

Ashford Borough Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **21st July 2016**.

Present:

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

Cllrs. Aaby, Apps, Barrett, Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Bell, Bennett, Bradford, Buchanan, Burgess, Clarkson, Clokie, Mrs Dyer, Farrell, Feacey, Galpin, Heyes, Hicks, A Howard, W Howard, Knowles, Krause, Link, Miss Martin, Mrs Martin, Michael, Powell, Shorter, Sims, Smith, Mrs Webb, Wedgbury, White.

Also Present:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Corporate Director (Law and Governance), Director of Development, Head of Finance, Head of Corporate Property and Projects, Economic Development Manager, Senior Member Services Officer.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, The Reverend John Mackenzie said prayers.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Mrs Blanford, Chilton, Dehnel, Mrs Heyes, Ovenden, Pickering, Waters.

91 Exempt or Confidential Information

The Mayor asked whether any items should be dealt with in private because of the likely disclosure of exempt or confidential information. There were none.

92 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 19th May 2016 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

93 Announcements

(a) Leader of the Council

The Leader said he would like to take a few moments to update colleagues on a number of recent positive developments.

The headline on the front of last week's Kentish Express, 'Boom Town', was quite pleasing because, it did indicate that the Council was working hard to bring about significant change to Ashford. Despite the uncertainty nationally, which was almost inevitable in the short term following Brexit, Ashford was continuing to keep the momentum going. Whilst they remained very confident, they were of course monitoring the various market fluctuations. He was therefore particularly pleased to see an important report today by Ms Forbes, one of the Bank of England's most

senior officials. Her survey found no clear evidence of a sharp downturn, despite the severe warnings about the risk of leaving the European Union. Ms Forbes was one of the nine members of the Bank's monetary policy committee and she had indicated that the markets had "stabilised" after the initial "panic". Official Figures published yesterday showed a record number of people in work and this resulted in sterling being pushed up almost 1% against the Dollar and 0.7% up against the Euro. The FTSE 100 was up to its highest since last August. In the circumstances Ms Forbes was warning colleagues against voting to reduce interest rates at their next meeting.

The Leader said that colleagues would see that the new state-of-the-art Further and Higher Education college campus was coming to life before their very eyes. Hadlow College planned to complete both initial phases of the Ashford College and receive the new students in September 2017. A new Ashford College within the town centre had been an aspiration for all partners for nearly 15 years. This should begin to help address one of the key challenges to economic growth and greater prosperity within the Borough by improving the relatively low skills base that they had in Ashford. With over 1,000 students and over 100 staff within easy walking distance of shops, services and restaurants in the town centre, it should have a very positive impact on local businesses by increasing turnover.

The Leader advised that exciting plans to redevelop another part of the town centre had seen a key milestone last night with the unanimous grant of planning permission for the first phase of development of the Commercial Quarter at Dover Place, which would provide new office space with retail and restaurants on the ground floor together with car parking and landscaping. Last night had also seen another planning application being granted approval for the development of an unused brownfield site for three separate uses, namely, bulk provision of concrete, the Ashford Borough Council Depot for Ground Maintenance and for 12 business units. They often heard people talking about building on such unused brownfield sites and he was therefore pleased to see only last month that approval had been given for another one - a mixed-use development on the old Powergen site along Victoria Way. The plans by U+I in partnership with Quinn Estates and Neighbour, were for 660 quality apartments, together with an interesting and much improved public realm. This regeneration project would link the town centre with Victoria Park, which was a jewel in the town's crown that had been underused and neglected in the past. This would create a new residential community very close to the International Station and would certainly inject new life into what was currently an unused and derelict site and would in turn assist in continuing the revitalisation of Ashford as a whole.

He said that just over a year ago Ashford Borough Council announced it had purchased approximately 30 retail units which made up Park Mall, with a plan to reinvigorate a rather run-down shopping centre – directly in response to calls from residents. At that time about a third of the units were empty. He was pleased to say that the Council had breathed new life into Park Mall, filling most of the vacant units and driving up footfall by around seven per cent. A recent MORI poll indicated that in the first quarter of 2016 town centre footfall in the UK had been down about 0.9%, whereas Ashford had bucked the trend and had been highlighted as being at the top of the tree by being up 1.6%. Park Mall had now become home to a quality independent-led town centre offer, occupying either business incubator spaces or other units on longer leases and licenses, thus complementing existing retailers in the High Street. As he had said in the past, Park Mall was not immune to the comings and goings of businesses on the High Street. They were still getting charity shops but they were trying to limit the numbers somewhat. Over time, retailers would

come and go, but overall Park Mall's future was looking brighter than this time last year.

Finally, the Leader advised that he had been informed the buzz was building for one of the biggest Create Music Festivals in its 21 year history, this coming Saturday – 23rd July. Regarded as one of the best free music festivals in Kent, this year's centerpiece would be a special celebration of the life and work of David Bowie with a special hit-filled performance show. Joining tribute act 'David Live' on the packed festival line-up were over 40 acts over four stages. Families and festival-goers would also get to enjoy food and crafts in the *Love Ashford* Zone, Rio Olympic themed dancers and face painters, a new park sculpture trail, a Chapel Down Boutique Bar, and inventive street performances throughout the day. The night would close with a magical pyrotechnic display around the Grade II* Hubert Fountain. The Leader hoped that the weather was kind and urged as many colleague Members as possible to attend and enjoy this special festival.

His Worshipful the Mayor said he would like to echo the sentiments of the Leader. He considered Ashford had a great future and wherever he went this year he would be certainly talking Ashford up. As Mayor he had already been to Park Mall to open a couple of new shops and had been out and about opening other new businesses around the town and said there was so much fantastic work going on.

(b) Twinning Visit

His Worshipful the Mayor said he wanted to again draw attention to the Twinning Visit to Bad Münstereifel in September. He would like as many Councillors and Officers as possible to attend with him. There was still time to contact either himself or Gillian Lines if anyone would like to go. Bad Münstereifel was a really lovely town and he wanted everyone to see it.

94 Cabinet – 9th June and 14th July 2016

The report of the Corporate Director (Law & Governance), which had been tabled, clarified the procedure for consideration of the Cabinet minutes.

(a) Cabinet – 9th June 2016

Resolved:

That (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 9th June 2016 be received and noted with the exception of Minute Nos. 20, 21, 22 and 28.

(ii) Minute Nos. 20, 21, 22 and 28 be approved and adopted.

(b) Cabinet 14th July 2016

Resolved:

That subject to the expiry of the period by which decisions arising from the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 14th July 2016 may be called in, i.e. 27th July 2016: -

- (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 14th July 2016 be received and noted with the exception of Minute Nos. 71, 74, 81, 82 and 83.
- (ii) Minute Nos. 71, 74, 81, 82 and 83 be approved and adopted.

95 Audit Committee – 16th and 30th June 2016

(a) Audit Committee – 16th June 2016

Resolved:

- That
- (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 16th June 2016 be received and noted with the exception of Minute No. 45 (ii)
 - (ii) Minute No. 45 (ii) be approved and adopted.

(b) Audit Committee – 30th June 2016

Resolved

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 30th June 2016 be received and noted.

96 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2015/16

Resolved:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2015/16 be received and noted.

97 Audit Committee Annual Report 2015/16

Resolved:

That the Audit Committee Annual Report 2015/16 be received and noted.

(DS)

MINS: