

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

21 September 2017

COUNCILLOR ALISTAIR BEALES - CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE PROJECTS AND ASSETS

For the period July to 12 September 2017

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

I was asked at the last meeting of the full Council if I had the time to do my job as Cabinet Member for Corporate Projects and Assets. I believe I do but I thought it reasonable to reflect upon my activities and the progress within my portfolio. I recalled that I had the time to initiate and develop the Major Housing Scheme proposal and to take that through Panels, the then Cabinet Scrutiny Committee, and Cabinet and answering a host of questions from colleagues and the public whilst doing so. I found time to risk serious delay to the development programme to take the revised proposal (after the removal of the River Lane area) back through the same process so that colleagues and public could properly scrutinise the revised proposal despite that risk of delay. Time was found to gain approval of the policy at the longest Council meeting I can recall in my ten years as a councillor and largely due to the time needed to answer a good number of public questions and those from colleagues. Time was found during the election campaign of 2015 when some sought to make an election issue of the Major Housing Scheme and happily more time was needed to congratulate and celebrate with re-elected and newly elected Conservative colleagues.

Time was found to attend an event to mark the start of a project on the Gaywood River (see more detail below). Time was found to attend the opening of the show home on the Marsh Lane site when 8 new homes were reserved (effectively sold subject to mortgage offers being confirmed and other details tied up) with Early Bird reservations on 7 other homes (prospective buyers pay £200 to have first refusal on their preferred plot once sale prices are published). Time was found to negotiate with the owners of the Vancouver Centre and agree a deal that has seen the outmoded and empty former Beals store demolished to make way for a new H&M store to taxpayer and wider public benefit. I could go on but I suspect none of us have time for that. One thing that I do find time for whatever the season and however busy is to be advised by and to give clear direction to the officer team who make it all happen and to colleagues who's advice and support is vital if portfolio and Council policy is to progress.

So having pondered I think I can justify my belief that I have time to do my job. I have no time for some things however. At the full Council meeting on 27th

July 2017 the Labour Group and other opposition councillors voted against CAB20 the Long Term Empty Homes Strategy. No amendments were put forward to improve the policy and there was little constructive debate. A full and constructive debate had taken place on CAB20 at Cabinet on 27th June 2017 with many questions put to the Housing Services Operations Manager (an officer who displays real passion for her work) and matters of concern were raised by Conservative Cllr. David Pope and addressed by officers and members. Cllr. Pope attended for the whole cabinet agenda and another Conservative member, Cllr. Paul Kunes for exempt item CAB27. No member of the Labour Group or any opposition councillor even bothered to attend. The issue of homelessness was considered by the Environment & Community Panel on 8th February 2017 (agenda item EC76) not at the request of opposition councillors, (as they have a right to do), but at the behest of the vice chair, Conservative Cllr. Lesley Bambridge. I have no time for the opposition's moral posturing on such important issues given their abject failure of scrutiny, debate and any attempt at meaningful improvement by amendment.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

The Hidden Heritage of the Gaywood River Project referred to above is co funded by £94K of Heritage Lottery Fund money, £40K from Norfolk Rivers Trust, £30K from the Environment Agency and £47K from BCKLWN – a truly inter authority co-operation to great public benefit. The riverbanks will be reprofiled to change it from the drainage channel it has become to a more natural watercourse of gentler flowing wider areas of water with shallow areas at the at the bankside, and more constrained faster flowing areas of water creating gravel rills and other natural habitat in other areas. Scrub will be cleared and natural habitat such as yellow flag iris and lesser and greater reedmace encouraged. Pond dipping platforms will be installed. The project will also enable the creation of a woodland parkland and wildflower meadow on the former land raise site complete with benches and picnic areas and hard paths for disabled access to such areas. The Norfolk Wildlife Trust and Norfolk Rivers Trust will oversee and deliver activities for school children such as pond dipping, litter picking and planting days to involve children and public alike.

3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

1st Aug – Cabinet
8th Aug – portfolio briefing
9th Aug – Cabinet briefing
14th Aug – Gayton PC
15th Aug – Sandy Lane review meeting
16th Aug - Hidden Heritage of the River Gaywood at Lynnsport
19th Aug – Marsh Lane show home opening

21st Aug – meeting with Corporate Projects Officer
21st Aug – Cabinet sifting
24th Aug – meeting with the Leader
29th Aug – portfolio briefing
29th Aug – meeting with Cllr Devereaux and Executive Director Geoff Hall
29th Aug – Regeneration & Development Panel
4th Sept – Planning Committee
5th Sept – telephone conversation with Eastern Daily Press journalist
6th Sept – Cabinet
13th Sept – Cabinet briefing
13th Sept – Leziate PC
14th Sept – Fields in Trust ceremony
20th Sept – One Public Estate meeting in Hunstanton
21st Sept – full Council