

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 July 2015**.

Present:

Her Worshipful the Mayor, Cllr. Mrs G A Dyer (Chairman);

Cllrs. Aaby, Barrett, Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Bell, Bennett, Mrs Blanford, Bradford, Britcher, Burgess, Chilton, Clokie, Dehnel, Farrell, Feacey, Galpin, Heyes, Hicks, Hooker, Knowles, Koowaree, Link, Mrs Martin, Michael, Murphy, Ovenden, Powell, Shorter, Sims, Smith, Waters, Webb, Wedgbury.

Also Present:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Head of Cultural & Project Services, Head of Finance, Head of Environmental & Customer Services, Senior Member Services and Scrutiny Support Officer.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting the Reverend Catherine Wilson said prayers.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Apps, Buchanan, Clarkson, Mrs Heyes, Krause, Miss Martin, Pickering, White.

76 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 28th May 2015 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

77 Announcements

(a) Twinning

The Mayor said she would like to refer Members to the correspondence they had received on the subject of this year's twinning visit. A delegation from Fougères and Bad Munstereifel would be visiting in September and both the Twinning Association and her as the hosting Mayor had requested that if at all possible Members could consider taking in a guest. It was only really a three day hosting stint when taking in to account travelling and quite a few Members would have experienced hospitality in those towns so it would be lovely to reciprocate with these guests and make their stay in Ashford a happy one.

(b) Civic Service

The Mayor also said that her Civic Service had taken place that past Sunday and she wanted to thank everyone who came out to Smarden. It had been a lovely event and she also wanted to thank those people who had been so closely involved with the organisation of it as it had gone perfectly. She thanked Catherine, her Chaplain, who had conducted the service and they had received many compliments about the whole event and particularly the service.

(c) Deputy Leader

The Deputy Leader began his announcement by advising that the Leader could not be present at this evening's meeting as he was attending a meeting in London on the Future Shape of the Fire & Rescue Service and its relationship with local government - both subjects were of course close to his heart.

He said that this week had seen the very positive news that the European Commission would co-fund state-of-the-art signalling equipment at Ashford International Station. The investment would secure the continuation of the town's place on the international rail map, and protect and create thousands of local jobs. The Commission had agreed to fund half of the £4 million project, with the remaining cost to be covered by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership. Without the signalling upgrade, any train operating company wanting to compete on the cross-Channel market would find it impossible to serve Ashford with modern international trains. Now, the new signals would make sure that the town could be incorporated as international rail routes expanded. This was very good news, not only for Ashford, but the whole of the South East. The co-funding would enable the next generation of Eurostar trains to continue to stop at Ashford International Station, and make it easier for any new operator on the market to stop in Ashford, something which was important to Ashford's growing reputation as the UK's international town. Ashford was one of the most connected places in the UK, not only 38 minutes from London, but also with direct international connections to Paris, Brussels, Lille, Marseille, Lyon and Avignon, therefore the announcement was very welcome.

Ashford businesses in the urban area could now apply for government grants of up to £3,000 to get better broadband as Kent had been included in the £40 million national Broadband Connection Voucher Scheme. This was really good news for Ashford businesses and another big step in getting better broadband connections across the Borough. The vouchers were not just for those businesses struggling with connectivity, they could also be used to boost superfast broadband to even greater speeds or they could help those businesses who were struggling to access better services. This came in addition to the £50 million of funding that Broadband Delivery UK, KCC and BT had made available in Kent to support the wider community access better broadband, including businesses and residents in rural areas.

The Deputy Leader said that colleagues would be aware that the purchase of Park Mall was completed on the 24th June and the Council had already secured its first new tenant. This week Park Mall was set to welcome Emporia Fabrics & Crafts - who would be taking over the empty old Dorothy Perkins unit. Emporia was just the type of retailer they wanted to attract to the area - an ambitious independent store offering a range of unique fabrics, crafts and gifts and haberdashery. In addition they had already begun making some immediate improvements to make the area more attractive. This had included installing 30 hanging baskets, re-planting the existing planters with seasonal flowers and a herb garden was being planted. They had also introduced music playing in the centre and had painted the doorways, bins and benches to improve their appearance as well. They would soon be repairing the clock and cleaning the canopy above the shops. Of course there was much more to do, but any journey starts with those first few steps.

He advised that the last few months had also seen some other important events, with the opening of Conningbrook Lakes Country Park and the National Tourism Symposium being held in Ashford. The beautiful Conningbrook Lakes Country Park

opened at the end of May. Situated next to the Julie Rose Stadium, the family orientated park was already delighting visitors, with reports of families enjoying bike rides and lovely picnics there. This was a beautiful lakeside setting, with views to the North Downs and access to a network of country trails. It really was a fantastic facility for visitors to explore and enjoy. The birds and wildlife there showed that the lakes provided such a rich mixture of habitats. This was now another stunning attraction for Ashford – a real jewel in the crown. Right now the public were able to walk freely around the park, or join one of the clubs to participate in the water-based activities that included sailing and canoeing on the main lake, which covered some 35 acres. The opening of the park illustrated the Council's commitment to tourism, which was significant to the Borough. Tourism was worth £270 million to the local economy, with nearly 4.2 million visitors coming to the Borough each year, supporting Ashford's 5,296 tourism-related jobs. They were therefore delighted to host the National Tourism Symposium at Eastwell Manor in early June, organised by Visit Kent and the National Tourism Society. It enabled Ashford to showcase its diverse leisure and business tourism offer. The Deputy Leader further advised that at the symposium Ashford was able to announce, on a subject close to his heart, the new Wine Trail developed with Chapel Down Winery. The trail took in the Borough's award winning vineyards at Chapel Down, Biddenden, Gusbourne Estate and the Old Dairy Brewery, in addition to a few smaller, but equally as important high-end wine producers. This was another example of the Council working with the Borough's businesses to deliver meaningful projects that connected residents and visitors to the Borough. Considering that Cardiff hosted the national symposium in 2013, Liverpool in 2014 and that next year's event would be held in Birmingham, it was clear that Ashford continued to punch well above its weight.

Finally, the Deputy Leader advised that another important event would take place in the Borough at the end of July as the Create Festival celebrated its 20th year. In recent years, the festival had grown significantly, becoming one of the largest free music festivals in the South East, by hosting four live music stages of local and headline acts, with a range of other entertainment filling one big day in Victoria Park on Sunday 26th July. He hoped residents enjoyed what would be a fantastic family festival of fun and local music.

78 Cabinet – 11th June and 9th July 2015

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

(a) Cabinet – 11th June 2015

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 11th June 2015 be received and noted.

(b) Cabinet 9th July 2015

Resolved:

That subject to the expiry of the period by which decisions arising from the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 9th July 2015 may be called in, i.e. 22nd July 2015: -

(i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 9th July 2015 be received and noted with the exception of Minute No. 70.

(ii) Minute No. 70 be approved and adopted.

79 Appeals Committee – 4th June 2015

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Appeals Committee held on the 4th June 2015 be received and noted.

80 Audit Committee – 30th June 2015

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 30th June 2015 be received and noted.

81 Selection & Constitutional Review Committee – 9th July 2015

The Mayor referred to the tabled paper which included the names of the Members to be appointed to the Investigation and Disciplinary Committee.

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Selection & Constitutional Review Committee held on the 9th July 2015 be approved and adopted, subject to noting the names of those Members to be appointed to the Investigation and Disciplinary Committee.

82 Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report 2014/15

Resolved:

That the Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report 2014/15 be received and noted.

83 Audit Committee Annual Report 2014/15

Resolved:

That the Audit Committee Annual Report 2014/15 be received and noted.

(DS)

MINS: