

## **CABINET**

**1 DECEMBER 2014**

Present: Mayor (Chair)

Councillors D Scudder, K Crout, S Johnson, I Sharpe and  
M Watkin (for minute numbers 36 to 43)

Also present: Councillor Bell

Officers: Managing Director  
Shared Director of Finance  
Head of Regeneration and Development  
Head of Community and Customer Services  
Housing Section Head  
Legal and Democratic Section Head  
Town Centre Manager  
Spatial Planning Manager  
Economic Development Manager  
Economic Development Officer  
Housing Strategy Officer  
Democratic Services Manager

31 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies were received

32 **DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST (IF ANY)**

There were no disclosures of interest.

33 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2014 were submitted and signed.

34 **CONDUCT OF MEETING**

Councillor Bell spoke on behalf of the Labour Group at this meeting. Cabinet agreed some changes to the agenda order and moved WiFi and Business Improvement District items forward.

## **WI-FI CONNECTIVITY PROJECT**

A report from the Economic Development Officer outlined two opportunities for Watford Borough Council firstly to deliver street level WiFi connectivity to the town centre and other specific community areas across Watford on a cost neutral basis, and secondly to deliver business quality wireless broadband connectivity from Watford Borough Council's rooftop locations and generate an income for the Council.

The report was introduced by Councillor Sharpe who described how the idea was started as a result of wanting to boost IT and communications in the Town Centre. It was initially thought that the infrastructure would be funded by Watford Borough Council. Following advice from other Councils it was found that WiFi could be let out as a concession if there was sufficient interest in the market. The Council would be working with partners such as West Herts College, Watford Community Housing Trust and Safer Watford. The WiFi would benefit the Town Centre and also improve connectivity in more deprived areas of the Town.

The Mayor considered the WiFi project to be exciting and something which has only previously been done in big cities and towns. It could go live in October 2015.

**RESOLVED:**

That Cabinet:

1. Agrees to progress to procuring both a WiFi service concession and a rooftop service concession in January 2015. Procurement for the two concessions would run in parallel, but as separate procurements. The preferred bidders' detailed proposals would be returned to Cabinet for approval prior to awarding any contracts. If successful it was estimated that a WiFi service could go live in October 2015.
2. Agrees that a procurement exemption had been agreed to engage the services of specialist consultants Regional Network Solutions (RNS) to support the project. RNS assists with feasibility studies, soft market testing, asset and requirement capture, assistance in drafting contracts and procurement evaluation. They bring in-depth technical and commercial knowledge of this market. Details were in the appendix to the report.

## **BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT**

The Town Centre Manager provided an update on the proposal to establish a Business Improvement District (BID) for Watford town centre. The Town Centre Manager outlined the Council's role as a partner/Board Member on the Town Centre Partnership.

Councillor Sharpe presented the report and thanked officers for their work. He described how the BID was a way of using a Business Rate Tariff to fund ongoing improvement in an area. These improvements could include events or street furniture to make the area a more desirable location. There was a loan available for the ballot. If the ballot was successful then the loan would be paid back by proceeds from the BID. If the ballot was unsuccessful then the loan would not have to be paid back. Councillor Sharpe commented that the BID required a large amount of preparation work with businesses.

The Mayor commented that the time was right for the BID as businesses had seen the investment that the Council was making into the Town.

The Town Centre Manager outlined how Town Centre businesses were feeling the benefits of the improvement works which had been carried out. There were businesses in Watford who were also working in other areas of the country which had a BID and had seen how it could be successful. There had been business engagement events which had received positive feedback from businesses and the Town Centre Partnership Board had demonstrated that they were committed to making the BID work and were becoming the voice of the businesses.

Following a question from Councillor Bell, the Town Centre Manager described how businesses with a rateable value of over £10,000 would be eligible to vote in the ballot. Those businesses which were below £10,000 would be able to contribute individually after the ballot. The majority of businesses in the defined area fell into the category of over £10,000. The Town Centre Manager had recently met with a small business owner in the Lower High Street who could see the value of the BID and offered to take information out to other small businesses in the area to promote the initiative.

## RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. Agrees to support the principle of Watford BID subject to approval of the BID proposal and business plan.
2. Subject to the approval of a BID Business Proposal by Committee in 2015, Cabinet agrees to nominate the Head of Regeneration and Development as the named person to cast the vote in respect of the Council's eligible properties in the BID boundary area, in consultation with the appropriate portfolio holder.

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## **TO CONSIDER THE FUTURE INVOLVEMENT OF WATFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL IN THE HOUSING AND REGENERATION INITIATIVE (HARI)**

Cabinet received a report from the Head of Community and Customer Services. Due to a different economic and housing environment the HARI board had recently considered various options to review the way that the HARI Partnership operated. On 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2014 the HARI Board recommended, from the options considered, that HARI should cease either by mutual agreement or,

failing that, termination from Watford Borough Council (and Three Rivers District Council.)

Councillor Johnson presented the report and described how the ending of the HARI partnership was positive as it was taking up a considerable amount of officer time. It would be recommended by the Council that the remaining funds left in HARI would be used to continue to fund the post of Tenancy Fraud Officer for another 18 months.

The Housing Section Head commented that HARI had been running for a number of years, the organisation was set up as Watford Borough Council had access to grant funding and Three Rivers District Council had access to land so there was an opportunity for joint working. Recently there had been a Board and two sub-groups. However, the housing providers were now working over such a large area and were in competition with each other over affordable housing so this arrangement was no longer practical.

The Housing Section Head described how it was part of the Housing Strategy to revive the way that the Council engaged with providers and so the structure of HARI was no longer necessary. This would enable future work to happen in a more flexible context.

The Mayor commented that the positive aspects of the quality relationships with providers would still be able to continue.

The Mayor thanked the Housing Section Head as it was her last meeting and wished her well for the future.

**RESOLVED**

That Cabinet:

1. Agrees the termination of the Housing and Regeneration Initiative (HARI) Agreement either by mutual consent or by service of a termination notice.
2. Delegates any and all future decisions on HARI, including any financial arrangements, to the Head of Community and Customer Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing

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## **PRESENTATION OF WATFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL'S HOUSING STRATEGY (2015-2020) FOR APPROVAL**

The Housing Section Head introduced a report on the new Housing Strategy and Action Plan to cover the period 2015-2020. Whilst it was not a statutory duty to produce a Housing Strategy, it was a key strategic document which would support the delivery of the Local Plan and provide an overarching direction for the Council's other housing related plans and strategies.

The Housing Strategy was developed with input from Elected Members through the Housing Policy Advisory Group (HPAG) and Planning Policy Advisory Group (PPAG) and other Members attending open joint meetings of the two.

The Action Plan produced would be reviewed annually to assess achievements and adjust priorities as necessary.

Councillor Johnson thanked the Housing Section Head for her help and support. He described how the strategy had taken two years to produce and how the discussions at HPAG had been useful to the process. He would be reviewing the action plans quarterly.

The Mayor commented that housing was the top issue in Watford and described how at the last Cabinet meeting local homes for local people had been prioritised through the housing nominations policy. She outlined that Watford could need to look beyond the boundaries to meet housing needs and how the Council should support people to meet their own housing needs.

The Mayor thanked HPAG and PPAG for their work and for outlining clear priorities. HPAG would have a role going forward in overseeing the strategy and testing out the effect of the policy changes. She thanked the Housing Strategy Officer for her detailed research of each ward in the strategy.

Councillor Bell thanked the Housing Section Head and wished her well for the future and commended the detail in the strategy. He mentioned a resident whose son was being re-located outside of the Borough.

The Mayor responded that the issue Councillor Bell raised related to temporary accommodation and that people might well be housed outside the Borough as all the temporary accommodation in Watford, including local B&B's etc, were full. The Council was working with other Boroughs and would meet temporary accommodation needs but it might be outside our boundaries.

## RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the Watford Borough Council Housing Strategy 2015-20 for publication
2. Delegates annual reviews of the Action Plan to the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

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## LOCAL PLAN PART 2

A report was presented by the Spatial Planning Manager, which described how the Local Plan Part 1 – the Core Strategy was adopted in January 2013. Part 2 of the Local Plan replaced and updated the remaining Watford District Plan 2000 policies and site allocations.

The draft consultation was brought to Cabinet to be considered alongside the Economic Development Strategy and Housing Strategy. An earlier draft of the Policy was considered by the Planning Policy Advisory Group (PPAG) on 1<sup>st</sup> October and changes were made.

The Mayor thanked the Head of Regeneration and Development and her team.

Councillor Sharpe described how Watford was ahead of other Councils in Hertfordshire in getting to this stage. It was important to have a Local Plan in place as it set out the mechanism to deliver social wellbeing, economic prosperity and housing. If the Council did not have a Local Plan it would be vulnerable to developers building on inappropriate sites. The Council was trying to guide development to the right places in the context of great pressure on space available.

Councillor Sharpe commented that Part 1 of the Local Plan had set out a vision of regenerating land, of a thriving Town Centre and sustainable neighbourhoods with facilities and amenities in easy reach. There was a focus on derelict and underused land for development. The work done on economic development in the Town had highlighted the need to protect areas to provide employment for the future. Also the need for special measures relating to noise around the residents' homes in the Town Centre to balance their needs with the effects of the night time economy.

Sites that had been identified for housing and employment land were now part of the consultation going forward. Councillor Sharpe encouraged the community and Councillors to engage in the consultation. The consultation would then enable informed decisions to be made.

The Mayor commented that it was important that three key strategies for the Town had come to the Cabinet meeting. There was a need to be clear about having the right houses in the right place for a cross-section of society. Watford should be a town for all and the policies must reflect that.

Councillor Bell commented on the gypsy and traveller site identified next to the current site on Tolpits Lane. He referred to objections being made to Three Rivers District Council's wish to put their gypsy and traveller site adjacent to this. He felt that the current site had been there for 30-40 years and he would not want the current peaceful situation to be disrupted.

The Mayor responded that the Council was obliged to identify a gypsy and traveller site. Although there had been a couple of recent incursions there were very few problems historically.

The Head of Regeneration and Development highlighted that the consultation would start on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2014. She thanked the team and hoped for a good response to the consultation. She felt that the Plan would help to inform residents where development would be in their area.

In response to a question from Councillor Bell, the Head of Regeneration and Development pointed out that following a change at national level, Houses of Multiple Occupancies (HMO) no longer had to be registered so the Council was not always aware of their location. However, the planning team has worked to plot their location in the Borough. Compared to other districts Watford had a low number of HMOs, about 2% of housing stock. If a planning application for an HMO was received then research on other HMOs would be carried out in the surrounding area. There was a demand for quality single person accommodation in the Borough.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet:

1. Agrees that the draft Local Plan Part 2 progresses to consultation
2. Delegates authority to the Head of Regeneration and Development to make any necessary editorial changes/corrections prior to consultation.

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#### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY REFRESH (2015-2020) DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION, LAUNCHING JANUARY 2015**

A report of the Economic Development Manager described how the emerging Economic Development Strategy had focused on five core areas: the sustainable growth of Watford and its economy; transport and connectivity; inward investment and business retention; innovation and enterprise; employability and skills.

A formal consultation on the draft strategy would commence in January 2015. Following a consultation process the Strategy would be brought back to Cabinet in March 2015 for sign off.

Councillor Sharpe commended the report and commented that it demonstrated how a local authority should engage with issues and create a local thriving economy by providing a lead for sustainable economic growth. The Council had a strategic role and should not leave it solely to the market.

The strategy built on the town's strengths e.g., transport links and how these would be taken forward through projects such as the Croxley Rail Link. It also looked at business retention, employability and skills. The Strategy would have a clear and definite impact on the Town.

The Mayor commented on investment which had been made into posts at the Council and also the Chamber of Commerce. She highlighted work with partners e.g., the Local Asset Backed Vehicle (LABV) in the Health Campus. The Council had received praise through the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and felt that businesses had confidence in the Council and its ability to deliver.

The Economic Development Manager described how there was an opportunity, as the country emerged from a recession, for economic development. The evidence base for the strategy had shown that there was potential for creating 14,000 jobs in the future. The Borough had a role to provide the right spaces in the Town for businesses and helping them to thrive. Economic growth needs housing growth but there would be difficult choices to be made due to the amount of land available. As a result of this it could result in sharing economic growth across South West Hertfordshire.

Councillor Bell welcomed the report's proposals and thought they were good for the town. However, he commented that it should have been done before. Councillor Sharpe responded that a large amount of work had been done around the town to regenerate and redevelop. Previous work on economic development had been primarily around holding events, whereas now the Council had a strategy for the future.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet:

1. Agrees that the draft Economic Development Strategy 2015-2020 progresses to consultation in January 2015.
2. Delegates authority to the Economic Development Manager to make any necessary editorial changes/corrections prior to final review and adoption by Cabinet.

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## **MULTI STOREY CAR PARKS**

Cabinet received a report of the Property Development Project Manager stating that the Gade, Sutton and Church car parks provided an important facility for the town but that their appearance and user experience could be significantly upgraded.

The report presented considered lease offers received for Sutton, Church and Gade car parks. These were currently managed by Intu Properties under a lease terminating in 2035. There was a break clause which provided that the lease could be broken by either party on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 by giving 3 months notice. The new lease arrangements would provide an increase on the income received from Intu in recent years and secure investment in excess of £2m.

Councillor Sharpe presented the report and commented that this was about satellite car parks not those directly related to the Intu shopping centre. The break clause had been mutually agreed with Intu.

The Head of Regeneration and Development highlighted how the report was an example of showing the practical actions of the Council's strategies. A vibrant and attractive Town Centre was a key aim for the Council and the car parks were currently unattractive. The Council would be welcoming a new partner in Town Centre Car Parks (TCCP) who had innovative ideas on how the car parks could



be improved. TCCP would be coming to the Town Centre Partnership to work with businesses in order to meet their aims and increase usage of the car parks. Going forward there would be early renovations of the car parks and then a longer term strategy to increase revenue.

The Managing Director commented that it was important to make the decision in the Part A section of the meeting, however, the commercial and financial arrangements e.g., Heads of Terms were contained in Part B appendices.

Councillor Bell welcomed the improvements as he had received complaints regarding the Gade car park. He felt that getting the charging policy right was important to attract people to come into Watford.

The Managing Director responded that the Council had procured a contractor to invest in the car parks. This would be done on a commercial basis and the needs of the users. TCCP would consult the Council on the charging policy but they would make the final decision.

Councillor Crout expressed concern on the charging policy and commented that it would be good if the operator could enter for some of the national car park awards addressing safety.

The Head of Regeneration and Development responded that the company ran car parks in Leeds and London. Officers from the Council had visited them and had been impressed by how they were managed. Charging would be commercial but realistic. The company would be bringing in new technology to enable pre-booking spaces and season tickets.

Councillor Watkin commented it was important for the car parks to attract more people to park as surrounding wards of Park and Nascot suffered from the effects of displaced parking.

The Mayor felt it was good to have a professional company to come in and run the car parks as they were experts in the field rather than the Council investing its own money and trying to run them.

## RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. Authorises the Property Section Head to give notice to Intu under the break clause to terminate the lease.
2. Agrees to enter into three 15 year leases and associated legal documentation for each car park with Town Centre Car Parks (TCCP)
3. Delegates to the Managing Director authority to agree to final terms for the necessary leases.

42 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND 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 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.

43 **MULTI STOREY CAR PARKS - PART B APPENDICES**

There were no further questions on the Part B appendices

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm  
and finished at 8.45 pm