

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 28 MARCH 2019 FROM 7.30 PM TO 7.55 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Julian McGhee-Sumner, Stuart Munro, Pauline Helliar-Symons, John Halsall, Anthony Pollock, Parry Batth, Norman Jorgensen, Simon Weeks and Philip Mirfin

Other Councillors Present

Gary Cowan
Malcolm Richards
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

107. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Pauline Jorgensen.

108. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 21 February 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Leader of Council.

109. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillors Julian McGhee-Sumner and Stuart Munro declared personal interests in Agenda Item 110 Shareholders' Report by virtue of the fact that they were unpaid Non-Executive Directors of WBC Holdings Ltd. Councillors McGhee-Sumner and Munro remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

Councillor Philip Mirfin declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 110 Shareholders' Report by virtue of the fact that he was an unpaid Non-Executive Director of Optalis Holdings Ltd. Councillor Mirfin remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

Councillor Anthony Pollock declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 110 Shareholders' Report by virtue of the fact that he was a paid Non-Executive Director of Optalis Holdings Ltd. Councillor Pollock remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

110. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chairman invited members of the public to submit questions to the appropriate Members.

110.1 Adrian Mather asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question which was answered by the Executive Member for Finance:

Question

The new Southern Distributor Road will exit at Tesco roundabout on the Finchampstead Road. The Finchampstead Road is already one of the most congested roads in Wokingham, which is regularly grid-locked. This new road will likely be used by large commercial vehicles, which will also increase the environmental impact and congestion. How many vehicles does WBC estimate will be added to this grid-locked road at peak-time?

Answer

Looking at the answer here I do not have a number for you but I am well aware, having been the Executive Member for Highways twice in my history, I do understand what you are talking about. I do understand the issues you are talking about.

You are correct that the Southern Wokingham Distributor Road will connect into the highway network at the roundabout adjacent to Tesco. The road will provide a route from the London Road, west of Coppid Beech roundabout, over the new railway bridge, through to the A321 Finchampstead Road.

The Southern Distributor Road is not intended to replace the A329 London Road through the town, but instead would supplement it, providing users with greater choice, whilst also providing resilience to our network. The Council is currently working on a road signing strategy for all new roads and therefore no decision has yet been made on routing of HGVs. However the road will be designated to a standard that will be able to cater for them. The road is a piece of infrastructure identified to mitigate growth and development alongside many other major pieces of infrastructure currently being progressed by the Council.

The road and any housing applications associated with the South Wokingham area will be submitted for planning permission along with a range of supporting documents that will cover environmental and transport matters, all of which will be publicly available on the Council's planning portal when received.

The transport work is still being progressed by the major projects team, and by the developer's consultants associated with the housing elements, and therefore until this is completed, it would not be possible to provide an estimate of traffic flows at this stage, as even the simplest of junction designs can encourage or discourage traffic movements. The full planning submission needs to be assessed as a complete package and the findings, and any recommendation made by Officers, will be set out in detail to members of the Planning Committee prior to any permission being granted.

I think also there are other roads to the other side of the railway line which traffic could divert to instead of coming up to this junction. They could divert earlier on some of the other roads that exist and then pick up the Southern Distributor Road and access the London Road through the development in order to by-pass the Town and certainly this was intended to provide a by-pass for the Town.

I think we are well aware of the congestion aspects, both at the two railway bridges, and I think there have been discussions as to how we might mitigate some of that but no further conclusions have been arrived at. But I am sure that we will keep it under consideration simply because we do understand as many Councillors here are residents of Wokingham or Wokingham Without and therefore congestion issues affect us all and concern us all and all sorts of residents as well so we will be trying our best to mitigate as much congestion as we can.

Supplementary Question

So in relation to commercial vehicles I think the roadworks will require either digging down under the bridges or something like this to increase the capacity so that large vehicles can go actually under the railways. Do you know how long these works will take because I presume this will close these bridges?

Supplementary Answer

I am aware of the principles which you are talking about and given the issues around congestion in Peach Street over the last couple of years when I held the Highways portfolio recently I was very concerned about the impact, particularly on the southern bridge onto the Finchampstead Road, and the consequences of congestion in that area.

So do I have an answer to your question, no not specifically, but again I do understand the concerns that you are raising and have expressed them to Officers with a “can we find other solutions”. I think the Northern bridge is ok but I think there are issues with the Southern bridge but again it depends on the size and the height of the vehicles. If people are accessing Molly Millar’s I think currently they would normally go over the level crossing rather than under the bridges. But I think some of the lorries have got special height reducing tyres or something I think which does enable them to get under bridges but there are a whole load of issues that we are aware of which are quite complex but watch this space.

110.2 Stephen Kitt had asked the Executive Member for Business, Economic Development and Strategic Planning the following question but as he was unable to attend the meeting the answer below was provided:

Question

The recent Shinfield Residents’ petition debated in Council shows the alarm Shinfield’s residents have. Shinfield has genuine issues around traffic congestion/gridlock, pollution, delayed doctors surgery appointments, hospital access, shortage of green open space and school places in this already over populated area and not all of the new development is completed yet.

What action if any is being taken to resolve these issues before any further development in Shinfield takes place before there is a disaster in the Shinfield area which I see would be the responsibility of Wokingham Borough Council.

Answer

The Council has a carefully managed approach to enabling the delivery of sustainable, infrastructure rich communities which includes £400m investment in 7 new primary and 1 new secondary schools; 7 new strategic roads, 6 new neighbourhood centres and 1 new district centre, 3 new sports hubs and one enhanced sports hub, parkland and improvements to public transport, as well as over 30% affordable housing.

The Shinfield area has already seen the early delivery of the Eastern Relief Road along with some junction improvements, and new / enhanced bus services, which are due to increase in frequency as the development progresses. The A327 Arborfield Cross Relief Road located to the south east of Shinfield has also commenced enabling works, with full construction commencing shortly. Highways England have also in addition to the Council’s infrastructure delivery, commenced with smart motorways through our borough which is a positive approach as a number of congestion related issues within and around Shinfield are often related to issues / accidents that take place on the major road network and impact our local network. All of these features, along with education to new residents of sustainable travel through the Council’s My Journey programme all assist in improving and managing the network and potential congestion.

The Council have no powers in respect to the provision of GP's and surgeries, health provision is the responsibility of the Clinical Commissioning Groups. The Council consult with the CCG when planning for new housing growth. Shinfield surgery was built with capacity within the building to accommodate further health facilities to accommodate the housing growth locally.

With regards to school provision, the Shinfield Meadows Primary School has been available for use for the last academic year however there is currently insufficient pupil demand to open this facility at this stage. The Council monitors school places and there is currently surplus capacity for secondary education within the catchment area.

In terms of open space, the Council has delivered improved sports facilities at Ryeish including astroturf. Further facilities have been secured with the new developments and will be delivered as part of these schemes at various stages of the developments. A significant amount of public open space has been delivered as part of the Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) at Langley Mead and Mays Farm SANG and further SANG will be provided at the Ridge together with the strategic greenspace. These provide significant levels of new amenity open space locally and access to the countryside than the footpath network has done in the past.

We have clear plans for delivery whilst capturing the necessary infrastructure investment. We are committed to taking this successful approach forward.

110.3 Paul Fishwick asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question which was answered by the Executive Member for Finance:

Question

The section of King Street Lane Winnersh between Sainsbury's and Allnatt Avenue has been flooded on at least 22 occasions between 26 March 2018 and 6 March 2019 and on many occasions during dry weather conditions.

This flooding causes surface water to flow into adjacent properties gardens and pedestrians and cyclists find it difficult to travel along the highway without wading through water. The flooding events normally last about 20 to 30 minutes then the water quickly drains away via the gullies and the surface water sewer system.

The Council are aware of this flooding issue but appear to have done nothing about it. What action is the Council taking to stop these regular flooding events?

Answer

Officers were made aware of this issue last year and took immediate action to check and clear, if necessary, the highways drainage system and connecting gulleys to ensure that the system is not blocked. No faults or problems were identified with our system and the source of the problem could not be identified. Following these investigations Officers have been made aware of further incidents of flooding to the highway and verge area even during dry conditions. The drainage team are currently in talks with third party landowners to see if a cause can be identified and will report back to residents as soon as possible.

Do you have any idea of the source of this flooding as it would be useful for us to know?

Supplementary Question

I certainly have some ideas. My hobby is meteorology and climatology and I have a weather station and rainfall records for the whole of this period; which are actually to Met Office and environmental standards so I can produce all that information.

Will the Executive Member agree to an onsite meeting with myself and local residents so we can go through the issues, when they occurred, and what the potential source of this third party water is?

Supplementary Answer

Yes is the answer to that question.

110.4 Keith Malvern asked the Executive Member for Environment, Leisure and Libraries the following question:

Question

I was very impressed to read the report on page 27 of the latest Wokingham Borough News about the sheer variety of what libraries are doing. '... libraries are changing, because what you want from us is changing'

Many people would be surprised and disappointed to read elsewhere that it is proposed to move the Wokingham library from its current purpose-built location to a new home. What improved facilities will be provided to justify this move?

Answer

The relocation of the Wokingham Library to the new site was agreed in 2017.

In our view it is clear that in its current location, Wokingham Library has been successful and continues to provide a range of well-used services and activities for all people of all ages. However, the current library site does have its challenges and there are areas where improvements could be made.

A key limitation to the current site is the two storey layout and the location of the library meeting rooms. This necessitates additional staffing and reduces options for utilising the library space in different ways. The floor area available on the new library site represents a similar amount of available space that is more accessible and provides greater flexibility in terms of use.

Having the library on one floor will also benefit the staffing and operation of the facility, with a clearer line of sight across all the activities taking place.

The current library site is somewhat isolated from the rest of the town centre and has limited ability to align itself directly with other activities, or to utilise any extra space for larger events. Within the new site high levels of footfall are expected along the main pedestrian route giving the library an increased presence in the heart of the development. It would also increase the opportunity for 'linked trips', with visitors to the leisure centre also combining this with a visit to the library. The proximity to substantial amounts of public parking close by the library and proximity to public transport will also improve access for visitors.

Supplementary Question

I am grateful for the words that you have said and obviously we give you notice of these questions so you know you have got time to investigate but what I would say is that amongst the things that you have listed none of those seem to actually talk about offering more facilities other than, and I hesitate to use the word, convenience of the staff.

Can I ask if you can easily identify the benefits of the scheme that you put this scheme to a form of public consultation so that existing users can at least be made aware of what you are proposing and you can at least get their views as to whether what you are proposing will improve circumstances for them?

Supplementary Answer

Before we actually set on this course we conducted a number of public consultations about the principle of relocating the library and specific proposals for Wokingham library. The responses were positive and helped to justify the recommendation to relocate Wokingham library.

111. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chairman invited Members to submit questions to the appropriate Members

111.1 Gary Cowan has asked the Executive Member for Business, Economic Development and Strategic Planning the following question:

Question

I asked the Executive Member for Planning and Regeneration on 26-1-2017 the following question but due to my inability to attend the meeting the following written answer was provided to me: Question. With reference to the Judgment in the case of Gladman vs WBC case number Case No: CO/1455/2014 heard in July 2014 what were the implications of the judgement for Wokingham Borough Council, both the pros and the cons?

The reply was lengthy but the final paragraph was "The only thing I can think of is that the MDD challenge has now been superseded by an Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) of our housing numbers – this was reflected in the judgement. This is a technical assessment and evidence base. The Council has not signed up to providing this estimated need. This will be a process addressed through the Local Plan review".

If the Council has not signed up to the Objectively Assessed Need than why has our housing numbers risen from just over 600 in our adopted Core Strategy, which was subject to a full public consultation and a public inquiry, to an ever increasing number nearing 900 now without any public consultation and no public inquiry?

Answer

Simply put the number of new homes we are expected to accommodate has changed because the Government has introduced new rules, and they keep changing them. I am not happy about that and I know that you are not.

The Core Strategy housing requirement, you were quite right, was 662 per year dates from the South East Plan (2009), which you will also know an awful lot about, which was revoked by the Government in 2013.

Through the introduction of the first National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2012, a new approach to calculating housing need was introduced. This was changed again, with the Government publishing a revised National Planning Policy Framework in 2018, with further amendments already in 2019. As you know we are making our feelings felt about all these changes and the things that we come across.

The Government currently requires housing need to be calculated through a standard method. It uses the national household projection for each local authority and applies an affordability adjustment based on median house prices and earnings. For Wokingham Borough, the housing need through this approach calculates as 864 dwellings per annum. This however needs to be recalculated each year so the figure will change. Again we have pointed this out through our MPs that we are not happy about this either.

We are required by Government policy to use the standard method both as the starting point for progressing our Local Plan Update, and for calculating our deliverable housing land supply. This is not a matter of choice.

I am sure you will agree that the constant changes to Government policy and guidance are not helping anyone in preparing any plans. I am sure you will also agree that the Government's driving of the planning system to increase housing requirements without regard to where the homes should be and should not be directed across the country is completely unsatisfactory and undermines efforts to plan properly for the long term. Again we are taking this up very strongly with our Government; although they are busy on something else at the moment.

Notwithstanding the difficulties, we continue to progress our local plan work, following the clear process and requirements set out in legislation and Government policy. This is the best way we can defend residents against unsustainable and unplanned developments that will harm our Borough.

Supplementary Question

Picking on that the Objectively Assessed Need housing number does throw up some issues of concern. The Memorandum of Understanding, signed by the four Councils in the western housing market area, states that between them all, including Wokingham, they would meet this OAN which is about 3,300 per year. Reading in the housing local plan examination in public, which is going on now, said that they are 1,000 houses short and they call the Memorandum of Understanding as the solution which the Inspector appears to be comfortable with. So they are looking for somewhere to put 1,000 houses.

My question therefore is does our OAN take into consideration this shortfall in Reading which occurs later in the plan period or will it be dealt with by the Grazeley Garden Settlement document, approved by the Conservative Group on 13 October 2016, which saw the Grazeley masterplan and our Local Plan to be adopted in November of this year. But as our Local Plan has been rolled back to 2021 I assume the Grazeley masterplan will also be so it's housing trajectory on page 23 shows 1,750 houses to be built by 2020-2025. Will that now be 2022-2027 and carrying out at 450 a year for evermore after that? Would this not be a better solution to help Reading out?

Supplementary Answer

Nobody is saying that we are not going to help Reading out. They do not ask us to help out as they know what the answer is; and the answer is no.

The Leader of Council responded as follows:

Gary as you know, as you have been on this Council longer than I have things change and I think you had left the Council Chamber last Thursday before I made my speech. What I said was, and I stand by this wholeheartedly, was that we are building too many. Even if we continue with what we have already approved, which is the 8,000, we know we have another 2,000 coming. We have got more than an 11 year land supply so what we are saying to the Government is we do our bit but we are not going to do more than our bit. So we are not going to do more than Reading, we are not going to do more than Bracknell. We want to do our bit. We are certainly not taking any houses from any other local authority.

We have made a statement to the Government and so far the response has been quite positive. We said that if we have to do any further development, if and it is a big if, then we will want it to be a standalone development where we can put the infrastructure in first and then build the houses as that is what gets residents frustrated. That we build the houses then we put the roads in. You should put the roads in first and get the infrastructure right. So this is the condition that we have made to the Government. They have come back to us and said right, ok, work it up; us and five or six other local authorities. Work up a feasibility study to see whether it is viable. We are not too sure whether it is viable or not but we have got Officers working on that. That is what that money is for. Now if the Government want us to work that up and pay for it we are happy to do it but it makes no compulsion on us to actually build those houses or go ahead with it.

I make it very clear that this Authority is changing the way it looks at housing. We are going to build less houses than we have built. We will still maintain our five year land supply and then we will continue to fight with the Government and we have got our local MPs to support that. After the election we will be going back to every resident in this Borough to say "do you agree with this or not" and if you agree with it then hopefully we will get 40, 50, 60,000 people to give us their thoughts and if they agree with what we are doing that gives us a very big powerful message to give back to Government to say enough is enough.

111.2 Philip Houldsworth had asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question but as he was unable to attend the meeting the answer below was provided:

Question

The people of Winnersh have waited for over 30 years for the Winnersh Relief Road, now that the land clearance is complete, can we start the construction sooner rather than later and certainly sooner than previously indicated?

Answer

The land clearance is still underway, the last few trees are being removed which will be followed by the removal of the tree stumps. Enabling works will commence by May and will roll into construction works around October, however, where possible we will always seek to improve on the programme. To date the works are running to the programme that has been agreed with the contractor and are not able to be altered at present without causing delay to other projects. The project remains on target to be completed by September 2020.

112. SHAREHOLDERS' REPORT

(Councillors Julian McGhee-Sumner, Philip Mirfin, Stuart Munro and Anthony Pollock declared personal interests in this item)

The Executive considered a report relating to proposed changes to the governance arrangements around decision making, transparency and information exchange between the Council and the Council's wholly owned companies. The report also included the budget monitoring position and operational update for the period to the end of January 2019.

In introducing the report the Executive Member for Finance highlighted the changes that were being proposed in relation to reporting lines which would see Optalis report into WBC Holdings Ltd. Councillor Pollock also drew Members' attention to the proposed changes to the structure of the Boards of the Housing Companies which would make them more efficient.

The Leader of Council stated that having Optalis report to the Holding Company would strengthen the governance of the company and provide greater oversight.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) Optalis Holdings Limited ('OHL') submits regular reports on the operational, financial and strategic performance of the companies in the Optalis group to WBC (Holdings) Limited and that a Wokingham appointed Director of OHL and the Managing Director of Optalis Limited attends the shareholder meetings of WBC (Holdings) Limited;
- 2) the Group Operating Protocol ('GOP') between Wokingham Housing Limited, Loddon Homes Limited and Berrybrook Homes Limited and the Council shall be amended so that the Assistant Director of Housing and Place is recognised by the companies, WBC (Holdings) Limited and the Council as the Officer with authority to agree and manage the financial and operational requirements in service contracts between the Council and the housing companies;
- 3) the Assistant Director of Housing and Place shall attend the shareholder meetings of WBC (Holdings) Limited to discharge his overall responsibility to Housing;
- 4) the modifications to the GOP, form and frequency of the reports and attendance by OHL and the AD shall be determined by the Board of WBC (Holdings) Limited;
- 5) the budget monitoring position for the month ending 31st January 2019 be noted;
- 6) the operational update for the period to 31 January 2019 be noted.

113. CEMETERY REGULATIONS

The Executive considered a report setting out proposed updated regulations relating to Shinfield and St Sebastian's cemeteries.

The Executive Member for Environment advised the meeting that the proposals consisted of tidying up and updating the two cemeteries' regulations in order to bring the Council into line with current regulatory requirements.

RESOLVED: That the updated regulations relating to Shinfield Cemetery and St Sebastian's Cemetery be approved.

114. PROCUREMENT BUSINESS CASE - HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT - COACH SERVICES

The Executive considered a report relating to the proposed retendering and awarding of 14 home to school transport contracts for large capacity coaches.

The Executive Member for Finance introduced the report and explained that the Council had a duty to provide home to school transport, the current contracts for which would expire on 2 September 2019. The only change that was being proposed to the current provision was an increase in coach capacity which would enable those parents who chose to go to a school that was not necessarily their designated catchment school to buy relatively inexpensive travel for their children, thereby giving them more school choice.

RESOLVED: That the retender and award of 14 Home to School Transport contracts for large capacity coaches be approved.

115. RE-COMMISSIONING OF THE INTEGRATED SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICE FOR BERKSHIRE WEST

The Executive considered a report relating to the re-commissioning of the Integrated Sexual and Reproductive Health Service for West Berkshire which was a jointly commissioned service by Wokingham, West Berkshire and Reading Borough Councils. The procurement of the service was being led by the Berkshire Public Health Shared Service.

The Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing and Adult Social Care emphasised that good sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing was an important contributor to residents' wellbeing as it was central to some of the most important relationships in people's lives. Councillor Bath advised that the current contract for commissioning the Integrated Sexual and Reproductive Health Service was due to run out in April 2020 therefore the report was seeking to agree the proposed plan for re-commissioning the service.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the proposed plan for re-commissioning the mandatory sexual and reproductive health service be agreed;
- 2) the authority to award the Integrated Sexual and reproductive Health Services be delegated to the Director of Corporate Services in consultation with the Lead Member for Health and Wellbeing and Adult Social Care.