridge, even for a trial period. They believed that it would simply divert traffic to other areas and displace the air quality problems. It would damage local businesses in Wallingford. Other options should be considered, including better traffic light phasing and more environmentally friendly buses.

Tony Harbour, the Cabinet member, responded to the address and moved a motion to refer the petition to the General Licensing Committee for consideration as the appropriate body, together with any views expressed by councillors at the Council meeting. Councillor David Dodds, Chairman of the General Licensing Committee, seconded the motion.

Councillor Harbour thanked Diane Wyatt and the people of Wallingford for the petition. He explained that the Environment Act 1995 placed a statutory duty on councils to address issues of air quality. The council adopted an air quality action plan in February 2015, which included a Low Emissions Strategy. The only modelled solution which improved air quality in Wallingford involved closing the bridge for a few hours per day and would only be done on a trial basis. The trial would assess air quality, traffic and the impact on local businesses. Public safety and public transport

would not be compromised. Other options were considered but were either not viable, or would not bring about significant improvements to air quality.

Councillors debated this motion. There was concern that the public would not have full access to information, as the Low Emissions Strategy would only be finalised at the General Licensing Committee after which councillors and the public would wish to debate this strategy.

The committee considered that the issues involved were significant and that further consideration needed to be given to all of the options and issues, including: enforcing the weight limit on the bridge; modelling the effect of closures on the wider road network; the issues of damaging business; isolating Crowmarsh from Wallingford, and the provision of more rapid electric vehicle charging points.

Although the district council had responsibility for the air quality, the county council was responsible for highways, and issues were being debated between these councils, and other bodies in respect of air quality in Wallingford, Watlington and Henley.

An amendment was proposed, and seconded, that recommendations from the General Licensing Committee should come back to full Council for further debate and ratification.

Some councillors also considered that the General Licensing Committee was the right and proper place to consider all of the issues and would include expert opinion and be open to all councillors and to the public. The matter would come back to Council or Cabinet (as appropriate) if there were budgetary implications to be considered.

Council debated the amendment.

A full debate would be had in General Licensing Committee, and it would be premature to suggest that it needs to come back to Council at this point. The General Licensing Committee was provided with powers and controls to take issues forward.

However, other members felt that this was a political discussion and should be held in full Council.

The mover and seconder of the main motion accepted the amendment. Councillor Harbour stated that he remained concerned that it would undermine the work of the General Licensing Committee. He reminded members that the district council could only make decisions on recommendations which concerned public highways as Oxfordshire County Council were the highways authority. He also confirmed that a briefing session would be held before the General Licensing Committee.

RESOLVED

1. To refer the petition to the General Licensing Committee for consideration, together with councillor views expressed at this meeting.
2. That the General Licensing Committee make recommendations to Council on the Low Emissions Strategy for final approval.

23 Petition - Didcot Garden Town

Simon Hewerdine, the petition organiser, presented this petition which had been signed by in excess of 2,000 people.

Councillor Robert Simister, the Cabinet member, welcomed the petition and was able to confirm that the Didcot Garden Town proposal, which is currently out for consultation, broadly met the aims of the original petition which requested the removal of the partial development of Ladygrove Park from the plan. Councillor Simister proposed a motion to refer the Didcot Garden Town petition to Cabinet, as the appropriate body, with any views expressed by councillors at the Council meeting. Councillor John Cotton seconded the motion.

The Council debated this motion.

The petition had changed, after signatures were added. The first iteration was responded to positively.

House building and development would need to happen, regardless of garden town status, but the intention was to use this as an opportunity to improve Didcot for its residents now, and in the future, by providing more and better green spaces. The bids for money to central government are, and will be, for hundreds of thousands of pounds. Residents are continuously encouraged to give feedback and there has been extensive public consultation.

It is important to achieve the balance between good development and green spaces. A town is a living organism which needs to evolve to meet the needs of its residents.

A number of councillors raised concerns about:

- traffic going through the proposed route, and particularly the proposed closure of Cow Lane as this would have the effect of dividing the town;
- Ladygrove was designed with these spaces built into their design and they are important for the whole of Didcot, not just Ladygrove;
- Didcot Garden Town will impact on all of Didcot, not just Ladygrove. All green spaces around Didcot need to be protected.

The issue of moving the railway station was raised. Officers confirmed that Network Rail had asked for some retained space for a possible move at some point in the future.

RESOLVED

To refer the petition to Cabinet, including the views expressed by councillors.

24 Report of the leader of the council

With the agreement of the leader, Councillor Kevin Bulmer, the Co-Chairman of Joint Audit and Governance Committee gave a briefing on the issues raised on the council's control environment.

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee was receiving an increasing number of reports that indicated a significant reduction in the council's control environment, to the extent that internal and external audit were raising concerns with committee

members. Whilst he recognised and supported the efforts the officers were undertaking to address the concerns raised and to engage with internal and external audit, the general weakening of the council's control environment was a significant risk and firm and swift action must be taken to address it.

At the July meeting of the Joint Audit and Governance Committee, the internal audit annual opinion 2016/2017 reported that:

- There had been a notable weakening of the councils' control environment from the previous year, particularly within key financial systems;
- Assurance ratings within five key financial systems had reduced from the previous year – general ledger, pro-active anti-fraud review, housing benefits and council tax reduction scheme, national non-domestic rates and treasury management;
- From 45 completed audits in 2016/17, 40 per cent received limited assurance which span all service areas;
- In total 210 recommendations to improve controls and procedures were made, and 30 per cent (17.5 per cent previous year) were classified as high risk.

At the March and July committee meetings, Capita's attendance had been requested to respond to any questions members may have had on the numerous reports being presented. Capita failed to send any representatives to attend either meeting. It was agreed at the July meeting that the Co-Chairmen would send a strongly worded letter to Capita's managing director requesting greater engagement and assurance from Capita on the services they are providing which underpin the council's control environment.

It was necessary to draw these concerns to the attention of all councillors, and to ensure the concerns are addressed by officers and the Five Councils' Partnership and the control environment is strengthened. Whilst control issues do have a reputational and operational impact, the concern was greater than that as it is the control environment which ensures the council spends the public's money efficiently, effectively and transparently.

Councillor Bulmer was satisfied that officers were pursuing these matters vigorously, and they had the full support of the Joint Audit and Governance Committee in doing so.

The leader of the council gave his report.

- He had been peer reviewing another council;
- He had attended the LGA conference;
- He would be attending the Oxfordshire Leaders' and Chief Executives' meeting next week to discuss our own emergency procedures and activities.

Questions to leader

Question: This was not the first time that we have had difficulties with Capita contracts: there is no value in saving money if it results in a worse service.

Response: The leader agreed that the Five Councils' Partnership should not be about lowering standards but rather about levelling up to the best of the Five Councils. There are specific areas where Capita were letting us down and we need to manage those issues. South Oxfordshire was still a high performing council and is committed to improving further.

Question: When are we expecting an update from central government on our unitary status bid?

Response: Given changes to the political landscape since the general election and other governmental priorities, we were not anticipating a response from the secretary of state in the near future. We were working on the basis that we would continue as South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils for the foreseeable future.

Question: The leader was asked what would happen if the bid to the Secretary of State for the Housing Infrastructure Fund for Didcot Garden Town was unsuccessful.

Response: The planned bid from this authority was for £250 million, although the structure of the bidding process meant that it was a third party bid via the County Council. Whether or not the bid was successful, the council would continue to apply for all available sources of funding and would also continue to keep a constructive dialogue open with central government.

25 Questions on notice

None.

26 Motions on notice

None.

The meeting closed at 7.35 pm

Chairman

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