

Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 1st February, 2021.

Present:- Councillors Swindlehurst (Chair), Akram (Vice-Chair), Anderson, Bains, Carter, Mann, Nazir and Pantelic

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Dhaliwal, Hulme and Strutton

PART 1

98. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

99. Minutes of the Meeting held on 18th January 2021

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 18th January 2021 be approved as a correct record.

100. Strategic Transport Infrastructure Plan

The Associate Director Place Operations introduced a report that proposed the Cabinet adopt the concept of a new Strategic Transport Infrastructure Plan (STIP) for Slough.

The STIP set out a strategy for enabling growth and regeneration, which was also a key part of the Covid-19 recovery plan. The high level objectives also included protecting and enhancing the built and natural environment and it was aligned with the Council's policies on climate change and low emissions. The transport objectives included reducing the need to travel, promoting sustainable modes and improving access to employment, healthcare and education facilities. It was recognised that Slough was expected to experience strong growth in the coming years and the emerging Local Plan for 2016-2036 was expected to enable 13,000 new homes and 15,000 new jobs. It was therefore important that the Council had a clear transport and infrastructure plan in place to enable this growth in a sustainable way. The key high level proposals were summarised. The STIP was currently in draft form pending consultation with stakeholders, and the plan would come back to Cabinet later in year following this consultation and the development of business cases.

The Cabinet welcomed the overall concept of the STIP and commented that it was an important part of the Council's strategic approach to enable regeneration and the sustainable growth of the town. Several major developments were coming though, particularly those set out in the Centre of Slough Regeneration Framework including North West Quadrant and British Land both of which were expected to come through the planning process in due course. The significant scale of regeneration would have a major impact on travel and the STIP would address this and be a 'plan for growth'. One of the key areas for consideration would parking ratios and it was suggested that

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the Planning Committee be engaged and that the STIP be aligned to planning policies.

It was also noted that the report had been considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 28th January 2021. One of the issues that had been raised was the extent of the consultation and it had been clarified that the nature of the STIP was that consultation would be with stakeholders, including developers. Wider public consultation on the transport policies would take place later in the year as part of the new Local Transport Plan 4.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Strutton asked about the location of the Park & Ride site to the west of the borough, bus services and the need to ensure adequate disabled parking provision. The Associate Director responded to the points raised and emphasised that the STIP was a high level plan and that accessibility was fundamental to modal shift.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) That the concept of the STIP be adopted as the long-term plan for transport infrastructure to support regeneration of the town centre, the emerging Local Plan Spatial Strategy, and the Council's air quality and climate change policies.
- (b) That the significant technical work which had informed the STIP and the relevance of the STIP proposals to ongoing discussions with key town centre landowners and developers be noted.
- (c) That the long-term nature of the proposals and the role of the STIP in supporting future bids for funding to deliver those proposals be noted.
- (d) That the consultation exercise with stakeholders be endorsed.

101. Urban Forest (Urban Tree Challenge Fund)

The Lead Member for Sustainable Transport & Environmental Services introduced a report that updated on the implementation of the approximately £1m Urban Tree Challenge Fund and a proposed approach for the naming of trees and woodland to commemorate loved ones.

A comprehensive presentation was given by Officers on the progress that had been made and it was noted that a total of 1,523 standard and feathered trees and 5,360 whips had been planted during the 2020/21 season. There were a few weeks left of the planting season and seven sites to complete before year end with a further 648 trees and 1,375 whips expected to be planted. The Cabinet noted that the work on the Slough Digital Urban Forest had been recognised by the Forestry Commission as one of the most successful in the UK. Each site was carefully planned and data was closely monitored from the

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environmental sensors installed to measure the health of the forest. This also provided educational opportunities for the Slough's children and young people. Community engagement was recognised as being crucial in shaping the programme and the team sought to consult widely and be flexible in response to feedback.

The Cabinet welcomed the progress that was being made and emphasised that tree planting was an important priority which made a positive difference to local community. Many councillors had used some of their Community Investment Fund allocations to support schemes in their wards. Members also welcomed the proposal for the Executive Director and Lead Member to update the Council's policy on commemorative trees, particular in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Dhaliwal commended the programme and highlighted the wide range of environmental, educational and community benefits. Councillor Strutton raised the issue of maintenance and vandalism and it was noted that one of the benefits of the scheme was that the irrigation system put in place helped the trees become established and survive dry spells. There had been a small number of incidences of vandalism reported and the strong community involvement was very important in the long term maintenance plan.

Following the discussion the recommendations were agreed and Officers were thanked for the work they were doing in delivering the project.

Resolved –

- (a) That the contents of the report be noted including that the project was on target, within budget and in compliance with the match funding conditions of the Urban Tree Challenge Fund (Forestry Commission).
- (b) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director Customer and Community and the Portfolio Holder for Transport & Environmental Services to review and update the Council's policy on commemorative trees to include opportunities for businesses, organisations and residents to sponsor woodland to commemorate loved ones.

102. St Martin's Place Redevelopment Update

The Head of Property Services introduced a report on the proposed redevelopment of St Martins Place (SMP).

The Cabinet had decided in May 2018 that SMP should be redeveloped to provide a mix of affordable housing and contribute to the delivery of the Housing Strategy. Authority had previously been given to Slough Urban Renewal (SUR) to undertake a range of building surveys and preliminary design. The report updated on this work and recommended that remodelling SMP to provide 64 properties under Permitted Development rights was the

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preferred option. Lead Members noted the refurbishment options and discussed the ways in which an exemplar Permitted Development scheme could be developed which provided high quality accommodation with more generous space standards than often found in Permitted Developments. The more extensive redevelopment options such as the 'top-hat' approach was evaluated but was not considered optimal for planning and financial reasons. The current timescale for a Permitted Development scheme was to be commence in August 2021 and complete by November 2022.

Lead Members agreed with the approach set out and commented that as SMP was now vacant it was important to progress the scheme in a timely manner so that the housing would be available and the asset maximised. A number of questions were asked including about the parking provision, including by Councillor Strutton speaking under Rule 30. SMP had more car parking spaces than would usually be provided for a residential development of this size. It was therefore noted that 100 spaces had been allocated for ice arena events capacity and a drop off site for Claycots School.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet agreed the recommendations and requested that a further report be presented in quarter 1 of 2021/22 with the full business plan.

Resolved –

- (a) That it be agreed that the preferred option to redevelop SMP be as follows:
 - i. To reconfigure the existing building under Permitted Development ("PD") rights to provide 64 properties.
 - ii. To transfer the asset to the HRA to develop a 100% affordable housing project funded via the HRA through a combination of borrowing, commuted sums and capital receipts.
 - iii. To incorporate car parking spaces for the Ice Arena and drop-off car parking for Claycotts Primary School.

- (b) To facilitate business planning, it was agreed to provide delegated authority for the Executive Director of Place, following consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Executive Director of Corporate Operations to undertake the following:
 - i. Identify the preferred procurement route for construction works based on a combination of quality, cost and deliverability and undertake market testing to identify a cost base for the proposed business plan.
 - ii. Identify vacant sites within the HRA that could be disposed of and undertake any necessary consultation on disposal of these assets.
 - iii. Undertake a more detailed options appraisal, linked to current Council priorities, to inform a final business case for SMP.

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- (c) That it be noted that a report would be brought back to Cabinet in Q1 2021/22 to seek approval for the full business plan.

103. Community Investment Fund - Cabinet Allocation 2020/21

The Cabinet considered a report that provided an update on spend from the Community Investment Fund (CIF) in 2020/21 and invited Cabinet to make any further decisions regarding the use of its allocation for the year.

The report stated that there was £46,000 of unallocated capital available from the Cabinet pot and the Leader proposed that £20,000 be allocated to the northern station forecourt scheme to be used, in principle, in the event that resources from other sources such as highways budget underspends could not be identified.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Hulme referred to the work of the Food Poverty Task & Finish Group which had made a number of recommendations that could be taken forward if any CIF resources could be made available. The Leader commented that Cabinet expected to receive an update in April 2021 on how those recommendations had been taken forward in the Our Futures service design. The Cabinet agreed to allocate £20,000 of revenue to further support the implementation of the recommendations.

It was proposed and agreed that no further allocations be made and that any underspends from 2020/21 be foregone in view of the financial pressures on the Council.

A Lead Member and Councillor Strutton speaking under Rule 30 raised a number of specific issues to do with ward schemes which could be discussed outside of the Cabinet meeting.

Resolved –

- (a) That the expenditure to date from the Community Investment Fund 2020/21 to be noted;
- (b) That the following two schemes be approved:
- i. Up to £20,000 from the available revenue funding to contribute to the Council's work on tackling food poverty and on welfare provision.
 - ii. £20,000 from the available Cabinet capital allocation for the northern station forecourt scheme, if resources couldn't be identified from any other sources or highways underspends.

104. Revenue Budget Monitor - Quarter 3 2020/21

The Interim Service Lead, Finance introduced a report that provided Cabinet with an update on the financial position of the Council's revenue account for the third quarter (October to December) of financial year 2020-21.

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The report set out the significant impacts the Covid-19 pandemic had had on the Council's revenue position in terms of additional service pressures, costs, deliverability of planned savings and reduced income. The approved net budget for the year was £124.4m and as at quarter 3 the year-end position for all the Council run services was forecasting to be a £2.8m underspend. This took into account and applied the various Covid-19 grants of £20.5m. Before applying the grant, the total overspend would be £17.6m. The £2.8m underspend would be moved into reserves to take them to £12.2m and help the Council manage the Covid-19 related revenue pressures in future years.

The Cabinet discussed various aspects of the report and supported Officers in seeking to work with directorates to mitigate service overspends and address budget pressures as this would put the Council in a better position to manage the financial challenges in 2021/22. In terms of savings it was reported that 48% of planned savings were expected to be achieved. Alternative savings were being explored wherever possible but this was recognised to be difficult during the period of the Covid-19 response. The current position on the Slough Children's Services Trust finances was raised and Officers updated on the status of discussions with the Department for Education.

The Cabinet considered and approved the write off requests as at section 10 of the report.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Strutton asked about the position on reserves, use of the Winter Grant Scheme and highlighted that the total Government funding the Council had received related to Covid-19 was approximately £50m. Officers responded to the various issues raised and it was noted that majority of £50m Covid-19 funds referred to had been paid in grants to eligible local businesses rather than be available to support Council services. There was also significant uncertainty about future Government funding for local authorities Covid-19 response despite the fact that the increased demand for services, cost pressures and lost income would continue into the future. At the conclusion of the discussion the revenue budget update was noted.

Resolved –

- (a) That the reported underlying financial position of the Council for the year end 2020-21 be noted;
- (b) That the Council's provisional reserve balances for the year end 2020-21 be noted;
- (c) That budget transfer (virements) for 2020-21 as requested in Section 9 of the report be approved.
- (d) That write offs for the first quarter of 2020-21 as requested in Section 10 of the report be approved.

105. Capital Budget Monitor - Quarter 3 2020/21

The Interim Service Lead, Finance introduced a report that summarised spend against capital budgets for the 2020-21 financial year, as at the end of December 2020 on a consolidated and directorate basis.

In the first nine months of the financial year, £59m or 32% of the revised budget of £186.399m had been spent. This was considerably lower than the previous year at which point £123m had been spent. The lower than budgeted expenditure was largely due to the Covid-19 restrictions. It was currently projected that £118m would be spent by year end, which was 63% of the budget. Despite the challenges that Covid-19 had caused to many capital projects it was noted that a range of housing and regeneration projects had continued to be delivered through the year including the hotels and residential development on the Old Library Site which was ahead of schedule.

The Cabinet welcomed the work that had been done to keep key projects moving forward throughout the pandemic and reiterated its commitment to deliver key schemes. The projected spend of 63% was still relatively high given the challenges. A review of the capital programme would take place as part of the budget setting process and it was expected major projects would play a key role in the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

At the conclusion of the discussion the report was noted.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

106. Covid-19 Decisions and Winter Grant Scheme Update

The Cabinet received a report which set out the further significant decisions taken by officers in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and sought ratification of the Executive decisions.

The decisions taken since the previous meeting of the Cabinet included the Additional Restrictions Grant policy to ensure eligible local businesses received Government support; the community testing programme to identify asymptomatic cases; and a series of decisions on how Council services could operate safely within Covid-19 regulations.

The Cabinet also noted Appendix B which set out the support that would be provided to families in terms of free school meals over the February half term. The Council had decided to use Winter Grant Scheme funding to continue to support the approximately 5,500 children eligible for free school meals by providing food vouchers during half term.

At the conclusion of the discussion the significant decisions in Appendix A were ratified and the update on Winter Grant Scheme was noted.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the Significant Decisions taken by Silver as set out in Appendix A be ratified.
- (c) That the update on the Winter Grant Scheme setting out the position regarding the provision of Free School Meals during the February half term be noted.

107. References from Overview & Scrutiny

There were no references from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee or scrutiny panels.

108. Notification of Key Decisions

The Cabinet considered and endorsed the Notification of Key Decisions published on 31st December 2020 which set out the key decisions expected to be taken by the Cabinet in the next three months.

Resolved – That the published Notification of Decisions be endorsed.

109. Exclusion of Press and Public

The Cabinet noted that it was not necessary to seek agreement to exclude the press and public as all matters relating to the St Martins Place Redevelopment Update (Minute 102 refers) had been included in the Part I report and discussion.

Resolved – That it be noted that the matters listed in Part II of the agenda were considered and resolved during Part I, without disclosing any of the exempt information, but that the Part II minutes of the meeting held on 18th January 2021 remained restricted as they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 the Schedule 12A the Local Government Act 1972.

Below is a summary of matters included in the Part II agenda.

110. Part II Minutes - 18th January 2021

Resolved – That the Part II minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 18th January 2021 be approved as a correct record.

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111. St Martin's Place Redevelopment Update

The Part II item was not necessary as all matters were contained within the Part I report.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.34 pm and closed at 8.45 pm)