CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Monday 29 October 2012 at 9.00 a.m.

Members Present:

Cabinet:  Councillors  J Fuller (Chairman)

K Kiddie, G Wheatley, M Wilby

Apologies:  Councillors  Y Bendle, D Bills

Non-Appointed:  Councillors  P Allen, D Blake, M Dewsburry, M Edney, F Ellis, C Foulger, D Goldson, M Gray, T Lewis, A Palmer, B Riches, R Savage, B Spratt, K Tilcock, N Ward, K Weeks

Also in Attendance:  Four members of the public

Officers in Attendance:  The Chief Executive, the Deputy Chief Executive, the Head of Asset Management, the Head of Business Improvement, the Head of Finance, the Head of Localism and Growth, the Compliance and Risk Manager, the Accountancy Manager, the Conservation Design Architect, the Senior Conservation Officer, the Project Consultant, the Property Consultant, the Senior Planning Officers

2124 COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER AWARDS

Cllr M Wilby thanked all those involved in the Community Volunteer Awards evening, held Friday 19 October, which celebrated the hard work and dedication of individuals and groups in the community. It had been a very successful evening, thoroughly enjoyed by all.

2125 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on Monday 17 September 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Arising from minute 2120, Council Tax Support Scheme, the Head of Finance advised the Cabinet that the Government had announced that local authorities could apply for a grant, if their new Council Tax Support scheme satisfied a number of conditions. Unfortunately, the Council’s scheme agreed at Council on 24 September, did not satisfy these conditions. The working group was therefore
meeting later that day to discuss whether it should propose any changes to the scheme, to enable the Council to apply for funding.

2126 WYMONDHAM AREA ACTION PLAN (AAP) PREFERRED OPTION DOCUMENT AND INTERIM SUSTAINABILITY REPORT

The Decision

Members considered the report of the Head of Localism and Growth, which presented members with the full preferred options document and accompanying Interim Sustainability Appraisal for Wymondham.

The Head of Localism and Growth presented the report, explaining that the preferred options document was a draft of the Council’s proposed policies and plans for Wymondham, based around the previously agreed vision and objectives, taking into account the requirements of the Joint Core Strategy. The document looked at growth in the town in a co-ordinated way, considering the wider issues such as employment, services, infrastructure and community benefits. Members noted that the proposals would be subject to further public consultation in the New Year.

Members’ attention was drawn to section 12 of the consultation document, “A Joined up Strategy for the Town” and suggested that changes to the text were required to make clear that widening the railway bridge was not the only way of increasing accessibility to the town. The Head of Localism and Growth also referred to a piece of additional evidence recently submitted (and tabled at the meeting); a map from Chris Blandford Associates, which outlined the extent of the strategic gap between Wymondham and Hethersett.

In response to queries regarding the development options for the remaining 1488 houses, the Head of Localism and Growth explained that there were advantages in both the spread and concentration of development. The dispersal of development shared the burden, but a more concentrated approach on a small number of locations would create more sustainable neighbourhoods. The latter approach would also enable Norfolk County Council to secure a new primary school as a result of the development.

Cllr R Savage, also Mayor of Wymondham, was disappointed that the proposals did not spread the development more evenly around the town, an option which was more favourable with the majority of residents. He also stressed the importance of the need to improve the railway bridge, wishing to see the widening of the bridge and carriageway as a condition to any planning permission. Referring to paragraph 3.3 of the report, and the possibility that Wymondham might need to take further houses to assist in meeting the current deficiency in the 5 year housing land supply across the Norwich Policy Area, he voiced strong concerns that Wymondham could not manage any further homes above the 2.200 figure already agreed. In response to the latter point, the Head of Localism and Growth stressed that the report was not suggesting that if needed, these extra homes would be allocated in Wymondham, but he could not confirm that the 2200 homes was the absolute maximum.

Cllr M Gray suggested that the chart illustrating the different stages of the AAP process (outlined in the Introduction of the Consultation document) required amending to include a “modification stage” after “consultation”. He also suggested
that the Carpenter’s Barn permission required some reference under section 7, question 15.

The Head of Localism and Growth responded to numerous further questions, during which he confirmed that the map submitted at section 4 of the document, “The area covered by the AAP” would be amended to take in to account the work carried out identifying the extent of the strategic gap between the town and Hethersett. Regarding any new planning permissions agreed now before the adoption of the plan, he could not say for sure whether these permissions would be taken off the 2200 figure. Concerning the extent of the consultation, he explained that all previous work had included all adjoining parishes, all receiving the full documentation. He welcomed views from anyone who visited Wymondham, not just those residents living in the town.

Discussion turned to a retail study already carried out in Wymondham, which had identified that there was no need to extend the retail space in the town centre, although there was a need for a new food store, which had been earmarked in the AAP. Members noted that a planning application had already been submitted for a store at the Old Sales Yard in Cemetery Lane, which was yet to be determined.

The Decision

RESOLVED: To approve the preferred options consultation document and accompanying interim SA report, subject to minor amendment, and to instruct officers to proceed with a public consultation in late 2012 / early 2013.

The Reasons for the Decision

To ensure planned and co-ordinated future development in Wymondham, allowing residents to be involved in shaping communities.

Other Options Considered

As outlined in the report

2127 CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL: WYMONDHAM

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Senior Conservation Officer, which summarised the comments received from the public consultation on the conservation area appraisal for Wymondham, and set out the officer responses to these representations and the proposed amendments.

The Conservation Design Architect explained that officers had worked closely with colleagues in the Planning Policy team, to ensure that the appraisals were compatible with the Area Action Plan for Wymondham. There had been a number of proposed changes to the boundaries arising from the consultation; officers felt that there was justification for the proposed additions to the South of Wymondham at Cemetery Lane / Tolls Meadow and an area to the West of the town around
Cavick House. It was felt however, that the proposed changes at Chapel Meadows could not be justified, as whilst they were of natural landscape value, they were of no architectural or historical interest.

Members thanked officers for their work and cited it as an excellent example of joined up working.

The Decision

RESOLVED:

1. To note the representations made arising from the consultation on the two appraisals and the associated officer responses at Appendix B;
2. To RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL the amendments proposed and updated appraisal, as outlined in Appendices C and D.

The Reasons for the Decision

To provide a sound basis and analysis of the area to assist with development proposals.

Other Options Considered

None

2128 LONG STRATTON 2026 – DEVELOPING THE VISION AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE AREA ACTION PLAN

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Head of Localism and Growth, which presented members with the vision and objectives for the Long Stratton Area Action Plan (AAP).

The Head of Localism and Growth explained this to be a key stage in the process, stressing that the aim of the AAP was about much more than the bypass and allocation of new homes. It was about new employment opportunities, improved facilities, services and infrastructure, and environmental enhancements to the village. The vision and objectives would form the basis of more detailed work towards the Preferred Options document, planned to go out to public consultation in early 2013.

The Chairman suggested a “market town” approach, referring to Long Stratton’s close proximity to the city and the size of the village. He viewed the AAP as a fantastic opportunity to improve the quality of life of the residents of Long Stratton.

The Decision

RESOLVED: To approve the vision and objectives and to instruct officers to
proceed with production of a Preferred Options document for public consultation in early 2013.

The Reasons for the Decision

To ensure planned and co-ordinated future development in Long Stratton, allowing residents to be involved in shaping communities.

Other Options Considered

As outlined in the report.

2129 COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT – NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKING DELIVERING LOCALISM

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Head of Localism and Growth which examined the progress made to date on community empowerment, particularly through “Your Neighbourhood, Your Choice”, and set out proposals for future neighbourhood working.

The Project Consultant outlined the salient points of the report to members. The Council had made good progress with the pilot “Your Neighbourhood Your Choice”, and this had provided a good basis for future community empowerment in South Norfolk. The Peer Review had given positive feedback and it was evident that the Council was at the forefront of community empowerment. There were however, still improvements to be made, and these were addressed within the proposals of the report.

Cllr M Dewsbury, Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, explained that the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group, appointed to carry out an in depth review of the Neighbourhood Boards, had observed 2 rounds of meetings, members had spoken with stakeholders and much time and effort had been invested in reviewing the process. Whilst she felt most of the Localism Committee’s recommendations to be sensible, she was disappointed that it did not concur with the Scrutiny Committee on two points: the quorum and the membership of the Boards. The Scrutiny Committee firmly believed that an increase in the quorum from 3 to 5 was necessary. The Scrutiny Committee held a strong view that the membership of the Neighbourhood Boards should be increased to include all ward members who had a parish in that Neighbourhood, as local members were “experts” in their areas and could add value to the process. She suggested that this proposition could be trialled for a period of 2 years.

Cllr M Wilby, Chairman of the Localism Committee, reminded Cabinet that the Localism Committee was made up of the Chairmen of the Neighbourhood Boards, and was therefore very familiar with the practicalities of the Neighbourhood meetings. Whilst he would be happy for Cabinet to increase the quorum of the Boards to 5, he could not support the proposal to increase the membership of the Boards to include all ward members. He considered that this would make the
Boards too top heavy; localism was about devolving power and more weight needed to be placed with community representatives, not district councillors.

Cllr K Weeks was very disappointed that the Localism Committee had “watered down” the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee and was concerned that Scrutiny Committee was losing all credibility.

Cllr P Allen, a member of the Task and Finish group, firmly believed that the membership of each Board should be increased to include all ward members who had a parish within the Neighbourhood. Ward members were “experts” in their areas and she felt that their knowledge and experience would add value to each of the Boards. She sought a more structured approach to meetings, suggesting that the business of each of the Boards needed to better managed to ensure that “adhoc” informal meetings were not required. With regard to paragraph 2.5 of the report, and the lack of proposals coming forward for funding, she stressed the need for firm policy in this area.

In response, the Chairman highlighted the need for a flexible approach, which in turn might lead to a need for adhoc meetings. He felt a more rigorous structure would be off-putting to the public. He suggested that increasing the membership of the Boards would be too chaotic; he believed that the work of the Boards needed to be directed by a small number of people.

During further discussion, Cllr B Spratt, Chairman of the Tas Valley Neighbourhood Board, reminded Cabinet that all members were welcome to attend and contribute to meetings, even if they were not a formal member of that Board. Cllr M Edney, Chairman of the Tiffy Valley Neighbourhood Board agreed that he would welcome the attendance of all ward members to the meetings, but did not consider it necessary for them to become formal members. He stressed the need for adhoc meetings, to ensure a flexible approach when needed.

Cllr M Gray drew attention to the lack of participation from parish councils and the need for community representatives to capitalise more on their roles. He felt that the way in which the Boards engaged with residents needed to change, with more emphasis on the quality of responses, not the quantity.

Referring to a recommendation from the Localism Committee, Cllr D Goldson, as Chairman, welcomed the review of the Grants Panel, but requested that the membership of the Task and Finish Group be selected to ensure an open minded approach.

In conclusion, the Cabinet felt the Your Neighbourhood, Your Choice, pilot to have been a good basis for future work on community empowerment. It did not agree with the proposal to extend the membership of the Boards to all members, but agreed that a quorum of five was more appropriate. The Chairman looked forward to the Peer Review team returning in February to view the progress that had been made.

The Decision

RESOLVED:

a) To agree that the scheme Your Neighbourhood,
Your Choice should continue for a second year.

b) To incorporate the funding of the scheme into the FY 2013/14 revenue budget

c) To agree the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee, and subsequent amendments to these recommendations from the Localism Committee, with the exception of the quorum of Board members which will increase to 5.

d) To give authority to the Neighbourhood Boards to commence a further Participatory Budgeting exercise, actively involving existing community groups.

e) To agree that a review of the Grants Panel be undertaken with the assistance of the Funding Manager (once in post) with a Task and Finish Group of members.

f) That the review includes the possibility of Neighbourhood Boards having responsibility for local funding applications, and to a specific allocation being made from each Board for that purpose.

g) To hold a Parish and Town Council Conference to be run by the Neighbourhood Boards to improve the involvement of Councils.

h) To approve the revised Ground Rules for Community Empowerment set out in Appendix E of the Scrutiny report (p187), together with the role descriptions for Board Chairmen and Board members (Annexes A and B to Appendix E)

i) To request officers to provide detailed proposals for the process outlined in section 4 of the report to a future meeting of Cabinet

The Reasons for the Decision

Supporting the Council’s corporate priorities, through strong involvement with communities and improving local areas.

Other Options Considered

- That membership of the Boards be increased to include all ward members with parishes in that Neighbourhood.
- That the quorum of the Neighbourhood Boards remains at 3

2130 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE AND RISK REVIEW

The subject of the decision
The Head of Business Improvement presented members with a brief overview of performance during the second quarter of 2012/13. Members noted that out of the 27 strategic indicators reported to Cabinet, 21 had met or exceeding target, 4 had not achieved target but had still performed within the tolerance level and 2 had not achieved target, nor was within the tolerance level set.

Referring to NI 18: Time taken to process Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Claims, the Head of Business Improvement explained that although the exemplary standards set had not been met, the current performance of 8.5 days was still very good and favoured extremely well against other local authorities. Turning to BV012: Working days lost due to sickness absence, he explained that the figures had been affected by high levels of long term sickness during the period, and that performance was expected to improve by the end of the financial year.

Members’ attention was also drawn to areas where performance had hit target and reference in particular was made to the cost of waste collection per household, the number of known targeted long term empty homes back in to use and the number of affordable homes delivered.

Cabinet then turned to the paper prepared by the Head of Finance, which covered the Council’s revenue budget and was to be considered alongside the performance information in evaluating delivery against priorities.

The forecasts had been split in to 3 areas, salaries, income, and other and all were indicating a favourable variance, although it was noted that some savings, particularly those relating to staff salaries, were not recurring.

The Compliance and Risk Manager then referred members to the list of organisational risks scoring 15 or above, explaining that this was the first time risk management had been presented to Cabinet alongside the financial and performance information, with the intention of providing a more holistic view of performance across the organisation. Attention was drawn to 2 of the risks which had scored above target; that the Council’s assets are not managed effectively and as a result do not support service delivery, and the shortage of 5 year land supply resulting in uncoordinated development. In response to queries, the Compliance and Risk Manager confirmed that risks relating to both businesses going in to administration and tree management were currently monitored, but had not reached a score high enough to warrant a formal report to Cabinet.

The Compliance and Risk Manager explained that it was hoped that the risk management information could soon be developed through CorVu and would be available in a similar format to that of the performance information in the members’ portal. The Chief Executive added that it had taken longer than originally envisaged to take full advantage of the CorVu system, but she hoped that this would be last time performance information would be presented in its current format.

**The Decision**

**RESOLVED:**

To note the Finance, Performance and Risk Report Quarter 2 2012/13
The Reasons for the Decision
To ensure processes are in place to improve performance.

Other Options Considered
None

2131 CAPITAL AND TREASURY REVIEW QUARTER 2 2012/13

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Accountancy Manager, which monitored the capital expenditure and treasury management activities in the second quarter of 2012/13, against both the updated Capital Programme and the Treasury Management Strategy, as approved by full Council on 22 February 2012.

Members welcomed John Duvall, the Council's new Accountancy Manager, to the meeting. The Accountancy Manager highlighted the key areas of his report to members.

During discussion, the Chairman wished to clarify that although there had not yet been any expenditure with regard to the Gypsy and Traveller transit site, the project was progressing. In response to a query from Cllr B Spratt, the Head of Finance confirmed that the Department for Communities and Local Government had suggested that it might look at ways of encouraging the larger town and parish councils to freeze precept levels, although she did not believe that any guidance had been issued to date.

The Decision

RESOLVED: TO RECOMMEND THAT COUNCIL

a) Notes the progress of the capital programme for the half year and the projected year end position.
b) Approves the on going expenditure for Equity Home Loans and the corresponding capital receipts from Great Yarmouth Borough Council for this financial year.
c) Approves the long term investments made for £2 million at 1.75% with Lloyds plc for 140 days, which was agreed by the Leader and Portfolio Holder.
d) Notes the treasury activity in quarter two and that it complies with the agreed strategy.
e) Approves the quarter two 2012/13 prudential indicators.

The Reasons for the Decision

To ensure that the Council’s capital programme is aligned to its priorities and investments are made in accordance with the Treasury Management Strategy
Other Options Considered
None

2132 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICIES

Members noted that the Development Management Policies document would be presented to the November meeting of the Cabinet.

2133 AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Members noted that the report regarding Affordable Housing had been drafted, and would be presented to the November meeting of the Cabinet.

2134 CABINET CORE AGENDA

Members noted the latest version of the Cabinet Core Agenda

2135 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended).

2136 PROPOSED PURCHASE OF COMMERCIAL INVESTMENT PROPERTY IN NORWICH

The subject of the decision

Members considered the exempt report of the Property Consultant, which detailed the proposed purchase and letting of two adjoining industrial/warehouse units in Norwich.

The Property Consultant informed members of the location of the units, and explained that they had become available to acquire at a discounted purchase price. In response to a query, he confirmed the two units could be opened up to make one unit if required.

Cllr K Weeks explained that he had viewed the units and could not support the proposal as he did not feel the position of the units to be favourable. Cabinet
accepted that the units would not be suitable for trade organisations, however; still felt the proposal to be viable.

The Decision

RESOLVED: To agree to purchase the units proposed on the terms outlined in the report.

The Reasons for the Decision

To ensure a financial benefit to the Council, in line with the Acquisition Strategy for investment properties.

Other Options Considered

Not to purchase the units.

2137 ACQUISITION OF LAND AT KETTERINGHAM

The subject of the decision

Members considered the exempt report of the Head of Asset Management, which informed Cabinet of an opportunity to acquire land in Ketteringham.

The Deputy Chief Executive outlined the background to the proposals and the risks involved in acquiring the land in question. Members noted that the purpose of the proposal was to enhance existing service delivery.

Members could see merit in expressing an interest in the site through the submission of an informal bid, but could not support expenditure of more than half of that proposed at paragraph 3.2 of the report. Cabinet was keen for officers to progress any opportunities for a joint proposal with other organisations.

The Chairman expressed the need to proceed with caution, stressing that the matter should be referred back to Cabinet prior to any binding legal agreement.

The Decision

RESOLVED: 1. To approve the submission proposal as described in paragraphs 3 of the report and offer the potential variant as described in 4.3, by the submission date set by DIO of 2nd November 2012, subject to:

(a) A maximum expenditure of 50% of that suggested at paragraph 3.2 of the report;
(b) The conditions in paragraph 3.4 - 3.4.7 are in place;
(c) Investigation of opportunities for working with other organisations or companies on a joint proposal;
2. That the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council and relevant portfolio holder is authorised to add further conditions which are deemed appropriate relating to the acquisition;

3. That prior to any binding legal agreement, the matter be referred back to Cabinet.

The Reasons for the Decision

To further enhance the services provided by the Council.

Other Options Considered

- To allow a higher maximum expenditure
- Not to submit a bid

(The meeting concluded at 11.44 am)

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Chairman