

ADDENDUM TO MINUTE No 19/16 COUNCIL MEETING 25 FEBRUARY 2016

19/16 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 4)

The following questions were asked of the Leader.

Councillor Rhodri Oliver asked:

How could a decision be made on devolution until the Secretary of State made an announcement?

Councillor Michael Wassell replied:

Talks were continuing on the 'high level' details currently available.

Councillor Keith Gilbert asked:

Why there had to be a Mayor – was it so that central Government had less people to control?

Councillor Michael Wassell replied:

The Secretary of State was aware of the concerns about that. However, without a Mayor the powers and funding would be restricted. He would send out a briefing note on the Act.

Councillor Mark Taylor asked:

Was the Government view on devolution contradictory to their view on the EU? He further suggested that the Local Plan should be put on hold until after the EU Referendum.

Councillor Michael Wassell replied:

The idea of devolution was to pass powers down to local authorities. The Local Plan was about Districts and how they wanted to develop until 2036. It was imperative to get the Local Plan done as it would address the issue of the Council's lack of a five year housing land supply.

Councillor Linda Monument asked:

Would the powers passed down to the Mayor by central Government be passed down permanently?

Councillor Michael Wassell replied:

The Government could take that power away but he could not imagine that they would. The Secretary of State had a number of powers and each combined authority would be required to provide an annual report to ensure that it was being correctly run – if not the Government would do something about it.

Councillor William Smith said:

Ultimately it appeared to be creating a Unitary Authority. He did not think that the Council should go with Cambridgeshire.

Councillor Terry Jermy asked:

Would the Leader agree that there were significant challenges in terms of officer resources and the fact that the process and criteria were changing constantly?

Councillor Michael Wassell replied:

He agreed with some of those concerns but not all.

Councillor Rhodri Oliver asked:

If there was any work by the Council's Legal Department identifying local risks? He was concerned that there was significant legal risk as the Secretary of State could wipe out all powers and put in a Mayor alone, which would be a centralisation of power.

Councillor Michael Wassell replied:

It was difficult to get a local opinion but Members were being kept informed at all times. The combined area would be approximately 5,000 square miles and it would be important to ensure that when the Constitution was written it was suitable for all 24 constituent Councils. His focus would be on getting the best deal for Breckland residents and Members.

Councillor Bill Borrett asked:

If it was a democratic process as it had been changed by the Government several times and he was concerned that the Council would end up with something it did not want. He felt that Members were not involved.

Councillor Michael Wassell replied:

There had been 16 workshops for Members and their views were vital and part of the process. At the end of briefings attendees were asked for their concerns, worries and opinions and those comments were published. There were opportunities for Members to get involved. He would welcome a full consultation.

Councillor Phil Cowen asked:

Whether the Council was going to publicise what was going on as there was criticism in his Ward about the lack of communication. Once the central Government announcement was made he proposed to put Devolution on the Overview & Scrutiny Commission work programme as it was important to open the debate in public meetings.

Councillor Terry Jermy asked:

If he could have a breakdown of the workshops run on the Local Plan including their location, the number of attendees and whether any Councillors had been present. He suggested that the way those events were publicised should be reviewed.

Councillor Michael Wassell replied:

That he did not have that information but he could find it out.

The Chairman of the Council noted that he had attended two and they had both been well attended by the public.