

CABINET

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Monday, 3 October 2022 at the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 10.00 am

Committee

Members Present:

Cllr W Fredericks	Cllr R Kershaw
Cllr E Seward	Cllr L Shires
Cllr T Adams (Chair)	Cllr A Brown

Members also attending:

Cllr C Cushing
Cllr N Dixon

Officers in Attendance:

Chief Executive, Democratic Services Manager, Assistant Director for Finance, Assets, Legal & Monitoring Officer, Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager, Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager, Estates and Asset Strategy Manager and Strategic Surveyor

Apologies for Absence:

Cllr A Fitch-Tillett
Cllr V Gay
Cllr N Lloyd

49 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 6th September were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

50 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

Public Speakers:

Mr G Bull, Chairman of North Walsham Town Council

Mr Bull said that the Town Council had been working very closely with NNDC and it was hoped that it could move back into the Cedars building as part of a wider civic hub. He said that he was aware of the other parties that were interested in leasing part of the building and although he was supportive of them, he did not feel that the nature of their business was compatible with that of a civic hub. Mr Bull went onto say that the Town Council had also submitted a bid for the barns adjacent to the Cedars, and this wouldn't be feasible if they weren't able to move into the main building. He concluded by saying that there was a perception amongst the public that the Cedars would become a civic hub and that the town council would be a long-term tenant.

Ms J Morton, on behalf of the Directors of the Walsham Tap

Ms Morton began by saying that she wanted to highlight the vision that the micro-

pub would be a pub for the community. The investors and directors lived and worked in North Walsham and believed that the proposals for a pub would enhance the current regeneration of North Walsham.

She said that the main objective was to provide an inclusive, safe, comfortable, welcoming haven for the community. The aim was to deliver quality products at all times. The real ale served would be from local breweries and non-alcoholic beverages would also be sourced from local regional companies (where possible) thereby, endeavouring to keep the carbon footprint to a minimum.

There would also be a focus on the staff, employing local people where possible and investing in their development. This was demonstrated by the proposed employment of a manager who had recently won regional pub of the year. His knowledge and expertise was exceptional and he was passionate about investing in staff.

She concluded by saying that it was their wish to be part of the local pub community within the town. They wanted to work together to give the people of North Walsham, the local community and visitors a great experience. It was hoped that the proposal of a pub at the top end of town would be a flagship for North Walsham. The directors believed fundamentally, that the community would see the value of this endeavour and were deserving of it.

The Chairman thanked both speakers for their comments. He said that the agenda item would be brought forward for discussion.

51 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received

52 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr L Shires declared the following non-pecuniary interest. In her capacity as County Councillor for North Walsham she had been involved in conversations with both parties interested in the Cedars building.

Cllr E Seward – non-pecuniary interest – member of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA)

53 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

The Chairman advised members that they could ask questions as matters arose.

54 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Cllr N Dixon, Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, said that he wanted to comment on the recent presentation to Members by Professor Hilber on second homes and holiday lets which had highlighted several pertinent points, the main one being that there was no single solution to the problem. It would require multiple inputs, yet to be defined, and whatever the Council did it would require the targeting of evidence to ensure that any intervention would be effective. This would then need to be carefully monitored to see if it was having an impact. He concluded by saying that it was clear that it was a very complex subject and not North Norfolk centric.

The Chairman said that he had found the presentation very interesting and it was

good to learn from international experiences.

RESOLVED

1. To note the data provided in the report and consider the merit of draft policies relating to Council Tax and Planning restrictions, alongside the resources required to implement such policies.
2. That NNDC supports the draft provisions of the Regeneration and Levelling Up Bill which would enable the doubling of Council Tax on second homes, alongside the Council making representations to Government seeking further legislative changes to enable the retention of increased tax revenue collected by 2nd tier authorities (District Councils).
3. That NNDC supports the extension of planning controls proposed in the draft provisions of the Regeneration and Levelling Up Bill, alongside the Council making representations to Government seeking further changes to request that all second and holiday homes require planning permission.
4. That NNDC responds positively to a call for evidence on the registration of tourist accommodation.
5. That, if Cabinet is not satisfied that the data provided in the report provides the necessary information required to support mitigation measures, it is recommended that consideration is given to what further investigation is required, and the resources necessary to undertake such investigations.
6. That consideration is given to consulting Parish and Town Councils on the impact of second homes and holiday lets, and take account of any proposed mitigation.

55 TACKLING EMPTY HOMES

Cllr W Fredericks, Portfolio Holder for Housing, introduced this item. She explained that with high levels of housing need in the District and new homes in short supply, it was important to make the best use of existing residential properties – including empty homes. The report proposed that using additional resources to better identify and monitor empty homes would be a cost-effective approach to tackling large numbers of empty homes. This would ensure that that Council held accurate information on empty homes, charged owners correctly and could also increase revenue income for the Council. The Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager added that the focus of the new temporary post would be on the revenue side, as the District had a relatively low number of empty homes and was below the national average. The focus would be on ensuring that the status of each empty home was recorded correctly and charged accordingly.

The Chairman invited Members to speak:

Cllr C Cushing asked if there were any targets or specific measures set. The Housing Strategy & Delivery Manager replied that there would be monitoring around the status changes of properties and how many de-listed properties were brought back into council tax banding, how many second or holiday homes were changed to empty homes and how many occupied homes were changed to empty homes and how this impacted on revenue. She said that it would be reasonable after six months to move from monitoring to targets. Cllr Cushing replied that he was essentially asking how Members could be sure that it was the additional resource that was

having an impact and that the anticipated outcomes would not have occurred regardless. The Housing Strategy & Delivery Manager said that currently, movement was in one direction, with homes going into the lowest council tax banding and the resource would be aimed at reducing this.

It was proposed by Cllr W Fredericks, seconded by Cllr T Adams and

RESOLVED to:

Agree a temporary (12-month fixed term) resource to identify, investigate and monitor empty homes (and Second / Holiday homes and de-listed properties) more proactively. The post to be funded from reserves.

Pilot the use of Homeless Prevention Grant to pay for repairs to bring a small number of empty homes into use to provide temporary accommodation for homeless households. Funded from existing budget.

Arrange training for existing officers on the powers available to tackle Empty Homes. Funded from existing budget.

Reason for the decision:

To support use of funding from reserves to be used for an additional temporary post

56 ECO4-FLEX

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Cllr W Fredericks, introduced this item. She explained that ECO-4 Flex was (Energy Company Obligations) was an Ofgem initiative, which provided energy efficiency improvement measures to low income households living in properties with poor energy efficiency. This latest round (ECO4) ran from April 2022 to March 2026. Households seeking approval to access the scheme could approach the Council directly or an installer could approach NNDC on behalf of the household. She added that the Council's Energy Officer would work alongside suppliers and installers to support the scheme.

It was proposed by Cllr W Fredericks, seconded by Cllr R Kershaw and

RESOLVED to:

1. Adopt a North Norfolk District Council Statement of Intent. (Appendix 2)
2. Delegate authority to approve applicants to the Council's Energy Officer.
3. Promote the Statement of Intent (Availability of Grant Funded Energy Improvement Works) to local households, energy suppliers and the installers working for the energy suppliers.

Reasons for the decision:

Recommendations 1 and 2 will enable eligible applicants in the district to access additional grant funding for energy efficiency improvement works.

Recommendation 3 will help raise awareness of grant funding amongst eligible applicants.

57 COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS 2023 - 2024

Cllr E Seward, Portfolio for Finance, introduced this item. He said that there were two recommendations that he would like to draw Cabinet's attention to. The first would come into effect from April 2023 and related to properties which were uninhabitable and were being repaired. It would provide a 50% discount for a period of 9 months, meaning a £700 Council Tax reduction for a Band D property. He explained that the offering of such discounts sat with the District Council. This particular discount had been removed in 2017 by the previous Administration and since then, the number of properties being repaired for re-use had fallen. The proposal was therefore to reintroduce the discount. Cllr Seward then spoke about recommendation 5, which proposed the introduction of a new second homes premium of 100%. The proposal relied on legislation being laid and Royal Assent before billing authorities could introduce it and any such premium must be agreed one year in advance of its introduction. So, if supported, it would come into effect from April 2024. He said that there were currently 4,500 second homes in North Norfolk and although they could bring benefits to the local economy, it was accepted that many local families could no longer afford to buy or rent properties in the District. A council tax premium on second homes could raise income by ring-fencing funds for affordable homes. Cllr Seward added that council tax retention continued to be an issue. Currently, only 10% was retained by the District Council. A full levy of 100% council tax imposed on second homes would result in raising £8.2m a year. Even half of this amount would go a long way towards the provision of affordable housing in North Norfolk.

The Chairman said that he welcomed both of the proposals outlined by Cllr Seward. As it currently stood an increase in the second homes council tax premium would benefit the County Council and it made sense to push for the District Council to retain the larger share.

Cllr L Shires said that she supported the retention of second homes council tax income by the housing authority, which was the District Council. She said that housing was a huge concern of residents and many of the discussions that she had been involved in recently, at all levels, had related to housing. It was key to providing stability and enabling families to flourish. In addition, at County Council level, many of the recent policies that had been introduced, such as providing additional support for domestic abuse victims and the provision of social care in a home setting, required more housing. This would fall to the District Council as the responsible authority for housing, to provide.

Cllr N Dixon commented that regarding the 100% premium, there seemed to be two possible objectives – the exercising of some kind of control or intervention over the number of second homes and holiday lets and then the fate of the money collected. He said that there should be more thought given as to the purpose of the proposal and whether, if both objectives couldn't be achieved, the achievement of one objective merited the premium being levied. He suggested that the proposals should be considered in the context of Professor Hilber's comments and there should be clarity about what the Council wanted to achieve and how this would be done.

The Chairman asked whether the town and parish councils would benefit from any increase in revenue and that some thought should be given to this in the future. He said that he could understand why the County Council would want to increase their access to additional funding given current resourcing pressures.

Cllr C Cushing asked what would happen if the Government did not agree to District Councils levying 100% premium on second homes. Cllr Seward replied that until the

final legislation was published it was hard to see how it would pan out. It was possible that there could be a legislative change ring-fencing the income to the housing authority, or alternatively, there could be negotiations between the County and District councils – as had happened previously. Regarding Cllr Dixon’s point on clarity, he said that levying a council tax premium could slow the growth of the number of second homes. He added if the premium was ring-fenced for affordable housing it could be used to purchase land for housing association and trusts to use for affordable and social housing.

Cllr W Fredericks said that she echoed Cllr Seward’s comments about the purchasing of land and how challenging it was to develop and build housing in the District at the moment. Due to the impact of nutrient neutrality, house building had effectively ground to a halt since mid-March and during the intervening months costs had risen hugely. Developers were also understandably wary of committing to building homes when residents may not be able to secure a mortgage. She concluded by saying that many second home owners contributed positively to their local community but they did reduce the availability of homes for local people and new ones could not be replaced quickly enough.

The Chief Executive reminded members that Cabinet were recommending the proposals to Full Council and that there would be a further opportunity for debate on 16th November.

It was proposed by Cllr E Seward, seconded by Cllr A Brown and

RESOLVED to:

Recommend to Full Council that under Section 11A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 2012 and other enabling powers that:

- 1) The discounts for the year 2023-24 and beyond are set at the levels indicated in the table at paragraph 2.1
- 2) The existing 100% council tax hardship discount and associated policy (see Appendix B) remains in place for 2023-24
- 3) That an exception to the levy charges may be made by the Revenues Manager in the circumstances laid out in section 2.2 of this report
- 4) The premiums for the year 2023-24 and beyond are set at the levels indicated in the table at paragraph 2.3
- 5) A new second homes premium of 100% as detailed in paragraph 2.4 is applied from April 2024, subject to the necessary legislation.
- 6) To continue to award a local discount of 100% for eligible cases of care leavers under Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended)
- 7) Those dwellings that are specifically identified under regulation 6 of the Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings) (England) Regulations 2003 will retain the 50% discount as set out in paragraph 1.2 of this report.
- 8) Those dwellings described or geographically defined at Appendix A which in the reasonable opinion of the Revenues Manager are judged not to be structurally capable of occupation all year round and were built before the restrictions of seasonal usage were introduced by the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, will be entitled to a 35% discount

Reason for the decision:

To set appropriate council tax discounts and premiums which will apply in 2023-24 and to raise council tax revenue.

In accordance with the relevant legislation these determinations shall be published in at least one newspaper circulating in North Norfolk before the end of the period of 21 days beginning with the date of the determinations.

58 TRANSFER OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AT STALHAM

The Portfolio Holder for Finance & Assets, Cllr E Seward, introduced this item. He explained that the report detailed the proposal to transfer public open space to Stalham Town Council, along with the remaining commuted sum, to enable them to manage the site for the benefit of the community. Local Members and the Town Council were supportive.

It was proposed by Cllr E Seward, seconded by Cllr T Adams and

RESOLVED to:

Approve the transfer of:

- A. public open space North of Yarmouth Road Stalham as identified on the plan in the appendix to Stalham Town Council
- B. The remaining commuted sum of approximately £170,000

Reason for the decision:

To approve the transfer of land and funds as a key decision.

59 FUTURE LETTING OF THE CEDARS, NORTH WALSHAM

Cllr E Seward, Portfolio Holder for Finance & Assets, introduced this item. He began by thanking both speakers for attending the meeting and for demonstrating a confidence and commitment to North Walsham. He said that he welcomed the interest from the micro-brewery as it brought a different perspective on future use of the building. However, it should be acknowledged that the two speakers had brought different perspectives on how the building should be used in the future and that was the crux of the issue. The property had been marketed for a year and during that time there had been three expressions of interest from community organisations and 1 from a commercial venture. Public sector bids would occupy around 60% of the building and the micro-brewery just under 50%.

Cllr Seward explained that the public sector bodies that had put forward bids for space in the building had made it clear that they did not want to share a common entrance with the pub. He said that it was not an option to have the mix of organisations and therefore not viable to pursue that. However, the building did need to be occupied on completion. He went on to say that the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) needed a permanent physical presence in the town. Residents could not afford to lose it. In addition, the Town Council had to leave their current premises soon as it was not compliant with energy efficiency regulations. The Town Council needed a permanent base. It provided key services to residents and had also indicated that it was prepared to invest further in the Cedar's site. Cllr Seward said that the third public sector organisation that had expressed an interest could not be

revealed at this stage, but they had indicated that if they could not find a suitable long-term site, then the services that they provided would be lost to the town. Cllr Seward concluded by saying that it was for all of these reasons that Cabinet was recommended to support the Cedars becoming a civic hub for North Walsham.

He went onto say that it was important to consider the history of the building, explaining that it had been handed over to NNDC in 1974, following Local Government reorganisation. The property had been the home of the Smith family, who had contributed to the development of the town in the early part of the twentieth century and they had bequeathed it to the Urban District Council. The time had now come to hand the management of the building back to the town for the local community to use.

It was proposed by Cllr E Seward, seconded by Cllr T Adams and

RESOLVED to:

- 1) To note the proposals received, and;
- 2) Instruct officers to investigate an alternative delivery model that meets the Councils' asset management aspirations and provides the continued community services, and;
- 3) Continue discussions with parties forming the combined option in Proposals 1, 3 and 4, and;
- 4) Note that this would form the basis of a future report.

Reason for the decision:

The recommended proposal supports the Councils Asset Management Plan.

60 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

61 PRIVATE BUSINESS

The meeting ended at 10.47 am.

Chairman