

## CABINET

11 February 2019

Present: Mayor (Chair)  
Councillors K Collett, S Bolton, S Johnson, I Sharpe, M Watkin  
and T Williams

Also present: Councillor N Bell  
Mr Ransford Stewart, on behalf of the owners of 24  
Cassiobury Park Avenue (for minute numbers 60-63 and 65)

Officers: Managing Director  
Shared Director of Finance  
Deputy Managing Director and Director of Place Shaping and  
Corporate Performance  
Head of Democracy and Governance  
Urban Design and Conservation Manager  
Mayor's Political Assistant  
Democratic Services Manager

60 **Apologies for absence**

No apologies had been received.

61 **Disclosure of interests (if any)**

There were no disclosures of interest

62 **Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2019 were submitted and signed.

63 **Conduct of meeting**

A change was made to the order of the agenda and the item on the 'list of locally important buildings' was moved to be taken first.

64 **Corporate Plan 2019/2020 including revised corporate priorities**

The Mayor introduced the report and explained that housing was still the council's top priority. Councillor Collett commented that the corporate plan identified areas for improvement and that she was involved in meetings and working with officers on equalities and disability. The report was welcomed as being positive.

The Mayor thanked officers for their work on the corporate plan and Cabinet commented that the council had a solid financial base from which to deliver the priorities.

## RESOLVED

Cabinet agrees to:

1. Note and approve the proposals for new Watford Borough Council priorities for 2019/20 and going forward.
2. Note the revised draft Corporate Plan 2019/20 (appendix 1 to the report) and propose any amendments.
3. Note that an Equality Impact Analysis has been developed to support the Corporate Plan (appendix 2 to the report).
4. Note that the work programme within the plan will underpin service plans and staff's individual work programme as set out in their annual performance development reviews.
5. Recommend the draft Corporate Plan 2019/20 (subject to any amendments) to Council.

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### **Review and Adoption of Proposed Changes to the List of Locally Important Buildings**

The Mayor introduced the report and welcomed Mr Stewart who had registered to speak on the item as well as a number of residents who were in attendance.

Mr Stewart explained he was addressing Cabinet on behalf of the owner of 24 Cassiobury Park Avenue to urge Cabinet to exclude the property from the local list. Mr Stewart described how the property had been a place of crime and drug use prior to his clients acquiring the property in June 2018 and, with the help of the police, taking possession in August 2018. The new owners were shocked and upset when trying to redevelop the property they discovered that officers were intent on locally listing the building. The owners had contacted two heritage consultants who had reported that there was no special interest about the

property over and above those listed at the time. The craftsmanship at the property was poor. There had been several alterations to the building including a poorly constructed conservatory, and the central chimney had been demolished and re-built but not at the same height. There was a lack of information about the architect, Mr Knowles, who was not a notable architect locally or nationally. The property was a standard arts and crafts house of the 1920s which did not meet the criteria of local listing. There was no appeal procedure for locally listed buildings. Mr Stewart's client had been in contact with officers who had said that the property could be demolished if the replacement was of a high standard. Mr Stewart concluded that adding the property to the local list was excessive and disproportionate.

Councillor Sharpe, commenting on the report as a whole, described how the council had maintained a local list since 2010 and were encouraged by Historic England to recognise elements of specific buildings. The local listing provided an extra degree of protection to those buildings but did not preclude alteration or demolition but held these to a higher standard. There would be a consultation later in the year on a conservation area in Cassiobury. The council was criticised when receiving controversial development applications about the extent of changes to the historic fabric of the town. Whilst this was unavoidable, to an extent the local listing was designed to provide continuity and to preserve some of the historic fabric. There had been a consultation process and changes had been made following feedback.

The Mayor advised Cabinet that there was a typing error on page 50 of the agenda where it should state number 11 and not number 1 Cassiobury Park Avenue.

The Deputy Managing Director stated that officers had met with the owners of 24 Cassiobury Park Avenue and whilst being sympathetic to their position had considered it in the public interest to include the property in the local list. The property had been designed by a Watford born architect and had some good architectural features. Although a property had been altered it could still be included on the local list. The property had been part of the first land sold in the Cassiobury sale in 1908. It was typical of the metro land style developments around London and made a positive contribution to the street scene. Officers were willing to speak to anyone affected by the local listing regarding development of properties. There had been a number of extensions to properties in the area and the council wished to gain a degree of control in order to protect the heritage of the area.

Local ward councillors for borough and county, Councillors Kloss and Watkin, spoke regarding the local listing and were content that due process had been carried out by officers. Both councillors had been contacted by the owner of 24

Cassiobury Park Avenue. Whilst having sympathy for the new owners of 24 Cassiobury Park Avenue, the local listing was part of a larger scheme and other property owners were in a similar position of having purchased a property for development and then discovering the property was proposed for local listing. If the location would potentially become a conservation area in the future then all the houses would have the same or similar restrictions.

The Mayor invited Mr Stewart to respond. Mr Stewart commented that within a conservation area there would be buildings of high quality as well as those of less significance. Number 24 Cassiobury Park Avenue was at the lower end of heritage qualities. The heritage value was removed at the rear of the property due to the alterations.

Cabinet commented that there would always be an element of subjectivity and changes to the proposals had been made following the consultation. There was considerable expertise within the council on conservation matters. Whilst there was sympathy with owners who found that their property would be listed; the council would work with property owners with heritage assets and there were examples in other areas of Watford where significant alterations had been made despite the property being within a conservation area.

#### RESOLVED

That Cabinet agrees:

1. The list of proposed additions to the local list set out at section 4.26 of the main report and deletions as set out in 4.30.
2. Officers should prepare a consultation document for a new conservation area as shown on Map A in the report.
3. To officers assessing the properties that were suggested for inclusion during the consultation and that properties which meet the local list requirements are subject to public consultation.
4. To note that officers intend to make Article 4 Directions for those properties it is proposed to add to the local list.

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#### **Council Tax - Changes to long term empty homes premium**

Councillor Watkin introduced the report and explained that recent legislation allowed the council to invoke a greater premium on empty properties within the borough. There were 63 properties listed in the report which had been empty for over two years. The premiums which could be charged would increase from

100% in April 2019 to 200% after 5 years, and 300% after 10 years if they remained empty.

The Director of Finance commented that the council would check whether the property was inhabited. If the property came back into use then the council would receive a New Homes Bonus. However, this was not affecting a large number of properties within the borough.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet agrees to recommend to Council the adoption of proposed changes with effect from 1 April 2019.

67 **Ombudsman Decisions**

Cabinet received a report of the Head of Democracy and Governance regarding two findings of maladministration by the Local Government Ombudsman. Councillor Watkin introduced the report and stated he had been reassured by officers that processes had been reviewed to prevent reoccurrence.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet notes the Ombudsman's decisions.

68 **Contract Exemptions Flooring and Basement Electrical Works**

Cabinet received a report of the Head of Democracy and Governance regarding two contract exemptions. Councillor Watkin introduced the report and explained that a local supplier had been sourced to restore the floor on the second floor of the Town Hall following an unsuccessful tender process. The electrical works in the basement had been carried out by a contractor already on site.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet notes the exemptions.

69 **Rogue Landlord Procurement Exemption**

Councillor Johnson introduced the report of the Head of Community and Environmental Services and stated that the Building Research Establishment (BRE) had previously been used by the council for a stock modelling exercise. As 29% of housing stock in Watford was privately rented it was important for the council to have data on the number of houses in multiple occupation and

consider how best the council could support landlords. The previous work by the BRE had been of a high standard.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet notes the approved exemption to the council's procurement procedures in relation to the appointment of BRE to carry out the project in accordance with the successful bid proposal.

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm  
and finished at 7.45 pm