

WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 5 December 2012, at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Kinson (Chairman); Councillors Barrott, Mrs Blacklock, Boad, Mrs Bromley, Brookes, Mrs Bunker, Caborn, Coker, Copping, Cross, Davies, Ms De-Lara-Bond, Dean, Doody, Mrs Gallagher, Gifford, Gill, Mrs Goode, Mrs Grainger, Hammon, Heath, Mrs Higgins, Illingworth, Kirton, Mrs Knight, MacKay, Mrs Mellor, Mobbs, Pittarello, Pratt, Rhead, Sawdon, Shilton, Mrs Syson, Vincett, Weber, Weed, Wilkinson, Williams and Wreford-Bush.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dagg, Dhillon, Edwards, Mrs Falp and Guest.

50. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

51. **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 24 October 2012 were approved as a correct record subject to the attendance being amended to show Councillor Ms De-Lara-Bond being present

52. **COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman made the following announcements and communications:

- (1) The Chairman congratulated all those involved in the work on the underpass at Leamington Railway Station that had won the Keep Britain Tidy Award;
- (2) The Chairman announced the five winners of the Warwick District Council Design Awards 2012 (Pentelowes Barn, Hunningham; 7 Fieldgate Lawn, Kenilworth; the Royal Terrace, Royal Leamington Spa; The Old Coach House, Royal Leamington Spa and Pavillions, Kenilworth);
- (3) The Chairman informed the Council about a letter of thanks from the Fusiliers for the support from the Council but disappointment that the Ministry of Defence had been unmoved by the work of local Councils;
- (4) The Chairman thanked his Personal Assistant for her work in organising his Christmas Concert 1 December 2012 and thanked all those who had attended;
- (5) The Chairman thanked the Deputy Chief Executive (Mr Bill Hunt) for his attendance at the Parish Supper and presentation to those who attended the meal;
- (6) The Chairman announced that Bowls England would be moving to Royal Leamington Spa and thanked all Councillors and Officers involved in this for their efforts; and
- (7) The Chairman permitted Councillor Mrs Higgins to outline her work in the last two weeks of tree planting in Warwick and for her to pass the thanks of Warwick to Warwick District Council for assisting with this.

(The Chairman explained that there had been no submissions for consideration under agenda: item 5, Public Interest Debate; item 6, petitions; item 7, notices of motion; item 8, Public Submissions; item 9, Questions to Committee Chairmen; item 10, Questions to Portfolio Holders; item 15 Public and Press and item 16 Confidential Report of the Executive in November 2012.)

53. **LEADER'S AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' STATEMENTS**

Councillor Shilton, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services made two announcements:

- (i) he informed the Council that the Jubilee Tree in St Nicholas Park in Warwick would receive a commemorative plaque; and
- (ii) in addition to the Keep Britain Tidy Award, the Keep Britain Tidy had approached the Council about its Street Pride work with a view to adopting this as a national campaign.

Councillor Cross, Portfolio Holder for Culture, made three statements, as follows:

- (i) he thanked Councillor Mrs Gallagher and officers for all their work in bringing Bowls England to Royal Leamington Spa. This would lead to investment in the Victoria Park Bowling Green and Pavilion. The Council would be working closely with Bowls England to bring this forward and the economic benefits this would bring to the District;
- (ii) The Pump Rooms Museum had become an accredited museum by the Arts Council; and
- (iii) Sky Blues in the Community would be working in the Forbes Estate and surrounding area with a priority to improve fitness and improve sports participation in arts and sports. The Sky Blues in the Community, although based at the Ricoh Arena, were a community based registered charity independent to the football club.

Councillor Hammon, Portfolio Holder for Development Services informed the Council about the performance of Development Control in determining applications by way of a detailed update following the question to the Leader at Council in October.

He reminded Members that at the last Council meeting, Councillor Boad had referred to the Council's performance in terms of speed of determining planning applications and had asked what actions had been taken to rectify this, whether improvements had been made, and were these being monitored.

In response, the Leader of the Council had advised that performance had improved significantly. Councillor Hammon, as Portfolio Holder for this area had spoken with the Head of Service and the Development Manager who were responsible for monitoring performance in this area and could now to provide further details for Members.

As Members would be aware, the Planning service went through a difficult period of transition during 2011/12 following the retirements of the Development Manager and Team Leaders, and departure of the Head of Service. As a consequence, performance in terms of the speed of decision making dipped as a backlog of applications developed. In October 2011, the Council was dealing with 414 applications. As a snapshot of performance, applications were taking on average 74 days to determine in October 2011, with only 37% of applications decided within the 8 week target.

Twelve months on and the speed of decision making had improved vastly. The total number of applications with the Council for determination was down to 203 (less than half of the total 12 months before), with performance improved with an average time taken to determine an application at 57 days, and 92% of applications determined within the 8 week target.

This improvement had been down to the hard work of officers in processing and managing applications more efficiently and effectively through the planning process. Improvements had been made to processes, new staff had been employed in place of temporary staff giving greater stability, and more decisive decision making had resulted in more certainty for applicants and third parties in terms of the timescale for decision making. As the backlog of applications had been removed, performance continued to improve and officers were continuing to make changes to improve performance and provide a better service to customers.

The speed of decision making was becoming increasingly important in light of the Government's recent announcements within its draft Growth and Infrastructure Bill. Local Planning Authorities that had a poor performance record in terms of time it took them to reach decisions, and which were most often overruled at appeal, could be subject to special measures which would allow developers to bypass them and go straight to the Planning Inspectorate. Not only would this result in losing control of decision making, it would also have negative financial consequences for the Council. It was important therefore that Members support officers in ensuring that applications were dealt with efficiently, and not unnecessarily being delayed in their determination by being called-in to Planning Committee.

Councillor Boad responded and thanked the Portfolio Holder for the information.

54. **QUESTIONS FOR THE LEADER**

Councillor Brookes asked the Leader of the Council:

"That considering that the Development Review Forum had seen proposals from developers that were outside the areas defined in the Preferred Options for the Local Plan, could the Leader, provide assurance that the Local Plan is being treated seriously and this Council will select the sites for development not the developers"

In response, the Leader of the Council, Councillor Doody, explained that he wished he could provide reassurance but while we were at this stage, it was an ideal time for developers to test their sites not included within the preferred options. This could cause the Council a number of difficulties because we could not reject applications on the grounds that they were not part of the Local Plan. However the Council could contest applications about how the scheme would integrate with the Local Plan and Warwickshire County Council could consider how the applications would fit within the road infrastructure for the area. However at the end of the day the determination of any such applications would be a matter for the Planning Committee.

Councillor Boad asked the Leader of the Council:

"If he could investigate the level of lighting within the Council Chamber which had recently appeared to be much lower."

In response the Leader of the Council, agreed to investigate and report back to Council.

55. **REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE**

The report of the Executive meeting of 14 November, was proposed by Councillor Doody duly seconded and

RESOLVED that the reports be approved.

56. **SEXUAL ENTERTAINMENT VENUES CONSULTATION**

The Council considered a report from Corporate and Community Services that set out the current situation with regards to Sexual Entertainment Venues in the District and the areas of influence the Council had with regards to licensing and regulation.

The report also provided information with regard to policy requirements, the policies of other Councils and brought forward proposals for consultation as requested by Council in October 2012.

Councillor Boad proposed that the content of the report be noted and that a budget of £5,000 be allowed for consultation costs to support the work of the Overview & Scrutiny Task & Finish Group, to be taken from the contingency budget. This was duly seconded and

RESOLVED that

- (1) the report be noted; and
- (2) £5,000 be approved from the contingency budget for consultation costs to support the work of the Overview & Scrutiny Task & Finish Group.

57. **COMMON SEAL**

It was

RESOLVED that the Common Seal of Warwick District Council be affixed to such deeds and documents as may be required for implementing decisions of the Council arrived at this day.

(The meeting ended at 7.08 pm)

CHAIRMAN
23 January 2013