

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Tuesday 20 July 2016

Time: 7.00 pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: The Mayor (2016/2017), J Lloyd CC and Councillors D Bainbridge, S Batson MBE DL CC, P Bibby, L Briscoe, R Broom, J Brown, H Burrell, L Chester, E Connolly, D Cullen, M Downing, J Fraser, J Gardner, M Gardner, E Harrington, R Henry CC, J Hollywell, C Latif, G Lawrence, Mrs J Lloyd, A McGuinness, M McKay, J Mead, S Mead, A Mitchell, M Notley, R Parker CC, R Raynor, C Saunders, S Speller, P Stuart, S Taylor OBE CC, J Thomas and A Webb.

Start/End Time: Start Time: 7.00 p.m.
End Time: 10.10 p.m.

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Martin-Haugh, M Hurst, G Snell, and the Youth Mayor Emma Chapman.

Councillors M Downing and M Notley declared personal interests in Item 18 – Proposed Extension to Symonds Green Community Centre.

The Mayor informed the meeting that item 16 – Treasury Management Strategy had been accepted as an urgent item which had been circulated on the supplementary agenda.

2. **MINUTES – ANNUAL COUNCIL - TUESDAY 24 MAY 2016**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Annual Council meeting of 24 May 2016 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

3. **MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The Mayor welcomed Tom Pike, Strategic Director (Environment) to his first Council meeting.

The Mayor informed Council that since the last meeting, the Mayoral Team had undertaken 50 civic events in the town which included attending the Stevenage-Ingelheim-Autun reunion and unveiling a memorial plaque in honour of Peter Mason, the former Chair of the Market Traders Association.

The Mayor informed Council that he and the Mayoress had attended Stevenage Day event where he was honoured to light the Queen's Beacon, an event which officially opened the town's 70th birthday celebrations. Finally the Mayor thanked officers from both SBC and Hertfordshire County Council for their hard work in ensuring the success of the Pearl Azumi Cycle Race.

The Mayor then invited Members and the public in the chamber to stand for a minute's silence in remembrance of Peter Mason and the 84 people who were tragically killed in a terrorist attack in Nice, France earlier in July.

4. MAIN DEBATE – 'OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS – OUR FUTURE' – HOW EFFECTIVE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING WILL DRIVE IMPROVEMENTS ACROSS THE TOWN

Council received a presentation from Councillor Speller, Portfolio Holder Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council, and representatives from various Community Groups in Pin Green.

Councillor Speller informed Council of the importance of effective neighbourhood planning in shaping communities by sharing his own experience within the Pin Green area, working alongside ward Councillors, Resident Association, Community and Voluntary Groups.

Council was advised that neighbourhood planning was about communities getting involved in day to day decisions within their neighbourhood, having a purpose and ensuring the efficient use of its local community assets. The Council also heard from a number of representatives from various Community Groups in Pin Green who shared their experiences of this initiative.

Councillor Speller moved a Motion and advised the meeting that for neighbourhood community planning to be effective a number of essentials would need to be taken into consideration such as acknowledging that the people came first; that neighbourhood planning process took time; that it was essential that all parties learnt to work together as a team, and resolved to take one step at a time and keep the whole process simple.

Councillor Brown in seconding the motion acknowledged neighbourhood planning as the way forward, however he advised that it was important not to ignore the needs of local people considering the

disparities that exist across neighbourhoods in Stevenage such as the quality of life, demographics, type of housing, incomes, crime and disorder statistics and life expectancy.

A full debate ensued with both Councillors and members of the public taking part. Points raised included:

- Neighbourhood Planning, alongside provision of homes and the regeneration of the town centre was one of the key themes in Future Town Future Council programme
- The programme ensured that resources and money were directed to schemes that residents required
- Neighbourhood Planning reinforced the Council's motto 'changing communities together'
- The experience and the success of Neighbourhood Planning in Pin Green was to be built on, however it was important that neighbourhoods with a different political persuasion receive similar support from the political leadership
- A recognition that not all neighbourhoods had similar infrastructures such as the community and voluntary groups in Pin Green
- Neighbourhood planning was a positive initiative, particularly for new councillors to get to know their area, and being able to work together positively with residents.

After a full debate, it was **RESOLVED** that:

"This Council strongly believes in the positive contribution that neighbourhood planning and working can make towards improving the local environment and the quality of life of those living in the Borough and vows to work proactively with local organisations from the public, private & voluntary sectors to seek to maximise the impact that effective neighbourhood

5. **PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS**

None

6. **QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL**

None

7. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None

8. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE

With respect to the new initiatives and the various programmes around the Future Town Future Council (FTFC) and the Local Plan, the Leader of Opposition enquired if the projects would represent value for money to the residents and sought assurances on whether all of the projects were deliverable.

In response, the Leader informed Members that the Council had sound plans and it was a matter for both Members and Officers to ensure that the plans were delivered. However it could be affected by external factors including the implications of the outcome of the European Union Referendum

Council then received updates on the following:

- Pearl Izumi Cycle Event
- Stevenage Day
- 1st Park Run Fairlands Valley Park Run
- The Healthy Hub within the Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre
- Acquisition of new build homes at Meredith Road
- Insulation Contract for homes
- Emergency / Temporary Accommodation
- Public Space Protection Order
- Herts FSB Stevenage Small Business Award
- Green Flag Award Scheme

9. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Mayor referred the meeting to the Motion detailed in the agenda.

In moving the Motion Councillor Batson shared her experience growing up as a child in the 1960's when she experienced name calling and incidents of hate crimes, however she welcomed the improvements over the years especially in Stevenage which today was a richly diverse multicultural community, with everyone being able to practice their religions without suffering abuse.

Councillor Batson informed the meeting that in light of the reported increase in incidents of racist and xenophobic abuse nationally both in the build up to the Referendum on Europe and the subsequent decision to leave the European Union, it was important that adequate information and advice was accessible on the Council website so as to reassure its residents that the Council valued everyone regardless of their racial background, religion, colour or nationality.

Councillor Fraser welcomed the opportunity to second the Motion and added that although he was a leave campaigner, his decision was not based on racism or xenophobia.

A full debate ensued with both Councillors and members of the public taking part. Points raised included

- National events spark incidents of hate crimes
- Immigration debates and concerns should not be seen as racist
- Council would need to promote and encourage the reporting of hate crime
- Some leave campaigners did give ammunition to particular myths and lies around immigration.
- United Kingdom had a proud tradition of welcoming immigrants, into the country and over the years sectors such as the NHS and public transport sector had been dependent on their hard work
- A press release by the Council reiterating its commitment to addressing hate crimes would be issued soon

After the debate, it was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that -

We are proud to live in a diverse and tolerant society. Racism, xenophobia and hate crimes have no place in Stevenage or in our country. We, Stevenage Borough Council condemn racism, xenophobia and hate crimes unequivocally. We will not allow hate to become acceptable.

Stevenage Borough Council will work with our partners to ensure local programmes have the support needed to fight and prevent racism and xenophobia. We will continue to promote and encourage the reporting of hate crime.

We reassure all people living and working in or visiting Stevenage that they are valued members of our community.

10. **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS/ PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

The Mayor informed the meeting that three questions had been received, all of which were set out in the order of business.

- A. In response to a question from Councillor Snell, the Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration, Councillor J Gardner

acknowledged that most of the vacant units were in private ownership, and advised that as Council had acquired parts of the Town Centre it would actively manage to attract new tenants to retail units which would lead to a reduction of void shops and offices.

On the issue of town centre regeneration, the Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration reassured the meeting that the regeneration plans had generated interest from both investors and developers. Members were invited to attend a briefing session on July 25 2016.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor R Parker (on behalf of Councillor G Snell), the Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration advised that Council owned units were being marketed on a competitive basis and in the case of privately owned units, the Council continued to actively engage and support leasing agents.

- B. In response to the question from Councillor A McGuinness, the Portfolio Holder Environment & Regeneration Councillor J Gardner advised that the Council, as a matter of principle, would not object to a proposal from a neighbouring authority but make submissions. On the issue of East Herts Local Plan, the meeting was advised that SBC would be submitting its comments when the plan comes forward.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor McGuinness on the benefits to Stevenage residents of expanding urban extensions into green belt area, the Portfolio Holder Environment & Regeneration advised that the benefits would include building new schools and infrastructure which would increase retail activity in the town centre, a benefit to the local economy.

- C. In respect to the question from Councillor Parker, the Leader of the Council informed the meeting that a democratic decision to leave the European Union had been taken and although there was a lot of uncertainty at the moment, the Council would continue with its programmes. Councillor Taylor acknowledged that EU regulation did impact on many council services, however until the process for withdrawal was established in Article 50, it was difficult to know the impact of the Brexit decision.

In a supplementary question from Councillor Parker, Councillor Taylor informed the meeting that Members would be updated of any further implications following the recent downgrade with the country's sovereign rating. She added that she was proposing to establish a working party with representatives from each political

group on the Council to consider the implications for the Council of leaving the European Union.

In response to a question from the public gallery on the impact of Brexit on Council's town twinning programme, the Leader stated that she and the Mayor had written to the towns of Autun and Ingelheim reaffirming SBC's continuing support for their close links.

The Leader also advised that Council would be seeking continued financial support from central government as some ongoing programmes established by European funding would be affected.

11. ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2015/2016

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the work undertaken by the Overview Scrutiny Committee and the Select Committees during 2015 / 2016 is noted.

12. STEVENAGE BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN: SUBMISSION

Council were advised that the item was considered by Executive on 20 July 2016 and the recommendation to Council was set out in the Supplementary Agenda.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Stevenage Borough Local Plan (attached as Appendix 2) and associated Policies Map (attached as Appendix 3), the Regulation 22 Consultation Statement (attached as Appendix 1), and the Sustainability Appraisal (attached as Appendix 4) for submission to the Secretary of State under Regulation 22 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 is approved.

(NOTE: Councillors A McGuinness and R Parker CC requested that their vote opposing the resolution above be recorded.)

13. A TEN YEAR BUSINESS PLAN FOR THE GARAGES ESTATE

Council were advised that the item was considered by Executive on 20 July 2016 and the recommendation to Council was set out in the Supplementary Agenda. There had been no further comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the funding of £9.24m over 10 years from £1.62m of capital reserves, capital receipts from the disposal of selected garage blocks (estimated at £860k, ring fenced to the investment ongoing) with the balance secured from prudential borrowing (of £6.76m) is approved.

14. APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICERS

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the following officers are appointed as Deputy Electoral Registration Officers

- Constitutional Services Manager
- Electoral Services Manager.

15. AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES – 29 MARCH AND 8 JUNE 2016

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Audit Committee held on 29 March 2016 and the draft Minutes of 8 June 2016 are noted.

16. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY – URGENCY DECISION ON SOVEREIGN RATING DOWNGRADE

This report circulated on supplementary agenda was accepted as an urgent item by the Mayor. The Portfolio Holder for Resources informed Council that due to the uncertainty with regards to the UK's sovereign rating, an additional recommendation had been proposed.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED**

1. That the exclusion of the UK from the Council's minimum sovereign rating criteria of AA- for approved countries for investment is approved.
2. That the use of UK financial institutions based on their individual UK entity ratings and not the UK sovereign rating is approved.
3. That any changes to the UK's rating and resulting investments are reported back to the Audit Committee and Executive at the earliest opportunity.

17. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1-7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.

2. That having considered the reasons for the following item being in Part II it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in

disclosure.

18. PROPOSED EXTENSION TO SYMONDS GREEN COMMUNITY CENTRE

As noted in Item 1 above, Councillors M Downing and M Notley had declared personal interests in this item and left the meeting.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that the recommendations in the report are approved.

Mayor