

CABINET

11 September 2017

Present: Mayor (Chair)
Councillors P Taylor, K Collett, S Johnson, I Sharpe and
M Watkin

Also present: Councillor Bell

Officers: Head of Democracy and Governance
Managing Director
Shared Director of Finance
Deputy Managing Director and Director of Place Shaping and
Corporate Performance
Communications and Engagement Section Head
Regeneration and Property Section Head
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (IM)

18 **Apologies for Absence**

No apologies were received.

19 **Disclosure of Interest (if any)**

There were no disclosures of interest.

20 **Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2017 were submitted and signed.

21 **Conduct of meeting**

The Mayor advised that following discussions with the Portfolio Holder for Housing it had been agreed to withdraw agenda item 11, a report of the Regeneration and Property Section Head updating Cabinet on the construction of homes in Watford. It was noted that this issue had been discussed previously by Cabinet in March.

Councillor Bell spoke on behalf of the Labour Group.

Public Realm Improvement - High Street - Watford

Cabinet received a report from the Deputy Managing Director and Director of Place Shaping and Corporate Performance regarding an opportunity for the council to lead on improvement works to the High Street between Clarendon Road and St Mary's Square.

Councillor Sharpe introduced the report. He explained that Cabinet was being asked to approve a proposal to include £800,000 in the 2018/19 Capital Programme to allow further important investment in the public realm. Considerable investment had continued in Watford's town centre at a time of falling expenditure in such schemes elsewhere in the country.

The proposal before Cabinet would tie in with highway improvements in the High Street associated with the on-going Charter Place redevelopment, and with The Parade enhancement works which had already been carried out by the council.

In addition to the re-paving works to the foot and carriage ways between Clarendon Road and St Mary's Square, Councillor Sharpe explained that the proposed improvements envisaged a shared space with reduced traffic levels, changes to the current taxi and blue badge arrangements, some re-routing of the buses and improved lighting and CCTV provision.

Councillor Bell sought assurance that the views of the general public from the recent consultation as well as those of key stakeholders, particularly the taxi drivers and blue badge holders, would be taken into account when the details of the project were finalised. In response, the Mayor confirmed that a series of discussions were planned with interested groups, including those mentioned by Councillor Bell, in order to agree a final proposal that balanced a range of disparate views.

In response to a further query by Councillor Bell about the development of the former One Bell public house, there followed a short discussion about the proposal to allow an extension of the building in the conservation area. The Mayor explained that this was a pragmatic solution, which by making the iconic building more economically viable would ensure its future existence on the High Street.

Officers commented that in addition, it was hoped the proposal for this asset would provide a catalyst to improve the surrounding area. Discussions with the Business Improvement District and Hertfordshire County Council were continuing to progress this objective.

RESOLVED –

That Cabinet recommends to Council that £800,000 is included in the Capital Programme 2018/19 for the scheme.

23

Local Plan Review 2016 - 2036

Cabinet received a report of the Deputy Managing Director and Director of Place Shaping and Corporate Performance.

Councillor Sharpe introduced the report, explaining that it was being proposed to focus resources on progressing the Local Plan Review 2016-2036. This followed recent evidence suggesting that the need for homes and jobs was much higher than planned in the Local Plan Part 1 Core Strategy. Separate to this, an appeal decision in April 2017 had brought into question the council's five year housing supply. As a consequence, it had become apparent that the council needed to revise its housing supply to reflect the more recent objectively assessed need figures.

Work undertaken in preparation for Local Plan Part 2 would not be wasted as it would feed directly into the preparation of the plan review which was already underway.

Councillor Sharpe emphasised the scale of work ahead and the need to engage with the community to shape the future development of the town. He acknowledged Watford Borough Council's duty to cooperate with neighbouring authorities and partners, and emphasised the need for the council to shape its policy and direction and not be subject to planning by appeal.

The Deputy Managing Director confirmed that the South West Hertfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Economic Study suggested that the objectively assessed need for homes in Watford was 577 per year. This compared with 260 per year proposed in the Core Strategy. However, in response to confusion and inconsistency in methods being used to calculate these figures, the Government would be introducing a standard methodology. This was expected in the next six months. The Deputy Managing Director advised that the figure could change as the most up to date analysis of the evidence would be needed.

Councillor Bell questioned how the recent Ascot Road planning permission would impact on the five year housing supply. The Deputy Managing Director confirmed that this had contributed to a current 5 year supply, however the figure was not static and likely to fluctuate over time.

The Mayor acknowledged comments from Cabinet about the need to balance demands for further housing against significant traffic problems around the town. Questions of density and traffic congestion were key and required the council to be robust in defence of its limited geographical space.

RESOLVED –

That Cabinet recommends to Council that the Local Plan Part 2 is not submitted for examination and that resources should now be focussed on progressing the Local Plan Review to cover the period 2016-2036.

24

Revision to Digital Watford Board Terms of Reference

Cabinet received a report of the Head of Service Transformation setting out revisions to Digital Watford Board's terms of reference.

Councillor Watkin introduced the report. He explained that Cabinet had approved the establishment of the Digital Watford Board in June 2016. Since then, and following a review by the new Head of Service Transformation, it had become apparent that two distinct tranches of work were being undertaken by the Board: Watford 2020 (an internal transformation programme) and Digital Watford (an outward facing programme implementing and exploiting digital infrastructure in the borough).

The different reporting structures needed for these two areas of work required changes to the Digital Watford Board's terms of reference. These needed Cabinet approval.

Cabinet agreed that it was important to ensure that Watford remained a place where people wished to locate. Recognising the young demographic of the borough, Digital Watford was an important and exciting aspect of this endeavour.

RESOLVED –

That Cabinet agrees:

1. that the Digital Watford Board Terms of Reference should be amended as indicated in section 3.3 of the report
2. that the new membership of Digital Watford Board as indicated in section 3.4 be noted
3. that a report on the Watford 2020 Programme be brought to Cabinet on 9 October 2017 with highlight reports being taken to Overview and Scrutiny thereafter for the duration of the Programme.

25 **Contract Procedure Rules Exemption Report**

Cabinet received a report of the Head of Democracy and Governance which outlined an agreed exemption to the contract procedures rules. This had concerned the procurement of the installation of an uninterrupted power supply for the server room and had been agreed by the Managing Director and Head of Democracy and Governance.

Cabinet acknowledged the report was required in line with the council's constitution and contract procedure rules and represented good governance and clear accountability in the conduct of the council's business affairs.

RESOLVED –

That Cabinet notes the report.

26 **Town Hall development**

Cabinet received a report of the Section Head of Facilities Management / Buildings & Projects about the development of the town hall.

Introducing the report, the Managing Director explained that developing the town hall site would bring a number of benefits: establishing a public service hub, including the co-location of Hertfordshire Constabulary on a long term lease; removing the single storey modular building "The Terrapin", which was beyond its life expectancy and no longer financially viable; and improving current parking provision with a part single/part double storey vehicle parking deck over the town hall and leisure centre car parks.

Subject to Cabinet approval of the current project proposal and the capital funding required to undertake the development, a planning application for the new four or five storey building would be submitted towards the end of 2017. It was envisaged that construction work would begin in spring 2018 and be completed by the end of 2019. These timescales were consistent with the requirements of Hertfordshire Constabulary.

In parallel, the Managing Director confirmed that work had been undertaken with Hertfordshire County Council (Highways Authority) to develop a transport strategy to support the new access requirements for the building and to assess the potential impact on surrounding roads.

Costs for the proposed scheme would be paid back over a 15 year period and would thereafter generate income to Watford Borough Council.

Cabinet welcomed the proposal, particularly the decision of Hertfordshire Constabulary to co-locate to the proposed new building which represented a significant benefit to the safety of the town. This would be particularly welcomed by residents, who were concerned about the potential loss of a permanent police building in Watford.

It was hoped that, once vacated by Hertfordshire Constabulary, the Shady Lane site would provide an opportunity to ease current affordable housing constraints in the town.

Although there were concerns about disruption during the construction phase, it was acknowledged that dialogue was being maintained with the Colosseum and Central Leisure Centre, as well as with the council's existing tenants, to mitigate any impacts.

There followed a short discussion about the Colosseum's capital maintenance programme, which required some significant work to be undertaken on its building. It was reported that discussions were underway with the Colosseum to investigate whether this maintenance work might coincide with the council's own development to keep overall disruption to the public to a minimum.

RESOLVED –

That Cabinet:

1. approves the project
2. recommends to Council to approve the capital funding required to undertake this development.

27 **Exclusion of press & Public**

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 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 reports.

28 **Construction of homes in Watford update**

As noted under minute 21, this item was withdrawn from the agenda.

29

Watford Riverwell

Cabinet received a report of the Deputy Managing Director and Director of Place Shaping and Corporate Performance. The Regeneration and Property Section Head introduced the report and officers responded to questions from Cabinet members.

RESOLVED –

That Cabinet agrees the recommendations.

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 8.20 pm