

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Extra-Ordinary Meeting of Council held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall, Marshall's Yard, Gainsborough, DN21 2NA on 25 April 2024 at 7.00 pm.

Present: Councillor Stephen Bunney (Chairman)
Councillor Matthew Boles (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Emma Bailey	Councillor Owen Bierley
Councillor Trevor Bridgwood	Councillor Mrs Jackie Brockway
Councillor Liz Clews	Councillor Frazer Brown
Councillor Karen Carless	Councillor Jacob Flear
Councillor Ian Fleetwood	Councillor Sabastian Hague
Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan	Councillor Paul Key
Councillor Lynda Mullally	Councillor Maureen Palmer
Councillor Roger Patterson	Councillor Mrs Diana Rodgers
Councillor Mrs Lesley Rollings	Councillor Tom Smith
Councillor Jim Snee	Councillor Mrs Mandy Snee
Councillor Paul Swift	Councillor Baptiste Velan
Councillor Moira Westley	Councillor Trevor Young

In Attendance:

Sally Grindrod-Smith	Director Planning, Regeneration & Communities
Emma Foy	Director of Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer
Lisa Langdon	Assistant Director People and Democratic (Monitoring Officer)
Katie Storr	Democratic Services & Elections Team Manager
Julie Heath	Communications Manager

Apologies

Councillor John Barrett
Councillor Eve Bennett
Councillor Christopher Darcel
Councillor David Dobbie
Councillor Mrs Angela Lawrence
Councillor Paul Lee
Councillor Jeanette McGhee
Councillor Peter Morris
Councillor Roger Pilgrim

81 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

82 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that under Section 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

83 UPDATED SITUATION: SCAMPTON

Before asking Officers to present the report, the Chairman, who had requested the Extraordinary Meeting, set out the context for his request. The decision and actions relating to the Scampton site where some of the most important decisions the District had faced in recent memory, and as such he wished to ensure that all Members had been provided opportunity to express views and be appraised of the current position.

The Director of Planning, Regeneration and Communities was invited to present the report which provided Members with an update on work undertaken to secure the future of the site of the former RAF Scampton.

Members were being asked to note the actions taken and progress to date, which had focussed on developing the possibility to enter into a dual or shared use agreement for the site with the Home Office.

The District Council had been notified that the Home Office had taken legal possession of the entire site, known as RAF Scampton on 28 March 2024. A Special Development Order(SDO) had been laid in Parliament and had come into effect on 11th April 2024.

Whilst the SDO sought temporary permission for the site to be used to accommodate up to 2,000 users, the decision had been taken by the Home Office to reduce the business-as-usual operating capacity down to 800.

As such the Home Office now had legal possession of the land and a formal, temporary planning approval to use the site for asylum accommodation for a period of 3 years, from 11 April, with a six month decommissioning and re-instatement period.

The Corporate Policy and Resources Committee on 21 March had resolved to approve a set of parameters that would be the guiding principles by which the Council would negotiate the possibility of a shared use proposal for the site. The mutually agreeable position was outlined to Members.

The paper set out progress against the 16 parameters approved by Corporate Policy and Resources Committee and these were brought to Members attention in detail.

The Home Office had co-operatively engaged with WLDC to develop a shared use proposal. The principles of the proposal were detailed to Full Council

Work was continuing with the Council's legal and commercial advisors to fine tune the detail of the headline agreement. It was stressed the principle was to ensure that the headlines in

the pre-heads of terms document, allowed the work on the heads of terms, which would be developed in the next phase, to deliver an end legal agreement that was viable, deliverable and in line with the procured arrangements.

Proposed draft key lines of communication were set out in the report, recognising the sensitivities of a headline shared use agreement and the need to balance the local community position with a provision of clarity regarding matters which had generated significant public interest.

At the present time there was not a confirmed date by which the site would become operational for asylum uses. Officers also outlined the unknowns which remained particularly around the discharge of SDO conditions.

Whilst there was still significant work to be done to deliver a contractually legal and compliant development agreement, positive progress had been made, under challenging circumstances, with the direction of travel indicating that there was a way forward that could support West Lindsey to realise the aim of safeguarding the £300m investment into the site.

The Chairman opened the matter for debate with the Leader making opening statements, speaking of the challenges the Council had faced with regards this matter over the last 12 months. He considered the current position and work to date demonstrated a great collective effort from Officers and Members alike, paying tribute to Ian Knowles, Chief Executive, Sally Grindrod-Smith, Director of Planning Regeneration and Communities, wider Officers from across a range of Council Services and praising the excellent work of the Communications Team.

He spoke of being proud of how the Council had challenged the Government, taken brave decisions, which had at times come with a huge level of risk and considered this testament to the spirit of West Lindsey and the Council as a whole.

Whilst the head-line proposal was not a perfect resolution, and ideally the District would have preferred to not have even been considered for such proposals, given all circumstances, and the position the District had been facing 12 months ago, he was of the belief the draft proposal was the best possible outcome the District could achieve. It sought to protect the £300 million investment, protected key and vital heritage aspects of the site and saw the asylum use much reduced and conditioned to the greatest degree possible. Acknowledging there was more work to be undertaken to secure the final proposal, with a further Ministerial meeting and a visit to the Weathersfield site, he urged all Members to be supportive of the work to date and the arrangement being sought.

Local Ward Member for Scampton indicated his total support of the Leader's comments and the work of the Council in being willing to challenge the Home Office at the highest level. The Council planned investment of £300 million at the site would not just generate benefits for Scampton, but for the District with more widely positive benefits at a County and Regional level. Whilst acknowledging the situation was not perfect, a compromise as outlined would deliver the best outcomes and allow the matter to progress, acknowledging the significant impact the situation had caused.

The Deputy Leader echoed comments of the previous speakers, and praised the work of Officers and Members for the fantastic and considerable work that had been undertaken to

get the Council to the current position. This had been unchartered territory requiring a great deal of nerve. The industries that would occupy the site would transform aero-space, tech businesses. The impact on business and investment interest associated with the site had been the driving force in challenging the decision of the Government at the highest level. The much reduced footprint of the asylum element of the site was something Members considered should be a key message.

A Member did express concern that the public's view had not been fully accounted for and suggested that Members elected in May had not been fully appraised, he was of the view that all Members should have been permitted a vote of this matter at an early stage and going forward.

Members asked a number of questions relating to negotiations pertaining to leasing arrangements and sought to understand the differing approaches. Officers outlined their preference and surmised as to why this would not be the preference for the Home Office.

In responding to comments around ensuring a safe, legal and compliant site, the Director of Planning, Regeneration and Communities outlined in detail the multi-agency work which had been undertaken, week-in week-out over the last 12 months with attendance from Police, Fire, County Council, Public Health and adjoining Districts. The District Council and its partners would have access to the Operational Management Plan, and this would enable robust and fully informed Emergency Plans across all sectors to be developed.

Challenge was made by a fellow Member to previous comments about the suggested lack of Member involvement in prior decisions regarding this matter. With Members emphasising the only decision taken had been to fight proposals or not fight. Officers stressed that they had had no say in the sale of the site, the use of the site, the planning permission for the site. The only strategy which had been applied was to proceed with robust enforcement as a Strategy; the Authority had been forced into the position.

Members from across the Chamber spoke in support of the work to date and the head-line proposals. The Council had taken positive actions and made a statement about how it was prepared to back business and commerce across the District. Acknowledging there was still hard work ahead, Members were hopeful the Scampton site had a positive future and again praised all those involved.

Acknowledging the matter had been fast paced and of a legally sensitive nature, with many technical aspects, there was a level of support for allowing all Members, by way of Full Council decision, to be permitted a vote on any final arrangement. Such a vote would demonstrate the cohesion of the Council to find a positive outcome to the situation.

It was also suggested that the District should not rest on its laurels as ultimately a number of asylum seekers would still be resident on the site. Some political exchange ensued with the Chairman reminding the Chamber of the rules of engagement he had set for the meeting.

Officers outlined the 29 conditions the Council had managed to secure against the SDO, many of which were pre-commencement, and outlined in detail how they gave the Council a certain level of assurance over a range of matters, including site numbers. The Council would have a pivotal role in enforcing the SDO.

Members from Neighbouring Wards, echoed comments relating to the much more improved position under negotiation, offered praise for the work and spoke of feelings running across the Ward, when compared to 12 months prior. Crime and disorder were of a lesser of a concern and it was suggested that if the public could be made aware of some of the multi-agency work which continued to be undertaken and the conditions which would be in place, these fears would be further reduced.

A Member made a request for a recorded vote, which was duly seconded.

There were many comments throughout the debate around the Government's poor history of site decommissioning across the District and the legacy this often left. Members were positive this would not now be the case for Scampton and questioned whether there would be any lessons learnt for the future.

Officers were hopeful that the need for the Home Office to have clear lines of open communication with those areas effected had been established and it was considered the outcome had demonstrated the importance of the Councils robust approach to Strategic Planning, its Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans.

In closing statements tribute was paid, by the Opposition, to the former Leader who had been at the helm for the early stages of the fight to save the investment.

With thoughts moving to the vote, a Point of Information/ Order was raised. There was concern that if the decision being taken was a private one, the request for a recorded vote was superfluous.

In responding, Officers confirmed whilst the debate had been in closed session all decisions made were in the public domain.

It was further questioned as to what Members were voting on given the recommendation was to note. In responding the Chairman moved an amendment, requesting the words "and endorse" be added, there by demonstrating that elected Members were in support of the work being undertaken by Officers in respect of negotiations. Consent was sought and received from the meeting to include the additional words.

On being put to the vote, votes were cast in the following manner:

For: Councillors Bailey, Bierley, Boles, Bridgwood, Brockway, Brown, Bunney, Carless, Clews, Flear, Fleetwood, Hague, Howitt-Cowan, Key, Mullally, Palmer Patterson, Rodgers, Rollings, Smith, Snee J, Snee M, Swift, Velan, Westley and Young.

Against: None

Abstain: None

With a total of 26 votes cast in favour, no votes against and no abstentions, it was unanimously:

RESOLVED that the actions taken and progress to date pertaining to the negotiations to explore the possibility to take control of the site to enable the

delivery of the procured heritage, skills and regeneration scheme be noted and endorsed.

The meeting concluded at 8.02 pm.

Chairman