

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK**COUNCIL**

Minutes from the Meeting of the Council held on Thursday, 15th October, 2020 at 4.30 pm in a Remote Meeting on Zoom and available for the public to view on WestNorfolkBC on You Tube - Zoom and You Tube

PRESENT: Councillor G Hipperson (Chair)
Councillors B Ayres, Miss L Bambridge, P Beal, J Bhondi, R Blunt, F Bone, C Bower, A Bubb, A Bullen, Mrs J Collingham, J Collop, S Collop, C J Crofts, S Dark, M de Whalley, I Devereux, A Dickinson, P Gidney, A Holmes, Lord Howard, M Howland, G Howman, C Hudson, H Humphrey, B Jones, C Joyce, A Kemp, J Kirk, P Kunes, A Lawrence, B Lawton, B Long, J Lowe, C Manning, G Middleton, J Moriarty, C Morley, S Nash, E Nockolds, T Parish, S Patel, J Ratcliffe, C Rose, J Rust, A Ryves, C Sampson, S Sandell, Mrs V Spikings, S Squire, M Storey, A Tyler, D Tyler, D Whitby and M Wilkinson

C:113 **WELCOME AND ROLL CALL**

The Mayor welcomed Members to the Meeting. The Democratic Services Manager took the roll call of those present.

C:114 **PRAYERS**

Prayers were led by Rev Canon Ling

C:115 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED: The minutes of the Meetings of the Council held on 10 September and 8 October 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

C:116 **DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

None

C:117 **MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor congratulated Councillor Stuart Dark on his award of the MBE which had recently been announced.

C:118 **URGENT BUSINESS**

None

C:119 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC QUESTIONS

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The Mayor invited Brenda Kent to ask her Public Question of Council.

"May I first of all congratulate the Council on the efficiency with which I understand homeless people have been housed during the pandemic.

Looking to the future and with avoiding building on precious green open spaces and wildlife habitats in mind, could you tell me please whether the Council keeps statistics on how much long-term vacant property there is in the Borough that is already designated for residential use or which could be converted into high standard residential accommodation; and are there any schemes or incentives which would encourage and help owners to offer such properties for sale or rent?"

Councillor Lawrence, Cabinet Member for Housing gave the following response:

"The council recognises the importance of bringing long term properties back into use, for a number of reasons including to ensure that the best use is made of the areas existing housing stock. The councils Long Term Empty Homes Strategy can be viewed on the website. The majority of empty homes are owned by individuals, but there have been some landlords with significant numbers of stock in management that have had a number of vacant schemes over an extended period of years. The council seeks to incentivise owners of empty properties to bring them back into use, will proactively look at problem solving, where that might include identifying a third party to sell the property to, or enforcement action where appropriate. There are records continually maintained on the number of empty homes. There is no discount for an empty and unfurnished property, and after two years of it being empty an additional levy of 100% of the annual council tax is payable (so they pay double council tax). From 1 April 2020, after 5 years of being empty the levy goes up to 200%, and from 1 April 2021 after 10 years of being empty the levy goes up to 300%.

Over the years there have been a number of targeted central government funding streams that we have used in conjunction with housing association partners to either acquire or lease homes that have been long term empty properties where appropriate. In these scenarios homes are brought back into use as social housing.

The Council is currently looking at opportunities in the town centre to re-purpose vacant commercial building and convert upper floors. There are several aligned government funding streams for this type of work including the Town's Fund and the High Street Heritage Action Zone programme. There have been some changes to planning use class

orders over the summer that create greater flexibility in the context of re-purposing retail space.

Finally, on the point of wildlife habitats and open spaces – these are things considered as part of planning decision making processes. The encouragement (through policy mechanisms) to utilise brown-field land or existing property needs to be considered in the context of economic and commercial perspectives.”

By way of supplementary Mrs Kent asked if the post of empty homes officer still existed, to which it was explained that the role was carried out within a department.

C:120 **CABINET MEMBERS REPORTS**

i **Business Development - Councillor G Middleton**

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Councillor Middleton presented his report and in doing so outlined the current pots of funding which were currently available from government funding awarded for the area. He confirmed the Action Plan for the public realm work would be considered by the Regeneration and Development Panel in order for them to have input.

Councillor Middleton undertook to give an update of the cycling and walking infrastructure plan once it was available and members would be consulted.

ii **Commercial Services - Councillor P Kunes**

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Councillor Kunes presented his report and gave an update on the situation with the Gayton Road cemetery, and the fact that an alternative site was being sought for when it was full. He also confirmed that visits were being carried out to hospitality premises as required. With regard to a question on temporary event notices being granted for “raves”, Councillor Kunes confirmed the council’s hands were tied by legislation although lobbying of Government was taking place to include the TEN notices for consideration of the risks of covid.

iii **Development - Councillor R Blunt**

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Councillor Blunt presented his report, and informed members that as the Upwell neighbourhood Plan was supposed to have gone to referendum before now its contents would be included as part of

planning considerations. He agreed to email the number of parishes involved in the Neighbourhood Plan process.

Councillor Blunt responded to questions on the planning appeal decision in Fairstead and undertook to ascertain why interested parties hadn't been notified by the Planning Inspectorate directly. He also confirmed that lobbying was being carried out on the requirements of the housing delivery test particularly during the current climate. He also responded to questions of the local plan policy on the waterfront and cycling and walking strategy.

iv **Housing - Councillor A Lawrence**

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Councillor Lawrence presented his report. He updated members on the Homechoice figures which he didn't have available at the time of writing. In response to questions on rough sleepers accommodation he confirmed that officers and partners were looking for alternative accommodation for the homeless as the covid restrictions for the night shelter severely limited the numbers that could be accommodated there. He also confirmed that officers were working with those persons identifying as likely to be evicted and would continue to try to help.

He responded to questions about the housing IT system, and confirmed the number of empty properties in the borough was high, but work was being undertaken to reduce the number.

v **Project Delivery - Councillor P Gidney**

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Councillor Gidney presented his report and undertook to provide information on the level of enquiries for the pontoons and the level of Conservancy Board fees charged for the longer pontoons. He also explained investigations were taking place for a support building for the pontoons.

Councillor Gidney also responded to points made about future development on Hardings Way.

vi **Deputy Leader and Culture, Heritage and Health - Councillor Mrs E Nockolds**

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Councillor Nockolds presented her report and made reference to a change in approach of encouraging visitors to the area. She also

confirmed that the football viewings being held in the corn exchange was being done in a covid secure manner and the attendance at the cinema showings had been good.

vii **Leader and Resources - Councillor B Long**

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Councillor Long presented his report and corrected that the reintroduction of staff to King's Court had been slowed, not curtailed. He also responded to questions on the doctors surgery at Fairstead and that the Council would be guided by the healthcare experts, but that council would stand by the decisions it had made on the site, and would support the provision of new facilities acknowledging that the facilities at centre point needed car parking in order to operate. In response to a question on the tackling of deprivation within the budget Councillor Long commented that the issues raised would take a long time to address.

Councillor Long also informed members that a portfolio holder for the Environment would be made in due course, and undertook to ascertain if funding had been sought for cycle ways and pedestrian access in air quality grants. He also confirmed that some funding had been received to assist with the covid enforcement in public areas. Councillor Long also confirmed that tree planting had not taken place in the current climate.

C:121 **MEMBERS QUESTION TIME**

None

At 18.20 the Council took a 10 minute adjournment and reconvened at 18.20 where a roll call was again called.

C:122 **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COUNCIL BODIES**

i **Cabinet: 22 September 2020**

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Councillor Long proposed CAB166 Climate Change Policy. This was seconded by Councillor Nockolds. It was confirmed that members would be able to have informal discussions without officers present (not decision making meetings) to help move this forward.

Councillor Ryves moved the following amendment to add to the existing recommendation "...and a target of 2040 be set for carbon neutrality". This was seconded by Councillor de Whalley.

Council debated the amendment, and being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

Council then debated the substantive motion and on confirmation of no dissenters the recommendation was agreed.

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Councillor Long then moved CAB167 Notice of Motion 1-20 - Climate Change, this was seconded by Councillor Nockolds. Council debated the motion and the recommendations from Cabinet. On being put to the vote the recommendations from Cabinet were approved and the Motion rejected.

RESOLVED: The recommendations above from the Cabinet meeting held on 22 September 2020 were approved.

At 19.41 Council took a vote on whether to continue to sit, where it was agreed not to continue to sit.

The following items would be referred to the next Council meeting:
CAB168 Revised Revenue Budget 2020-21
CAB170 Scrutiny and Executive Protocol

The meeting closed at 7.47 pm