

Ashford Borough Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **19th April 2018**.

Present:

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

Cllrs. Barrett, Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Bell, Bennett, Mrs Blanford, Bradford, Buchanan, Burgess, Chilton, Clarkson, Clokie, Farrell, Feacey, Galpin, Heyes, Mrs Heyes, Hicks, W Howard, Howard-Smith, Koowaree, Krause, Link, Macpherson, Miss Martin, Mrs Martin, Ovenden, Pickering, Shorter, Sims, Suddards, 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, Senior Member Services Officer.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting Members remained standing in respect of the late Deryck Garth Weatherall who was the Member for the Ashford Twelve Acres Ward between 1976 and 1999, Mayor in 1987/1988 and Leader of the Council from 1995 to 1999. The Reverend John Mackenzie then said prayers.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Adby, Dehnel, Murphy, Smith, Waters.

417 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.

418 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Clarkson	Made a Declaration that he was a Director of A Better Choice for Property Limited.	421(b)

419 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 22nd February 2018 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

420 Announcements

(a) The Mayor

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting. He advised that the numerous rewarding and inspiring engagements over the past weeks had given him the privilege to meet many wonderful people who were doing incredible things for both the community and humanity. This had provided him with an insight in to Ashford's communities and their challenges. He and the Mayoress had also attended Civic functions, given support to local Mayors, delivered a number of speeches and received many thanks for the inspiration they gave. They had endeavoured to show Ashford in the best possible light.

He said the winter months had brought involvement with looking after the homeless and he was pleased to report that his call to house everyone when the extreme cold weather came in was magnificently answered by Ashford Borough Council Officers and Porchlight. The outcome was a shining example of what focussed partnership could achieve in a couple of hours. On behalf of the homeless he thanked everyone involved. He said that Members would be pleased to know that he knew, from talking with Mayors from Kent and the Boroughs surrounding London, that Ashford was probably the only town to achieve full housing for the homeless during the cold weather. He said he was passionate about doing everything possible to get the homeless back on their feet as quickly as possible, so he was looking at what they had told him they needed. Homeless people did not want handouts, but work and having to move around from church to church for night shelter and being out on the streets during the day, offered them little hope of being able to achieve this because of a lack of cleaning facilities and a postal address. He hoped something could be achieved before the winter of 2018 and he was passionate about doing all he could to realise this.

Today saw many young people struggle at school because education was highly focussed towards academia, with a consequence that some dropped out of school or achieved little. Apprenticeships were a passion of his because they had always offered the less able work without paper qualifications. Training was through working alongside skilled craftsmen and paper qualifications could be obtained downstream if desired. He considered that a stigma was still attached to apprenticeships and this was completely wrong. When opening a Trades Apprenticeships Centre recently he had told Apprentices to hold their heads high because what they were doing for four years was on a par with a university degree, if not higher, because of the practical, on-the-job experience they gained throughout the apprenticeship and the security of a job. A young girl had told him that two and a half years in to her electrical apprenticeship, the self-worth and self-esteem it had given her was invaluable and it had allowed her to help her Dad with the rent and afford a small car. With an internationally recognised certificate at the end of four years, she could go on to earn more money than some graduates. The present way of funding higher education in schools could lead them to not acting in the best interests of young people. Six months in to higher education this particular girl had realised that it was not for her and had fortunately come across her present apprenticeship scheme and the world was now her oyster! He was an ambassador for apprenticeship schemes and the organisation he had met had asked him to come back and help. He was therefore currently looking at the best way to leverage the hidden talent Ashford had through this apprenticeship provider which already had some 6500 apprentices under work based training through a network of 3000 businesses. If Ashford was to attract

businesses it would be necessary to demonstrate that it had the programmes to deliver the skilled workforce.

The Mayor said that given his passion for young people he never refused any of the many invitations received. On a recent visit to a farm who educated young people in to animal husbandry, irrespective of their personal circumstances, he was pleased to witness first-hand the difference working with animals made, not only to their quality of life, but also their learning and he was impressed with the skill they demonstrated. Animals had such a therapeutic effect on people with health issues and it was easy to see why people came alive and into their own. A young girl with Downs Syndrome had completely captured his thoughts as she had won two rosettes for her sheep at the Kent Show and this had revealed to him the incredible opportunities available to those with health difficulties through animal husbandry. All of the young people with special needs that he had met had blossomed through working with animals, and this would not necessarily had been the case with other vocations. He thought would it not be wonderful for these people to take up a career in livestock farming because it would lead to them becoming self-sustaining. When he thought about how architectural land was continually being gobbled up for development he asked why some of this could not be given out as small farm holdings in a similar way to the thinking behind affordable housing. A number of today's farmers were very fortunate in that they had come by their land through inheritance or purchased it at a time when land prices were affordable. When he had raised these thoughts with a senior person within Kent Young Farmers, he was taken aback when he was asked who would compensate her for the difference in price between agricultural and development land. He considered that current Government policy to open up farmland for housing did nothing for young people wishing to branch out in to farming and would result in a lost opportunity for farming for current and future generations of young people. He believed the country needed to become self-sufficient in terms of food production, and with Brexit on the horizon this became an even more urgent requirement.

Showing a genuine interest in a young person completely changed their mood, so the more everyone did this, the better the outcome would be. This was most clearly demonstrated when he was asked by children at Stanhope to prepare, cook and eat a meal with them. While the food was cooking they played football, hop-scotch and many other games. The day went without incident and the young people left with a positive attitude and wonderful memories. He was sure that the day was reflected in their classrooms through positive behaviour.

The Mayor said that he had joined Ashford United Football Club recently for their fun day and big game against Faversham Town, and this had been a refreshing experience. There were plenty of young children present and it was great to see the club doing so much for the Borough's young people. He considered that as Ashford grew the Club should be at the heart of the Borough and its communities and an important component of Ashford's growth agenda. Having been once, he had already been back for a second visit and he looked forward to attending more games in the future because AUFC brought together people of all ages for sheer joy, laughter and camaraderie, irrespective of winning or losing.

His recent Sunday Lunch Opera Carvery had been a huge success and much talked about in the circles of local Mayors and those who attended. Jo Appleby, the soprano who performed at the last night of the Proms ended the afternoon with a run of songs from the Proms and for a while everyone became a "promenader", singing

and waving Union Jacks. He considered there was nothing like stirring Proms music to bring the best of Britishness out in everyone and to remind them that this was still the greatest nation on Earth and they would survive anything, including Brexit.

Finally, the Mayor said that earlier that day four young people, along with him, had sky-dived from 15,000 feet, experiencing a 60 second, 125mph free-fall from that height. They had plummeted 10,000 feet before releasing their parachutes. This would never be forgotten and they all had something to remember that would be a life-changing experience and an inspiring event for the rest of their lives. The purpose of the sky-dive was to raise money to provide a bus for Wyvern School and he was pleased to report that, incredibly, this had been achieved. He wished to acknowledge donations from his family, friends, businesses, work colleagues, Councillors Bartlett, Mrs Webb, White, Martin and Ovenden and all others both from the UK and overseas who had donated and to thank everyone who had identified with his passion to help all young people regardless of their personal circumstances.

(b) Leader of the Council

The Leader said that as spring finally appeared to have arrived, he would like to update colleagues on a number of recent developments, and mention a few things that they all had to look forward to over the coming months. Before doing so, he wanted to congratulate the Mayor on his safe arrival back in Ashford after his rather high level adventure! He said the Mayor was certainly having a very full and exciting year.

He advised that the works on the £90 million expansion of the McArthurGlen Designer Outlet were well underway. This expansion would create 500 new jobs for the area, add 50 new premium retail brands, and would be a significant boost to Ashford's economy. The improvements to local roads and pedestrian walkways surrounding the Centre were part of a long-term project to make roads safer and improve traffic flows. There would unfortunately be some serious disruption, and he knew that the Chairman of the Joint Transportation Board, Cllr Bernard Heyes, was looking into this and was seeing what could be done to ease the disruption. The works had also caused problems for the train operators and the bus company, because the access to the station was limited from the eastern end of Newtown Road and this presented some problems for access to the International side of the station. This Council had been swift to respond to Southeastern and Stagecoach with help to provide temporary "Layovers" for the Double Decker Buses, where the taxis used to stand, until the works were completed. This did not interfere with the Council's programme of works in that area. They had also asked KCC Highways to look at what could be done to ease disruption during these roadworks. McArthurGlen had committed £1.5 million to the local community as part of the expansion, this contribution would include: - a completely re-landscaped access route from the Designer Outlet to the Ashford International Station and the town centre on Newtown Road to improve safety and access; and the introduction of a shuttle bus from the Designer Outlet to the town centre.

The Leader advised that the Elwick Place development had reached its highest point of construction as the scheme moved towards completion. A 'topping out' ceremony for the scheme, being developed by Stanhope PLC, had been held the previous Thursday and had been attended by Ashford Borough Council, and Stanhope's main contractors, Lendlease. The development was due to open this December. The two-hectare development would see a derelict brownfield site that had stood idle for

years, transformed into a vibrant new leisure quarter for the town with a six screen picturehouse cinema, hotel, new restaurants and cafes and 282 parking spaces. The development had been funded by the Council on land that it owned, and would provide a return to the residents of this Borough.

When mentioning returns on the Council's investments, the Leader said he wanted to advise colleagues that current yields on International House, Ellingham Way Industrial Estate, Stanhope Shops and Wilko Store were running from 8.8% to 12.6%. By any measure in the current economic climate, that was very good business indeed.

What was very clear was that there were a host of new physical developments occurring in and around the Town Centre of Ashford and there was a need to revisit and rebuild the masterplanning that was last undertaken over a decade ago. The Council needed a cohesive approach to the planning for its Town Centre and he had therefore decided to form the Ashford Town Centre Place Making Board. The Board would evaluate the various options being advanced and weld them into a cohesive and deliverable matrix, creating a vision for Ashford as a vibrant, exciting and unique location. The Board would oversee the short, medium and long term delivery of this major place making project – much as the Ashford Strategic Delivery Board had done with the 'Big 8' strategic projects. Feeding into the above Board would be four operational work streams with Officers and Members. These operational work-streams would work up clear plans, explaining the anticipated outcomes they were hoping to achieve and giving options where appropriate. One of these teams would be tasked to consult a wide range of people and organisations. All Members of the Authority would be invited to contribute as they moved forward. These plans would be proposed and advanced to the Ashford Town Centre Place Making Board. The Board would be made up of Lead Officers and Lead Members from each work-stream, together with the Leader as Chair and the Chief Executive, who would also have an over-seeing role in monitoring the Working Groups. There would also be Member and Officer advisers from Finance and Legal and external advice where necessary. Over the last few days the Council had been visited by a Corporate Peer Review Team of seven senior Members and Officers appointed by the Local Government Association to critically examine the Council's corporate approach, right across all functions and responsibilities. The Council had encouraged everyone to be open and honest because they welcomed constructive and helpful criticism and would welcome their report and recommendations.

The Leader advised that the Council was introducing a Borough-wide residents' magazine, called Ashford For You, on a trial basis of four issues. The first edition was being delivered directly to residents' doors next week. The 24 page, quarterly magazine would be distributed to all households in the Borough and would cover what was going on in the Borough, profiling services, people and places. They wanted to ensure the Council was communicating with all its residents and keeping them abreast of what was happening across the Borough. Whilst he knew many residents used digital methods of communication, such as the Council's website and social media channels, they do not reach every household in this way so the Council was introducing a Borough-wide magazine to complement the other ways they reached the community. It was hoped that the magazine would prove to be a success and would ensure that residents were well informed about what was happening across the Borough.

Finally, the Leader said he wanted to remind colleagues that Ashford and the City of London would be launching the Fields of Battle - Lands of Peace Photographic Exhibition on the 30th April at the Guildhall, London where it would stay for one month and then be transferred to Ashford for the month of June. This was an Exhibition that would be seen thereafter across the country and indeed overseas.

421 Cabinet – 8th March and 12th April 2018

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

(a) Cabinet – 8th March 2018

Resolved:

- That (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 8th March 2018 be received and noted with the exception of Minute Nos. 367 and 372.**
- (ii) Minute Nos. 367 and 372 be approved and adopted.**

(b) Cabinet – 12th April 2018

Resolved:

That subject to the expiry of the period by which decisions arising from the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 12th April 2018 may be called in, i.e. 25th April 2018: -

- (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 12th April 2018 be received and noted with the exception of Minute Nos. 409 and 410.**
- (ii) Minute Nos. 409 and 410 be approved and adopted.**

422 Audit Committee – 20th March 2018

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 20th March 2018 be received and noted.

(DS)
