



Date: 21 July 2015

Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council

A Borough to be proud of

To: **All Members of Council**

Copy to all other Members of the Council

(other recipients for information)

Dear Councillor,

Please see overleaf a Supplementary Agenda for the meeting of the **COUNCIL** on **TUESDAY, 21 JULY 2015 at 6.30 pm.**

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Owen'.

Rebecca Owen
Democratic Services Officer

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

6. QUESTIONS

Questions received under Council Procedure Rule number 11.1:

(a) Question from Councillor Witherford to the Executive Member for Finance

“Pre May 2015 the Conservative Group circulated their key pledges to local residents, one of which was to “protect the Council’s finances by reducing its debt burden”. Your implication was that the previous administration had left the Borough Council with an unsustainable multi-million pound debt. After two months in administration, are you still of this opinion? Should this still be your belief, in the interest of transparency can you detail the areas of your concern and advise when we can expect to see the “sound fiscal plan” that was promised as a matter of urgency which would, in your opinion, restore this authority to a sound financial position”.

Response from Councillor Surtees

“Can I thank Cllr Witherford for her question, as it gives me the opportunity to clarify the position of the Conservative Administration, having now taken control of the Council. As we said in our election manifesto, we were concerned as to the sustainability of the Council’s finances. There were two main areas of concern, firstly the high level of debt to which it had committed itself in recent years, and secondly the suggestion in a report to Council in March 2015 that the council’s reserves could be depleted.

Whilst recognising that the level of HRA borrowing is capped by Government, and that the terms of the PSLB loans are very favourable, although with high costs for early exit, most people will be baffled as to why the previous administration opted not to pay anything back in the first seven years. The result is significantly larger repayments in years 8 to 30 and will lead to additional interest charges. There have been regular additions to borrowing for capital developments and more is still needed both to fund the current capital programme and to support the council’s new Development Company in its start-up phase.

In March the council identified required savings and additional funding requirements to meet its medium term budget and agreed to spend reserves rather than making a tough decision over the funding of the green waste collection service.

We have engaged in detailed dialogue with senior officers within the council since we took control to protect our finances, reduce our debt and interest payments. We are reassured by the financial management exercised by officers.

This involves detailed analysis which we are undertaking with officers, which will address some very complex and challenging issues. The outcomes of this analysis – our “sound fiscal plan” – will be incorporated into a revised Medium Term Financial Strategy, which we will submit to Council in November of this year”.

(b) Question from Councillor Bray to the Leader of the Council

“With the Conservative Group having spent the past few years opposing the Crescent development, voting against it in Council meetings and even writing to Sainsbury’s to pour scorn on the scheme, can I take it, in light of members of the new administration lining up for photo opportunities, that the Conservative administration has had a change of heart?”

Response from Councillor Hall

“Ten years ago, a Conservative Administration produced the Hinckley Regeneration Masterplan. This was reported in the Hinckley Times in 2005 and again two weeks ago.

Along with development of the Atkins building and new council offices, there were plans for a cinema and supermarket on the bus station site, and a new leisure centre on Argents Mead. These were all part of a plan to improve prosperity and quality of life for people in Hinckley.

The current Conservative Administration sees the Crescent as a part of that plan, and very much as work in progress, which will benefit from our commitment to complete the regeneration. Cllr Bray should therefore not take this as a change of heart, and when he and his colleagues want to discuss the merits of regeneration schemes that we bring forward, I will not take that as his group now opposing the regeneration of Hinckley”.

8. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S POSITION STATEMENT

In my first position statement as Leader of this Council I will start with an administrative matter, by advising members of the duties that I have undertaken for which I have claimed back travel and other costs. In recent weeks I have attended meetings in Leicester, Warwick, Coventry, and Birmingham, mostly to discuss the evolving Combined Authority proposals. I also attended the LGA conference in Harrogate, and a meeting of the DCN in London, and met with the CEO of MIRA. As well as travel (both car and train) and parking costs for these trips the Council also directly paid for my attendance at the LGA conference, and my accommodation whilst in Harrogate.

I would like to put on record my appreciation for the work of officers during the post election period. New and returning Councillors have all attended many training sessions, which we have found both useful and enjoyable, and I would like to acknowledge the hard work of the many staff who have contributed to those sessions.

As we are a new administration members will know that officers have been devoting a great deal of time to briefing myself and fellow members of the executive committee on their various departments activities and current plans, as well as taking time to consider our proposals for the future. I would like to thank all those officers who have been involved for their patience and openness.

The executive Member for Finance has just answered a question about one of our manifesto commitments, and I'm pleased to answer any such questions in the future, but to save time I will include updates in this statement about our progress against those promises.

We promised To Protect and Enhance the Nature and Character of our Communities. We know that people enjoy the diversity that is available across the Borough - our mix of villages with strong rural communities, and easy access to the countryside through to our

main towns with larger and more varied places for work, shopping and leisure activities. It is the very nature and character of our communities that people value the most, and our job as Councillors can be no more important than to protect that on behalf of the people who we represent. We have been elected to do that and we are getting on with it.

For example, the deputy leader recently chaired a meeting of the Parish Forum, and has since met with David Tredinnick MP to discuss the possible impact on Rural Exception Sites if these are not excluded from new legislation to extend the right to buy.

We promised to fix the current planning issues. My initial discussions with officers about planning matters have been very positive, and in particular identifying what we as a Council must do to ensure we control where houses are built. Members will be aware of recent progress being made to strengthen this councils case against speculative applications, via the Allocations document and the Examination in September, and we intend to go further by ensuring that we maximise our ability to direct new housing to brown field sites. One big step towards that is for this Council to take more responsibility for housebuilding, and in the coming months members will have evidence of that taking place. On tonights agenda we also see the Market Bosworth neighbourhood plan taking its next steps along its path to being made.

Once any development is underway our planning committee should monitor compliance, and in future will be provided with regular updates on enforcement actions, and will also receive progress updates on major developments. Members will in future be better informed as these projects are delivered, and be better able to deal with any concerns from local residents.

We promised to put an end to the continued unwanted expansion into the green fields surrounding our towns and villages, we can achieve this more quickly with the co-operation of developers. I therefore hope to have the opportunity before the end of the year to meet with local developers, to discuss ways in which they may deliver their current commitments more quickly, and to discuss how they might better support our plans for the future.

Based on recent growth, the population of Hinckley and Bosworth could increase by 25000 over the next 30 years, and we need a plan for where those people will live, but it is as important to identify where we do not want those people to live, and work with developers to protect those areas. Many of our communities have been under pressure in recent years because it is easy to build on the edge of existing settlements, but easy is not always best, and we should be more creative and considerate with our housing solutions, and deliver the services that local people know are required.

We promised to protect and improve key services. We plan to protect the universal services for the collection of refuse, recyclable materials and garden waste. We do have a challenge in this area because of falling values of recycling materials and tailing off of land fill diversion credits. Last year this Council discussed the possibility of introducing a separate charge for the green waste collection service, but in the end opted to use its reserves. This is unsustainable and we have to find more certain ways of funding these services if they are to continue. We are therefore working with officers to determine how our recycling, green waste and refuse collection services can be sustained in their current form.

We promised to ensure that all residents of Hinckley and Bosworth get fair value for money from their council tax. We know that our rural communities require additional services and this Council has a good record of supporting them to gain access to funding in some areas, but we intend to go further. We will be bringing forward plans to provide a

greater level of direct investment to deliver some of these services.

But we are also as determined as the last Conservative Administration, which laid out the regeneration Masterplan, to complete the regeneration of Hinckley, and that requires us to do more after The Crescent and new leisure centre. We will start with the existing leisure centre site, and bring forward our proposals with the intention that work should be able to commence on that site as soon as the new leisure centre is in use. Other areas of the town will also have detailed plans produced so that people can see what regeneration stage 2 could deliver, whilst we will also work on short term and more easily delivered initiatives.

In addition to any existing work plan, the recent general election result, and more recent budget, have introduced several challenges on the horizon, particularly with changes to council house rents, introduction of the living wage, implementing changes to 'right to buy', and possible introduction of combined authorities and devolution. This last measure is one that could deliver greater responsibility to this Council, with a greater programme of work, and more opportunities for self funding. Members have within tonight's programme an update on two such proposals that this council is a part of, and we'll have an opportunity to discuss these later.

18a Urgent item: Motion

Motion proposed by Councillor Bill and seconded by Councillor Bray:

“This authority believes that public services should be administered as closely as possible to local people and it therefore resolves to inform the Ministry of Justice that it objects to the proposed closure of the Hinckley Magistrates Court and that a cross party working group is established to pursue the matter and its implications”.

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