

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, duly convened and held at the Council Chamber, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN1 1RS, at 7.00 pm on Wednesday, 6 October 2021

PRESENT:

The Mayor Councillor Chris Woodward (Chairman)
Councillors Allen, Atkins, Atwood, Backhouse, Barrington-King, Bailey, Bland (Vice-Chairman), Britcher-Allan, Chapelard, Dawlings, Everitt, Fairweather, Fitzsimmons, Goodship, Hall, Dr Hall, Hamilton, Hayward, Hickey, Hill, Hills, Holden, Knight, Lewis, Lidstone, March, McDermott, Ms Palmer, Patterson, Poile, Pope, Pound, Rands, Rutland, Scholes, Scott, Simmons, Thomson, Warne, Willis and Wormington

IN ATTENDANCE: William Benson (Chief Executive), Lee Colyer (Director of Finance, Policy and Development (Section 151 Officer)), Claudette Valmond (Head of Legal Partnership and Interim Monitoring Officer) and Mark O'Callaghan (Scrutiny and Engagement Officer)

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

FC32/21 Apologies were received from Councillors Ellis, Funnell, Morton and Roberts. Councillor White was not present.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 07 JULY 2021

FC33/21 No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting dated 07 July 2021 be approved as a correct record.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

FC34/21 No declarations of pecuniary or other significant interest were made.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

FC35/21 The Mayor announced:

- A new officer supporting the directors and mayoralty had joined the Council.
- In August, the Mayor had attended the commemoration of the opening of a pair of war memorial cottages in Capel which were available to locals in need.
- In September the Mayor had attended the Big Thank You event in Calverley Grounds to recognise volunteers who gave their time to support their communities.

The Leader announced:

- Accounts for 2020/21 had been completed and received an unqualified external audit for the twelfth successive year. This was against a background of significantly increased workloads due to the administration of Covid grants.
- Tunbridge Wells was one of the few councils to have completed on time, the Finance team were commended.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development announced:

- Tunbridge Wells had again been voted by 'Which?' as the best place to live in Kent.
- Those involved in running local events were commended for helping to get back to normal life. The Puppetry Festival started 9 October.

The Portfolio Holder for the Environment announced:

- With the effects of climate change increasing, the delegates to COP26 were urged to show leadership in tackling the challenges.
- A new Climate Change officer had joined the council to drive forward local progress.

The Portfolio Holder for Culture and Leisure announced:

- Royal Tunbridge Wells had won gold and category winner in the Large Town category of Britain In Bloom.
- A large number of other prizes had been won in Tunbridge Wells In Bloom.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

FC36/21 The Mayor advised that no questions from members of the public had been received under Council Procedure Rule 8.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

FC37/21 The Mayor advised that six questions from members of the council had been received under Council Procedure Rule 10.

1. Question from Councillor Rutland

"In June of this year, you told the Courier newspaper that you were pushing for a meeting with the owners of the former cinema site in the middle of Tunbridge Wells. In the latest edition of the council's Local magazine, you stated that you wished 'to see if there is anything we can do about the cinema site'. What actions, meetings and conversations have taken place with the owners or other relevant parties since you were elected leader of the council in June?"

Answer from Councillor Dawlings

"In July I met with the owner and their agents as I indicated I intended to do. I emphasised the importance of the site to the town, the impatience we all feel at the site remaining undeveloped and the need for a quality development in such a key central part of the town. This meeting had led to further meetings with our planners, but pre-application planning meetings are in confidence and I'm afraid we must respect the confidence of those pre-application meetings."

[No supplementary question.]

2. Questions from Councillor Hayward

"The black bins were purchased via ESPO which is a public sector owned professional buying organisation. The cheapest on the price list was taken

and the Craemer bins with no virgin material purchased. The price quoted on ESPO and paid was that for a single order of 780 bins. About 44,000 were actually purchased. There is no option for suppliers to offer reduced pricing for larger quantities on the ESPO platform. Given the scale of the order and the need to demonstrate Value for Money, did the administration seek a reduced rate which, under the framework and required by procurement rules, reopens the competition to all suppliers?"

Answer from Councillor Dawlings

"I think you're mistaken. The black bins purchased are a blend of virgin material and recycled plastic. The Council utilised the ESPO – the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation – framework which is a fully compliant and approved route to the market. A full supplier engagement process was undertaken to ensure manufacturing timescales were achievable and that Brexit would not cause any adverse supply issues – this procurement process was undertaken in late 2018 when Brexit at that time was a very imminent problem. The Council requested best and final pricing from framework providers following our supplier engagement event and then placed call-off orders via the framework. A mini-competition would not open competition to the wider market, only to those suppliers approved under the ESPO framework. The blended bins which included recycled material were slightly cheaper than those with no recycled material."

Supplementary question from Councillor Hayward

How many [defective] bins have been refunded under warranty and will they be replaced by better-quality bins from a different supplier to avoid the repetition of the very expensive officer time in dealing with defective bins, of which there must be hundreds?

Answer from Councillor Dawlings

"I don't know, this was a joint procurement process with Tonbridge and Malling. I will ask and reply when I have an answer."

3. Question from Councillor Patterson

"Does the Leader of the Council realise the offence and hurt caused by his article, on page 7 of the Local Magazine entitled 'Local Plan', to residents of Capel Parish? Why does he regard the historic countryside and infrastructure of Capel Parish as less valuable and less worthy of protection than other parishes in the Borough?"

Answer from Councillor Dawlings

"It's probably impossible to make a brief statement about a subject as sensitive as the Local Plan for anyone who lives near an area which is earmarked for significant development. Capel is one of those areas and I feel for anyone adversely affected by development near where they live and especially so when they love where they live. I think we are all aware there is a shortage of homes in our country and the pressure to provide more homes in the south east is unrelenting. The Pre-Submission Local Plan has wide cross-party support. I think just one member of your party opposed the Plan and I don't suppose that in supporting the plan any member was making a judgement on the historic countryside and infrastructure of Capel Parish, I

certainly was not. To me, the Local Plan recognises the need to protect the area of outstanding natural beauty, the need to minimise the loss of green belt and the need for housing to be supported by the necessary infrastructure. The Local Plan includes policies that address environmental concerns, notably the principal of net gains to biodiversity. I also recognise both the dangers associated with not having a sound Local Plan, and the attendant consequences of development by appeal, and the benefits there are with having robust and up to date policies which are used on a daily basis – for example, in relation to boosting social rented affordable housing and supporting higher standards of design, sustainable construction and renewable energy use. I am confident we have produced a sound and sustainable Local Plan which has strongly sought to maximise opportunities for brown-field development. The Plan has been worked on for a number of years and is shortly to be a matter to be addressed by the independent Planning Inspector.”

Supplementary question from Councillor Patterson

“Will Councillor Dawlings be making arrangements to visit Capel Parish to explain the ideas of his article?”

Answer from Councillor Dawlings

“I would be very happy to come and talk to members of Capel Parish.”

4. Question from Councillor Pope

“An increasing number of residents are complaining about the suspension of the garden waste collections and asking what they are expected to do with the garden waste that has been building up for 10 weeks. As the suspension of this paid-for service appears to be indefinite, what response can you provide for residents?”

Answer from Councillor Bailey

“The decision to temporarily suspend the garden waste service was taken due to the national shortage of HGV drivers. This is affecting crucial areas of the economy, including the distribution of food, fuel and medicine, as well as waste and recycling services around the country. Our contractor is taking urgent action to recruit the staff needed to resume the garden waste service. This has included substantially increasing pay, with the firm’s pay rates for waste service drivers amongst the highest in Kent. However, the labour market is extremely challenging and it is taking time to secure the required staff. But this continues to be a priority, both for us and for the contractor, and we will restore the service - in full or in part - as soon as we possibly can. In the meantime, the Council’s advice is that residents find other suitable ways to dispose of their garden waste, either by composting or by taking it to local Household Waste Recycling Centres. However, we fully accept that this is far from ideal and sincerely apologise for the inconvenience caused. The Council is not charging while the garden waste service is suspended, and existing contracts will be extended to make up for missed collections. So, all subscribers will receive the 26 collections they paid for.”

Supplementary question from Councillor Pope

“A large number of other councils have suspended these services and also had similar issues with staff shortages but most of them have either restarted the collections or have published dates when they will restart the collection of garden waste. Is there any indication of when the service may restart?”

Answer from Councillor Bailey

“Councils have taken slightly different approaches to garden waste; some have tried to keep the services going despite suffering staff shortages and may have experienced delays to their main waste and recycling collections as a result. We decided to prioritise our waste and recycling collections by suspending the garden waste service and generally that has worked very well. In terms of timing, we are in constant discussions with Urbaser and we are monitoring their efforts to recruit the resources needed to restart the service but we have no date currently.”

5. Question from Councillor Rutland

“We are justifiably proud of the many creative businesses in Tunbridge Wells. However, in June, the contract for the redesign of the Amelia Scott website was awarded to Stunn Ltd, an agency based in Birmingham. Are steps being taken to review our procurement policy in order to create opportunities for local firms and suppliers?”

Answer from Councillor March

“This tender was run as an open procedure via the Kent business portal and contracts finder, meaning it was advertised to all companies local to the Borough Council but also across the UK. This process provided opportunities for local businesses to engage with the council and take part in the tender but it also allows us the opportunity to test the market fully and ensure value. The government is currently assessing the regulations surrounding public sector procurement in the UK and we have taken an active role in responding to consultations. We are awaiting the outcome of this process and – coupled with the recent procurement policy notice regarding reserved contracts – we will look to implement changes to our processes in line with any new regulatory framework.”

Supplementary question from Councillor Rutland

“Currently, is there anything to stop the council directly inviting local businesses to pitch for these kinds of contracts? If not, does it do so as a matter of course?”

Answer from Councillor March

“All Tunbridge Wells and UK businesses can go through the Kent business portal and contracts finder. They have the ability to do so if they wish to, nothing is stopping them at all. In fact, with the Amelia we have had a variety of local and national suppliers working on the project: we have local architects from Canterbury, we have a technical team from Tunbridge Wells and the café franchise has gone to a Tunbridge Wells company. They all had the same opportunities.”

6. Question 6 from Councillor Patterson

“Is Councillor McDermott aware of the recent report by eminent academics published by the Royal Academy of Engineering and supported by the Architects Journal, reported recently in the BBC on 24th September that says: ‘Cement production alone causes 8% of global emissions. The construction industry should re-use existing buildings and foundations, to recycle their embodied emissions, instead of building new ones. 51% of the lifecycle of carbon from residential development is emitted before the building is first used.’ With this in mind would he consider how the Pre-Submission Local Plan can be adapted to reuse existing buildings and reduce new build to further the Council's objective to be carbon neutral by 2030?”

Answer from Councillor McDermott

“You should be familiar with the fact that the embodied energy of existing buildings is a theme running through the Pre-Submission Local Plan including a presumption that unsustainable demolition will be avoided wherever possible. I am happy to email privately with further details but he might want to start with Strategic Policy STR7 on climate change, a strategic policy which guides the whole of the Local Plan, and policies EN1 and EN3 which encourages the use of low-carbon materials and sets out ambitious new standards for carbon reduction. If Councillor Patterson is serious about meeting the Council's climate change ambitions he will recognise the vital importance of the Local Plan in delivering this and the fact that the policies in the new Local Plan are far stronger than the existing policies on such matters.”

Supplementary question from Councillor Patterson

“Given that TWBC target is to reduce annual carbon emissions 2,500 tonnes per annum to 750 tonnes per annum by 2030 and the foundations of 4,900 new houses alone will generate 17,000 tonnes, will the portfolio holder acknowledge that if the Local Plan, as it stands now, is implemented there is no chance of the borough being carbon neutral by 2030?”

Answer from Councillor McDermott

“Members have seen the extreme evidence base, topic papers and other supporting documents, such as the sustainability appraisal and infrastructure delivery plan, which have informed all the different aspects of the Local Plan. These are available on the Council's website and I refer Councillor Patterson to that information and documentation. I would also like to point out that with the Amelia Scott – we have done quite a good job there – when we took the bricks down we cleaned them all and then replaced them, that was 18,000 bricks. Similarly, there was a lot of oak panelling and such things in the building, 800ft of it, and we've repurposed those. These are examples of how we are working to do this.”

In response to the Mayor's intervention, Councillor McDermott undertook to respond in writing.

[Answer provided after the meeting –

“The metric tonne per annum figures you refer to are those from the carbon audit of the operations of TWBC. The July 2019 Full Council resolution was that there is an ambition to make the Council's operations carbon neutral and

these figures reflect this. Progress is starting on the Council's change in operations in order to bring about this reduction in carbon output towards the ambition for 2030.

I am assuming that the figure of 4900 new homes refers to the number of new homes which are proposed to be allocated in the parish of Capel in the Pre-Submission Local Plan – I have heard you use that figure before. It is important to remember that it is expected that c.750 houses would be delivered in Tudeley and c.1050 in east Capel, by the end of March 2030.

I believe you are conflating two issues here: the carbon emissions from the operation of the Council and carbon embodied in the production of cement. I have no reason at this time to think that the Council will not realise its ambitions of its operations being carbon neutral by 2030.

The Council's 2019 resolution recognised that the combined work of the wider community, including businesses, organisations and individuals is needed to realise the goal of carbon neutrality for the borough by 2030. As I set out in my response to your first question, the Local Plan contains a number of policies that will work towards this, being far stronger and more stringent than current ones.

The construction of buildings will increase carbon emissions but this must be balanced against a variety of other improvements which are being made by society and businesses across the borough (and region), including in terms of vehicle efficiency, reduced commuting through increased working from home, extending tree cover, more active travel, changes in farming practices, etc and carbon offsetting through, for example the planting of additional trees.

Therefore, I will not and cannot agree to your request, and I remain optimistic that the goal of carbon neutrality for the borough will be reached by 2030.”]

NOTICE OF USE OF URGENCY PROCEDURES

FC38/21 Councillor Woodward moved, and Councillor Bland seconded, the recommendation set out in the notice on the agenda.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation.

RESOLVED – That the use of the Call-In and Urgency procedure in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 14 in respect of Cabinet decision: PSPO 2021 – Three-month extension of two 2018 measures and formal approval of other three-year extensions made on 23 September 2021 be noted.

AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION: ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES AND DOCUMENT SEALING

FC39/21 Councillor Simmons moved, and Councillor Backhouse seconded, the recommendation set out in the report on the agenda.

Debate included:

- Sealing of documents was a necessary process but difficult to implement securely with remote and flexible working practices.
- The proposed amendments were minor in nature.

- The recommendation was approved by the Audit and Governance Committee.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation.

RESOLVED – That the amendments to the Constitution as set out in paragraph 1.5 of the report be approved.

LAMBERHURST NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN

FC40/21 Councillor Dr Hall moved, and Councillor McDermott seconded, recommendations one and two (not three) as set out in the report on the agenda.

Debate included:

- Neighbourhood planning was widely supported.
- The Plan balanced local history with sustainable development.
- The efforts of the many people involved were commended.
- Recommendation three in the report was not necessary as a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) was not required for the purposes of this particular Neighbourhood Plan.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation.

RESOLVED –

1. That, following a favourable local Referendum result in relation to the use of the Lamberhurst Neighbourhood Development Plan to help in the determination of planning applications in the Parish Neighbourhood Area, the Lamberhurst Neighbourhood Development Plan be formally 'made' (adopted) and become part of the statutory Development Plan for the area with immediate effect; and
2. That the Lamberhurst Neighbourhood Development Plan Decision Statement (post-Referendum) shown at Appendix A to the report be published.

COUNCIL TAX REDUCTIONS SCHEME 2022-23

FC41/21 Councillor Dawlings moved, and Councillor Scott seconded, the recommendations set out in the report on the agenda.

Debate included:

- This was a new scheme introduced in 2021/22 and had not yet completed a full year in operation.
- Positive feedback had been received including from the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- The new scheme was easy to understand.
- The Council could choose to give 100 per cent relief to those most in need.
- Those in receipt of maximum Universal Credit, the poorest, still had to pay £200-300 Council Tax under the scheme.
- Availability of disposable income affected many other aspects of poverty.
- Members should spend time at the Gateway to fully understand the issues affecting those on low incomes.

- The Council should show leadership in increasing the relief and not just follow others.
- Council Tax paid was taken into account when calculating other benefits.

In response to a request for clarification in the event that the motion was rejected, the Chief Executive and Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) advised:

- The report had been considered by the Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board and Cabinet where detailed questions could have been asked of officers before being presented to Full Council.
- The proposals had been consulted on and any change at this stage would require new consultation.
- Any changes to the relief would need to be funded by the Council which would have significant implications.
- It was a legal requirement to review the scheme each year. The motion would allow the current scheme to continue and a full review could be undertaken next year.

Debate continued:

- The government had announced a Household Support Fund to further assist with food and energy costs.
- The current scheme and the Council's support of services such as Citizens' Advice was generous.
- TWBC only received ten per cent of Council Tax. The cost to unilaterally offer 100 per cent relief would need to be borne by the Council.
- Relief between 75 and 85 per cent was normal.
- A review should be undertaken once a full year's data had been completed.

Councillor Pound requested a recorded vote on the motion.

Members who voted for the motion: Councillors Allen, Atwood, Backhouse, Bailey, Barrington-King, Bland, Chapelard, Dawlings, Fairweather, Goodship, C. Hall, Dr Hall, Hamilton, Hickey, B. Hills, Holden, Lidstone, March, McDermott, Ms Palmer, Poile, Rands, Rutland, Scholes, Scott, Simmons, Thomson, Warne and Woodward. (29)

Members who voted against the motion: Councillors Atkins, Britcher-Allan, Everitt, D. Hill, Lewis, Pound and Willis. (7)

Members who abstained from voting: Councillors Fitzsimmons, Hayward, Knight, Patterson, Pope and Wormington. (6)

RESOLVED –

1. That the progress of the inaugural year of the income banded Council Tax Reduction Scheme be noted; and
2. That no changes be made to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2022-2023.

ELECTORAL REVIEW: COUNCIL SIZE

FC42/21 Councillor Barrington-King moved, and Councillor Holden seconded, the recommendations set out in the report on the agenda.

Debate on the motion included:

- The recommendation from the General Purposes Committee for keeping the number of members at 48 followed several workshops and a public consultation.
- The size of the Council should be based on the numbers needed for the council to function effectively.
- The public consultation showed a majority favouring no reduction.
- Partner organisations, including parish councils favoured the status quo.
- The higher the ratio of representatives to electors the better.
- Saving money or conforming to average ratios elsewhere were not sufficient reasons to change.
- A reduction in numbers as a form of appeasing the Boundary Commissions in the hope of avoiding steeper cuts was not sufficient reason to change.
- Workload of councillors had not reduced – contracted services still needed overseeing, ward work had not lessened and modern communication technology had increased the amount of contact with residents.
- Retaining 48 members was justified.

Councillor Dawlings moved, and Councillor Pound seconded, an amendment that the Council's submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission on Council Size be amended to recommend that the number of councillors be 39.

Debate on the amendment included:

- The number of direct council functions had reduced significantly since the last review.
- New communication methods had made it easier to engage with residents.
- The loss of Revenue Support Grant and limited other sources of income put tight restrictions on the council's resources.
- Fewer meetings were being held and many meetings were now held online, reducing the time and travel required of councillors.
- Considering the reduction in workload, maintaining the number of councillors was not justified.
- 39 members was justified and more likely to be accepted by the Boundary Commission.
- The public consultation showed a majority in favour of keeping the same or increasing the number of members.
- Councillor's workload had not reduced.
- Population was expected to grow by 30,000 over the next 20 years.
- A reduction in members would reduce the talent pool and range of experience from which to draw committee and cabinet members.
- The fewer members the larger and less representative the wards.
- Fewer members would increase the workload and time commitment which could deter those with work or childcare responsibilities from standing for election.

- Reducing opportunities for those with work or childcare responsibilities would disproportionately affect young people and women, two groups already under-represented on the Council.
- The work of the General Purposes Committee had demonstrated that the number of members needed for the Council to function was closer to 48.
- The submission to the Boundary Commission should be based on evidence.
- The submission to the Boundary Commission should not be based on what the Council thinks the Commission wants to hear.
- Significant changes would be coming as a result of the earlier decision to retain elections by-thirds. Ward boundaries would change in any case.
- Continuing efficiencies and new technology would reduce the workload on councillors.
- Much of the work of councillors was 'behind the scenes' and this was not always appreciated by residents. A reduction in councillors would reduce the influence of residents.
- The average ratio quoted by the Boundary Commission was a useful guide. Tunbridge Wells was not so special that the ratio was not relevant.
- The workload of Councillors was not equal and there was spare capacity.
- The main barrier to people wanting to be councillors was the belief they would not be influential, fewer councillors would increase the influence of each councillor and encourage more people to come forward.
- All wards would be three-member in future, ward work could be shared.
- Tunbridge Wells was over-represented compared to other similar authorities.

The Mayor took a recorded vote on the amendment.

Members who voted for the amendment: Councillors Allen, Bland, Britcher-Allan, Dawlings, Everitt, Fairweather, Goodship, Hamilton, Hayward, D. Hill, Knight, Lewis, March, McDermott, Pound, Scott, Warne, Willis and Woodward. (19)

Members who voted against the amendment: Councillors Atkins, Backhouse, Bailey, Barrington-King, Chapelard, Fitzsimmons, C. Hall, Dr Hall, B. Hills, Holden, Lidstone, Ms Palmer, Patterson, Poile, Rands, Rutland, Scholes, Simmons, Thomson and Wormington. (20)

Members who abstained from voting: Councillors Atwood, Hickey and Pope. (3)

AMENDMENT NOT CARRIED

Debate returned to the original motion (keeping the number of members at 48):

- No further comments.

The Mayor took a recorded vote on the motion.

Members who voted for the motion: Councillors Atkins, Atwood, Backhouse, Bailey, Barrington-King, Chapelard, Fairweather, Fitzsimmons, C. Hall, Dr Hall, B. Hills, Holden, Lewis, Lidstone, Ms Palmer, Patterson, Poile, Pope, Rands, Rutland, Scholes, Simmons, Thomson and Wormington. (24)

Members who voted against the motion: Councillors Allen, Bland, Dawlings, Everitt, Goodship, Hamilton, D. Hill, McDermott, Pound, Scott, Willis and Woodward. (12)

Members who abstained from voting: Councillors Britcher-Allan, Hayward, Hickey, Knight, March and Warne. (6)

RESOLVED –

1. That the Council Size Submission (the Submission) at appendix A be approved and submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission (the Commission) for England by 1 November 2021; and
2. That authority be delegated to the Head of Policy and Governance in consultation with Group Leaders to make such amendments to the Submission as are necessary to give effect to the resolutions passed by Full Council prior to the Submission being submitted to the Commission.

APPOINTMENT OF MONITORING OFFICER

FC43/21 Councillor Dawlings moved, and Councillor Simmons seconded, the recommendations set out in the report on the agenda.

Debate included:

- It was a legal requirement to have a Monitoring Officer.
- An interim Monitoring Officer was being appointed pending the appointment of a permanent replacement.
- Claudette Valmond was eminently qualified and well experienced.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation.

RESOLVED –

1. That Claudette Valmond be appointed as the Interim Head of Legal Partnership and Monitoring Officer for the Council, with effect from 24 October 2021; and
2. That the Interim Head of Legal Partnership be authorised to exercise the Head of Legal Partnership's delegated functions and responsibilities in the Council's Constitution, with effect from 24 October 2021.

TOWN HALL

FC44/21 Councillor Dawlings moved, and Councillor Hayward seconded, the recommendations set out in the report on the agenda.

Debate included:

- Space within the Town Hall was surplus to requirement.
- Demand for co-working space was well established.

- Three companies had set out different models of operating such a scheme which informed the preparation of an Invitation to Tender.
- A full procurement process would be undertaken but at pace to maximise the opportunity.
- Renting part of the Town Hall would provide much needed income.
- Facilities would be improved, including for the Council's own staff.
- Wider economic benefits would come from attracting more workers to the town centre.
- The Council would retain ownership of the building.
- The cross-party working group would continue to be fully involved as work developed.
- Major alterations to the building were not expected as the mixed-office arrangement seems to be in line with current market demands. Some investment would be needed.
- The cost to the Council would depend on reaching an agreement to balance short-term investment and long-term returns.
- The proposed budget was not the size of the investment by the Council but would provide a framework on which an agreement would be negotiated, in a process similar to the Council's normal method of approving capital expenditure, subject to further decision-making procedures.
- The proposals were an opportunity to improve the conditions and wellbeing of council staff.
- Improvements would contribute towards the Council's target to be carbon neutral by 2030.
- The proposals were exciting and a tribute to cross-party working.
- The majority of the council's income came from sources other than taxes, so the council needed to increase alternative income.
- Caution was needed over approving a large capital budget without a business case or forecasts and delegating the authority to raise and spend the budget to officers.
- The decision to award a contract should be subject to formal decision-making.
- The budget was to indicate the seriousness of the Council in moving forward and to strengthen the Council's negotiating position.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation.

RESOLVED –

1. That a capital budget of up to £5m be established to enable the conversion of the Town Hall for co-working;
2. That the Head of Economic Development & Property, s151 Officer and Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance & Governance be delegated authority to release the budget subject to the Council entering into contract with a co-working provider who has satisfied the Council's due diligence and provided a sound business case; and
3. That the s151 Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance be delegated authority for the identification of the source of the funding which may include borrowing or external funding.

MOTION ON NOTICE FROM COUNCILLOR CHAPELARD

FC45/21 Councillor Chapelard moved, and Councillor Everitt seconded, the motion set out in the notice on the agenda.

Debate included:

- Motion reaffirms the motion agreed by the Council on 7 January 2015.
- Gatwick proposed to bring its northern emergency runway into regular use. This would increase aircraft noise and pollution.
- The proposals would mean Gatwick accounted for 5.5 per cent of the total UK carbon dioxide emissions.
- Air capacity would be increased by a third runway at Heathrow so there was no need for expansion at Gatwick.
- Noise was the greater concern in this matter as emissions from cars were more polluting.
- The previous motion was well debated and there appeared to be no material change on the issues since.
- The motion was a worth expression of leadership from the Council and in line with the Council's targets on climate change.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation.

The motion was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED – Tunbridge Wells Borough Council continues to oppose any further expansion of Gatwick Airport. This council does not support the airport's proposal to use its northern runway for routine use as it will lead to more flights and more pollution for our residents. The environmental damage this will cause goes against tackling the climate change emergency.

URGENT BUSINESS

FC46/21 There was no urgent business.

COMMON SEAL OF THE COUNCIL

FC47/21 **RESOLVED** – That the Common Seal of the Council be affixed to any contract, minute, notice or other document arising out of the minutes or pursuant to any delegation, authority or power conferred by the Council.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

FC48/21 The next scheduled meeting was Wednesday 15 December 2021.

NOTES: The meeting concluded at 9.30 pm.