

## COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Wednesday, 27 April 2022 in the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 6.00 pm**

|                         |                     |                    |
|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Members Present:</b> | Mr T Adams          | Ms P Bevan Jones   |
|                         | Mr D Birch          | Mr H Blathwayt     |
|                         | Mr A Brown          | Dr P Bütikofer     |
|                         | Mrs S Bütikofer     | Mr C Cushing       |
|                         | Mr N Dixon          | Mr P Fisher        |
|                         | Mrs A Fitch-Tillett | Mr T FitzPatrick   |
|                         | Mr V FitzPatrick    | Ms V Gay           |
|                         | Mrs P Grove-Jones   | Mr G Hayman        |
|                         | Mr C Heinink        | Mr P Heinrich      |
|                         | Dr V Holliday       | Mr R Kershaw       |
|                         | Mr N Lloyd          | Mr G Mancini-Boyle |
|                         | Mr N Pearce         | Mr S Penfold       |
|                         | Mr J Punchard       | Mr J Rest          |
|                         | Mr E Seward         | Miss L Shires      |
|                         | Mrs E Spagnola      | Mrs J Stenton      |
|                         | Mr M Taylor         | Mr E Vardy         |
|                         | Mr A Varley         | Ms L Withington    |

**Also in attendance:** The Chief Executive, The Director for Place & Climate Change, The Director for Communities, the Director for Resources (S151 Officer), the Assistant Director For Finance and Legal (Monitoring Officer) the Democratic Services Manager and the Democratic Services and Governance Officer (Scrutiny)

### 158 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs W Fredericks, P Heinrich, N Housden, G Perry-Warnes, C Stockton, J Toye and A Yiasimi.

### 159 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> February were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The minutes for the meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2022 were approved and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:

The recorded vote for Agenda Item 10, Recommendation 10 - Council Tax should state that Cllr T FitzPatrick voted against the recommendation and that Cllr W Fredericks voted for the recommendation.

### 160 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

### 161 TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS

The following Members declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda item 10: Opposition Business, as elected members of Norfolk County Council:

Cllr T Adams, Cllr N Dixon, Cllr T FitzPatrick, Cllr S Penfold, , Cllr L Shires, Cllr E Vardy.

## **162 CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The Chairman updated members on recent civic events. The Vice-Chairman, Cllr P Grove-Jones spoke about her visit to the Cromer Christian Fellowship commissioning service for the new Church Leader on 19<sup>th</sup> March. She said it had been very enjoyable and she was made to feel very welcome.

The Chairman then spoke about his support for 'It's on the Ball' cancer charity. He said that he had joined David Holliday from Moongazer Ale for part of his 147 mile journey pushing a beer barrel from Hindringham to St Bart's Hospital in London. To date, £17,600 had been raised for the charity.

He concluded by thanking members for attending the Chairman's Afternoon Tea at the How Hill Trust, Ludham. It had been a wonderful afternoon and raised just over £300 for the Chairman's charities.

## **163 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Leader, Cllr Adams began by updating Members on the Tree Planting project. He said that by the end of the latest tree planting season, a total of 71,000 trees had been planted and he was hopeful that the overall target of 110,000 would be achieved on time. He thanked everyone involved.

He then spoke about £300k of additional funding that had recently been received for the Changing Places project. He thanked the Director for Resources for his work in pursuing this funding and Cllr E Spagnola for her initial challenge to the Council to install new facilities across the District. This had led to a real difference for both residents and visitors, with new facilities in Fakenham and Wells already underway and more planned for Holt and Stalham.

Cllr Adams then highlighted the recent announcement that North Norfolk would be one of two areas in the country where funding from the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme had been allocated. It would focus on helping communities and businesses on areas of the coast that could not sustainably be defended from coastal erosion.

Regarding the recent invasion of Ukraine, Cllr Adams said that the Council had appointed a Ukrainian Community Support Officer and 39 properties had been checked for their suitability to host Ukrainian families. Currently over 70 people were expected to come to North Norfolk. He thanked the community groups and hubs for their support in welcoming refugees.

The Leader then updated members on ongoing discussions around a County deal. He said that there had not been significant progress yet. He had attended the District Council Network (DCN) mini conference in March and the message was that if such county deals were not managed carefully, there was a risk of regionalisation rather than localisation of local government.

The Council had started to look at the opportunities presented by the Levelling Up fund and the Shared Prosperity Fund. The latter was disappointing for the District,

with only a relatively small amount of funding available.

Cllr Adams concluded by talking about upcoming projects. He said that the Quality of Life Strategy was due to go to Cabinet shortly and he thanked the Assistant Director for People Services for her work on this. He then spoke about recent meetings he had had with representatives from Holt and Stalham Town Councils, ahead of further meetings with Fakenham and Cromer Town Council. He finished by reminding members about the Mammoth Marathon which was taking place in May. It was the first road marathon in North Norfolk since 1990 and officers had worked very hard alongside the North Norfolk Beach Runners to put it in place.

## **164 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS**

None received.

## **165 PORTFOLIO REPORTS**

The Chairman invited members to put questions to Portfolio Holders.

Cllr C Cushing asked the Leader, Cllr T Adams, about the impact of the recent nutrient neutrality ruling from Natural England. He said that it was having an immediate effect on his ward of Fakenham, with a large housing development there now on hold. He asked the Leader if there was any information on the next steps to address such issues. Cllr Adams replied that it was an example of where a national issue was affecting normal people as well as having a wider impact on builders and suppliers. He said that the Council was trying to progress applications as far as it could until the issue was resolved. He said that he would follow up on Cllr Cushing's query regarding the Fakenham development and come back to him.

Cllr A Brown asked the Leader if there were any targets regarding the homing of Ukrainian refugees in the County and the District specifically. The Leader replied that currently only small numbers were coming through. He said that dialogue with neighbouring councils had been good and over 70 people were due to come to North Norfolk soon.

Cllr G Hayman asked the Leader what he was doing personally to support Ukrainian refugees and whether he wished to thank the local MP for taking in a refugee. The Leader replied that he would like to thank everyone who was involved in supporting Ukrainian refugees. He added that it was not possible for everyone to take a refugee into their home but he also worked with charities outside of his role as a councillor which were providing support.

Cllr R Kershaw said that he had offered two double rooms for refugees at the start of the crisis but had not received a response from the Government so far, despite chasing it several times.

Before taking questions on her portfolio, Cllr A Fitch-Tillett drew members' attention to a couple of key points. She said that one set of beach access steps at Overstrand had been shut. At Happisburgh there was an issue with sand martins nesting so the cutting of the access ramp was being delayed until the nesting season was over. She finished by welcoming the additional coastal funding that the Leader had announced earlier. Cllr J Stenton asked for further detail on how the funding would be released. Cllr Fitch-Tillett replied that it was hoped that this initial tranche could be used to leverage in further funding in the future. She added they had only been

notified of the funding a month ago so it was still early in the process.

The Chairman then advised members that the following written question had been submitted in advance by Cllr J Rest for Cllr V Gay, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture & Wellbeing:

*'Can we be advised on the predicted running costs that will be incurred at the REEF Leisure centre, due to excessive rising fuel costs - as reported on Sky news 10/04/22 by Jane Nickerson of Swim England's governing body, Jane Nickerson.*

*In addition, please can the following information be provided:*

- Details of any terms stated in the contract to cover this.*
- Details of any subsidy that NNDC will be required pay to cover this increase in costs.*
- Details of any provisions that 'Everyone Active' has in place for such an eventuality.*

Cllr Gay said that at the current time, the leisure contractor, Everyone Active, paid for the energy used rather than a price per unit. This would be reviewed after two years. She said that the Council had not been asked to provide a subsidy and as yet there was not sufficient evidence to base such a request on. The Reef was programmed to use energy as efficiently as possible and Everyone Active felt they could find further efficiencies and like all of the Council's contractors, they were committed to delivering the Net Zero Strategy targets. Cllr N Lloyd, Portfolio Holder for Environment, added that the question underlined the importance of the Council's climate change agenda. He said that all options were being explored including the installation of solar ports over car parks.

Cllr M Taylor asked Cllr R Kershaw, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth, about the impact of the North Walsham Heritage Action Zone project on local businesses in the short term. He said he was aware that one business was close to folding and wondered what the Council was doing to support them. Cllr Kershaw replied that all local businesses had been involved in the consultation process and timings of the works had been shared in advance. Visitors were happy with the changes so far. He added that the Market Place works were being undertaken in sections to minimise the impact and he said that in the long term footfall to the town would increase. He concluded by saying that officers regularly visited local businesses to talk through any issues that they were having. In conclusion, he said that two of the empty shops in the town centre had recently been filled.

Cllr T FitzPatrick said that Cllr Kershaw's report was commendably short. He said that he had recently attended a presentation in Great Yarmouth about the real changes that the Council had brought to the town – including the new leisure centre, including the third river crossing, the new covered market and the energy campus. He said that Equinor had moved from North Norfolk to the new energy campus and this had resulted in the loss of 140 jobs. He asked what was being done to find replacement quality jobs in the west of the District. Cllr Kershaw replied that regarding Equinor, the servicing of the wind farms had moved to Great Yarmouth and this was beyond the control of the District Council. He added that officers were meeting with Walsingham Estates on 13<sup>th</sup> May to try and help fill the property. He added that the hospitality sector continued to do well, with the Chestnut Group investing in 5 pubs across North Norfolk. Cllr FitzPatrick replied that 140 quality jobs had been lost in the west of the District and he felt this had not been answered. Cllr

Kershaw referred to the film studio at West Raynham which was generating a lot of jobs in neighbouring areas, including Fakenham.

Cllr N Pearce asked Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Organisational Resources, about the arrangements in place to look after people coming into the reception area at the Council offices. He said that on three separate occasions he had witnessed elderly people seeking planning advice and they had been turned away because they did not have an appointment. Cllr Shires replied that she was not aware of the specific incidents mentioned but that they should have been offered a way to make an appointment. Cllr Pearce replied that they were not and he did not feel that the service was good enough. Cllr Shires offered to discuss the matter with Cllr Pearce after the meeting.

Cllr G Mancini-Boyle held up an agenda for a recent meeting of the Planning Policy & Built Heritage Working Party. He commented on its size and asked how much it had cost to print and post out. He said that he would like to remind members that the Council had declared a climate emergency and the provision of paper copies was unacceptable. The Chairman replied that members of the working party had requested hard copies due to the complex technical content of the documents. The Vice-Chairman added that any member could contact Democratic Services and ask not to receive printed copies. As the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Cllr Toye, was not in attendance, he suggested that Cllr Mancini-Boyle put his question in writing to him.

Cllr C Heinink asked Cllr E Seward, Portfolio Holder for Finance, about the £150 energy rebate and when residents should expect to receive it. Cllr Seward replied that officers were working on it and payments would start in May. The first rollout would be for customers that pay by direct debit as the Council already had bank account details for them. For those that did not pay this way, requests could be submitted via the grant approval application portal and following checks, payment would be dispatched by BACS.

## **166 QUESTIONS RECEIVED FROM MEMBERS**

A question had been submitted by Cllr Rest. It had been dealt with under Portfolio Holder reports.

## **167 OPPOSITION BUSINESS**

The following item of Opposition Business had been proposed by Cllr G Mancini-Boyle, seconded by Cllr T FitzPatrick:

The Chairman, Cllr J Punchard, proposed that a recorded vote was taken. Cllr T FitzPatrick seconded this

### Norwich Western Link

‘North Norfolk District Council pledges its full support for the construction of the Norwich Western Link dual carriageway which will deliver the following benefits for North Norfolk:

- Reduce ambulance response times for the whole of North Norfolk.
- Boost North Norfolk's economy and support its businesses.
- Enable speedier access from North Norfolk to the A11 by reducing through traffic around Norwich.

- Lead to a reduction in CO2 and other greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles.
- Improve road safety and take traffic off unsuitable roads.

This Council therefore resolves to request the Leader of North Norfolk District Council to write to the Leader of Norfolk County Council reaffirming its fullest support for the Norwich Western Link.'

Cllr Mancini-Boyle introduced the motion by saying that although the Western Link was not in North Norfolk, residents, businesses and tourists across the District would benefit from its completion. He referenced access to the Norfolk & Norwich Hospital (NNUH). Many residents had to drive through small rural villages to get there and this meant that ambulances and lorries also had to drive these routes which were often unsafe and lengthy. Access to the A11 was also challenging. Heavy traffic in small villages meant that vehicle emissions were high and potentially harmful to residents including children and the elderly.

Cllr Mancini-Boyle said that more consultation would come forward regarding the final route once the Secretary of State had made the decision on the funding. He added that members of South Norfolk and Broadland District Councils had already voted in support of the Western Link and he urged members to put politics aside and support the motion – for the whole of Norfolk.

Cllr T FitzPatrick seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

The Chairman opened the debate:

Cllr S Penfold said that his main concern was that the motion sought commitment from members to support the construction of the Western Link dual carriageway. He said that it was not an 'in principle' pledge but a full commitment and it was too early for this. At the current time, Norfolk County Council (NCC) did not know the construction costs for the project and had not set out a timetable for the works. In February 2022 NCC had issued a news release focussing on the design of the western link but not the costs. It had stated that more information on the route, costs and timetable would be provided in June 2022. Cllr Penfold said that it was clear that the County Council did not yet know how much the project would cost and how long it would take to construct. Questions should therefore be raised about its viability. It wasn't clear whether the County Council could afford the 15% of costs that it had agreed to – which were originally £185m and would undoubtedly be much higher now. He concluded by saying that the motion was set against a backdrop of escalating financial woes at the County Council, a lack of commitment from the Government on funding and soaring material and supply costs. He felt it was therefore naïve and premature and it would be irresponsible for a District Council to pledge commitment to County Council project when they did not know the costs or timetable for construction.

The Leader, Cllr T Adams, said that he did not feel that this was a matter for the District Council to provide a steer on. He said that he did not feel that construction of the link would solve the issues faced by the Ambulance Service. He agreed with Cllr Penfold that escalating costs were a concern and many people were questioning its deliverability.

Cllr E Spagnola said that it was unfair to put the Ambulance Service in the spotlight and suggest that waiting times could be solved by constructing the Western Link. There was a much wider issue regarding investment and a focus on handing over patients at the hospital.

Cllr A Fitch-Tillett said she supported the construction of the road and the points raised in the written motion. However, she too felt that it was premature. She referred to the Northern Distributor Road (NDR) which had not been delivered on budget. She said that she didn't feel she could support the motion until it had been fully costed, funding was allocated and it was clear when it would be delivered.

Cllr C Cushing said that this was about a vision for Norfolk that was sustainable and relied on people walking and cycling everywhere. This worked well in city centres but was not practical for a rural area like North Norfolk. People relied on their cars to get around and without the Western Link, traffic would continue to increase and impact on small villages. That was why so many residents in the surrounding areas were supportive of the road being built. He said that similar motions had been supported by the Liberal Democrat councillors unanimously at both South Norfolk and Broadland District Councils. He explained that residents from the west of the District wanting to access the NNUH, had to travel via Lenwade which was a winding, treacherous route. Cllr Cushing then said that he believed the Western Link would provide a strong boost for businesses by improving connectivity and he urged members to support the motion.

Cllr V FitzPatrick said that the construction of the road was of huge public benefit. He gave the example of an ambulance journey to the hospital and said that dangerously ill patients were much safer being transported on a fast dual carriageway rather than winding, lengthy back roads. He added that for most residents, the journey to Norwich was impossible by bus and the majority of people ended up using the 'rat runs' which then impacted on the quality of life of the people living adjacent to them. He encouraged members to support the motion.

Cllr N Lloyd said that he believed the motion to be premature and poorly written. The route was not yet finalised and the funding not secured. He said that there was no data regarding emissions in the motion and he felt this was necessary for members to support. He said that regarding ambulances, he would also like to see some data on this. As far as he was aware the main issue was around transferring patients from the ambulance into the hospital rather than the journey time. He concluded by saying if the funding and route were confirmed then he may support it but it should be acknowledged that the County Council did not have a good track record of listening to the District Council and he remained sceptical that it would make any difference.

Cllr A Brown said that in his view, an indication of support at this stage would send a signal to the Leader of the County Council to sign a 'blank cheque'. Instead, he would support sending a letter suggesting that the County Council revisits their decision not to declare a climate emergency.

Cllr G Hayman proposed that the question be now put. Cllr T FitzPatrick seconded the proposal, subject to him having a right of reply if it was passed. When put to the vote the proposal was not supported by 11 votes in favour and 19 votes against.

Cllr L Shires said that she wanted to send a clear message of support to the paramedic and hospital teams who regularly raised concerns about the difficulties they were facing regarding response times. She said it was unfair to suggest that a pledge to build a 3 mile stretch of road would resolve these issues. The latest data that she had seen included an ambulance response time of 21 hours and 57 minutes – and this stretch of road would not address that. The problem was a matter of a severely underfunded system.

Cllr P Grove-Jones said that roads in a rural area were slow. There was a sequential

increase in traffic as new roads opened. She gave the example of the M25 which was now gridlocked most of the time, despite being built as a relief road.

Cllr J Punchard said that he was supportive in principle as it made sense to complete the route by constructing the last three miles. However, like other members, he questioned how much it would change ambulance response times. Regarding emissions, he said that he hoped that it would not be like the NDR, which had a lot of roundabouts, which required drivers to stop frequently. He concluded by saying that it needed more detail before he would support the motion.

Cllr T FitzPatrick then spoke as seconder of the motion. He said that in his view, the main point was not about ambulance response times but about getting to the hospital in a car, which this road would help. He went on to say that in his role as a County Councillor he had supported the construction of the Northern Broadway which had been built under the 'Rainbow Alliance' at the County Council. He felt it had been too important an issue to play party politics with and this was a similar matter. Regarding the reduction of emission, the Western Link would take cars out of the city centre reducing pollution. Ultimately, however, it would be electric cars using the roads so this issue would be addressed. He went on to say that the existing Broadland Northway brought substantial benefits to Cromer but not to the west part of the District. Finishing this link would stop rat running, support existing jobs by improving transport links and for emergency services every minute was critical. It was time to see some benefits being brought to the western side of the District. He asked members not to play politics with this. The funding would be dealt with by the County Council, support was just sought from the District Council to demonstrate recognition of the benefits it would bring to residents.

Cllr G Mancini-Boyle then spoke as the proposer of the motion. He said that he would listen to the concerns that had been raised regarding costs and the route. He said that he was confident it would be built at some point. He said that Councils were happy to approve large housing developments but did not seem open to backing the infrastructure to support these. He concluded by urging all members to support the motion.

A recorded vote was taken. 10 members voted in favour, 20 against and 3 abstained. The motion was therefore not supported.

**168 NOTICE(S) OF MOTION**

None received.

**169 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**170 PRIVATE BUSINESS**

The meeting ended at 7.31 pm.

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Chairman