

CABINET

4 July 2016

Present: Mayor (Chair)

Councillors P Taylor, K Collett, S Johnson, I Sharpe and
M Watkin

Also present: Councillor N Bell (Labour)
Councillor K Hastrick (Liberal Democrat)
Councillor S Bashir (Labour)
Councillor J Dhindsa (Labour)
Councillor Asif Khan (Labour)
Councillor R Martins (Liberal Democrat)
Councillor M Turmaine (Labour)
Mr Ansar (to speak on item 7)
Ms Wilson (to speak on item 7)

Officers: Managing Director
Shared Director of Finance
Head of Democracy and Governance
Head of Regeneration and Development
Head of Community and Customer Services
Regeneration and Property Section Head
Culture and Community Section Head
Environmental Services Client Manager (Parks & Streets)
Partnerships and Performance Section Head
Corporate and External Communications Section Head
Democratic Services Manager

12 Apologies for Absence

No apologies were received.

13 Disclosure of Interest (if any)

There were no disclosures of interest.

14 **Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2016 were submitted and signed.

15 **Conduct of meeting**

Councillor Bell spoke on behalf of the Labour Group.

Cabinet agreed some changes to the order of agenda items.

16 **Appropriation of the Farm Terrace Allotment Land**

Cabinet received a report of the Managing Director regarding the Farm Terrace allotment site following the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government's decision on 26 May 2016 to grant permission for the Council, under s8 of the Allotments Act 1925, to allow the Council to appropriate the land under s122 of the Local Government Act 1972 for planning purposes to facilitate the delivery of the Watford Health Campus scheme.

Councillor Taylor introduced the report and explained that there were sufficient spaces still being offered to 24 remaining Farm Terrace plot holders.

Councillor Bell commented that a member of the public had asked whether the plots were the same size as the current 24 plots. A member of staff had asked them to make a Freedom of Information request for this information. He was concerned that there were not enough plots available.

The Managing Director responded that the relocation proposal included Holywell and Brightwell allotments. There were other options which included reprovion at Paddock Road. He apologised that the member of the public had not been given the information they had requested and that it would be provided as soon as possible. The Partnerships and Performance Section Head explained that Veolia held the information regarding plots and that the availability fluctuated daily.

The Environmental Services Client Manager (Parks and Streets) explained that for the size of Farm Terrace plots as a whole, reprovion would be like for like elsewhere. At Paddock Road planning permission had been received for development of an area. There were 21-22 plots available at Paddock Road and a number of vacant plots elsewhere. He continued that the majority of Farm Terrace allotment holders had taken up the offer of compensation and had moved to other sites.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. following the grant of consent by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government under s8 of the Allotments Act 1925 for the land known as Farm Terrace allotments to be appropriated for planning purposes under s122 of the Local Government Act 1972 to enable the site to be used for the benefit of the Watford Health Campus scheme, to so appropriate the Farm Terrace allotments site as shown edged red in Appendix 1 to the report.
2. notes and agrees the recommendation to terminate the remaining 24 Farm Terrace allotment tenancies following appropriation, in line with s1(1)(d) of the Allotments Act 1922, to enable the plans for the land to be brought forward to facilitate the delivery of Watford Health Campus.
3. notes the progress of Watford Health Campus and the importance of the allotment land to the delivery of the next phases of the project. This is particularly in relation to the West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust's emerging plans for the Watford Hospital site and the overall requirements for appropriate infrastructure to support the new community that will be created through the Health Campus.

17

Contract for the support of Syrian refugees

Cabinet received a report of the Head of Community and Customer Services to note a tender exemption for the Council to enter into a contract with the Refugee Council to provide support for Syrian Refugees.

Councillor Johnson introduced the report and explained there was an urgent need to establish support to help the families. It had been necessary to agree the contract quickly due to the circumstances and there were now three families within Watford who were doing well.

The Head of Community and Customer Services explained that the council had a contract with an organisation called the Refugee Council, which was providing support services for eight authorities in Hertfordshire. There were two contact workers in Hertfordshire who worked with these authorities. The three families were settling in well, their children were being allocated school places and they were registering with doctors. The council received regular reports from the Refugee Council.

In response to a question from the Mayor, the Head of Community and Customer Services explained that the Refugee Council was supposed to engage

with local charitable organisations. He would pursue that matter with them. Befriending was a key activity to integrate people into the local community

Councillor Johnson explained that there would be a full procurement process when the current arrangements had finished.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet notes the content of the report.

18

Investment in Watford's Adventure Playgrounds

A report was received from the Head of Community and Customer Services. The report highlighted the investment the Council was making in the two Adventure Playgrounds (APGs) at Harwoods and Harebreaks. Funding of up to £1.25 million had been made available by the Council for the new facilities which would be open to all at all times.

Two members of the public, Mr Ansar and Ms Wilson, attended to speak to the committee.

Councillor Collett introduced the report and explained that it highlighted investment in two APGs to create high quality play facilities. The proposed change was about two things: to extend the opportunities for children aged 5-15 to access high quality play facilities everyday throughout the year. Secondly, the need to respond to the challenging financial situation of the council which meant there were difficult decisions to be taken requiring a transformational approach. The proposal would deliver the council's objective to protect areas for play and bring equipment up to a modern standard. There would be play activities commissioned for the Easter and summer breaks.

The Mayor invited Ms Wilson to speak.

Ms Wilson explained that she was giving a point of view from the parents of children who used the facility. She explained that APGs enabled children to have creative play and learn vital skills. The children would go to the playworkers for emotional support and learnt social skills at the APG. Money was being saved in the wrong place and instead was being spent on the town centre. The parents wanted to keep the staff and considered that the facilities had been run down. There were children who had been upset when they heard about the decision and who had made the banners which were brought to the meeting. She had reported anti social behaviour regarding the activities of older children in the young children's play areas to the police.

Ms Wilson continued that the reinvestment would mean that the current facilities were replaced with a sterile playground which could be subject to more antisocial behaviour. Once the decision had been made the current facility would be lost and there would be no going back.

Ms Wilson presented a petition to the Mayor and explained that in a week they had collected 2,500 signatures in support of the petition.

The Mayor invited Mr Ansar to speak.

Mr Ansar explained that he was born and grew up in Watford, he had attended Watford Grammar School for Boys and worked for Watford Borough Council on the play bus and APG. His family were still residents and his previous colleagues still worked for the youth services. There had been a lack of public consultation over the issue and he wanted to see more local democracy and representation. There should be a six month period to offer an opportunity to talk to residents as there was a great strength of feeling. The council was good at putting up buildings and there were very few green spaces left. The last public consultations regarding play had made a strong recommendation which was that APGs were a vital public asset. There was a budget of up to £1.25m but he was not sure if it was ringfenced. The council would be making savings, cutting staff and outsourcing to Veolia. There would be the cost of providing supervision on those sites for two weeks in Easter and six weeks in summer. There were concerns on the long term impacts on crime.

The Mayor responded that local government had been particularly affected by government austerity measures. The council had managed to protect the front line services and had kept council tax down.

Councillor Bell commented that more notice could have been given to staff. There was strong support for the playground. Despite figures on investment in playgrounds there was no history of investment in the APG site. The APG had provided supervised care for young people over so many years and this was not reflected in the report. He encouraged the Mayor to take up the offer of working with the community to find another solution.

Councillor Bell commented that the current facilities provided a place where parents could trust that their children were safe. The two new modern playgrounds were not what people were looking for. He continued that there had been a lack of consultation and that the proposed events were for information.

The Mayor responded that many councils did not have a staffed APG facility and similar ones had been closed across London. There would still be play facilities.

She continued that she knew that people who used it valued the service. However, the council had to find another £3m of cuts between now and 2018. She explained that each service had been looked at for what they provided. There were other people in the town who did not use the APGs who were not heard at the meeting.

Councillor Watkin explained the difference between the council's capital budget, to be spent on capital projects such as the works to the top of the town and on new equipment for play areas. However, the revenue budget was being cut which meant that day to day expenditure had to be cut.

Councillor Collett commented that it was a very emotional situation and due to government cuts the council was being forced to make a decision it did not like. However, the APGs were staying open unlike in other areas of London. Play facilities were one of the top priorities in the citizen's survey and the current APG equipment was old and tired. The APG would be kept and would be open with new equipment which would fit into the natural environment; it would not be built on.

The Managing Director highlighted that financially over the last five years the council had had to produce efficiency savings of £4.5m. This process had led to the council reviewing every type of service it provided and assessing how it could be delivered differently to save money. There were no longer any decisions the council could make that did not involve difficult choices. In relation to APGs, if they were not part of reducing costs at this point, the council would have to look at other services e.g., housing, leisure centres, environmental health inspection. There was a way of preserving the service through the report's recommendations for the next 20 years.

The Mayor concluded that the council would provide new facilities as well as continuing to offer free swim and gym and play activities in the holidays. These services were not provided by other councils. A public consultation would not change the reality; there was not a compromise on the way forward.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. approves the outline design plans for the investment of up to £1.25 million into the two Adventure Playgrounds
2. approves the outline timetable for the investment at Appendix B to the report

3. notes the plans to communicate the investment and proposals to inform the Watford community of the plans for the future of the Adventure Playgrounds

19

Summary of the Financial Outturn 2015/16

A report was received from the Director of Finance to inform Cabinet of the revenue and capital outturns for financial year 2015/16.

The report had also been considered at Budget Panel on 28 June and the minutes were circulated at the meeting.

Councillor Watkin introduced the report and explained it was the final report on last year's financial performance. There had been an overspend on the temporary accommodation budget. However, the council had managed to achieve significant improvements to commercial rent income and income from kerbside recycling. There would be £1.19m carried forward to 2016/17.

Councillor Watkin continued that with regards to capital expenditure there would be £9.125m re-phased into 2016/17. There was major investment into the borough which was seen as a key priority. However, there was also uncertainty about the future particularly the relationship with Europe following the recent referendum result.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. considered the revenue outturn as summarised at Paragraph 4.1, and supplementary notes at Appendices 1 to 5 and notes the year end position, which includes carry forwards.
2. approves the 2015/16 budget carry forwards into 2016/17 as recommended by Leadership Team totalling £1.190 million as detailed at Appendix 3.
3. considered the capital outturn as summarised at Paragraph 5.1 and shown in detail in Appendix 5. Cabinet confirms the re-phasing of £9.125 million into 2016/17.

Publication of Local Plan 2006-2031, Part 2, Site Allocations and Development Management Policies

A report of the Planning Policy Section Head was received, the publication of Local Plan Part 2 was proposed to take place during August and September 2016. The Local Plan Part 1 Core Strategy was adopted in January 2013.

An updated map of the Watford Junction site had been circulated to the committee at the meeting, this was also applicable to item 11 on the agenda.

Councillor Sharpe introduced the report bringing forward Local Plan Part 2 to go to public consultation. He explained it was very important that the council had a plan, as there was a government agenda which was pro development and restricted the ability of local councils to reject development. The council had a duty to engage positively. The consequences of no local plan would be development by appeal. Local Plan Part 2 had been out to informal consultation. It was crucial to get the policy right on key areas such as Clarendon Road in order to defend an important employment area but also to encourage development. The open space and children's play space policy had been rewritten to drive at quality. Local Plan Part 2 was trying to focus development, jobs and houses on derelict and underused land which was in need of regeneration. The aim was to protect residential areas and protect against inappropriate development. The council would be more vulnerable if it was not able to show where development would be accepted.

Councillor Sharpe continued that methods of delivery of local plans had changed. It had originally been perceived to be a suite of documents, now there would be a single local plan. The Local Plan had to be found sound by an inspector. Once Local Plan Part 2 was agreed, the council could quickly move for a review of the entire plan.

The Head of Regeneration and Development explained that the council had decided to continue with a two part plan (core strategy and site allocations/development management policies) rather than start from scratch and deliver a whole plan review in 2011. There were still a third of councils nationally which did not have an adopted local plan, so Watford Borough Council was in a good position. Local Plan Part 2 would give the council a complete plan and allow a move away from saved policies from the old district plan. The complete plan could then be reviewed which should be a quicker process.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet

1. agrees Local Plan Part 2 can progress to Publication consultation
2. agrees that editorial, formatting and minor changes to Local Plan Part 2 and accompanying proposed submission documents (including if needed as a result of the related separate consultation on the inclusion of the optional national technical space standard) can be agreed by the Portfolio Holder and Head of Service ahead of publication.

21

Ascot Road/Croxley View Masterplan Study

Cabinet received a report of the Regeneration and Development Manager. A draft masterplan study had been produced following work with consultants, this would deliver a new mixed use urban quarter for Watford and new homes linking through to Croxley View.

Councillor Sharpe presented the report and explained that it was important to the council's planning strategy to make use of opportunities to regenerate unused land. For this reason there were allocated sites of Special Policy Area. These areas were recognised as areas of focus for development regeneration opportunities. Ascot Road/ Croxley View land was to be further developed alongside the current developments of the school and Morrisons. The arrival of the Metropolitan Line Extension had the potential to create a new urban quarter which would be transformational. It was important to do a masterplan rather than leave it to the market. The site would involve significant levels of development and would contribute towards job and housing targets. The masterplan would be going out for consultation and the department would be creative in ways to get the public's views on the proposals.

Councillor Bell commented on the timing of the consultation as it was taking place over the holiday period in July and August.

The Mayor responded that people were unlikely to be away for the whole period and it was likely that it would be developers who were commenting on the proposals.

The Head of Regeneration and Development commented that a consultation period would normally only be 4 weeks, however, it had been extended to 6 weeks to take account of starting in August. The consultation periods were aligned with Local Plan Part 2 and Watford Junction Masterplan. This was an opportunity for people to have their say about development.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. supports the draft Cassiobridge/Croxley View Masterplan study being made available for public consultation.
2. agrees to officers continuing discussions with adjoining land owners and stakeholders in relation to the scheme.
3. agrees to officers pursuing discussions with key stakeholders for the establishment of all necessary legal frameworks and agreements, such as Section 106, Lease and partnership agreements, to facilitate the provision of a comprehensive development strategy for the area.

22

Watford Junction Development Brief / Masterplan

A report of the Planning Policy Section Head was received by Cabinet. The consultants working with key stakeholders produced a draft development brief/masterplan which would deliver a new sustainable urban quarter for Watford and a new pedestrian crossing over the railway lines, future proofing the station's passenger capacity. The draft development brief/masterplan would be taken to public consultation during the summer.

Councillor Sharpe introduced the report and explained it was an important and challenging site because of differences in land ownership. It was surprising how much land there was available and how it was underused. He hoped that the challenges could be overcome to make somewhere that was a genuine community. The site would include schools, open space, jobs and a significant contribution towards new housing. This would also go out for consultation and he hoped creative ways could be found to make sure there was a wide awareness. It was important that the council was planning ahead and place shaping.

Councillor Watkin commented that at that day's Hertfordshire County Council Cabinet meeting they had looked at future transport plans, including making Watford Junction into a significant transport hub.

Councillor Sharpe explained that the proposed pedestrian bridge was important as it was vital to have greater connectivity to the station.

Cabinet welcomed the inclusion of new schools into the masterplan and heard that there were further plans for expanding or creating new secondary schools in Watford and the surrounding districts.

The Head of Regeneration and Development commented that currently the Watford Junction site did not function well. Officers had had a positive meeting with the owners of the Iveco House building on the site and were starting to see progress.

Councillor Johnson spoke regarding the housing targets for the future stating that the Development Management Committee should be challenging development in the knowledge that the council was hitting the targets.

The Mayor agreed that it was about quality and taking risks on rejecting developments that the council was not happy with.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. agrees that the draft Watford Junction Development Brief/Masterplan can progress to consultation.
2. agrees that editorial, formatting and minor changes to the Development Brief/Masterplan can be agreed by the Portfolio Holder and Head of Service ahead of consultation.
3. agrees to officers continuing discussions with landowners and stakeholders in relation to the emerging scheme.
4. notes the proposals reflect a long term plan that would see the development take place over a 20 year period, through to 2036.

23

Amendments to the Various Agreements for the Watford Health Campus Partnership LLP

A report was received from the Property and Regeneration Section Head. Following legal agreements made three years ago between the Council, Kier and West Watford Hospitals National Health Service Trust, it had become necessary to make a number of amendments to them to reflect changes in circumstances coupled with a better understanding of issues relating to the regeneration of the site.

The Managing Director commented that the report was regarding making amendments to various agreements in the Health Campus partnership. There were four technical adjustments to the agreement which had already been to the partnership board:

1. The council's ability to lend into the health campus scheme, subject to due diligence.
2. Following being successful in acquiring Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) funding there was a need to reprioritise how that would be repaid.
3. To allow the partnership to take account of abnormal costs in a way that costs are apportioned in development zones. This would allow more flexibility to look at site wide abnormal costs to ensure each zone was viable.
4. To vary the Campus Agreement with West Hertfordshire Hospital Trust so rather than carrying out sharing in the value of the land under the land equalisation agreement for every scheme, as hospital plans are unclear on timing, there would be a reconciliation between Council and Trust when their plans are finalised.

The Managing Director continued that these changes would have no impact on the outcomes of what was being delivered.

The Shared Director of Finance explained that the council would be providing loans to increase the council's returns which was relatively safe and would yield a better return than just leaving the funds in the bank.

Councillor Bell commented that it was right that the changes should come before Cabinet. He asked a question regarding the covenant strength of Kier.

The Property and Regeneration Section Head responded that with regards to the financial security of Kier they were highly rated to be able to make the repayments.

The Mayor commented that she had met with Kier following the result of the referendum and they had provided assurances that they were still committed. The future for the council was about being more commercial.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. agrees to an amendment of the Members Agreement allowing the Council to lend Senior Debt to the project, similar to a bank. This debt would carry a priority return from development receipts.
2. agrees in the Members Agreement to the prioritising of the return of an additional tranche of Growing Places Funding (GPF) which has been invested in the scheme's infrastructure.
3. agrees to delegate decisions to the Partnership Board regarding the allocation of site specific abnormal costs to site wide costs where appropriate to create viable development zones.
4. agrees to an amendment of the Campus Agreement relating to the land equalisation agreement with West Hertfordshire Hospital Trust (WHHT) so that payment from the Council is deferred until plans for the hospital and its development land are further progresses and that a reconciliation mechanism is entered into when WHHT plans are finalised.

24

Exclusion of press & Public

Following a request by the Mayor, the Head of Democracy and Governance explained that the next item of the agenda was Part B as it contained details which could prejudice the council's position and those of the council's partners.

RESOLVED

that, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during consideration of the item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Section 100(1) Schedule 12A of the Act for the reasons stated in the report.

25

Industrial Zone South Watford Health Campus

The Property and Regeneration Section Head introduced the report and responded to questions from Cabinet.

RESOLVED

That the recommendations contained in the report were agreed.

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 8.50 pm