

## **Agenda Item: 4**

# **CABINET**

**Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet of South Norfolk Council, held on Tuesday 1 June 2021 at 9.00am.**

**Committee Members Present:** Councillors: J Fuller (Chairman), R Elliott, K Mason Billig, A Thomas and J Worley

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillors: M Edney and L Neal

**Other Members in Attendance:** Councillors: D Bills, F Ellis and T Laidlaw

**Officers in Attendance:** The Director of Place (P Courtier), the Director of People and Communities (J Sutterby), the Director of Resources (D Lorimer), the Chief of Staff (E Hodds), the Assistant Director Economic Growth (T Armstrong), the Assistant Director Planning (H Mellors), the Assistant Director Regulatory (N Howard), the Place Shaping Manager (P Harris), the Strategy and Programme Manager (S Carey), the Principal Infrastructure and Planning Policy Officer (S Marjoram) and the Housing Standards Senior Manager (K Philcox).

**Also in Attendance:** Mr D Gooderham of Bawburgh Parish Council (for part of the meeting)

## **2900 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

With regard to item 10, the Empty Homes Policy, Cllr A Thomas declared an “other” interest as having been personally impacted by the recent flooding in the District and having to vacate her home.

## **2901 MINUTES**

Cllr R Elliott explained that he had attended the Cabinet meeting held on 19 April 2021 (as a non-Cabinet member), however this had been omitted in the draft minutes.

Subject to this correction, the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 19 April 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

## **2902 SOUTH NORFOLK VILLAGE CLUSTERS HOUSING ALLOCATIONS PLAN – REGULATION 19 CONSULTATION**

Members considered the report of the Place Shaping Manager, which sought Cabinet's agreement for the Regulation 18 version of the South Norfolk Village Clusters Housing Allocations Plan (VCHAP), to go out for consultation for a period of 8 weeks.

The Chairman introduced the item, reminding members of the background to the report and advising that the aim of the VCHAP was to deliver sustainable growth within the villages of South Norfolk. The Plan sought to fulfil the requirement in the Greater Norwich Local Plan, to allocate 12,000 new homes across the 48 village clusters. He hoped that by bringing new homes in to the villages it would help to build vitality and sustainability to the settlements, providing local jobs and protecting services. He hoped that with development sizes of 12 -24, a housing mix could be determined for each site, to suit all needs.

The Place Shaping Manager outlined his report explaining that sites had been assessed in accordance with the agreed criteria, taking in to account a range of different factors. Members noted that the consultation document included details of all sites that were "preferred", "shortlisted" or "rejected". Consideration had also been given to the Sustainability Appraisal that had been prepared independently alongside the Plan, and members were referred to paragraph 3.5 of the report which detailed the reasons for the "balanced" strategic approach in distributing development across the village clusters. Members also noted that there were four settlements, Burston, Roydon, Scole and Dickleburgh, where sites were being allocated through their own Neighbourhood Plans.

Cllr F Ellis, the Chairman of the Regulation and Planning Policy Committee, expressed her support for the document, explaining that over 450 sites had been assessed, resulting in 66 "preferred sites" and 24 shortlisted "reasonable alternatives". She thanked officers and members of the Policy Committee for their work and positive contributions in assessing the sites and developing the Plan, and she hoped that the proposed consultation would attract new sites coming forward.

Cabinet agreed that village locations were now becoming a more attractive place to live and recognised the importance of growth and development to ensure their sustainability. Members welcomed the opportunity for the smaller settlements to grow proportionally and with care, and thanked officers for the level of care and detail that had gone in to the assessment of sites.

## **RESOLVED**

To:

1. Publish the draft South Norfolk Village Clusters Housing Allocations Plan (Appendix A) and the accompanying supporting documents for eight weeks consultation under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012; and,
2. Delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Planning, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for External Affairs and Policy, to make any minor factual amendments to the consultation document (Appendix A), prior to consultation being begun.

### **The Reason for the Decision**

To seek views on the suggested content of the proposed objectives and policies, in accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement, and to invite further sites for consideration.

### **Other Options Considered**

To postpone the consultation

## **2903 UPDATE TO LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME**

Members considered the report of the Place Shaping Manager, which highlighted amendments to the current Local Development Scheme (LDS) to reflect changes to the timetable for the South Norfolk Village Clusters Housing Allocations Document.

The Place Shaping Manager outlined his report explaining that it was a statutory obligation to ensure that the LDS was kept up to date, and he referred members to the proposed new timetable at Appendix 1 of the draft LDS.

## **RESOLVED**

To:

**RECOMMEND THAT COUNCIL** approves the proposed amendments to the current Local Development Scheme

## **The Reason for the Decision**

To ensure that the latest timetable for the production of the South Norfolk Village Cluster Housing Allocation Document is properly reflected in the LDS

## **Other Options Considered**

None

### **2904 COVID-19 RECOVER PLAN 2021 - 2022**

Members considered the report of the Director of People and Communities, which provided an update on the proposed actions contained within the new Covid-19 Recovery Plan 2021-2022 and detailed the source and amount of funding required to support an effective recovery for communities, businesses and the Council.

The Director of People and Communities introduced the report, and referred members to Appendix A, which detailed the various funding streams made available to the Council, and how the Council sought to allocate them.

The Assistant Director Economic Growth advised that a suite of funding streams had been made available to support the economy, through both central government and more localised sources. Officers were developing a new Economic Growth Strategy and were looking at ways the Council could revise its current approach to business support, identifying any gaps and developing programmes to fill these gaps where possible.

Members' attention was drawn to the need to increase resources in some areas and recognised the increase in demand in areas such as Housing and Benefits. Some members expressed concern that the peak of pressure on such services was yet to come.

Members expressed their appreciation for the government funding received and expressed their thanks to the volunteer groups who had assisted in so many ways and helped to create a real sense of community throughout settlements.

## **RESOLVED**

To Approve:

1. The proposed actions as set out in the attached Covid-19 Recovery Plan 2021-2022.

2. The indicative sums set out in Appendix A and the table at 4.4 to provide further support to the Covid-19 recovery, and to delegate to the relevant Director, in consultation with the appropriate Portfolio Holder in order to utilise the funding flexibly and to ensure the greatest impact.

### **The Reason for the Decision**

To facilitate the delivery of an effective recovery from the impacts of the pandemic.

### **Other Options Considered**

None

## **2905 REOPENING THE HIGH STREETS SAFELY AND WELCOME BACK FUNDS**

Members considered the report of the Programme Manager for Economic Growth, which sought approval to accept a Grant Funding Agreement which would enable the Council, working with Broadland District Council, to draw funding allocated from the Reopening the High Streets Safely Fund (£246,044) and Welcome Back Fund (£242,044).

The Assistant Director Economic Growth presented the report, explaining that the funding available was to be split between South Norfolk and Broadland Councils, to ensure the safe and successful re-opening of the high streets, as the Council continued to respond to the economic impacts of Covid-19. Members noted that these funds could be spent on temporary measures only and that acceptance of the grant would enable the Council to recover its costs already incurred from June 2020 onwards through the “Confidence” and “Pleased to see you” campaigns.

The Chairman expressed his support for the recommendations, stressing that any support for smaller shops on the high street, and instilling confidence in shoppers, should be welcomed.

### **RESOLVED**

To:

1. Accept grant funding from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for the Reopening the High Street Safely Funding and Welcome Back Fund, for the amounts of £246,044 and £242,044 respectively.

2. Accept the funding agreement terms and conditions, as set out by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for the Reopening High Street Safely Fund.
3. Delegate to the Director of Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Stronger Economy and Finance and Resources, to incur expenditure which support activities consistent with the scope of the funding.

### **The Reason for the Decision**

To support the delivery of a safe and successful high street reopening, as the Council continues to respond to the economic impacts of Covid-19.

### **Other Options Considered**

None.

## **2906 STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE, RISK AND FINANCE REPORT FOR QUARTER 4 2020/21**

Members considered the report of the Senior Finance Business Partner and the Strategy and Programmes Manager, which provided an overview of the performance of the Council for Quarter 4, against the key outcomes set out in the Delivery Plan for 2020/21.

The Director of Resources outlined the Council's financial position for quarter 4, referring to the Council's response to the pandemic and the financial support given to individuals and businesses, and also that received by the Council.

Members' attention was drawn to the table at paragraph 3.3 and the Director of Resources explained that the £1.072m carry forward would be placed in an earmarked reserve to fund the Covid Recovery Plan for 21/22. She also outlined the impact of Covid on the Council's substantive services.

Members noted that proposals also included a new Leisure Services Recovery Reserve and were reminded that the Council agreed back in February to financially support the leisure service up to £2.5m over 3 years, to assist in its recovery. Members also noted that £0.5m had been set aside in a proposed earmarked Waste Reserve, to support the service and potential changes to waste as detailed in the recent Government White Paper.

Turning to the Capital Programme, the Director of Resources was pleased to report that despite Covid, 80% of the budget had been spent for 202/21, and she referred Cabinet to the slippage requests at paragraph 3.32.

Cllr R Elliott explained that the leisure service aimed to increase membership levels back to what they were prior to Covid, and although early days, he was optimistic that levels would increase as more people were vaccinated, and

Winter approached. He wanted to personally thank the leisure team for all their hard work, and for remaining so flexible over the last 12 months, working not only in other areas of the Council, but also for the NHS. The Director for People and Communities added that he was immensely proud of the leisure staff and their adaptability.

Cllr J Worley suggested that the figures in the report demonstrated the Council's past and future commitment to residents. The Council had remained cautious very early on in the pandemic, but at the same time remained optimistic, investing in the District, local residents and businesses. He felt it an outstanding achievement that despite one of the worst years on record, the Council had still achieved a positive outturn.

Cllr T Laidlaw acknowledged that he had previously been critical of the Council's rate of spend on the capital programme, however he was very pleased with the current position, which he felt was an indication of the hard work of officers. He also drew attention to a minor error in the papers at paragraph 3.24, under "Transfers to General Reserves" and this was acknowledged by officers. The Director of Resources confirmed that this error did not impact on any other figures in the report.

The Strategy and Programmes Manager then provided members with an overview of the Council's performance against performance measures, explaining that 14 measures had met year end success criteria (demonstrated by a green indicator), 5 had missed the target by a narrow margin (amber), and 4 had missed the end of year target by a significant margin (red). Members noted examples in each of these areas.

Referring to risks, the Strategy and Programmes Manager explained that the register continued to be monitored by Management Team, and that there had been no changes to the strategic risks during the last quarter.

During discussion, Cllr A Thomas commented on the huge pressure that staff were under, in particular the Benefits, Housing and Council Tax teams, and she stressed the importance and value of such services.

The Chairman referred to the Council's overall performance as extraordinary, adding that despite the ongoing impacts of Covid, the Council had remained stable, helping those in need, whilst continuing with "business as usual" in most areas. He stressed that he was immensely proud of what the Council, members, and staff had achieved.

## **RESOLVED**

To:

1. Note the revenue and capital position (variance details in Appendix 1)
2. Note the current position with respect to risks and agree the actions to support risk mitigation (detailed in Appendix 2).
3. Note the 2020/21 performance for Quarter 4 (detail in Appendix 3).
4. **RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL** the slippage requests for both Revenue (as detailed in paragraph 3.30) & Capital (as detailed in paragraph 3.32).
5. **RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL** the recreation of three new earmarked reserves;
  - a) Covid Recovery Reserve (see 3.4)
  - b) Leisure Services Recovery Reserve (see 3.11)
  - c) Waste Reserve (see 3.15).

### **The Reason for the Decision**

To ensure that processes are in place to improve performance and that budgets are managed effectively

### **Other Options Considered**

None

## **2907 EMPTY HOMES POLICY**

Members considered the report of the Policy and Partnerships Officer, which presented the draft Housing Standards Empty Homes Policy, for approval.

The Director of People and Communities presented the report to members, explaining that the Policy sought to incentivise property owners to bring empty homes back in to use, and to put the mechanisms in place to allow the Council to adopt a more regulatory route if required.

Members noted the Council's strong performance in minimising the number of empty homes, and also how complex and labour-intensive cases could be. The Portfolio holder, Cllr A Thomas explained that the Compulsory Purchase Order route would only be sought following Cabinet approval, and she stressed the need to work positively with homeowners before any regulatory route was sought.

Members welcomed the proposals and it was

**RESOLVED:**

To:

1. Approve adoption of the Empty Homes Policy.
2. Agree proposal that Cabinet provides approval to seek to undertake Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) and Compulsory Purchase Order (CPOs) processes on a case by case basis.
3. Approve creation within the 2021/22 financial year of:
  - A reserve fund of £500,000 in order to undertake a voluntary offer of purchase as part of a Compulsory Purchase Order procedure
  - A Housing Standards formal enforcement budget of £50,000 per annum
  - A Housing Standards financial assistance offer budget of £30,000 per annum.

**The Reason for the Decision**

To support a more robust approach to empty homes and help bring them back in to use.

**Other Options Considered**

As outlined in the report.

**2908 PROPOSALS FOR ADDITIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT**

Members considered the report of the Assistant Director Regulatory, which presented proposals for the delivery of additional environmental enforcement capacity.

The Assistant Director Regulatory presented his report and drew attention to the options outlined in paragraph 4. He explained that the proposals would assist in protecting the environment, provide community safety for residents, whilst delivering on the actions in the Environmental Strategy.

Members expressed support for Option 2, an Environmental Enforcement Officer, plus a Case Support Officer, and also welcomed the proposal to increase the hours of the current Water Management Officer position, to full time.

Cllr K Mason Billig stressed the importance of ensuring that the Council took a proactive approach and educated residents with regard to riparian rights and responsibilities and Cabinet agreed that it was important to learn the lessons from the recent flooding in the district.

**RESOLVED:**

To agree to

- (a) establish a permanent post of Environmental Enforcement Officer and to pilot Case Support Officer capacity as a short-term contract, described in Option 2.
- (b) establish an additional 17 hours per week to make the Water Management Officer post full-time as described in Option 3 at a cost of £11k per annum.

**The Reason for the Decision**

To ensure an increase in enforcement capacity and greater case support

**Other Options Considered**

As outlined in the report.

**2909 HOUSING IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION DISCRETIONARY ACTIVITY POLICY**

Members considered the report of the Policy and Partnerships Officer, which presented Cabinet with the draft Housing Standards Houses in Multiple Occupation Discretionary Activity Policy, for approval.

The Director of People and Communities presented the report, explaining that the proposals sought to place more emphasis on the regulatory role, providing a more robust approach. Members noted that an additional 43 houses of multiple occupation had come to light since the start of the pandemic, and it was felt that this was due to the more proactive approach adopted over the last 12 months.

The Chairman welcomed the proposals and agreed that this was about more than enforcement, but also protecting the most vulnerable and was part of the wider holistic approach to the Covid outbreak management strategy

## **RESOLVED**

To:

1. Approve adoption of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Discretionary Activity Policy.
2. Approve amending an existing vacancy from Band E to Band F enabling recruitment to 1fte Community Enforcement Officer post.

### **The Reason for the Decision**

To demonstrate a more holistic and muscular approach to tackling housing issues, which feeds into the Council's wider strategic ambitions to ensure the quality of life for residents and support the vision of the Environmental Strategy.

### **Other Options Considered**

Not to undertake discretionary action regarding Houses of Multiple Occupation

## **2910 REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S TEMPORARY STOPPING PLACE FOR GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS**

Members considered the report of the Assistant Director Individuals and Families, which outlined proposals to restart the Gypsy and Traveller Temporary Stopping Place (TSP) at Bawburgh, as part of the Council's overall policy, to support all members of the community, and ensure a robust but proportionate response to unauthorised encampments when needed.

The Director of People and Communities introduced the report, explaining that a TSP was a valuable and effective tool to support unauthorised encampments. However, the site at Bawburgh had unfortunately not been used in recent times for its intended purpose, and officers were therefore seeking to redesign the site, improve its security and provide more robust management.

The Chairman agreed that the site required fresh investment and stressed that robust management was necessary and needed regular review.

Local member for Bawburgh, Cllr D Bills, outlined the problems associated with the site, advising that Gypsies and Travellers had on numerous occasions set up camp on the Bawburgh Village Hall car park, leaving the

Parish Council to pay for the clear up after they had left. He stressed the importance of ensuring that any proposals were realistic and viable, in order to provide assurances to residents, that the site was a workable option.

Mr D Gooderham of Bawburgh Parish Council thanked officers for producing a factual and honest report regarding the problems associated with the site. He stressed that one of the biggest problems was the remote location of the site, and he was concerned that the budget might not be sufficient to provide the necessary security and management that was required. However, he explained that residents would be grateful of any improvements that could be made.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr A Thomas agreed that more robust management and security was required and accepted that this might come with hidden costs. She stressed the need to work more closely with Bawburgh Parish Council, so that it could be more prepared for any potential issues in the village and possible encampments on the village hall car park.

The Chairman agreed that there was a responsibility to work with colleagues in the Police and to provide a commitment to support the Parish Council where possible.

Cllr K Mason Billig expressed her disappointment that other district councils had not wanted to contribute to the costs of the site, or provide a TSP in their own districts, and she stressed the need to ensure that other authorities did not take advantage of the Bawburgh site.

#### **RESOLVED:**

To delegate the redesign and management plan of the Temporary Stopping Place up to £125,000, to the Assistant Director of Individuals and Families, in consultation with the portfolio holder for Better Lives.

#### **The Reason for the Decision**

To support an effective tool for the Council to use on unauthorised encampments, whilst minimising the impact on the local community.

#### **Other Options Considered**

- To sell the site
- To lease to an individual family

(The meeting concluded at 11.01am)

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Chairman