

Ashford Borough Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **18th July 2019**.

Present:

Her Worshipful the Mayor, Cllr. Mrs J Webb (Chairman);

Cllrs. Anckorn, Barrett, Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Mrs Blanford, Buchanan, Campkin, Chilton, Clarkson, Clokie, Farrell, Feacey, Forest, Gideon, Harman, Hayward, Heyes, Howard, Howard-Smith, Iliffe, Knowles, Krause, Ledger, Link, Michael, Mulholland, Miss Ovenden, Rogers, Shorter, Smith, Spain, Sparks, C Suddards, L Suddards, Turner, Walder, Ward, Wedgbury, White, Wright.

Also Present:

Chief Executive, Director of Law and Governance, Director of Finance and Economy, Head of Legal and Democracy, Head of Corporate Property and Projects, Property and Development Surveyor, Member Services Research Assistant, Member Services Manager (Operational).

Apologies:

Cllrs. Bell, Burgess, Mrs Heyes, Ovenden, Pickering.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting Charlotte Coles, representative of the Mayor's Chaplain, said prayers.

80 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.

81 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Bartlett	Made a Voluntary Announcement as a Member of Kennington Community Council.	90
Iliffe	Made a Voluntary Announcement as a Member of Kennington Community Council.	90

82 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 30th May 2019 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

83 Announcements

(a) The Mayor

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting. She advised that since there were very important items to discuss at this meeting she would keep her announcements relatively short this evening.

She and David had attended many events and had been met with such warmth and kindness – it had been a real pleasure to represent Ashford since the 31st May. She also wanted to take the opportunity to thank the Councillors who had escorted her when David had been unable to.

The Mayor said her Civic Ceremony had been a real highlight. She knew that everyone who had attended had been emotionally moved by the John Wallis School Choir and their singing of “Oceans” and the Nepalese Piper had gone viral on Facebook! She wanted to give a personal thank you to everyone who had attended and the many Officers and Clergy who had made it a day to remember. She said she felt very fortunate to have such an amazing team helping her and she was shortly going to be made even more famous by having her own “Mayor’s Blog” She wanted to thank Alice Pritchard and the Communications Team for making this possible and asked everyone to look out for news on her events that were in the process of being arranged.

She did want to draw attention to her first big fundraising event – an Autumn Ball on Saturday 7th September at London Beach Hotel, with a Michael Bubl  tribute. She hoped to see many colleagues there to help support her charities.

Finally, the Mayor said that it now gave her great pleasure to be able to present Past Service Certificates to former Members of the Council. The following former Councillors attended the Meeting and were presented with framed certificates for their dedicated service to the Council: - Mrs Aline Hicks, Mr George Koowaree, Mr Ryan MacPherson and Mr Chris Waters. Separate arrangements would be made for other former Members who were unable to attend this Meeting to receive their certificates in due course.

(b) Leader of the Council

The Leader said that he would like to take a few moments to update colleagues on some recent developments of note. He was delighted to announce that the Council had been awarded more than £3m from the Heritage Lottery Fund to regenerate Victoria Park. This meant that the Council could deliver on its exciting plans to redevelop and restore one of Ashford’s oldest and most loved green spaces. The Council would work with the local community, volunteer groups and the Friends of Victoria Park Group to reconnect

people with this historic park. The plans included a new children's play area, a community hub building with a café and new toilets as well as improvements to the river corridor, better lighting across the park and the restoration of the Grade II Listed Hubert Fountain and surrounding piazza.

A cluster of major developments in South Ashford had been included in the Government's House Building Initiative and allocated £150,000 to support their delivery. The South Ashford Garden Community, which included Chilmington Green, was one of only nine garden villages to receive a share of a £3m fund to help their development. When making his announcement, he had been pleased to hear the Minister of State for Housing, Kit Malthouse MP, congratulate Ashford for its initiative in supporting housing delivery across the Borough. He was also pleased to announce that tourism in the Borough would also be boosted by the award of another £3m to Kent, of which Ashford would receive a share. This was part of a wider £23m project to deliver economic development through tourism in the south of the UK and northern France.

The Leader said it was encouraging this year to see over 1500 Year 6 pupils from 36 Primary Schools in the Borough taking part in the annual Safety In Action campaign led by the Council together with colleagues in the Police and Fire Services. The scheme was designed to inform children of the hidden dangers and pressures they may encounter in the transition to Secondary School. Officers from the Council's Housing team also deserved a special mention after they won a prestigious award for building excellence for the Noakes Meadow scheme in South Ashford. This comprised two fully accessible homes, suitable for wheelchair users and the Occupational Therapists who had seen the development had commented that this should be the blueprint for this type of accommodation across Britain. There had also been a lot of positive press coverage about a £1m initiative to tackle the problem of homelessness in the Borough. This money was being spent on buying a large house in Beaver Road and converting it in to good quality short-stay accommodation for people who found themselves homeless. When it opened at the end of the year up to 25 people would be able to be housed there and this was the second time the Council had done this – a win-win situation for everyone. Tax payers money was saved from having to place homeless people in expensive B&B accommodation and the homeless people themselves benefitted from using more appropriate accommodation.

It had been pleasing to see last weekend's Festival in the Park in North Park, (soon to be renamed Civic Park), had been attended by more than 7000 people including many families. He was sure people had enjoyed the music and lovely riverside setting and the organisers were to be congratulated for yet another very successful event. This would of course be followed up by the Create Festival happening this week – a week-long festival of creative and arts events. The festival was run by the Council and had been running for 24 years, establishing itself as one of the biggest free music festivals in the South East. He was sure that thousands of Ashfordians would pack in to Victoria Park this coming Saturday for the music festival, before the event finished on Sunday with a birthday party in memory of Mr Harper who donated the Hubert Fountain. Chris Dixon and everyone else who had helped organize this fantastic event were to be congratulated. Just last Saturday the Leader had attended "Tributes in the Park" in St Michaels and had enjoyed a tremendous afternoon of music – Maddy singing songs of the 60s, Natalie Ward performing hits of the 70s, 80s and 90s, two local choirs and perhaps the real highlights were the tribute artists including Elvis, Tom Jones, Abba and

Freddie Mercury and Brian May. The event was finished off with a rousing tribute to the Proms and again all responsible for organising the event should be congratulated.

The Leader said he was sure all Members would join him in saying well done to Councillor Winston Michael, who was the founder and driving force behind the Kent Challenger Games held at the Julie Rose Stadium. This event was really something special for young people. It boosted individual confidence and self-esteem and fostered a real sense of team spirit. Councillor Michael was to be congratulated for his leadership in setting this up in the first place and for continuing to organise it. He recognised that to run such a successful event took a team of dedicated helpers and he also wanted to thank them for their sterling efforts.

He had attended the official opening of the new and enlarged One You Shop in Park Mall that past Monday and he had been hugely impressed to see the enhanced facilities, including the excellent toilet and changing facilities for visitors with disabilities. One You was a national campaign run by Public Health England, but the shop in Park Mall was the only physical location in the country where local people could pop in to get advice on a range of health issues.

Finally, the Leader said he was delighted that Macknade was coming to Elwick Place. This much-respected family business would be providing high-quality produce from local and international suppliers in their delicatessen and food hall, as well as a large restaurant and bar for those enjoying a day out in the town centre. He understood that disabled visitors would be especially welcome at Macknade, with specially-adapted toilet and changing facilities to be provided in their new Ashford premises. He hoped this update had been useful and demonstrated that Ashford had been very fortunate to secure funding from a number of different sources.

84 Cabinet – 13th June and 11th July 2019

(a) Cabinet – 13th June 2019

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 13th June 2019 be received and noted.

(b) Cabinet – 11th July 2019

Resolved:

That subject to the expiry of the period by which decisions arising from the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 11th July 2019 may be called in, i.e. 24th July 2019: -

- (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 11th July 2019 be received and noted with the exception of Minute No. 76.**
- (ii) Minute No. 76 be approved and adopted.**

85 Audit Committee – 18th June 2019

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 18th June 2019 be received and noted.

86 Appointments Committee – 24th April and 11th June 2019

(a) Appointments Committee – 24th April 2019

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Appointments Committee held on the 24th April 2019 be received and noted.

(b) Appointments Committee – 11th June 2019

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Appointments Committee held on the 11th June 2019 be received and noted.

87 Annual Report of the Audit Committee – 2018/19

Resolved:

That the Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2018/19 be received and accepted.

88 Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 2018/19

Resolved:

That the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2018/19 be received and accepted.

89 Change to Committee Membership – Conservative Group

Resolved:

That the Change to Committee Membership for the Conservative Group as outlined in the report be approved.

90 Petition – Bockhanger Community Centre

The Mayor directed Members' attention to the report of the Head of Legal and Democracy which set out the procedure for considering the Petition and also the advice of the Head of Corporate Property and Projects on the subject of the Petition itself.

In accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme, Councillor Spain, spoke to the Petition he had submitted.

Councillor Spain said that having started the 'Give Bockhanger a new Community Centre' petition back in December 2018, he had now had the responsibility of bringing it to Full Council for debate. Collectively, the Council had the responsibility to do justice to the more than 1700 Ashford Borough residents who had signed it. All of those residents had signed the petition with a desire to see a new Community Centre and Community Café for the residents of Bockhanger and Bybrook – something fit for the 21st Century and something all could be proud of. He hoped the Council would respect and honour their wishes by allowing him a few minutes to explain the background of how they had arrived at the current position, the impact that the lack of a Community Centre was having and to paint a picture of what he hoped all would agree was needed to meet the needs of the residents of Bockhanger and Bybrook and more widely across the north of the town.

On Thursday 29th March 2018 Ashford Borough Council closed the Bockhanger Community Centre which had served as a key social and community amenity for the people of Bockhanger and Bybrook for over 50 years. On the 10th May 2018 the Council had voted to demolish the Centre at an estimated cost of £150,000 citing spiralling repair and operating costs due the buildings state of repair as key reasons for the decision. There was a feeling across residents that the Centre had been allowed to decline and indeed Kennington Shadow Community Forum in its final meeting were quoted – *"it's state of dereliction is, in a major part, a result of a lack of ABC investment over the years"*. At the beginning of the winter KCC Libraries moved out and the library was relocated to a small space in the local Sure Start Centre, so by the end of 2018 all of the facilities that had existed on-site for over 50 years had gone. To use a colloquial phrase, the real 'kicker' for the community was that there was no commitment to build a new centre on the site.

Councillor Spain said that there had been a real impact on the community. Given its run down state in its final years demand was certainly suppressed at the old centre, however despite that the centre was supporting a range of activities and clubs and was still serving its community. After its closure the knock-on effects had been wide ranging and he had heard many variations of the same story time and time again as he collected signatures for the petition over many months. Stories about increased loneliness amongst all ages, particularly more senior residents for whom the activities at the centre provided something of a lifeline and a rare social opportunity to engage locally with others in shared activities. There were also parents with children who had attended clubs and activities running in the centre who now had to take their children further afield. There were also those who ran the anchor institutions in the Bockhanger and Bybrook community – the business owners. The four shops that made up the parade had all suffered a drop in demand and business due to a drop in footfall and making them think twice about the future and more immediately about investing in improvements

and refurbishments to their premises – an economic and business impact too. The most common story had been a very human one and a vital part of life – birthday parties and family celebrations. These were key aspects of life in a community and a larger community space had provided a venue for bigger parties, wedding receptions etc. and this was incredibly important. When the Community Centre was well maintained and thriving a picture had been painted of a place at the heart of a thriving community.

So, the clear will of the 1710 Ashford residents who had signed the petition was for Bockhanger and Bybrook to have a new, better Community Centre of the highest quality – good for at least the next 50 years which must at a minimum include: - multiple flexible rooms and spaces – accessible for local groups and people of all ages and needs; a Community Café; and the Bockhanger/KCC library back in the building where it belonged.

On a slightly different, but related, issue, Councillor Spain said he wanted to touch on a mind-set which he believed was hampering the Council from doing the right thing in this instance. It had been said to him several times that a scheme to develop the site cannot be made to “wash its own face” in terms of community provision, i.e. potential residential development on the site and the immediate surrounding area would not be enough for a developer to support the potential for a new Community Centre. His view was that this was not the way to view this particular site. It had hosted a substantial community facility for over 50 years and was primarily a facility, it should not be seen as another opportunity for residential development and primacy should be given to community use. He also thought there was a duty to view the site holistically rather than in a silo where it had to justify itself financially on its own – if that was the case nothing would be able to ever be provided on that site. A 21st Century, thriving Community Centre, with the library back in the building and a Community Café and even the possibility of small business units and shared workspaces, could thrive with the potential to raise revenue. It was about being imaginative and in a Ward of this size there were requirements for viable small premises for business start-ups – that could be done here and provide some quality local employment and a thriving community eco-system anchored around a community hub. There was tremendous potential for a new Community Centre and very real beneficial impacts for thousands of residents living near to the site and beyond but it relied on the will of fellow Councillors to make it happen and he asked that they make the commitment to honestly, opening and respectfully consult with local residents and more importantly commit to making a new Community Centre actually happen on this site. He therefore proposed the following motion that had already been circulated to fellow Councillors: -

That this Council notes:

1) That Ashford Borough Council received a petition signed by 1710 Ashford Borough residents calling on the Council to ensure that a substantial new replacement Community Centre, including a Community Cafe, is provided for the residents of Bockhanger and Bybrook.

2) That the petition was prompted by the closure, and subsequent demolition, of the old Bockhanger Community Centre which had served the people of Bockhanger and Bybrook for over 50 years.

3) *That the Ashford Borough Council Local Plan 2030, adopted in February 2019, expresses the importance of community facilities to communities and notes that:*

“[Meeting the Needs of the Community - 10.1] The provision of good quality community infrastructure and services designed around people and their cultural, leisure, health, learning, social and well-being needs is fundamental to the creation of strong, vibrant, healthy and sustainable communities.” p. 299

4) *Various community groups such as a karate club, a dance club, a nursery, and many others, have used the facility over the years, and it was also used extensively for hosting family occasions such as birthday parties demonstrating its importance to the local community. Current expressions of interest regarding a new community centre known to the petitioner include: a table tennis club for older people, a club for disabled residents and carers to meet and share experiences, a possible new karate club, and a number of people expressing an interest in volunteering to help run a Community Café.*

5) *That whilst other areas of Ashford such as Repton have had significant investments in community infrastructure the Bockhanger and Bybrook area, which has grown in population over the last 50 years, has now had (with the demolition of the Community Centre) its community infrastructure – and therefore long-term investment - substantially reduced.*

6) *That the Local Plan 2030 clearly expresses the importance of retaining community facilities:*

“[Retention of Existing Facilities - 10.6] Retaining existing facilities wherever practical is the most sustainable way of enhancing and expanding provision. This position is supported by the NPPF which recognises the importance of community and social facilities and requires that LPAs guard against the unnecessary loss of this valued provision, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day to day needs.”

and

“[10.7] The Council therefore aims to protect social and community infrastructure and to guard against unnecessary loss unless there are strong reasons why this is no longer viable or where provision is replicated nearby.”

7) *That given that the closure and demolition of the old community centre has reduced “the community's ability to meet its day to day needs.”, and that the provision (of the old community centre as a substantial sized community centre) is not “replicated nearby”, this supports the requirement for these needs to be met by providing a new Community Centre/hub.*

8) *That the poor condition of the old Community Centre in the final years before its closure and demolition will have suppressed and masked the potential real demand, and so its usage during this period is not a good predictor of the demand that would emerge once a high-quality substantial Community Centre/hub is provided. In other words future potential use cannot be extrapolated or predicted from the recent use of the old Community Centre in its run-down state.*

9) *That many communities in Ashford have substantial community facilities that are very well used, and are at or near capacity. Stanhope Parish Hall, Singleton Village Hall, and Godinton, for example, are well used by a variety of local groups. This demonstrates a clear need, and demand, for substantial social and community infrastructure provision at the heart of our many communities across the Borough.*

10) *That community provision across the Borough should be equitable, and that the Council should not, for an extended period, take away, or deny, provision from a community which is, or becomes, under-served for its population size and its “cultural, leisure, health, learning, social and well-being needs”.*

This Council therefore resolves:

1) *To undertake a full and thorough consultation with as large a number of Bockhanger and Bybrook residents as possible, by the end of 2019, as to the type of replacement/new community centre/community hub to be built, and the facilities contained within it.*

2) *That these facilities should at an absolute minimum include:*

- *Multiple flexible spaces of various sizes.*
- *An integral and spacious community café large enough for a good number of the community to socialise and hold events.*

3) *To actively engage with Kent County Council and work with them to re-establish and re-locate the library and other associated facilities in the new building.*

4) *To provide a top-quality, modern, environmentally responsible, future-proofed, flexible, and accessible community centre/community hub fit to serve the thousands of residents in the surrounding Bockhanger and Bybrook community for the next 50 years.*

5) *To work with local stakeholders including residents, businesses, community groups, Kennington Community Council, and others, to ensure the long term sustainability of the new community centre including strong governance and operational arrangements.*

This was seconded by Councillor Chilton who reserved his right to speak later in the debate.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3 Ms Crook, a local resident, spoke on the petition. She said that since she had moved to Bockhanger in 2001 the Community Centre had been important to her. On a personal note, they had only lived in the area a few months when their Father had left leaving them feeling lost and at a loose end. Feeling the need for her children to be more involved, their Mother had made enquiries about clubs and sports groups that were running at the Community Centre. They had joined several of these groups and made friends instantly, many of whom they were still in touch with today. This had given them back a feeling of belonging and no longer being out on a limb. She wondered how many more single parent families were out there now with nowhere to go to whilst desperately wanting to feel included, wanted and part of a

community family. She said that the Community Centre was just as important to her now and she hoped the turnout at the meeting this evening showed how important it was to have a new one built. There were so many things that a new Community Centre could be utilised for: - a pop in advice centre; local fitness classes; scouts and brownies; woodcraft groups; Kennington Community Council offices; polling stations; a local amateur dramatics group; a Community Café; and maybe even supplying hot meals for the elderly and homeless in winter. She also thought the library and nursery should be back where they were once successfully attended. The previous day she had asked children playing in the area if they had a new Community Centre would they use it and what would they use it for. She had such a positive response. They did want a Community Centre and suggestions included: - a youth club; a café; a cheerleading club; an Astro turf football pitch; a free water fountain; and a stage for a drama club – there were endless ways that they could make use of a new Community Centre. This would help them re-unite as a community because she had noticed that since the centre was shut down there had been an increase in anti-social behaviour in the Bybrook and Bockhanger Wards. A new facility would help restore pride in the area they lived in and this was vital for their community, their children and their future. She wanted to see children off their consoles and joining groups and building life-long friendships. She concluded by saying that they had once had a thriving Community Centre for over 50 years and now all that was left was the original sign which she was holding and an empty space where it once stood. It was easy to mind your own business, but it took a little more effort to mind a community but the feeling of having something in common and something that connected people made it all worthwhile. She hoped the Council would take this in to consideration and re-think their position. She considered the community had been torn apart and Bockhanger deserved better.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3 Mr Holme, a local resident, spoke on the petition. He said that just the previous night his nephew had befriended a girl who was about to jump from the bridge over the motorway. Fortunately she did not jump but he considered this spoke to a larger problem of the crushing needs amongst young people these days in terms of health and mental wellbeing. The closure of the centre had left an empty patch of grass and mud and a single goal post, but there were always 20-30 children who met there and used it as a vibrant hub. When he had begun to help compiling signatures for the petition it had been incredible to hear some of the stories including a young lady in a wheelchair who wanted to run a group for people in her position and carers, but had no idea where to go because the Centre had been closed – it had been quite moving. Loneliness amongst the elderly was also at crisis point and in this area they had nowhere to go other than their own homes – bus routes were unreliable and there was such a need for a local Community Centre with a café where these people could go and socialise.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3 Mr Silvester, a local resident, spoke on the petition. He said he had lived in the Kennington and Bybrook area his whole life and he had met many people and heard many stories about what the Community Centre meant to them in helping compile the petition. Its demolition had left a lot of people isolated and a new centre would help those people. This would increase morale and the day to day lives of people in Bockhanger and there was the potential to bring in income both at the centre and for the existing businesses nearby. A new facility and a licensed bar would allow for parties and weddings as well as sports and social groups, all who would pay to use the facility. In conclusion, after the feedback he had received, he was in no doubt that such a facility would be well used and bring out an improved community spirit.

Bockhanger deserved the best and this would help everybody there and in the surrounding area.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3 Mr Everest, a local resident, spoke on the petition. He said that he lived on Bockhanger Square for the last 22 years and in Ashford for 50. Being completely transparent, back in 2013/14 he had been an advocate for removing the hall because it, and the surrounding areas, had fallen in to such a state of disrepair. However since then after discussing the matter with local residents and being involved in his work-life with CALM, he understood the need for a community hub in the area. Since 2014 there had been ongoing discussions about what would be best for the Bockhanger Community Centre and the immediate vicinity. He had seen numerous plans with various options for development but none had come to fruition and the area still sat in a state of disrepair. The existing hall had been taken away and he still considered that was for the best, but that did not mean that it should not be replaced with a new facility as part of a vibrant hub. Only recently a farcical attempt to repair the path leading up to the shops had resulted in part-completion due to a lack of communication between the contractor and the Council and had left the area around the shops and Post Office uneven and unsafe. This was not the case with similar paths in other areas of the town so he could not understand why it happened in Bockhanger. With the right commitment and foresight the area could be developed to provide both open space for the younger generation and facilities in a new Community Centre for all ages, including supporting the vulnerable. This would take courage and investment but it was now what was required. The Council had approved a draft Masterplan for Conningbrook Lakes Country Park which would provide a mix of recreational facilities from Section 106 payments and other funding was being secured for other parts of Ashford, but he asked the Council not to forget the communities that were already there. Whilst he did not disagree with the developments elsewhere, it did hurt that as a community built some time ago, they had been forgotten. Most evenings there were 20-30 children playing in Bockhanger Square and yes he did occasionally worry about footballs hitting his windows, but he loved the fact that they were playing outside and there was a buzz to them. They felt safe in this area and they could be kept an eye on, but it showed that there was a need for better provision of play facilities. He concluded by asking the Council to seriously take in to consideration the values that the community was created on and think radically about the best way to invest in and develop Bockhanger Square and the community facilities, a remodelled play area and rejuvenated shop facilities.

Councillor Michael said that he had listened carefully to the speakers and concurred with a lot of what had been said. He was a Governor at the Phoenix School which was next to the site so he was familiar with the social challenges faced by the local community. He agreed with comments about a lack of facilities for young people in Bockhanger and knew that this could lead to social unrest. The children at the school had undertaken a survey and increased outdoor recreational facilities was high on their list of requirements. It had been proven that these helped mental health and wellbeing and improved frames of minds as well as reducing anti-social behaviour. All new developments coming on stream had provided wonderful amenities for all age groups, but it appeared that little was being done to provide similar facilities for the older and more established communities such as Bockhanger. This needed to be addressed. He considered that tax payers across the Borough needed to be treated equally and fairly otherwise the Council faced the accusation of creating two classes of citizens. He said he supported the underlying reasons for the petition but not all that was asked for. Going

forward, he considered that Council Members were all like-minded on this and he thought that the Council would sit down with community representatives to agree a shared vision to address what the community would actually use, rather than what one group thought they should have. He wanted to see the area regenerated and for the community to feel proud of where they lived and feel valued by this Council. He considered that in everything the Council did it strove to put people and communities at the heart, but they had possibly failed here, so to carry those people forward they had to be fully engaged and involved in what was planned. He said the Council should establish a community driven working party to establish a Masterplan and an agreed list of priorities – agreed with the community as a whole. What was realistic and what had the highest social and health benefits? The community also had to be pragmatic with its demands but the Council had to make every endeavour to satisfy demands, as much as it could, within a reasonable timeframe.

The Leader of the Council said he had listened attentively so far and it was fair to say that every Member of this Council was keen for this to be the best Borough in the United Kingdom. Some of what had been said by Councillor Spain did seem to be a rather long “shopping list” of facilities and he considered there did need to be more structure when approaching this issue. Additionally, many of the facilities provided in other areas had been the result of major housing development and large sums of developer funding. That did not however mean that other areas should be neglected. It was acknowledged that there were less affluent areas in the Borough that needed attention so whilst he could not support the motion on the table, he was hoping to put forward a better motion that would be more practical and more focussed. This would involve the newly established Kennington Community Council and its 16 Members taking the lead in identifying their local needs and the two Councils working together to agree a programme that prioritised those needs and considered how they best be addressed. Furthermore he considered the two Councils should work together in a positive way to address the funding issues that would inevitably arise in delivering such facilities and/or improvements and proper and timely reporting should take place to ensure that real progress was being made on these matters. The Council received New Homes Bonus (NHB) and there was a proposal coming forward shortly to Cabinet to use part of that money to create a new Infrastructure Improvement Fund. Some 60-80% of that fund would be used to address the five least affluent areas in the Borough, as identified independently, and one of those was Bockhanger. He did not think Members were too far apart in their thinking. He also wanted to see action – this Council had delivered its eight strategic projects through drive and action. This should not be a party political issue – this Council cared and he was personally passionate about Ashford and its people.

Councillor Farrell said he hoped the rest of the debate would rise from “my motion is better than your motion”. He wanted to wholeheartedly support the motion tabled by Councillor Spain. Too often motions from opposition Members were viewed as political point scoring or gesture politics, but that could not be said about this motion. All Members had just spent several months campaigning across Wards and discussing key issues with residents and it had been clear in his Ward that there was a feeling that the Council prioritised housing and commercial development over the creation and sustenance of public facilities for existing communities. He believed it was important that the Leadership of this Authority recognised that. Council’s had had to become more commercially minded as they were forced away from Revenue Support Grant and whilst there were some benefits to that, in respect of place making and local economy shaping,

there was a danger that other important aspects of Council work fell between the cracks or took a back seat. Of course there were some areas where this Council had sought to positively impact communities and Councillor Spain's motion had mentioned some of those, however there were areas of Ashford that felt they had been left behind. The motion made mention of the run down nature of the Bockhanger Community Centre prior to its demolition and other Members may make reference to service re-provision elsewhere, but this did call to mind the demolition of the Joe Fagg Pop In Centre which was a hub of the community in the middle of the town serving elderly, disabled and socially isolated residents. He had previously indicated at the Planning Committee how this amenity had also been allowed to decay to an extent that could be classed as "convenient", and he had also quoted NPPF guidance that referred to like-for-like replacement of discarded community facilities. This had been disregarded at the time but already appeared to be coming to fruition with reduced numbers on its new location and Age UK already seeking a return to the town centre. The motion as tabled presented a good opportunity to challenge the view that this Council only cared for developers and those with power and influence. Voting for the motion would allow a process of reconnection between the Administration and communities which for some time now had felt marginalised within the Borough. On behalf of his side of the Chamber at least he wanted to thank Councillor Spain for bringing this matter to the Council's attention and he commended it to the Council.

Councillor Bartlett said he thought it would be useful to remind colleagues of the work that had been undertaken in the last 24 months in the run up to the decision to demolish the hall. A Group of Officers and Members came together in May 2017 to form the Bybrook, Bockhanger and Ashford South Advisory Committee and part of the remit was to look at the deteriorating condition of the hall. There had been 13 meetings and they had been joined on two occasions by the Chairman of the Bockhanger Community Association (BCA) for an insight in to his tenure as custodian of the hall. There had been three community engagement events – two specifically on the hall and an additional Parish wide drop-in event by the then Shadow Kennington Community Council, to give residents the opportunity to set out their expectations for community facilities within the area. The BCA were responsible for the hall from 2003 to March 2018 at which point the hall failed its electrical installation testing and the Bockhanger Monkeys nursery decided to relocate. There were a number of other issues with the building at that point – there was no fire detection system, the roof regularly leaked and the cold water tank needed replacing to avoid legionella risk. Added to that asbestos was identified in a number of locations. He thought KCC had done their very best to remain at the facility and use the hall as a branch library for as long as possible. They were the last organisation to leave in December 2018 and great credit should be given to the local KCC Members for working with the library service and the KCC Portfolio Holder Mike Hill to open a new Bockhanger Library less than 50m away. Since relocating the library's hours had been increased which demonstrated its value to the community in its new position. The reality was that this Council had inherited a building from the BCA that had become a focus for anti-social behaviour, with vandals regularly on the flat roof creating risks to themselves and nearby residents. He knew that the BCA did their very best, but the lesson learnt was for any new facilities to have buy in from the local residents and community. It did seem right that the new and energetic Kennington Community Council, with its 16 enthusiastic Councillors, took the lead on this very important project. At least four different plans had been produced by Ashford Borough Council for the site, but he considered it was time they now took a back seat while the Community Council provided input. He considered that the local community needed to provide support as did any

clubs and organisations that would use it, and Ashford Borough Council would stand by to help.

Councillor Wedgbury said he would like to raise a couple of issues. Firstly, with one of the School Governors from the nearby primary school present, he was sure that he would take in to consideration the number of suggested groups that may use a hall in Bockhanger and immediately open it up to residents to allow them to use their existing hall that was already there. It would be perfect for things like dance clubs that had been mentioned. He did karate twice a week and he knew the local groups and considered it extremely unlikely that a karate club would use the proposed facility. They already had venues and tended to use primary schools. With regard to talk of a Community Café he wondered why there was not already one at the St Mary's Community Centre just around the corner? This would be a perfect facility for such an initiative with an excellent little kitchen and nice sized hall and it was a facility that was already there. Finally, he understood that it was not just about the building costs of such a facility, but the annual running costs. The annual running costs of a very large facility with multiple rooms, many of which would not be used, would be very expensive and he did not consider it right to force residents of other areas to fund a facility so far away. It should be down to the local community, using their own Community Council, to pay for that facility.

Councillor White said he had listened to the debate and agreed with some of the points but not all. He did believe there was a lesson to learn as a Council inasmuch as they had decided to knock this building down before they had plan and in hindsight that was wrong. He hoped in learning from that there would now be a meaningful consultation with all of the residents and that the residents would come forward with their comments to make that meaningful. He supported social cohesion and regeneration of the area, but to go further there was a need to look at the entire ring around Ashford Town Centre – Kennington, South Ashford, Willesborough – all of those areas needed attention and he agreed with Councillor Michael that a dedicated community group needed to be set up to get that community spirit back and to work with the Community Councils and this Council had to play its part as the custodians of the public purse.

Councillor L Suddards said she had originally had no intention of speaking as a newly elected Councillor, but she thought it was interesting that earlier that day she had been part of a cross-party Community Grants Panel which had worked together and she had left that meeting with such a lovely feeling of achievement. However tonight she felt very dispirited hearing the Leader describe the motion of a fellow Councillor as a “shopping list” and references to ‘sides’ of the Chamber which was not a Council she thought she had been elected to. She wondered if fellow Councillors had actually read the motion. Everything it was asking for was clear and reasonable and she thought everyone in the Chamber should be on the same side and did not want to see one part of Ashford set against another.

Councillor Barrett said that as newly elected Portfolio Holder for Housing he had three main priorities: - firstly to tackle homelessness; secondly to increase the Council's housing stock following the impacts of the Right to Buy scheme; and thirdly to regenerate poorer areas of the Borough. This third priority was not an easy task as it required money, circumspect thought and patience. It was fair to say that this particular petition and debate had actually delayed plans that were already in train. There had been a plan set in motion to regenerate the area around the Bockhanger Community Centre for the last three or four months. He had been due to walk the area with the

Council's Head of Housing to set that regeneration plan in motion. This would have seen 20 to 30 houses, six shops and a community hub. He thought it was only fit and proper to go out to consultation with both the local Community Council and the local residents and ask them what they wanted. He would therefore not be supporting the motion as proposed but he gave an assurance that whatever was decided by this Council, as Portfolio Holder he would ensure that it was enacted as swiftly and properly as possible.

Councillor Anckorn said he heard a lot of talk about pragmatism which was obviously a good thing, but he considered the residents of Bockhanger were being pragmatic. There was nothing crazy or radical about the desire to have a decent community facility for everyone in that area to use. They were not asking for Wembley Stadium or the Olympic Park in North Ashford, they just wanted a decent community space. During the election the Conservatives had used the motto "Ambitious for Ashford" so he thought they should show some ambition for Bockhanger and Bybrook and provide the community facility this area desperately needed.

Councillor Shorter said in reflecting on the debate so far he felt there was a general consensus on many of the points raised in principle and he also agreed that comments from Councillor Farrell about "this side of the Chamber" should not be welcomed. As the Leader had identified, the Council did not just want to discuss Bockhanger in isolation, it wanted to look at the whole area in a holistic exercise in order to identify needs and bring forward programmes for delivery to satisfy those needs. This seemed a more sensible approach rather than "cherry picking" one area without considering other needs in the area. He supported the ambitions of the motion, but wanted to see something wider agreed.

Councillor Chilton had reserved the right to come back as seconder of the motion. He said the motion put forward by Councillor Spain had been supported by more than 1700 residents of the Borough who had signed this petition. He also wanted to support the residents that had turned out at a Council meeting, for perhaps the first time, en masse, in support of a proposal. He congratulated those people as the silent majority. He said it was clear that the Council focussed on developers and housing but what about community? That was who they were there to serve. To Members who were proposing alternative motions he said this was simply "kicking the can down the road, into the long grass". He was elected on this Council about 10 years ago and he remembered that at one of the very first Cabinet meetings he had attended there were plans for the Bockhanger Centre. A few years later these disappeared and then prior to the last elections there were more plans for Bockhanger. He considered that what they were being asked to support now by the Leader were more plans that would be shelved again and nothing would happen. He asked where the leadership of this Council was and what was it doing to look after the residents of Bockhanger. Residents this evening had given cold, raw stories of social neglect over which this Council had presided. They had sat in this Chamber passing grand developments, lending money to colleges, kicking charities and voluntary groups out of their premises and knocking down Bockhanger's Community Centre – but they had paid £30,000 for a beacon in North Park that had never been lit as far as he was aware. He said that this Council should serve the communities and not the corporates and he thought he had a fair idea which developer would get the contract if the site was allocated for housing. Bockhanger had aspirations, the same as every area of the Borough, but the question he would ask is did this Council have aspirations for that community? The Deputy Leader had mentioned the Bockhanger, Bybrook and Ashford South Advisory Committee. This had been disbanded just after the elections

when those areas had voted out the Conservative Members who sat on that Committee and he considered that interesting. Councillor Michael in his remarks had said this Council had “perhaps” failed this community. It was his view that it had failed Bockhanger and Bybrook by knocking down an important community asset following years of neglect and underfunding. He represented the Stanhope Ward, one of the most deprived parts of the town, but they had community facilities as did plenty of other areas. The motion before the Council was a simple one endorsing everything the Leader had said – consultation, engaging with local stakeholders and building a centre that was fit for purpose. This was not radical, need not be expensive with commercial operators involved and should be supported. This Council said it was the best Borough in Britain, best placed and ambitious and there was an opportunity to prove that this evening by supporting the motion.

Councillor Spain summed up as mover of the motion. He thanked all Members for their thoughtful contributions to the debate and recognised the differing opinions. He said he admired Councillor Shorter’s intent to look at this issue more widely and recognised there was a bigger job to do, but he was concerned that there was a very real and immediate requirement in Bockhanger. They had already been without a Community Centre for some time and they all knew the impacts that was having on mental and physical health, loneliness etc. He therefore urged the Council to deal with the issue in Bockhanger now by supporting this motion. With regard to existing plans for the site, whilst he recognised the need for more housing generally across the Borough and he had seen those plans, these were predominantly residential and the community aspect was limited and he did not consider that this would do justice to the real needs of the people of Bockhanger. They needed something that at least replaced what they had before and was fit for the next 50 years and he urged Councillors to work together and not vote on party lines in order to address the needs of the people they had heard from tonight – real people with real stories who were hurting.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 15.4 Councillor Spain asked that a recorded vote be taken on this motion.

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 the motion and the Members voted as follows: -

For: Councillors Anckorn, Campkin, Chilton, Farrell, Harman, Hayward, Ledger, Michael, Miss Ovenden, Rogers, Spain, C Suddards, L Suddards, Turner, Walder, Ward, Wright

Votes For 17

Against: Councillors Barrett, Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Mrs Blanford, Buchanan, Clarkson, Clokie, Feacey, Forest, Gideon, Heyes, Howard, Howard-Smith, Iliffe, Knowles, Krause, Link, Mulholland, Shorter, Smith, Sparks, Mrs Webb, Wedgbury

Votes Against 23

Abstentions: Councillor White

Abstentions 1

This motion was lost.

The Leader of the Council moved that: -

“Now that the “Kennington Community Council” has just been legally established and having now met with the new Chairman Mr Chris Morley, we are both in agreement that the following should be formally put to the Council: -

- (i) That the sixteen Community Councillors representing the five Wards, in the Kennington Community Council should take the lead in identifying their local community needs.*
- ii) That the Kennington Community Council and Ashford Borough Council should work together to agree a programme that prioritises these needs and consider how best they can be addressed.*
- (iii) That the two Councils work together in a positive way to address the funding issues that will inevitably arise in the delivery of such facilities and/or improvements.*
- (iv) That proper and timely reporting be undertaken to ensure that progress can be made on these matters.”*

He wanted to make it clear that this motion did not link with other areas and was focussed solely on Bockhanger area itself.

This was seconded by Councillor Bartlett who reserved his right to speak later in the debate.

Councillor Chilton raised a point of order. He said that the Leader had said he met with the Chairman of Kennington Community Council and they had agreed this motion. He asked if the Chairman had received a mandate from the other members of the Community Council, who had incidentally been appointed rather than elected, and if any minute of that meeting had been kept? The Leader responded that he met the new Chairman of the Kennington Community Council as a matter of courtesy and to explain that they wanted to work with them. He indicated to him that he would be putting a motion to this Council and asked his opinion on that. He had responded that he wanted to make sure that the 16 members of his Council could be the conduit to consult with the area they were responsible for.

Councillor Wedgbury said he was concerned that there had been no mention so far in the debate of the 16-22 age group and he hoped that their desires for recreational facilities would be taken in to account in the consultation.

Councillor Gideon said that she was delighted to be the Portfolio Holder covering Health and Wellbeing. As part of that role she had been privileged to open the new enlarged One You Shop in Ashford Town Centre and Health and Wellbeing was something that permeated all of the Council’s policies and formed a major part of the Corporate Plan going forward. It was a major part of everything the Council did and she had found it very insulting that this Council had been stigmatised as not being interested in the health and wellbeing of the community. It was right to go back to this community and ask them

what was now the right thing for you, for all ages, interests and demands and get that design right in order to deliver a longer term sustainable solution.

Councillor Iliffe said that it was right for the community to take the lead on this as they knew their community better than anyone. The Kennington Community Council was made up of individuals who lived all across the area. Residents of that whole area used the original facility and they understood what the needs were and what groups were out there and that was really the exact reason why the people of that area had decided in a referendum to have a Community Council - so that they could take such decisions to the heart of the community with full knowledge of what their requirements were. There were already a number of facilities in the Kennington area – Rylands Road, Spearpoint Pavilion, St Mary’s Church Hall, the WI Hall and the Scout Hut – so there was a need to get this right. There was a need for a facility in Bockhanger but it was important that if they were going to propose a facility for the next 50 years it was genuinely the right one that supported the real needs of the community.

Councillor Harman said there had been a lot of focus on a ‘building’ when a lot of the what the residents had been talking about was open space and she hoped any consultation would include serious consideration of the need for open space in this area and giving children space for outdoor activities. Indoor activities could potentially be sited elsewhere – playing outside could not.

Councillor Bartlett had reserved the right to come back as seconder of the motion. He said he appreciated the opportunity to debate this important matter but considered that the discrepancy between what had been described as “that side” and “this side” was very little. The only part of the original motion with which he personally disagreed was the proposal to relocate the branch library from its new location where it had been very successful since it had been opened by KCC back in February. It was therefore very disappointing to have degenerated into this level of debate when if such a resolution had been shared earlier he was sure they could have come up with something that would have been amenable to all. He disagreed with incurring the costs of again relocating the library because it had already cost money to relocate it just 50 yards to a place where it had been successful and increased its opening hours. He did agree with what had been said about launching a consultation with Kennington Community Council. It should involve discussion on open spaces and precisely what would go in to any new hall would remain to be seen. He thought it was very important that the new Community Council took ownership of the project because after all this would involve a very substantial amount of public sector money and it was vital that they got it right.

Councillor Clarkson summed up as mover of the motion. He said that the Council was fortunate in that it did own a lot of the land in the area in question so they did want to get the right mix and he assured everyone present that this was in no way intended to be a “fudge” or a delay. It was imperative to work with the local democratic body – the Community Council and he personally was not daunted by the potential costs. He had always thought if something was worth doing you had to find the money. He said he knew the debate had appeared quite fractured, but he did not think anyone in the Chamber was very far apart. They all wanted first class facilities here and across the Borough and the need in this particular location was recognised, but they wanted to get it right and give the people of Bockhanger what they genuinely needed, not what someone else thought they wanted.

Councillor Spain said he would like to propose an amendment to the motion by adding part one of his original motion which he considered was vital in order to put the people of Bockhanger and Bybrook in the driving seat and ensure that there was a definite time commitment for the consultation. Namely: -

That the Council undertake a full and thorough consultation with as large a number of Bockhanger and Bybrook residents as possible, by the end of 2019, as to the type of replacement/new community centre/community hub to be built, and the facilities contained within it.

Councillor Clarkson said he was prepared to accept that amendment.

Councillor Shorter said he would be wary about setting a deadline of the end of 2019. He respected the objective but he feared that process and holiday periods may take over and by failing to meet that deadline it would be seen as a failure in the entire project. He would advocate a more realistic timeframe of the end of March 2020.

Both Councillor Spain and Councillor Clarkson said they were prepared to accept that further amendment.

A vote was then taken on this motion. This Motion was carried.

Resolved:

That following the formation of the “Kennington Community Council” and the subsequent meeting between the Chairman, Mr Chris Morley and the Leader of the Council, the following Motion be agreed:

- (i) That the sixteen Community Councillors representing the five Wards, in the Kennington Community Council should take the lead in identifying their local community needs.**
- (ii) That the Kennington Community Council and Ashford Borough Council should work together to agree a programme that prioritises these needs and consider how best they can be addressed.**
- (iii) That the two Councils work together in a positive way to address the funding issues that will inevitably arise in the delivery of such facilities and/or improvements.**
- (iv) That proper and timely reporting be undertaken to ensure that progress can be made on these matters.**
- (v) That the Council undertake a full and thorough consultation with as large a number of Bockhanger and Bybrook residents as possible, by the end of March 2020, as to the type of replacement/new community centre/community hub to be built, and the facilities contained within it.**

91 Notices of Motion

Councillor Campkin introduced a Notice of Motion that he had given pursuant to Procedure Rule 11 and was detailed in full in the Supplementary Agenda.

He said that according to the IPCC's report released last year, the world had 12 years to reduce its carbon emissions to net zero in order to avoid the most catastrophic effects of climate change – they now had only 11 years. This would require co-operation across the world – individual, national and international action and would require Local Government action as well. The Council was as responsible as anyone else for Ashford's contribution and if they did nothing they were condemning future generations to the catastrophic effects of climate change – heatwaves, floods, droughts, food scarcity and a lack of medication – all things that the Global South were already experiencing today. So they needed to reduce carbon emissions to zero whilst also preparing Ashford to deal with the effects of climate change that could not be avoided because climate change was not something that was going to happen, it was something that was happening now and had been happening for decades and while it had been happening, it had been being ignored. Ashford prided itself on being a leader. It was the best in the region for recycling and constantly redeveloping and enhancing the town for its residents, and whilst individual actions were essential and the backbone of the future, it was now time for the leadership of the country to take a lead and take bolder actions. 100% recycling rates would not stop the planet getting hotter. People could use all the refillable water bottles they wanted but this would not stop the poisonous diesel fumes spewing from buses. You could ban all the plastic bags in the country, but this would not stop the crops failing or the floods that drowned villages such as Wye in the winter. Just as you would not stop wars while you invested people's money in arms manufacturers, you would not stop climate change whilst you were investing people's money in fossil fuels. There was a need to invest in renewable energies, community energy, food forests, electric vehicles and infrastructure. They must support local produce and food producers and not rely on food from the US or the third world, as their people would need that food when their crops failed and the transport of that food caused the same emissions they were trying to reduce. They could no longer rely on French electricity, Russian gas or oil from the Middle East and must produce their own energy and when they had become truly sustainable they could then help others. The current climate crisis threatened everything this Council had achieved and now was the time to be a leader in facing this crisis, protecting their legacy and building a town fit for the 22nd Century. This was all why Councillor Wright and himself had fought so hard to be elected to this Chamber. They hoped they had brought with them the tools, policies and philosophy needed to steer Ashford towards a cleaner, greener, prosperous future, where Ashford could take its place on the world stage as a leader in averting the apocalypse and building a sustainable and fairer world in its place. None of this was about party politics, ego or vanity projects – the science said this was happening, what needed to happen next and set the date, and if the science was wrong it was only wrong in that the situation was worse. He was going to propose that Ashford declared a climate emergency and immediately took action to avert this crisis and move towards a brighter future, but they had been somewhat gazumped last week when the Leader announced at Cabinet that the Council's number one priority in the next Corporate Plan would be to reduce carbon emissions to zero by 2030 and by 80% by 2025. His own motion called for a report to the Council in six months' time, and six months after that the Council would be launching its new five year Corporate Plan with which he believed this motion

was entirely compatible. He wanted to thank the Leader for doing this but wanted to push ahead with the motion as presented. By setting this in stone, etching it in history and formally shouting from the rooftops that they do acknowledge that there was a climate emergency and this Council was going to do something about it.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Wright. She said she had proposed, seconded and voted for and against numerous motions throughout her life in different guises, but with this one she was particularly delighted because she knew they were knocking at an open door. This was something that could unite everyone and transcend politics as they all needed to work together for a clean healthy future for themselves, their children, grandchildren and their planet. She had been surprised and delighted after barely two months on this Council to find that the Leader and Cabinet had set already set a target for carbon neutrality of 2030, with an 80% reduction by 2025 and this was de facto part of the Council's strategic policies. She did however think that this motion would further underline those commitments and underpin everything Ashford was doing in the next five years. It was important not to underestimate the massive effort and investment that would be required but there would be huge benefits in a more sustainable Ashford. They had already started on the right road and they had the examples of other Councils such as Stroud, Oxford, Bristol and Aberdeen to follow, and there would be plenty of support for these policies from elsewhere. The leadership of Local Authorities would be important in communicating the urgency of this, as it would be vitally important to bring the people of Ashford with them and involve everyone as it would be them who would have to support these policies and make some individual sacrifices if this was to be achieved. She had a vision of Ashford as a vibrant community, linked by fast and frequent electric buses, local work spaces reducing the need for commuting and small work units for repairs that could move away from a "throw away or fast fashion society".

Councillor C Suddards said he would like to propose an amendment to the motion by adding the following: -

"That the Council undertake a review of its current use of single use plastics and further agrees to end its use of these by 2021 and that the Environment, Climate Change and Conservation Advisory Committee be tasked to regularly report back on progress towards this end"

This was seconded by Councillor Ward.

Councillor Campkin said he was prepared to accept that amendment.

Councillor Bartlett said he thought it would be helpful to remind colleagues of some of the work that had been undertaken at this Council over the last year to tackle climate change. The new Core Strategy adopted in February required Air Quality Assessments to be undertaken on all new developments that may lead to a significant deterioration of air quality and this had resulted from the good work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Sub-Committee Chaired by Councillor Feacey. All new dwellings now required at least one electric car charging point and the Council had supported the solar farm development in Shadoxhurst which it was hoped to bring forward next year. The new M20 Junction 10A and A28 Dualling projects would reduce standing traffic and would bring a significant improvement to air quality. Redevelopment of brownfield sites had been swift and intensive and centred on the main transport hubs in Ashford, whilst also protecting and enhancing Ashford's green spaces. Additional air

diffusion tubes had been installed on the M20 to monitor the impact of Operation Brock. Future actions were likely to include working with Kent Police to ban vehicles idling, particularly near to schools, and launching a scheme encouraging electric and hybrid vehicles amongst taxis and private hire. The Council might even resurrect Smartlink – a previous plan to link all parts of the town by bus. They had only just started. More was needed but more was definitely to come.

The Leader of the Council said that he was pleased Councillor Bartlett had outlined some of what this Council was doing. Before the elections they had also appointed a specialist Environmental Officer who was well versed in the need to have a carbon neutral Borough. Ashford was blessed as a Borough to have the largest land mass of the all the Districts in Kent and to be right in the heart of the Garden of England and it was important that they moved forward with this. He was against declaring a “climate emergency”, not because he underestimated the importance of this issue, but because this was not how this Council dealt with things. When the Government announced the withdrawal of £8m of funding to zero over five years, this Council did not declare a “financial emergency”, it came up with a plan to deal with it over the five years and they had overcome it that way. He had spent 30 years attending some awful emergencies in his time with the Fire Service so he was also conscious of that. Again, he agreed with much of what had been said and they were very close to having a full agreement, but he did not feel he could support the motion as moved because when one started to mention international governments, this did appear to be a bit excessive for a small District. This was more for Central and National Governments, and whilst this did not mean that they did not have an important role to play, this would not be particularly on the international stage. He therefore hoped he would be able to put forward a not too dissimilar motion and one that would actually sharpen up delivery. Given that the Five Year Corporate Plan was now in its fifth and final year, and was therefore being revised he would propose that a key element of the new Five Year Plan commencing in 2020, would be that Ashford would be over 80% Carbon Neutral before the end of this plan in 2025. It would then be further proposed that Ashford would be completely Carbon Neutral before the end of the next five year plan in 2030. This would reinforce the status of Ashford Borough being the Garden of England Borough, right in the very heart of Kent. In addition this objective would also be the number one priority for delivery in the new emerging Big Eight Projects for the Ashford Strategic Delivery Board, which had thus far delivered every project put in front of it.

Councillor Wedgbury said that all in this Chamber were very fortunate to be part of the top 5% wealthiest on the planet and the wealthiest generation to ever live on the planet. As a point of information there had been ice ages in the past, one which had lasted for more than a million years and during that ice age CO₂ in the atmosphere was 800% higher than today, so in his view it was not necessarily true to consider this the cause of climate change. He did however agree that it was sensible not to waste the worlds resources and be more efficient by not burning carbon fuels and he supported that, but he did think that this was the wrong motion presented in the wrong way because it did not tackle the real issues that no-one was prepared to talk about.

Councillor Spain said that he did support the motion on the table and it was important to acknowledge and understand that this was an emergency. It established a level of urgency and demonstrated that the Council recognised this. He commended the commitments that had been made towards carbon zero targets, but by acknowledging

that this was an emergency situation, it would also drive the Council to re-visit the 2030 Local Plan because that guided many of the decisions the Council was making.

Councillor Ledger said that he too welcomed this motion and thanked colleagues for bringing it forward. He considered it was an emergency, it was not something that could be dealt with at another time, and all that was being proposed tonight was to say that this was step one of a journey. The Council needed to acknowledge what it had now and where things were headed. Every Member and every Officer at Ashford Borough Council had to embrace this, as well as all of the Borough's residents. This needed to become a culture within the Council and it needed to be leading on this and guiding people by setting examples and flagging up excellence. There were already a number of strategies that sat on shelves, but these needed to be built on, worked with and used.

Councillor Shorter said he had two points to raise. Firstly the issue of the term "emergency" – it was clearly a massive priority for everyone and that had been accepted but the concept of an emergency was something you identified, put in counter measures and dealt with – a relatively short term issue you could get on with and close. In this context, it was going to take a number of years before they could begin to think they were properly dealing with this. Secondly, on the issue of the Local Plan to 2030, Councillor Spain had mentioned reviewing the Local Plan, but the last Plan had taken five years to approve and the process of review had effectively already started again and would be actively entered in to using the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group which would take those issues forward and deal with all elements of that Plan. It was an ongoing and evolving process.

Councillor Harman said she also wanted to talk about the word emergency as it applied to climate change but also the culture in the Council and embracing a culture change. She acknowledged what had been said about the Local Plan, but in sitting on the Planning Committee she had been disappointed by how infrequently sustainable objectives were discussed in the context of planning applications and planning policies. These should be considered first and foremost, encouraging people in Ashford and making it easy for them to make the right choices in terms of cutting edge technology and energy efficiency.

Councillor Howard said that he was Chairman of the new Environment, Climate Change and Conservation Advisory Committee and in that role he was a little disappointed with how the debate had gone this evening. Only recently they had had an incredibly positive meeting with lots of ideas put forward and he had personally learnt a lot from colleagues about things like food forests, passive houses and more. This issue of a climate emergency had been raised and he feared that bringing in this type of language would result in the exact opposite of what was intended. They all wanted to get things done and looking at points 2 – 6 of the motion, he thought everyone was on board with those, but bringing in language like 'emergency' did begin to lean towards party politics and bring in some of the sillier aspects of tonight's meeting such as shouting out and holding up signs, when they were actually all in agreement and in fact the Leader's proposal would actually achieve more than the original motion and in a quicker timeframe.

Councillor Farrell said he was disappointed to follow someone who viewed such an important debate as silly, nevertheless other recent Councils who had declared climate emergencies included Birmingham, Richmond, Dorset, Oxfordshire, Northumberland, Surrey, Sunderland, West Berkshire, West Dorset, Windsor and Maidenhead. Indeed

many others had also done this, but these were all Conservative led Authorities so he wondered if Ashford Conservatives were so self-confident that they could protect this Borough from climate change so that Ashford would not be affected.

Councillor Anckorn said he understood the debate around the word “emergency” but wanted to make the point that this was a question of the habitability of the planet and as yet it was the only planet they had. It was also a fact that people were currently dying in less fortunate and less wealthy parts of the world because of climate change. He had been very pleased to attend the new Environment, Climate Change and Conservation Advisory Committee recently and it had been an excellent session where Members had worked together constructively to feed in to a brainstorming session, coming up with a lot of ideas and he hoped that the Council would take some of those forward. He did not think this issue should be looked at with “doom and gloom”. There were potentially some great wins to be had from tackling climate change, improving communities and making the lives of local people better, not worse.

Councillor Campkin then summed up as mover of the motion. He thanked those colleagues who had spoken in support of his motion. He did acknowledge what Ashford was already doing and was intending to do, but the science said that this was still not enough. If they could get to carbon zero by 2030 that would keep the temperature to less than a 1.5 degree increase, but that was still not enough. He appreciated the more positive spin from the Leader and his use of the word “objective”, but there was an emergency and there was a need to be clear about that.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 15.4 Councillor Campkin asked that a recorded vote be taken on this motion, including the addition proposed by Councillor C Suddards.

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 the motion and the Members voted as follows: -

For: Councillors Anckorn, Campkin, Chilton, Farrell, Harman, Hayward, Ledger, Rogers, Spain, C Suddards, L Suddards, Walder, Ward, Wright
Votes For 14

Against: Councillors Barrett, Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Buchanan, Clarkson, Clokie, Feacey, Forest, Gideon, Heyes, Howard-Smith, Krause, Link, Mulholland, Shorter, Wedgbury
Votes Against 16

Abstentions: Councillors Mrs Blanford, Howard, Iliffe, Knowles, Michael, Miss Ovenden, Sparks, Turner, Mrs Webb, White
Abstentions 10

N.B. Councillor Smith had left by this point in the meeting.

This motion was lost.

The Leader of the Council moved that: -

“The Five Year Corporate Plan is now in its fifth and final year, and is therefore being revised. It is proposed that a key element of the new Five Year Plan commencing in 2020, will be that Ashford will be over 80% Carbon Neutral before the end of this plan in 2025. It is further proposed that Ashford will be Completely Carbon Neutral before the end of the next five year plan in 2030. This will reinforce the status of Ashford Borough being the Garden of England Borough right in the very heart of Kent. In addition this objective will also be the number one priority for delivery in the new emerging Big Eight Projects for the Ashford Strategic Delivery Board.”

This was seconded by Councillor Bartlett who reserved his right to speak later in the debate.

Councillor C Suddards said he would like to propose an amendment to the motion by adding the following: -

“That the Council undertake a review of its current use of single use plastics and further agrees to end its use of these by 2021 and that the Environment, Climate Change and Conservation Advisory Committee be tasked to regularly report back on progress towards this end”

This was seconded by Councillor Ward

The Leader of the Council said he was not prepared to accept that amendment to his motion as he wanted to examine the facts before setting a target date that he did not yet know would be achievable or not. He said he was surprised that colleagues did not come and talk to him in advance of these meetings rather than springing motions on the Council at the meeting, as he was sure that much of what had been proposed this evening could have been shaped into a composite motion that all could agree on. He was not against the idea of eliminating single use plastics, he was all for it, but he simply did not feel he could put a date on it at present and to do so without the facts would be foolhardy.

Councillor Clarkson’s motion, with the addition of Councillor C Suddards’ amendment, was then voted on.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 15.4 Councillor C Suddards asked that a recorded vote be taken on this motion, including the addition he had proposed.

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 the motion and the Members voted as follows: -

For: Councillors Anckorn, Campkin, Chilton, Farrell, Ledger, Spain, C
Suddards, L Suddards, Turner, Walder, Ward, Wright

Votes For 12

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Against: Councillors Barrett, Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Mrs Blanford, Buchanan, Clarkson, Clokie, Feacey, Forest, Gideon, Heyes, Howard-Smith, Krause, Link, Mulholland, Shorter, Sparks, Mrs Webb, Wedgbury

Votes Against 19

Abstentions: Councillors Harman, Hayward, Howard, Iliffe, Knowles, Michael, Miss Ovenden, Rogers, White

Abstentions 9

N.B. Councillor Smith had left by this point in the meeting.

This motion was lost.

Councillor Bartlett had reserved the right to come back as seconder of the original motion. He said he thought this debate had illustrated that this Council was at risk of becoming truly dysfunctional because the motion put forward by the Leader was actually a lot more challenging than the original motion. This Administration wanted to achieve 80% carbon neutrality by 2025. Nothing had been heard on that from those who had made the original proposal – they had only mentioned 2030, but this Council was looking to move earlier than that and should be commended. He could also not understand why when there were proposals like this, the Opposition Group Leaders could not come to the Group Leader meetings and seek a way forward together to find something that they were all like-minded on.

Councillor Clarkson's original motion was then voted on.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 15.4 Councillor Clarkson asked that a recorded vote be taken on this motion.

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 the motion and the Members voted as follows: -

For: Councillors Barrett, Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Mrs Blanford, Buchanan, Campkin, Chilton, Clarkson, Clokie, Feacey, Forest, Gideon, Harman, Hayward, Heyes, Howard, Howard-Smith, Iliffe, Knowles, Krause, Ledger, Link, Michael, Mulholland, Miss Ovenden, Rogers, Shorter, Spain, Sparks, L Suddards, Turner, Walder, Ward, Mrs Webb, White, Wright.

Votes For 36

Against:

Votes Against 0

Abstentions: Councillors Anckorn, Farrell, C Suddards, Wedgbury

Abstentions 4

N.B. Councillor Smith had left by this point in the meeting.

This motion was carried

Resolved:

That given that the Five Year Corporate Plan is now in its fifth and final year, and is therefore being revised, it is proposed that a key element of the new Five Year Plan commencing in 2020, will be that Ashford will be over 80% Carbon Neutral before the end of this plan in 2025. It is further proposed that Ashford will be Completely Carbon Neutral before the end of the next five year plan in 2030. This will reinforce the status of Ashford Borough being the Garden of England Borough right in the very heart of Kent. In addition this objective will also be the number one priority for delivery in the new emerging Big Eight Projects for the Ashford Strategic Delivery Board.

(DS)

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