

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Economic and Social Overview & Scrutiny Committee  
held in Committee Room I, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney,  
at 6.30pm on Thursday 25 May 2016

### PRESENT

Councillors: P J Handley (Chairman), Mrs E H N Fenton (Vice-Chairman), M A Barrett, A C Beaney, J C Cooper, Mr E J Fenton, P D Kelland, Mr T N Owen, A H K Postan and G Saul

Also in attendance: Mrs J C Baker and Mr C J A Virgin

#### 4. MANCHESTER TERRORIST ATTACK

Those present stood in silence as a mark of respect for those killed and injured in the terrorist attack at the Manchester Arena.

#### 5. MINUTES

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meetings held on 9 March and 26 April 2017 be approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

#### 6. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs M J Crossland and Mrs L E C Little and the following resignations and temporary appointments were reported:-

Mr A H K Postan for Mrs J M Doughty

Mr E J Fenton for Mr H B Eaglestone

#### 7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Whilst not a disclosable interest, Mr Cooper advised that he was the Honorary Treasurer of the Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association which organisation had been involved in the Madley Park Playing Fields project to be considered at Agenda item No. 8

#### 8. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

In accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure, Mr Ian Chatt addressed the meeting with regard to agenda item No. 8 (Madley Park Playing Fields Project) on behalf of the Woodstock Road Witney Residents Association.

A copy of Mr Chatt's submission is attached to the original copy of these minutes as Appendix A, together with a more detailed statement submitted on behalf of the Association and a number of other representations received, copies of which had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting.

In response to concerns expressed by Mr Chatt, Mr Beaney enquired how the project steering group had been constituted. Mr Chatt indicated that he was uncertain as to how those involved had been selected as the Woodstock Road Witney Residents Association had only joined having sought membership in November 2016. Mr Chatt considered that the Association had only been allowed to participate with some reluctance.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr David Bates, the Chairman of the Madley Park Residents Association, then addressed the meeting. The points which he raised reflected the detailed statement submitted on behalf of the Association, copies of which had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting, a copy of which is attached to the original copy of these minutes as Appendix B. In response to a question from Mr Handley, Mr Bates advised that the project had been the subject of consultation over a period of some six years.

(Mr C J A Virgin joined the meeting at this juncture)

Mr Beaney indicated that the steering group appeared to have considered both positive and negative factors and questioned whether Mr Bates had any concerns that it had been an undemocratic group.

In response, Mr Bates acknowledged that the consultation meeting held at Madley Park Hall had not drawn as great a level of response from young people as had been wished. In consequence, further consultation had taken place with separate approaches being made through the local school and the youth organisation, Base 33. Mr Bates believed himself to be a strong believer in democracy and, when it became evident that residents of Woodstock Road had concerns, the steering group had tried to address these over two or three years by working through different scenarios in an effort to build a relationship between the new and existing communities.

## 9. MADLEY PARK PLAYING FIELDS PROJECT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Leisure and Communities regarding the refurbishment of an existing play area and the addition of new facilities at Madley Park Playing Fields, Witney.

The Leisure Services Manager introduced the report which invited the Committee to make recommendations to the Cabinet on the project. He outlined the process by which the current scheme had been developed and made reference to the additional information referred to in the report, copies of which had been made available in the Members Room.

Mr Handley noted that the proposals currently put forward had been developed following extensive consideration by the project steering group. He also explained that the project was an extension of an existing play area and the need to seek planning permission would be dependent upon the final scheme design.

Mrs Baker, the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Leisure and Health advised that she considered that the project had evolved over a number of years through a strong democratic process. She had joined the steering group, which included representatives from both Town and District Councils, some five years previously. The group had maintained balanced representation as the process moved forward and, recognising that there were strong views amongst some local residents, when the Woodstock Road Witney Residents Association had sought representation, the group had agreed.

Equipment in the play area such as the sky surfer had been a great success and was well used. The provision of such facilities had not created the problems that had been feared by some residents.

The Woodstock Road Witney Residents Association had offered its own contributions and the group had sought expert advice from the Police, Witney Town Council (which had vast experience in providing and operating play areas), the Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association, Base 33 and, at one stage, Sovereign Housing. The group had gained a lot of knowledge from the experience of this diverse membership and had sought to draw on this experience to design a safe and enjoyable place for young people.

Mrs Baker expressed regret that the Woodstock Road Witney Residents Association had felt compelled to withdraw from the steering group given its previous indication that it considered the proposals to be acceptable subject to the provision of a planted buffer zone some 5 metres in depth. In the event, advice from the Thames Valley Police, Crime Prevention Design Advisor and the Council's Environmental Services Manager had cautioned against providing screening of this nature.

Mr Owen expressed some concern over the tone of Mr Chatt's statement and Mr Postan suggested that, where there were opposing views, it was difficult to find a solution to accommodate both parties. He suggested that formal consideration through the planning process would enable the matter to be determined in an open forum. It was explained that the need to secure planning permission would be dependent upon the final design of the scheme.

Mr Kelland indicated that the design process appeared to have been open and above board and sought clarification of the separation distances between the play area and residential properties. The Leisure Services Manager advised that the play area was located some 140 metres away from residential properties in Woodstock Road and approximately 38 metres from those at Blenheim Heights. He also stated that the recommended distance for a buffer zone was 10 metres.

Mr Beaney made reference to paragraph 3.10 of the report which gave an estimated project cost of around £116,000 and noted that there appeared to be a significant shortfall in available funding. He also sought further clarification of the concept plan as it appeared that some of the equipment was more suited to a younger age group. The Leisure Services Manager advised that, in addition to providing a new facility for teenagers, it was intended to refurbish the existing play area for the younger age group.

Mr Handley acknowledged the concerns expressed by the police with regard to the provision of screening, indicating that difficulties had been experienced in other parts of the District in similar circumstances. Rather than debate indictments of the process, Mr Handley stressed that the Committee should concentrate on the issues now before it. He too enquired whether the matter would be best resolved through the planning process. In response, the Strategic Director reiterated that the need to secure planning permission would be dependent upon the final design. She also advised that, whilst it was too voluminous to be included within the committee report, the detailed information questioned by Mr Chatt could be found in the documentation in the Members Room.

Mr Handley noted that the levels of noise created by certain equipment could be reduced through design and the use of appropriate materials. He suggested that, in referring the matter on to the Cabinet, the Committee could recommend that the concerns expressed by local residents be taken into account in the final design of the facility.

Mr Beaney felt unable to express unqualified support for the project without first having sight of the final design.

In response to a question from Mr Cooper, the Leisure Services Manager confirmed that there was a separation distance of 38 metres between the play area and the properties at Blenheim Heights and that the recommended minimum distance was 10m.

The Strategic Director acknowledged that, if the final scheme did not require planning permission, Mr Beaney's suggestion would offer the opportunity for the final design to receive formal consideration once known. Mrs Baker concurred.

Mr Fenton agreed that the final design of the play area was critical and questioned whether it would be possible to incorporate some form of noise amelioration measures. Mr Postan considered it would be preferable if it was found necessary for the scheme to require planning consent.

Mr Saul suggested that the Committee should take a view on the needs of young people and the wider community in general and, if Members thought the concept plan acceptable, they should recommend that it be approved by the Cabinet.

Mr Kelland enquired whether it would be helpful to compare the current proposals with existing play areas. The Leisure Services Manager advised that there were similar facilities throughout the District which did not give rise to any significant difficulties. Mrs Baker noted that the Witney Town Council had been represented on the steering group and had wide ranging experience of operating play areas in the town. Similar facilities to those proposed were already in existence at Burwell Farm and on The Leys and these did not give rise to complaint. Experience drawn from those had been taken into account in planning the new facilities.

Having been proposed by Mr Beaney and duly seconded it was:-

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That, subject to any necessary planning consent, the Cabinet be recommended to authorise the project to proceed based upon the location, concept plan and advice received as outlined within the main body of the report and requested to refer the matter back to this Committee for further consideration once the final design of the play area has been completed.
- (b) That the Cabinet be recommended to authorise consultation to take place with Witney Town Council regarding a leasehold/freehold transfer and/or management arrangements for the site.

## 10. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATE REPORT

The Committee received and noted the Chairman's update report.

## 11. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2017/2018

The Committee received the report of the Strategic Director seeking consideration of a work programme for the committee for 2017/2018.

### 11.1 RAF Brize Norton

Members expressed concern over the continued delay in the redevelopment of MOD housing land in Brize Norton. The Strategic Director advised that Officers shared these concerns and had raised this issue with representatives of the Department for Communities and Local Government. The next meeting of the Liaison Group was not scheduled to take place until September but Officers would continue to pursue the matter at appropriate levels.

### 11.2 Oxfordshire Health Care Transformation Programme

Mr Handley advised that the consultation on Phase 2 of the Oxfordshire Health Care Transformation Programme had been postponed until August.

### 11.3 Police, Community Safety and CDRP

Given that the consultation on Phase 2 of the Oxfordshire Health Care Transformation Programme had been postponed, and that there had been some recent changes to policing boundaries, Mr Beaney suggested that the annual update from the Local Police Area Commander be brought forward to the July meeting. Officers undertook to explore this possibility with the Area Commander.

### 11.4 Leisure Management Contract Working Party

Members noted that there appeared to have been some confusion over the status of the Working Party at the last Council Meeting. The Strategic Director pointed out that in the update on this item it clearly indicated that the Working Party was still in existence and had 'agreed that no further meetings would be held until the new contract was in place'; informed Members that the Cabinet had agreed to let the contract at its last meeting; and advised that it was proposed that arrangements would be put in place for the service provider to attend meetings of the Committee on an annual basis to provide an update on the operation of the contract and answer Members' questions.

Mr Beaney suggested that the Working Party should set a date for another meeting and the Strategic Director undertook to provide an update on the new contract arrangements at the next meeting to enable Members to consider an appropriate date.

### 11.5 Review of Member Structures and Democratic Costs

Members noted that the Council had invited the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to give consideration to, and make recommendations upon, the options for amending the Council's Committee structure and the question of the electoral cycle and the number of members of the Council. It was **AGREED** that this be incorporated into the Work Programme.

## 11.6 Planning Enforcement

Mr Beaney expressed concern over the operation of the Council's Planning Enforcement Service and suggested that the Committee give consideration to the operation, staffing levels and reporting arrangements of the service. Whilst emphasising that he was in no way critical of the Council's staff, Mr Owen indicated that the planning enforcement system rendered them unable to remedy breaches of planning control in a timely fashion.

The Strategic Director undertook to provide a briefing paper on the subject at a future meeting.

**RESOLVED:** That, subject to the amendments detailed above, the Committee's Work Programme for 2017/2018 be approved.

## 12. CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received and considered the report of the Chief Executive, which gave members the opportunity to comment on the Cabinet Work Programme published on 14 May 2017.

### 12.1 2016/17 Outturn and performance report - Homelessness Reduction Act

Mr Cooper reminded Members that this issue had been raised during the budget process and enquired whether any action was being taken. The Strategic Director confirmed that work was underway and undertook to provide a briefing paper to Members.

**RESOLVED:** That the content of the Cabinet Work Programme published on 14 May 2017 be noted.

## 13. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – QUARTER 3 2016/2017

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Leisure and Communities providing information on the Council's performance at the end of the third quarter of year 2016/2017.

Mr Beaney expressed concern over performance at ERS5, the percentage of full plans checked within 21 days of receipt, indicating that this had been an on-going problem. He also reiterated the concerns he had expressed at the development control sub-committee in relation to staffing levels in the planning service.

The Strategic Director explained that this indicator referred to Building Control, not planning and advised that, following a lot of work within that service, performance had improved significantly in the final quarter. This would become evident in the next round of figures and the Strategic Director undertook to provide an update to Members.

Mr Kelland expressed some concern that the reduction in the frequency of cutting highway verges by the County Council would have an adverse effect upon tourism within the District. It was noted that a number of local councils were supplementing the number of cuts at their own expense and suggested that such concerns should be addressed through the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**RESOLVED:** That the information provided be noted.

#### 14. START TIME OF MEETINGS

The committee received the report of the Head of Democratic Services seeking consideration of the start time of meetings for the remainder of the 2017/2018 municipal year.

**RESOLVED:** That, meetings of the committee for 2017/2018 commence at 6:30pm.

#### 15. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

##### 15.1 Digital Nominations Scheme

Mr Kelland reminded Members that it had been agreed that Members would be provided with an update on the operation of the Digital Nominations Scheme once the new system had 'bedded in'. Mr Handley indicated that he had been made aware of some issues regarding the operation of the system and the Strategic Director advised that an update would be provided in September.

##### 15.2 Water Meters

Mr Kelland noted that water rates were now split from rent in housing association properties and indicated that water bills were often reduced when water meters were fitted. He suggested that the Council should encourage those in social rented properties to apply for water meters.

##### 15.3 Leisure Facilities

Mr Beaney noted that arrangements were in train to secure the provision of phase 2 of the Carterton Leisure Centre and enquired whether, given the growth in residential development, there were any plans to improve facilities elsewhere in the District. The Strategic Director advised that, whilst there were no specific proposals, the new leisure contract would secure investment in all the Council's Leisure Centres. Where development created an increased need for leisure provision, developer contributions would be secured through legal agreements.

Mr Beaney also made reference to problems that had arisen at the Witney Leisure Centre and the Strategic Director undertook to investigate and respond to him directly.

Mr Postan questioned whether investment in the Carterton Leisure Centre would result in a shift of custom from other Council facilities. In response, the Strategic Director advised that the Council received quarterly usage reports which would highlight any such displacement.

The meeting closed at 8:00pm

Chairman