

Public Document Pack

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2020 at 5.00 pm in Online Only.

Present: Councillor Jason Savage (Chairman); Councillors Albon, Ara, Ashbee, Bailey, Bambridge, J Bayford, R Bayford, Boyd, Campbell, Coleman-Cooke, Crittenden, Currie, Day, Dexter, Duckworth, Cllr Everitt, Farrance, Fellows, Game, Garner, Green, Gregory, Hart, Hopkinson, Huxley, Keen, Pat Moore, Ovenden, L Piper, Cllr Rev. S Piper, Pugh, Rattigan, Rawf, Rogers, Roper, Rusiecki, D Saunders, M Saunders, Scobie, Scott, Shrubb, Taylor, Tomlinson, Towning, Wing, Wright and Yates

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Braidwood, Dennis, Kup, Paul Moore, Parsons, Potts and Whitehead.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by the Vice-Chairman and agreed that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 9 July 2020 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman noted that two Democratic Services Officers, Emily Kennedy and Charlotte Crowley, would be leaving Thanet District Council and wished them luck for their future roles.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5. PETITIONS

(a) Park Avenue, Broadstairs Petition

Mrs Amanda Suess presented a petition and e-petition regarding the felling of the trees in Park Avenue Woodland in Broadstairs. Members noted that the following petitions contained 455 and 319 signatures respectively:

"We the undersigned petition the council to require the owner of the area of woodland off Park Avenue - East of Park Wood Close-, Broadstairs (Land Registry Ref K61934), to replant any trees covered by tree protection orders within that area following the recent heavy felling and to reaffirm its current view that the area should remain as open space/woodland."

In accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme, the petition was referred to Cabinet without debate for report back to the Council within three ordinary meetings.

(b) Bigger Bins in Thanet Petition

Members noted that the e-petition regarding bigger bins on Thanet beaches contained 45 signatures:

"We the undersigned petition the council to Provide bigger bins for the general public to use across the Thanet coastline."

In accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme, the petition was referred to Cabinet without debate for report back to the Council within three ordinary meetings.

6. QUESTIONS FROM THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

(a) Question no1 - Coach House, Northdown Park

Mr Nicholas Hughes, the Committee Services Manager, on behalf of Mrs Iris Johnston asked Councillor Duckworth the following question:

"The lease on the Coach House in Northdown Park is due to end in 2021 after years of failure to reopen as a Museum. Could the Leader please confirm that the building will not be re-let to the existing leaseholder who has failed to comply with the original agreement."

Councillor Duckworth responded with the following points:

- The relationship between the council as landlord and one of its tenants is confidential to the parties as well as being commercially sensitive.
- It is not appropriate to publicly share commercially sensitive information or to breach that confidentiality.
- Mrs Johnston's concerns will be passed on to the Director of Property.

(b) Question no2 - Destruction of Woodland in Thanet

Ms Benedict asked Councillor Everitt the following question:

What if any significant deterrents will the council use in future to prevent landowners/developers continued illegal destruction of open spaces and woodland in Thanet?

Councillor Everitt responded with the following points:

- The new Local Plan contains a number of policies that seek to protect and enhance trees and woodlands, particularly where development is proposed. These are:
 - Policy SP23 states that development proposals should demonstrate how they respect and respond to the character, key sensitivities, qualities and guidelines of the relevant landscape character areas
 - The Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (adopted alongside the Local Plan) contains guidance about how new development can be incorporated into the wider landscape, including how existing features and new planting can assist that process
 - Policy SP27 addresses the green infrastructure network and identifies ways in which new development can protect and contribute to that network.
 - Policy SP30 sets out requirements for new development to make a positive contribution to the conservation, enhancement and management of biodiversity assets resulting in a "net gain" for biodiversity
 - Policy GI06 refers to landscaping and green infrastructure in new developments
 - Policy QD02 sets out how new development proposals should address existing landscape features
- The council investigates any breaches of planning control in relation to these policies and will take enforcement action where this is in the public interest.
- In addition to this, existing groups of trees or woodland can, where they are in conservation areas or of particular community value, be protected by Tree

Preservation Orders. The Council then has powers to enforce their protection, including prosecution against unauthorised removal under the Planning Act. Council Officers often attend sites to require the cessation of works to protected trees upon receiving complaints from the public.

- For areas of woodland not protected, the Council liaises with the Forestry Commission if felling has occurred as a license may be required from the Commission.
- The Council would also work with Kent Police's Wildlife Liaison officer, who would pursue any illegal destruction of protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

(c) **Question no3 - Thanet Tree Strategy**

Mr Tate asked Councillor Everitt the following question:

"Thanet has relatively few trees, with only 19 mentions in the Local Plan, so will the Council prepare a Tree Strategy, aimed at increasing tree canopy cover in the District, maximising the benefits trees provide, and promoting biodiversity and conserving tree and woodland eco-system, as many other councils have done?

Councillor Everitt responded with the following points:

- The Council are in the process of preparing a Thanet Tree Strategy.
- The outline draft strategy has been discussed at the Climate Emergency Working Party meeting in July and will be progressed by our new Climate Change Officer.
- The Working Party are also awaiting an update on the national tree strategy for England to help steer our own strategy.
- Councillors across the Council understand the importance of improving the tree cover in Thanet, and the Leader expressed gratitude to Mr Tate for bringing these issues to the Council's attention, particularly the issue in Broadstairs.
- The policies referred to in the answer to the previous question are also relevant here, for further reference to Thanet's longer term tree strategy.
- This is a matter that the Council is taking seriously.

(d) **Question no4 - Climate Emergency**

Mr Nicholas Hughes, the Committee Services Manager, on behalf of Mrs Deb Shotton asked Councillor Duckworth the following question:

"The Climate Emergency is the biggest threat to mankind. The Council should be progressing and implementing the Climate Emergency Action Plan. Why is the Council wasting time and money on environmentally harmful plans at the Port instead of investing in clean technologies to help meet this challenge?"

Councillor Duckworth responded with the following points:

- Thanet District Council declared a climate emergency on Thursday 11 July 2019. Since then a working party was formed consisting of elected members from across the political parties to consult, discuss and steer the response to the climate and ecological emergency.
- An action plan has been formulated, to capture work that is already underway, alongside opportunities and ideas.
- TDC's new Climate Change Officer, Dr Hannah Scott started on the 1st September and she will be driving the Council's response to the Climate Emergency moving forwards, coordinating and developing our action plan further.
- Thanet is linked in with the other councils across the County through the Kent Resource Partnership and the Kent Climate Change Network, taking national and county steer on our approach through the Kent Environment Strategy and other developing directives. We will monitor plans in relation to developments and changes to legislation as they happen.

- The Council are also planning to set up opportunities in the coming months to engage with the public on our proposed activities.
- The reference in the question to plans at the port is understood to be in relation to the berth 4/5 replacement project.
- The existing aggregate berth (Berth 4/5) at the Port of Ramsgate is at the end of its operational life. There is no viable option to refurbish or continue to maintain the existing berth.
- A long term contractual commitment with a customer exists such that the Council must maintain an operational berth or risk the consequences of breaching the contract agreement. A project has therefore been developed to replace the berth.
- It is also worth mentioning that the requirement for an Environmental Impact Assessment as part of the marine licencing process was screened out by the Marine Management Organisation.

(e) **Question no5 - Community Woodland**

Ms McKenzie asked Councillor Everitt the following question:

"The 2006 Adopted Local plan set aside an area of land, roughly 21.7 hectares, behind Twenties Cottages on Shottendane Road extending to Hartsdown Road Margate for Community Woodland. Why has this land now been designated for housing with no planting having taken place in the subsequent 14 years?"

Councillor Everitt responded with the following points:

- The site proposed for a Community Woodland in the 2006 Plan is situated to the north of the housing site allocated in the new Local Plan; it is not the same site.
- Prior to the 2006 Plan, there was a detailed project developed for planting of the Community Woodland. However, during the process of developing the scheme, the Woodland Grant Scheme was amended such that the project was not eligible for funding. As a result, the project was not progressed at the time. The site was put into the Local Plan as a potential project to be supported.

(f) **Question no6 - Ramsgate Port Berth 4/5**

Ms Austin asked Councillor Everitt the following question:

"I understand Ramsgate Port berths 4/5, currently processing 400 tonnes of aggregate per hour, are to be replaced with a 3000 tonnes-per-hour facility.

Could you please explain why this is needed, what impact it will have on the neighbouring SSSI, and why this has been characterised as a like-for-like replacement?"

Councillor Everitt responded with the following points:

- The berth is not currently processing 400 tonnes of aggregate per hour, vessel arrivals on the berth occur approximately fortnightly. In 2019 an average of 125 tonnes per day was discharged via the berth. The purpose of the berth is to transfer aggregate from a vessel to the shore, it does not have any aggregate processing ability.
- The existing conveyor on the berth has the capability of transferring 400 tonnes of aggregate per hour whilst unloading a vessel. The performance specification for the replacement berth requires that it has the capability of safely accommodating the loads from a 3,000 tonne per hour conveyor. A higher capacity conveyor allows vessels to be unloaded faster but this does not in itself mean that the tonnage of aggregate handled will increase.
- The council is not currently aware of any plans by its customer Brett Aggregates to increase the volume of aggregate discharged via the berth following completion of the project.

- The replacement option chosen is the most economical option for the 30 year service life of the berth. It will be able to accommodate slightly larger vessels but the Council is not aware of any current proposals to bring larger vessels and this is about making the berth viable over its service life as new vessels come into service. The berth has not been designed as an upgrade.
- The opinion of the Marine Management Organisation is that the proposed project is screened out of requiring an Environmental Impact Assessment. This provides an indication of the low level of environmental risk posed by the proposal.

7. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

(a) Question no1 - Pontoons in Ramsgate Harbour

Councillor Wing asked Councillor Everitt the following question:

"Will 1 of the 2 BAM Nuttall pontoons presently mooring in Ramsgate's Royal Harbour be used to replace Berth 4/5?"

Councillor Everitt responded that:

- A contract has been awarded to the contractor BAM Nuttall Ltd for the replacement of the berth. The project will involve the reuse of one of the two pontoons that are currently moored in the Royal Harbour at Ramsgate.

Councillor Wing followed up her question by asking that given TDC has been locked in to a lease agreement which does not end until 2054 with Brett's Aggregate, and according to the lease agreement of 2009 suggesting the rent they pay is less than £20k a year, it will take many years for the estimated £1.4m of Council taxpayer's money to be recuperated. How was this spend justified, given that Brett's did not ask for the replacement and the last engineer's report of 2015/16 did not recommend a replacement?

Councillor Everitt responded that

- The Council had a contractual commitment to provide a berth for unloading the aggregate. Calculating the profit against the cost is not relevant as the Council was in a contractual agreement. If the council wished to cancel the contract, it would have to pay significant sums to extract itself.
- The berth had to be replaced, because it was not fit for purpose. It was not suitable to use because of health and safety risks in bad weather.
- It had to be replaced and it can't be replaced like for like. That process has been tendered, BAM Nuttall won the contract and the Council would be replacing the berth before the winter weather sets in.
- If this task was not completed before the winter weather arrived, a financial risk will be posed to the council as a result of the contract.
- It was contractual commitment made by the Council many years ago which must be adhered to.

(b) Question no2 - Anti-Social Behaviour

Councillor Bailey asked Councillor Duckworth the following question:

"Ongoing Anti Social Behaviour on the beaches late at night includes vandalising beach huts and using the wood and private property to build fires. How can TDC work with Your Leisure, and the police, to increase security and enforcement, perhaps ring fencing some of the rent to pay for CCTV?"

Councillor Duckworth responded that:

- Your Leisure manage the beach huts and provide security on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. They commence patrols at 8.30pm and finish patrols around 2am.
- We are not aware of any incidents of vandalism to beach huts that have been reported to the Council this season. Your Leisure are aware of one incident.
- In order to determine the most appropriate and effective action to take we do need incidents to be reported in detail, with information on the location where the anti-social behaviour is happening. This will enable us to work together with Your Leisure and other agencies to resolve persistent problems.

Councillor Bailey followed up her question by asking if the mobile CCTV cameras that TDC use could be utilised on the summer months along the proms and beaches?

Councillor Duckworth responded that there are some CCTV cameras used, but lots of people had requested these. It is something the Council can look at providing, but resources may be limited.

(c) **Question no3 - Re-Examination of Temporary Traveller Sites**

Councillor Roper asked Councillor Everitt the following question:

"TDC has a legal obligation to provide "Temporary Tolerated Sites" for Travellers. Sites at Potten Street and Shottendane Road are being put forward to Cabinet, but Potten Street in particular has strong local objections. In addition having only two sites could cause problems. Could the whole process now be re-examined?"

Councillor Everitt responded that yes, there is a published report going to Cabinet on the 17th where this will be addressed.

Councillor Roper followed up his question by noting that he recently found out that the process is beginning again, and that the decision to use those two sites has been undone, and asked if land owners in the area could be asked if they have more suitable sites that they could make available, for example Manston Airport?

Councillor Everitt responded that the report going to Cabinet will discuss this. It will be put through the Local Plan review process, which is a formal process, which will involve a call for sites. It will also involve a much more structured and comprehensive consultation process as this was a previous concern, that the previous call was not subject to a thorough consultation process, which was partly due to Covid and partly due to the nature of the sites. The reassurance the members of the public will get from a proper process put through the Local Plan review will be worthwhile. The Council will certainly be looking at what other land is available for this purpose.

(d) **Question no4 - Temporary Traveller Sites**

Councillor Pugh asked Councillor Everitt the following question:

"As traveller incursions continue to rise across Thanet, not least in my own ward, what measures is this Council taking to secure temporary sites to tackle this issue?"

Councillor Everitt responded that once again, there is a published report going to Cabinet on the 17th where this will be addressed.

Councillor Pugh followed up his question by asking: considering the call for sites will be potentially incorporated into a review of the Local Plan, can we be assured that any review will be wide reaching and with greater consultation with residents across Thanet?

Councillor Everitt responded that the nature of the Local Plan Review is that it involves a much wider consultation, so that will certainly be happening.

(e) **Question no5 - Beach Lifts in Ramsgate and Broadstairs**

Councillor Rawf asked Councillor Whitehead the following question:

"This summer elderly and disabled residents and visitors were excluded from the beaches in Broadstairs and Ramsgate. Can the council explain why they have not fixed the lifts in both towns? The council has promised to prioritise the needs of the disabled so why break that promise?"

Councillor Duckworth responded that:

- There is disability access to Ramsgate Main Sands via Harbour Parade and to the other end of the beach and car parking includes designated disabled bays along Marina Esplanade.
- There is also disability access via the Pavilion Gardens onto the boardwalk at Viking Bay. However, we have now extended the matting to join onto the boardwalk providing additional access straight off Harbour Street and parking is available in the Harbour car park including disabled bays.
- Due to the restrictions imposed by the Government in response to the Covid-19 emergency both lifts had to be closed, although the appropriate annual maintenance has still been undertaken. When the restrictions in terms of lockdown were eased there was still the issue for TDC with achieving the legal requirements for social distancing especially in confined spaces such as lift.
- The decision was made to keep both lifts closed, but we were approached by a residents group in Broadstairs to look at the option of opening the lift. The first issue has been the availability of specialist contractors to repair the lift so it could be fully operational, this has caused the longest delay due to the lack of available parts and the fact that lots of manufacturing companies are still on furlough.
- The second issue has been how the lift could be operated safely and comply with the social distancing requirements, our preferred solution is to have the lift manned at all times, reduce the operating hours, increase cleaning, ensure only those who need it get access, that they are from the same family and wear face coverings.
- TDC does not have the resources to fulfill this requirement and discussions are still ongoing with the residents group.
- Due to both these issues not yet being resolved the lift remains closed.

Councillor Rawf followed up his question by asking can the Council reassure myself and the residents of Thanet that the Council will use the winter period to service and make sure the lifts are ready to be used again in the summer?

Councillor Duckworth responded that the annual maintenance and servicing went ahead, and there is no reason for it to not go ahead next year, but the issue will be watched and Councillor Duckworth will contact Councillor Rawf if there are any issues.

(f) **Question no6 - Anti-Social Behaviour at Dane Park**

Councillor Taylor asked Councillor Albon the following question:

"Councillor Whitehead, you and I have spoken frequently regarding measures that we can take to ensure that Dane Park areas are safe and welcoming as possible.

I know we would like to fully discuss our approaches to this, so can you outline current measures and plans?"

As Councillor Whitehead was not present, Councillor Albon responded that:

- The community safety team are working with the parks and open spaces team to try and resolve some of the issues that have been raised with councillors with

regard to Dane Park and Dane Valley as they have both been subjected to unauthorised encampments and anti-social behaviour recently.

- It is extremely important that residents report incidents of assault to Kent Police, without reports they are unable to act.
- Community Safety Unit are aware of the anti-social behaviour issues around Dane Park and Dane Valley along with recent traveller incursions. The Community Safety Unit works alongside Kent Police and the Margate Task Force to increase community assurance and act in a multi agency approach to the specific concerns raised.
- The CSU are aware that the community needs and aspirations are part of the scoping exercise for the Thanet Community Safety Partnership.
- Also, Councillor Albon has agreed to meet with ward councillors and residents at Dane Park next week to listen to their concerns and to see what can be done.

Councillor Taylor did not have a supplementary question.

8. NOTICE OF MOTION

(a) Motion: Park Avenue Woodland - Broadstairs

It was proposed by Councillor Garner and seconded by Councillor Bailey that:

"To consider a notice of motion to require the owner of the area of woodland off Park Avenue - East of Park Wood Close-, Broadstairs (Land Registry Ref K61934), to replant any trees covered by tree protection orders within that area following the recent heavy felling and to reaffirm its current view that the area should remain as open space/woodland."

Members chose to debate the motion.

No recorded vote took place as Council was unanimous in its decision to pass the motion to Cabinet to be resolved.

Therefore, the motion was carried.

Councillor Pugh left the meeting prior to this item.

9. LEADERS REPORT

The Leader informed Council that the Leaders report had been circulated to Members and published on the Council's website the report has been attached as an annex to these minutes.

- It commended the generally strong beach management strategy and communication during what was a busy summer, particularly tackling an increase in litter and anti-social behaviour.
- It noted that Thanet Parkway Station had been given the go-ahead, supported by the Kent and Medway economic partnership and our neighbouring district councils.
- It acknowledged that while the Labour group may not agree with the decision, since the DCO for Manston Airport has been granted, the Council will be engaging constructively with the owners in the wider public interest.
- The two depots at Manston Road and Dane Park, where some of the most visible Council staff work, will not be forgotten when it comes to any changes to the working environment for Council staff after Covid.
- Covid has placed the Council's finances in a precarious position, especially in the longer term rather than the immediate future.

- Some of the information leaked prior to this Council meeting is subjective and may be inaccurate and cannot be wholly understood by the public in terms of its context or validity.
- This has resulted in the calling of a peer review which will help to fully understand issues and highlight aspects that are positive and should be built on.
- Members from across the Council have been working together much more constructively and effectively in the last year than was the case during the last peer review.
- Ultimately, this Council is here to serve the people of Thanet to the best of its ability within the resources that are available and will welcome praise and criticism in order to continuously improve.

Councillor Game as Leader of the Conservative Party made the following points:

- Agreed that sharing the Leaders report online is a positive way to progress.
- The Conservative group supports Thanet Parkway station and the £2m invested by the Council will be used to support local economic growth. Considering the scheme will cost £34m, and KCC are putting in £5.8m, this Council is putting in a relatively small contribution.
- Further bidding may mean a reduction to the contribution being made by KCC, but we must question whether our contribution will also be reduced.
- The granting of the DCO at Manston is positive for the District and the Leader has a duty to work constructively with owners despite differences in views. Manston will only be used as a lorry park for Brexit as a last resort, as the government have invested in a contraflow system and 27 acre site along the M20 for Operation Brock.
- The peer review will be examining the culture of the organisation, but it is governance that is the issue. The Conservative group encourages discussion around the scope of the review, aiming for a wide-reaching cross-party examination of the governance of TDC.

The Leader replied to Councillor Game's comments with the following points:

- Thanet parkway certainly is good news; both parties across Kent have worked together to boost the local economy through this project and can collectively look forward to the delivery of the station.
- How much TDC will get back will depend on the Conservative leader of KCC, with whom TDC has been having constructive conversations
- In regards to Manston Airport, the Leader recognises the need to engage with the situation as it is rather than trying to overturn things that are already in place. There are no guarantees about the site not being used as a lorry park.
- Members are able to voice their concerns regarding the peer review at the upcoming Members Briefing but this process must be done correctly. It is vital to have the governance of this organisation examined to prove that everything is in order.

Councillor Reverend Piper as leader of the Thanet Independents Party made the following points:

- Approved of publishing the report prior to the meeting for all to access.
- Agreed that council departments are functioning well in the circumstances. Those who worked hard on the beaches to provide an environment that locals and visitors want to come to should be praised, despite the beaches not always being treated with respect.
- Noted Councillor Whitehead had been doing an outstanding job working with the housing team in what has been challenging circumstances
- Praised Democratic Services, who have been nominated for the ADSO Team of the Year award.

- Believed that since the council departments are working well, a peer review is not necessary. Previously the behaviour was toxic; this review could undo recent progress and create distrust.
- A concentrated approach focusing on the issues would be far more appropriate.

The Leader replied to Councillor Reverend Piper's comments with the following points:

- Agreed that the staff working hard on the beaches deserve our respect.
- Litter continues to be a big issue and this council wants to improve its enforcement powers by changing current bylaws into a public space protection order.
- Concurred that Councillor Whitehead is an outstanding Councillor, and hoped to welcome her back soon.
- The peer review could not have been brought to the attention of Members sooner, because the LGA had not decided on what action to take.
- Since the serious allegations of bullying and harassment have been reproduced in the press, Members need to have confidence that that is not an accurate characterisation of the Council as a whole, and Council Members and Officers need to be able to tell an independent authority the truth.

Councillor Garner as Leader the Green Party made the following points:

- Shared agreement with Councillors Game and Piper regarding how the report is delivered to the group leaders and wider members of the public.
- Commended the departments who have worked hard to continue delivering services to residents. Also agreed with the Leader that improvement to the operations facilities is a high priority.
- Noted that it was good to listen to residents concerns about trees in this Council meeting
- The Green's viewpoint on Thanet Parkway station had not changed; £34m will lead to loss of greenfield sites, countless mature trees and disrupt Cliffsend.
- Noted that the huge reduction in air travel as a result of Covid leads the group to remain opposed to the DCO and to support the judicial review of the decision.
- Pleased to hear the Leader keeping Members up-to-date regarding the serious issues raised in the article published in the Municipal Journal as a result of the leaked letter. These allegations need to be properly addressed through the correct channels. TDC must become more transparent and this should be a priority in any investigation. No Council that is operating properly should have anything to fear from sharing information and allowing external bodies to scrutinise its work.

The Leader replied to Councillor Garner's comments noting that:

- Councillors should be encouraged to visit the operations sites where some of the most important staff work exceptionally hard to deliver services. The improvement of the conditions of these sites needs to be a priority for this council post-covid.
- Disagreed with the Green Party's viewpoint on Thanet Parkway station. £26m will be spent in the district and would not come in for any other project. It is not about journey times, and it will be successful.
- There is opportunity for a great deal of development in Thanet which will require growth and change. Having a station on that point on the line will improve access.
- Agreed with the need for transparency and to continue to discuss the peer review.

10. REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL TO COUNCIL

Councillor Bayford, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, presented the report and the following points were noted:

- Members have actively engaged in identifying items for future scrutiny. These were ranked using a matrix made by Democratic Services.
- The panel will work through this list.
- The Memorial Working Party has now been set up, specifically for Members to discuss the 'Uncle Mack' plaque in Broadstairs.

Members noted the report.

11. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT NO.1, 2020-21

After the Cabinet Member for Finance, Administration and Community Wealth Building presented his report, it was proposed by Councillor Yates and seconded by Councillor Albon and Members agreed by recorded vote the recommendations detailed in the report, namely that Council approves:

- (i) The General Fund revenue budget 2020-21 forecast position.
- (ii) The General Fund Capital Programme 2020-21 forecast position.
- (iii) The proposals to fund the budget gap created by Covid-19.

A recorded vote took place on this item due to the nature of the meeting being completely virtual.

The Monitoring Officer conducted a recorded vote on the motion as follows:

47 Members voted in favour of the motion: Councillors Albon, Ara, Ashbee, Bailey, Bambridge, J Bayford, R Bayford, Boyd, Campbell, Coleman-Cooke, Crittenden, Currie, Day, Dexter, Duckworth, Everitt, Farrance, Fellows, Game, Garner, Green, Gregory, Hart, Hopkinson, Huxley, Keen, Pat Moore, Ovenden, L Piper, Rev. S Piper, Rattigan, Rawf, Rogers, Roper, Rusiecki, D Saunders, M Saunders, Savage, Scobie, Scott, Shrubb, Taylor, Towning, Tomlinson, Wing, Wright and Yates.

No members voted against or abstained from this motion.

The motion was carried.

12. REVISED HRA BUDGET AND MONITORING 2020-21 AND HRA PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2019-20

After the Cabinet Member for Finance, Administration and Community Wealth Building presented his report, it was proposed by Councillor Yates and seconded by Councillor Albon and Members agreed by recorded vote the recommendations detailed in the report, namely that Council approves:

1. To note the HRA 2020-21 budget monitoring position;
2. To approve the revised HRA budget estimates for 2020-21;
3. To approve the revised Housing Revenue Account capital programmes (Annex 1) for 2020-21;
4. To note the Section 151 Officer's Assurance Statement as set out in section 10 of this report;
5. To note the 2019-20 HRA Provisional Outturn position and capital programme outturn (Annex 2).

A recorded vote took place on this item due to the nature of the meeting being completely virtual.

The Monitoring Officer conducted a recorded vote on the motion as follows:

47 Members voted in favour of the motion: Councillors Albon, Ara, Ashbee, Bailey, Bambridge, J Bayford, R Bayford, Boyd, Campbell, Coleman-Cooke, Crittenden, Currie, Day, Dexter, Duckworth, Everitt, Farrance, Fellows, Game, Garner, Green, Gregory, Hart, Hopkinson, Huxley, Keen, Pat Moore, Ovenden, L Piper, Rev. S Piper, Rattigan,

Rawf, Rogers, Roper, Rusiecki, D Saunders, M Saunders, Savage, Scobie, Scott, Shrubb, Taylor, Towning, Tomlinson, Wing, Wright and Yates.

No members voted against or abstained from this motion.

The motion was carried.

13. REPORT REGARDING URGENT ACTIONS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 28

It was proposed by the Chairman, Seconded by the Vice-Chairman and Members agreed to the recommendations outlined in the report, namely:

Council notes the urgent actions taken under Rule 28 of the Council Procedure Rules.

There were no objections to these recommendations, deemed as temporary measures, and it was agreed by all Members.

14. APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

It was proposed by the Chairman, Seconded by the Vice-Chairman and Members agreed:

That Mr Lee Wellbrook and Mr Peter Lorenzo are appointed as Independent Members of the Standards Committee for a term expiring at the Annual Meeting of Council 2023.

There were no objections to these recommendations and it was agreed by all Members.

15. CHANGES TO COMMITTEES, PANELS AND BOARDS

The Leader proposed, Councillor Campbell seconded and Members agreed option one as detailed at paragraph 4.3.1 of the report, namely:

“That a seat is removed from the Labour Group on the Planning Committee and the Labour Group need to remove a nomination from that Committee. That a seat is given to the Conservative Group on the Planning Committee and the Conservative Group need to make a new nomination to that Committee”

Subsequently, the Leader advised of the removal of Councillor Pat Moore from the Planning Committee and Councillor Game nominated Councillor Rattigan to the Planning Committee. No changes were received from Councillor Rev. S Piper or Councillor Garner.

Meeting concluded: 6.55pm

Leader's report for Council (10 September)

"This is the second leader's report that I have posted online in advance of the council meeting for which it is intended, and I am grateful to those members and others for their feedback on that practice, which generally seemed well received.

"I think it is an innovation we should consider continuing, even when we are able to resume meeting face to face, which I know many members are anxious to do.

"The council, and society generally, has had to learn to do many things differently over the last six months, and I continue to be proud of the way our officers and members have adapted.

"While the health emergency is not over, the rate of infection has significantly abated and so far there has been no risk of a local lockdown in Thanet. We rely on the good sense of our residents to ensure that this remains the case by following the government guidance as far as possible. However, we must also be ready if it happens and that work is in hand.

Busy beaches

"I don't usually talk about the weather in these reports, because not even the most cynical observer can argue the council is to blame for that, but the very warm spell which extended until the middle of August saw record numbers travelling to our beaches.

"This was what our local economy needed after lockdown and in many ways great to see, but it also brought a range of challenges and in some places inconvenience for residents because the existing toilet and parking facilities struggled to cope with such a large and sudden volume of visitors.

"The sudden reversal of government restrictions on travel in May was a factor in this, but the limited opportunity to travel overseas also swelled numbers of visitors to levels we perhaps had never expected to see coming regularly to Thanet again.

"The new beach management plan launched in June was followed by the beach safety information booklet in July, both of which were important to our approach. We installed hundreds of extra bins and, where needed, temporary toilets, extended hours for cleansing teams and brought in security staff, and we deployed a beach supervisor to improve coordination and response.

“We worked more closely than ever with partners, including the police, the RNLI, KCC, Southeastern, town councils and a number of volunteer groups, with online co-ordination meetings taking place before the hottest days when we knew we would be most tested.

“Five of our beaches – Margate Main Sands, Ramsgate Main Sands, Viking Bay, Joss Bay and Botany Bay – were the subject of alerts on days when numbers rose to the point where concerns were coming into play about safety, including around the opportunity for social distancing.

“These alerts, issued via our Communications team through social media and other channels, were sometimes reported as evidence that things were getting out of control. On the contrary, they were indicators that the council and its partners were managing the emerging situation.

“We also received some fantastic national and regional media coverage, particularly the live BBC Breakfast broadcast from Ramsgate beach on the glorious early morning of August 7th, where viewers were treated to stunning shots of the coastline taken by a drone.

“I know that made an impact because of the number of people from outside Thanet who have told me that they saw it, but at times that week we were stretched to cope with the level of demand from media outlets wanting to talk to us about our beaches.

“That is publicity which cannot be bought, and I really hope that this year’s visitors and others will be encouraged to come back, because our beaches are at the heart of what we are as a district. Notwithstanding the public health issue, it was heartening that people returned to Thanet in such numbers and that so many families brought young children who will now have their own happy memories of time spent here.

“Of course, not everything was picture postcard perfect. Litter was still a big problem. There were incidents of anti-social behaviour.

“One particularly unpleasant side effect of the weather was the quantity of seaweed and the odour it produced along parts of the north coast, despite the fact that we have already removed more than 500 tonnes, far more than in recent years. This was despite the legal restrictions on doing so from the protected chalk reef.

“Although seaweed is a natural phenomenon and we are reassured by the tests carried out by Kent Fire and Rescue that the concentration of hydrogen sulphide was harmless, it was clearly unpleasant for residents affected and the media coverage of it was not good for Thanet.

New station approved

“There was some more positive news last week with Kent County Council’s planning committee granting the final go-ahead for Thanet Parkway Station.

“Minutes before our last council on July 9th, by the wonders of video conferencing, I was in the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership meeting asking its members to support a £17.5m bid to the government’s Getting Building fund for Parkway.

“Over the previous two weeks the Chief Executive and I had worked hard lobbying our East Kent neighbours to support this bid and it should be recorded that they all did, in some cases at the expense of their own projects. This is because they understood the potential that it has to encourage new investment into the district and the wider area.

“We also lobbied our MPs and wrote to ministers. We were eventually successful in securing £12m via the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), taking central funding to £26m out of an estimated £34.5m.

“This cash is ring-fenced for infrastructure and to support growth of the economy. If it was not being invested in this project it is extremely likely that it would be invested elsewhere in the SELEP region, which covers Essex and East Sussex, as well as Kent – not on another scheme in Thanet.

“The total cost is a very large amount of money, and extraordinarily more than £10m of it is just for an upgraded level crossing to improve safety in Clifftsend, but it includes significant contingency and overall this is a substantial investment in Thanet’s future which will underpin the local plan we adopted in July.

“I am grateful for the support of our two MPs, particularly Craig Mackinlay who asked the Prime Minister a question about it in Parliament – even if Boris Johnson called it “Thanet Park” in his reply.

“This is an investment in Thanet’s future and I am sorry that some of our local representatives across various political parties fail to recognise that creating more jobs and prosperity requires changing the way things have been in the past.

“It is not about extra capacity or comparative journey times from Ramsgate, but opening up opportunity to a spread of people who already drive to that station or others.

“Even if commuting patterns change post-Covid, the evidence is that people want to move away from London and have the ability to travel in when necessary. They will bring money and jobs into our economy if we make it easier for them to live here.

"I hear people say that Parkway will benefit Discovery Park as if this is a bad thing for Thanet because that is just over the border in Dover district, but I'm not aware that there is any ban on our residents working there, and in fact a substantial number already do.

"I know that part of the concern expressed locally was about Thanet District Council's own budgeted contribution of £2m, a commitment which we inherited from the previous administration but believe to represent good value considering the amount of government money it is levering into Thanet.

"The £2m comes from a pot of business rates funding that is required to be spent on supporting economic growth in the district. It is not available for general use. However, given the financial pressures on all local authorities post-Covid, I am pleased to tell the council that part of our ambition has always been to secure a reduction in TDC's contribution.

"I had more, constructive discussions on that with Roger Gough, the leader of KCC, last week. There is a further bid to the New Stations Fund for £3.4m due for decision soon.

"If successful that would bring KCC's commitment down to about the same level as TDCs and neither side believes that would be equitable, given the relative size of the councils, but we expect and will push for some reduction regardless of that.

Manston DCO

"Although some people think there is a connection, personally I have never believed that the case for Parkway has anything to do with that for Manston Airport. We heard on the day of the last council meeting that the DCO had been successful so were able to discuss it then.

"I am not a supporter of reopening the airport, for environmental reasons and because of its potential impact on Ramsgate, and I remain sceptical that it will happen, but I recognise that there are other views within the council. Regardless, with the DCO being granted, we have a duty to engage constructively with the owners in the wider public interest.

"I therefore recently held an initial meeting with Tony Freudmann, of RSP, and have invited him to give a members' briefing soon so that councillors can get an early understanding of their plans for the site, regardless of whether they are pro- or anti-airport.

"In the short term it is clear the airport is back on the government's agenda as a lorry park for Brexit so there are no plans to do any work on site until next summer.

Council depots

“While we haven’t been able to assemble in the council offices since March, Cllr Albon, Cllr Whitehead and I did get to visit the council’s Manston Road and Dane Park Depots in July.

“The operational staff who are based at these two locations are among the most visible of the council’s employees and do vital work, but there is a risk that the two bases from which they work escape the attention of elected members’ entirely.

“I hope that other members get an opportunity to visit, because we need to do better. It showed me that any relocation plan that comes forward as a result of the changed working environment for office staff post-Covid needs to include improvements in this area too.

Performance issues

“We have an item on the agenda this evening about the budget so I am not going to dwell on that issue here, except to say that the council has been placed in a serious financial position by the impacts of Covid-19, but so has nearly every local authority in the country.

“We can manage the present situation without impact on services by drawing on our reserves, but it does mean that our resilience to further unexpected costs is limited and there remains a significant likelihood that the financial impact of Covid is not over.

“I do think it is to the credit of the finance team that the assumptions they brought to cabinet at the end of July have largely proven robust enough to bring before council six weeks later, as indeed have those they shared with cabinet members from early in the crisis.

“I believe that the council has performed well over recent months in very difficult circumstances. I was disappointed therefore to see that once again internal correspondence has been pushed into the public domain to create a different story.

“While I recognise some of the issues in the recently leaked letter from the head of internal audit and they are already being addressed, other points are subjective and may be inaccurate, and it cannot be right that they are placed by a third party in the media where reporters and the public can have no real understanding of their context or validity.

“I know that the head of internal audit is particularly unhappy that the letter has been leaked and misrepresented.

"In order that members can have confidence in the actual situation, the chief executive and I asked the Local Government Association to conduct a peer review to look at issues raised in the leaked letter and to provide a proper overview.

"Having been part of a previous peer review here, I know that this won't necessarily be a comfortable process and that some of the answers we get won't be what we would like.

"However, I also see the enthusiasm of so many officers with whom I work on a day-to-day basis, their obvious pride in working here and their complete commitment to delivering the best possible services for our residents. I am certain the peer review team will see that too and that this review will highlight things that are positive and should be built on.

"I am confident, too, that members from across the council have been working together much more constructively and effectively in the last year than was the case in 2014. I hope that can continue.

"I want to commend in particular to council the commitment and hard work of my cabinet, including my deputy, Cllr Helen Whitehead, especially on housing matters. We are due to resume direct management of council housing on October 1st and I thank everyone involved in the transition from East Kent Housing for their contribution.

"In the end, this council is here to serve the people of Thanet to the best of its ability within the resources that are available. That is what matters and any help we can get to do that better we should welcome, even if some of the things we learn are difficult to hear."