



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Council held at The Great Hall, The Guildhall, St Giles Street, Northampton, NN1 1DE on Monday 21 February 2022 at 6.00 pm.

Present Councillor Ann Addison (Chair)

Councillor Rufia Ashraf
Councillor Jamal Alwahabi
Councillor Azizur Rahman
Councillor Fiona Baker
Councillor Dermot Bambridge
Councillor Harry Barrett
Councillor William Barter
Councillor Sally Beardsworth
Councillor Phil Bignell
Councillor Lizzy Bowen
Councillor Rebecca Breese
Councillor Adam Brown
Councillor Michael Brown
Councillor Alan Chantler
Councillor Nazim Choudary
Councillor Imran Ahmed Chowdhury BEM
Councillor Paul Clark
Councillor Stephen Clarke
Councillor Maggie Clubley
Councillor Fiona Cole
Councillor Raymond Connolly
Councillor Daniel Cribbin
Councillor Julie Davenport
Councillor Paul Dyball
Councillor Gareth Eales
Councillor Terrie Eales
Councillor Alison Eastwood
Councillor Penelope Flavell
Councillor Louisa Fowler
Councillor Matt Golby
Councillor Andrew Grant
Councillor Mike Hallam
Councillor Enam Haque
Councillor Lauryn Harrington-Carter
Councillor Jonathan Harris
Councillor Cheryl Hawes
Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Councillor James Hill
Councillor Nigel Hinch
Councillor Keith Holland-Delamere

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Councillor Mark Hughes
Councillor Rosie Humphreys
Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift
Councillor David James
Councillor Koulla Jolley
Councillor Andrew Kilbride
Councillor Jamie Lane
Councillor Phil Larratt
Councillor Daniel Lister
Councillor Malcolm Longley
Councillor Greg Lunn
Councillor Peter Matten
Councillor Ian McCord
Councillor Dennis Meredith
Councillor Colin Morgan
Councillor Charles Morton
Councillor Jonathan Nunn
Councillor Kevin Parker
Councillor Suresh Patel
Councillor Ken Pritchard
Councillor Bob Purser
Councillor Wendy Randall
Councillor Emma Roberts
Councillor Jake Roberts
Councillor Cathrine Russell
Councillor Brian Sargeant
Councillor Sue Sharps
Councillor John Shephard
Councillor David Smith
Councillor Zoe Smith
Councillor Laura Stevenson
Councillor Danielle Stone
Councillor Nick Sturges-Alex
Councillor Walter Tarasiewicz
Councillor Mike Warren

Apologies
for
Absence:

Councillor Andre Gonzalez De Savage
Councillor Anthony S. Bagot-Webb
Councillor Muna Cali
Councillor Pinder Chauhan
Councillor Karen Cooper
Councillor Janice Duffy
Councillor Rupert Frost
Councillor Jo Gilford
Councillor Terry Gilford
Councillor Rosie Herring
Councillor Paul Joyce

Councillor Anna King
Councillor Charles Manners
Councillor Sam Rumens
Councillor Lisa Samiotis
Councillor Richard Solesbury-Timms
Councillor Winston Strachan

Officers

64. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bagot-Webb, Chauhan, Cooper, Duffy, Frost, J Gilford, T Gilford, Gonzalez de Savage, Herring, Manners, Rumens, Solesbury-Timms, King, Joyce, Cali, Strachan, and Samiotis.

65. Declarations of Interest

Councillor E Roberts declared a personal and non-pecuniary interest in respect of item 5 as she attended an NTFC match with tickets she was gifted as a West Northants Councillor.

Councillor Ashraf declared a personal and non-pecuniary interest in respect of Item 5 as she recently visited the Club in her capacity as Mayor of Northampton.

Councillor Barrett declared a personal and non-pecuniary interest in respect of Item 5 as he visited the Club over the festive period.

Councillor G Eales declared a personal and non-pecuniary interest in respect of Item 5 as he visited the Club in his capacity of Mayor of Northampton during his tenure as Mayor.

66. Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman advised that the Deputy Chairman, Councillor Gonzalez de Savage, was unwell and unable to attend the meeting.

67. Public Participation

Tom Cliffe, Supporters' Representative of Northampton Town Football Club, addressed Council in respect of Item 5 and noted that 97% of respondents to a recent poll were in favour of the development of the East Stand. The proposal would give the Northampton Town Community Trust additional facilities to carry out its award-winning community work, and high-quality disabled facilities would also be provided.

James Whiting, Chief Executive of Northampton Town Football Club, addressed Council in respect of Item 5 and thanked the Council for carrying out a thorough and detailed process. He said that the Club always welcomed detailed scrutiny. The benefits of the completion of the East Stand were wide-ranging for both supporters and the wider community. An open house event was held in the summer to share plans with supporters as well as details of the wider development. Feedback was

overwhelmingly positive, further confirmed by a poll which showed 97% of respondents in favour of the plans. The area behind the club was earmarked for future development with the Club owning the freehold. There would be room in the future to build a stand comparable to those seen at premier league stadiums. Mr Whiting acknowledged that there would always be opposition but asked Council to look at the facts; a deliverable development, club-owned land behind the stand, development on the land in line with the Council's planning policies and the aims of the Enterprise Zone, additional jobs created and significant rates for the Council.

Hayden Spenceley addressed Council in respect of Item 5 and stated that at a minimum, adequate facilities for disabled supporters should be provided; the deal before Council was a great option and Mr Spenceley believed that it was the only option worth taking.

Andy Roberts, Chairman of Northampton Town Supporters Trust, addressed Council in respect of Item 5. He stated that the Trust's position was that it was happy there seemed to be an impetus between the Club's owners and the Council to secure a deal which would see the East Stand completed. Mr Roberts implored the Council to support a deal which would see the East Stand completed, and also protect the historic community land behind the stand, which was registered as an asset of community value. Under the present deal, the land would be sold, with half earmarked for industrial development. This land should be retained, or at least protected in favour of development for future ongoing investment for the Club. The Trust had asked the Club and the Council to attach conditions to the development of all of the old athletics track land covered by the ACV and would like to see a partnership infrastructure foundation between the Council, Club and supporters to discuss potential use of the land.

Keith Buckby, Director of NTFC Supporters Trust, addressed Council in respect of Item 5 and stated that whilst he supported the development of the East Stand, he could not put blind faith in businesspeople with no previous connection to, or affiliation with the Club. He urged Council to exclude the Club's original footprint from the deal whilst waiting to see if the owners and directors delivered on their promises.

Derek Krajewski addressed Council in respect of Item 5 and stated that a lack of infrastructure was one of the main reasons for the Club's underperforming. He stated that the Council was at risk of missing an opportunity for investment and growth in the town and the Club by selling off land for warehouses. He urged the Council to remove the ACV land from any land deal.

68. **Disposal of Land at Sixfields, Northampton**

The Assistant Director of Assets and Environment presented a report to Council which sought to address the options for the disposal of land at Sixfields currently owned freehold by WNC. The report discussed the proposals put forward by the current long leaseholder, County Developments (Northampton) Limited ('CDNL'), as well as an additional proposal from Cillarda Limited, and provided Members with information to support a discussion on the matter in advance of the Cabinet Meeting to be held on the 28th February, where a decision would be made.

Members made comment, asked questions, and heard:

- The Council set the timetable in which to consider and assess options.
- Due diligence had been carried out in respect of backers of the CDNL proposal; since the Council was receiving money, there was little risk in terms of financial issues.
- The running track had benefitted from some remediation, the main site has had limited works carried out on it.
- There was no trace of Chinese involvement on the public record, and this was not considered to be relevant in terms of land transaction.
- The Council did not have a specific ethical policy, but the Council would always seek to work in an ethical way.
- There had been no requests from any of the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committees to review this issue, although they were empowered to do so if they wished.
- The disposal of the site would "tidy up" the issue around various leases on the site.
- The Cilldara area covered 17.29 acres and the CDNL area was 20.90 acres.
- Any decision made by Council in respect of the disposal of land at Sixfields would be carried out properly so the Assistant Director of Assets and Environment did not feel that this should be a priority for the Council's external auditor. However, this was a decision for the auditor and the Council would welcome and cooperate should they choose to investigate the decision.

The Monitoring Officer clarified that being a Cabinet decision, officers approached the Chair of the Cabinet, the Leader of the Council in respect of the decision-making timetable.

Councillor Longley proposed the report and thanked the Assistant Director of Assets and Environment for his detailed presentation.

Councillor M Brown seconded the report and reserved his right to speak.

Members made comments as follows:

- The Labour Group supported the principle of a deal with the owners of NTFC on the sale of land but had concerns which they sought to deal with by suggesting that a condition of the sale be included on the athletics track so that its use could only be for the current/future purposes of NTFC. This would effectively be a condition on the current WNC/NBC part only and the Cilldara area on Plan 3 of the Council report be the only footprint to be developed for non-NTFC related enterprises. An alternative option would be to remove any ACV land from the sale and look to incorporate into existing stadium lease and essentially retain the ACV.
- Cabinet were urged to ensure that they understood the details of the entire deal before they made a decision. It was questioned why the Club had not developed the East Stand at any time over the last 6 years.

- Plans should include facilities for young people and an athletics track. The sale of the land and subsequent development should fit in with the Council's emerging Sports and Leisure Strategy.
- It was very unfortunate that the issue around the Club had become so polarised, but it would be unwise to push forwards with so many unanswered questions, specifically the second offer of more money for less land.
- Concern around the potential development and whether the Club's debt would be cleared by the development.
- A member stated they would like to see the second offer being considered in more depth and suggested a delay of a few months would not harm any potential sale, considering how keen the current bidders were.
- The need for the East Stand to be completed, including proper facilities for disabled people was acknowledged, but concern was expressed around the number of "unknowns" surrounding the deal.
- It was suggested that Cabinet should accept neither offer, assess the options for housing, and reassess the position in 2024.
- It was suggested that the deal should have gone through a pre-scrutiny process and further options, including the costs were the Council to develop the stand itself, should be included.
- Some concern was expressed around the Club not completing the stand in its 6 years of ownership, and around what might be built on the land proposed to be disposed of.
- It was suggested the Council had big aspirations, including to become a city; it needed city-level facilities. It was noted that as the planning authority, the Council had a level of control over what may be built on the land that was proposed for disposal.

RESOLVED:

Council:

- a) Noted the contents of the report and the options open to the Council.
- b) Provided comments to the Cabinet.

69. Urgent Business (previously agreed with the Chairman)

There was no urgent business on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 7.59 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____