

West Northamptonshire Council

Cabinet Minutes

12 October 2021

Cabinet Members Present:

Jonathan Nunn (Chair)	Fiona Baker
Lizzy Bowen	Rebecca Breese
Adam Brown	Mike Hallam
Phil Larratt	Malcolm Longley
David Smith	

Other West Northamptonshire Council Members Present:

William Barter	Sally Beardsworth
Julie Davenport	Gareth Eales
Nigel Hinch	Keith Holland-Delamere
Kevin Parker	Emma Roberts
Sue Sharps	Danielle Stone
Walter Tarasiewicz	

West Northamptonshire Council Officers Present:

Joanne Barrett	Assistant Director Housing & Communities
Jane Carr	Director of Transformation
Anna Earnshaw	Chief Executive
Paul Hanson	Democratic Services Manager
Martin Henry	Chief Finance Officer
Sofia Neal-Gonzalez	Democracy Officer (minutes)
Sarah Reed	Executive Director of Corporate
Stuart Timmiss	Executive Director of Place & Economy
Catherine Whitehead	Monitoring Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Matt Golby.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD IN PUBLIC ON 14th SEPTEMBER

RESOLVED: That the minutes from the Cabinet meeting of the 14th September were approved and signed as a true and accurate record.

4. ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

Item 05- Urgent Business

None

Item 06 - Old Black Lion Pub and St Peter's Church – Northampton Towns Fund

At the Chairman's invitation Councillor Lizzy Bowen presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. The committee was advised that the report also included information about St Peters Church which was a 12th century listed building. It was advised that Northampton Forward was leading on this project, there were also a number of key stakeholders involved both private and public. The committee was advised that the Church's Conservation Trust (CCT) had been in conversation with the National Bell Ringers association regarding moving their headquarters to the area and potentially using this site. It had been highlighted in the report that a local pub operator would take over the running of the pub. WNC would maintain links to the project.

Councillors made the following comments.

- The report mentioned a 'proper pub' several times, could there be clarification with what this means?
- It was noted that after any consultation there were at times members of the public who claimed to have not been consulted. It was queried whether how the consultation process is conducted could be revisited.
- It was noted that Northampton Forward had already pre-approved this decision before it had come to Cabinet.
- It was advised that many of the constituents of Spring Boroughs were unhappy about this proposal as the community already had various facilities like this one.
- The community was a diverse one and it was questioned whether the project proposal taken this into account as a shared secular space had been requested by the community.
- A proper business case for the project was requested. There had been a pub on site previously which had failed, would this be any different?

Councillor Lizzy Bowen made the following comments.

- The board make up was a government requirement and WNC had followed guidelines on this.
- With regards the Business Plan there wasn't much more that could be provided and it had been a thorough process.
- There had been a local emphasis on the lease arrangements, communication with Phipps Brewery Company had taken place regarding this.
- It was noted that the diversity of the community might not have been appreciated as much as it should have but the committee was advised that this project was not just for Spring Boroughs but for the whole of Northamptonshire.

The Chairman advised that there had been active dialogue with the local breweries.

Item 07 – Local Enforcement Plan for West Northamptonshire

At the Chairman's invitation Councillor Rebecca Breese presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. Cabinet was informed that each sovereign authority had had its own plan, one was now needed for WNC to bring all the authorities together. The draft had been produced by officers from all local authorities and had been written in a specific style in order to avoid jargon.

Councillors made the following comments.

- Concern was raised about the lack of staff in planning. It was queried how officers would have the time to deal with breaches over the whole of Northants when they were short staffed.
- There had been much emphasis on new builds while some older terraced houses were vacant, could these houses not be renovated and used.
- It was felt that certain parts of the plan could potentially give developers the opportunity to exploit the situation that the council finds itself in.
- It was asked how residents could be sure that any breaches would be investigated.

The Executive Director of Place & Economy advised that staffing levels were being looked at and the policy presented to Cabinet reflected the legislature and best practice that was available at the time.

Item 08 – Hackleton, Overstone and Clipston Neighbourhood Development Plans

At the Chairman's invitation Councillor Rebecca Breese presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. The committee was advised that approval of the reports would allow all three of the plans to move onto the next part of development.

A councillor asked whether Cabinet would actively encourage communities to invest in development plans, taking value versus cost into account.

The Executive Director of Place & Economy advised communities that wish to have development plans to be clear about the objectives that they wish to meet, and stated he was happy to attend parish council meetings to discuss.

Item 09 – Bus Service Improvement Plan

At the Chairman's invitation Councillor Phil Larratt presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. Apologies were given for the report not being completed and as in depth as was wanted.

As discussed at Cabinet in June the implementation of the plan meant forming an enhanced partnership with bus operators, this would be required before any funding could be released. The committee was advised that the plan was a progressive one but at the moment not fully complete. It was hoped that a completed draft would be ready in the next week, the plan would then be revisited. It was advised that a task and finish group of cross party members would be required for this project. The Council had hoped to restore many of the features and routes that had been lost.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was advised that there had been a lack of engagement with bus drivers on this plan and concerns had been raised at full council.
- The Bus Implementation Strategy should be bold and ambitious.
- It was noted that work should be done in order to reach the Council's carbon neutral goal.
- Some villages currently had no bus services and these are essential for rural life.
- There were private services in place for University transport which could cost up to £200 per term per student.
- Cabinet was urged to read the CPRE report, it was full of important information pertaining to countryside accessibility.

- Although a cross party working group had been discussed at the June Cabinet meeting this had still not happened.
- It was advised that some councillors felt uncomfortable with delegating authority to Cabinet on this issue.
- Affordability was discussed, specifically bus fees, it was noted that costs had gone up significantly.
- It was noted that Stagecoach had extended some of their services but there were still serious connectivity issues.
- It was asked that routes be changed in a timely manner if found to not be working.

Councillor Phil Larratt made the following comments.

- The value of public transport, especially in rural areas was understood.
- The gold service buses by Stagecoach were an example of a good bus service.
- It was noted that Milton Keynes had engaged consultants to help them with the process. WNC could not afford this, so the work had been undertaken by officers.
- Once the whole plan is available it will be shared, leader from every group will receive a copy.
- The Bus Back Better initiative would be an opportunity to give back bus services to areas that had lost them.

The Executive Director of Place & Economy noted that this plan would be reviewed every year and informed Cabinet that various park and rides had been discussed.

Councillor Adam Brown suggested an amendment to the recommendations.

Agree delegated authority to the Executive Directors for Place, Economy and Transport and for Finance, in consultation with the Cabinet Members with responsibility for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste and for Finance, to agree the final Bus Service Improvement Plan (in consultation with a cross party working group of up to 6 members) prior to submission to the Department for Transport and publication on the Council's website by 31 October 2021

Item 10 – 24 Guildhall Road refurbishment and relocation of Northampton

Arts Collective Limited

At the Chairman's invitation Councillor Lizzy Bowen presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. The lease agreement for this property had been for a peppercorn rent for 25 years with a get out clause at year 10 if needed. It was advised that further funding for this project had come from the Towns Fund. The project had gone through a business case which found that although more money

could have been achieved on the open market, funding then wouldn't have been an option. There had been assurance that once approval had been received the project should be completed by March 2022.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was asked who the other tenants of the building would be.
- It was noted that the previous councils had a history of badly managed projects.
- Many historical sites had been lost over the years, so this project was an exciting one.
- It was queried as to whether the staffing levels for this project were enough.

Councillor Lizzy Bowen advised that recruitment was almost up to full capacity and that securing other tenants was in hand.

Item 12 – Approach to Community Funding for 2021/22 and 2022/23

At the Chairman's invitation Councillor David Smith presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated.

Councillors made the following comments.

- The report was welcomed as many organisations in the charity sector had lacked clarity with regard to funding.
- This system would allow organisations to target a specific area for funding.
- It was noted that there had been no detailed timescales presented in the report.
- It was asked if the Council had the correct amount of staff in place in order to process requests in a timely fashion.
- Exceptional circumstances were mentioned in the report, could there be some clarification as to what was meant by that?
- A councillor queried what would happen to any money that was left over in this fund at the end of the year.
- A larger pot of money for the voluntary sector had been expected.
- It was noted that the current grant cycle was 1 year, could this be increased to 3, this would be helpful to organisations such as Age Concern.

Councillor Mike Hallam advised that this would allow the Council to move forward as required, and that increasing to a three year cycle could be looked at. He advised that parish councils can't apply, but that they have other avenues open to them.

Councillor Adam Brown noted that use of this fund would be monitored.

Councillor Fiona Baker had been disappointed with the time taken to create this but understood that a lot of work had taken place. Many voluntary organisations had not been able to fund raise due to covid, so this fund would be important.

Councillor Phil Larratt queried whether councillors could go through parish councils in order to fund some organisations, noting that some smaller ones might not have bank accounts etc.

Councillor Malcolm Longley advised councillors that this had been a one-off fund that was covid related, which meant care needed to be taken when allocating funds. Councillors must be sure, for this fund, that any projects should be covid-related.

Item 11 – Hardingstone Bike Park

The Chairman noted that this report contained exempt appendices and should any discussion involve them then the committee would move into private session.

At the Chairman's invitation Councillor Lizzy Bowen presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated.

The Cabinet was informed that this had been an NBC led proposal, which now had various stakeholders including WNC, with a peppercorn rent being offered. There were very few bike parks in the country, the nearest one being nearly 2 hours away so this was an exciting venture. The section used would be a disused section of the Delapre gold course, which would include various routes for different needs.

Provisional parking is to be provided which was a requirement of the grant, with forecasted costs having increased mainly due to the price of raw materials. Cabinet was informed that some Section 106 money had been made available for this project but that there had been no firm price on the works as yet. It was hoped that work would start next year.

Councillors made the following comments.

- The maintenance of the bike park was a concern and it was questioned whether this would end up falling solely to WNC.
- It was noted that the fees had gone up significantly, this was a concern.
- Concern had been raised about the idea of delegated authority, should this not be a collaboration with all councillors involved.
- It was queried why a peppercorn rent was approved for some options but not for others.
- It was noted that a lot of emphasis had been placed on NSport.
- Could there be confirmation that should this not work, the land would not be used for a housing development.



Councillor Fiona Baker advised that having worked with NSport over a period of time she had found them to be exceptional at delivering their projects.

Councillor Lizzy Bowen agreed with the concerns raised about the price of the project, but after having investigated other parks costings found the price given was a fair one. Peppercorn rent would be used in areas where nothing else had been achieved in order to help the wellbeing of the people of the county.

Councillor Malcolm Longley advised that the Assistant Director Assets & Environment would be in charge of the project and he was very confident in his ability to complete the project. It was advised that the project was a full funded one.

Councillors Phil Larratt and Mike Hallam agreed and felt this was an excellent use for the site and would attract people to the area.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 20:50