

EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MINUTES

Committee: Cabinet **Date:** 21 January 2021

Place: Virtual Meeting on Zoom **Time:** 7.00 - 8.17 pm

Members Present: C Whitbread (Chairman), N Avey, N Bedford, A Patel, J Philip, S Kane and H Whitbread

Other Councillors: R Baldwin, P Bolton, R Brookes, L Burrows, S Heap, S Heather, H Kauffman, P Keska, C McCredie, R Morgan, S Murray, C P Pond, M Sartin, D Stocker, D Sunger, J H Whitehouse, J M Whitehouse and D Wixley

Apologies:

Officers Present: G Blakemore (Chief Executive), N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), A Small (Strategic Director Corporate and 151 Officer), S Jevans (Qualis Group Managing Director), Q Durrani (Service Director (Contracts & Technical Services / Commercial & Regulatory)), J Houston (Specialist Partnerships & Economic Development), F Edmonds (Climate Change Officer), M Thompson (Service Manager (Technical)), T Carne (Corporate Communications Team Manager), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer), L Kirman (Democratic Services Officer) and R Moreton (Corporate Communications Officer)

125. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Leader of Council made a short address to remind everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the internet, and would be capable of repeated viewing, which could infringe their human and data protection rights.

126. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct.

127. MINUTES

Decision:

The Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 03rd December 2020 be taken as read and would be signed by the Leader as a correct record.

128. REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

There were no verbal reports made by Members of the Cabinet on current issues affecting their areas of responsibility.

129. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE CABINET

The Cabinet noted that no public questions or requests to address the Cabinet had been received for consideration at the meeting.

130. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee reported that they held a special meeting on 7th January 2021 to discuss a call-in. It was for a Planning & Sustainability Portfolio Holders decision of 18 December 2020, PLS-003: Adoption of Epping Forest SAC Interim Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy.

After a full debate the Committee voted to confirm the decision of the Portfolio Holder.

Their next meeting will be held on 2nd February, when they will receive a presentation from North East Parking Partnership.

Councillor Murray commented that it had been a majority decision at the call-in meeting with, he thought, a low level of involvement by members. He then asked when the special Council meeting would be held and was told sometime in February.

131. COUNCIL HOUSEBUILDING CABINET COMMITTEE - 08 DECEMBER 2020

Councillor H Whitbread introduced the minutes of the meeting of the Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee held on 8th December 2020.

Councillor Morgan noted that there had been no mention of the culvers at Matching Green in the report. Officers were going to look at ways to increase car parking before the garages were demolished. Was there any further development on this? Councillor H Whitbread said that she would provide an update as soon as possible.

Councillor Heap asked which parcel of land was in Marlescroft Way that had been allocated for building. Councillor H Whitbread replied that she would reply by email on this matter. Councillor Murray said that he would also be interested in the answer.

Councillor Caroline Pond asked when would ward councillors be consulted on the new plans as outlined on pages 28 and 29 of the agenda. Councillor H Whitbread noted that the consultation phase had already begun, but she would be happy to chase up any specifics for her.

Councillor Wixley noted that the land around Marlescroft Way had been underwater this week so it was not a good place to develop.

Decision:

That the minutes of the Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee held on 08th December 2020 be noted.

132. HIGHWAYS RANGER SERVICE - UPDATE

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Technical Services, Councillor Avey, introduced the report updating the Cabinet on the Highways Ranger Service. He noted that the Highway Ranger services was provided by Essex Highways through each of the Local Highways Panel for district and borough Councils. Across Essex a number of authorities delivered the service in house. Epping Forest District was one of the few authorities where the service was provided by Ringway Jacobs.

Following a joint agreement, the service was transferred from Ringway Jacobs to Epping Forest District Council on 1 April 2020. Despite the onset of Covid-19 and the

challenges it had presented, the Council had been successful in setting up the new service. Funding for the Rangers was provided by Essex County Council. However, EFDC has allocated some additional funding to do some additional work which was over and above their core duties.

Councillor H Whitbread commented on the wonderful service this was providing. She had noticed a difference in her ward such as having the pavements mended. It was a good thing for the district to be doing.

Councillor Patel noted that it was a great idea to bring this service back in house, members and residents could see the benefit of this.

Councillor Morgan said that they had done an excellent job and asked if there was any chance they could tackle potholes as they had not been done for the past two years in rural areas and was getting really bad in places. Councillor Avey replied that we were not allowed to fix potholes at present, maybe in the future.

Councillor Philip noted that the budget was now underway, if they could add resources to the Highways Rangers within the confines of the existing budget then it would be worth doing, but had to recognise the financial constraints we were working under at the moment.

Councillor C Whitbread said he was mindful of the constraints but also of our desire to improve the place where we lived. He thanked the officers for the exceptional quality of their work.

Decision:

That the Cabinet noted the good progress of work that the Highway Rangers have made since the transfer of service from Ringway Jacobs to the Council.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To provide an update to Members on the successful launch and ongoing work of the Epping Forest Highway Rangers.

Other Options for Action:

To not provide an update to Members. This has been discounted as this is a new service and it is felt that Members should receive an update.

133. BAKERS AND COTTIS LANE DEVELOPMENT SITES

The Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder introduced the report. This was for a proposed Leisure Centre and a Multi-Storey Car Park in Epping, replacing the aging 1970's sports facility in the Town which was now approaching the end of its useful life. Both the sports facility and the car park were critical, in Planning terms, to unlocking the other regeneration sites within the Town.

As the redevelopment of the sports centre site would result in a net deficit in parking spaces, the overall regeneration proposals required the existing surface car park in Cottis Lane to be replaced with a Multi Storey Car Park.

He pointed out a typo in paragraph 1.4 of the report which should have said Waltham Abbey and not Waltham Forest.

The Portfolio Holder noted that originally it was to be for Qualis to build it and own it and potentially operate or sell back to the council. The report however suggests that we progress negotiations with both Places for Leisure and Qualis to see what would be the best deal we could get to get the sports centre built on a build contract rather than Qualis taking ownership and us having to pay Stamp Duty going in both directions.

Councillor S Kane agreed it was not good having to pay two sets of stamp duty and supported talking to Places for Leisure as well as Qualis, as they had done a very good job for us over the last few years and they were the professionals in this field. Councillor Philip said it was sensible and prudent in avoiding an unnecessary tax burden. It was worth highlighting that a design had gone in with the planning application as Qualis had been working closely with Places for Leisure on this.

Councillor Patel agreed that it was right that they were liaising with Places for Leisure on this, they had done good work for us and were the experts.

Councillor Heap citing paragraph 5.4 of the report asked if Qualis failed, would the council have to bail them out. He was told that was a decision that we would have to make at the time. They were unlikely to fail but it may be a risk. If they did, they would have to come back to the council and we would see what we could do.

Councillor Wixley was interested in the sports centre. He was impressed with the plans shown but noted that Loughton Football Club was not among the user groups listed. Could they be added to the list? Also, if the car parking was to be free, the disadvantage would be that the non-centre users would also park there. He was told that the list of consultees would be reviewed and noted that car parking would not be free, this was a decision that has yet to be made.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse leant towards the same model as used in Waltham Abbey and Places for Leisure had the experience in doing things like this. He was pleased to see the sports consultants' report and wanted to know what type of sports hall would be built, would it be large or small. And what sites did the bit about the land title apply to and what were the issues. Councillor Philip replied that this report did not go into detail on the construction, that was for another time. This was also not the place to say we would definitely go with Places for Leisure as we had a second option with Qualis and had to negotiate with both to see what the best offer was. He did not know the detail of the title issues and would get back to Councillor Whitehouse on this. Mr Small added there were some right of way and access issues on Hemnall Street and Bakers Lane.

Councillor Brookes was excited about having a new pool in Epping, but disappointed that plans for a steam room had been dropped. Also, could a small multi-function room be added to the plans.

Councillor Janet Whitehouse referred to the loss of car parking income, did we have enough spaces planned for this centre with the cinema, leisure centre and householders. Was the research adequate that came up with the number of carparking spaces. Councillor Philip said that it all depended on where the car park ends up after it was constructed. If the council purchased the car park from Qualis then we would retain the income, if it stayed in Qualis' ownership then we would lose the income. However, as we would have loaned them the money to construct the car

park, the they would be paying us interest on that loan. Those two sums are very similar and did not make much of a difference.

Councillor H Whitbread was pleased to see the progress being made. She asked if the issue coming to the full council in February would delay work on the sports centre. She was told that would depend on the result of that meeting.

Decision:

The Cabinet considered the options set out within the report and:

- (1) Agreed to the inclusion of the Revenue and Capital implications associated with these schemes within the Cabinet's Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plans and their Capital Programme proposals for Council; and
- (2) Agreed that subject to Council's agreement of these plans, to instruct officers to enter detailed negotiations with Qualis and Places Leisure for the delivery of these proposals, with the final form of the agreements to be brought back to Cabinet at a later date for agreement.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

This paper considers the options and cost implications and set out a recommended approach, including that provision be made within the Council's future and long-term revenue and capital spending plans for the Council.

Other Options for Action:

Not to proceed with the proposal.

134. ONGAR TOWN CENTRE

The Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder introduced the report on the Ongar Town Centre.

He noted that as part of the Council's work to assist the economic recovery and sustainability of local High Streets across the district, Studio 3 Business Consultants were appointed in September, to undertake a series of independent economic reviews. The purpose of these being to identify quick wins and to consider longer-term recommendations to increase footfall to town centres, to support local businesses and identify opportunities for attracting new business to the area.

The second of the studies focussed on Chipping Ongar and its high street and the detailed report produced by Studio 3 (attached to the covering report), set out a range of recommendations for action, including quick wins.

Following on from the first report on Waltham Abbey, the Cabinet agreed in their meeting of 22nd December 2020, to the appointment of a Town Centre Manager, a role which would have a direct involvement in all high street developments including those given the go-ahead as a result of this report.

Councillor Keska thanked the Cabinet for this report and for appointing an experienced consultant to carry out the background work. The report built on work undertaken by the Town Council and as the Ward Member he supported the

recommendations and asked that the Town Manager be appointed without delay. There was a lot of work to be done and the sooner it was started the better. Councillor Philip pointed out that the Towns Centre Project Manager was not delegated to individual Town Centres. He was currently exploring whether to nominate a local member for that area to act as the Town Centre Champion to work with the project manager to keep things moving. He was working on a role description for this to ensure that they would add value to what we were doing.

Councillor Bedford welcomed the report noting that there were a lot of quick wins in there to help Ongar. Councillor Avey said that it was a good report. It mentioned the Highways Rangers and that they would be spread out across the district and not just working in Ongar. We must also start thinking about car parking tariffs for the area and the impact other car parks in the area. Also, we have always talked about re-establishing the commuter line between Ongar and Epping, but the stumbling block has always been TfL who did not want to put in a platform at Epping. We needed to find a way to talk them round.

Councillor Philip echoed Councillor Bedford's comments, quick wins were the key part to this. He also took onboard Councillor Avey's comments about the Highway Rangers and car parking. Councillor C Whitbread agreed that we had to look afresh at our Town Centres, and this was the way to do it.

Councillor Patel welcomed the report. The Cabinet had wanted achievable targets and needed to support High Streets and Town Centres especially as we were in our third lockdown. He welcomed the idea of having a champion for each town centre area to bring in the best for the residents.

Councillor S Kane commented that this showed the importance of looking at each Town Centre individually as they all had different requirements and not have a district wide approach. He added that with the Waltham Abbey plans having been agreed recently by the Cabinet they were already making quick wins thanks to the rangers, and collaboration with the Town Council was absolutely key, it was not something we could do ourselves. He was pleased to say that Waltham Abbey was already on the way. Councillor C Whitbread agreed with him saying that each Town Centre had its own bespoke approach and that went for all areas as well as some of the rural villages as they needed support during this time. Councillor Philip added that it was one of the reasons we were doing them individually and hoped to get to all the major Town Centres by the end of this council year. Councillor C Whitbread replied that these were the two that needed early support to give them a jump start. Also, becoming more apparent was the need for a place budget.

Councillor Janet Whitehouse liked the report but had concerns raised to her about the Town Centre Manager and that they should not be someone from outside the town who did not know it. Could we have someone from the town to organise events. Councillor Philip said this was to be a Town Centres Project Manager, someone to be taking on projects but was not dedicated to any one town centre. We were looking for quick wins of things that could be done, but to be successful it had to be run as a project. If there was a person in Ongar willing to do things, he suggested that they got in Contact with Ongar Town Council and offered their services to them.

Councillor Murray said that it was an interesting report, working in partnership with Town and Parish Councils was good. When you get to Loughton it should be remembered that although it was one community it should be seen as two areas with different needs, these were Loughton High Road and the Broadway. Councillor Philip noted that in the Local Plan both areas were identified as separate areas; Councillor Murray was right, they did have different requirements

Decision:

The Cabinet considered and agreed the report produced by independent business consultants, Studio 3, on the economic viability of Ongar Town Centre, which included recommendations to improve short and medium-term sustainability of businesses in the High Street.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

This report forms part of the Council's Covid Economic Recovery Programme, which has been designed to help support and improve economic viability of Town Centre's across the district. The study conducted by Studio 3, is a completely independent view of the status of the economy connected to Ongar High Street and identifies what is necessary to increase footfall; support local businesses and help sustain high street viability in the medium term.

Other Options for Action:

Cabinet could decide not to proceed with the recommendations, or, to agree to some and not others.

135. DIGITAL GATEWAY FOR PLACE

The Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder introduced the report on the setting up of a digital gateway.

The Economic Development team had been tasked with the development of a digital platform for the district that would create a single online point of access for a wide range of information and services catering for the needs of residents and public and private sector organisations plus links to EFDC and other public sector websites and information.

This report therefore provided an overview and update for Cabinet on work carried out to date.

Councillor Philip noted that this came in two parts an electronic presence for businesses and online support. His own preference was that the Council should not be looking to craft its own system but to acquire something from off the shelf for doing this as it would allow a more rapid turn round in implementation.

Councillor S Kane was also in favour of finding an 'off the shelf' solution, it would keep the costs down, would be quicker to implement and reduced the risk to the Council.

Councillor H Whitbread said that this was an important piece of work and important to have because of the Covid crisis. She welcomed the report and agreed the recommendations.

Councillor Patel also welcomed the report as it would help the businesses to benefit from it.

Councillor Philip asked if any of the Cabinet members had any preferences for the two applications mentioned in the report to let him know or if were they happy for

himself and the Economic Development team to pick the best one. He asked that the second recommendation be modified to recommend that we went for an 'off the shelf' application rather than develop our own one, this to be left up to the Economic Development team and the Portfolio Holder to make the final decision. This was agreed.

Councillor C Whitbread commented that we have had three very good economic development reports at this meeting, and he would like to express his thanks to the officers concerned, John Houston, Nick Dawe and his Cabinet team who have been working on this. There was still a lot to do and we had to get around the district, but he believed that this was an opportunity presented by the current pandemic to get something good for the district.

Decision:

- (1) That Cabinet noted the work undertaken by officers in relation to the development and implementation of a digital platform for the district; and
- (2) That Cabinet considered the proposals and agreed to go for 'off-the-shelf' software rather than the Council developing its own and authorised the Economic Development Team in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder to make the final decision.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To give guidance and approval for the site and its initial design, development, construction and approval for purchase of the Maybe* support/training package.

Other Options for Action:

N/a

136. TREE PLANTING STRATEGY

The Planning and Sustainability Portfolio Holder introduced the report on the Council's tree planting strategy. This report looked to update Cabinet on work being done to move forward a joined up and proactive strategy that aimed to increase tree and hedgerow planting throughout the Epping Forest District. The overall aim was to enable and support all organisations in the public and private sector to have a proactive approach to planting. Initially the Council would look to lead this activity by getting significant planting underway this planting season (November-March).

The Council's Corporate Plan aimed to make the District a good place to live, work, study and do business, significant tree planting supported these aims by enhancing health and wellbeing in the area, capturing carbon and improving air quality. This strategy also encompassed the tree planting project within the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and the call for sites from Essex County Council for the Essex Forest Initiative.

It should be noted, that the success of this initiative was dependent on the established and developing links with Parish and Town Councils and other interested groups, charities and volunteers.

He noted that it had got to a certain stage with the Green Arc project and our Tree Planting project but was then stymied by Covid. He urged the Town and Parish councils to apply for tree planting packs from the Woodland Trust.

Councillor Heap asked if private individuals could offer land to grow young trees on to be lifted later to be replanted elsewhere. Councillor Bedford said that was a good idea and asked that he get in touch with Mr Houston.

Councillor Patel asked how this compared with work for the Green Arc Project. He was told that they were linked together but this was a more local thing, the Green Arc ran from the Thames up through Epping Forest and through Barnet Forest, trying to link areas together, creating natural habitats and bio-diversity.

Councillor Sunger noted that in Chigwell a number of people, in memory of recently deceased loved ones, had donated money to plant trees; how had this affected your project. Councillor Bedford was unaware of this and would get Mr Houston to call him to discuss.

Councillor Murray noted that trees helped many people during the lockdown. They had an active scheme for people to donate money to tree planting in memory of departed loved ones. This should be given more publicity as part of this strategy.

Councillor Wixley welcomed the report. The report mentioned links between the District and Town Councils, was there any more information on this. Loughton Town Council had been in the process of recruiting volunteers, but this had ground to a halt with Covid. He also wondered if ward councillors were to be consulted on where to plant trees, such as Jessel Green. Finally, he would like to thank the Portfolio Holder and Mr Houston for resurrecting the Green Arc Project. Councillor Bedford replied that they have been working with the Town and Parish Councils and had been setting up a volunteer register. Jessel Green would be an ideal place to plant trees and to involve the Town Council in this. The Green Arc Project was getting on well but had faltered a bit due to Covid, but he did not want it drop away again.

Councillor H Whitbread was in favour of the report and commended the Portfolio Holder for his passion for this project. She would like to know how many trees had been planted in the last few years. She was told that a couple of thousand had been planted in the last two years, but he would like to see a million planted.

Councillor McCredie reminded members that the Country Care volunteer team was stood down at present but could be used to help on this.

Decision:

The Cabinet noted the work being undertaken on a large-scale tree planting strategy and endorsed the approach taken by officers.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

This report does not require a decision or recommendation as all actions suggested are within existing budget provision.

Other Options for Action:

N/A

137. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that there was no other urgent business for consideration by the Cabinet.

138. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Cabinet noted that there was no business for consideration which would necessitate the exclusion of the public and press from the virtual meeting.

CHAIRMAN