

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall on 19 July 2022 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor Owen Bierley (Chairman)
Councillor John McNeill (Vice-Chairman) and
Councillor Mrs Tracey Coulson (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Stephen Bunney
Councillor Christopher Darcel
Councillor Michael Devine
Councillor Mrs Caralyne Grimble
Councillor Mrs Jessie Milne
Councillor Peter Morris
Councillor Roger Patterson
Councillor Mrs Lesley Rollings
Councillor Jim Snee
Councillor Trevor Young

In Attendance:
Sally Grindrod-Smith Director Planning, Regeneration & Communities
Ady Selby Director of Commercial & Operational Services
Grant White Enterprising Communities Manager
Andy Gray Housing and Enforcement Manager
David Kirkup Contracts Manager – Property and Assets
Katie Storr Democratic Services & Elections Team Manager

Also In Attendance 1 Member of the Public

Apologies: Councillor Jane Ellis
Councillor Steve England
Councillor Jaime Oliver

Membership: Councillor Peter Morris substituting for Councillor Jane Ellis
Councillor Caralyne Grimble substituting for Councillor Steve England

10 CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed all Officers and Members, including those substituting for the evening, to the Meeting. Housekeeping arrangements were summarised and Members noted that the pre-Covid layout was now in operation, with all meetings continuing to be

webcast live.

11 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

12 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Some Members of the Committee expressed dissatisfaction that the Minutes of the last meeting had not been published in a timely enough manner, with apologies offered.

Members' requested that further detail be included in the Minutes, around the general discussion held in respect of the impact of Solar Farm developments on the visitor economy, and in a wider context, the loss of food producing land.

In the absence of a specific amendment being made, with Members' agreement, Officers undertook to include a further few paragraphs to cover those points raised, with the further amended Minutes to be submitted to September's Committee for sign-off.

RESOLVED that the signing of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee held on 7 June, 2022 be deferred until the Committee's meeting on 13 September, to allow further amendments to be made in line with Committee's comments above.

Note: For completeness, suggested post Meeting edit to minutes of 7 June is set out below:

Inserted into Minute 7 – Page 4 – Paragraph 5

“During the discussion on the Visitor Economy item Members noted that the currently proposed Solar Farm developments had the potential to pose a serious threat to the Visitor Economy. In particular concern was raised around a potential impact on the visual amenity and accessibility of open spaces across the District. During this debate wider impacts were also noted with particular concerns raised regarding the potential loss of land for the purpose of agriculture, specifically food production.

Officers noted these concerns, both in terms of the impact on the Visitor Economy and the wider economic impacts, and offered assurance that these would be picked up and referenced during the Local Impact Assessment stage of each of the development proposals.”

Instead of, as originally drafted at paragraph 5, which has been removed: -

“Concerns were raised regarding the proposals for solar farms across the area, and the impact this could potentially have on the visitor economy. In recognising these concerns, it was explained that the proposals were at a very early stage, with the process having been set out and discussed at the November meeting of the Committee. Members were given

assurance that information would be shared on any further updates as soon as it was available.”

13 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

With no comments or questions and with no requirement for a vote, the Matters Arising were **DULY NOTED**.

14 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations made at this point in the meeting.

15 SELECTIVE LICENSING - TIMELINE AND ACTION PLAN

The Committee gave consideration to a report which sought approval of the Selective Licensing Working Group Terms of Reference and set out proposals for approval relating to the future direction of the work, as **RECOMMENDED** and supported by the Working Group.

In presenting the report, Officers outlined the background to the report, indicating its content sought to deal with recommendations (c) and (d) arising from the Committee's meeting on 3 May 2020.

Draft Terms of Reference had been developed and were attached for approval. Sections 3 and 4 of the report dealt with the proposed timescales and the development of and rationale for the future approach, noting both had been fully consulted on with the Working Group which had been established. Notes arising from that meeting had been included for completeness and future dates when engagement would again be sought from the Working Group, were detailed at Section 5.

Finally, Section 6 set out proposed analytical work which could be undertaken in respect of Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) Designation for Selective Licensing. Re-stressing that the approach proposed in the report did not look specifically at selective licensing, there was an opportunity to immediately deal with one of the main queries relating to the original designations, and to help inform any future approach.

Using the current evidence base, the Council could commission work to help to understand whether a designation done by LSOAs would have an impact on the geography of any future designations, the associated maximum costs were set out in the report for approval.

Debate ensued and in response to a Members' question, Officers confirmed that the revenue spend could have been dealt with under delegation, but given the subject matter and Members' previous concerns, had decided Committee approval was most appropriate. Another Member suggested the figure was considerable for data analysis work, whilst it was stressed this was an absolute maximum estimation, the Member indicated he would welcome further details as to the number of hours or days that equated to.

On the whole Members welcomed the proposed approach, and considered it a much

improved position to that of 3 months ago. The in-depth Member engagement was both welcomed and considered to have been invaluable. Officers were congratulated on their work to-date and Members indicated they were much more content with the methodology. It was suggested by a Member that the report still lacked any indication as to how selective licensing would address the anti-social behaviour and further consideration of this in the future would be welcome, and was considered. Others suggested anti-social behaviour was a wider issue and selective licensing could be a tool but not the complete solution. It was suggested that landlords that would potentially be subject to any licensing scheme had an expectation that anti-social behaviour would be addressed as part of the payable fee and as such concurred with earlier speakers.

The proposed future engagement style was also welcomed but Members sought assurance that ample timing would be allowed for Workshops (beyond 2 hours) and suggested that these should be held face-to-face.

A Member of the Working Group was positive that the additional focus on this area would bring about improved results, it was stressed that no assumptions had been made at this stage. Work would focus on looking at the issues that needed addressing and then identify the best tools to address those. This was caveated with being realistic about the tools that were available to deal with the Council's responsibilities, recognising that no one intervention would fully address all of the issues evidenced.

A number of options like an opt in scheme were loosely suggested during the debate for wider consideration at workshops. Assurance was sought that the proposed methodology was robust enough and widely supported, given concerns which had been raised previously. In responding, Officers advised it had been developed in consultation with Members of the Working Group, the Working Group would be integral in designing the workshops, and it would be Member engagement in those sessions which would inform the next report in November. As such that would provide a collective voice, from across all Members, as to the direction and Members' aspirations for the Private Rented Sector, which had been supported by a broader Group of Members in its development. It was confirmed delivery style could be adjusted should any Covid resurgence require it, but the aspiration was face-to-face delivery of engagement sessions.

It was unanimously **RESOLVED** that: -

- (a) the Terms of Reference for the Selective Licensing Working Group as set out in Appendix 1 of the report be approved;
- (b) the proposed timescales put forward by the Selective Licensing Working Group, to deliver a workshop to all Councillors during September/October 2022, in order to inform the Prosperous Communities Report due in November 2022, as set out in section 3 of the report, be approved;
- (c) the proposed approach to consider first; Theme 1 "Overall Approach to the Private Rented Sector" and that this form the basis of the workshops to be held in September/October 2022 be approved; and
- (d) £7,550 be released from the budget remaining for Selective Licensing, in order to carry out the initial Lower Super Output Area designation

analysis.

16 PARKING STRATEGY

Members gave consideration to a report which presented the draft Parking Strategy and Action Plan for approval.

One of the functions of the parking service, operated by the council was to have a Strategy, approved by Members setting out the direction of travel for the service and which guided key decisions.

In presenting the report Officers outlined the process by which the Strategy had been developed using specialist consultants. The Consultants had been provided with a detailed brief and Members noted their report, in response to that brief, had been included as an appendix to the report. The Consultants report included a number of recommendations and observations which, following internal review, had been developed into an Action Plan, which was also attached as an appendix to the report. Members noted that not all recommendations had been included in the Action Plan.

The key findings were detailed in Section 2.1 of the report and were highlighted to the Committee.

The report recommended that any review of the free parking offer should be considered as part of the wider fees and charges review, rather than at this point. It was also recommended that a joint approach with neighbouring authorities to the roll out EV charge points be further explored and finally that the Strategy be refreshed after a three-year period, as opposed to five, given the significant regeneration planned in the District within that period.

Lengthy and detailed debate ensued and Members sought assurance that the Strategy would be fully reviewed, in coming years, in light of planned regeneration, the investment from Levelling-Up and Shared Prosperity Funding and other heritage schemes in motion. There was real aspiration to transform the use of the Market Place etc and Members considered parking would be an important piece of the jigsaw that needed to align with other key Strategies, Plans and Developments.

Understanding the reasoning for not making changes to tariffs as part of the report Members were keen to see this go ahead, indicating they considered there to be a real need. Many a study had been undertaken regarding the impact of free parking versus parking charges but Members felt it was important peoples' habits and needs were taken into consideration; people welcomed the opportunity to nip in and out in close proximity to shops and facilities. Improved signage was welcomed, and an offer Members currently considered lacking. Motor Home and Coach Parking did not appear within the Action Plan and it was suggested that this should possibly be reconsidered, at some point in the future. Having formal coach parking, it was considered, would strengthen and encourage the Visitor Economy aspirations and again better align the offer with the future aspirations for the District.

In response to questions, Officers confirmed the Council did employ a Parking Officer, on a fixed term contract basis.

Many Members spoke in support of including Motorhome and Coach Parking provision as part of the District offer, being of the strong belief this was a fundamental part of any Visitor Economy, particularly given the rural nature of the District.

Regarding payment methods, there was strong consensus that cash should remain an option for service users. Ensuring equality was paramount and Members were mindful that some service users did not have smart phones or bank account allowing debit transactions.

Members sought indication as to whether neighbouring authorities or partners had shown any desire to work jointly in respect of EV Charge points, or whether this was in the aspirational stages. Members also questioned whether any consideration had been given to “green-ing” the car parks, noting this may be a more longer-term action but that the Council had committed to improve its green credentials. Consideration could be given to the types of surface covering used, its impact on flooding, vegetation added, accepting impacts on maintenance would need to be considered.

In responding, Officers advised that as yet joint working was aspirational with appetite untested. There was a surface of rescheduling and the suggestions made could be further investigated, adding vegetation may be feasible with some re-configuration. There was no intention to remove cash as a payment method at this stage, payment by phone had increased since Covid and to date card payments were not accepted due to the capital investment required versus the income generated. It was suggested by the Committee that charges should be set in conjunction with Marshalls Yard.

Some Members expressed disappointment in the Consultants report suggesting it was an “off the shelf” proposal which failed to reflect the real issues Gainsborough and the District were experiencing. Car park usage had dropped significantly, and even further since the data collection was undertaken. People visiting the town centre after lunch was non-existent, this was impacting both the market and local businesses viability and the report had suggested the town centre may benefit from reduced traffic- which was against the desires Members had previously expressed. The evidence base was questioned and considered non-comparable with the notion of quick convenient parking close to amenities previously mentioned fully supported and considered to be what the Authority should be seeking to achieve.

Security of the car parks was raised given recent incidents of traveller encampments on Council land, this had not only reduced car park income but had had a significant impact on the town centre and businesses therein. Members sought indication as to whether they were any plans to prevent such an occurrence again, noting the process Officers had to undertake to move people on and the fact that this process could be repeated over and over in theory, with travellers simply re-locating to a new site, to re-trigger the process again.

Officers gave re-assurance that no camp could remain indefinitely, summarising the legal process and steps undertaken to ensure swift vacation. Physical barriers had previously been investigated with the costs deemed too considerable considering the parking incoming.

Barriers had been erected at the Leisure Centre where it was feasible and cost effective, however the site affected most recently would prove difficult to secure given the number of entrances and egresses. Officers undertook to re-investigate feasibility on some other sites.

Officers summarised the recent case, the actions taken, the balance which needed to be struck and whilst not ideal, encampments on council land were more easily resolved than those on private land.

Turning attention back to the Strategy, Members' referenced previous annual decisions to suspend car parking charges for events, usually at Christmas, and it had been intimated that this would become part of the Policy, to prevent such requests having to be dealt with. Members suggested this was not reflected in the Strategy and should be, with further suggestions that free charges should apply to one Christmas event in each town, where charges applied, and one event each Summer.

During the course of the debate and in response to comments and points raised, the following amendments were proposed.

- 1) That the following wording be added to the conclusion of recommendation 5 – **“and will include detailed proposals on opportunities to “green” the Strategy.”**; and
- 2) That a new recommendation be added as follows: - **“The Council will consider opportunities to “green” its Car Parks during the next three years and bring forward proposals to the appropriate committee where necessary.”**

Further discussion ensued and whilst fees and charges for parking would be reviewed in the same timescales as all other fees and charges, some Members considered the free parking offer did need to be reviewed, but that some level of free short term parking needed to remain. Again, the issue of close proximity parking was raised and it was considered, despite some Members requests, the feasibility of parking within the Market Place had not been thoroughly investigated but should be.

At the request of a Member who sat on the Gainsborough Transport Board, Officers outlined recent discussions, and spoke of the additional town centre parking, and re-configuration of the Market Place the cinema development would bring about, introducing parking almost in the Centre. The anchor rejuvenation and regeneration project had very much considered how people moved around the town centre and sought to open access back up in into the heart of the Market Place.

The benefits were disputed, with some Members considering, if the cinema was to reach the figures expected, the car park would be full on all occasions and offer no additional parking for town centre businesses. It was suggested that Lincolnshire County Council were very supportive of the idea to park in the Market Place yet this Authority, it was suggested was been obstructive. The idea had support from local business and local residents and the Leader of the Opposition sort indication as to the process by which he could request a feasibility study be undertaken.

The Director of Planning, Regeneration and Communities addressed Committee and outlined rationale for previous decisions related to the use of the Market Place. As had been discussed, shopping related activity currently primarily took place in the early morning,

the purpose of bringing the cinema into the Town Centre was to increase footfall in that area throughout the later afternoon and into the evening. Modelling had shown that there would still be scope for spaces, particularly for those shoppers that wanted to “pop and in-out” very quickly.

The recently signed off Levelling-Up Bid had included a whole piece of work on the Public Realm Strategy and use of the Market Place. This had been presented to Committee and provided the direction around creating a Market Place with a café-like culture, a greener environment, to sit and have coffee, a very different and complementary offer to the layout of Marshall’s Yard.

The designs for the public realm of the Market Place would be subject to broader public and business engagement, as also agreed by the Committee, and that work would commence through the Levelling-Up agenda. As such Committee had taken a decision on its Strategy around parking in the Market Place and the next steps were to engage on the detailed designs. The Levelling-Up Bid had very much been made and awarded on the basis of delivering improved public realm in the Market Place and to create a thriving centre at the heart of the Town and as such significant capital money had been apportioned to that aspect of the programme. Officers undertook to also pursue conversations with County Council through the Transport Board.

With the amendments made earlier in the meeting duly seconded, on being put to the vote they were **CARRIED**.

Further discussion ensued and there was some disagreement as to County Council’s position, as stated by other Members. Some Members noted the desire for Market Place parking was also absent from the recently adopted Gainsborough Neighbourhood Plan, driven by the Town Council. The Consultants report did not suggest further parking provision was required. Some Members were of the view that decisions on such matters had already been made and more evidence would be needed. It was counter suggested that the evidence was not been sought.

It was suggested that resident parking should be investigated, with the aspirations to have people living above the shops, and there may be opportunity to introduce a resident charging scheme. Again, there were differing views as to whether these were needed, viable or feasible.

Following lengthy exchange it was **RESOLVED** that: -

- (a) the draft Parking Strategy and Action Plan be approved;
- (b) operational oversight and delivery of the Action Plan be delegated to the Director of Planning, Regeneration and Communities;
- (c) car parking tariffs and free parking periods be considered as part of fees and charges during the next budget setting process.
- (d) a joint working approach with neighbouring authorities regarding the roll-out of electric vehicle charge points, be approved for adoption by Officers, with oversight by the Land, Property and Growth Board; and

- (e) the Parking Strategy be refreshed within 3 years and to include detailed proposals on opportunities to “green” the Strategy.
- (f) the Council considers opportunities to “green” its Car Parks during the next three years, and proposals be brought forward to the appropriate committee where necessary.

17 MANAGING FLOOD RISK IN WEST LINDSEY

Members considered a report which sought approval to establish both an Officer Flooding and Drainage Working Party, and a Member Flooding and Drainage Working Group. The Committee were also asked to approve Terms of Reference for both forums. The proposed establishment of these Groups had arisen from work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The report set out current work being undertaken in respect of Flood Risk Management and proposed a more formal method of providing Officers and Members with adequate oversight of the current and future risk.

The new method would bring together current work, both operational and strategic, into one formal area. The Officer Flood and Drainage Working Party would report to Management Team, feeding into the working party would be a strategic Member Working Group, comprising Members who represented the Authority on external flood-related bodies.

Reassurance in the area would be provided to the wider Member cohort through a twice-yearly report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The report demonstrated how Officer and Member attendance at external forums would ensure the Council not only fulfilled its legislative duty, but also achieved a flow of consistent and credible information onwards to the Flood Working Party. It also acknowledged the need to communicate the Council’s strategies and preparedness to its residents, in order to support them to adequately protect their properties.

Further details of the current reality were set out at Section 6 of the report, with Section 7 providing further information in respect of the proposal. If approved, the recommendations would help further prepare and protect residents against the short and long-term risks from surface water and fluvial flooding.

Debate ensued and as a whole all Members welcomed the approach and concurred there was a need. The previous Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny outlined in detail the background to this work, the problems residents had experienced, the complexity involved in trying to identify the responsible agency and at times the total lack of support for residents. Whilst acknowledging the Working Group would not be able to resolve all issues it would give residents and Members a clear forum in which to discuss reoccurring problems and allow Officers to liaise with relevant agencies, holding them to account. Recent successes were cited.

Many Members spoke of issues across their Wards, and a perceived lack of action in some

cases, which had been ongoing for years, with new and planned developments being a further cause for concern. Members whole-heartedly welcomed the introduction of a forum for common discussion. The modelling approach and conservative thinking adopted by other agencies was questioned

Ensuring Councillors knew about the Working Group and where they could raise such matters was considered important, as such it was suggested that Emergency Planning and clear direction on Flooding Matters should be considered for inclusion in the 2023 Member Induction. The Chairman of the Member Development Group undertook to take this away

Given concerns raised regarding the modelling used by some agencies it was suggested that the Environment Agency and others, accepting they had visited previously, should be invited to return. The publication of Section 19 investigations, the transparency of findings and residents' access to this information, depending on who the lead flood authority was raised. Again, it was suggested partners should be held to greater account and this was not an acceptable service for affected residents.

The importance of local knowledge, particularly in respect of riparian ownership and less-formal watercourses was acknowledged and considered invaluable. Members spoke of how practices of old had not been maintained, adding to the flooding issues.

Caution was expressed that the current membership proposal could see the Working Group becoming unwieldy but no alternative proposals were made.

It was unanimously **RESOLVED** that: -

- (a) the establishment of an Officer Flooding and Drainage Working Party be approved;
- (b) the establishment of a Member Flood and Drainage Working Group be approved, and delegated authority be granted to the Director of Commercial and Operational Services, in consultation with the Chairman of Prosperous Communities and the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to determine the membership thereof;
- (c) Overview and Scrutiny Committee be responsible for oversight of the work of the Member Flooding and Drainage Working Group and Officer Flooding and Drainage Working Party, with Prosperous Communities Committee, the parent Committee, responsible for any decisions recommended by Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and
- (d) the Terms of Reference for both forums be approved.

18 FURTHER EDUCATION TASKFORCE

Consideration was given to a report which proposed the creation of a Further Education Taskforce to bring together key stakeholders across the District to consider further education provision, within the context of the wider education and skills agenda.

In presenting the report, Officers outlined recent circumstances, which had seen the proposal arise, namely the Lincoln College Group's public announcement of their intention to vacate the Gainsborough site. They would retain ownership but the provision of their further education, in particular education courses such as "Made in Gainsborough" and similar would be relocated to other campuses in Newark or Lincoln.

The Task Force, in effect, a working group, would report to this Committee and comprise Member representation but also representation from education providers, including Lincoln College Group, but also other providers operating in the West Lindsey area, or those which had a direct correlation or link to West Lindsey.

Key functions of the Further Education Task Force were highlighted to the committee and included : -

- to help and understand the impact of the change to the users of the Gainsborough College site, to understand the impact on current young people and future generations? but also to understand the impact on the town and the wider District as well.
- Having gained an understanding, to look at future actions, recommendations and potential proposals for the future, either for the District Council directly or how the District Council could work with education providers in the District area.

Officers further outlined the wider challenges affecting further education provision and the negative impacts seen as a result of the Pandemic. Further education, in many settings, did need to be a commercially viable operation, and needed to be able to demonstrate that it could sustain itself with the students on-roll and income generation.

Finally, Members were advised that the report included background information setting out the ways in which the Council had supported further education and Lincoln College in recent years and Officers spoke of their disappointment and shock given the District Council's proactive approach over a number of years. The Made in Gainsborough programme had been a real success in supporting young people in Gainsborough to access education and support them on into employment.

Since the announcement, Officers had tried to engage and work with Lincoln College Group to explore every possible option to seek to retain the Gainsborough College site.

The Appendix to the report set out draft Terms of Reference for the Task Force, for approval.

Debate ensued and many Members spoke of their disappointment at the decision to withdraw provision from Gainsborough, the uncertainty it placed on school leavers and how for some, a course in Lincoln, Scunthorpe or Newark was not financially feasible and/or practicable due to travelling, limiting opportunity.

Whilst disappointing it also presented opportunities, to understand the needs of Gainsborough and surrounding area, to look at alternative provision, to change the perception of the site, and its level of attainment, citing evening classes or basic GCSE Maths and English, which opened the door to many a job.

The work of the Council's Officer, Amanda Bouttell, was praised by Members, recognising the hours of work dedicated to supporting careers fayres, working with the Gainsborough Academy, and the development of "The Made in Gainsborough" Programme.

Clarification was sought as to whether Member positions would be filled at the evening's meeting, filled at the next meeting, or whether a further recommendation was required to delegate this to Officers to complete outside of the meeting.

Councillor Mrs Rollings was proposed and seconded.

A number of other names were suggested based on expertise in the field, however, not all of those suggested were present at the meeting and not all suggestions made, would fulfil the criteria in the Terms of Reference. The Committee recognised the risk of appointing persons who had not been first consulted but all agreed that appointments should be based on expertise and interest.

Given comments made and points noted during the discussion the following amendments to the Terms of Reference were agreed by consent of the meeting: -

At 3.3 – the following be added to the list: -

- West Lindsey District Council Officers

The following be amended at 3.3 - to add the words shown in italic

- 1 x Ward Member for Gainsborough/ (**or a Ward within close proximity of Gainsborough**)

The following be amended at 5.3 to be in line with the recommendation –

- The Further Education Taskforce will report to the Prosperous Communities Committee: every quarter (not 6 months)

To allow appointments to be made outside of the meeting, the following additional recommendation was proposed and seconded, and on being put to the vote was supported.

"The Director of Planning, Regeneration and Communities, in consultation with the Chairman of this Committee seek nominations for representatives to serve on the Further Education Taskforce, in line with the agreed terms of reference."

It was unanimously **RESOLVED** that

- (a) a Further Education Taskforce for West Lindsey be established with Terms of Reference, as amended above;
- (b) a quarterly update report from the Further Education Taskforce be received by the Prosperous Communities Committee on a quarterly basis; and
- (c) the Director of Planning, Regeneration and Communities, in consultation

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with the Chairman of this Committee seek nominations for representatives to serve on the Further Education Taskforce, in line with the agreed terms of reference, including the appointment of Councillor Mrs L Rollings made during the meeting.

19 WORKPLAN

With no comments, questions, or requirement for a vote, the Work Plan was **DULY NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 9.03 pm.

Chairman