

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Council



held on Wednesday, 13 July 2022 at 7.00 pm
at the First floor, 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, Milton, OX14 4SB

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Councillors: Margaret Crick (Chair), Jerry Avery (Vice-Chair), Paul Barrow, Ron Batstone, Eric Batts, Andy Cooke, Andy Crawford, Neil Fawcett, Hayleigh Gascoigne, David Grant, Simon Howell, Alison Jenner, Bob Johnston, Diana Lugova, Ben Mabbett, Robert Maddison, Sarah Medley, Patrick O'Leary, Helen Pighills, Mike Pighills, Sally Povolotsky, Emily Smith, Catherine Webber and Richard Webber

Officers: Patrick Arran, Head of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer, Steven Corrigan, Democratic Services Manager and Mark Stone, Chief Executive

Remote attendance (not entitled to vote):

Councillors Nathan Boyd, Samantha Bowring, Eric de la Harpe, Amos Duveen, Debby Hallett, Judy Roberts, Val Shaw, Bethia Thomas, Max Thompson and Elaine Ware

16. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cheryl Briggs, Andy Foulsham, Jenny Hannaby and Janet Shelley.

17. Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the extraordinary Council meeting and the annual Council meeting held on 18 May 2022 as correct records and agree that the Chair sign them as such.

18. Declarations of interest

None.

19. Urgent business and chair's announcements

The Chair provided general housekeeping advice. She welcomed the opportunity to be undertaking her role as Chair of the council visiting people in the community once again.

20. Public participation

Three members of the public had registered to ask a question.

- A. Steven Corrigan, Democratic Services Manager, read out the following question on behalf of Alderwoman Joyce Hutchinson:

“Having examined the original S106 agreements I note that two postscripts have been added by the District Council

- 1) Reserving funds for the Wessex Leisure Centre
- 2) Making reference to an e-mail written by R. Cross dated 16/12/16

As Wessex Leisure Centre does not exist and is no longer planned and the e-mail ‘is no longer retained on file ‘quoted from a Freedom of Information request, will these references be removed and the S106 contributions be spent according to the original legal agreements?

If not how will any changes in the spending of the S106 contributions be decided?”

Councillor Roberts, Cabinet member for development and infrastructure, responded as follows:

“I share your concern that developer contributions that were intended to improve local sports and leisure facilities should do so, even if the previous administration tried to tie them to a project that they should have known was never feasibly going to happen.

Following the termination of the Wessex Leisure Centre project, Section 106 funds earmarked for that scheme remain formally allocated whilst projects to deliver the most appropriate and beneficial use of those funds are considered.

Work is ongoing towards achieving this, in consultation with local representatives.

The options being considered cover schemes which may be delivered by the district council or potentially projects of other organisations where that delivers a suitable outcome. Any use of Section 106 funds will need to be spent in accordance with the associated spending criteria”.

- B. Julie Maberley, representing Wantage and Grove Campaign, asked the following question.

“In the Council Meeting on 10 February 2021, in response to a question from Alderman Hutchinson, “Councillor Helen Pighills stated that the council’s Corporate Plan committed the council to work with partners on the production of a leisure strategy. It was hoped this would be available by the end of March but was dependent on the availability of staff resources which had been assisting with the council’s response to the Covid pandemic.

She confirmed that S106 funds previously allocated to the Wessex Leisure Centre project were being reviewed to determine how they could be re-allocated to alternative projects in the areas which generated the funds and what projects could be funded.

She confirmed that there was no CIL money available for leisure projects in Grove and Wantage.

Whilst the council could not commit to ensure the leisure facilities would be in walking distance, the council was committed to ensure the funds would be used in the areas that generated them and to reduce reliance on cars to access facilities.”

It is now July 2022 and we have seen no evidence of a leisure strategy or any review of the s106 funds previously allocated to the Wessex Leisure Centre.

When will the Leisure Strategy included in the Councils Corporate Plan be produced and will there be any public consultation on the strategy before it is final?”

Councillor Helen Pighills, Cabinet member for healthy communities, responded as follows:

“On 22 July, the Cabinet will consider my proposed Active Communities Strategy, and the papers for this meeting will be published later this week.

The Active Communities Strategy will sit beneath the overarching Healthy Communities Strategy as just one in a suite of supporting strategies, that will address many of the wellbeing and health related priorities of the council’s Corporate Plan. The strategy sets out how the Council plans to improve the health and wellbeing of residents and the role council plays in providing high quality active opportunities for all our communities. A key aim of the strategy will be collaborative partnership working across the district.

Officers are also working with Sport England to secure relevant external support and expertise to develop a district wide leisure facilities strategy. It is anticipated that the formal commercial appointment for this work will be made by the end of the year through the Sport England Active Environments Framework. This crucial work will not only outline needs across the district but is a crucial piece of evidence needed to inform our Joint Local Plan with South Oxfordshire”.

C. Mr Gooch asked the following question:

“It was recognised by the Council as long ago as 2006 in LTP2 that Wantage Town has poor connectivity and lacks investment and vital infrastructure. What work, if any, has the Council undertaken to apply for a share of the £3.6billion available in the Towns Fund and if they have not done so why not?

Councillor Neil Fawcett, Cabinet member for strategic partnerships and place, responded as follows:

“Thank you for the question which helpfully reminds me of that time in September 2019 when the government invited 100 places around the UK to develop proposals for a Town Deal, as part of their planned £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

Members will probably recall as I do that the launch of the Towns Fund attracted a lot of publicity because of accusations that the choice of towns was politically motivated. A subsequent inquiry by Public Accounts Committee in Parliament concluded that it was *“not convinced by the rationales for selecting some towns and not others”*.

Sadly, nowhere in Oxfordshire was invited to bid so we were simply not in a position to put in an application even if we had wanted to.

The Council always considers its position carefully in terms of funds made available by government, including working with civil servants at the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to get a better understanding of assessment criteria. Through those relationships we are able to build a clearer understanding of the

Council's likely chances of success when bidding for any funds. Beyond the headline figures there are often nuances and technical implications to be considered, that affect our chances of success.

Where realistic opportunities do arise that would benefit Wantage, or any other area in the district, we will actively pursue that opportunity. We have been successful at winning grants for a number of different government funds but for the time being unfortunately the towns fund, to which your question relates, is not available to Wantage”.

21. Petitions

None.

22. Community Governance Review - related alteration order

Council considered an agenda item which set out that the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee was currently undertaking a community governance review and would be making final decisions on a number of matters at its meeting on 12 September 2022. The committee could agree changes to parish boundaries which could impact on district ward and county division boundaries. To make district ward and county divisions coterminous with any parish changes, Council considered a proposal to authorise the head of legal and democratic to request the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to make related alteration orders to alter both the district wards and county division boundaries where necessary. The Chair of Council, Councillor Crick, advised of an amendment to the recommendation to include consultation with the Chair of the Community Governance and Electoral issues Committee on any request.

RESOLVED: to authorise the head of legal and democratic, in consultation with the Chair of the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee, to request the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to make related alteration orders to change district wards and county divisions to reflect the changes made to the parish boundaries arising from the current community governance review.

23. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Update

Council received and noted the written update report on The Future Oxfordshire Partnership from Councillor Fawcett, Cabinet member for Strategic Partnerships and Place.

24. Report of the leader of the council

Councillor Emily Smith, Leader of the council, provided an update on a number of issues. The text of her address is available on the council's [website](#).

25. Questions on notice

A. Question from Councillor Hayleigh Gascoigne to Councillor Judy Roberts, Cabinet member for development and infrastructure

“The house building in Great Western Park, which sits on the boundary of Didcot and Harwell, appears to be almost complete, if not already completed.

The provision for medical facilities, in the form of a GP surgery, was part of the legal agreement with the developers. Can we have an update on what the progress is on the GP surgery, as this is a clear concern for the local public?"

Answer

Thank you for your question on a matter I know is of keen interest to local residents.

The Vale of White Horse District Council has been actively engaging with supporting the former Oxfordshire CCG (OCCG) (now Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB)) and Woodlands Medical Centre, to find a mutually acceptable way forward which will enable the delivery of a new branch surgery at Great Western Park. The new premises will also ease pressure on space at the existing surgery.

The original Great Western Park development S106 Agreement directed that the land be transferred to the Vale Council as at that time Oxfordshire CCG was unable to hold land. As the council is not a provider of healthcare facilities this has complicated matters and a significant amount of officer time has been spent trying to move this forward to the benefit of Didcot residents.

In April 2022, the OCCG confirmed in writing to the council that it has delegated powers from NHS England to be the commissioner of Primary Care Services in Oxfordshire and they are keen to ensure that primary medical services operate from the Great Western Park site to serve the local population. OCCG has also confirmed that the Woodlands Medical Centre is willing to expand in the locality and has written formally to the council confirming that Woodlands Medical Centre has nominated a preferred medical developer and requested that the council progresses a number of matters to enable this to happen. This is now underway.

The matter is complex but, by continuing to work together, we are hopeful that this will enable the ICB and Woodlands Medical Centre to deliver the health centre in a timely manner. I understand they hope that the new surgery building will open its door to patients by 2025 at the latest. I would encourage people registered with Didcot GP practices to get involved with their local patient groups so they can be part of the discussions about the future of this project, which is important to the growing population of the town and its surrounding areas.

B. Question from Councillor Bob Johnston to Councillor Helen Pighills Cabinet member for healthy communities

"It is 20 years since the White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre in Abingdon opened. Can the Cabinet member give an approximate figure for the number of visitors to the White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre since then?"

Answer

Thank you for your question which helpfully highlights the many years of service that the White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre has provided, and which continues to be delivered with our leisure partners GLL. The leisure centre is a vital facility for helping to keep our residents active and healthy, and attracts people from a wide area, not just Abingdon.

The centre was opened in 2002 and some of us were delighted to go along Sunday before last to mark its 20th birthday with leisure centre staff and customers.

The leisure centre in Abingdon, costing £11 million pounds, was the largest leisure project in Southern England. I understand from colleagues who were part of the Liberal Democrat administration at the time, that this significant project was delivered on time and within budget by hard working officers.

Our reporting data covers a period from April 2002 to May 2022 and identifies circa 13.67 million visits in that time

Supplementary question and answer

In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Pighills agreed that it was right that in acknowledging the success of the White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre over the years, that Council also pay tribute to the role and hard work of officers across the council who paid a part in bringing the project to fruition on time and within budget and the impact their work has had over the past two decades and will continue to have in the future.

26. Motions on notice

Council considered the motion set out in the agenda.

Councillor Sally Povolotsky moved, and Councillor Diana Lugova seconded the motion as set out in the agenda at agenda item 15:

After debate and on being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

RESOLVED:

That this Council notes that families and individuals in our district face a cost-of-living crisis.

Households across the UK are facing the highest tax burden in 70 years, and the typical family will see a hit of £1,200 a year through a combination of tax rises and soaring energy prices according to the Resolution Foundation.

People living in rural areas, like ours, are disproportionately affected by fuel price increases because of the lack of public transport and longer distances to reach work, education and health services.

In April, Ofgem increased the energy price cap by 54 per cent, however there is no price cap on solid fuel bottled gas or heating oil which 5%* of Vale residents rely on to heat their homes.

Council thanks our officers for the additional work already being done support residents amid this crisis; including:

- Processing the £150 Council Tax rebates promptly and well before the government's deadline
- Establishing processes to enable access to the Household Support Fund
- Expanding the support, supplies and signposting available from our Community Hub through the height of Covid and beyond
- Extremely successful homelessness prevention work
- Managing partnership grants with non-for-profit organisations to provide financial and other advice across the district
- Signposting of benefits and other support

But there is much more to do both nationally and locally. Therefore, Council resolves to ask the Leader and Chief Executive to explore:

1. Expanding our Council Tax Reduction Scheme to reduce the tax burden for lower income households
2. Ways to protect funding for partnership grants delivering advice services to residents in next year's budget and future years as far as possible
3. Ways to continue and widen the remit of the community hub, which was initially created in response to Covid to support residents and is now acting as a central point for information and support
4. Working with partners to improve access to affordable food across our district

And asks the leader to write to relevant government ministers and our local MPs to ask for urgent action to relieve the cost-of-living crisis through such measures as:

- a. Provide immediate financial support for consumers of heating oil, Bottled gas, solid fuels, those reliant on generators for electricity and those on prepayment meters.
- b. Increase Rural Fuel Duty Rate Relief and expand the number of rural areas covered
- c. Consider reducing VAT to 17.5% putting money back into the pockets of average families, boosting the economy and helping to support local retailers
- d. Deliver a real and immediate increase in investment in UK renewables and an energy plan for the UK which immediately reduces costs for the end user and leads to the decarbonisation of the UK energy network in the long term.

The meeting closed at 8.01 pm

Chair:

Date: