

Ashford Borough Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **14th December 2017**.

Present:

His Worshipful the Mayor, Cllr. W R Michael (Chairman);

Cllrs. Adby, Barrett, Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Bell, Bennett, Mrs Blanford, Buchanan, Clarkson, Clokie, Farrell, Feacey, Heyes, W Howard, Howard-Smith, Koowaree, Krause, Link, Macpherson, Murphy, Ovenden, Pickering, Shorter, Smith, Suddards, Waters, Mrs Webb, Wedgbury, White.

Also Present:

Chief Executive, Director of Law and Governance, Director of Finance and Economy, Director of Place and Space, Head of Legal and Democracy, Head of Planning and Development, Policy Manager, Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development), Senior Member Services Officer.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Bradford, Burgess, Chilton, Dehnel, Mrs Dyer, Galpin, Mrs Heyes, Hicks, Knowles, Miss Martin, Mrs Martin, Sims.

295 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. The Director of Law and Governance advised that there were none.

296 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Bartlett	Made 'Voluntary Announcements' as he lived near to Junction 10a of the M20 and site S16 – Waterbrook as well as being a shareholder at the Farriers Arms, Mersham which adjoined site S35 – Mersham Village Hall.	299(b)
Clarkson	Declared an Other Significant Interest as a Director of A Better Choice for Property Limited and would leave the meeting for the debate and vote on Minute 277 of the Cabinet of 7 th December 2017.	299(b)
Feacey	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as a Trustee of Repton Connect.	299(a)

297 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 19th October 2017 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

298 Announcements

(a) The Mayor

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting. He advised that he and the Deputy Mayor had fulfilled a considerable number of engagements since the last Council Meeting. Remembrance Sunday and the Battle of Cambrai commemoration had made an indelible mark upon him and those that attended. The Borough did itself proud at those events and he wished to thank Councillor Dehnel for his exceptional organisation that took place.

He said that young people were often maligned because of a few incidents that occurred, and one evening he had walked the alleys and backstreets of Stanhope, Willesborough, and the Town to engage young people. He was pleased to find that Ashford was doing well and that there were some great young people out there. He came across a group of 20 people who were actually playing Pokémon Go - enjoying the great outdoors and harmlessly socialising. For them, sitting at home and watching television was not the answer and they wanted inexpensive and free things to do in Ashford with their evenings. The future lay with the current young generation and he considered that youth development was a must if the future was to be bright. He advised that Ashford Cadet Forces played a very important part by providing young people from 8 to 18 years with training in leadership, team building, and life skills in general. It was all voluntary and he had been impressed by their commitment and dedication. He considered it would be of immense social and community value to encourage more children to become Cadets but, as they got little or no direct funding, help was needed and maybe consideration could be given for use of Section 106 monies to create youth programmes such as Cadet Forces. It was just as important these days to provide young people with something to do in the evenings as it was to provide them with play parks and sports pitches.

Previously he had mentioned how lucky Ashford was to have so many ordinary people doing voluntary work, because without them things would come to a grinding halt. Coppicing a woodland with volunteers recently, he had met people who had been doing this sort of work twice a week for many years. Batchelor Foods and its Cup A Soup brand was an Ashford icon, and as Premier Foods they had done something remarkable recently to mark their 60th anniversary. Involving the next generation, they had planted 60 trees across schools and he had got to see at first hand the excitement this generated. The future was with the next generation and embracing them in things like this would deliver better citizens and parents of tomorrow. There were many organisations and individuals doing exceptional things within the Borough and acknowledging them was what the Mayors Award was all about. He said that Members must know of those in their Wards deserving recognition and he looked forward to being provided with their details.

The Mayor advised that as they came to the end of the year, 2017 had been a remarkable year for Ashford, seeing much of the Town regenerated or destined to be

regenerated through firm plans in place. Members could be proud of the achievements and the progress the Council had made, and, without taking anything away from Members, he wanted to acknowledge the work of Officers to help place Ashford as one of the most forward-thinking Councils in the country. Their vision, imagination, dedication, and wise counsel was fundamental to placing Ashford in an exalted position among Local Authorities and attracting investors. On behalf of himself and Members, he asked the Chief Executive to thank Officers and let them know they were truly valued.

Today's Ashford had more than its fair share of entrepreneurs with 90% of businesses having ten employees or less. When attending the Business Awards recently, he had met a few that had taken the bold step of starting a business and doing so in Ashford. He had told delegates that they demonstrated vision, courage, and ambition to drive their businesses and, as a consequence, Ashford. He informed them that Ashford was seeing a phenomenal level of growth and considerable inward investment and that it was them that were changing conversations. No longer was the talk about who Ashford was, but what they could be. Whilst Ashford welcomed large businesses it was the indigenous small and medium sized enterprises that were the key to Ashford's success and that gave Ashford its character and sustained and drove place and people centred development. He had ended by saying to all businesses that together with Ashford, they could achieve. The Mayor said that recently he had received the Duke of Kent to the Borough and as part of his visit he had presented Premier Coatings Limited with the Queen's Award to Industry for their outstanding overseas sales over the past three years. They also received the Mayor's Award which thrilled them (although perhaps slightly less than the Queen's Award!)

The Mayor said that a manufacturer had recently remarked to him that they were unable to fill temporary positions because Ashford had more or less full employment. This was pleasing to hear, but he knew that there were people out there off the radar with low esteem and low expectations and out of work. He had met with youth who were unable to cope academically and were no longer attending education. In bygone years these people could have got an apprenticeship working alongside skilled craftsmen, but not so today without qualifications. He said that all young people were thirsty for work which once obtained would inspire and motivate them to be the best they possibly could be since it brought self-worth and self-esteem. The new College campus was exceptional news for the youth of Ashford, but people were telling him that they needed to give hope to those less academically able.

2018 would deliver significant milestones but these would not be without challenges. The most notable challenge would be the Adoption of the new Local Plan. Meeting many communities affected by proposals, he was aware of widespread consternation and the need for a very understanding ear. Concerns had also been aired to him by businesses. Everyone applauded the Town Centre regeneration, but deep reservations existed about infrastructure and, in particular, the ability of key road arteries to cope. Residents had asked that development should focus considerably on brownfield sites, where infrastructure existed, rather than greenfield. The Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group, along with Officers had struggled to deliver a plan against a backdrop of evolving Government Policies and lack of clarity, and at times it had been tantamount to "nailing jelly to a wall". Just when it was thought the plan was done, Government had introduced rework to protract the process. Many residents had told him the past excesses of bankers had been replaced by the excesses of unscrupulous developers and landowners.

Finally, the Mayor said he would like to draw Members' attention to his charity events next year. On 27th January there would be a Black and White Masquerade Ball featuring the very popular Natalie Ward; on 18th March there would be a Lunch Time Opera with Jo Appleby, the soprano who sang at the last night of the Proms; and on the 5th May the ever-popular Rat Pack and Swing with Dean Gee. All events would be held at the London Beach Hotel in Tenterden and would include either dinner or lunch. The last Curry night in November had been a sell out so another was planned for February and would be offered to Members and Officers first before opening to others. Members' support for these events would be immensely appreciated by his charities, particularly those young people facing personal difficulties and those at the Wyvern School who desperately wanted another bus so more of them could get out and enjoy the things we all took for granted. He wanted to wish everyone an enjoyable and relaxing Christmas and hoped that the New Year held many good things personally and for Ashford and all its residents. He welcomed all present to join him in the Committee Rooms after the meeting for some festive cheer.

(b) Leader of the Council

The Leader said that in the final Full Council meeting of 2017 he would like to reflect on the many positive developments and milestones they had seen this year, and mention a few highlights they could look forward to in 2018 as Ashford's ongoing transformation continued.

2017 had certainly been a year of major achievements, with developments physically starting on site for a number of projects across the Borough. They had seen construction start on the Commercial Quarter and Elwick Place as well as the multi-million-pound state-of-the-art Ashford College Campus opening its doors to students in September. These developments were part of the changing face of the Town Centre. Ashford was witnessing inward investment on an unprecedented level – £668m across the Borough, of which £520m was within the Town Centre itself. This was certainly having a positive effect on Ashford's reputation. Research from inward investment agency Locate in Kent showed that the Town was voted the most improved area in the County for business growth. Excellent rail and road links in close proximity to London and Europe, available sites, quality of life and a supportive local Council were all listed as positives. More than three in five (62%) had stated that Ashford had improved as a business location over the past five years. This again made Ashford the number one business location in Kent.

As well as the major building projects that were underway, the Leader said that they had to have close regard to the supporting infrastructure. This year had seen the pinch point at the Willesborough Road by the Julie Rose Stadium at Conningbrook greatly improved by work from KCC Highways. During the last week, the Secretary of State had given the go ahead to the construction of Junction 10A of the M20, which was a real milestone in itself with work starting next year, however it had also brought forward an additional highway benefit, with Highways England now agreeing to resolve the long standing difficulty at Barrey Road. They had announced that they would be putting in signalling at Barrey Road with the junction of the A2070. This had been a major area of contention and would be a great benefit for access to the businesses on that Industrial Estate. He advised that at least three years ago he had written to KCC Highways seeking the introduction of Box Junctions to improve the flow at the Drovers Roundabout. The suggestion had received a favourable response but nothing had actually been done. He was therefore sure that Members

would be pleased to learn that proposals to improve traffic flows at the Drivers Roundabout were now being actively considered. Recently, a list of some 30 temporary road closures in Ashford up to the end of January 2018 had been published and whilst at first glance one could think about the disruption, he considered it was important to remember that the disruption would be short lived, and afterwards the Borough would have a significant number of its roads re-surfaced and/or improved, and that must be good news for everyone.

The Leader advised that the Borough's profile as a tourist destination was also growing and the Council had been working hard to promote the Borough as a place to live, work, play and invest. Ashford's thriving visitor economy and the value of tourism in the Borough could not be underestimated. Ashford's tourism industry accounted for thousands of jobs and contributed significantly to Kent's economy with the latest figures showing that there had been a 6% increase in spend on attractions in the Borough. The latest figures published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs also showed Ashford was leading the way as the best recycling Local Authority in Kent for a third consecutive year. Ashford's recycling rate had risen to 55% which was a further rise of 2% since last year. He said that when he had become Leader, Ashford Borough Council had been referred to as 'England's Worst Recycler', but they now sat as the 35th best recycling Local Authority in the entire country. Ashford's success could be attributed to a number of factors including: - excellent engagement with its residents; strong contractual management thanks to dedicated staff with an excellent understanding of the contract; a sound communications plan; membership of the Kent Resource Partnership (KRP); and working with Biffa who were an engaged contractor. In other good news, the latest figures published in KRP's Annual Report showed that Kent's landfill waste was less than 3% for 2016/17 – exceeding the Government target of 10%. More specifically, the report highlighted that less than 2% of waste generated in Ashford was sent to landfill and this was an excellent statistic the Borough should be very proud of. The remaining 98% of Ashford's waste was either recycled, composted, or used to generate electricity.

This year had also seen the ten year anniversary of the arrival of high speed rail services and the 175th Birthday of Ashford's, now, International Station. Over the past 175 years, the Station had played a crucial role in connecting communities in Kent and the South East. Ashford had a long and proud relationship with the railway, which had played an important role in the Borough's history and been a catalyst in its ongoing growth and development. Today, Ashford International provided an even greater link, with the Station used by over 3.6 million passengers each year. The introduction of High Speed One to London in 38 minutes, and the direct rail routes to mainland Europe made Ashford International a vital rail hub. Ashford's economic success continued to grow and he believed that this was due in a very large part to Ashford International Station.

Looking ahead to 2018, the Leader said there was much to be excited about. The Cinema complex would open towards the end of the year; the first building on the Commercial Quarter would be occupied; the Designer Outlet Centre would be well underway; the first homes in Chilmington Green would be built; and the new Town Centre Brewery development would be emerging and changing the Ashford landscape. The new signalling would be in place at the Station, Ashford would be receiving the new rolling stock early in the New Year and the platforms were already being widened to accommodate the new trains. They would also see the launch of *Snowdogs Discover Ashford* – a major cultural event which would be a real attraction

for those in Ashford and those wishing to re-discover what Ashford had to offer in the lead up to Christmas next year. With 2018 being so significant - 100 years on from the end of the First World War, he was sure there would be a number of commemorative events to remember the past and the sacrifice made, and indeed other less sombre events that would enrich and improve the lives of Ashford's community in the forthcoming year.

Finally, the Leader said he would like to thank colleagues and Officers for their efforts this year, and on behalf of the Council he wanted to wish colleagues, residents and businesses a Merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous New Year.

The Mayor responded that whilst all Councillors had been involved, he particularly wanted to congratulate the Leadership and Cabinet for all they had done this year.

299 Cabinet – 9th November and 7th December 2017

The report of the Director of Law and Governance, which had been tabled, clarified the procedure for consideration of the Cabinet minutes.

(a) Cabinet – 9th November 2017

Resolved:

That (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 9th November 2017 be received and noted with the exception of Minute No. 215.

(ii) Minute No. 215 be approved and adopted.

(b) Cabinet – 7th December 2017

The Mayor directed Members attention to the tabled paper which included comments from Cllr Miss Martin on Minute No. 262 – Submission Version of the Ashford Borough Local Plan 2030.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3 Mr Tomkins, Chairman of Brook Parish Council spoke on Minute No. 262 – Submission Version of the Ashford Borough Local Plan 2030. He said that as far as Brook was concerned this process had started way back in 2014 when the Parish Council had filled in a SS12 form against a plan to build houses in Brook. The plan had been rejected for a variety of reasons, mainly because the housing was seen to be unsustainable, but that same plan now unfortunately seemed to have come back whilst nothing had changed in the village. They still had no amenities and no buses so people in the village were struggling to understand why the plan was seen to be sustainable this time. This was the third time he had addressed Members in this Chamber and he did not know what more he could say. As far as he was concerned the plan for Brook was unsustainable and should not be in the Local Plan. Members had previously stated that they would not build in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which Brook was. Several Councillors had said that villages needed to expand or they would die, but that was not true for Brook, it was thriving. For these reasons, he urged Members to think again about including Brook in Policy HOU3A, which was totally unsound.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3 Mrs Harman, a Local Resident spoke on Minute No. 262 – Submission Version of the Ashford Borough Local Plan 2030. She said that she had lived in Aldington for 11 years and had attended the Cabinet meeting on 7th December. She wanted to comment on the statement made by the Leader of the Council at that meeting that the proposed development for Aldington in the Local Plan 2030 was “only 30 dwellings” and the comment of another Member at the same meeting that “villages had to grow”. She wanted to point out that the proposed development for Aldington in the previous Local Plan was 40 dwellings, but actually turned out to be 186 homes built, currently being built or to be built in the next few months. She objected to villagers being branded as ‘nimbys’ when reacting to planning applications. She believed that the current system encouraged reaction because each application was presented individually and without the context of previous building. This meant that the number of houses spoken about was small, giving the impression of “nimbyism” when in fact the reaction was to the slow continuous erosion of village life, loss of green fields and increasing demand on services created by cumulative development. She thought the Council should talk about the whole number of dwellings created in a village during a plan period, not the individual developments and suggested that the 30 dwellings proposed for Aldington in the Local Plan 2030 period was a highly inaccurate description of what would happen in reality. The planning system itself encouraged windfall application after windfall application which, even if rejected, seemed to get through on appeal. She thought that the public consultation process was inefficient and left villagers feeling that their opinions did not count as “they were just being nimbys”. Mrs Harman understood the Council needed a Local Plan and more housing, however she thought Members should give more weight to the feeling of their voters – the current residents, as their quality of life was being eroded. Aldington had experienced ten years of continuous development, ten years of small groups of new houses appearing and the village welcoming their residents and ten years of everyone avoiding potholes created by HGVs and meeting them head-on on blind bends on sharp country lanes whilst out on the school run or driving to work. Villages could grow by other means than building – this included investment, improvement of existing properties, enabling of home industry and encouraging rural innovation. Whilst the Local Plan did consider some very good policy descriptions, she considered it also contained a lot of extremely vague language that would not stop opportunistic developers and landowners arguing their cases. She said that if she was a millionaire she would purchase all of the fields around Aldington just to protect them, but unfortunately she was not, so she wanted to ask the Councillors whose side they were on?

The Ward Member for Weald East said he wanted to speak particularly on Policy ENV5 – Protecting Rural Features. He wanted to remind Members what had been achieved in the process in the lead up to the announcement of M20 Junction 10a on the 1st December. The Inspector’s decision referred to the need to protect Mersham Conservation Area by way of conditions. He found it a strange omission from the Local Plan that the area between Stour Park and Mersham Conservation Area was not afforded specific protection, but he knew that residents and Councillors would have the opportunity to raise their concerns, including this one, at the Public Examination. This was vital as it would set the development of the Borough until 2030. The Junction 10a planning application had been highly transparent and the hearings had been open and discursive, but Members and residents would need help to be able to make a real difference to the Local Plan. Mersham had secured positive views from Highways England to prevent rat-running through the village, protection for the Conservation Area and in Sevington, after 20 years, traffic lights at

Barrey Road. It was therefore impossible to over-emphasise the importance of public involvement in contributing to decisions. The Mayor had previously spoken of the problem of unscrupulous developments and he said he did echo that and would also like to draw colleagues attention to the Policy at page 235 of the Plan – HOU 11 – Houses in Multiple Occupation, where Paragraph 5.90 set out the problems that these could cause in terms of Anti-Social Behaviour, noise and nuisance, but that the restriction was limited to certain listed areas. He hoped this could be extended to the whole of the Town Centre. In closing though, his request was for help to make it as easy and straight forward as possible for both the public and Councillors to contribute towards the Public Examination. He asked the Mayor to ensure that the Planning Department issued clear guidelines as to how the public could be involved. The Mayor responded that he would certainly ask the Planning Department to do that.

The Deputy Leader said that he wanted to address the two public speakers. He said that the Council certainly did not brand anyone as a 'nimby' and as Ward Member for Biddenden, a very rural village, he understood the concerns of those who loved their villages, wanted to protect them and were nervous of any change. He advised that the situation at the moment nationally was that there was a huge need for housing and a push to provide them. That was putting enormous pressure on to Councils and recent changes to the planning rules meant that rural areas in particular needed to supply land for housing. If this Local Plan did not do that then the Council would be laying themselves open to unscrupulous developers who could come in and put in planning applications which, whilst they may turn down as a Planning Committee, would likely be approved on appeal. Other villages, other than Aldington and Brook, were taking housing and having to defend speculative applications, so whilst the question had been asked "whose side are you on?", the answer was very much on the side of villagers and the rural areas. He considered this Local Plan was necessary to protect the whole of the Borough, and the rural areas in particular, against unscrupulous developers and if they did not get it through, and quickly, those developers would be putting in applications wherever they wanted and obtaining large parcels of land in the rural areas for development on appeal. It was all about defending the villages.

In response to the points made, the Leader said that he echoed the comments of the Deputy Leader. The Council could not, by law, refuse to consider any planning application put before it, whether that was a windfall site or a large development. Of all the villages in the Borough, his own village Charing had taken more than any other including the town of Tenterden. Charing was currently facing an appeal for 286 homes which the Planning Committee had already turned down. He had personally never branded anyone a 'nimby' in their approach and very much valued the villages. The Cabinet had insisted they utilise all available brownfield sites in the urban area to ease the burden on the villages and dwellings were currently being generated all over the Town. He said that the planning process was set out in law and if the Council did not have a plan then they would be in trouble, with developers coming in with all sorts of schemes in areas they did not want them and the Council would have very little recourse to say no. That was why the Plan was so important. It was the result of over four years work, with two public consultations. He understood the views people had expressed, but things had changed in terms of Governments and demand for housing and this Council had to go along with the laws of this country, be sound in its judgements and achieve the best results possible for the people of the Borough. He wanted to reassure those present that the Council was not turning its back on the villages, they were trying to make the best of a very

difficult situation. He encouraged all of those who had contributed to the consultation thus far to take the opportunity to do so again before the Inspector.

The Minutes were cleared with the exception of Minute No. 277 and before the vote was taken on that item the Leader and the Chief Executive left the Council Chamber.

Resolved:

That subject to the expiry of the period by which decisions arising from the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 7th December 2017 may be called in, i.e. 20th December 2017: -

- (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 7th December 2017 be received and noted with the exception of Minute Nos. 262, 264, 265, 270 and 277.**
- (ii) Minute Nos. 264, 265 and 270 be approved and adopted.**
- (iii) the recommendations in Minute No. 262 - Submission Version of the Ashford Borough Local Plan 2030, be approved and adopted**
- (iv) Minute No. 277 be approved and adopted.**

300 Audit Committee – 5th December 2017

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 5th December 2017 be received and noted.

(DS)

MINS: