



Minutes of the MILTON KEYNES COUNCIL held on WEDNESDAY 19 OCTOBER 2016 at 7.34 pm

Present: Councillor Coventry (Mayor)
Councillors Bald, Betteley, Bint, Brackenbury, M Bradburn, R Bradburn, Brunning, Burke, Cannon, Clancy, Clifton, Crooks, Dransfield, Eastman, Exon, Ferrans, Ganatra, Geaney, A Geary, P Geary, Gifford, Gowans, Green, D Hopkins, V Hopkins, Jenkins, Khan, Legg, Long, Marland, D McCall, I McCall, McKenzie, McLean, Middleton, Miles, Morla, Morris, O'Neill, Patey-Smith, Petchey, Small, Wales, Walker, Wallis, Webb, P Williams and C Wilson

Aldermen Bristow and Howell and Alderwoman Saunders

Apologies: Councillors Alexander, Buckley, Hosking, McDonald, McPake, Nolan, C Williams and K Wilson and Aldermen Bartlett, Beeley and E Henderson and Alderwomen I Henderson Irons and Lloyd

Also Present: 29 members of the public

CL64 MINUTES

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 14 September 2016 be approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

CL65 ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor invited Alderman Bristow to make an announcement regarding Bletchley Park.

Alderman Bristow took the opportunity to thank the Council, on behalf of the Bletchley Park Trust, for the funding it had provided twenty five years ago which in his opinion had saved Bletchley Park from being developed as a housing site and therefore retain what was a national asset of some significance.

CL66 DEPUTATION – PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO INTU'S PLANNING APPLICATION

The Council received a deputation whose objective was to raise the Council's awareness of the implications of the public inquiry into INTU's planning application in which the Council was involved.

The Council noted the objectives of the deputation which would be referred to the next meeting of the Cabinet.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

- (a) Question from Mr C Westwood to Councillor Gifford (Cabinet member for Place)

Mr Westwood, referring to the planning application for the site adjoining Linford Lakes Nature Reserve which was most likely to be included in the Council's Site Allocations Plan when adopted, asked Councillor Gifford why had the Council been so slow in adopting a Site Allocations Plan.

Councillor Gifford indicated that the reason for the Council not having a five-year supply of housing land at this time, as required by Government planning policy, was mainly associated with the non-delivery of some large sites which had planning permission, but were being developed more slowly than anticipated.

Councillor Gifford also indicated that the final version of the Site Allocations Plan, which contained a number of smaller sites and would be considered later in the meeting, was intended to address the shortfall in housing land supply in the short to medium term. If the Plan was approved, it would be published for an eight-week public consultation from 26 October, after which the Plan, and any comments, would be submitted to an independent Planning Inspector for examination. If the Plan was successful at the examination, it would become the Council's five year land supply.

Councillor Gifford stated that the preparation of the site allocations plan had been a lengthy process. Councillor Gifford pointed out that it was intended to only include a small number of sites in the Plan and the site adjoining Linford Lakes was one of a number of sites not being taken forward in the final version of the Site Allocations Plan, as those sites were not deemed suitable.

- (b) Question from Mr H Gilbert to Councillor D McCall (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group)

Mr Gilbert, referring to a statement from Councillor Crooks in the 4 August 2016 edition of the Citizen newspaper apparently welcoming with open arms the concept from Gallaghers of developing a massive satellite settlement which, in the view of Mr Gilbert, would obliterate the rural area north of Milton Keynes around Haversham, Little Linford and Castlethorpe and also impact on Newport Pagnell, asked Councillor D McCall to confirm or deny whether this was the official line of the Liberal Democrat Group.

Councillor McCall indicated that Councillor Crooks was speaking as an individual as the Liberal Democrat Group did not take a Group Line on development control issues as the Development Control Committee was a quasi-judicial committee.

As a supplementary question Mr Gilbert asked Councillor McCall to reject what he believed to be destructive and ill-judged proposals.

Councillor McCall referred to his previous answer.

CL68 PROPOSED PUBLICATION AND SUBMISSION OF SITE ALLOCATIONS PLAN

Councillor Gifford moved the following recommendation from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 6 September 2016, which was seconded by Councillor Marland:

“That the draft Site Allocations Plan be published for eight weeks’ consultation and then submission to the Secretary of State under Regulation 22 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations.”

The Council heard from a member of the public during consideration of this item.

On being put to the vote the recommendation was declared carried unanimously.

RESOLVED –

That the draft Site Allocations Plan be published for eight weeks’ consultation and then submission to the Secretary of State under Regulation 22 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations.

CL69 COUNCILLORS’ QUESTIONS

(a) Question from Councillor P Geary to Councillor Gifford (Cabinet member for Place)

Councillor P Geary asked Councillor Gifford if she agreed that when the Council adopted a policy it was the duty of officers and its appointed consultants to implement that policy.

Councillor Gifford indicated that was the case in normal circumstances, but she was not aware of the specific matter Councillor Geary was referring to.

As a supplementary question, Councillor P Geary, asked Councillor Gifford if she shared his disappointment with the Council’s consultants who, at the Minerals Local Plan Examination in Public, when question on changes made to the draft Plan by the Council, stated that the changes had been made by politicians and they would not have recommended them. Councillor P Geary also asked if Councillor Gifford would raise the issue with the Council’s Service Director for Planning.

Councillor Gifford indicated that she would raise the issue as requested.

- (b) Question from Councillor Ganatra to Councillor Long (Cabinet member for Health, Wellbeing and Adults)

Councillor Ganatra asked Councillor Long if the Labour Administration was aware of the new Government initiatives on rough sleeping.

Councillor Long indicated that the Administration was not aware.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Ganatra indicated that the Government was to make significantly more funds available and undertook to forward details to Councillor Long.

Councillor Long thanked Councillor Ganatra for the information and invited him and other colleagues to support any funding applications made by the Council.

- (c) Question from Councillor Ferrans to Councillor Gowans (Cabinet member for Public Realm)

Councillor Ferrans, citing an overflowing litter bin in a play area in her ward and the apparent confusion amongst officers as to who was responsible for emptying the litter bins in play areas, ask Councillor Gowans how often litter bins in play areas should be emptied.

Councillor Gowans indicated that play areas are one of the areas prioritised in the street cleansing contract, but as he did not have the specific details to hand he would provide a written reply as soon as possible.

As a supplementary question Councillor Ferrans asked if the response could clarify which team was responsible for emptying the bins.

Councillor Gowans agreed to look into the matter.

- (d) Question from Councillor Bint to Councillor Gifford (Cabinet member for Place)

Councillor Bint, referring to assurances given to the Development Control Committee that the Highway Stopping-Up Orders relating to the INTU planning application would go through the appropriate decision making processes, asked Councillor Gifford why there had been no public decision making process relating to the stopping-up of the highway, but officers were supporting the decision to stop-up the highway despite there being no apparent decision by the Council to do so.

Councillor Gifford indicated that she was unsure whether she was able to comment as the Public Inquiry was currently in progress. However, as she had not been the responsible Cabinet member when the highways matters had been dealt with she was unaware of the process adopted at the time, but she agreed to investigate and respond to Councillor Bint outside the meeting.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Bint, asked Councillor Gifford if, despite there being no apparent decision by the Council, and being aware that officers were supporting the stopping-up of the highway and instructing barristers in this respect, whether she supported the position being taken by the Council to the stopping-up of the highway.

Councillor Gifford reiterated her previous answer in that she would respond to Councillor Bint outside the meeting.

- (e) Question from Councillor McLean to Councillor Gowans (Cabinet member for Public Realm)

Councillor McLean, referred to his question asked at the June meeting of the Council about street lighting. Councillor McLean indicated that information about street lighting had still not been provided to parish and town councils despite an undertaking given by Councillor Gowans. Councillor McLean stated that this information would help local communities monitor the operation of street lights and report failures which ultimately would help this Council's performance with regard to maximising the number of street lights which were working.

Councillor McLean asked Councillor Gowans whether officers had yet informed him as to the form in which the street light data was stored and when it would be supplied to parish and town councils.

Councillor Gowans stated that all street lights should be on and working. Councillor Gowans indicated that street light information broken down by parish was not currently available. He Also indicated that this issue should be part of wider discussions on how this Council worked with parish and town councils as it was important that this Council did not dictate the relationship, rather the parish and town councils should be telling this Council how best the councils could work together.

As a supplementary question, Councillor McLean, indicating that despite the Service Director (Public Realm) having been notified of a number of street lights that were not working they had still not been repaired, asked Councillor Gowans when would data be provide to parish and town councils.

Councillor Gowans indicated that data would be supplied as soon as possible, but it was important that the Council worked together with parish and town councils in the best way possible and did not impose ways of working on them.

- (f) Question from Councillor Geaney to Councillor Middleton (Cabinet member for Resources and Innovation)

Councillor Geaney, referring to the potential £2 million overspend on the Residual Waste Treatment Plant, asked Councillor Middleton what services would be cut to meet the overspend.

Councillor Middleton indicated that delays to the Residual Waste Treatment Plant coming on line were as a result of a sub-contractor going into administration. Also the Council's Waste Reserve Fund would meet a substantial amount of the extra cost. Councillor Middleton suggested that the project should be welcomed as it would save the Council up to £100 million over its 25 year life.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Geaney reiterated her original question.

Councillor Middleton indicated that it was not as simple as what services would be cut and this matter was just one element of the overall savings of £22 million the Council needed to make.

- (g) Question from Councillor Bald to Councillor Middleton (Cabinet member for Resources and Innovation)

Councillor Bald, referring to what she believed to be a premature decision taken in July 2014 to borrow £95 million, which had already cost the Council Tax payers £7 million in interest charges and would cost a further £2.8 million in the years to come, a sum which would have funded the Council's landscaping costs for three years, asked Councillor Middleton if he regretted both allowing the decision to be taken and the burden it was placing on the Council Tax Payer.

Councillor Middleton indicated that with hindsight a different decision might have been taken and the additional cost to the Council Tax payer were regrettable. However, it appeared the correct decision at the time based on the best information available from the Council's Financial Advisers and the forecasts by the Governor of the Bank of England. Councillor Middleton stated that there had been a number of benefits from the borrowing undertaking, which included the development of the Residual Waste Treatment Plant and the savings of up to £100 million the Plant would deliver.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Bald, suggesting that Councillor Middleton should have consulted with people with business and financial knowledge before making such a big decision, sought his assurance that in future he would consult with such experts. Councillor Bald also reiterated the support of the Conservative Group for the Waste Treatment Plant.

Councillor Middleton indicated that he was happy to take soundings from across the Chamber, but the Council had used expert consultants used by many local authorities before taking the decision to borrow the money and also took into account the views expressed by the Governor of the Bank of England on future interest rates.

- (h) Question from Councillor A Geary to Councillor Gowans (Cabinet member for Public Realm)

Councillor A Geary, referring to a road safety scheme undertaken and funded by Castlethorpe Parish Council, in conjunction with this Council, asked Councillor Gowans if he thought the additional £720 licence fee charged by this Council, without any notice, for digging holes in the verge was justified and whether he thought the way this was done without notice was the way he would want the Council to be seen as acting.

Councillor Gowans indicated that without knowing the full details, the Council's actions did seem surprising. Councillor Gowans also indicated that he agreed with the sentiment of the question. Councillor Gowans invited Councillor Geary to send him more details so that he could look into the matter.

As a supplementary question Councillor A Geary, indicating that he was happy to provide further details and pointing out that he was not asking for a refund for the Parish Council, reiterated his original question as to whether Councillor Gowans believed that the £720 licence fee charged by this Council, without any notice, was justified and whether he thought the Council had acted in an appropriate way.

Councillor Gowans responded that as he did not know the details he would look into the matter.

- (i) Question from Councillor Walker to Councillor Gifford (Cabinet member for Place)

Councillor Walker, referring to the initiative by BT to offer telephone boxes, including the old red telephone boxes, to local communities for £1 rather than remove them, asked Councillor Gifford if she was willing to work with local communities to find innovative uses for the boxes and provide funding for the purchase.

Councillor Gifford indicated that she was aware of the initiative and agreed look into the possibility of supporting communities in purchasing the boxes and putting them to community use.

- (j) Question from Councillor Green to Councillor Gowans (Cabinet member for Public Realm)

Councillor Green, referring to her previous question asked at the Council meeting on 13 January 2016, asked Councillor Gowans when the highway signs in the rural areas would be cleaned as many were still covered in algae and were unreadable.

Councillor Gowans, referring to the limited budget available, indicated that signs would be considered for cleaning if there was a safety issue. Councillor Gowans invited Councillor Green to notify him of any signs which she considered by their state were likely to cause a risk to road safety.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Green, asked Councillor Gowans whether he expected residents to clean the signs themselves and, if the Council Tax did not cover the cleaning of signs, what did it cover.

Councillor Gowans indicated that the Council Tax contributed to 240 different services provided by the Council.

CL71 CENTRAL MILTON KEYNES MARKET

The Council noted that Councillor Walker had withdrawn his motion in respect of Milton Keynes Market.

CL72 PLAN:MK

Councillor A Geary moved the following motion which was seconded by Councillor Green:

“That the Council:

- (a) recognises the huge level of uncertainty placed upon the rural areas and areas designated as Open Countryside in the Local Plan caused by the lack of a 5 year land supply in Milton Keynes;
- (b) welcomes the decision of Cabinet to drive through the Site Allocations Process in order to ensure a short and medium term solution;
- (c) recognises that the only way to provide the absolute clarity and certainty required for the communities of Milton Keynes is to ensure the implementation of Plan:MK at the earliest opportunity;
- (d) expresses concern that the timeline for Plan:MK has slipped and is now unlikely to be delivered before early to mid-2018, a slippage of over 12 months, leaving the Council very exposed and open to speculative planning applications which could cut across, or be inconsistent with, the Vision MK 2050.
- (e) recognises the considerable strain being placed on the Council’s planning team which is simultaneously managing Plan:MK, including the development of planning policies to underpin both Plan:MK and MK 2050, on top of routine planning work;
- (f) calls upon the Cabinet to allocate one off additional resources in 2016/17 to the planning team to speed up the process of the implementation of Plan:MK in order to provide certainty and clarity within the planning process and to ensure that the future ambitions for growth and development of Milton Keynes are realised in an orderly and structured way, in line with Plan:MK; and

- (g) requests that the Budget Scrutiny Committee takes into account the spirit and intentions of this motion and includes additional resourcing proposals for Plan:MK in its report to Cabinet in order to influence the formulation of the 2017/18 Council Budget.”

The Council heard from a member of the public during consideration of the motion.

On being put to the vote the motion was declared lost with 19 councillors voting in favour, 29 councillors voting against and 1 councillors abstaining from voting.

CL73

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Councillor P Geary moved the following motion which was seconded by Councillor Jenkins, on which a recorded vote was requested:

“That this Council:

- (a) fully understands that to achieve the best for the residents of Milton Keynes that working in partnership with other people and organisations is fundamental to deliver the services that are required both now and in the future;
- (b) acknowledges that this is in harmony with the Council's position of being a Co-operative Council;
- (c) understands that for this Council to be able to work effectively with other organisations the reputation of Milton Keynes Council is paramount and that the Council must:
 - (i) be a good partner;
 - (ii) honour agreements; and
 - (iii) at all times treat partner organisations as equals and aim to work with them;
- (d) acknowledges that it takes many years to build up a good reputation and only a few seconds to destroy it;
- (e) understands that recently there have been a number of incidents where the Council's reputation has been damaged and that this may affect the Council's ability to work with organisations in the future;
- (f) affirms that as councillors, in future, we expect that the Council will work collaboratively and constructively with partners and will at all times look to build trust and should only give ultimatums when negotiations are completely failing;
- (g) further acknowledges that parish councils and other organisations do not have limitless resources and that:
 - (i) they too have their own priorities to follow; and

- (ii) in the past a fragmented approach has been taken to the transfer of services to parishes and this approach is incompatible with good service planning and puts parish and town councils in an impossible position, unable to effectively plan and manage their budgets and precepts; and
- (h) asks Cabinet to work with the Corporate Leadership Team to ensure that:
 - (i) the negotiating approach taken by some in this Council of brinkmanship and threats of cuts stops now;
 - (ii) a whole Council approach is taken to the transfer of services so communities can see the whole picture and plan effectively; and
 - (iii) complaints by partner organisations will be fully investigated and approaches changed if necessary.”

The voting was as follows:

FOR: Councillors Bald, Bint, Clancy, Dransfield, Ganatra, Geaney, A Geary, P Geary, Green, D Hopkins, V Hopkins, Jenkins, McLean, Morla, Morris, Patey-Smith, Small and Walker (18)

AGAINST: Councillors Betteley, Burke, Clifton, Coventry, Gifford, Gowans, Khan, Legg, Long, Marland, McKenzie, Middleton, Miles, O’Neill, Petchey, Wales, Wallis, Webb, P Williams and C Wilson (20)

ABSTENTIONS: Councillors Brackenbury, M Bradburn, R Bradburn, Cannon, Crooks, Eastman, Exon, Ferrans, D McCall and I McCall (10)

The motion was declared lost.

CL74

MENTAL HEALTH

Councillor Crooks moved the following motion which was seconded by Councillor I McCall:

“That this Council:

- (a) notes that mental health challenges affect one in four people every year;
- (b) believes that it is now essential to achieve parity of treatment across physical and mental health;
- (c) regrets continuing Government cutbacks in the provision of resources and professional staffing in this area;
- (d) calls for this to be remedied in the anticipated re-setting of the public finances in the Autumn Statement;

- (e) asks that the Council give full recognition to mental health in its own forthcoming budget setting; and
- (f) urges the Council to exercise strong leadership in promoting public understanding of mental health and reducing stigma and discrimination.”

On being put to the vote the motion was declared carried unanimously.

RESOLVED -

That this Council:

- (a) notes that mental health challenges affect one in four people every year;
- (b) believes that it is now essential to achieve parity of treatment across physical and mental health;
- (c) regrets continuing Government cutbacks in the provision of resources and professional staffing in this area;
- (d) calls for this to be remedied in the anticipated re-setting of the public finances in the Autumn Statement;
- (e) asks that the Council give full recognition to mental health in its own forthcoming budget setting; and
- (f) urges the Council to exercise strong leadership in promoting public understanding of mental health and reducing stigma and discrimination.

CL75 LEADERS EXECUTIVE SCHEME OF DELEGATION

The Council received the Leader’s Executive Scheme of Delegation, noting the changes to Cabinet portfolios.

CL76 MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE

The Council, noting the resignation of Councillor Brunning from the Children and Young People Committee, considered confirming Councillor Buckley as her replacement.

RESOLVED –

That the appointment of Councillor Buckley to replace Councillor Brunning as a member of the Children and Young People Committee be confirmed.

CL77 WARD BASED BUDGETS

The Council noted that for the period 1 April 2016 to 30 September 2016, 14 Ward Based Budget applications totalling £8,610 had been approved.

THE MAYOR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 10:07 PM