

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING

Minutes

WEDNESDAY, 18 OCTOBER 2023

PRESENT: Councillor L Swindlehurst (Chair)

Councillors J Aberley, C Atkins, P Barks, G Bentley, C Beswick, C Boone, B Cawley, A Church, J Cox, M Deaville, B Emery, E Fallows, K Flunder, J Garvey, M Gledhill, M Haines, A Hart, I Herdman, T Holmes, K Hoptroff, B Hughes, P Hughes, A Hulme, C Jebb, M Johnson, J Jones, J Kempster, L Malyon, K Mills, N Moul, V O'Shea, A Parkes, D Pascall, I Plant, J Porter, D Proudlove, P Roberts, J Salt, D Shaw, C Smith, M Spooner, M Swindlehurst, G Taylor, E Wain, R Ward, L Whitehouse, P Wilkinson, C Wood, M Worthington and N Yates

APOLOGIES: Councillors C Brady, M Durose, C Edwards, O Pointon and D Price

Prayers were offered by Reverend Nigel Irons.

23 **FORMER COUNCILLOR TONY MCNICOL AND MR HARRY MAWDSLEY**

The Council observed a minute's silence in memory of former Councillor Tony McNicol and Mr Harry Mawdsley (Independent Person) who had recently passed away.

24 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 19 July 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

25 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following declarations were made:-

Agenda Item	Members Declaring Interest	Nature of Interest
General – any matters arising relating to Staffordshire Police	Cllr. Porter	Other interest - employed by Staffordshire Police
Item 10 - Biddulph Neighbourhood Plan - Referendum and Decision Statement	All Biddulph Town Councillors	Other Interest – member of Biddulph Town Council

26 **CHAIRMAN'S OR LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS AND CORRESPONDENCE, IF ANY.**

The Chairman had attended many enjoyable and enlightening engagements leading to collaborative opportunities. Work was also ongoing to develop the Parish Assembly. Councillors were thanked for their attendance at the Civic Service held on 17 September 2023.

27 **TO CONSIDER AND DEBATE ANY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET, OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANELS AND COMMITTEES, IF ANY.**

27a **STANDARDS COMMITTEE - ANNUAL REPORT**

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

27b **AUDIT AND ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE - SUPPLEMENTARY ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT 2022/23**

RESOLVED:

That the Supplementary Annual Treasury Management Report 2022/23 be approved.

27c **AUDIT AND ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE - TREASURY MANAGEMENT UPDATE**

RESOLVED:

That the Treasury Management position as at 31st August 2023 be noted.

27d **CABINET - DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS SPD – ADOPTION**

RESOLVED:

1. That the feedback to the public consultation, suggested Council responses and modifications to the SPD be noted.
2. That the Developer Contributions SPD be adopted.

27e **CABINET - LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME – ADOPTION**

RESOLVED:

1. That the content of the proposed Local Development Scheme be noted.
2. That the Local Development Scheme and the outline timetable for the production of all documents that make up the local plan be adopted.

28 **CORPORATE PLAN 2023-27**

RESOLVED:

1. That the Council's Corporate Plan 2023-2027 as detailed in Appendix D of the report be approved.
2. That the process of internal and external consultation as set out in Section 14 of the report be approved.
3. That the process for adoption of the Corporate Plan as set out in Section 15 of the report be approved.

29 **BIDDULPH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - REFERENDUM AND DECISION STATEMENT**

RESOLVED:

1. That the representations received in response to the revised modifications consultation in relation to the Biddulph Neighbourhood Plan be noted.
2. That following statutory consultation on revised modifications, the District Council be satisfied that the basic conditions as required by Paragraph 8 (2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) have been met for the Biddulph Neighbourhood Plan and that a Decision Statement be published to confirm this and the plan proceeds to referendum in the Parish of Biddulph expected to be on 7th December 2023.

30 **APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS**

RESOLVED:

1. That the appointment of Philip Carnall as an Independent Person be confirmed.
2. That John Berrisford be appointed as a substitute Independent Person.

31 **NOTICES OF MOTION IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULE NO. 8, IF ANY.**

31a **LEEK TO STOKE RAILWAY LINE - COUNCILLOR J PORTER**

"Following the Prime Minister's announcement, this Council fully supports reopening the Leek to Stoke Railway Line and will work with our local MP Karen Bradley to make it happen over the coming years. We will work to deliver the maximum economic benefits to the whole of the Staffordshire Moorlands, including improving transport links, boosting local tourism and cutting carbon emissions. We will work with local communities to reopen railway stations along the line, including in Endon, to ensure this project benefits both our towns and rural communities."

As an **AMENDMENT** it was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** that:

"This Council welcomes the opportunity to work with all partners on the possible renewal of the Leek – Stoke railway line for industrial and passenger transport. We look forward to engaging with Network Rail on the development stage and to considering and reviewing the final fully costed and funded business case as part of our work to improve all aspects of public transport across the Staffordshire

Moorlands and we are committed to maximising the potential for job opportunities and developing tourism across the whole of the District.”

During the debate councillors discussed the need to consider improved connectivity for the whole district and to ensure that public money was spent wisely.

RESOLVED:

Having been **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED**, upon being put to the vote, the **AMENDMENT** was **CARRIED** unanimously in the terms set out above.

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TO ANSWER QUESTIONS ASKED UNDER PROCEDURE RULE NO. 10, IF ANY.

1. Question to the Leader of the Council received from Councillor Joe Porter

“Why has the Labour and Independent Administration only “cautiously” welcomed the Prime Minister’s announcement that the Leek to Stoke Railway will be reopened? Surely this should be hugely welcomed as one of the biggest economic opportunities for the Staffordshire Moorlands?”

Response:

“The Leek Stoke rail link project has many steps to go through before it can come to fruition. It is important to note that it is a long term joint project involving a number of public bodies and companies beyond this council including Staffordshire County Council, Stoke on Trent City Council, Network Rail and the UK Government.

Following the Prime Minister’s announcement, the project can move to the ‘Develop Stage’. This stage is rightly led by Network Rail as it will go deep into the technical detail of what is needed to be done in terms of construction, engineering, and railway architecture. If this stage is successful, the project will move to the final stage of planning which involves the production of a final business case.

This is a clearly defined path of development, typical for a regional infrastructure project that could involve up to £400 millions of public money. It will be some years before the groundworks could begin and even longer for it to become a reality.

As of now there are many variables to be considered. We do not yet know the views of our partner councils (Stoke and Staffordshire). The Government has recently said that some projects listed in the Network North policy paper are currently ‘illustrative’ rather than confirmed and while some projects have funding allocated to them, the Leek Stoke rail line does not. Also, there will definitely be one and possibly two general elections during the planning and construction stages so it is reasonable, given the HS2 situation, to factor that in.

In terms of caution, we also know how costs can change during the lifetime of large projects. There is no word yet from the government to confirm that the project will be fully funded from The Treasury. If a scenario developed where SMDC had to make a significant financial contribution towards the project, the council would have to consider that very carefully against our other priorities. We are committed to growing our local economy, improving public transport and developing tourism across the whole of the Staffordshire Moorlands. “

2. Question to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning received from Councillor Paul Roberts

“What changes to the SMDC planning policies will the labour run administration make to reflect Sir Kier Starmer’s speech last week with regards to building housing on the Green Belt?”

Response:

“Any change to Green Belt policy would first require the Government to revise the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). If this were to occur the new NPPF would become a material consideration in determining any planning applications and any future local plan review would need to demonstrate conformity with it. However, until such time that the NPPF is revised no change to Council policy with regard to Green Belt development would occur.”

In response to supplementary questions Councillor Proudlove stated that the Council was not in a position to change policy in terms of greenbelt which would require national policy to change. Exceptional circumstances would need to be demonstrated when considering planning applications to release land from the greenbelt. Failure to progress strategic sites in the local plan had left the Council vulnerable in terms of land supply and that work was underway to unlock land in the adopted Local Plan.

3. Question to the Leader of the Council received from Councillor Paul Roberts

“Can the Leader detail everything that the Member Development Champion who has been paid just under £800 between the election and now, has done during his time in the post?”

Response:

“Since their appointment on 20 June this year the Member Development Champion has been working closely with the Democratic Services team with regards to the delivery and design of councillor training and development activities. This has included:

- Reviewed the role of member development champion
- Ensuring that training seminars are actively promoted to members to maximise participation
- The use of video recordings of sessions where possible to enable councillors to view seminars that they were not able to attend (e.g. code of conduct, data protection and housing land supply seminars).
- Circulation of training and network opportunities delivered by the Local Government Association
- Reviewed the effectiveness of member induction programme
- Considering the next stage of seminars to be delivered covering areas such as overview and scrutiny

Presentations and recordings available so far have been emailed to members and uploaded to the Councillors’ Portal. This can be accessed via the Council’s intranet using the link <https://smdc.alliance-online.org/members/staffmoorlands>. In line with

previous years following all-out elections, councillors will shortly be invited to attend a meeting of the Member Development Working Group following the successful delivery of a number of seminars. The meeting will be chaired by the Member Development Champion and is due to take place on 15 November at 2.00pm to provide an opportunity for members to provide feedback on the seminars that have taken place so far and suggest development areas for the future.”

In response to supplementary questions the Leader of the Council stated that in the modern era councillors may deal with their duties via email, telephone, Teams and by undertaking work at weekends.

4. Question to the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism received from Cllr Keith Flunder

“Can the cabinet member for Tourism confirm plans for the closure of the Butter Market during the improvement works, and does he think that the compensation being offered to stallholders is sufficient?”

Response:

“We have been liaising with Butter Market traders for a number of months through group and individual sessions. We have listened to the views of the traders in developing the proposals and this includes the approach to compensation, in the event of a closure. Last week, we wrote to the Butter Market traders to recommend closure during the refurbishment period. This is not a decision we have taken lightly and we have taken on board the feedback we received through group and one to one sessions with market traders and have reflected this within our compensation options.

In addition to the compensation offer, we have also made a commitment to facilitate outside trading for all traders who requested this with all traders located together close to the Market Place. Finally, we are also committed to securing storage options for traders taking up the outdoor trading option. We are working towards a scheduled start date of the beginning of April 2024. This will allow for uninterrupted trading in the indoor markets for the seasonal events that are important for many businesses – Valentine’s, Mother’s Day and Easter.”

In response to supplementary questions the Portfolio Holder stated that there was a strong recommendation to close the market on health and safety grounds and that discussions were ongoing with market traders with regards to compensation and support during a difficult period of time, although the need to close for safety reasons would be further discussed. Works had been delayed which would allow traders to continue to operate through Easter which would be beneficial. In terms of a temporary location it was important to ensure traders maintained a presence in the town centre.

5. Question to the Portfolio Holder for Services received from Cllr James Aberley

“The latest press release from SMDC announces the installation finally, of the new car parking machines that were signed off back in March during the Conservative administration. The press release requests residents to use alternative machines or the pay by phone app during the physical changeover of machines. Would the cabinet member agree with me that it is discriminatory against people who for whatever reason choose not to, or can’t use the pay by phone app, and in some

cases car parks only have one machine, so there is also no other alternative available, and would the cabinet member agree with me that SMDC should suspend car parking charges with clear signage on a car park by car park basis during the replacement works?”

Response:

“The installation of new parking ticket machines in the Council Car Parks is now underway. To advise users how to pay for parking, a temporary notice will be placed on the car park information sign where installation is taking place. This will remain there for the 2-3 hour period it takes to install the new ticket machine.

In the knowledge that it would be more inconvenient for parking users to pay during the installation period the enforcement of parking charges will be relaxed for that time. However, having listened to feedback the Council have also decided to relax parking charges in car parks where installation is taking place for the period of time it takes to have the new ticket machine operational.”

In response to supplementary questions the Portfolio Holder stated that it was important that social media posts are checked in the same way as media releases.

6. Question to Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism received from Cllr Mark Deaville

“We were all massively disappointed that Cheadle were not successful in their bid for Levelling-Up funding. We decided that we would still go ahead with a much-needed refurbishment and some refiguration of Cheadle Leisure Centre. I’d be grateful if you could update Council on these plans please – with timelines. I’d be grateful for a written response please before the meeting.”

Response:

“Officers are working with the professional team supporting Leisure Transformation Plan projects at Brough Park and Biddulph Valley Leisure Centres to develop viable options for the future refurbishment of South Moorlands Leisure Centre. This work is progressing well and the outcome will be included in future Leisure Transformation Plan reports which are due to be reviewed over the course of November and December”.

In response to supplementary questions the Portfolio Holder stated that options were being considered for the refurbishment of Cheadle Leisure Centre. There were issues with regards to pool length and carbonisation protection and would provide more details in due course. Options for a basic/advanced refurbishment and replacement designs were being considered. The need to work hard and think smart was very important given the financial climate.

The meeting closed at 7.39 pm

_____ Chairman _____ Date