

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

Wednesday, 20 May 2020

PRESENT: Councillor Nunn (Chair); Councillor Larratt (Deputy Chair); Councillors Eldred, Hadland, Hallam, J Hill, Hibbert and King

1. APOLOGIES

There were none.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 March were agreed and signed by the Leader.

3. INTENTION TO HOLD PART OF THE MEETING IN PRIVATE IF NECESSARY

The Leader announced that Item 14 Town Centre Strategic Acquisition, Item 15 Exempt Appendices to Agenda Item 9 and Item 16 Exempt Appendices to Agenda Item 10 had all been made exempt under schedule 12A, Part 1, (3) of the Local Government Act 1972, as they contained commercially sensitive information.

4. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There was one member of the public registered to speak, Mr Daniel Soan, on Item 9 - Purchase and Redevelopment of Riverside House for Use as Affordable Housing.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Hadland and Hallam declared disclosable pecuniary interests in Item 8 – Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy as private sector landlords.

Councillors King and Nunn declared disclosable pecuniary interests in Item 11 – Community Asset Transfer. Councillor King announced her interest as a Parish Councillor for Upton. Councillor Nunn announced his interest as a Parish Councillor for East Hunsbury.

6. ISSUES ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

There were none.

7. HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2020-23

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing introduced the report and explained that the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy had been updated for 2020-2023, in line with the current regulations. Most notably, the Homelessness Act 2002 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The report outlined the findings from the review, and Councillor Hibbert commended the stakeholders who undertook the review work and held a series of local workshops during the second half of 2019 and the early part of 2020.

The new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy outlined the following objectives:

- Improving the health and wellbeing of local people
- Resilient Communities
- More homes, better homes
- Exceptional Services to be proud of

At the Leader's invitation, Councillors Birch and Stone addressed Cabinet and expressed

that they welcomed and were heartened by the updated strategy. They were impressed with the work carried out and congratulated those involved for their efforts in tackling the homelessness issue and making a positive impact on people's lives.

The Leader thanked the Councillors, and commended officers at Northampton Borough Council for their great efforts and the great work that continued throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (a) Approved the Council's new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan for the period 2020-2023; and
- (b) Delegated to the Director of Housing and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing, to make any minor changes to improve the layout and readability of the Strategy and Action Plan prior to publication.

8. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT POLICY

The Leader invited Councillor Hibbert to introduce and explain the report. Councillor Hibbert explained that the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy had been refreshed and updated. If agreed by Cabinet the new policy, which has taken into account government guidance, new legislation, changes to existing legislation and recent case law, would be enforced on 1 June 2020.

Councillor Hibbert commended the Council's intelligence-led and risk-based approach to housing enforcement and explained how this had informed the policy. The updated policy also would provide officers with extra powers, in line with the government regulations, to impose financial penalties on landlords and agents who failed to comply with regulations, as detailed in the report.

At the Leader's invitation, Councillors Birch and Stone addressed Cabinet and welcomed the new powers given to enforcement officers as this would benefit tenants, families, and promote well managed and safe housing which complied with housing standards. Councillor Stone expressed concern for housing officers to deal with the capacity of case work, and the timeliness of intervention in response to tenants' issues.

RESOLVED:

Cabinet approved the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy (attached to the report as Appendix A) With effect from 1 June 2020.

9. PURCHASE AND REDEVELOPMENT OF RIVERSIDE HOUSE FOR USE AS AFFORDABLE HOUSING

At the Leader's invitation, Councillor Hibbert introduced the report and emphasised that the purchase and redevelopment of Riverside House for affordable rented housing would bring the building back into use and provide much needed affordable housing. In total, there would be 60 apartments made available, 16 one-bedroom and 44 two-bedroom apartments, in a great town centre location. He explained that Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH) would assist with the scheme, and ensure that disruption was minimised through the change of use. Councillor Hibbert expressed the great working relationship Northampton Borough Council has with NPH and commended the Council and NPH for their great work. He thanked the Councillors for their support and confirmed that more schemes and housing for residents would be brought to Cabinet in the near future.

At the Leader's request, Mr Daniel Soan, addressed Cabinet and expressed that the purchase and redevelopment of Riverside House would help fulfil the need for more affordable housing and have a positive impact on Northampton and the local economy. He hoped that with the proximity of Riverside House to Northampton General Hospital, priority would be given to NHS key workers when housing is allocated. He asked if there were any electric charging points planned, as well as fibre broadband, which should be delivered for residents.

The Leader then invited Councillors Birch, Stone and B Markham to speak on the item. Councillor Stone expressed her delight to see projects such as Riverside House, and emphasised that affordable housing was much needed. Councillor Birch shared that whilst it was great news to see more housing in the town centre for young people, there was a real need for more 3-4 bedroom homes for families. Councillor B Markham gave his support for bringing the building back into use and bringing people into the town centre. He thanked officers for their hard work and hoped that officers would not lose sight of this, and that the great work would continue into unitary.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (a) Approved the purchase and redevelopment of Riverside House, funded through the Housing Revenue Account at a total cost set out in Exempt Appendix A to the report, in order to provide a total of 60 apartments (16 one-bedroom and 44 two-bedroom) that will be let to eligible households on the Housing Register;
- (b) Approved the use of the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme to complete the purchase and redevelopment of Riverside House;
- (c) Delegated to the Director of Housing and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer, the Borough Secretary, Cabinet Member for Finance and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing – the authority, on being satisfied with the results of the due diligence exercise undertaken by NPH on the Council's behalf, to purchase and redevelop Riverside House as affordable rented housing.
- (d) Delegated to the Director of Housing and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing and the Chief Finance Officer, the authority to determine the rent levels and services charges for the new homes in Riverside House; and
- (e) Delegated to the Director of Housing and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing and Northampton Partnership Homes, the authority to develop and approve a Local Lettings Policy that determines how the homes in Riverside House are allocated.

10. REDEVELOPMENT OF BELGRAVE HOUSE FOR AFFORDABLE RENTED HOUSING

At the Leader's invitation, Councillor Hibbert introduced the report and explained that the redevelopment of Belgrave House for affordable rented housing had been brought before Cabinet before in January 2019. The redevelopment would bring back into use Belgrave House and provide 122 apartments in the regenerated building 'The Clock House' for residents.

Councillor Stone raised the point that key workers should be prioritised and allocated much needed housing. As Covid-19 has heightened issues for these individuals with noise-levels impacting their sleep and wellbeing. Councillor Birch shared the same sentiments and announced she was pleased to see the report.

Councillor Hibbert explained that under Covid-19 the definition of key worker has expanded, and these places will be designated to those in need.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (a) Approved the acquisition and redevelopment of Belgrave House, by the Council entering into a 35 year full repairing and insuring finance lease with Legal & General's Limited Price Inflation Fund (LPI Fund) in order to enable Belgrave House to be converted from office use into a residential scheme of 122 apartments, called 'The Clock House', which will be let at affordable rents to eligible households on the Housing Register;
- (b) Approved the use of the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme, including the use of Right to Buy receipts to subsidise 30% of the costs, in order to complete the acquisition and redevelopment of Belgrave House;
- (c) Delegated to the Director of Housing and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer, the Borough Secretary, Cabinet Member for Finance and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing, the authority, on being satisfied with the results of the due diligence exercise undertaken by Northampton Partnership Homes, to enter into a 35 year finance lease with Legal & General's LPI Fund;
- (d) Delegated to the Director of Housing and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing and the Chief Finance Officer, the authority to determine the rent levels and service charges for the new homes in The Clock House;
- (e) Delegated to the Director of Housing and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing and Northampton Partnership Homes, the authority to develop and approve a Local Lettings Policy that determines how the homes in The Clock House are allocated.

11. COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER

The Cabinet member for Regeneration and Enterprise, Councillor Hadland presented the report and explained that there was a history of devolving assets to community centres and Parish Councils. A consultation with Parish Councils had taken place, and safeguards had been put into place for community use. The transfer of assets would give more powers to Parish Councils, as set out in the recommendations.

Councillor Birch shared that this would give neighbourhoods a sense of pride in their communities and would become more important after lockdown had ended. She hoped that support would be given to ensure there were not multiple leases and asked for assurance that a robust process would be in place to work with the Parish Councils.

Councillor Stone expressed that in the climate after covid-19, with the anticipated recession and struggling communities, community centres would be increasingly important as hubs for social care and providing community support and engagement.

Councillors Eldred and King expressed that they completely supported the report and were pleased to see more power for Parish Councils and community centres and authority being given to local people.

The Deputy Leader shared that this would only be the start of support and assets within the community, and that he had every confidence in communities as they had been ran well for

years. He expressed recognition for Liz Carroll-Wheat and her excellent work at East Hunsbury.

The Leader emphasised his commitment and support for the community asset transfer as it showed a bright future for Parish Councils and community spaces.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet delegated authority to the Economic Growth and Regeneration Manager, in consultation with the Borough Secretary, Chief Finance Officer and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise to complete the transfers of Public Open Spaces and Community Centres to the Parish Councils on the following terms:-

- That there is a restrictive covenant placed on the land and centres to ensure
- That they continue to be used as intended for community use.
- That the Council will continue to provide grass cutting services where there are existing contracts until June 2028 but thereafter the Parish Council will assume this responsibility.
- The Parish Councils will take on all other responsibilities for the land and centres at completion of the community asset transfer.
- The Council to retain a right of pre-emption should the Parish Council no longer require the land or centres for permitted use.
- There will be an independent valuation process undertaken by a RICS qualified valuer to determine market price completed for all assets to be transferred.
- The independent market valuation will consider the financial benefit of the grass cutting contract, the management and maintenance costs, the restrictive covenant and where relevant, the council tax charges collected on behalf of the Parishes for services provided in the Parish Council areas. A net market value will be determined, and the transfer price will be agreed considering any value for money savings that will be achieved by the transfer.
- Each party will bear their own professional fees including legal and estates costs.
- The transfer will be subject to advertisement to adhere to statutory requirements to allow members of the public opportunity to comment. These comments will be reviewed by the Economic Growth and Regeneration Manager, in consultation with the Borough Secretary, and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise and should there no objections to the proposed disposal are received the matter will complete. If there are any objections received to the proposed disposal then in accordance with statutory procedure the matter will be brought back to Cabinet for consideration.

12. NORTHAMPTON ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGY

At the Leader's invitation, Councillor Hadland introduced the report which set out the new strategy for growing Northampton's economy. He explained that the economic growth strategy had been a vast piece of work dating back to 2008, and extensive research and stakeholder involvement had gone into finalising the strategy. The new strategy aimed to encompass Northampton's geographical and economic interests and support business enterprise to create a modern twenty-first century town centre, whilst protecting the town's heritage assets.

Councillor Stone addressed Cabinet and shared that she was pleased to receive the report, but hoped that Cabinet would relook at the strategy following Covid-19, as a recession would cause economic uncertainty. She stressed the need for diversity and engagement with different communities to inform the strategy.

The Leader praised the great work that had been done to achieve the new economic strategy, and affirmed that the work does not exclude any community, and would benefit all

communities in Northampton.

RESOLVED That Cabinet:

- (a) Adopted the Northampton Economic Growth Strategy (2020-2025) attached to this report as Appendix 1 which establishes the economic growth vision and priorities for the town. The document also sets out the actions that are required to achieve economic growth for all over the period of 2020-2025.
- (b) Approved the budget arrangements identified within the report including reallocating future years Business Incentive Scheme revenue to fund the broader range of economic development activity identified within the strategy.
- (c) Delegated to the Economic Growth and Regeneration Manager in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise, the Chief Finance Officer and the Borough Secretary the authority to make any minor amendments to the said strategy which will include its desktop publishing, with the caveat that any further reports be brought to Cabinet as and when considered necessary.

13. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Chair moved that the public and Press be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that there was likely to be disclosure to them of such categories of exempt information as defined by Section 100(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 as listed against such items of business by reference to the appropriate paragraph of Schedule 12A to such Act.

The Motion was Carried.

14. TOWN CENTRE STRATEGIC ACQUISITION

This item was held in private session.

Cabinet agreed to the recommendations as set out in the report.

15. EXEMPT APPENDICES TO AGENDA ITEM 9

This item was held in private session.

Cabinet agreed to the recommendations as set out in the report.

16. EXEMPT APPENDICES TO AGENDA ITEM 10

This item was held in private session.

Cabinet agreed to the recommendations as set out in the report.

The meeting concluded at 7:15 pm