

Ashford Borough Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **16th April 2015**.

Present:

His Worshipful the Mayor, Cllr. J S Link (Chairman);

Cllrs. Apps, Bartlett, Bell, Mrs Bell, Bennett, Mrs Blanford, Britcher, Burgess, Chilton, Clark, Clarkson, Claughton, Clokie, Davey, Davidson, Davison, Mrs Dyer, Feacey, Galpin, Heyes, Hicks, Hodgkinson, Howard, Mrs Hutchinson, Marriott, Miss Martin, Mrs Martin, Michael, Mortimer, Ovenden, Robey, Shorter, Smith, Taylor, Wedgbury.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Aaby, Buchanan, Mrs Heyes.

Also Present:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Head of Planning & Development, Head of Cultural & Project Services, Head of Community & Housing, Head of Finance, Senior Commercial Development Manager, Principal Solicitor for Property & Projects, Senior Member Services and Scrutiny Support Officer.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting the Reverend Eileen Harrop said prayers.

421 Exempt or Confidential Items

The Mayor asked whether any items should be dealt with in private because of the likely disclosure of exempt or confidential information. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that there was one item on the agenda for this meeting within these categories, item E1. He confirmed that there was also an exempt appendix to a further report which was subject to a recommendation from Cabinet and if Members wished to discuss that item there would be a need to pass the resolution to exclude the press and public.

422 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Shorter	Made a Voluntary announcement as a Director of Kent Play Clubs (Kingsnorth).	426
	and	
	Made a Voluntary Announcement as a Director of the 'A Better Choice' Building Control Company.	426

423 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 19th February 2015 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

424 Announcements

(a) Last Meeting of the Present Council

The Mayor said he wanted to take the opportunity to thank those Members who were not seeking re-election for the work they had undertaken over the years. The list of those not standing was: - Councillors Adley, Clark, Claughton, Davidson, Davison, French, Hodgkinson, Mrs Hutchinson, Marriott, Robey, Taylor and Yeo. He said he would also like to wish good luck to those Members who were standing for re-election.

(b) The Leader

The Leader said that this was the last address he would give during this four year term and he was grateful to all Councillors from all parties for their contributions to the achievements made over the last four years. He was particularly grateful to the Group Leaders as he felt they had worked well together and in harmony, which he thought bode well for the citizens of this Borough. For some colleagues this would be their final meeting and for others but a brief interlude before they hopefully resumed their public service. Whilst he believed it was customary at this time to reflect on achievements, it was also a time to remember absent colleagues and a time to bid farewell to those who were not standing again. For those hoping to be returned he said it was a time to look to the bright and challenging future for Ashford.

Turning to some of the Council's collective achievements over the past four years, he said that 2011/12 saw: - the sensitive restoration of St Mary's Church in to a multi-use arts centre; the completion of the landmark footbridge over the M20; the completion of the new Victoria Way; major expansions of the Tesco's and Sainsbury's superstores; and the opening of the Bupa Care Home at the Drovers Roundabout. 2012/13 saw:- preparation for the introduction of the Council's new recycling arrangements; an approach from the owners of the Designer Outlet to greatly expand their retail offer which would soon be coming to the Planning Committee; and the re-location of Jasmin Vardimon's artistic operation to Ashford. 2013/14 had seen: - the setting up of two Limited Companies – the Building Control and Property Companies; the introduction of the new recycling service which had seen Ashford move from the bottom to the top 10% in the UK and become the most improved District in the country; the opening of the John Lewis at Home store; and Dunelm Mill move to Ashford. In the last year, 2014/15, the Leader advised that the Council had purchased International House and he was happy to tell Members that whilst a full progress report was in preparation, it would show just how successful this purchase had been for the people of Ashford. Hadlow College had taken over the educational provision and £9.8m of funding had been secured for the new college in Ashford. Workmen were now on site and work on the college would start in earnest in the next few weeks. This past year had also seen: - approval of the

Chilmington Green planning application; the 40th Anniversary of Ashford Borough Council and the 50th Anniversary of the twinning arrangements. The Council had also received grant approval for: - the nearly £20m (full cost £70m) needed to fund the full Junction 10A of the M20 which all preferred to the partial junction; over £10m for the partial dualling of the A28 (full cost £19.5m); £2m for signalling at Ashford International Station (full cost £4m); and significant affordable housing grants. This year had witnessed the long awaited opening of the Willesborough Dykes cycle path, works well underway at Conningbrook Country Park with a planned opening this summer, Commercial Quarter public realm works underway and progressing and the Tourism Review identifying a thriving visitor economy and a well performing tourism service.

As they approached the end of this Council term and looked to the future, the Leader said it was important to advise that the Council was in extremely good shape. It had a sound financial structure as evidenced by its auditors, good reserves and un-committed money from New Homes Bonus had been left for the new Administration, a Council Tax freeze for three of the last four years of this Administration and a committed freeze for the first year of the new Administration. This all meant that Ashford's remained the lowest Council Tax in Kent and one of the lowest in the country. The Council's services, far from being adversely affected, had actually improved. Recycling had been a huge success and the introduction of T-CAT had helped improve the town centre and the wider area. This had been because of all Members working together. The results of an independent survey showed that Ashford was the best location for business in Kent and the Council had a positive attitude towards business itself. Being named the 38th best place in the UK to live was very pleasing and it echoed what residents had already told the Council in the independent public survey, carried out at the request of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, that the Borough was a desirable place to live. Ashford had actually been named in the top 50 places to live list in four of the last five years. He considered it was therefore no surprise that the Borough was attracting large scale investment with more in the economic growth pipeline. The Leader said that the value of tourism in the Borough should never be underestimated. It currently provided in excess of 3600 jobs and contributed millions of pounds to Kent's economy. This had been reinforced by Ashford being given the opportunity to host the United Kingdom Annual Tourism Symposium in June. On top of all this Eurostar had announced that services would be expanded from May to include daily trains to Marseille and Lyon. This meant that France's three largest cities would all be within easy reach by rail, thus re-enforcing the view that Ashford was the UK's international town.

The Leader said that he also wished to announce that after a great deal of commercially sensitive work the Council was now in a position, subject to Council approval, to become actively involved in the town centre revitalisation to ensure that positive things actually happened and that empty shops were filled once again. He said he hoped all would agree that these were important times for the Borough and everyone should 'keep their eye on the ball' and not become too distracted during the next 14 important working days leading up to the elections on the 7th of May. He concluded by wishing everyone well for the future.

(c) The Deputy Leader

The Deputy Leader, Councillor Claughton, gave a light hearted address as his final statement as a Member of the Council. He said in the immortal words of Monty Python – ‘now for something completely different!’

Councillor Claughton said that if a week was a long time in politics, as a famous pipe smoking PM had previously said, then 22 years in Local Government seemed to have gone faster than it had taken to try and find a solution to Operation Stack – or maybe not! He said it would not be a perambulating journey down memory lane as he would like to finish while the flora was still verdant and before the fauna retreated to their respective habitats ready for winter hibernation. Yet looking round he did feel a sense of nostalgia, with recollections of debates and Members past and present and thoughts about certain Members present.

He said his first foray in to the hurly burly of Council life was in this very Council Chamber over the vexed question of something called Park & Ride. Two decades on and the Ride remained well and truly parked! However, CTRL was not built in a day and like Stuart Barton’s unbridled admiration for the Borough Council and its doings, one still lived in hopes! He said he recalled a Councillor of foreign extraction whose sole preoccupation was trying to find as many misspelt words and incorrect apostrophes in the plethora of reports that came before his watchful gaze. He served but one term. Councillor Claughton said he also remembered well one particular Full Council meeting when, for reasons that escaped him, they had got on to the subject of BSE, or as it was affectionately known Mad Cow Disease. After one particularly boring bovine had spoken, the then Leader, one Councillor Hugh Blake, a military man to his blanched belt and braces, became very irate, rose to his feet and as if on the parade ground barked “CJD is very serious and we should not be making policy on the hoof!” With that the assembled ensemble burst in to fits of uncontrollable giggles, much to the chagrin of Colonel Blake who failed to understand what had generated so much whimsy amongst the ‘silly moos’ present. Even a ribald remark from a backbencher telling him to “pull the udder one” failed to have the necessary effect as Hugh’s hue became ever more crimson. This also brought to mind another former Leader, thankfully still very much with us, Paul Clokie, who he wanted to take the opportunity to wish the very best of good health in the years to come.

Councillor Claughton said that the number of Members he had seen come and go in various overt and covert guises was far too many to count on his abacus, but what he did know, and could say without fear of contradiction, was that whilst on occasion politics had intervened and the whips had been seen cajoling Members with the nicest possible form of torture, overall, by and large and to the greatest extent, this Council had always tried to work together for the betterment of the Borough, which was, or should be, quintessentially why they were all there. He said that in looking back it would be remiss not to thank all the Officers he had rubbed shoulders, and occasionally more abrasive parts with, especially Member Services who’s service to Members remained exemplary, along with his community cohort Michelle (ma belle) and his Health & Wellbeing team Sheila, Belinda and Christina – a delight. He had also seen no less than five Chief Executives, none more astute than their present incumbent, a man not only of ability and integrity but one who possessed that most essential requisite, a sense of humour – an officer and a gentleman.

It had been frequently said that “he was going to miss all this” and Councillor Claughton said it would be churlish to say that he wouldn’t because he would, but what would he miss precisely? The involvement of course, but also the little things. The would miss the infectious laughter of Linda Stringer, the mild, gentle, almost sotto voce like tones of Harold Apps, the fragrant charm of Jill Hutchinson, the well-tailored Robert and the newly stationed Jeremy ‘Choo-Choo’ Adby. He would miss Messrs Davison and Davidson. The former reviled (sorry revered!) in the leafy fleshpots of Hamstreet and whose comments were always forthright and A1 (or should that be A1) and the latter, our very own strapping Jock Bob McDavidson, who during his long tenure seemed to have been ‘very concerned’ about pretty well everything and anything, much to his enduring credit. Then there was the splendidly coiffured Brendan Chilton, who was apparently thinking of dying his barnet auburn, as he had ambitions to be the next Red Ed, not Balls, no it was absolutely true! He would miss his fellow music and cricket loving aficionado Bernard Heyes, the man who was to Parish Councils what Eric Pickles was to hang gliding and he would miss the erudite, tall in the saddle Councillor Galpin who, by his initials alone, proved he was a real thoroughbred and one of the very few Councillors who had been on the same level as himself, height wise. He would miss the Member to his rear, perhaps he should rephrase that, the Councillor sitting behind him Jim Wedgbury, who in his retirement did not slide down poles any more, but continued to delight in constantly driving people up them! Last, but never least, he would miss the gentleman sitting on his left hand, and if he did sit on your hand you would jolly well know all about it, our Leader. Now while not as infamous as his televisual namesake, and one who preferred tub thumping to the human variety, he said that their Clarkson nevertheless remained in Top Gear, rarely applied the brakes and never missed an opportunity to talk up and promote Ashford, a quality that ensured a strong and well led Council.

Councillor Claughton concluded by saying it had been an honour and a privilege to serve the people of this Borough. He had not always got it right, had on occasion been caught by the Neil Shorter and Tracey Kerlys, and had certainly learnt a good deal about human nature. However now, as he rung down his own particular curtain and rode off into the Ashfordian sunset he hoped, if nothing else, like Sir Peter Teazle in The Rivals, he could say with all deference that “I leave me character behind me”.

(d) International House

The Portfolio Holder for Town Centre Focus & Commercial Property said that he would like to give a brief provisional update on the management and outturn of International House. He knew the matter had received a large amount of attention from Overview & Scrutiny and Audit and he had previously given an undertaking that following the first year of owning International House a report would come forward. Since completing the purchase of International House in April 2014 the Council had undertaken work to maximise the return that this asset provided. This included securing vacant possession of and completing the refurbishment of the first floor and thereby creating 5300 square foot of additional office space which would achieve circa £84,000 per annum in additional rent. Terms had already been agreed for the letting of a large part of this space. A reconfiguration of the office accommodation on the second and third floors had resulted in the creation of an additional 730 square foot of office space, creating an additional rental income of £11,000 per annum. He advised that save for the available space on the first floor, referred to above, there was currently only one void in the whole of the two office blocks (Suite 1, 3rd Floor –

totalling 474 square feet). The available space was being actively marketed with local agents. A revised property management strategy had resulted in provisional savings which reduced the budgeted expenditure by £25,000 for the next financial period – 2015/16. There had been a requirement to manage a number of voids in the opening financial period, partly as a result of the works being carried out on the first floor, but the impact of this had to a large part been mitigated by pro-active treasury management. The outturn for the coming financial period (2015/16) was in line with the February 2014 forecast of £870,000 (a net income of circa 11% - a return on the cost of International House not the entire Commercial Quarter site now being developed). He concluded by advising that a report would be going to the first Cabinet meeting of the new administration in June which would show the actual outturn for the first year of full ownership. This was an interim brief as promised.

425 Cabinet – 12th March 2015

The report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, which had been tabled, clarified the procedure for consideration of the Cabinet minutes.

Councillor Bartlett referred to Minute No. 401 – Proposed Purchase of a Long Leasehold Interest of Store 1 (Occupied by Wilko Retail Ltd), Park Mall, and said that he would like to ask questions on this report that would require the meeting to go into exempt session as they referred to the confidential appendix to the report. He therefore asked if this minute could be deferred to the exempt session along with Minute No. 406 – Park Mall Regeneration Proposals which had already been proposed. This was agreed by the mover and seconder of the minutes.

Resolved:

- That (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 12th March 2015 be received and noted with the exception of Minute Nos. 397, 398, 401 and 406.**
- (ii) Minute Nos. 397 and 398 be approved and adopted.**
- (iii) Minute Nos. 401 and 406 be deferred and considered later in the meeting.**

426 Audit Committee – 3rd March 2015

Whilst moving the Minutes, Councillor Clokie said he would like to say publicly how much he had enjoyed being on the Council over the last 17 years and how much he appreciated the support he had received from both Officers and colleague Members. He said he wanted to take the opportunity to say that now rather than regret not having the opportunity to say it in the future.

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 3rd March 2015 be approved and adopted.

427 Standards Committee – 19th March 2015

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Committee held on the 19th March 2015 be received and noted.

428 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

That pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items as it is likely that in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure of exempt information hereinafter specified by reference to the appropriate paragraph of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, where in the circumstances the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Minute No.	Agenda Item Heading	Relevant Paragraph of Schedule 12A
430 and 433	Proposed Purchase of a Long Leasehold Interest of Store 1 (Occupied by Wilko Retail Ltd), Park Mall	3
431 and 433	Park Mall Regeneration Proposals	3

429 Committee of the Whole Council

The Leader of the Council proposed that “General Procedure Rule 12 (r) be applied and the meeting become a Committee of the Council”.

This was seconded, put to the vote and carried.

Resolved:

That the meeting become a Committee of the Council in accordance with General Procedure Rule 12 (r).

430 Proposed Purchase of a Long Leasehold Interest of Store 1 (Occupied by Wilko Retail Ltd), Park Mall

This report had previously been considered at the Cabinet on 12th March 2015, Minute No. 401/3/15 refers, and the Cabinet had made four recommendations to Council. Approval of these recommendations had been deferred to the closed part of this meeting to allow for Members to ask questions on the confidential appendix.

Recommended:

That the recommendations detailed in Minute No. 401/3/15 of the Cabinet on 12th March 2015 be approved and adopted.

431 Park Mall Regeneration Proposals

This report had previously been considered at the Cabinet on 12th March 2015, Minute No. 406/3/15 refers. A series of questions had been tabled by a Member and a full list of those questions and the answers had been attached to the exempt report on the agenda for this meeting. An additional paper updating on the regeneration proposals and the due diligence process had also been tabled at the meeting for Members attention. This tabled paper also included an amendment to recommendation (i). The Mayor gave Members a few minutes to read that paper.

Recommended:

That the recommendations detailed in Minute No. 406/3/15 of the Cabinet on 12th March 2015 be approved and adopted, subject to recommendation (i) being amended as set out in the exempt tabled paper.

432 Meeting of the Council

The Leader of the Council moved that "General Procedure Rule 12 (s) be applied and the Meeting of the Council be resumed".

This was seconded, put to the vote and carried.

Resolved:

That the meeting of the Council be now resumed.

433 Minutes of the Committee of the Whole Council

The Leader of the Council proposed that the recommendations of the Committee of the Whole Council as contained in Minute Nos. 430 and 431 be approved and adopted.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 15.4 Councillor Wedgbury asked that recorded votes be taken on the recommendations of the Committee of the Council.

This was supported by at least six other Members (i.e. a total of at least seven) who showed their support by standing.

A recorded vote was then taken on Minute No. 430 and the Members voted as follows: -

For: Councillors Apps, Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Bell, Bennett, Mrs Blanford, Britcher, Burgess, Chilton, Clark, Clarkson, Claughton, Clokie, Davey, Davidson, Mrs Dyer, Feacey, Galpin, Heyes, Hicks, Hodgkinson, Howard, Mrs Hutchinson, Link, Miss Martin, Mrs Martin, Michael, Mortimer, Ovenden, Robey, Shorter, Taylor, Wedgbury.

Votes For 33

Against: Councillors Davison, Marriott, Smith.

Votes Against 3

Abstentions: None.

Abstentions 0

A recorded vote was then taken on Minute No. 431 and the Members voted as follows: -

For: Councillors Apps, Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Bell, Bennett, Mrs Blanford, Britcher, Burgess, Chilton, Clark, Clarkson, Claughton, Clokie, Davey, Davidson, Mrs Dyer, Feacey, Galpin, Heyes, Hicks, Hodgkinson, Howard, Mrs Hutchinson, Link, Miss Martin, Mrs Martin, Michael, Mortimer, Ovenden, Robey, Shorter, Taylor, Wedgbury.

Votes For 33

Against: Councillors Davison, Marriott, Smith.

Votes Against 3

Abstentions: None.

Abstentions 0

Resolved:

That the recommendations of the Committee of the Whole Council as contained in Minute Nos. 430 and 431 be approved and adopted.

(DS)

MINS:

Queries concerning these Minutes? Please contact Danny Sheppard
Telephone: 01233 330349 Email: danny.sheppard@ashford.gov.uk
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