

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Cabinet

held on Friday, 7th December, 2012 at 1.00 pm
in the The Abbey House, Abingdon, OX14 3JE

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillor Matthew Barber (Chairman), Yvonne Constance, Roger Cox (Vice-Chair), Reg Waite and Elaine Ware

Non-participating members: Councillors Eric Batts, Gervase Duffield, Debby Hallett, Dudley Hoddinott, Robert Sharp and Richard Webber

Officers: Steve Bishop, David Buckle, Steve Culliford, Mike Gilbert, Paul Howden, William Jacobs, Suzanne Malcolm, Matt Prosser, Margaret Reed, Anna Robinson, Toby Warren and Ben Watson

Number of members of the public:

Ca.32 Apologies for absence

None

Ca.33 Minutes

RESOLVED: To adopt the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 5 October 2012 as a correct record and agree that the chairman signs them.

Ca.34 Declarations of interest

None

Ca.35 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

The chairman accepted one item as a matter of urgent business in order that budget virements could be effected to allow work to proceed on various projects (minute Ca.36 refers).

Ca.36 Virements

The chairman accepted this as an urgent item.

Cabinet considered a request for three budget virements as follows:

- Vire £84,000 from one cost centre to another to allow income and expenditure to be matched for the localisation of council tax support
- Vire £6,000 to allow an underspend in one sport and recreation operations cost centre to another cost centre to fund feasibility work for future leisure provision in the Wantage and Grove area
- Vire £10,800 from the Contingency Budget to the enterprise zone budget to fund the cost of additional software to manage the business rates discount and retention scheme.

RESOLVED: To approve the virement requests listed above.

Ca.37 Statements, petitions, and questions relating to matters affecting the Cabinet

Seven members of the public had requested to address Cabinet on the proposed local development order for the Science Vale UK Enterprise Zone.

1. Sutton Courtenay Parish Council chairman Mike Jenkins made a statement broadly welcoming the proposed local development order for Milton Park but expressing concern at the inclusion of land to the north of the existing site, known as Kelaart's Field. The parish council believed this site should be omitted from the local development order. He also expressed concerns at the potential for increased noise disturbance to local residents from use of the business park and expressed concern at light pollution but was pleased to see that conditions had been included in the order to control the latter. Finally, he suggested that there should be a stakeholder group involving MEPC, Milton Park's owners, and the local community.
2. Mr Martin Woodgett spoke on behalf of over 200 petitioners against the proposed expansion of Milton Park into Kelaart's Field, thereby closing the gap to the nearest homes. He also expressed concern at the poor public consultation process that left little time for residents to prepare their case. He supported the views expressed by Sutton Courtenay Parish Council and added that Milton Parish Council held similar views. He believed that Moor Ditch should be retained as the park's northern boundary and referred to the archaeological potential of the site to the north. He urged Cabinet not to urbanise Kelaart's Field by expanding the park to the north.
3. Gwendolyn McEwen representing Milton villagers questioned whether the council had studied the implications of the planning conditions in the proposed local development order and whether the council had sufficient resources to enforce the conditions. She asked why Kelaart's Field had been included in the order, and she asked why there was a car dealership in the area marked on the plan as MP5.
4. John Wattam reported that he understood the bigger picture but urged the council not to forget the effect on local people. He asked Cabinet to reflect on the proposals and the concerns of local residents and reshape the local development order. He urged the council not to damage the site.

5. James Walton, a Sutton Courtenay resident, welcomed the Science Vale UK concept but: (1) asked that Kelaart's Field was excluded from the order, (2) urged the council to review acceptable uses of the site (e.g. business in the scientific industry, not car dealerships), and (3) asked the council to consider the implications of Didcot A Power Station that was due to be decommissioned in 2013 and the land this would offer for expansion of Milton Park.
6. Philip Campbell, was acting as agent for MEPC, Milton Park's owners. He supported the proposed local development order as it encouraged science-based companies to the area. He believed that there were sufficient planning controls in the order, providing a clear framework for the development of the site. He reported that the park was currently 90 per cent occupied and there would be no expansion into the green field areas yet. Kelaart's Field was in the enterprise zone and was likely to be one of the last sites MEPC would develop. He reported that MEPC would set up a liaison group with local residents. Finally, he reported receipt of a letter from the Prime Minister in support of the proposed local development order.
7. James Iles, planning consultant for MEPC, believed that Milton Park was well suited to a local development order as it would allow development without the high cost of the planning process. The order would set out the planning parameters for the whole site. He believed that MEPC had exceeded the public consultation requirements. The buffer between the extended site and the nearest homes was over 300 meters and he pointed out that there had been no objection from English Heritage. The field to the north of the expanded site would still be publicly accessible, even though it was in MEPC's ownership. There would be improvements to the road system through a legal agreement. He also believed that a variety of uses at the park contributed to a range of jobs.

Councillor Dudley Hoddinott, a non-Cabinet member, asked to address Cabinet on the exempt item later in the meeting, on West Way, Botley.

Ca.38 Council tax reduction scheme

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report requesting the adoption of a new council tax reduction scheme for 2013/14. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 abolished the council tax benefit scheme and required councils to introduce local council tax reduction schemes. The Local Government Finance Act 2012 set the rules surrounding the new scheme, which included:

- Introducing awards of discounts rather than benefits
- Protecting pensioners so they were no worse off under a new scheme
- Protecting vulnerable people
- Introducing new funding arrangements where 100 per cent subsidy would be paid to councils administering the scheme—the grant would be based on estimated expenditure for 2013/14 less ten per cent
- Consulting the public about a new scheme
- Adopting the government's default scheme if the council could not agree a new scheme

Cabinet noted that officers had worked with the other councils in Oxfordshire to introduce a new scheme to help those on low incomes to meet their council tax liability. Following discussions with leaders across the county it was agreed that the new scheme for 2013/14 should replicate the current council tax benefit scheme. The new scheme ensured that there would be no disadvantage to the low-paid and the scheme would not act as a disincentive to work. The scheme, along with the operational costs and effects on fraudulent activity, would be closely monitored during 2013/14 and would inform the development of a new scheme for 2014/15. Cabinet supported this approach.

RECOMMENDED: To Council to:

- (a) adopt the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2013/14 outlined in paragraph 8 of the report;
- (b) authorise the head of finance to finalise the scheme for 2013/14; and
- (c) encourage Oxfordshire local authorities to continue to work together to develop and introduce a uniform Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2014/15.

Ca.39 Council tax exemptions and discounts

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report on council tax exemptions and discounts. Tabled at the meeting were amended recommendations following new council tax regulations, which were laid before Parliament on 30 November. Cabinet was asked to recommend Council on the level of discount to be applied to second homes, unoccupied and unfurnished dwellings, and dwellings undergoing or requiring structural repair.

The Local Government Finance Act 2012 set out options for councils to consider:

- reduce the current statutory minimum discount of ten per cent for second homes to nil
- award a discount of between zero and 100 per cent to unoccupied and unfurnished dwellings. The period of the discount can also be between zero and six months
- award a discount of between zero and 100 per cent to dwellings undergoing or requiring structural repair. There are no changes to the maximum duration which remains at 12 months
- apply a premium to long-term empty dwellings of up to an additional 50 per cent of the council tax due, where that dwelling has been empty for at least two years.

Cabinet considered that owners of long-term empty properties should be encouraged to bring such properties back into use and the scheme should reflect that. The scheme should also discourage second home ownership to contribute to the council's objective of meeting housing need. This would also offset the reduction in funding the council would receive under the new local council tax reduction scheme. Cabinet supported the officers' recommendations.

RECOMMENDED: To Council:

- (a) That in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended by the Local Government Finance Act 2012) and the Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings) (England) Regulations 2003 (as amended)
- (i) from 1 April 2013 the council tax discount to be applied on second homes (Classes A and B in the Regulations) be reduced from ten per cent to nil;
 - (ii) from 1 April 2013 (subject to (iii) below) the council tax discount to be applied on unoccupied and unfurnished dwellings (Class C in the Regulations) be 25 per cent for up to six months and zero per cent thereafter;
 - (iii) from 1 April 2013 where the unoccupied and unfurnished dwelling is requiring or undergoing structural repair (Class D in the Regulations) the discount to be applied be 50 per cent for up to 12 months and zero per cent thereafter;
 - (iv) from 1 April 2013 a premium of 50 per cent (on top of the 100 per cent currently payable) be applied to long term empty dwellings where they have been unoccupied and unfurnished continuously for at least two years (except those falling within Classes E and F in the Regulations where no premium will apply).

Ca.40 Council tax base 2013/14

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report recommending the council tax base for 2013/14. Before the council tax could be set by Council, a calculation had to be made of the council tax base, which was an estimate of the taxable resources for the district as a whole and for each parish area. The council tax base for the district had to be notified to Oxfordshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner by 31 January 2013. Each parish and town council was also notified of the figure for its area. Cabinet was asked to recommend Council the schedule set out in appendix 1 to the report.

RECOMMENDED: To Council:

- (a) That the report of the head of finance for the calculation of the councils' tax base and the calculation of the tax base for each parish area for 2013/14 be approved;
- (b) That, in accordance with The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by the Vale of White Horse District Council as its council tax base for the year 2013/14 be 45,964.9; and
- (c) That, in accordance with The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by the Vale of White Horse District Council as the council tax base for the year 2013/14 for each parish be the amount shown against the name of that parish in appendix 1 of the report of the head of finance to Cabinet on 7 December 2012.

Ca.41 Science Vale UK Enterprise Zone - business rates scheme

Cabinet considered the strategic director's report that sought approval for the business rate discount scheme for the Science Vale UK enterprise zone. The aim was to stimulate economic growth by encouraging new businesses into Milton Park and Harwell Oxford business parks.

Cabinet noted there would be a two-stage process. First, an in principle decision would be taken to allow the business parks to confidently offer the benefit to potential applicants. Second, there would be a financial assessment to see whether the new business complied with the state aid de minimis regulations. Cabinet supported the proposed scheme.

RESOLVED: To

- (a) approve the business rate discount scheme as attached at appendix one to the report, and
- (b) authorise the strategic director with responsibility for Science Vale to determine whether businesses are eligible for a business rate discount under the scheme.

Ca.42 Science Vale UK Enterprise Zone - Milton Park Local Development Order 2012

Cabinet considered the strategic director's report that asked Cabinet to recommend Council to adopt a local development order for Milton Park, subject to confirmation that the Secretary of State does not wish to intervene. Cabinet noted that the proposal was to introduce the order to simplify planning controls and stimulate economic development at Milton Park. The proposed order would cover the whole of Milton Park, which included part of a site to the north, known as Kelaart's Field, and land to the south of the railway line near the A34 road junction.

In answer to questions from Cabinet members, the officers had carried out a thorough consultation exercise involving MEPC, Milton Park's owners, including two briefings (which Milton and Sutton Courtenay Parish Councils had attended) and letters to local residents.

Cabinet believed that it was important to proceed with the local development order but understood the concerns raised by local residents. Cabinet welcomed the draft order but asked for some amendments to mitigate residents' concerns as far as possible. Cabinet asked the strategic director in consultation with the Cabinet member to change the wording of some of the conditions in the draft local development order to:

- reflect the need to safeguard the scheduled ancient monument and its setting to the north of Milton Park
- reflect the need to maintain appropriate separation between the development and the residential areas of Milton and Sutton Courtenay
- minimise the impact of new green field development on visual amenity
- ensure the lighting and noise conditions also apply to Kelaart's Field
- include an 8 metre buffer between any new development and Moor Ditch

Cabinet also asked MEPC to review its consultation procedures and set up a liaison group with the local community.

With these safeguards, Cabinet supported the proposal.

RESOLVED: To authorise the strategic director in consultation with the Leader to revise the draft local development order, as directed by Cabinet above, before it is submitted to Council for adoption.

RECOMMENDED To Council:

to adopt the Milton Park Local Development Order 2012, subject to confirmation that the Secretary of State does not wish to intervene.

Ca.43 High Street Innovation Fund and Town Teams

Cabinet considered the report from the head of economy, leisure and property. Cabinet was asked to recommend Council to approve the addition of £155,000 to the economic development budget, from externally received monies, to deliver high street innovation fund projects for the Vale towns, town teams in Abingdon and Faringdon, and the creation of a Vale-wide business partnership. The report also outlined draft action plans for each town.

Cabinet supported the recommendation to approve the additional budget and authorised any necessary changes to the action plans.

RECOMMENDED: To Council to:

- (a) Approve the addition of £155,000 to the economic development budget, from externally received monies, to deliver high street innovation fund projects for the Vale towns, town teams in Abingdon and Faringdon, and the creation of a Vale-wide business partnership.

RESOLVED:

- (b) Subject to Council's approval of recommendation (a) above, to authorise the head of economy, leisure and property, in consultation with the strategic director and Cabinet member, to make any necessary changes to the action plans and to allocate funding as appropriate, including allocating town teams funding for Abingdon and Faringdon.

Ca.44 Local Development Scheme

Cabinet considered the head of planning's report on the local development scheme. Cabinet was asked to consider the draft revised scheme and arrangements for its publication, including adjustments to the timetable for part 1 of the Local Plan to 2029. Cabinet noted that the local development scheme was a procedural document setting out how the council was planning for development and showed how people could participate.

Cabinet agreed to publish the updated local development scheme to meet statutory requirements and to publish the council's updated timetable for the replacement local plan. Cabinet noted that the key date for this council was December 2013: the submission of the local plan part 1 (strategic policies and sites) to the Secretary of State. Cabinet noted that the local development scheme document would be amended, before publication, to show that the inspector's report was due to be published in June 2014.

RESOLVED: To agree the revised local development scheme and publish it on the council's website to take effect on 19 December 2012.

Ca.45 Revenue grant to Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens Advice Bureau and The Independent Advice Centre, Wantage for 2013/14 to 2016/17

Cabinet considered the head of corporate strategy's report on a revenue grant to Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens Advice Bureau and the Wantage Independent Advice Centre for the period 2013/14 to 2016/17. Both organisations delivered services that supported the council's objectives or those in need.

The report had also been considered by Scrutiny Committee, which recommended Cabinet:

- To award grants to the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Wantage Independent Advice Centre, as recommended by the officers, on a four-year rolling basis to allow them to plan ahead
- To make the grant figure the funding floor but for this to be negotiable upwards each year
- To agree a four-year service level agreement, also reviewable annually
- To request the Cabinet member to review the service charges for the Citizen's Advice Bureau
- That Scrutiny Committee reviews the merged Citizens Advice Bureau operation next year and forwards any relevant recommendations to Cabinet

Cabinet welcomed Scrutiny Committee's input and agreed with the majority of its recommendations with the exception of the grant figure being the funding floor for upwards negotiation each year; Cabinet considered the grant should be set for four years. Cabinet particularly welcomed introducing service level agreements for both centres and the Cabinet member agreed to review the service charges for the Citizens Advice Bureau.

RESOLVED:

- (a) Subject to approval by Council as part of the 2013/14 budget and medium term financial plan setting process, to approve a four-year revenue grant of £414,852 to Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens Advice Bureau of £103,713 per year from 2013/14 to 2016/17, subject to the completion of a four-year service level agreement;
- (b) Request the Cabinet member for finance to review the service charges for the Citizens Advice Bureau; and

- (c) Subject to approval by Council as part of the 2013/14 budget and medium term financial plan setting process, to approve a four-year revenue grant of £231,300 to The Independent Advice Centre, Wantage of £57,825 from 2013/14 to 2016/17, subject to the completion of a four-year service level agreement.

Ca.46 Exclusion of the public, including the press

RESOLVED: In accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, to exclude the public, including the press, from the remainder of the meeting to prevent the disclosure to them of exempt information, as defined in Section 100(l) and Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, to the Act when the following item is considered:

Westway, Botley

(Category 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information.)

Ca.47 Westway, Botley

Cabinet considered a report on a proposal to redevelop land at West Way, Botley. Cabinet agreed to enter into negotiations over the future of the shopping area.

The meeting closed at 2.26 pm