

HINCKLEY AND BOSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL  
24 JUNE 2008 AT 6.30 P.M.

PRESENT: MR. J.G. BANNISTER - MAYOR  
MR. K. NICHOLS - DEPUTY MAYOR

Mrs. M. Aldridge, Mr. P.R. Batty, Mr. P.S. Bessant, Mr. D.C. Bill, Mr. C.W. Boothby, Mr. J.C. Bown, Mr. S.L. Bray, Mrs. R. Camamile, Mr. M.B. Cartwright, Mr. D.S. Cope, Mr. W.J. Crooks, Mrs. S. Francks, Mr. D.M. Gould, Mrs. A. Hall, Mr. P.A.S. Hall, Mr. D.W. Inman, Mr. C.G. Joyce, Mr. C. Ladkin, Mr. M.R. Lay, Mr. K.W.P. Lynch, Mr. R. Mayne, Mr. K. Morrell, Mrs. J. Richards, Mr. A.J. Smith, Mr. B.E. Sutton, Mr. R. Ward and Ms. B.M. Witherford.

Officers in attendance: Mr. S.J. Atkinson, Mr. Michael Brymer, Mr. D. Bunker, Miss L. Horton, Mrs. B. Imison, Mr. S. Kohli, Mr. R. Parkinson, Mrs. P.I. Pitt, Mr. T.M. Prowse and Mrs. S. Stacey.

64 PRAYER

The Reverend Barbara Beckingham-Shaw, Superintendent of Hinckley Methodist Circuit, offered prayer.

65 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf Mr. J.D. Cort, Dr. J.R. Moore, W.A. Moore, Mr. L.J.P. O'Shea and Mr. D.O. Wright.

66 MINUTES (C7)

It was moved by Mr. Lay, seconded by Mrs. Aldridge and

RESOLVED - the minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2008 be confirmed and signed by the Mayor.

Mr. Ladkin entered the meeting at 6.35pm.

67 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared at this stage.

68 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor referred to his recent visit to Le Grand Quevilly, stages of the Motor Rally of the Midlands held in Hinckley and to the recent Youth Games and Disability Games, all of which had been very successful.

69 QUESTIONS

The following questions and replies were received in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11.1.

- (a) Question raised by Mrs. R. Camamile and addressed to Mr. K.W.P. Lynch

"If the increasingly protracted deal for the sale of the council-owned land at Brodick Road is ever completed, how much money will the Housing Revenue Account receive in respect of the former garage site adjacent to Langdale Road?"

Response from Mr. K.W.P. Lynch

"I thank Councillor Camamile for her question and I presume that she is referring to both the underused former garage site and the adjacent open space and play area in Brodick Road, for the sale of which the Council signed an agreement with a local developer for housing prior to the May 2007 election.

The proceeds from the sale of the whole site will contribute to the funding of regeneration and housing projects within the capital programme. The value of the amount relating to the former garage site is estimated at around £100,000".

In response to a supplementary question from Mrs. Camamile Mr. Lynch indicated that he would ask officers to respond to Mrs. Camamile in writing regarding the ransom strip.

- (b) Question raised by Mrs. R. Camamile and addressed to Mr. D.C. Bill

"Would The Leader of the Council agree that without the deal involving the land at Brodick Road this Authority would not be in a position to progress with a number of key projects for the Borough and its residents, including the redevelopment of the play area at Brodick Road and the partnership, which is facilitating its relocation into the town centre, with North Warwickshire and Hinckley College?"

Response from Mr. K.W.P. Lynch

"I would thank Councillor Mrs Camamile for asking this question. It is quite correct that the grant of the option to purchase the land at Brodick Road has provided this Authority with the capacity to progress with the re-location of Hinckley and North Warwickshire College to the former Atkins site and to develop the Goddards building into a Business Enterprise Centre bringing innovation and employment to the Town Centre. Also, it will provide additional funding to significantly improve the recreational facilities at Langdale Park. Having said this, I have made it quite clear at previous meetings that I wish that we had provided this capacity by other ways other than the sale of the recreational land at Brodick Road. However, that is where we are and we now should all be concentrating our efforts in delivering on the

various projects which will bring significant regeneration and related employment benefits to the Borough of Hinckley and Bosworth."

(c) Question raised by Mrs. J. Richards and addressed to Mr. S.L. Bray

"The news of the potential relocation of the Borough's leisure centre seems to have received a mixed reaction from the facility's users and local residents alike. In the Leicester Road area in particular, residents are extremely concerned about increased road traffic movements and the consequent safety implications. What assurances at this stage can the Borough Council give to Leicester Road residents that existing road safety issues will not be exacerbated if the leisure centre is moved to this area?"

Response from Mr. S.L. Bray

"Members can be assured that a thorough Traffic Impact Assessment will be conducted as part of the planning process. This will highlight any issues that may need to be addressed.

If residents feel there are existing road safety issues on Leicester Road, these should be highlighted to their local Ward Councillors who can forward these concerns onto Leicestershire County Council Highways Department."

(d) Question raised by Mr. M.B. Cartwright and addressed to Mr. S.L. Bray

"The closure of Farmfoods leaves yet another boarded-up empty retail unit in Hinckley Town Centre at a time when the overall economic climate is looking unfavourable to say the least.

Therefore, given this very serious situation, I would like ask a question in two parts as follows:

Does the Borough Council have a short to medium term action plan to help breathe some life back into what was once a vibrant market town and what measures are currently being undertaken to address this very worrying situation?

Further to any other initiatives this Authority may or may not be considering to address the decline of retailing in Hinckley and given that the situation is likely to get worse before it gets better, will the Administration agree to a comprehensive review of town centre car parking charges while making a commitment to try to positively stimulate the local retail economy by offering periods of free parking for shoppers?"

Response from Mr. S.L. Bray

"I have every sympathy for any business that is currently suffering in the current economic climate. I am sure fellow councillors will agree that we should continue to take positive steps to ensure the town centre continues to remain a vibrant, competitive centre. Consequently the Council has an active approach to the regeneration of Hinckley

town centre that is evidenced through a number of measures. In particular:-

- A Town Centre Masterplan was published in May 2006 following extensive public consultation which proposed a series of strategic aims designed for example to improve the general vitality and diversity of the town centre, to improve the range of facilities offered, and to develop a much improved public realm. This is to be brought about by the proposed redevelopment of several key sites around the town. Two flagship sites are currently progressing within timescales indicated in project plans, i.e. the Bus Station site and the Atkins site. These sites will improve the range of facilities and retail uses offered within the town (including a cinema and the potential of 3,500 students being relocated into the town centre).
- The Council has bid successfully for funding from the Leicestershire Economic Partnership (jointly with Leicestershire County Council) to implement a £250,000 public realm improvements scheme in Upper Castle Street. This will provide repaving, improvements to shop fronts, heritage lighting and publicity for local shops in this part of the town. Works will start next month.
- Works have recently been completed on repaving and lighting schemes to Eales Yard, Cross Keys Yard, Vernons Yard and Bell Entry off Castle Street to improve pedestrianisation access and street scene.
- A £75,000 investment into market improvements is to be undertaken during August, including new stalls, in preparation of celebrating our 700 year history as a market town.
- A dynamic calendar of events takes place in coordination with the Town Centre Partnership aimed at improving the viability and vitality of Hinckley.
- The Council already offers free car parking in key town centre shoppers car parks after 3pm on Saturdays and concessions at Christmas. Of course this can be kept under review, but Members need to be mindful of the financial implications of any change in its car parking policy and charges. The affect of removing parking charges would be £500,000 per annum. The equivalent to 13% on the Council Tax.

For the first time in four years, the administration has frozen parking charges and removed the charge on Station Road toilets to boost Town Centre visitors.

- A Town Centre Business Improvement District Scheme is being developed for Hinckley Town Centre. The BID that will aim to assist Hinckley in competing with other local town centres. It will be put to a vote later this year.

- The Chairman of the Hinckley Chamber of Trade has recently been quoted as saying “in response to suggestions that we are at present suffering decline in retail trading, the feedback from our Chamber of Trade members would argue against this with many members reporting good trading in the Town”.

Following a supplementary question from Mr. Cartwright Mr. Bray responded that he would arrange for the Director of Community and Planning Services to write to Mr. Cartwright with regard to free car parking provision for limited time spans.

(e) Question raised by Mrs. J. Richards and addressed to Mr. S.L. Bray

"Once the full implications of the plans became apparent, local residents overwhelmingly rejected the flawed plans of this Council's previous Liberal Democrat administration to build a giant superstore on what has become known as the bus station site.

Each of the proposed new developments for the so-called bus station site include an even bigger supermarket than ever previously envisaged so given that the increased traffic generated by such proposals is extremely likely to be unsustainable on the town's road network while the potential impact on retailers in Hinckley's already decimated traditional shopping area may well be catastrophic, is the Council's administration confident that its plans for this development are in the best interests of Hinckley?"

Response from Mr. S.L. Bray

"The proposals for the redevelopment of Hinckley's Bus Station site emerged from the strategies contained in the Renaissance Town Centre Masterplan. This sought to improve the quality and range of facilities on offer to those who visit, work, shop or live in Hinckley. This Plan, published by the previous administration, contained plans for a range of retail units including a supermarket.

To provide further information on the level of future retail capacity that could be assimilated into the town centre, a detailed consultancy study was undertaken in 2007. The study provided evidence that leakage of trade to surrounding centres was of a high level, and that the town needed to grow its retail offer to attract people back into the town centre. Specifically, the lack of larger units contributed to this factor. It was also evidenced in the study that the additional capacity proposed would compliment rather than conflict with the existing retail offers.

With regard to specific weaknesses (revealed through consultation), the absence of a cinema was perceived to be a critical gap in Hinckley's leisure offer. A cinema is a key component of the new Bus Station proposal, the provision of which will be brought about as part of the overall investment into the site redevelopment.

The Bus Station Steering Group has a Senior Officer from Leicestershire County Council Highways Authority working alongside Borough Council Officers to ensure the impacts arising from the regeneration of the Bus Station site are both understood and fully mitigated.

In addition, Officers have been working on a transport impact assessment document designed to provide a programme of transport measures to mitigate the impact of future development proposals located within Hinckley town centre. Effectively, this would ensure that a transparent and equitable contribution is made by developers into a 'contributions pot'. A report on this will be brought to the Planning Committee meeting being held on 1 July 2008.

In conclusion, it is considered that not only are these proposals in the best interests of Hinckley's future vitality as a town centre, but also essential to its continued viability.

All three Group Leaders, along with myself, took part in the interview process to select a new developer and everyone agreed that the plans submitted were imaginative and exciting. I look forward to presenting the finalised developer at July's Council meeting. I hope then that at long last, work will begin on giving Hinckley the vibrant and successful town centre it deserves."

(f) Question raised by Mr. K. Morrell and addressed to Mrs. S. Francks

"On the front page of the Leicester Mercury on 11<sup>th</sup> June Cllr Sandra Francks staunchly defended the Borough Council's refuse collection arrangements and made it very clear that she believes most residents are "managing admirably" under the system introduced by the Authority's previous Conservative administration.

However, after these same arrangements were introduced in 2004, Mrs Francks took part in a march from Castle Street to the Council Offices apparently to protest against what she at the time described as "fortnightly refuse collection". Furthermore, she promised residents that she would "carry on protesting against" the Borough Council's refuse collection service.

It should also be noted that election leaflets from her party have stated that "the Liberal Democrats are committed to bringing back weekly collections of rubbish".

Would Cllr Francks please attempt to clarify matters in order that local residents can sort the political mischief from anything that might resemble a solid policy position and actually get to know where they stand in respect of this Administration's policy regarding the refuse collection service?"

### Response from Mrs. S. Francks

"I would like to thank Councillor Morrell for his question as I welcome any opportunity to clarify my (and the administrations) position on waste collection. I believe that our refuse collectors carry out a magnificent job in what is a challenging role. In fact, they manage to collect 99.975% bins on time every time. This level of service would struggle to be matched by any other type of organisation. Furthermore, I continue to support the council's decision to reduce the amount of waste that is sent to landfill and maximise the amount of waste that is reduced, reused or recycled. As you know this council's ambition is to recycle 50% of its household waste by 2010.

My objection (that you refer to) was in response to the method of implementing a fortnightly refuse collection service rather than the outcome that was trying to be achieved. I believe that in the main the use of a 'carrot' is much preferred to the use of a 'stick'. The reality is that a weekly waste collection service is provided (one week residual waste the other week recyclable waste). However, the administration is also interested (if feasibility and affordable) in enhancing further the methods by which we collect waste i.e. expansion of a food waste collection service following on from current trials."

I hope that this response clarifies matters.

### 70 POSITION STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

In his presentation the Leader highlighted the very positive report on the Council's performance for 2007/08 and the continued Direction of Travel achieved. The Leader also referred to the current economic climate, with talks being held locally to ascertain the impact of the credit crunch and to the forthcoming Local Government Conference which, it was hoped, would outline national government thinking.

As requested by the Finance and Audit Services Select Committee on 23 June 2008, circulated to Members at the meeting were details of the Housing Revenue Account budgets for the fiscal year 2007/08.

### 71 REVIEW OF HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE CAPITAL AND REVENUE BUDGETS (C8)

In presenting the report of the Strategic Leadership Board (SLB), the Chief Executive gave details of the overspend on the above budgets and the conclusions of the investigations commissioned to identify the cause(s). Despite its seriousness, this issue needed to be put into context, and should not diminish the sound and successful management of the rest of the Council's service areas and the high performance in these areas.

So far as corrective measures were concerned, verification measures had been introduced and would be overseen by the Director of Community and Planning Services. The "open book" arrangements were being carefully scrutinised and if found to be ineffective, previous methods of accounting would be adopted. It was emphasised that this issue did not and would not in

itself affect the levels of housing rents or Council tax. It was anticipated that changes in the budgets would have minimal effect on the service deliveries to tenants. Essential works of a health and safety nature would continue. All actions had been discussed with and were fully supported by the Chair of the Tenants' Advisory Panel and it was intended to provide guidance on the implications to all tenants by numerous means within the next two/three weeks.

At this juncture Mr. C.W. Boothby, as a Council tenant, declared a personal interest in this item.

A lengthy discussion ensued with concerns being raised as to the timescales in the reporting of information to Members. It was agreed that there should be more robust passing of data and compatibility between respective database systems, following which the Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission confirmed that the Commission would be examining this whole issue. The Director of Finance advised of the projected costs (currently £30,000) arising from the engagement of Consultants to assist the Council in investigating the overspend and the Chief Executive advised that this was an investment which would inform the longer term position also.

Members were in full agreement as to the regrettable position in which the Council had found itself. Whilst not minimising the seriousness of this matter, the Authority was "where it was" and the Leader of the Council commended the responsible way in which this issue had been handled by Members and Managers.

On the motion of Mr. Bill seconded by Mr. Lynch it was RESOLVED -

- (i) The management action to reduce the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) capital budget to 2,022,929 for 2008/09 only and to manage the activity according to the priorities set out in the report of the Strategic Leadership Board be endorsed;
- (ii) The ongoing reconciliation work with Inspace (to be concluded in time for the approval of the final accounts by the external auditors) be supported and the final figure be reported back to Council;
- (iii) The accounts for the HRA programme be presented in the light of the information in the report;
- (iv) The actions outlined in section 4.3 of the report of the SLB to manage the activity and the budget during 2008/09 be supported;
- (v) Accounting procedures for the HRA programme be aligned to those operated effectively elsewhere in the Council by no later than 31 March 2009, pending a review of the use of "open book" arrangements for the longer term;
- (vi) It be noted that this issue will have no additional impact on the levels of housing rents or the Council Tax;
- (vii) Members be advised on the effectiveness of the management actions on a quarterly basis during the remainder of the financial year;



- (viii) The recharge policy outlined in the Tenants Handbook be reaffirmed and the review of this be agreed; and
- (ix) A further report on the longer-term position of the management of the Council's housing stock be presented to a later meeting of the Council, following completion of the review of the HRA Business Plan by Tribal Consultancy.

Messrs. Boothby, Bray and Gould and Mrs. Hall and Mrs. Richards left the meeting at 8.12pm. Messrs. Bray and Gould returned at 8.15pm, at which time Mr. Bessant left. Mr. Bessant, Mrs. Hall and Mrs. Richards returned at 8.17pm.

## 72 FINAL OUT-TURN 2007/08 (C10)

Together with details of the above, the Director of Finance advised on changes to the housing revenue capital budget for 2008/09.

Mrs. Aldridge left the meeting at 8.20pm.

The Executive Member for Finance indicated that despite restraints, the Council was in a healthy financial position for the next three years with no significant overspend other than on the HRA (Housing Repairs) Capital Programme. Should there be any material change in the out-turn position between approval by the Council of this and the final accounts and completion of the final audit by Price Waterhouse Cooper LLP, such change would be brought back to Members for approval.

Mrs. Aldridge returned at 8.25pm.

It was moved by Mr. Lynch, seconded by Mr. Bill and

RESOLVED - the following be approved

- (i) The General Fund Out-turn for 2007/08 and the transfers to Earmarked Reserves and Balances outlined in paragraphs 3.7 and 3.8 of the report of the Director of Finance;
- (ii) The carry forward to 2008/09 of the specific underspends on the General Fund incurred in 2007/08 as set out in paragraph 3.9 of the report and detailed in Appendix 1 of the report;
- (iii) The recommendation to transfer the year end underspend on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to the HRA fund balance, as set out in paragraph 3.10 of the report; and
- (iv) The recommendations in respect of the year end Out-turn for the General Fund Capital Programme and the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme, as set in paragraph 3.1 of the report.

73 DRAFT STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2007/08 (C9)

In accordance with the terms of the Account and Audit Regulations that a Statement of Accounts be prepared each year consideration was given to the above. In response to a Member's question regarding payback with interest in the event of any overpayment, the Director of Finance indicated that this would be part of on-going discussions.

Members paid tribute to the officers involved in producing the accounts in a timely fashion, following which it was moved by Mr. Lynch, seconded by Mr. Bill and

RESOLVED - the draft Statement of Accounts for 2007/08 be approved.

74 ANNUAL CORPORATE GOVERNANCE STATEMENT (C11)

This, together with the 2 preceding items on this evening's agenda, had been examined and fully supported by the Finance and Audit Services Select Committee on 23 June 2008. It was emphasised that this Statement was a key measure of the overall effectiveness of the Authority and had been produced following assessment of all service areas.

On the motion of Mr. Lynch, seconded by Mr. Bill it was

RESOLVED - the Annual Corporate Governance Statement be approved.

75 REVISIONS TO CONSTITUTION (C12)

Further to Minute No. 375 of 11 December 2007 Members were reminded that revisions had been made to the Constitution to take account of new roles and responsibilities arising from the recent restructures and legislative changes.

Mr. Bown left the meeting at 8.28pm, returning at 8.30pm.

Clarified to the Council was that, so far as speaking at Planning Committee Meetings was concerned, the Constitution provided that Ward Members could speak for two periods of two minutes each (i.e. a total of four minutes). Members of the public speaking at Planning Committee meetings would now each be allowed a maximum of three minutes in which to address the Committee.

Discussion ensued regarding training for Planning Committee Members and substitutes and Members were unanimous in their view that such training, despite constraints on Members' time, should be mandatory for all.

It was moved by Mr. Bill, seconded by Mr. Bray and

RESOLVED - the updated Constitution, to be effective from 25 June 2008, be approved.

Mr. Lay left the meeting at 8.37pm.

76 LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (LSP) - REVIEW OF YEAR 1 AND OUTCOMES AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2008/09 (C13)

Arising from discussions on this, Members were agreed, in view of the amount of agricultural land within the Borough, on the need to encourage farmers to examine diversification. In response to the Older People's Member Champion request that improved facilities for Older People be provided in the form of a meeting centre, the Leader of the Council replied that such a facility would be beneficial to all organisations within the Borough.

The call was made that the LSP should remain focussed in its key roles and reference was made to the neighbourhood action teams which, Members were informed, were intended to become more accountable through local Members.

On the motion of Mr. Bill, seconded by Mr. Bray it was

RESOLVED -

- (i) The progress of the LSP be noted; and
- (ii) The strategic priorities for 2008/12 be noted and agreed.

77 LEICESTERSHIRE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY (C14)

Members were advised that the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act identified the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) as a means of identifying and sharing local priorities and introduced a duty to prepare a Local Area Agreement (LAA). Further, this legislation made clear that the next LAA should be the delivery plan for the SCS.

Minor textual amendments having been observed by Members on HB 1.7 ("fewer" for "less") and Desford now being in the Market Bosworth Community Forum Area, it was moved by Mr. Bill, seconded by Mr. Bray and

RESOLVED - the Leicestershire Sustainable Community Strategy and the new Local Area Agreement (LAA2) be endorsed.

(The meeting closed at 9pm)