

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Council



held on Wednesday 16 December 2015 at 7.00 pm
at the The Ridgeway, The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BY

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Mike Badcock (Chairman), Reg Waite (Vice-Chairman), Matthew Barber, Eric Batts, Ed Blagrove, Yvonne Constance, Roger Cox, Margaret Crick, Stuart Davenport, Charlotte Dickson, St John Dickson, Gervase Duffield, Katie Finch, Debby Hallett, Robert Hall, Jenny Hannaby, Anthony Hayward, Dudley Hoddinott, Simon Howell, Vicky Jenkins, Bob Johnston, Mohinder Kainth, Monica Lovatt, Sandy Lovatt, Ben Mabbett, Chris McCarthy, Mike Murray, Chris Palmer, Helen Pighills, Julia Reynolds, Judy Roberts, Robert Sharp, Emily Smith and Elaine Ware

Officers: Steve Bishop, Steven Corrigan and Margaret Reed

Number of members of the public: 3

Co.24 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of councillors Alice Badcock, Janet Shelley and Catherine Webber.

Co.25 Minutes

RESOLVED: to adopt as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2015 and agree that the Chairman sign them.

Co.26 Declarations of interest

None.

Co.27 Chairman's announcements

The Chairman thanked councillors and officers for their support during the year and those who attended the charity ball and quiz.

Co.28 Statements, petitions and questions from the public relating to matters affecting council.

Mr Steven Corrigan, Democratic Services Manager, read out the following question on behalf of Dr Les Clyne to Matthew Barber, Leader of the council:

"Has the Council asked the developers of the Grove airfield development when they expect the current negotiations on land values between the developers, the landowners, their agents and the trustees for the Grove airfield development to be progressed to the point at which all remaining parties can sign the draft Section 106 agreement? If they have asked, what timescale was quoted? If they have not asked, will they please now do so as a matter of urgency, and will you please send me a copy of their response within seven working days of you receiving the response."

In response Matthew Barber thanked Dr Clyne for his question and continued interest in this matter. He confirmed that the council had requested updates and every deadline had been missed. He confirmed that he would provide Dr Clyne with an update when further responses were received and provide a written response of this answer with additional information about responses received to date.

Co.29 Urgent business

None.

Co.30 Petitions under standing order 13

None.

Co.31 Questions under standing order 12

1. Question from Councillor Bob Johnston to Councillor Charlotte Dickson, Chairman of the General Licensing Committee.

"Could the Chairman please explain how council will reconsider and amend its Air Quality Management Area policies and actions in light of recent emissions-rigging scandal?"

Councillor Dickson responded as follows:

"Local authority monitoring has always shown that central government predicted vehicle emissions reductions from cleaner vehicles, which was based on manufacturers' data, were not being recorded in their areas.

This emission rigging scandal will not undermine any of the existing actions in the Vale Air Quality Action Plan because the actions look at the whole fleet and not individual car manufacturers. The actions focus on driving behaviour, traffic flows and improving the take up of electric cars. The fact that some cars are not meeting their predicted emissions standards will mean that the above actions will potentially take longer to achieve the required nitrogen dioxide reductions."

In response to a supplementary question she undertook to provide a written update on the implementation of the council's Air Quality Action Plan.

2. Question from Councillor Bob Johnston to Councillor Roger Cox, Cabinet member for housing.

"Given the Government's stated desire to reduce family benefit to a maximum of £23,000 per annum, which will result in housing associations no longer being able to house them as social housing rents will be unaffordable, could the Cabinet member please explain what contingency arrangements the Vale (as a statutory housing body) is making to deal with the expected increase in social housing need?"

Councillor Cox responded as follows:

“There are many factors that affect any increase in the demand for social housing, but I believe this council is in a good position to deal with the demands in the future. There are two parts in answering this question. Firstly, how will the decrease in benefit affect those households already in social housing? This is an issue for our housing association partners. Sovereign estimates around 60 households would be affected. So we are working strategically with them to assist those households. Initially, those households would qualify for discretionary housing benefit to assist them in paying the rent for a period of six months. Sovereign Housing Association will then work intensively with the household to try and get them back into work or training so that they can be exempted from the benefit cap. They will only need to work 16 hours per week to be exempt. Also we will encourage both Sovereign and SOHA to make best use of their housing stock and internal transfers to move households away from affordable properties to those that charge only social rent.

The changes made in the Housing Needs Service, will enable the council to assist households trying to access social housing. There is a real emphasis on preventing homelessness. In 2013/14 the Council prevented 245 households from becoming homeless, in 2014/15 this rose to 323. The trend this year shows that the council will exceed this figure again. The council runs a successful social lettings agency and in 2014/15 found 90 homes for families in the private sector. The majority of the rents were kept to the local housing allowance levels, but with incentives for landlords, many households on low incomes have accessed this accommodation.

Households who are subject to the benefit cap, who have a high priority through the housing register, will be given targeted assistance. A protocol has been agreed with both Sovereign Housing Association and SOHA, that if a household bids and is successful for an affordable home and their income is insufficient to meet their rent liabilities, then they will be offered a home with a social rent. We have also set up protocols with Citizens Advice and a variety of other agencies to also assist those households subject to the benefit cap or low incomes to assist them in maximising their income.

Therefore, as you can see the council has taken a strategic view, in partnership to help those households that require our assistance.”

In response to a supplementary question Councillor Cox confirmed that officers would work with housing associations to ensure families on modest incomes were not housed in bed and breakfast accommodation in high drug use areas.

3. Question from Councillor Judy Roberts to Councillor Eric Batts, Cabinet member for technical services.

“Please could the Cabinet member explain why the Vale is continuing to ignore repeated requests from residents and parish councils for a proper hydrology survey for the Cumnor Hill area?”

Councillor Batts thanked Councillor Roberts for her question and responded as follows:

“I recognise the potential benefit of a proper hydrology survey of the Cumnor Hill area. However, this council is not the lead local flood authority. That responsibility lays with Oxfordshire County Council who would be the commissioning authority for such a survey. The county have given informal indication to suggest that they could carry out a survey. However, they would be looking for funding assistance

from potential developers in the Cumnor Hill area in order to make a hydrology survey feasible.”

As a supplementary question Councillor Roberts asked that in light of the extensive number of planning permissions granted in this area what assurance could the Cabinet member give to residents of Dean Court and North Hinksey that there will not be serious flooding following future heavy rainfall?

Councillor Batts responded that he could not provide such an assurance. The appropriate authority, Oxfordshire County Council, was aware of the potential for flooding in the area and he suggested that Councillor Roberts raise her concerns with the ward member for the County Division.

4. Question from Councillor Judy Roberts to Councillor Elaine Ware, Cabinet member for corporate strategy.

“Could the Cabinet member please confirm her intention to review the Grants Scheme in early 2016?”

In response Councillor Ware confirmed that she will review the Grants Scheme in 2016. She referred to a meeting she had held with Councillor Roberts in August and to an email from the Grants Team Leader dated 25 August which states that she is keen to review the scheme in April 2016. She undertook to provide Councillor Roberts with a copy of the email following the meeting.

As a supplementary question Councillor Roberts referred to Article 13.2 in the council’s constitution which requires that actions taken should be proportionate to the desired outcome. She stated that the most appropriate way of distributing grant money would be on the basis of per head of population rather than by parish as had been the case in the previous four years and resulted in the Faringdon area receiving an extra £40,000. She asked for an assurance that the forthcoming review would assess the desired outcome of smaller parishes receiving extra grant money and that this be statistically assessed and the conclusions made public.

In response Councillor Ware confirmed that this issue would be considered as part of her review.

5. Question from Councillor Julia Reynolds to Councillor Matthew Barber, Leader of the council.

“Letcombe Brook is a chalk stream which are globally rare. It is seven miles long, from Letcombe Regis, through Wantage, Grove and East Hanney. It is a key strategic environmental asset and its continual maintenance by the Letcombe Brook Project Officer is vital for flood mitigation and for ensuring the integrity of its habitats by conserving and enhancing the biodiversity and landscape. The Letcombe Brook Project arose from public concern about pollution, low water levels and years of neglect resulting in litter, erosion, poor bank treatments and frequent flooding. The Project officer works with a small team of volunteers, developers, residents who are riparian owners, and organises field visits for local schools, which forms part of the National Curriculum. Advice is given to the East Hanney flood group, tree and bank erosion management is ongoing, indigenous planting has been carried out and invasive species such as himalayan balsam is pulled out on a regular basis. The brook supports a healthy wild brown trout population and priority species such as otter and UK’s most endangered species, the water vole. Funding from the Environment Agency was withdrawn three years ago. Will the Leader commit to additional funding for the Letcombe Brook Project in the forthcoming budget?”

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In response Councillor Barber stated that the 2016/17 capital base budget included provision of £6,000 for flood alleviation work.

6. Question from Councillor Chris Palmer to Councillor Matthew Barber, Leader of the council.

“Given that the first refugees are due to arrive in Oxford before Christmas, what plans are there locally for any refugees, and what can/ should the Churches in Abingdon do to help?”

There are many different things that the Churches can and may well be willing to do to help out. But they need to know what is expected and how many people they would be expected to help?”

In response Councillor Barber responded that the council had not received a request from the Home Office to house refugees. The most appropriate option was to house refugees in areas where a support network existed and the Vale was unlikely to meet this criteria. However, the Vale was ready to share the burden and would work with partners, including the churches, to help any refugees.

Co.32 Treasury management outturn 2014/15

Council considered the Leader of the council’s recommendation, made on 2 October 2015, on the outturn performance of the treasury management function for the financial year 2014/15.

RESOLVED: to

1. approve the treasury management outturn report for 2014/15;
2. note that the treasury activities in 2014/15 have been carried out in accordance with the treasury management strategy and policy.

Co.33 Joint Statement of Licensing Policy

Council considered the Licensing Acts Committee’s recommendation, made at its meeting on 25 November 2015, on a statement of licensing policy jointly developed with South Oxfordshire District Council.

RESOLVED: to

1. adopt the Joint Statement of Licensing Policy as attached to the Council agenda for the meeting held on 16 December 2015;
2. authorise the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to make minor editorial changes to the Joint Statement of Licensing Policy;
3. authorise the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to publish the Joint Statement of Licensing Policy in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003.

Co.34 Joint Gambling Policy

Council considered Cabinet’s recommendations, made at its meeting on 4 December 2015, on a statement of licensing policy jointly developed with South Oxfordshire District Council.

RESOLVED: to

1. adopt the proposed Joint Gambling Policy attached to the Council agenda for the meeting held on 16 December 2015;
2. authorise the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to make minor editorial changes to the Joint Gambling Policy; and
3. authorise the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to publish the Joint Gambling Policy in accordance with the Gambling Act 2005 (Licensing Authority Policy Statement)(England and Wales) Regulations 2006.

Co.35 Council tax base 2016/17

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meeting on 4 December 2015, on the council tax base for 2016/17.

RESOLVED:

1. to approve the report of the Head of Finance to Cabinet on 4 December 2015 for the calculation of the council's tax base and the calculation of the tax base for each parish area for 2016/17;
2. that, in accordance with The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Vale of White Horse District Council as its council tax base for the year 2016/17 be 48,176.9; and
3. that, in accordance with The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Vale of White Horse District Council as the council tax base for the year 2016/17 for each parish be the amount shown against the name of that parish in the revised Appendix 1 attached to the Council agenda for the meeting held on 16 December 2015.

Co.36 Councillors' allowances scheme

Council considered the independent remuneration panel's recommendation on the councillors' allowances scheme.

RESOLVED:

1. to increase only the basic allowance for 2016/17, in line with the staff pay increase for 2016/17;
2. not to increase the special responsibility allowances, the childcare or dependent carer's allowances, or the travel allowances.

Co.37 Review of the council's constitution

Council considered the report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services on proposed amendments to the council's constitution.

RESOLVED: to

1. note the work done by the Joint Constitution Review Group and the intention to bring forward wholesale revisions of the council's constitution for consideration by Council;

2. note the overall approach of the review group to develop “mirror” constitutions with South Oxfordshire District Council and commonality of wording where possible;
3. authorise the Head of Legal and Democratic services to make the necessary amendments to the constitution to amend the scrutiny call-in procedures and the definition of key decisions;
4. approve the amendments of the officer employment procedure rules for inclusion in the constitution as attached to the report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to Council on 16 December 2015;
5. authorise the Head of Legal and Democratic Services or a deputy monitoring officer to appoint a panel of independent persons drawn from the independent persons appointed by South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils under the Localism Act 2011;
6. authorise the Head of Legal and Democratic services to make any minor or consequential amendments to the constitution.

Co.38 Report of the Leader of the council

The Leader of the council reported government announcements of the second Vale Enterprise Zone and the Didcot Garden Town designation both of which would support infrastructure spending in the district.

He also reported that the district council had achieved the second highest recycling figures in the country.

Co.39 Notices of motion under standing order 11

Council considered the following motions submitted under standing order 11.

- (1) Motion proposed by Councillor Mike Badcock, seconded by Councillor Bob Johnston:

“That Council requests officers to convene a special Council meeting no later than the date of the annual Council meeting in May 2016 in order to grant the freedom of the Vale of White Horse district to 3 Regiment Royal Logistic Corps, 4 Regiment Royal Logistic Corps and 7 Rifles in recognition of their contribution to the service of the country and the residents of the Vale.”

RESOLVED:

That Council requests officers to convene a special Council meeting no later than the date of the annual Council meeting in May 2016 in order to grant the freedom of the Vale of White Horse district to 3 Regiment Royal Logistic Corps, 4 Regiment Royal Logistic Corps and 7 Rifles in recognition of their contribution to the service of the country and the residents of the Vale.

- (2) Motion proposed by Councillor Roger Cox, seconded by Councillor Mike Murray:

“This Council commends the Government’s efforts to support people in having the security and stability of owning a home of their own.

This Council welcomes the Government’s Housing and Planning Bill which will help to create a million new homeowners by 2020. The Council endorses the Bill:

- Turning Generation Rent into Generation Buy. First-time buyers will benefit from the provision of 200,000 Starter Homes which will be available at a 20 per cent discount to first-time buyers under 40.
- Making planning permission simpler and protecting the greenbelt. The Bill reforms complex planning legislation and grants automatic planning permission in principle on brownfield sites.
- Selling high-value vacant council assets. Councils should make the best use of their assets, as high value council homes become empty they should be sold to fund new affordable house building in the same area.
- Extending Right to Buy to housing association tenants. Ending the unfairness of Right to Buy only being available to council house tenants, this will be extended to 1.3 million housing associations tenants. Homes that are sold to tenants will be replaced with new affordable homes on a one-for-one basis.
- Giving local people more of a voice through neighbourhood planning and local plans. Shifting power from Whitehall to local people, so communities will have more of a say in planning in their local areas and where homes and businesses should be built.

This Council supports the Housing and Planning Bill, which will allow people who want to work hard to save and aspire to buy their own home achieve their dream.”

Those councillors in support of the motion welcomed the initiatives to build starter homes to address the lack of affordable housing for first time buyers and to extend the right to buy programme to meet the aspirations of people to own their own home.

A number of councillors spoke against the motion. The new starter homes would be smaller and constructed to a lower standard. Housing associations had borrowed against their housing stock and the extension of the right to buy programme would force them to sell their assets below market value and impact on their ability to borrow against their assets in the future. There was no requirement to replace the housing stock sold or to increase the rental sector. More houses were required to address the housing shortage and address the affordability issue. The Bill had missed an opportunity to build the houses required.

The chairman called for a recorded vote on the motion which was carried with the voting recorded as follows:

For	Against	Abstentions
Councillors	Councillors	Councillors
Mike Badcock	Debby Hallett	Margaret Crick
Matthew Barber	Dudley Hoddinott	Jenny Hannaby
Eric Batts	Bob Johnston	Anthony Hayward
Edward Blagrove	Emily Smith	Helen Pighills
Roger Cox		Judy Roberts
Stuart Davenport		
Charlotte Dickson		
St John Dickson		
Gervase Duffield		
Katie Finch		
Robert Hall		
Simon Howell		
Vicky Jenkins		

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For	Against	Abstentions
Mohinder Kainth		
Monica Lovatt		
Sandy Lovatt		
Ben Mabbett		
Chris McCarthy		
Mike Murray		
Chris Palmer		
Julia Reynolds		
Robert Sharp		
Reg Waite		
Elaine Ware		
Total: 24	Total: 4	Total: 5

RESOLVED:

That Council commends the Government's efforts to support people in having the security and stability of owning a home of their own.

This Council welcomes the Government's Housing and Planning Bill which will help to create a million new homeowners by 2020. The Council endorses the Bill:

- Turning Generation Rent into Generation Buy. First-time buyers will benefit from the provision of 200,000 Starter Homes which will be available at a 20 per cent discount to first-time buyers under 40.
- Making planning permission simpler and protecting the greenbelt. The Bill reforms complex planning legislation and grants automatic planning permission in principle on brownfield sites.
- Selling high-value vacant council assets. Councils should make the best use of their assets, as high value council homes become empty they should be sold to fund new affordable house building in the same area.
- Extending Right to Buy to housing association tenants. Ending the unfairness of Right to Buy only being available to council house tenants, this will be extended to 1.3 million housing associations tenants. Homes that are sold to tenants will be replaced with new affordable homes on a one-for-one basis.
- Giving local people more of a voice through neighbourhood planning and local plans. Shifting power from Whitehall to local people, so communities will have more of a say in planning in their local areas and where homes and businesses should be built.

This Council supports the Housing and Planning Bill, which will allow people who want to work hard to save and aspire to buy their own home achieve their dream.

(3) Motion proposed by Councillor Gervase Duffield, seconded by Councillor Reg Waite:

"This Council welcomes the recent announcements of the second Vale Enterprise Zone and the Garden Town initiative and calls on all parts of the Council to have regard to protecting and respecting as far as possible the rural character of the villages affected and to work to avoid an urbanised 'greater Didcot'.

In supporting the motion a number of councillors welcomed both the second Vale Enterprise Zone and the Garden Town initiative which would secure the long term

future for local communities within the district. However, it was important that these initiatives did not impact on the historical character and rural nature of the district's villages. Recent planning applications were, due to the density of housing proposed, threatening the traditional image of a number of villages around Didcot and the existing green space between those villages and Didcot. Measures were required to protect green spaces and prevent the coalescence of Didcot and the village settlements and to protect the rural character of the villages.”

RESOLVED:

That this Council welcomes the recent announcements of the second Vale Enterprise Zone and the Garden Town initiative and calls on all parts of the Council to have regard to protecting and respecting as far as possible the rural character of the villages affected and to work to avoid an urbanised 'greater Didcot'.

The meeting closed at 8.10pm

Chairman