

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2021 at 7.00 pm in Ramsgate Sports Centre, High Street, Ramsgate.

Present: Councillor Jason Savage (Chair); Councillors Ara, Ashbee, Austin, Bailey, Bambridge, J Bayford, R Bayford, Boyd, Coleman-Cooke, Crittenden, Currie, Dennis, Dexter, Duckworth, Everitt, Farrance, Fellows, Garner, Green, Gregory, Hart, Hopkinson, Huxley, Keen, Kup, Pat Moore, Paul Moore, Ovenden, Parsons, L Piper, Rev. S Piper, Potts, Pugh, Rattigan, Rawf, Rogers, Rusiecki, D Saunders, M Saunders, Scobie, Scott, Shonk, Shrubbs, Tomlinson, Towing, Wallin, Whitehead, Wing, Wright and Yates

1. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL

Councillor Kup proposed, Councillor Pugh seconded and Members agreed that Councillor Hart be the Vice Chair of Thanet District Council.

Councillor Hart thanked Members for his election and advised that Elizabeth Hurst would be his escort.

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 3 June 2021 be approved.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Albon, Braidwood and Roper.

4. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

6. PETITIONS

No petitions had been received in accordance with council procedure rule 12.

7. QUESTIONS FROM THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

- (a) Question No.1 - Regarding Riveroak Strategic Partnership's Development Consent Order Application.

Mr Green was not present at the meeting and would receive a response in writing.

The Leader advised that the letter had been sent to the Secretary of State, and that the letter was available to view on the Council's website here:

<https://www.thanet.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/DCO-TDC-response-090721.pdf>

(b) **Question No.2 - Regarding Park Avenue, Broadstairs.**

Ms Benedict asked the Leader the following question:

“Will this new administration, like the last, confirm that they will robustly defend the enforcement order, issued by this council, for the replanting of the trees in Park Avenue Broadstairs, and that you will resist any planning application for this site, and support this site becoming a designated green space in the revised Local Plan?”

The Leader responded with the following points:

- The Council served a tree replacement notice on the owner of the Park Avenue site, requiring 12 trees of specific species to be replanted on the site by the 31st March 2021. The notice was appealed, so enforcement action was held in abeyance and the Council was awaiting a start date from the Planning Inspectorate for the appeal.
- There were two types of open space protection in the Local Plan:
 - Protected Open Space - this was a local designation to protect important open spaces for sports, informal recreation or general amenity; and
 - Local Green Space - this was a national designation and land can only be identified as LGS where it meets the specific criteria set out in Government guidance (in the National Planning Policy Framework)(NPPF).
- This site could be considered for designation under one of these policies as part of the Local Plan process.
- If a planning application was submitted for the site, then the Council must consider any proposal on its own merits against the adopted development plan, and associated relevant planning documents and guidance. This would include:
 - Considering Policy BSP7 of the Broadstairs Neighbourhood Plan as the site lies within an Area of High Townscape Value,
 - The context of the TPOs present on the site,
 - Any required replacement TPO trees
 - The policy framework of the Thanet Local Plan and Broadstairs Neighbourhood Plan in relation to landscaping and green infrastructure.
- The consideration of any planning application was a matter for the Council's Planning Committee to decide. It would be inappropriate to comment on the merits of a hypothetical application that might be submitted in the future.

(c) **Question No.3 - Regarding The Local Plan.**

Mr Dickman asked the Leader the following question:

“Given the recent incidents of contamination to our beaches, and the disastrous effect that it could have had to our local economy, had it been in the height of the season, should the Council consider removing the land on the slopes either side of the Tivoli Brook from the local plan.

If we have increased surface water from new homes on the slopes, taking nitrates and chemicals into the brook and therefore into the bay at Margate main sands, we run the risk of decimating our economy.

The recent contamination along our coast begs the question; when we have an old and fragile sewage system, will it cope with an extra 17,000 houses, and if not, is the Council prepared for the devastation to our tourist economy and will they pay reparation to any businesses adversely affected during this fragile time?”

The Leader responded with the following points:

- Local Plan Policy SP21, that allocated the site, included a requirement that master planning of the site would be informed by, and address, the capacity of any utility services and infrastructure. This would include the provision of any improved or additional infrastructure that was reasonably required by the relevant utility provider to meet any additional demands created.
- The Local Plan also contained a general policy (Policy CC02) that required new development to manage the surface water resulting from the development, in line with guidance from the Lead Local Flood Authority, Kent County Council.
- The Local Plan Examination Inspectors agreed the inclusion of this site in the Local Plan.

(d) **Question No.4 - Regarding Ownership of Land**

Mr Knibb asked Councillor Pugh the following question:

“How much of the land currently being proposed for development adjacent to the Shottendane and Manston Roads does Thanet District Council own?”

Councillor Pugh responded with the following points:

- Mr Knibb confirmed that the question related to the land currently subject to planning application reference OL/TH/21/0847. The details of this application were available on the Council’s website.
- The Council currently did not own any of the land included within this planning application. The Council had previously owned the northern part of land at Shottendane Road which was proposed for development.
- An agreement for the sale of this land from the Council to the purchaser in 1981 included an overage clause. This clause required the land owner to pay the Council 50% of any change in land value, if the land was used for any purpose other than agricultural purposes.
- In the interests of transparency, this historic ownership was confirmed when the application was considered at the Planning Committee on 23 June 2021.
- Members of the Planning Committee were reminded that covenants or ownership matters were not material planning considerations. Therefore this historic agreement could not be taken into account when deciding if a planning application was acceptable. It should be judged against local and national planning policy.

(e) **Question No.5 - Regarding Shower Facilities at Dumpton Gap Beach**

Ms Bevan asked Councillor Pugh the following question:

“Could the Council please give consideration to the installation of a shower(s) at Dumpton Gap beach? There is already an existing tap where the beach huts are located so this may be a suitable area? The beach is used regularly by groups for wild swimming, dog walking, and families using this safe beach. The tap is not suitable for washing off sand from adults and children and being able to shower off the sea water and sand would be beneficial to all especially as there is a Cafe and beach huts. Research has shown the importance of showering after sea bathing to wash off harmful microbes which indicates the necessity for a shower.”

Councillor Pugh responded with the following points:

- The main issue to resolve in installing a shower facility at this location would be drainage, the system installed currently was sufficient for a single tap but would block quickly if a shower drained to it.
- The Council would investigate options for this further, as it seemed to be a good idea, potentially something could be installed for next summer.

(f) **Question No.6 - Regarding Consultation on the Local plan.**

Mr Hughes, Committee Services Manager, read out the following question from Mrs Wells to the Leader:

“You will be aware of the strength of public concern regarding the Planned housing development on Westgate and Garlinge farmland.

The fact that this land is included in the local plan makes any public challenge to this difficult.

There is a current review of the local plan . The councils Published local development scheme states that a review of housing requirements and climate change matters forms part of the work program.

Why is this currently a closed process?

At what stage will there be Involvement of consultees in particular Westgate town council .

At what stage will there be public consultation?

What are the time scales for progressing to conclusion?”

The Leader responded with the following points:

- The Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG) process included public meetings as an integral part of its working. The CAG made recommendations to Cabinet, and these reports were also in the public domain.
- It was intended that there would be various opportunities for a range of stakeholders to comment on the draft Plan and related documents over the next two years. Exact dates for this were not known at this point.
- Before being submitted for examination, the final draft Plan would be agreed by the whole Council. Then, following a stage of formal consultation, the draft Plan would be considered at the Examination-in-Public sessions held by independent Planning Inspectors. The Inspectors would hear from various parties, and make recommendations about the final form of the plan to the Council.

8. **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

(a) **Question No.1 - Regarding GP Shortages.**

Councillor Gregory asked Councillor Kup the following question:

“Thanet has the 4th worse GP shortage in England which nationally has 100,000 Health care professional vacancies. Services may be reduced at QEQM following the 2016 STP proposals. With new huge housing developments currently planned, what is being done to improve recruitment & retention of HCPs & critically to halt the closures of vital services at QEQM?”

Councillor Kup responded with the following points:

- Kent County Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) were responsible for ensuring adequate health provision within the District.
- Whilst Thanet District Council did not have any direct responsibility, it was an important subject and the Council was active in a number of partnerships including the East Kent Integrated Care Partnership, East Kent Wellbeing & Health & Improvement Partnership, Thanet Health & Wellbeing Partnership and the Council also had its own Cabinet Advisory Group.
- The issue of recruitment and retention of medical staff was something that had been worked upon for a number of years culminating in the Kent and Medway Medical School. This was a collaboration between Canterbury Christchurch University and the University of Kent, to directly tackle this issue.
- The new Local Plan made provision for GP surgeries and medical facilities to be provided or expanded alongside new housing development. This was based on the infrastructure planning work undertaken in conjunction with the relevant health bodies.

Councillor Gregory followed up her question by stating that she was aware that investment in medical facilities were proposed, however that would not address the issue of healthcare staff shortages.

Councillor Kup noted Councillor Gregory's comment.

(b) **Question No.2 - Regarding Toilet Facilities.**

Councillor Bailey asked Councillor Kup the following question:

"On warm summer evenings locals and visitors enjoy sitting or walking along the seafront until last light. However, many are often 'caught short' because our public toilets are closed. This can have grim consequences. I have received several reports of people urinating, and worse, in public spaces and have recently had to request that the street cleansing team jet wash a shelter on the clifftop which had human excrement in it.

According to their websites Dover, Deal, Herne Bay & Hastings have at least one toilet facility open until 9.00pm, Brighton, Hove and Bournemouth until 10.00pm and Whitstable even has some toilets open 24 hours.

According to our website the latest any Thanet toilet is open is 8.00pm however, in practice they are often closed even earlier.

If other authorities have toilet facilities available later in the evening can't we?"

Councillor Kup responded with the following points:

- In Thanet there were 15 public toilets open all year round, and a further 12 toilets open during the summer season. These 27 toilets were open 7 days a week. This year the seasonal toilets were opened on 29 March. This was almost 2 months earlier than normal, in readiness for the easing of the most recent national lockdown.
- Toilets on the main bays at Ramsgate, Margate and Broadstairs were unlocked and locked each day by static cleaners from approximately 8.00am to 8.00pm.
- Toilets at other bays and in the towns were unlocked between 8.30am and 9.30am each day and were locked between 5.30pm and 8.00pm. These toilets were tended by mobile crews hence the variance in the approximate opening and closing times.
- The details of each public toilet, including its location and opening hours, could be viewed on the Council's website.
- Unfortunately experience has shown that the majority of vandalism and anti-social behaviour at toilets takes place during the evening. Opening the toilets later would increase the health and safety risk for the toilet cleansing team, and could have an impact on limited revenue budgets if vandalism took place. There would also be a need to train more staff who would work later shifts, and this would exceed the current budget provision.
- There were no plans to extend the opening hours of our public toilets at this time.

Councillor Bailey followed up her question by asking when the findings of the Toilet Working Party would be made public.

Councillor Kup responded that he would find out when the findings would be made public. He also advised that he wished to re-establish the group to see if a cross party agreement could be reached, regarding the opening and maintenance of the toilets to the level required by the residents of Thanet.

(c) **Question No.3 - Regarding the Local Plan**

Councillor Everitt asked the Leader the following question:

“When the leader stood for election to this council in 2015, she and her then party pledged to reduce the number of new homes envisaged in the emerging Thanet local plan from approximately 12,000. Her party won the election, but the number of homes went up to approximately 17,000 by 2018. Now that many of our residents are so angry about the adopted plan allocating so much Thanet farmland for housing development, who does she think they should hold responsible?”

The Leader responded with the following points:

- The housing requirements in the Local Plan were derived from the Government guidance in place at the time. In 2015, the Council had not had a full Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) carried out, and the housing requirement set out in the draft Local Plan was an estimate that related to a range of employment projections.
- The SHMA reports, following the Government methodology (and published in 2016 and 2017), raised the total requirement for Thanet to 17,140.
- The Local Plan, which included this number of homes, was supported at full council and received cross party agreement.

Councillor Everitt followed up his question by asking if the Conservative Group and others who agreed, at the Council meeting on 19/7/2018, to remove the Manston Airport site as a potential location for houses from the Plan, should not take some responsibility for the reallocation of 2500 houses from the Manston Airport site into surrounding green field sites within the District.

The Leader responded to note that the future of the Airport site was in the hands of the Inspectorate, and that the site was now protected in the Local Plan as an airport. The Leader added that she would be doing all she could to challenge the Government's housing requirement calculation, and a Cabinet Advisory Group would also look at what more could be done.

(d) **Question No.4 - Regarding Replacement Bins**

Councillor Austin asked Councillor R Bayford the following question:

“Domestic rubbish and recycling are regularly spread all over our streets by high winds and seagulls. Domestic bins with missing lids and the use of open recycling boxes for flats make this problem much worse. On the TDC website, our policy on replacement domestic bin lids reads:

‘The council will repair any containers that become damaged or un-serviceable as a result of the collection process, as soon as reasonably practicable and free of charge. Residents will need to report this type of damage to us.’

Could you please tell me:

- How many households are currently waiting for replacement bin lids?
- How long residents typically wait for such replacements?
- Whether the Council has done a cost-benefit analysis on:
 - moving to closed recycling containers for flats?
 - doing a blitz on replacements & repairs to reduce the extra work windblown waste creates for street cleansing teams and for long-suffering litter-picking volunteers?”

Councillor R Bayford responded with the following points:

- Bin lids were no longer routinely replaced. This was due to the time taken to replace a lid and because there were now several different bin types in service with some degree of variation in bin lid design. Overall it was more cost effective to replace the entire bin in the majority of cases.

- At the end of June there were 2044 containers to be delivered. This included all bin types.
- The Council emptied in excess of 30,000 household bins and containers each day and the bin replacement schedule was updated on a daily basis as bins were delivered and new requests were received. There was a permanent bin delivery team to replace bins when they were lost or damaged.
- Waiting times were currently high in some cases, and most outstanding requests for paid-for containers dated from February 2021 onwards. The Council had increased its bin delivery resources from two full time vehicles and crew, to three vehicles and crew to catch up with the backlog.
- The Council was trialling recycling collections from a privately owned high rise block, and was also working with the housing team to trial this at some of the Council owned tower blocks.

Councillor Austin followed up her question by asking if a cost analysis could be undertaken to establish if there was a saving to be made from replacing bin lids more quickly and to provide lidded containers to flats, compared with the street cleaning cost required to deal with the spread of rubbish as a result of broken bin lids and open top containers.

Councillor R Bayford responded that there was a plan to move to containers with lids, however the department was under such pressure that the focus was on the core service at the moment.

(e) **Question No.5 - Regarding the Local Plan and Empty Properties.**

Councillor Farrance asked the Leader the following question:

“The Local Plan requires over 17,000 homes to be built in Thanet, mainly on our precious farmland. There are 5,517 empty homes in Thanet, and 517 empty commercial properties.

Given that there are a variety of reasons for empty homes, could the Cabinet Member please give a breakdown of the number of empty homes in each category, and explain what TDC is doing to encourage the owners in each category to return these empty homes to much-needed occupation. Which would surely mean that less farmland would be required for building.”

The Leader responded with the following points:

- Council Tax information was the most reliable and accurate means of identifying the number of empty homes in the District. The following response was based on live Council Tax information.
- The council tax data included a number of different categories with a council tax exemption. Some of these were not really empty, such as second homes, homes where the resident was working away and homes owned by the Ministry of Defence. It also included homes that were between occupants, this was a normal part of the process of moving home and would be empty for less than 6 months.
- Excluding categories that were not genuinely empty, there were currently 1,593 properties, of which 572 were short term empty properties between occupants. There were 1,021 properties which had been empty for more than 6 months and which were the focus of the Council’s work to return empty homes to use.
- The Council had an Empty Homes Team who took action to help bring long term empty homes back into use.
- The Council was also able to offer loans to owners, in partnership with Kent County Council, through the No Use Empty initiative. Over £10,000,000 in loans have been approved in Thanet, which has assisted with the renovation of 364 homes.

- When the informal approach was unsuccessful, the team had a range of legislative powers at its disposal which may be used to help bring empty homes back into use. However, it is worth pointing out that there was no law against owning an empty home.
- The empty homes plan was published on the Council website here: https://www.google.com/url?q=https://democracy.thanet.gov.uk/documents/s71042/Empty%2520Homes%2520Plan%25202020-23%2520-%2520Google%2520Docs.pdf&sa=D&source=editors&ust=162685955344000&usg=AOvVaw1JBameVvSIMKx3CataK_s0
- The plan explained in more detail how the Council could take action to bring empty homes back into use.
- There were 508 empty commercial properties, and 488 of these had been empty for more than six months.
- The Local Plan made an allowance for empty homes coming back into use. This was based on guidance received from the Planning Inspectorate when the Local Plan was being prepared.
- This allowance was already included in the Local Plan, and totalled 540 units over the Plan period to 2031. This figure represented more than half of the current long term empty homes in the District.
- In addition, the Local Plan also included 30 hectares of business premises and land released for housing purposes, and included an allowance for “windfall” sites (sites not allocated in the Plan) that may come forward.

Councillor Farrance followed up her question by asking for reassurance that work would continue to bring empty homes back onto use.

The Leader responded that work would continue, and that she would be looking at every angle to bring down the number of houses allocated to the District.

9. **NOTICE OF MOTION**

(a) **Motion regarding Food Poverty**

It was proposed by Councillor Keen and seconded by Councillor Whitehead that:

“There is a crisis of food poverty in this country, created by political choices and systemic failings and thrown into sharp relief by the Covid pandemic. The Trussell Trust reports a soaring 81% increase in emergency food parcels from food banks in its network during the last two weeks in March 2021 compared to the same period last year and our local foodbanks tell the same story.

Some 35% of Thanet’s Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are in the top 10% most deprived LSOAs nationally. Almost 22% of Thanet children are entitled to free school meals, the highest in Kent, and this percentage is continuing to rise.

The National Food Strategy is the first independent review of England’s entire food system for 75 years. Its purpose is to set out a vision for the kind of food system we should be building for the future and a plan for how to achieve that vision. It is headed by Henry Dimbleby and next reports to the government shortly.

The Right to Food campaign is arguing that the 11 million people in food poverty should be central to this strategy. Enshrining the “right to food” in law would clarify government obligations on food poverty and introduce legal avenues to hold government bodies accountable for violations.

This council therefore calls for the right to food to be incorporated into the National Food Strategy and instructs the leader to write to Henry Dimbleby to further this demand.”

In accordance with council procedure rule 3.7, the Leader responded to the motion. She noted that Mr Dimbleby’s report had already been published, therefore the opportunity to gather evidence had passed, however she agreed that it was a serious matter.

Councillor Everitt proposed, Councillor Rawf seconded that the motion be debated.

Upon being put to the vote, Members did not agree to debate the motion, therefore the motion fell.

10. LEADERS REPORT

The Leader, Councillor Ashbee, presented her report to Council, covering the following key points:

- She took the opportunity to remember those who had lost their lives during the Covid pandemic and offered thanks to everyone who had helped to get the Country through the worst of it.
- The new administration would be looking for ways to improve the efficiency of the Council's core services, and would be looking at opportunities to encourage inward investment.
- The administration had reviewed the levelling up bids for Margate and Ramsgate. If successful, both bids would be a boost for the District.
- The Leader had an ongoing dialogue with the Chief Executive of Southern Water following the failings at the pumping station on 16 June.

Leader of the Labour Group, Councillor Everitt, made the following points:

- He hoped that both levelling up bids would be successful, but was concerned that the success of one bid may make the success of the other bid less likely.
- The Government had underfunded the Council for the last ten years, and the Council did not have enough money to offer the service that residents demanded. The search for efficiencies would not be sufficient to make up for this shortfall.
- Southern Water had a history of dishonesty and the service should be bought under public control.
- He hoped that the Leader would work with all the political groups within the Council, for the good of the people in Thanet.

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

- She would continue to look for funding opportunities from the Government, however she wanted to look at ways that the Council could be less dependent on Government funding. Members were asked to come forward with suggestions if they had any ideas to generate income.
- The new administration would fully engage with all groups within the Council.

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

- He wished to offer the new administration every success, particularly regarding the levelling up bids.
- The Leader had been quick to respond to the Southern Water incident.
- The Leader would need energy and cross party support to be successful.

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

- She acknowledged that there was work to do.
- The Council had offered to manage the compensation scheme for Southern Water, in order to make the scheme easier for businesses to make claims.

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

- He welcomed Councillor Ashbee into the leadership role.
- He would join the Leader in remembering those who lost their lives to Covid. The pandemic had taken a toll on Thanet, and he wanted to thank everyone involved, particularly Council Officers who had continued to work throughout.

- There was a lot of public interest in the Ramsgate levelling up bid, community involvement and transparency must be maintained throughout the process.
- The full details of the two levelling up bids should be made available to the public.
- The latest Southern Water failing showed that the company prioritised paying dividends above paying to upgrading their systems.
- The Chief Executive of Southern Water should come before Members to explain what was being done to rectify the situation.

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

- Community engagement was important across the District. The specific details of the bids could not be released until they had been approved, however they would be made publically available when it was possible.
- The Chief Executive of Southern Water would be invited to attend a Members briefing in August.

Members noted the report.

11. REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Councillor Reverend Piper presented his report, and offered his thanks to Councillor R Bayford for his work when he was Chair of the Panel.

Councillor Reverend Piper, noted an inaccuracy in the report at paragraph 1.4 which should have said that there had been no **scheduled** meetings. The Panel had met for an extraordinary meeting on 8 July 2021.

Members were encouraged to attend the next meeting that would take place on 20/7/2021, and would review planning enforcement.

12. DRAFT MEMBER PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY

It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by the Vice-Chairman and Members agreed to adopt the draft parental leave policy including the pay rates as shown at Option 2, namely:

'6 months full pay of Special Responsibility Allowance with any remaining leave being unpaid.'

13. CHANGES TO COMMITTEES, PANELS AND BOARDS - 2021/22

Proportionality

The Chair proposed, the Vice Chair seconded and Members agreed the proportionality between groups for committees, panels and boards, for the remainder of the 2021/22 municipal year as shown at paragraph 4.1.1 of the report, namely:

'That the number of seats on the Planning Committee for the Conservative group is reduced from seven to six and the number of seats for the Green group is increased from one to two. In addition one seat is removed from the Overview and Scrutiny Panel and Conservative group loses that seat.'

NOMINATION OF MEMBERS TO SERVE ON COMMITTEES

The Leader advised that Councillor Scott would no longer sit on the Planning Committee or the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, and that Councillor Fellows would come off the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Councillor Garner advised that Councillor Wing would now sit on the Planning Committee.

14. **REPORT OF AN URGENT DECISION UNDER RULE 4 OF THE BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK PROCEDURE RULES**

Members noted the report.

15. **REPORT TO COUNCIL ON TWO URGENT DECISIONS UNDER RULE 4 OF THE BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK PROCEDURE RULES**

Members noted the report.

16. **ALLOWANCES SCHEME**

The Chair proposed, the Vice Chair seconded and Members agreed the recommendation as set out in the report, namely:

‘To add one additional Cabinet member special responsibility allowance and one additional shadow Cabinet member special responsibility allowance to the scheme of members allowances and to refer the scheme to EKJIRP for them to consider, with any amendments being reported back to Council.’

Meeting concluded : 8.25 pm