

HINCKLEY AND BOSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

28 January 2025 AT 6.30 pm

PRESENT: CLLR R WEBBER-JONES - MAYOR
CLLR REH FLEMMING – DEPUTY MAYOR

Cllr CM Allen, Cllr RG Allen, Cllr MC Bools, Cllr SL Bray,
Cllr MB Cartwright, Cllr MA Cook, Cllr DS Cope, Cllr MJ Crooks,
Cllr WJ Crooks, Cllr C Gibbens, Cllr SM Gibbens, Cllr CE Green,
Cllr C Harris, Cllr L Hodgkins, Cllr C Lambert, Cllr KWP Lynch,
Cllr J Moore, Cllr LJ Mullaney, Cllr MT Mullaney, Cllr LJP O'Shea,
Cllr A Pendlebury, Cllr M Simmons, Cllr H Smith, Cllr P Stead-
Davis, Cllr BE Sutton, Cllr A Weightman and Cllr P Williams

Officers in attendance: Bill Cullen, Julie Kenny, Rebecca Owen and Sharon Stacey

345. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Glenville, Hollick, Surtees and Walker.

346. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

It was noted that Councillor Boothby had been absent from the previous meeting but was recorded as present in the minutes. It was moved by Councillor Bray, seconded by Councillor Bools and

RESOLVED – the minutes be confirmed as a correct record subject to Councillor Boothby being removed from the list of attendees.

347. **Declarations of interest**

Councillors R Allen, Bray, M Mullaney and O'Shea declared an Other Registrable Interest in the item relating to the Devolution White Paper as members of Leicestershire County Council. Councillor Harris declared a Non-Registrable Interest in the same item as a prospective candidate for Leicestershire County Council.

Councillor Sutton declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in the motion relating to inheritance of family farms as a farm owner and stated that he would leave the meeting for that item.

348. **Mayor's Communications**

The Mayor presented a community award to a member of staff in Street Scene Services, Andy McGreal, who had saved a colleague's life at work recently.

Tribute was paid to former councillor Ann Hall who had passed away recently and a longstanding member of staff, Helen Grimes, who passed away following a short illness.

The Mayor provided an update on events he and the Deputy Mayor had attended and the forthcoming charity fundraiser and civic service.

349. **Questions**

- (a) Question from Councillor Surtees to the Executive member for Finance

In the absence of Councillor Surtees, the question was not put.

- (b) Question from Councillor C Allen to the Executive member for Planning

“Can the Executive member for Planning please confirm:

- A. The current number of applications at or past their decision date split by major and minor applications
- B. The current status of the Local Plan, and that this Council remains on track to fully adopt its new Local Development Plan by March 2026?”

Response from Councillor Crooks:

- “A. Total planning applications over eight weeks = 79. Of these 79 applications, 36 are major applications, however will also likely have an agreement in place on timescale to the point of a decision. The remaining 43 are minor applications. In the past 12 months, 83% of major applications and 86% of minor applications have been processed within time, both well ahead of government targets of 60% and 70% respectively.
- B. The Council consulted on a Regulation 18 draft Local Plan in summer 2024. Since this time, a new National Planning Policy Framework has been consulted on and then published, including revised housing targets published in December. New housing targets, an increase of 50% from 433 dwellings per annum to 649 dwellings per annum, are being reviewed and legal advice is being taken with regard to next steps. The Council has to update its Local Development Scheme and submit this to MHCLG by 6 March 2025, setting out the timescale to adoption.”

- (c) Question from Councillor R Allen to the Leader of Council

“Can the Leader of Council please confirm when members will receive a copy of the peer review report and also how and when that document will be publicly available (ie will it be published on the council’s website)?”

Response from Councillor Bray:

“It’s a shame that Councillor Allen didn’t attend the extremely positive feedback session given by the LGA team.

We were advised by the LGA Peer Manager that the target was for the report to be published by the end of March 2025 and due to the Christmas break there would be a delay in us receiving a draft of the report. I am aware the Chief

Executive is presenting the outcomes from the peer review this Thursday at the Scrutiny Commission, which you might wish to attend.”

350. **Leader of the Council's Position Statement**

In his position statement, the Leader made reference to:

- The 62% increase in footfall as a result of events in Hinckley town centre in 2024
- Works to the ground floor of Hinckley Hub to accommodate NHS partners
- The Council's response to recent flooding and extreme weather events
- Successful fly tipping prosecutions
- The new National Planning Policy Framework which had resulted in significant increases in the number of new homes to be delivered in the Borough each year
- The current position in relation to the Regulation 18 consultation for the draft Local Plan
- Leicestershire County Council's response to Charnwood Borough Council's Local Plan
- The exhibition of work on display at the Atkins Building by students from North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College
- The residents' survey on crime and antisocial behaviour which was open until 31 January
- Winners of the anti-littering poster competition
- The planned programme of Music in the Mead for 2025
- The launch of the big bin service for businesses
- The recent passing of colleague Helen Grimes and former councillor Ann Hall.

Officers were thanked for work on the programme of events, supporting residents during the recent flooding and work on the Local Plan. Members asked that condolences be sent to the families of Helen and Ann.

351. **Minutes of the Scrutiny Commission**

Councillor Lambert presented the minutes of the Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 12 December 2024.

352. **Audit Committee annual report 2023/24**

Council received the Audit Committee's annual report for 2023/24 which had been produced as part of the committee's self-assessment and resulting action plan. The chair and vice-chair and members of the committee were thanked for their work. It was moved by Councillor Cope, seconded by Councillor Bray and

RESOLVED – the Audit Committee annual report 2023/24 be approved.

353. **Audit Committee review of terms of reference**

Consideration was given to updated terms of reference for the Audit Committee which had been recommended by the committee following its self-assessment

and development of an action plan. It was moved by Councillor Bray, seconded by Councillor R Allen and

RESOLVED – the terms of reference of the Audit Committee be approved and incorporated into the Council's constitution.

354. **Devolution White Paper**

Members received a report on the recent publication of the government's English Devolution White Paper which set out the key points and implications for the Council. In presenting the report, the Leader, seconded by Councillor Bools, moved the recommendations within the report and the following additional recommendations:

- (i) This Council resolves to oppose the imposition of a large, remote and inaccessible mega-council in Leicestershire and instructs the Leader and Chief Executive to continue to fight these plans;
- (ii) Should the government be determined to press ahead with local government reorganisation, then the Council believes a single Leicestershire-wide council would be the worst option for Hinckley and Bosworth residents. Smaller unitary councils based on a group of similar existing districts would be more accessible and mean decisions taken closer to local residents;
- (iii) The government has indicated that reorganisation will lead to an enhanced role for town and parish councils. Hinckley is presently the only unparished part of the Borough. The Council therefore requests officers to bring forward at pace proposals to create a town council for Hinckley which the Council will consult Hinckley residents on.

During discussion, reference was made to:

- The risk to discretionary services, should local government reorganisation go ahead
- The importance of putting the needs of residents first
- The lack of mandate and public consultation undertaken by the government in relation to local government reorganisation
- The high cost of local government reorganisation which would result in no financial savings in the short to medium term
- The disruption to public services as a result of reorganisation
- Leicestershire County Council's proposals for a single unitary authority which would result in decisions about the local area being taken by those who were distant from and not familiar with Hinckley & Bosworth.

Councillor Bray and eight other councillors stood to request voting on the motion be recorded.

The vote was taken as follows:

Councillors Bools, Bray, Cartwright, Cook, Cope, J Crooks, W Crooks, Flemming, C Gibbens, S Gibbens, Green, Hodgkins, Lynch, Moore, L Mullaney, M Mullaney,

Pendlebury, Simmons, Smith, Stead-Davis, Sutton, Webber-Jones, Weightman and Williams voted FOR the motion (24);

Councillors C Allen, R Allen, Harris, Lambert and O'Shea abstained from voting.

The motion was therefore declared CARRIED and it was

RESOLVED –

- (i) The proposals set out in the Devolution White Paper be noted;
- (ii) The emerging position across Leicestershire and Rutland in response to the White Paper be noted;
- (iii) Authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of Council, to continue working with neighbouring local authorities and undertake any work required to facilitate an effective response to the White Paper;
- (iv) The imposition of a large, remote and inaccessible mega-council in Leicestershire be opposed and the Leader and Chief Executive be instructed to fight these plans;
- (v) Should the government be determined to press ahead with local government reorganisation, the Council believes a single Leicestershire-wide council would be the worst option for Hinckley and Bosworth residents. Smaller unitary councils based on a group of similar existing districts would be more accessible and mean decisions taken closer to local residents;
- (vi) Council requests officers bring forward at pace proposals to create a town council for Hinckley which the Council will consult Hinckley residents on.

Having declared an interest in the following item, Councillor Sutton left the meeting at 8.10pm.

355. Motions received in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 17

Councillor M Mullaney, seconded by Councillor Cope, proposed the following motion:

“Council notes that:

- The recent 2024 autumn budget change to inheritance tax relief announced by the Labour government will introduce a family farm tax and will have a detrimental impact on family farms and farmers' ability to pass on their farms to the next generation of farmers and essentially put at risk our nation's food security

- House of Commons Library research, commissioned by the Liberal Democrats, has revealed that farming subsidies have fallen by 20% in real terms since 2015 – equivalent to the loss of £722 million in public funding for farmers
- Last year alone, 8100 UK farms closed their doors – equal to one in 25 of all farms in the country.

Council believes that:

- Whilst it is true that the financial inheritance left by the Conservatives was shameful, the Labour government has committed a shameful betrayal and let down farmers by breaking their promise to not introduce a family farm tax
- The family farm tax will damage the ability of farmers to pass on their farms to the next generation of local farmers
- Labour's family farm tax will threaten food security by forcing the sale of family farms and, with a smaller number of farmers, removing competition from the marketplace by stealth, risks basic food cost hikes for our residents
- The Labour government's family farm tax will make British food production harder
- The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Steve Reed and Keir Starmer promised not to introduce a tax like this
- Numerous rural and farming organisations such as the National Farmers' Union and Country Land and Business Association have warned that countless farms will be harmed, threatening food security and rural areas like ours
- The comments made of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Steve Reed, that already struggling farmers will have to "do more with less" shows an absolute ignorance as to how the rural economy works
- At a time when many farmers in Hinckley & Bosworth are struggling with soaring costs and energy prices, this sudden tax rise will damage the future of their farms and our local economy.

Council further believes that:

- Farmers are key allies in tackling climate change and the natural capital crisis, caring for and restoring the countryside while producing high-quality food for our tables, but their ability to do this has already been threatened by the transition away from the basic payment scheme which has resulted in many farmers fearing that new systems will fall short of what is needed
- The many failings of the Conservative's Brexit deal have also contributed to the problems facing farmers including increased food production costs and shortages as well as severely damaging their ability to export to their main markets in Europe. New trade deals have undermined animal welfare and environmental protection, undercutting responsible British farmers and setting a dangerous precedent for future deals
- The decision by Leicestershire County Council to sell off, or explore selling off, county farms is also deeply concerning and damaging to future food production – these include farms in Hinckley, Stapleton and Barlestone.

Council resolves to:

- Request that the Chief Executive writes to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to outline the Council's dismay at this decision and to call on the government to stop the family farm tax
- Call on Leicestershire County Council to halt its policy of selling off county farms."

During discussion on the motion, members emphasised the importance of farming for the economy and for mitigating climate change and highlighted the sale of county farmland for house building.

Councillor M Mullaney along with ten further members stood to request voting on the motion be recorded. The vote was taken as follows:

Councillors Bools, Bray, Cartwright, Cook, Cope, J Crooks, W Crooks, Flemming, C Gibbens, S Gibbens, Green, Hodgkins, Lambert, Lynch, Moore, L Mullaney, M Mullaney, Pendlebury, Simmons, Smith, Stead-Davis, Webber-Jones, Weightman and Williams voted FOR the motion (24);

Councillors C Allen, R Allen, Harris and O'Shea abstained from voting.

The motion was therefore declared CARRIED and it was

RESOLVED –

- (i) The Chief Executive be requested to write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to outline the Council's dismay at this decision and to call on the government to stop the family farm tax;
- (ii) Leicestershire County Council be called upon to halt its policy of selling off county farms.

(The Meeting closed at 8.41 pm)

MAYOR