

## COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2023 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

**Present:** ; Councillors Edwards (Chair), Owen-Hughes, Albon, Ara, Austin, Bambridge, Barlow, J Bayford, Boyd, Braidwood, Bright, Bright, Britcher, Crittenden, Currie, d'Abbro, Davis, Dawson, Dennis, Donaldson, Driver, Duckworth, Everitt, Farooki, Fellows, Garner, D Green, Huxley, Keen, Kup, Makinson, Manners, Matterface, Pat Moore, Munns, Nichols, Anne-Marie Nixey, Ovenden, Packman, Pope, Pressland, Pugh, Rattigan, Rogers, Rusiecki, Scobie, W Scobie, Scott, Smith, Towing, Whitehead, Wing, Wright, Worrow and Yates

#### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

#### 2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was proposed by the Chair, seconded by the Vice-Chair and agreed that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 18 May 2023 be approved and signed by the Chair.

#### 3. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair announced that former Councillor John Kirby had recently passed away. Members paused for a minute's silence in respect of Councillor Kirby.

#### 4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 5. PETITIONS

There were no petitions considered at the meeting.

#### 6. QUESTIONS FROM THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

##### (a) QUESTION NO.1 FROM A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC REGARDING NOISE DISTURBANCES FROM CRAMPTONS

The questioner was not present at the meeting to ask the question, therefore the question will be responded to in writing.

##### (b) QUESTION NO.2 FROM A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC REGARDING PROTECTION OF FARMLAND

Ms Brown asked the Leader the following question:

'Is the new administration at TDC prepared to continue the work that the former Leader of the council Ash Ashbee started and lobby the Secretary of State at DLUHC to consider Thanet as a special case and grant protection to the district's farmland due to the rarity across the country of the grade of farmland and favourable growing conditions that exist in Thanet?'

The Leader responded with the following points:

- The council had responded to the Government's consultation on draft changes to national planning guidance (the National Planning Policy Framework): this could be viewed on the council's website.
- It set out, among other matters, the case that the Government should give specific protection to best and most versatile farmland (grades 1, 2 and 3a).
- The Labour group, via Cllr Whitehead, had submitted its own response to the NPPF consultation and this had taken a similar view, so the council's position on this issue remains unaltered by the change of administration.

(c) **QUESTION NO.3 FROM A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC REGARDING PUBLIC TOILETS**

Ms Feary asked Councillor Albon the following question:

'I would like to ask why public toilets at local beaches close so early, for instance at Dumpton Gap, they close at 3.35, the cafe has a licence to remain open until 8pm, there are over 30 beach huts there. No other facilities nearby. Children have just left school, and surely with the lighter evenings, the toilets should remain open longer. On Stone Bay, they close at 16.10, on Joss bay it's 1645. Thanet Huts Facebook page, there are many comments regarding the state of the toilets or the lack of them. This leaves many people without essential facilities.

In 2019 Visit England carried out a survey on what influences where people visit, and 54% cited public toilets as a factor.'

Councillor Albon responded with the following points:

- The 28 public toilets in Thanet were open according to the summer opening times, which could be found on the council's website.
- The majority of the toilets were cleaned by three mobile units each consisting of a member of the cleansing team working from a small van. At Margate, Viking Bay and Ramsgate Sands static cleaners were deployed due to the high footfall in those locations. The level of available resources and the need for cleaning at each site were both factors in determining the opening and closing times at each location. The rota for unlocking and locking was set up to ensure that facilities in the areas with the highest number of visitors are open for the longest periods.
- At locking up time, staff worked in teams to protect them from anti-social behaviour which could occur in certain locations. There were cost implications for keeping the toilets open for longer hours. Keeping toilets open beyond the early evening presents a higher risk of vandalism which could lead to temporary closures and costly repairs. For this reason the latest closing times were between 8pm and 8.30pm at the main bays.
- Toilets also could be closed up to 15 minutes prior to the publicised closing time to enable thorough cleaning to be completed at each location.

(d) **QUESTION NO.4 FROM A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC REGARDING BROWNFIELD SITES**

Ms McCourt asked the Leader the following question:

'We have brownfield sites at Tivoli Road, and at Station Yard, All Saints Ave Margate; two builders' businesses use these locations, which are within residential areas. Our previous leader advised that a Russian owner was linked to this Station Yard site, who was uncontactable. I believe this council could take action and, where necessary, compulsory purchase these brownfield sites for housing. Empty homes and businesses

in and around Margate and Cliftonville too could be developed. Turning these properties and sites into habitable homes for local people should be a priority.

What lengths will this council go to in order to prioritise brownfield sites as exemplified here for housing before losing our prime farmland to developers, who prioritise profits over providing the homes for our residents? Our environment, wildlife, services and air quality is in jeopardy unless this council does all it can to STOP the loss of our precious farmland.'

The Leader responded with the following points:

- The identification of suitable brownfield sites for development was a key part of the Local Plan process. A similar process is being undertaken for the Local Plan update.
- However, the local planning authority also had a responsibility to ensure that there is sufficient and suitable land available to support economic regeneration and local businesses. This included the retention, where appropriate, of existing employment sites that contribute to that objective.
- The two sites mentioned had been identified as fulfilling that purpose, and are protected for employment use on the adopted Local Plan.
- In relation to empty homes, an allowance had already been made in the Local Plan (agreed by the Planning Inspectors) for the contribution to the housing land supply of empty homes brought back into use.

(e) **QUESTION NO.5 FROM A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC REGARDING THE MAINTENANCE OF FORMAL PUBLIC GARDENS**

Ms Bailey asked Councillor Albon the following question:

'The flowerbeds along Victoria Parade & Gardens have always looked beautiful and attracted very positive comments. However, this year they are overgrown with weeds and brambles and look extremely unkempt. The Broadstairs Tourism & Leisure Association have received several enquiries as to what has happened and where the gardeners are. Could you please tell us what has changed this year and what the plans are going forward in regard to reinstating and maintaining the formal public gardens in this popular tourist destination?'

Councillor Albon responded with the following points:

- Unfortunately the team had experienced staff shortages this year, which coupled with machinery breakdowns, had impacted their ability to deliver the usual standard of service in this location. The supervisors had been working in Victoria Gardens over the last week or so to try and resolve the weed issue.
- Recruitment for the vacant posts, as well as management and seasonal roles had begun, so going forward the situation would improve.

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

(a) **QUESTION NO.1 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING THE LIMITED LIABILITY PARTNERSHIP**

Councillor Wing asked Councillor Yates the following question:

'The following Limited Liability Partnership; East Kent Opportunities LLP was incorporated on 4th March 2008 and remains active and according to Companies House is a joint partnership between KCC and TDC. The last set of accounts were formally registered. For what purpose was this LLP setup, how does it generate income/profits and what has/does this money finance?'

Councillor Yates responded with the following points:

- East Kent Opportunities LLP (EKO) was incorporated in 2008 as a joint venture between Thanet District Council and Kent County Council with the express aim of bringing forward two sites in Thanet in a complementary way to support Economic Development and Regeneration in the area.
- Due to the fact that this was an Economic Development/Regeneration project, no allowance had been made in the budget for any income/profit. Instead these have been treated as windfalls as and when they have materialised and in some instances used to repay investment costs associated with unlocking the site, for example the cost of the spine road.

Councillor Wing followed up her question by asking is the LLP linked directly or indirectly to any land along the Haine road, and whether the LLP had benefited financially from any of the various subsequent housing developments?

Councillor Yates responded that he would respond to this question via email correspondence. Councillor Yates was unable to confirm the linkage regarding Haine road during the time of the meeting.

(b) **QUESTION NO.2 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING PUBLIC TOILETS**

Councillor Towning asked Councillor Albon the following question:

'We are unable to use the public toilets in Thanet.

Will you inform the meeting what steps have been taken to repair and have the toilets available? for local residents and visitors to use.'

Councillor Albon responded with the following points:

- There were currently 28 public toilets open daily in Thanet. Last week the public toilets on Cavendish Street in Ramsgate reopened. The toilets were closed in March 2022 due to continued anti-social and criminal behaviour. We had refurbished the toilet block, and installed new litter bins and a planter. CCTV is also being installed to discourage further anti-social behaviour at the block.
- Although the toilets at Margate clock tower had been closed now since 2019 we have once again put temporary toilets in place this season.
- Looking ahead there is an objective to improve toilet provision in key locations across the district and officers are scoping plans which will be shared later this year.

Councillor Towning followed up his question by asking what the real plan was, would there be another review?

Councillor Albon responded that the previous Conservative administration had been in control two years prior. The issue raised was being looked into by the council.

(c) **QUESTION NO.3 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING RIGHT TO BUY HOUSING SALES**

Councillor Bayford asked Councillor Whitehead the following question:

'It is pleasing to note that, following pressure from many authorities including TDC, the Government has changed the rules concerning receipts from Right to Buy housing sales, allowing councils to keep 100% of the monies raised, subject to certain conditions. Would

the Cabinet member for Housing outline how TDC intends to take advantage of this new freedom over the two years for which it is available?’

Councillor Whitehead responded with the following points:

- As stated, for the financial years 2022/23 and 2023/24, local authorities would be able to retain the Treasury share of Right To Buy receipts, but these could only be utilised in the same way as retained 1-4-1 receipts.
- In 2022/23 the Treasury share was £196,112.11 and for 2023/24 it had been predicted that this amount was to be £65,371.86, which equates to 4 right to buy sales.
- This equated to an estimate of just under £261,500 over 2 years. This was a welcome amount, and would be utilised as part of the 40% subsidy required as part of the £8.1m already in the approved Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme to provide additional, genuinely affordable homes for residents.
- Our ambitions to provide new affordable homes are the subject of a report later on this agenda, and the right to buy receipts are an important part of the funding for this programme.

Councillor Bayford followed up her question by asking whether there were any plans to re-establish a housing cabinet advisory group, and when would this likely happen?

Councillor Whitehead responded that the housing cabinet advisory group was one of the four cabinet advisory groups which would be brought forward shortly.

(d) **QUESTION NO.4 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING A PRIVATELY FUNDED CAFE IN NORTHDOWN PARK**

Councillor Manners asked Councillor Duckworth the following question:

‘One of my constituents has secured almost 500 signatures in a petition asking TDC to facilitate offering a concession and thereafter inviting expressions of interest for a privately funded cafe operation in Northdown Park. Can this be looked at as a priority? Indeed can we now look forward to TDC encouraging enterprise and community cohesion as part of its property strategy?’

Councillor Duckworth responded with the following points:

- We are currently conducting a thorough review of Northdown Park and all its facilities. The estates team is carefully evaluating every aspect, including the buildings, sports and recreation facilities, public conveniences, refreshments, and other relevant factors. The main goal is to assess different options and make well-informed decisions.
- As part of the review, we are considering the possibility of offering refreshments and light snacks in the park’s pavilion, subject to necessary consents. However, it’s important for us to prioritise the protection of our green spaces and make the most of the existing buildings before considering the construction of new cafes.
- Our aim is to ensure a comprehensive evaluation that takes into account the feasibility of various options. By utilising the existing infrastructure and exploring potential enhancements, we can maintain the park’s natural beauty while providing additional amenities for residents to enjoy.

(e) **QUESTION NO.5 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING THE THEATRE ROYAL’S REPAIR AND REFURBISHMENT**

Councillor Bambridge asked Councillor Duckworth the following question:

'The Theatre Royal in Margate is a unique piece of Margate history, much loved - and much missed since its closure.

Recently the council was awarded £2m from Government funds towards the theatre's repair and refurbishment. Out of this the sum of £370,000 was determined for urgently needed repairs required to keep this fine old building wind and watertight and to prevent its condition from deteriorating further.

Can Cllr Duckworth assure me that steps will definitely be taken to ensure that these urgent repairs will be carried out before the onset of next winter and can I please be advised of the timetable for the works?'

Councillor Duckworth responded with the following points:

- The urgent repairs for Theatre Royal Margate are currently being drawn up and a package put out for a contractor to complete the works. Based on advice from our conservation architect and theatre historian initially there will be a smaller package of works of temporary waterproofing repairs to the roof. There are several reasons for this;
- Discovery of the Sunburner in the ceiling which has heritage significance. It is an early Victorian gas light and ventilation system which needs careful investigation.
- In order to properly ventilate the theatre it is very likely modern plant and extraction will need to be located on the roof and will need to be included into the final designs.
- An overall master plan is required with conservation principles applied to safeguard the heritage of the theatre.
- The building will be watertight before autumn/ early winter. Safeguarding the building until the major works begin.
- The council will be applying for National Lottery Heritage Funding in the coming six months for this project and the more Town Deal funding available to form match funding the better chance the lottery bid will have.

Councillor Bambridge followed up her question by asking whether some of the reallocated GRASS funding for Margate Town Deal could be used to further secure the future of the Theatre Royal or Winter Gardens.

Councillor Duckworth responded that this was not the case, there had been no decisions on reallocating the GRASS funding money. It was hoped that the situation would be resolved amicably and the council was hopeful to continue to fund this project.

(f) **QUESTION NO.6 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING BIRCHINGTON'S NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

Councillor Kup asked the Leader the following question:

'We have seen an updated plan submitted to the council for 1600 homes in Birchington - it is more important than ever that our villages and towns, like Birchington, have robust and thorough Neighbourhood Plans in place to ensure there is still some level of protection to our unique villages and towns. Birchington's Neighbourhood Plan has been delayed due to circumstances with the appointed examiner. Can the cabinet member please tell me what the council will do so that this does not happen again, to ensure we are supporting our towns and villages?'

The Leader responded with the following points:

- The delay to the Birchington Neighbourhood Plan examination was the result of some very unusual circumstances. However, the Examination fact-check report

has now been received and when the final report is received, it will be reported to Cabinet.

- The other Neighbourhood Plans currently being prepared are running to the anticipated programme.

(g) **QUESTION NO.7 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING VILLAGES AND THE LOCAL PLAN REVIEW**

Councillor Pugh asked the Leader the following question:

'As the council conducts the Local Plan Review to extend the local plan to 2031-2040, what protections will be put in place for villages in Thanet to ensure that they are protected not just from overdevelopment but also from merging with one another?'

The Leader responded with the following points:

- The precise level of housing that will need to be accommodated in the district had not been determined, nor has the location or scale of any new development sites.
- Decisions about Local Plan allocations and other policies would be made by Members (including Full Council) at different stages of the plan-making process.
- The separation of settlements had been a feature of Local Plans in Thanet for many years, primarily through the Green Wedge policy separating the urban areas. In the villages, this was primarily achieved by the Village Confines policy (Local Plan Policy SP24).

Councillor Pugh followed up his question by asking whether the Leader, as a cross party effort, would consider this review to cover the entirety of the district, looking at reinstating village gaps to ensure protections?

The Leader responded that the Local Plan Review was a lengthy process which was being held up by multiple issues. The input from all other parties across the chamber was welcomed.

(h) **QUESTION NO.8 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING THE REGENERATION ALLIANCE AND RAMSGATE SOCIETY PROPOSAL**

Councillor Davis asked the Leader the following question:

'There has been a great deal of interest in and support for the Ramsgate Regeneration Alliance and Ramsgate Society proposal to establish a regular Tall Ships event at the historic Royal Harbour of Ramsgate. This support is from the public, community groups, local businesses, and the Sail Training Association, who have successfully run such events for many years.

This project would provide huge financial gain, both to the local economy and to this Authority, in the region of twelve to fifteen million pounds per event.

Will the Leader, as portfolio holder for the Royal Harbour, support this exciting initiative, with its potential to create jobs, training opportunities, and a huge boost to this island's tourism and leisure economy?'

The Leader responded with the following points:

- Tall ships events had taken place at Ramsgate before, most recently in the 1990's. The visit of the El Galeon earlier this year also proved to be a popular local attraction.

- Any new event proposal should be submitted to the council using the dedicated event app which can be found on the council's website. The application can then be reviewed by relevant officers including the Harbour Master at Ramsgate such that feedback from an initial assessment of the proposal can be given.
- Cllr Davis had suggested that such an event would generate employment, training opportunities and £12-15m benefit for the local economy. The details of anticipated benefits associated with an event accompanied by a robust business case along with an assessment of enabling costs should be included with an application for all such major events.
- With no information other than the content of the councillor's question it is not possible at this time to confirm or deny support for such an event. It was important that we do not commit limited resources and valuable officer time to proposals that do not deliver benefits to the council or local area. However, subject to a favourable outcome to an initial assessment of the event proposal, further officer time was supported, being committed to offering feedback and guidance to an organiser such that they can further develop their plans.

Councillor Davis followed up his question by asking whether the Leader would agree to meet with the directors of the sales association and the relevant officers in order to progress this matter further?

The Leader responded that he was open to this suggestion.

(i) **QUESTION NO.9 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING SOUTHERN WATER**

Councillor Scott asked the Leader the following question:

'How does this administration propose to challenge whether Southern Water has the ability to provide uninterrupted safe water for all households in Thanet and that the company has the extra capacity to dispose of and treat waste from the potential 21,000 new homes that could be added to the water supply and treatment network in Thanet if the proposed additional numbers are added to the Local Plan following the review? It is not a satisfactory solution to have on-site sewage disposal systems or cesspits installed on new developments with the waste being taken away in lorries.'

The Leader responded with the following points:

- Alongside the Local Plan, the council prepared an Infrastructure Delivery Plan to ensure that the necessary infrastructure to support development. This involved engagement with a range of statutory bodies and service providers (including the Environment Agency and Southern Water). This will also be a key part of the Local Plan update process.
- At the time of the meeting, none of the current plans for the strategic housing allocations in the 2020 Local Plan included on-site sewerage disposal systems.
- It should be noted that, in 2024, the "right to connect" to the sewerage network as part of new development is to be removed for surface water run-off, which is the primary component that results in flooding and sewage release.

Councillor Scott followed up his question by asking what actions the council would take in order to ensure that Southern Water would avoid further issues, or pursue the company for reparations?

The Leader responded that it was agreeable that the situation was unacceptable. The reparations did not solve the problem previously, a more comprehensible approach was needed.

(j) **QUESTION NO.10 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING THE COLLABORATIVE WORKING WITH TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS**



Councillor Fellows asked the Leader the following question:

'I want to ask Councillor Everett for his assurance that the Scrutiny Review that was completed last term about 'Collaborative working with Town and Parish Councils' will be progressed through Cabinet as soon as possible so the recommendations that the scrutiny review working group made can be implemented. These recommendations will benefit all our residents and are wanted by town and parish councils and will also help to relieve some pressure on services offered by TDC.'

The Leader responded that this was correct.

Councillor Fellows followed up his question by asking whether the Leader would push for Thanet District Council to create a better culture for dealing with Town and Parish Council's so that they could be treated as the powerhouses of local representations that they are?

The Leader responded that he was impressed with the work of Ramsgate Town Council. The Town and Parish Councils were considered an important part of the democratic set up in Thanet.

(k) **QUESTION NO.11 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING MANSTON AIRPORT**

Councillor Rogers asked the Leader the following question:

'Canterbury City Council and Dover District Council have both had a detailed presentation by Riveroak Strategic Partners at their full councils. Cllr Green objected to a presentation at Overview and Scrutiny and suggested that it was delayed until after the court case on the 5th and 6th July which was granted. My question is, as Manston Airport is in Thanet, can all councillors receive a full presentation by Tony Freudman, director of Riveroak, not just those on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee? All councillors deserve to know the true facts so residents of Thanet can be better informed.'

The Leader responded with the following points:

- The Development Control Order Application, made by Riveroak Strategic Partners (RSP) was initially granted by the Department of Transport in July 2020. It was subsequently quashed by the High Court in February 2021, following an application for a judicial review of the decision.
- The Secretary of State at the time, conceded that the decision approval letter issued did not contain enough detail to support the decision.
- Subsequently, the DCO was granted for a second time in August 2022 by the Minister for Transport. This second decision has also been the subject of a judicial review application, which was considered by the High Court earlier this month, on 4th and 5th of July. We are currently awaiting the outcome of this hearing.
- Once the outcome of the judicial review process is known, the council would be happy to arrange for members to be briefed on the outcome of the application and, depending on the outcome, the next steps in the process, and to invite Tony Freudman to attend.

Councillor Rogers followed up her question by stating that there was misinformation online, Councillor Rogers asked whether Councillors should be able to have access to the correct information?

The Leader responded that there was a lot of misinformation on social media. Facts are important, and Councillors should debate on the matters of fact rather than through misinformation of social media.

**(l) QUESTION NO.12 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING THE PARKING REVIEW**

Councillor Dawson asked Councillor Keen the following question:

'Can Cllr Keen please update the council on where we are with the Parking Review that was sent out to tender under the previous administration?'

Councillor Keen responded with the following points:

- This had been delayed due to staffing resources within the team but would be live on the tender portal in the next 7 days of this council meeting.
- As part of this review stakeholders including Councillors would be involved in providing feedback on the needs of the district.

Councillor Dawson followed up her question by asking whether the Labour administration would look at options such as public consultation to ensure that the council works with businesses and residents across Thanet so that this was fair to all residents and businesses?

Councillor Keen responded that part of the tender was for a full public consultation.

**(m) QUESTION NO.13 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING EMPTY HOMES**

Councillor Austin asked Councillor Whitehead the following question:

'With rising rents and mortgage costs and a shortage of affordable homes, we all know many residents are struggling to keep a roof over their heads.

Meanwhile, we're also aware we have empty homes in the District – and that the simplest, cheapest, most sustainable way to increase the housing supply is to make sure these are filled.

This council has had success in filling empty homes previously through the No Use Empty scheme. Could Cllr Whitehead please:

Update us on current estimates of how many empty homes in the District might be available for occupation (ie not including second homes, AirBNBs etc)?

Let us know what's happening to get as many of these occupied as possible?

Tell us whether her administration plans to set targets for getting empty homes occupied?'

Councillor Whitehead responded with the following points:

- Questions were frequently received and answered on empty homes, and it's a topic which was explored at length on many occasions; and it is a very important issue, without doubt, but it was disagreed with regarding the assertion that bringing empty homes back into usage is the simplest and cheapest way to increase the housing supply; if that were true, Councils across the country would not be facing significant numbers of empty properties.
- The key issue was the difference between private and public ownership, and the relative powers Councils have in relation to both. Empty properties within the councils portfolio can, and will be brought back into usage; the council had legal ownership, and could take action to make that happen.
- In terms of ownership, the council currently had 11 properties that would be classified as empty properties. Seven of these are fire damaged; three are welfare units, and one is currently under consideration for future housing plans.
- These properties can be brought back into use or already have future use, and the council would be acting to ensure that they fulfil a very necessary social use.

- Properties owned by private individuals are not within the councils jurisdiction in the same way, and the councils powers are exceedingly limited in terms of direct actions that we can take to bring them back into usage; and the reason for the existence of empty properties is often not simple, frequently involving complex probate, issues of capacity, and illness. Lengthy multi agency approaches, often spanning years, are often necessary to bring even severely dilapidated homes into use; and a property in private ownership simply being empty, without linked dilapidation or significant social disruption, is not grounds to bring it into public hands, as they are considered private assets, with legal protections relating to that.
- The key indicator for measurement here is the number of homes registered as unoccupied and unfurnished for more than six months on the Council Tax register. This overall figure is broken down into: under two years (953), two to five years (112), five to 10 years (40) and over 10 years (19). The combined number as of 03 July 2023 is 1,124. Empty homes undergoing structural alterations and major repairs are eligible for a 12-month discount, due to the importance of providing housing stock in good condition. There are 112 homes subject to such a discount. A further 315 properties have been left empty for more than six months for varying reasons, but primarily as they are awaiting probate, as referenced earlier. In total, the council believes that there are 1,551 long term empty homes that are of concern, and that we continue to monitor.
- So, to recap, in total it was estimated that there are 1,551 properties that are currently long term empty, of differing duration; 1,540 of these properties are privately owned.
- We do currently have a dedicated full time empty homes officer. Their role is to engage with the owners of empty homes to help them bring their properties back into use, with support via the No Use empty scheme. When the informal approach is unsuccessful, the council considers whether there are any appropriate legal powers that could be used to help bring about reoccupation. It should be noted, however, that it is not unlawful to own an empty home. We offer loans and support via No Use Empty to bring properties requiring work back into usage; this has been very successful. We have also previously increased Council tax on long term empty properties to up to three times standard rate, dependent on how long the property is empty; these all act as incentives to bring property back into use.
- The councils target for the 2023/24 year is to help bring 120 long term empty homes back into use; our empty properties Officer works incredibly hard, and we will continue to support those efforts.
- Although the overall number of empty properties is often quoted, it is also very worth noting that over the past 15 years our council has been the most successful local authority in the whole of Kent in terms of empty property interventions and in the number of homes brought back into use; this is a statistic that is often forgotten in these discussions.

Councillor Austin followed up her question by asking whether the council had any plans to explore whether it owned any properties which could be suitable for conversion?

Councillor Whitehead responded that there was an issue of sustainability of buildings that had been used for business. The council was looking at energy efficiency and sustainability. It was considered difficult to make these buildings energy efficient.

## **8. NOTICE OF MOTION**

### **(a) Motion regarding pausing new planning permissions for major applications**

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

'Motion to pause the granting of new planning permissions, for builds of more than 10 dwellings, and allow for a review into the impacts the current housebuilding programme is having across Thanet.

While it is important that new homes are built in Thanet, it is likely that the continual increases in mortgage interest rates will have a slow-down effect on both the build of new homes and of their purchase, possibly for the rest of 2023.

This presents us with an opportunity to pause the granting of new planning applications, for builds of more than 10 dwellings, and review and address the concerns of residents on the following issues:

Southern Water's infrastructure is not fit for purpose to service the current households and businesses in the district. What impact will the proposed number of new dwellings have on the current residents in Thanet and on the environment around our coastline because of increased sewage releases?

There are too many dwellings across Thanet which remain unoccupied. Investigate how many empty properties there are across the district and the reasons for this.

How many previously approved planning applications are still to commence development?

How many of the already approved numbers of affordable homes have been built and made available at an affordable price?

Have the GP surgeries, primary schools, social amenities promised in previously approved planning applications been adequately delivered by the builders?

What is the impact of the recent new builds on traffic and highways in Thanet?

This Council agrees to pause the granting of new planning permissions, for builds of more than 10 dwellings, and set up a cross party working group of 7 councillors to work with officers to carry out the review, using the Treasury Green Book Gate Review (see link below) process as a guide for that review.'

Members voted to debate the motion; due to paragraph 3.8 of the constitution stating 'The Council should not debate any motion which would give rise to a significant change to income of the Council, to its expenditure or contract terms, unless it has received a report from the Chief Finance Officer or the Monitoring Officer as appropriate setting out the legal of financial effect of the motion,' the Council did not debate this motion at the meeting, and deferred it to the next meeting of Council.

A full report on the financial impact of the proposed motion would be written for Members' consideration, so that an informed debate could take place in the October 2023 Council meeting.

## **9. LEADERS REPORT**

The Leader, Councillor Everitt, presented his report to Council, covering the following key points:

- The new Labour administration began with the plan for a major extension of affordable council housing for residents in need.
- There were many challenges ahead, which residents had noted. Including issues with public toilets, multi-storey car parks, open spaces, fly tipping and lack of street cleaning in residential areas.
- The levelling up award for Ramsgate was a fundamental part of the council's plans. It had the potential to utilise the port, and the potential to unlock additional income for the council to spend on frontline services.
- Thanet Parkway station was due to open.

- The Winter Gardens had suffered from decades of underinvestment. This was considered a major challenge, estimated for a £6 million price tag, which would require external funding.
- Kent County Council had put forth proposals to close the Richborough Household Waste and Recycling Centre permanently. There had been a revised consultation which included options that included Deal closing instead of Richborough.
- The representatives of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England had advised that a review would be carried out of the district council ward boundaries during 2023 and 2024.

Councillor Pugh, as Leader of the Conservative Group, made the following points:

- Congratulations were given to Councillor Everitt on becoming Leader of the Council.
- The proposals for more affordable housing in the district was welcomed.
- The leaders report neglected to mention the Margate digital project, which had been submitted by and secured under the previous conservative administration.
- It was important that the council delivered on all of the various projects concerning the Ramsgate Levelling up.
- It was questioned whether the leader would confirm to progress both Levelling up projects.
- The Labour administration was to continue to follow the programme for identifying potential operators which had been set out by the Conservatives.
- The process to establish a Margate Town Council was long overdue.

The Leader responded to Councillor Pugh's comments with the following points:

- The council wanted to build affordable housing, however the difficulty was regarding finding the land.
- Commitments were to all the schemes and programmes, this included the Margate digital project.
- Inflation had an effect on the Levelling Up awards.
- The Margate Winter Gardens process which the Conservative administration had set out was being followed, however other options were also being considered.

Councillor Garner, as Leader of the Green Group, made the following points:

- Congratulations to the Leader were given.
- Well wishes were given to the previous Leader of the Council, Ash Ashbee.
- It was hoped that the council would be able to build up the stock of council owned homes over the next few years.
- The ambition regarding issues such as litter, public toilets and parking. These issues made a difference to the quality of life to residents and visitors alike.
- Regarding the Thanet Parkway, the planting should be looked at, and where needed also replaced.
- On the issue of Thanet Parkway, the Green Group disagreed.
- The group would join the administration in lobbying regarding the Richborough centre, and other centres stay open.
- It was important that the council did more for residents on the coastline that would be adversely impacted during peak tourism period.
- The expressed commitment to transparency was welcomed.

The Leader responded to Councillor Garner's comments with the following points:

- The planting around the Thanet Parkway would be looked at.
- The Parkway was all about growth and housing. Over time the station would be a success.

Councillor Worrow, as Leader of Thanet Independents, made the following points:

- Congratulations were given to the Labour Group and the Leader.
- It was hoped that wards such as Westgate, Garlinge and Birchington would also be focussed upon as well as Ramsgate.

The Leader responded to Councillor Worrow's comments with the following point:

- It was noted that the administration was not going to focus solely on Ramsgate.

#### **10. REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

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

- This was the first report for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel of the new administration.
- There had been newly elected councillors which had joined the first meeting, and the meeting was considered lively.
- The next meeting would be held on 20th July 2023, in which the leader had been invited to attend.
- All members of the council and the public were welcome to attend Scrutiny meetings.

Members noted the report.

#### **11. APPOINTMENT OF MONITORING OFFICER**

It was proposed by the Leader, seconded by Councillor Albon and Members agreed that the recommendation set out in the report be agreed, namely:

1. That Ingrid Brown be appointed as the Council's Monitoring Officer from her first day of service;
2. That, in the meantime, Sameera Khan should continue in that role until either she leaves the Council's service, or until Ingrid Brown's first day of service, whichever is earlier;
3. That, if Sameera Khan leaves the Council's service before Ingrid Brown begins,
4. Nick Hughes, as deputy Monitoring Officer, should cover the role for the interim period."

#### **12. APPOINTMENT OF HEAD OF PAID SERVICE**

It was proposed by the Leader, seconded by Councillor Albon and Members agreed that the recommendation set out in the report be agreed, namely:

1. For Full Council to extend the appointment of Colin Carmichael as Interim Chief Executive, Head of the Paid Service, and Returning Officer for a further year, until 31 July 2024;
2. To note that the Appointment Panel has the responsibility of determining the timing and process of the appointment of a permanent Chief Executive.'

#### **13. AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Councillor Whitehead proposed, Councillor Albon seconded and Members agreed the recommendations as set out in the report be adopted namely:

'It is recommended that Council:

1. Adopt the target to deliver at least 400 new affordable homes by 2027 and agree the proposed funding and delivery proposals set out in this report.
2. Replace the current phased approach to budgeting for the affordable housing programme with a single acquisitions and development budget.
3. Note that detailed projects will be presented to the Cabinet for approval as they are identified.
4. Approve an additional HRA capital budget of £7.485m to deliver 51 new affordable homes, as set out in 3.3 and 3.4 below, subject to Cabinet approving the details.'

**14. ALLOWANCES REPORT - RECOMMENDATIONS FROM EKJIRP**

The Chair proposed, the Vice Chair seconded and Council agreed the recommendations of the East Kent Joint Independent Remuneration Panel be adopted namely:

'A. That it be recommended to Thanet District Council that the Members' Allowances Scheme 2023-24, as set out in Annex 1 of the report, be approved.

B. In respect of the Dependant Carers' Allowance, the Panel would propose a move to actual cost reimbursement instead of a reimbursement based on the National Living Wage.'

**15. REPRESENTATION ON NON-EXECUTIVE OUTSIDE BODIES**

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

'1. That Council agrees that Councillor Mike Garner be the Council's nominee on the Thanet Rural Regeneration Group for 2023/24.'

**16. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

The Chair proposed, the Vice Chair seconded and Council AGREED that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for agenda item 17, as it contains exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 & 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

Live streaming ended and Full Council went into private session.

**17. MEDIATION PAYMENT FOR A FORMER EMPLOYEE**

It was proposed by the Leader, seconded by Councillor Yates and Members agreed that the mediation payment for a former employee.

Meeting concluded : 9.05 pm