

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **BABERGH COUNCIL** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Tuesday, 2 November 2021

PRESENT:

Councillor: Adrian Osborne (Chair)

Councillors:	Clive Arthey	Susan Ayres
	Simon Barrett	Peter Beer
	David Busby	Trevor Cresswell
	Derek Davis	Siân Dawson
	Mick Fraser	John Hinton
	Leigh Jamieson	Robert Lindsay
	Alastair McCraw	Mary McLaren
	Mark Newman	John Nunn
	Alison Owen	Stephen Plumb

In attendance:

Officers: Chief Executive (AC)
Deputy Monitoring Officer (JS)
Strategic Director (KN)
Assistant Director, Economic Developments and Regeneration (FD)
Assistant Director, Housing (GF)
Assistant Director, Health and Wellbeing (NM)
Licensing Officer (KG)
Senior Governance Officer (HH)

Apologies:

Melanie Barrett
Sue Carpendale
Jane Gould
Kathryn Grandon (Vice-Chair)
Richard Hardacre
Michael Holt
Bryn Hurren
Elisabeth Malvisi
Margaret Maybury
Zachary Norman
Jan Osborne
Lee Parker
John Ward

54 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS

There were no declarations of interests.

55 BC/21/19 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 SEPTEMBER 2021

It was RESOLVED:-

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2021 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

56 BC/21/20 ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND LEADER

The Chair informed Members that the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ward had pre-recorded his Leader's Announcements as he was not able to attend the meeting.

Councillor Ward made the following announcements:

Good evening, everyone. Unfortunately, I can't be with you all in person this evening as I have a very bad cold and cough. It is definitely nothing more – I have done two LFTs and one PCR test and all were negative.

This is the first of additional council meetings designed to enable members to participate in debates on a range of topics. We are reinstating Cabinet member reports, and we have the first two this month. We are introducing debates on current live issues and topics of interest as an alternative to member briefings, which are not always well attended. This evening we will be discussing the current status of Covid recovery in Babergh, covering business confidence, its lingering impact and ongoing changes to the behaviour of residents. Finally, we will also be having a series of location reports from different parts of the district. There will be a rolling programme running from East to West, and this will start next year.

I hope you will value these themes and please feed back any comments or suggestions you may have.

Economy Briefing

Last week an all member briefing from the Economic Development team was held. This was excellent and highlighted the huge amount of activity and projects delivered in the district.

Our approach to supporting innovation is getting recognition nationally and we are definitely having an impact on stimulating the post-Covid economy and delivering jobs.

New Public Realm Team

Yesterday marked the start of our new in-house public realm service. 15 new members of staff arrived at the Stowmarket depot and Cllr Dawson was there to welcome them alongside our officers. I would like to thank our project team for all their hard work over the past 12 months to make this such a success.

ERA

As announced at the weekend, the government has agreed to Suffolk's request to be designated a Covid Enhanced Response Area. We will get extra resources to increase vaccinations and provide other support. Increasing booster vaccinations and the vaccination rate for 12-15 year olds are the main priorities. A walk-in service at Hadleigh church on Saturday was very successful with 2,030 people getting a jab.

Belle Vue Engagement

You will all have been aware of the recent exhibitions of plans for Belle Vue park in Sudbury. I want to thank the officers who were present for giving their time, particularly on the Saturday, and to all the councillors who also visited and spoke to many of the public there. Feedback regarding the Churchill development was, as to be expected, mixed – but not totally dominated by those who oppose our plans to regenerate the park. The feedback on our new entrance was, in contrast, overwhelmingly in favour of the plans, praising the design, thoroughness and quality of the visual elements. The major concerns were over access across a busy junction, but we will address this with SCC highways and ensure that safe crossings from the town will be provided. There were some useful suggestions for further improvements and conversations with skate park users were also very informative.

I just want to note one particular comment we received that 'Some of the more vocal groups in the press do not speak for all of Sudbury and Cornard'. We shouldn't lose sight of that when assessing, particularly, what is said online and the tone that is used by contributors there. Which brings me on to my next item.

David Amess

I would like to spend a few minutes reflecting on the tragic murder of Sir David Amess, following five years on from that of Jo Cox, and some of the subsequent commentary regarding the increasing lack of tolerance and coarsening of the political climate that we are experiencing now, primarily resulting from the lawless domain that social media has become. As the Daily Mirror recently commented, there is an ugliness infecting public discourse.

This is more than the lazy, destructive cynicism about politics that, arguably, has been growing for a few decades and which is fuelled by entertainers out for a cheap laugh. We are increasingly living in an Orwellian world where facts are regarded as lies and lies are accepted as facts. The anti-vax campaigns are just the latest sinister manifestation of this. We are having to cope with an environment in which politicians are being disbelieved, vilified and abused to an extent where we are almost regarded as being sub-human and therefore threats and attacks can be justified. Female politicians fare even worse with the additional vile misogyny that they receive. This applies to all levels of democracy and councillors up and down the country are experiencing similar abuse to MPs.

This is a real threat to representative democracy because those who would wish to stand will increasingly decide that the cost is too great. If there is a lack of candidates, if there is contempt for the system and the system fails, then there will be a vacuum and that vacuum will be filled with something very ugly indeed.

Clearly, there is a lot for police and the social media companies to do to stop this and prosecute offenders vigorously. At the moment, they are all failing dismally. However, there is also a role for councillors to play too. We must challenge inappropriate comments from our residents and get them to understand what is and is not acceptable. But councillors at every tier of local government must also be very careful what **we** say in public, taking particular care about what we say about each other and other authorities, mindful of how careless words can inflame the mob.

I won't say any more and I won't go into specific events in Babergh which, I am sure, you will realise are at the back or indeed front of my mind. But, please, let's all make every effort to help our residents engage in robust, lively but mature debate without rancour. And as for those who do not wish for this, well they must be shunned, and we must not give them any support or encouragement.

57 TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that the following validated petition had been received and would be dealt with through the usual planning process:

233 valid signatures regarding planning application DC/21/03644 in Ballingdon, Sudbury.

58 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

The Chair invited Mr Morelli, a member of the public to ask his question. In the absence of the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Customers, Digital Transformation and Information, Councillor McCraw responded.

Question 1 Mr Thomas Morelli to Councillor John Ward, Leader of the Council

“Councillor John Ward has, on several recent occasions, sought to draw a distinction between the physical presence of Babergh in Sudbury being referred to as an ‘access point’ and as an ‘advice centre’ — with the latter being something Babergh has apparently “never run in any of [its] face-to-face locations”. Can Councillor Ward please therefore explain why the Babergh website referred to its location in Sudbury as the “Sudbury Advice Centre” until at least November of 2016?”

Response

The reason I felt it was important to make the distinction between access and advice is that the customer services provision we offer is focused on providing face to face supported access to Council services and wherever possible resolving that enquiry at the 1st point of contact. The word access reflects similar language used across several different Councils and best describes service provision offered.

I appreciate the language may have changed since we looked at our wider public access strategy back in 2016 to recognise there are other ‘advice’ led services such as citizens advice, where residents can access advice on a wide variety of topics,

not just Council led services.

It's important to acknowledge that our residents need change overtime, and that many people wish to access our services in different ways such as online* or via telephone. However, we understand some of our residents would still prefer to contact us via face to face, which is why we offer several in-person services to allow them to do so. In addition to our access point at Sudbury library, we have also resumed our pop ups in Hadleigh and Shotley.

At present we are seeing approx. 10 people at the Sudbury access point per day (since April). We have 2 officers based there, so this equates to 5 visits per officer, per day, which we feel is sufficient coverage.

**Between 2013 and 2019, the proportion of internet non-users in Suffolk has decreased at a faster rate than regional and national averages. In 2019, only 8.3% of Suffolk's 16+ population never used the internet. This demand for more online led services is also reflected via our website visits increasing by 16% from 2,284,163 in 2017 to 2,638,391 in 2020.*

Mr Morelli then asked a supplementary question to the Cabinet Member for Customers, Digital Transformation and Information.

Supplementary Question

Given that when the singular unified access point was present at the town hall, residents could go in and enquire about a town council service, a district council service or a county council service and given that this integration was something that Babergh has previously highlighted on its website, does Councillor Ward or Councillor McCraw agree that this has now been lost and does he feel that this has had any negative effect on the residents of Sudbury?

Response Councillor McCraw

In terms of the services and access necessary for the services provided by the Town Council and those supplied by the district council they would in fact be different and their requirements would be somewhat different. The two buildings as it happens are not very far apart and it would be perfectly possible to make an access on the same day to both locations. I don't possess any figures for access to Sudbury Town Hall, that's not fundamentally our business. The nature of our contract with Sudbury Town Hall changed as circumstances have done. I did mention that we have made changes and continue to make changes in our access to services. We are trying to provide appropriate services for the ways in which customers contact us. I've mentioned the pop-up services in Shotley and Hadleigh and we are hoping to offer places for people to gain self-service support. We also have a telephone point which is in Sudbury so customers can contact us on days when we are not there. We also have an iPad available for anybody, whilst Sudbury Library is open, customers again can self-service as they wish. We've also launched very recently our iPad lending scheme with the libraries so that customers can loan a Wi-Fi enabled tablet that will cost them no extra money it's all ready to use to help them access online services at home.

And as I've said, the level of service we are receiving ten customers per day, two officers two days a week means five officers work per day, and we believe that is sufficient.

59 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

The Chair invited Councillor Dawson to ask her question to the Cabinet Member for Assts and Investments, Councillor Busby

Cllr Dawson to Councillor Busby, Cabinet Member for Assets and Investments

Please provide a breakdown summary of the full annual running costs since vacating, of the Corks Lane Development in 2017 up to development dated expected Spring 2022?, to include security maintenance, and insurance. For clarification, what were the original estimated cost for development of Corks Lane Development at 2017 and what are the recalculated development costs at Spring 2022?

Response

The total costs for repairs, maintenance and security at the Former HQ site in Hadleigh from 2017 to the end of this financial year are anticipated to be £500,000. This is against budgeted costs of £342,000.

The original costs for development were anticipated to be £12.9m delivering a net receipt to the Council of £865,000 with a total of £1.4m being delivered back to the public purse including the net receipt, loan interest paid to the Councils from the Growth Company, taxes and planning and building control income. Full details of which are set out in the confidential Council report from December 2018 - which can be resent to Cllr Dawson.

The development costs are currently anticipated to be circa £13m with a similar level of return being anticipated with a net receipt of £900,000. Whilst there have been delays with delivering this complex site, the works are currently being tendered and we anticipate that works will start on site early in the New Year.

Councillor Dawson asked the following supplementary question:

Taking into account the development costs which have, please confirm, in my understanding building costs have significantly risen from 18-35% in the building industry and that is right across the board. My concern now is that our original estimated profit is now not a viable financial proposition for our stakeholders. And I believe that really you ought to confirm perhaps if you ensure that this comes back to the Cabinet to be discussed and to reconsider that formal business case particularly if you are saying costs have gone up from 12.9 million to 13 million and that doesn't really marry up with price increases for all the items that will be required to develop this site. So, will you consider or take it on that you will ensure it comes back to Cabinet to consider the business case?

Response Councillor Busby

I think this is a little premature, as I said we are waiting for tenders to come in, they should be in this month. We have a growth meeting in early December at which time we will be in a much better position to understand what the costs and returns are likely to be. If the situation is as you suggest, then bringing it back to Cabinet may be an option, but let's not jump the gun, let's wait and see what the tenders come in at.

60 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATE

60.1 Councillor McLaren verbally updated Council on the Joint Scrutiny meeting that had been held on 20th September 2021.

60.2 The Committee had undertaken an annual review of the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Reduction Strategy 2019-2024.

60.3 The Committee had asked for further information on the day to day activities of the action plan and resolved that the Strategy was reviewed bi- annually to ensure that the action plan was on track.

60.4 Councillor McLaren informed Council that two information bulletins had also been presented to the Committee:-

- A Customer Services Update
- Anti- social behaviour Update

60.5 Councillors questioned officers on the detail in the bulletins and noted the reports.

60.6 Councillor McLaren informed Council that the committee scheduled for October had been cancelled. This was due to the substantive item on the agenda being the examination and review of the relationship between Cabinet and Scrutiny. However, as the Constitution Working Group was currently reviewing the governance arrangements of the Council with recommendations coming to Council in January, the Monitoring Officer had advised that it was not the appropriate time to carry out this review.

Council noted the report.

61 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET / COMMITTEES

62 BC/21/21 GAMBLING ACT 2005 – STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES STATUTORY THREE-YEARLY ADOPTION

62.1 In the absence of the Chair of Licensing & Regulatory Committee, Councillor Arthey introduced the report and informed Council that the purpose of the report was for Council to adopt the amended Statement of Principles as recommended by Licensing and Regulatory Committee at its meeting on 15th October 2021.

62.2 Councillor Arthey added that it was a statutory requirement to review the Policy every three years and the decision may only be taken by Council.

62.3 A consultation exercise had been undertaken with only one response being received.

62.4 Councillor Arthey **MOVED** the recommendations in the report which Councillor Simon Barrett **SECONDED**.

62.5 Councillor Lindsay proposed an amendment to the Statement of Principles to introduce a “no Casino resolution”

62.6 The Chief Executive clarified that if this was to be introduced the Council would need to consult on the matter. It would therefore need to be a separate motion on notice to the Council to orchestrate this.

62.7 Council debated the issue and requested that the Licensing and Regulatory Committee examine the issue and report back to Council on its findings.

It was RESOLVED:-

That the draft revision Gambling Act 2005 ‘Statement of Principles’ document as attached as Appendix A to the report be adopted, for publication and to take effect for three years (unless sooner revised) from 31 January 2022.

63 PRESENTATION REGARDING THE COVID RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

63.1 The Chair invited the Chief Executive, and the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Clive Arthey to introduce the presentation.

63.2 The Strategic Director and the Assistant Directors for, Economic Developments and Regeneration, Housing, and Health and Wellbeing provided the presentation.

63.3 After the presentation, Members agreed that the debate on the item was deferred and that Group Leaders would discuss the most effective mechanism for collecting comments.

64 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM CABINET MEMBERS

64.1 Councillor Davis, Cabinet Member for Communities presented his report and updated Council on his portfolio. Councillor Davis then invited questions from Council.

64.2 In the absence of Councillor Holt, Cabinet Member for Economy, the Chairman requested that any points for clarification were sent in writing to the portfolio holder.

64.3 Both reports were noted by Council.

65 BC/21/22 POLITICAL BALANCE AND COMPOSITION OF COMMITTEES

It was RESOLVED:-

That the Committees' size and numerical allocation of seats be approved as detailed in Appendix A to the report with effect from 4th November 2021.

66 COUNCILLOR APPOINTMENTS

It was RESOLVED:-

That the following appointments be noted:

Planning Committee

Councillor Alastair McCraw (replacing Councillor Simon Barrett)

Joint Audit and Standards Committee

Councillor Melanie Barrett (replacing Councillor Simon Barrett)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Adrian Osborne (replacing Councillor Sian Dawson)

Councillor Margaret Maybury to be removed from Overview and Scrutiny Committee (seat currently vacant)

67 MOTIONS ON NOTICE

There were no Motions on notice.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 7.40pm

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Chair