

# **NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **CABINET**

**Tuesday, 19 December 2006**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Hadland (Chair); Councillor Palethorpe (Deputy Chair);  
Councillors Caswell, Flavell, Larratt and Miah

### **1. APOLOGIES**

None.

### **2. MINUTES**

None.

### **3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES**

- (1) That Mr C Grethe be granted leave to address the Cabinet upon Items; 5, "Motions From Council", 7, "Delapre Park Bund", 8, Delapre Abbey Conservation Plan", 10, "Budget Monitoring 2006/07", 11, "Budget 2007/08 – 2009/10" and 12, "Future Services for Young People".
- (2) That P Varnserry be granted leave to address the Cabinet on Item 7, "Delapre Park Bund".
- (3) That Councillor Glynane be granted leave to address the Cabinet on Items 7, "Delapre Park Bund" and 8, "Delapre Abbey Conservation Plan".
- (4) That Councillor Hill be granted leave to address the Cabinet on Item 8, "Delapre Abbey Conservation Plan".

### **4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

### **5. MOTIONS FROM COUNCIL**

#### Mayorhold Car Park

Councillor Hadland commented that as a pilot scheme the Mayorhold Car Park was currently open three nights a week; Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays until 1:00 am. There appeared to be a net cost to the Council, however this could not be accurately assessed until the end of the Scheme in January. The Cabinet could not comply with the terms of the motion immediately as there was a budgetary effect that needed to be considered and no budget available to meet any cost.

Mr C Grethe commented that the motion at Council had been accepted and that the benefits of 24 hour opening would be for businesses in the Town Centre and also the patrons of the recently re-opened Roadmender. Its usage would generate further income.

Councillor Hadland commented that the motion as accepted by Council requested the Cabinet to “consider” twenty four hour opening and the costs and benefits needed to be assessed before a final decision could be made.

Councillor Caswell commented that the evaluation would take place at the end of January and would include the reaction of businesses to the pilot scheme.

**RESOLVED:** That the position be noted.

## **6. ISSUES ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**

None.

## **7. DELAPRE PARK BUND (CPFSP)**

Mr C Grethe commented that any measures undertaken needed to make the Park safer for people to use.

Mr P Varnserry commented that the Cabinet were aware of the position of the Delapre Action Group.

Councillor Glynane commented that the Delapre Consultation Group, in the context of the Abbey, had been a great success and had involved a wide variety of different community groups. However, in connection with the bund, the opposite was true and that many mistakes had been made. Motions presented to Council on the bund had received cross-party support. He noted that there had been no cost to the Council for the installation of the bund but that its removal would necessitate expenditure and he queried on what basis the figures reported had been arrived at. Residents wanted the removal of the bund at the smallest possible cost. He reiterated previous suggestions that the infill from the bunding could be used by English Partnerships.

The Asset Manager submitted a report that advised on progress towards removal of the park bund. He commented that discussions had taken place with English Partnerships Director of Engineering who had indicated that they would be prepared to use the infill material if it was suitable for their purposes. English Partnerships would have no responsibility for reinstating the ground or subsequent re-seeding. The costings reported had derived from indicative costs given by a civil engineering contractor. The costs in respect of the bollards as an alternative security measure had been taken from the recent Far Cotton Recreation Ground Scheme. Councillor Hadland commented that the £290,000 reported represented the worse case scenario with all of the costs falling upon the Council and £148,000 as being the best situation.

Councillor Palethorpe commented that it was important that no blame was attached to the Planning Committee who had made their decision on the basis of the best information that was available to them.

The Asset Manager commented that whilst English Partnerships had planning permissions for developing Ransome Road and the Cross Valley Link Road they did not have a contractor in place to carry out the works.

The Communications Manager commented that in respect of the public consultation, four hundred and fifteen residents living near the Park, or who had previously expressed an interest in the issue, and three hundred other residents picked at random from across Town were to receive a questionnaire.

- RESOLVED:** (1) That a further report be submitted to Cabinet after the consultation results are available and funding investigations have been completed.
- (2) That the grant of planning permission on 22 November 2006 for the removal of the bund (excluding the Golf Club bund) be noted.
- (3) That the progress in respect of the costs and methodology of the potential removal of the bunding be noted.
- (4) That the options for alternative measures to prevent unauthorised vehicle entry on to Delapre Park be noted.
- (5) That the progress of the consultation with local residents concerning views about the potential removal of the Park bund and the prevention of unauthorised vehicular access be noted.

## **8. DELAPRE ABBEY CONSERVATION PLAN (LE)**

Mr C Grethe commented that the Abbey was an important part of the Town's heritage and it and surrounding park land needed to be adequately maintained.

Councillor Hill commented that progress on Delapre Abbey had come a long way in the previous three and a half years and relationships with the Friends of the Abbey and other community groups had progressed. The condition of the Abbey itself had also improved. He noted that a company had been set up and that a Trust was in the process of being set up. The Conservation Plan was a key document that would enable the Council to assess the Abbey's condition and viability of handing it over to the Trust.

Councillor Glynane commented that the work on the Abbey represented a real community effort and he reiterated briefly its history. He commended the plan to the Cabinet commenting that it would protect the park land and gardens and made a suggestion of making the area a conservation area.

In answer to a question Councillor Hill commented that discussions as to the total area that comprised the Park were ongoing; at its maximum it could stretch to the dual carriageway.

Councillor Hadland commented that the plan and policies were important to the future of the Abbey and the park land.

- RESOLVED:** (1) That the historic significance of Delapre Abbey both nationally and locally and the conservation policies and recommendations identified as necessary to secure the future of the grade II\* listed building be noted.

- (2) That the Delapre Abbey Conservation Plan be adopted as drafted.

## **9. REGENERATION SCHEME (EI)**

Councillor Caswell submitted a report that reviewed the work of the Regeneration Team over the previous year and that proposed a strategy for taking regeneration and growth forward. He commented that a great deal of progress had been made.

The Corporate Manager, Regeneration Growth and Community Development commented on progress to date and in particular referred to the Northampton Brownfield Initiative with

English Partnerships and the recent opening of Edgar Mobbs Way which opened up access to industrial land, provided additional flood protection, provided access to the Country Park at Stortons Pits and provided access to extra car parking for the Football and Rugby Clubs. The road had reduced the amount of traffic passing through St James.

The Corporate Manager commented that the Central Area Framework (Town Centre Vision) had been produced with partners and had been generally well received. He suggested that some capital receipts from regeneration disposal could be used so as to facilitate regeneration scheme objectives but bearing in mind the Council's Capital Programme policies and considering each issue on a case by case basis.

Councillor Hadland commented that the use of capital receipts as a regeneration tool was a good idea but some further details as to how this would be controlled needed to be given.

Councillor Larratt noted that the strategic direction of the regeneration strategy appeared to make no mention of health or education and training. He noted that employers who were seeking to improve the skills base of the Town were not yet much in evidence. He also noted the importance of the public realm projects but was concerned that ongoing maintenance of features needed to be considered. The Corporate Manager for Regeneration, Growth & Community Development commented that he believed Councillor Larratt's points about education and health and training were covered by the references to social regeneration issues and economic environment to attract quality employment stated in paragraph 4.2 of the report.

Councillor Hadland commented that there were sufficient groups in existence to provide a co-ordinated approach to progressing the direction of the programme and the priorities of the regeneration scheme.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the progress on regeneration schemes and actions taken to date be noted.
  - (2) That the strategic direction for regeneration and growth as detailed in the report and the project priorities proposed in paragraph 4.3 be agreed.
  - (3) That whilst complying with the Council's Capital Programme Policies and Procedures to note that some specific regeneration schemes be considered on a case-by-case basis; it may be appropriate to explore the use of the Council's land as a resource in regeneration partnerships to generate long term revenue returns for the Council to consider using a proportion of receipts from land sales to support regeneration initiatives.
  - (4) That the Town Centre Vision be supported.
  - (5) That the report made by BDP Consultants for WNDC be supported for wide public consultation.
  - (6) That the coordination of the existing groups to secure a joint working arrangement with partner organisations to progress the strategic direction programme and priorities of the regeneration scheme.

## **10. BUDGET MONITORING 2006/07 (CPFSP)**

The Director for Governance, Resources & Improvement submitted a report that set out the current year's projected outturn position and the management action being taken to minimise the impact on the Council's general reserves at the end of the financial year. The Director commented on the present forecast for an overspend of £1.9m at 31 March 2007. He also commented that most of the impact had arisen from a higher than expected take-up of the new statutory concessionary fare scheme. Further measures were being taken to mitigate the overspend by taking opportunities to capitalise regeneration schemes where a capital receipt would result; proper recharges being agreed as part of Section 106 Agreements and by using £1m from reserves. This would reduce the Council's balances to approximately £1.9m. He also noted that some funds were being made available in case of further claw back of benefit subsidy by the Government.

The Director for People, Planning & Regeneration commented that the new Statutory Concessionary Fare Scheme applied to the over-60s and the scheme that had been implemented in Northamptonshire was at the statutory minimum with the addition of the Dial-a-Ride service. The estimated cost of the Dial-a-Ride service represented £60-70,000 of the overspend that had been reported. The budget for the concessionary fare scheme had been arrived at upon best advice from the County Council and Atkins. The arrangement was that bus operators did not make or lose anything by implementing the scheme. The Department of Transport had made available a toolkit to help authorities to estimate the cost but this had been issued late in the day and the only evidence that could be used to help in arriving at costs was the experience in Wales and Scotland where the scheme had already been implemented. The use of a concessionary fare scheme was demand led and the greater than expected take-up represented an increase cost to the Council of £900,000 this year. He noted that in 2007/08 costs should reduce but the bus operators could appeal the Council's assessment to the Secretary of State.

Mr C Grethe commented that the Disabled Forum had welcomed the introduction of the free bus scheme and had made some comments about difficulties for people not being able to access the service until after 9:30 am. He accepted the problems that this was causing the Council but welcomed the use that people were making of the Scheme.

Councillor Hadland commented that use of the Scheme was to be welcomed even if it did provide the Council with a financial difficulty. He also noted that several of the overspends detailed in the report were in relation to issues over which the Council had no choice. It was also noted that information from the bus companies on passenger movements in relation to use of the scheme would be interesting to know.

- RESOLVED:** (1) That the report and the management action to contain the forecast overspend be noted and approved.
- (2) That the potential impact for future years be noted as being covered in the subsequent report on the budget for next year and following years.

## **11. BUDGET 2007/08- 2009/10 (CPFSP)**

Mr C Grethe commented that in previous years public consultation meetings had been held and the Disabled Forum had also been included. He expressed the hope that public consultation, including the Forum, would take place on this occasion.

The Director for Governance, Resources & Improvement submitted a report that set out the current budget forecast for 2007/08 and later years. The report forecast available resources for 2007/08 and the budget to meet current service levels. He noted that in the report to Cabinet in September the Revenue Support Grant Forecast was an increase of 2.7%. This had been confirmed by the Secretary of State in November. The predicted Council Tax

increase was 3% and the Government had confirmed that it would consider capping at increases in excess of 5%. He noted that a one percentage increase in Council Tax raised £130,000 in income. The Appendix to the report set out the major issues and forecasts. He noted that some of the major influences in Appendix 1 was the under funding of the Capital Programme by some £4m which could be met by borrowing but servicing that debt would be made by the Revenue Budget. Inflation on energy costs had increased costs by some £300,000 and a recommended contingency of £1m was being considered. The current budget gap stood at £3.23m with an additional £1.1m to be met from efficiency savings.

Councillor Hadland commented that a special meeting of the Cabinet had been arranged for 8 January 2007 of which options to meet the budget gap would be considered for public consultation.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the report be received and that the funding shortfall identified of £3.23m after introducing a target efficiency/value for money saving of £1.1m be noted.
  - (2) That the actions already taken to minimise the funding shortfall be noted.
  - (3) That the options for future service delivery that are to be considered as the basis for public consultation to bridge the identified funding gap be the subject of a further meeting of the Cabinet on 8 January 2007.

## **12. FUTURE SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (CPFSP)**

Mr C Grethe commented that services for young people were important and the Council's Youth Forum played an important in this.

The Corporate Manager for Community Safety, Leisure & Town Centre Operations submitted a report commenting that as the County Council had now decided not to proceed with the commissioning of services for young people then the Cabinet no longer needed to make a decision in respect of this. The Corporate Manager referred to the Children and Young People's Charter which required signatories to take account of children and young people's points of view in its services.

- RESOLVED:** That the position in respect of the provision of future services for young people be noted and the signing of the Children and Young People's Charter be welcomed.

## **13. PETITION TO EXTEND UPTON PARISH BOUNDARY (CEDs)**

The Solicitor to the Council submitted a report that set out a petition from two hundred and eighty four residents living in Upton to extend the Parish boundary as shown on the plan appended to the report. It was recommended to submit the petition to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the petition for the extension of Upton Parish boundary be sent to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government together with the statement of the Council's views which agrees with the proposals in the petition.
  - (2) That the Secretary of State for the Electoral Commission also be informed that the Council have decided to consider the electoral

arrangements for the proposed Parish Council and that they consider it should be divided into two wards.

#### **14. UPTON BUS SERVICE (EI)**

Item withdrawn.

#### **15. TENANT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY (RO)**

The Portfolio Holder for Residential Operations submitted a report which sought approval to the Strategy for Tenant Involvement and the accompanying Compact between tenants, leaseholders and the Council. He noted that the report met the Audit Commission Inspector's recommendation for the Council to review the Tenant Pledge (Compact) as it had been originally produced in consultation with tenants in 2001. The Corporate Manager for Regeneration, Growth & Community Development commented that the development of the Strategy and Compact represented a positive collaborative partnership working. The Compact included an action plan and business case to support the work of Housing Services.

**RESOLVED:** (1) That the Strategy for Tenant Involvement and its accompanying agreement (Compact) between tenants, leaseholders and the Council be approved.

(2) That it be noted that the Strategy could be contained within existing resources and future resource levels as set out in the medium term Financial Strategy.

#### **16. PAY AND GRADING REVIEW**

The Portfolio Holder for Business Intelligence, People, Support and e-Government submitted a report that set out progress towards implementing the 2004 Joint Agreement made between Trades Unions and the national employers for "single status". He commented that although the deadline had been extended the intention was for the project to be concluded properly and thoroughly. He expressed his thanks to the Pay & Grading Review Panel, the Corporate Manager for Human Resources and the Trades Unions for their work on the Project to date.

**RESOLVED:** (1) That the report be received and that the draft Terms of Reference for a Pay & Grading Review Committee to agree the final recommendations of the Project Board be brought to a future meeting.

(2) That a short presentation be made to Councillors at the Council meeting on 22 January 2007 to explain the Pay & Grading Review.

The Chair referred to the fact that this was S McFadyen's last meeting and thanked her for all her work on behalf of the Cabinet and wished her well for the future.

#### **17. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

The Chair moved that the public and Press be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that there was likely to be disclosure to them of such categories of exempt information as defined by Section 100(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 as listed against

such items of business by reference to the appropriate paragraph of Schedule 12A to such Act.

The Motion was Carried.

#### **18. PROPERTY ASSET DISPOSAL PROGRAMME- INITIAL REPORT (CPFSP) (3)**

The Director for Governance Resources and Improvement submitted a report that set out the first stage of a review of the Council's Property Portfolio and initial disposal programme for the sites identified. The idea behind the review was to consider the best use of the Council's assets and the community benefits that may derive from development. Nine sites were identified for disposal in February 2007. Concern was expressed in respect of two additional sites upon which further discussions with the Regeneration Team would take place. It was noted that the former WC in Cattlemarket Road was not listed or connected to Southbridge.

Councillor Hadland commented that it was right for all assets to be investigated and the balance between disposing for development and its community asset value needed to be assessed.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the creation and updating of a capital receipt strategy to include the identification assessment, valuation and disposal of Council assets to be programmed over a three year period and beyond be agreed.
  - (2) That the disposal of the nine sites identified in Appendix 1 of the report as a first phase of implementing the Strategy in a manner to be determined by the Director of Governance, Resources & Improvement with the cost of external surveyors and legal services being funded from capital receipts be approved.
  - (3) That the proposed second phase property reviews identified for potential future disposal are outlined in Appendix 2 be noted.

#### **19. APPOINTMENT OF INTERNAL AUDITORS (CPFSP) (3)**

The Director for Governance, Resources & Improvement submitted a report that sought the appointment of PWC as the Council's internal auditors as a result of a tendering and assessment process. The Audit Committee supported the recommendation to appoint PWC.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That PWC be appointed as the Council's internal auditors in the light of the evaluation process and the Audit Committee's interview of short listed companies.
  - (2) That the Solicitor to the Council be authorised to agree formal contractual terms with PWC for a contract terminating in 2011 with a maximum 2 year extension option.

#### **20. PROGRESS OF GROSVENOR/ GREYFRIARS PROJECT (EI) (3)**

The Corporate Manager for Regeneration, Growth and Community Development submitted a report that set out the current status of the Grosvenor/Greyfriars project. He introduced Mr R Thompson, a representative of E C Harris Consultants. He commented that E C Harris had been assisting the Council with negotiations with Legal & General and Stagecoach and English Partnerships.



- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the appointments of E C Harris Consultants to undertake a gateway review and their subsequent report dated September 2006 and its recommendations be noted and agreed.
  - (2) That the recent discussions on progress with Legal & General and Stagecoach be noted.
  - (3) That a high level action plan be agreed and the need for a signed collaboration agreement prior to continuing negotiations towards Heads of Terms and Development Agreements be noted.
  - (4) That the key outputs to be negotiated with Legal & General, Stagecoach and EP be confirmed and that the Corporate Manager – Regeneration, Growth and Community Development in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Infrastructure lead negotiations with those parties.
  - (5) That approval be given to an additional £60,000 on an interim basis initially until 31 January 2007 to progress the project towards a conditional development agreement with further consideration of resources to be considered at the end of January 2007.

The meeting concluded at 19.50 hours