

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

COUNCIL

**Held on Thursday, 6 October 2022 at 10.00 am in the
The Breckland Conference Centre, Anglia Room, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke,
Dereham, NR19 1EE**

PRESENT

Cllr Mike Nairn (Chairman)	Cllr Chris Harvey
Cllr Peter Wilkinson (Vice-Chairman)	Cllr Paul Hewett
Cllr Tristan Ashby	Cllr Terry Jermy
Cllr Stephen Askew	Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris
Cllr Roger Atterwill	Cllr Robert Kybird
Cllr Gordon Bambridge	Cllr Terry Land
Cllr Bill Borrett	Cllr Keith Martin
Cllr Claire Bowes	Cllr Linda Monument
Cllr Roy Brame	Cllr Philip Morton
Cllr Marion Chapman-Allen	Cllr Rhodri Oliver
Cllr Paul Claussen	Cllr Paul Plummer
Cllr Philip Cowen	Cllr Sarah Suggitt
Cllr Vera Dale	Cllr Taila Taylor
Cllr Phillip Duigan	Cllr Stuart Terry
Cllr Keith Gilbert	Cllr Alison Webb
Cllr Robert Hambidge	

In Attendance

Maxine O'Mahony	- Chief Executive & Head of Paid Service
Rob Walker	- Deputy Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer
Sarah Wolstenholme-Smy	- Legal Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Julie Britton	- Democratic Services Officer
Teresa Smith	- Democratic Services Team Leader

99/22 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Birt, Brindle, Bushell, Sam Chapman-Allen, Clarke, Colman, Crane, Dowling, Duffield, Eagle, Grey, James, Kiddell, Nunn, Sherwood, Turner, Wickerson and Wilkin.

100/22 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 September 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

101/22 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

Councillor Cowen, the Executive Member for Finance, Revenue & Benefits, declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item 11 due to him being a Director of the Breckland Bridge Board and would vacate the room whilst this matter was discussed.

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102/22 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 4)

MIND was an important part of the Council's Inspiring Communities programme and was one of the Chairman's chosen charities. Unfortunately, Ashley Bunn from MIND was unable to attend this meeting to talk about this worthy charity but instead a short video was shared with Members highlighting how MIND was working in partnership with the Council and the wider work of 'Inspiring Communities'

The Chairman would be holding fundraising events throughout the year, including walking the Pingo trail on Saturday 15 October and Members were encouraged to join him to help raise funds for these wonderful charities. The walk would start at 10am, meeting in the car park off the main A1075, which was the starting point of the Pingo trail and if any Members wished to join him, all the details had already been sent to Members via email that included a map showing the starting reference and the route that the walk would take them. As parking was restricted, Members were asked to contact Teresa Smith, the Democratic Services Team Leader if they wished to attend so that numbers could be monitored and if needed a different parking location would be provided. To locate the starting point and the car park, Members were encouraged to use 'what3words' - 'wearyendingtweet' or refer to the email that was sent to them on 30 September 2022 which also included the two 'Just Giving' pages that had been created, one for each charity, should Members wish to leave a donation.

The Chairman hoped that Members would be able to join him on the day and the weather would be kind.

The Chairman also thanked Councillor Stuart Terry, the Assistant Manager of the Thetford Town Ladies Football Team, for the club's first appearance in the Vitality Women's FA Cup. The match was played against Kings Lynn Town Ladies FC on Sunday, 2 October 2022, and although it was a great game, unfortunately, Thetford lost but at the end of the match the Chairman was presented with a plaque which would be proudly displayed in the Breckland Council office.

The Chairman was pleased to inform Members that, Democratic Services Officer, Julie Britton, had been with the Council for 25 years and he thanked her for her long service.

103/22 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 5)

Councillor Paul Claussen, the Deputy Leader provided Members with the following announcements on behalf of Councillor Sam Chapman-Allen, the Leader of the Council who had sent his apologies.

COST OF LIVING

The cost of living was rising across the country and in Breckland many households would now be worried about their circumstances.

Breckland Council continued to put its residents first and through programmes such as its £1m Inspiring Communities initiative, this Council was funding projects that helped people to access low-cost food, financial help, and professional services to improve their wellbeing.

For example, to help people access affordable food, Members were aware that this Council had funded The Burrell Supermarket in Thetford and more recently launched the Breckland Mobile Food Store. These projects were now providing

low-cost food options and other support to thousands of residents up and down the district and work continued with Norfolk Community Foundation to launch new food hubs in other areas too.

The Deputy Leader was pleased to inform Members that the third-round allocation of the Household Support Fund would see Breckland receive over £126,000 from central government. This would mean it could support more people in financial hardship this winter and was in addition to the £340,000 in household support funding that had already been distributed this year.

Further to this, this Council had distributed over £200,000 in discretionary council tax funding to vulnerable households, with a further £49,000 set to be distributed by the end of November. £12,000 had also been released to help residents who were studying for qualifications in subjects that could enhance Breckland communities in the future, helping to provide them and this district with a bright future.

Breckland Council was aware of the importance of getting help to the people who needed it as quickly as possible and therefore the Deputy Leader was pleased to announce that Breckland Council was amongst the very first councils in the entire country to distribute national support to local people. This included the Council Tax Energy rebates, which were paid into everybody's accounts before the end of June and provided around £8m in funding to local people.

In addition to financial aid, this Council continued to build on its partnerships to evolve the range of support available locally, including the social prescribing service that provided holistic care to people struggling with their welfare. It had been recognised that concerns around the rising cost of living could well be putting more pressure on people and their households, which was why it remained so important that Breckland Council had a well-established and successful partnership with Norfolk and Waveney Mind and other mental health organisations, ensuring quality and accessible mental health support and advice was on hand for people during these challenging times.

There was an overview of the key support that was on hand for residents on the website and Members were encouraged to signpost any residents in their Wards to take a look and get in touch if they were in need of help.

HOUSING

Another area in which the Council was working to help some of the district's most vulnerable was through its housing and homelessness activity. Members were informed that following a successful bid to central government, Breckland Council had been awarded £865k over three years to enable this Council to continue and expand its work with people who were sleeping rough or were at risk of rough sleeping.

This money would be used to fund staffing resource who would work on the ground to provide a personalised approach to some of Breckland's most vulnerable residents, helping them into accommodation and support services. In addition, some of the money would be used to further enhance this Council's already-improving accommodation in Breckland, through partnership working with Solo Housing.

FLYTIPPING

The crackdown on environmental enforcement continued, with a focus not only on catching and prosecuting fly-tippers but to educate people in hotspot areas on legitimate ways to dispose of their rubbish, keep the district in good shape, and

avoid a fine.

Over the summer, this education approach saw leaflets distributed to residents in key areas, whilst Officers continued their tough stance on fly tipping, littering and abandoned vehicles. In the last few months, 22 Fixed Penalty Notices had been issued – more than any other council and removed 20 abandoned vehicles from the district. In doing so, it was being highlighted that Breckland was a no-go zone for fly tipping and Members and residents were being supported in the fight to keep Breckland beautiful.

GOLD ARMED FORCES COVENANT AWARD

Breckland Council had a long and proud tradition of supporting the Armed Forces community within the district and the Deputy Leader was delighted to share that the Council was presented with the Gold Armed Forces Covenant Employers award this week. This prestigious award acknowledged the fact that this Council was not only delivering support for serving members of the Forces, but also providing help and advice for retired service personnel and their families within the district. Receiving this award was not only a major achievement for Breckland, but also a great morale boost for its local Armed Forces community, who could be confident in approaching this Council for support when they needed it most.

KING CHARLES

Finally, this was the first meeting of Full Council since the sad passing of Queen Elizabeth II. The Deputy Leader therefore took the opportunity to thank the late Queen for her tremendous service to our country over a great many years, and also to sincerely thank councillors and members of the public who joined this Council for the historic proclamation event held here at Breckland Council's headquarters to announce the ascension of King Charles III.

God Save the King!

104/22 QUESTIONS ON NOTICE UNDER STANDING ORDER NO 6 (AGENDA ITEM 6)

The questions on notice including the responses had been published prior to the meeting. No further questions could be asked under this item.

105/22 QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE UNDER STANDING ORDER NO 7 (AGENDA ITEM 7)

Councillor Jermy directed his question to the Deputy Leader, Councillor Claussen.

Councillor Jermy was aware that there was a whole range of environmental organisations and charities that had raised concerns about the Government's proposals for investment zones, including the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) which he was very proud to have based in his Ward but one of the proposals was to minimise the burden of environmental assessments and he asked if the Deputy Leader could confirm which assessments the Government deemed unnecessary and were the likes of the BTO in the District right to be concerned about the Government's approach to the environment.

The Deputy Leader stated that unfortunately, no-one had the answer to that specific question at this time but having just returned from the Conservative conference such matters were absolutely in the forefront of everyone's minds. The number of stands at the conference that had been dedicated to environmental issues had been overwhelming and as Members would have heard from the Leader at the recent Cabinet meeting there were still many misunderstandings in

respect of the Government's proposals.

Councillor Atterwill thanked the Deputy Leader for the update on the Gold Award and as someone who represented a military village, he was very pleased and congratulated everyone involved. In Councillor Sherwood's absence, he directed his question to the Deputy Leader. He had noticed that there had been a great deal of coverage in the local press about the avian flu outbreak and asked if the Deputy Leader could provide an update on the work this Council was doing with other agencies to help minimise its impact and raise awareness across Breckland and support any effected businesses.

The Deputy Leader directed the question to Sarah Shipley, the Assistant Director for Environment; however, Rob Walker, the Monitoring Officer, pointed out that according to the Council's Constitution, the responses must be provided by the Cabinet or Leader not by an Officer and therefore, the response to Councillor Atterwill's question would be provided in writing.

Councillor Morton asked Councillor Cowen, the Executive Member for Finance, Revenue & Benefits what the effect of high inflation was on the salary budget and why the increment had been set at 2%.

In response, Members were informed that at the time the budget had been set inflation rates and all the various indicators that the Council used had been fairly consistent but now inflation was running much higher than originally anticipated. The Executive Member of Finance, Revenue & Benefits advised that the budget for next year was now being put together and as a consequence such an impact would be taken into account but in respect of any pay negotiations, he asked Councillor Morton if he would not mind waiting until he had more accurate information which he would then provide to him in writing in due course.

At the last Cabinet meeting the Qtr1 financial report was presented, and Councillor Borrett asked if Councillor Cowen agreed, given the current world situation, if that had been a remarkably positive first quarter report.

Councillor Cowen agreed with the comment. In the past he had always caveated the Qtr 1 report as it was likely to be the most pessimistic of the year as it could be difficult to predict; however, most of the time, it showed a significant variance in the budget with a potential overspend that this Council had seen year on year but reduced as the quarters progressed, however, for this year the low overspend that had been projected in Qtr 1 had been a very positive move and providing circumstances that had been seen in the past continued, this Council with its prudent finances, a significant reduction would be seen on that £300k so that by the end of the year in Qtr 4 the Council would have a very successful budget year.

Councillor Dale asked Councillor Webb, the Executive Member for Health & Communities a question about how the Ukrainian scheme was progressing.

Members were informed that the Breckland district had 94 Ukrainian guests, including 56 adults and 38 children and 40 homes for Ukraine hosts and the £350 thank you payment was being managed. Also, 120 Parkwood Leisure swim vouchers had been issued to the Ukrainian guests living in Breckland and over 70 temporary travel vouchers had been provided and native speaking welfare roles had been recruited to ensure that this Council provided the best level of support. Additionally, guests and their hosts were being signposted to various community events and services of which one was located in Dereham which was well supported. Advice was also provided on how to claim benefits, offer employment

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advice, with help with job applications, and also were being signposted to other services such as mental health, loneliness, debt advice. The guests could also obtain essential items such as bedding, clothing and furniture etc. Overall, this Council offered a very good support package and Councillor Webb said that she had received nothing but compliments from those guests.

Councillor Kiddle-Morris understood that £120k of funding had been allocated to this year's community grants scheme and asked Councillor Webb how this was being run, how much was being spent and how much remained.

The Executive Member for Health & Communities said that she had highlighted all the successful applications from Round 2 of this grant scheme at the recent Cabinet meeting. Further information was then provided, as follows:

£120k had been allocated for the whole year and the Inspiring Communities Match Funding was administered by the Norfolk Community Foundation who went through all the applications on behalf of the Council and produced a list of the best projects that had been agreed by Ward Members. Each round offered a total of £30k and to date the Council had awarded over £57k to 15 community projects – over £27k in round 1 over £29k in round 2. Basically, the funding allowed the enhancement of community spaces and support for issues such as debt, living with chronic illnesses and also the most vulnerable residents were able to access services such as low-cost clothing or gardening services. Councillor Webb stated that she was incredibly proud of this scheme and its success and was very pleased of the number of Councillors that had come forward proposing different schemes in their Wards. Just over £60k remained and the next closure was Friday, 9 December 2022 and details of how to apply for such funding could be found on the Norfolk Community Foundation website at <https://www.norfolkfoundation.com/>.

Councillor Wilkinson, the Vice-Chairman of the Council asked Councillor Cowen if he was comfortable with the overspends on the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs).

Members were informed that this formed the detailed part of the presentation that he had made at the previous Cabinet meeting. Councillor Cowen said that he was normally quite upset when the Council overspent on its budgets but in this case he was not too disappointed as in the past the Council had not been able to spend the amount in the budget on DFGs due to being short of tradesmen/workforce to deliver this service that this Council had been charged to provide but due to the exceptional work of Breckland Officers, slightly more monies had been spent and whilst £108k did not seem a huge sum of money, it was in fact 101% of what it said would be spent. There were ways that the Team were looking to mitigate this overspend, including drawing down funds from other sources, but he urged anyone who had a need to have their property improved to improve their quality of life to still contact the Council as it was still able to deliver this facility and he was delighted that this Council was able to spend the money granted to enable those people to enjoy a better quality of life.

Notwithstanding the £865k funding bid, Councillor Kybird asked Councillor Bambridge, the Executive Member for Housing & Homelessness, how Breckland Council was managing the current rising housing demand for homeless accommodation.

Councillor Bambridge said that he had been very grateful for the bid and the monies had been received. The establishment was being increased to support the homeless people in Breckland. Members had heard some of the actions that this Council was taking from the Deputy Leader such as seeking to grow the housing

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options scheme. The Council had a team of specialist helpers who went out on the streets throughout the year establishing where the homeless people were. Elm Road had been opened this year which was a fantastic facility providing homes for 17 families, including single people. Also, Solo Housing, a specialist organisation that looked after single people, who were sometimes the hardest to find a space for, now had properties across Breckland. This Council was also looking to purchase more properties in Breckland and was trying its hardest in what was an increasingly difficult situation. He then asked Members to be aware of any such issues in their Wards and report it accordingly.

Councillor Duigan also asked Councillor Bambridge about what work was currently being carried out on rural exception sites as they were very important for Breckland's rural communities particularly for younger people who did not want to move away from their villages.

Councillor Bambridge advised that rural exception sites were a comparatively recent addition to the agenda and was something that he had supported from the beginning. Breckland Council had a particularly good Team who dealt with such issues. He himself represented a rural Ward and one of the greatest fears in his village when there was some form of development was overdevelopment. However, rural exception sites were different as they were very much local houses for local people in perpetuity and were primarily for rent or part ownership or in some community's low-cost affordable market housing and were specifically held for that reason.

Councillor Askew directed his question to Councillor Suggitt, the Executive Member for Strategic & Operational Planning and asked about the recent publication on progress on the call for sites, as he was being asked why the names and areas were blocked out on the website.

Members were informed that the call for sites data recently went live on the Planning website that could be viewed on the new App called 'Commonplace' and all listings on this hub had to be kept confidential to remain GDPR compliant.

Councillor Terry had been notified of more dead birds in the area which was possibly caused by bird flu and asked if it could be confirmed what someone should do when they saw a dead bird and whose responsibility it was for clearing these dead birds away.

The Chairman said that a written response would be provided.

Councillor Land had been pleased to see the community shop shown on the earlier video, but nothing had been mentioned about 'warm banks' within the Deputy Leader's announcements and asked what Breckland's position was on this matter.

Councillor Webb pointed out that an email was sent to all Members on this subject and Members were being encouraged to look at halls in their vicinity and she asked Councillor Land if there was any further information that he required to let her know.

Cllr Jermy was interested in Councillor Cowen's response in respect of the DFGs as some people in his Ward had tried to apply for such funding but had been informed that there was no money left and to apply next year. He asked for this matter to be clarified. He also asked about people still being allocated homes that had adaptations that were not appropriate for them.

Councillor Cowen agreed with all points raised, but he was aware that it would be good to do more and advised that the Council was already looking to drive more funds forward. As far as unnecessary adaptations were concerned, he was sure that Councillor Bambridge's Team would be delighted to pick up these issues and investigate further.

Councillor Atterwill had noticed that just this week it had been reported that Norfolk County Council's finances were not in a good state and asked Councillor Cowen if he could confirm that such matters would not have a risk on this Council's work.

Councillor Cowen stated that he was unable to comment on Norfolk County Council's finances but as far as this Council was concerned, Members had seen what had been reported in Qtr1 and therefore there was no need to dispute anything that had been said thus far. The future was difficult to predict but this Council managed its finances prudently and would continue to do so.

Councillor Morton was aware that this Council was looking to improve its' housing stock through an eco-scheme and asked Councillor Bambridge if he would be applying for certain funding and how would the Council attract such funding.

Councillor Bambridge advised that an appropriate written response would be provided to all Members.

106/22 MOTION RECEIVED UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 8 (AGENDA ITEM 8)

Councillor Atterwill the proposer of the Motion which had been seconded by Councillor Land was asked to explain the reasoning behind his Motion.

Councillor Atterwill explained that Credit Unions were financial co-operatives owned and ran by their members with a self-help ethos that enabled members to save and borrow money to suit their own personal budgets and circumstances. Credit Unions offered straight forward saving accounts and loans to their members. Membership costs as little as £2.00 per year and included life insurance and loan protection. All members aged 18 and over were able to vote at the annual meeting on policy and other Credit Union matters and stand for election to any of the officer posts and receive an annual dividend payment. Credit Unions were regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority the Prudential Regulation Authority and belonged to the Financial Services Compensation Scheme that meant members' savings up to £85,000 were safe. Credit Unions encouraged people from all backgrounds and ages to save their money and the various services that they provided were explained.

In this time of financial need Councillor Atterwill felt that it was important to provide people with the tools to help themselves. Managing personal finances was not taught in schools but was an important life skill and the cost-of-living crisis could very well leave some individuals and families vulnerable to unscrupulous loan shark practices and payday loans with crippling interest payments. Membership of a Credit Union offered a safe and secure alternative. Currently there were very few Credit Unions located in Norfolk and none that he was aware of in Breckland. With the closure of mainstream bank branches and post offices in some rural towns and villages, this Council needed to encourage alternatives. Breckland Council had the IT resources and an outstanding and innovative Inspiring Communities Team who he believed could rise to this challenge. He hoped that Members would support this Motion and in advance of this meeting he had submitted this Motion to the Director responsible for Inspiring Communities and had also had a conversation with the Cabinet Member too.

Councillor Land seconded this Motion.

Councillor Webb, the Executive Member for Health & Communities thanked Councillor Atterwill for taking the time and trouble to talk to her before the meeting. She explained to Members that she had carried out some research herself and had found that the Council was already doing a great deal in respect of such matters and already worked with Citizen's Advice and Britain against Poverty together with a lot of work supporting vulnerable people.

Councillor Webb then proposed that this matter be forwarded to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission to discuss and make recommendations on all these important issues that Councillor Atterwill had raised, to ensure that this Motion was debated in full.

Councillor Kiddle-Morris seconded the proposal.

The Monitoring Officer advised that now that the amended Motion had been proposed and seconded, the amendment required consideration.

Councillor Jermy did not believe that this was an amendment as it was simply referring it to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission; however, he was very pleased to see that this Council was talking about Credit Unions. He had used a Credit Union himself but was not aware of any options for using such establishments in Thetford. He appreciated the Cabinet Member's comments but if Councillors were not aware of what options were out there, he understood why the public were not aware and not using them. The most important thing about Credit Unions was that they encouraged people to save as much or as little as they liked and as banks were disappearing at the rate they were, he agreed with Councillor Atterwill's comments, as Thetford had seen many of its banks closed and as a rural area there was an opportunity for Credit Unions to provide people with that opportunity to save their money. He loved the fact that the Food Bus was going round to villages that had long lost opportunities for banking and post offices providing a service that was really important. There was a lot of confusion about Credit Unions but just like banks they were regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and any savings that you had with them were protected. Councillor Jermy also pointed out that if anyone had a poor credit history that did not discount people from using a Credit Union.

He then referred to the video that was shown earlier and felt that there was a definite link between Credit Unions and mental health as being in debt was a real worry for people and he was very grateful that Councillor Atterwill had brought this to the forefront at this meeting and if it did go forward to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission at least it would get a further airing there.

The Monitoring Officer said that he had allowed a degree of discretion in respect of Councillor Jermy's comments but reminded Members that this was an amendment and advised that Councillor Atterwill was allowed a right of reply as the mover of the original Motion.

As far as Councillor Monument was concerned, Councillor Webb had made a fairly simple amendment. Instead of saying this Council resolves to make all these decisions it now said that this Council refers the matter to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission to discuss and make recommendations so allow time for extra debate.

In support of the amendment, Councillor Hewett, the Executive Member for

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Property, Projects and Procurement stated that he was a strong fan of Credit Unions but it had to be made clear that not all Credit Unions were regulated, and sometimes the public did not recognise that and even those that were, seven of those had failed under the Financial Services Compensation Scheme and therefore this Council needed to be careful on how this should be promoted.

Councillor Cowen, the Executive Member for Finance, Revenue & Benefits who used to Chair Overview & Scrutiny, could not but support the proposal to take this to the Commission, as the objective of the Commission was to bring in experts from financial areas to help inform the debate. This facility was not available at Full Council, and he believed that the scrutiny function of any council was the best place to drill down into the detail so that a fully informed decision could be made.

Councillor Claussen the Deputy Leader of the Council felt that everyone was in agreement with the amendment. He mentioned one of the things that the Leader had tasked him and the Executive Member for Finance, Revenue & Benefits with which was something that dated back to 2008, the last time such matters were looked at.

Councillor Atterwill supported the amendment as he felt that it was absolutely the correct route for such matters to be debated at the Overview & Scrutiny Commission and to invite experts in. He hoped that this would be acted upon fairly quickly and he would do everything to support this going forward.

Subject to one abstention due to late arrival, the vote on the amendment was supported.

Councillor Land was pleased that the Council was taking this matter seriously, as there were loan sharks operating across the estates in Thetford that brought nothing but misery. Credit Unions were taking the place of building societies but on a smaller scale and the failure of some credit unions was a really good reason for Breckland Council to get involved.

The Chairman asked Councillor Land to pass on the identities of loan sharks to Councillor Webb.

A vote was then taken on the substantive motion and subject to one abstention, all Members voted in favour of the Motion, and it was:

RECOMMENDED that the Motion be referred to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission for consideration.

107/22 MINUTES (FOR INFORMATION ONLY) (AGENDA ITEM 9)

(a) Planning Committee: 6 September 2022

Councillor Atterwill said that at the Planning Committee meeting on 6 September, he had asked Simon Wood, the Director of Planning & Building Control a question about the changes in the timetable for the production of the Local Plan review and had been advised that he would be provided with a response in due course but as yet, a response had not been received. Since then another revised timetable had been produced without any scrutiny by Councillors and given this was a subject that affected all Wards, he asked Councillor Suggitt, the Executive Member for Strategic & Operational Planning, if she would provide an undertaking and provide all Councillors with at least a written brief to update Members with the changes to the timetable and an update on the financial

resources.

Councillor Suggitt agreed that an update would be provided.

(b) Overview & Scrutiny Commission: 8 September 2022

The Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 8 September 2022 were noted.

(c) Cabinet Minutes: 26 September 2022

The Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 26 September 2022 were noted.

108/22 ATTLEBOROUGH LEISURE PROJECT (AGENDA ITEM 10)

Councillor Webb, the Executive Member for Health & Communities presented the report.

These were exciting new plans for Attleborough and would provide enhanced leisure provision for the town which would encourage major investment for the benefit of local residents. As a Council, it was committed to support residents' health and wellbeing across Breckland and this upgraded sports centre improvements would put fitness and leisure on the high street and would make a difference. As Members were already aware, the site currently comprises a sports hall and some basic gym equipment. The expansion would redevelop the gym and equipment levels and fitness classes would be able to be held on site. The requirements for this new leisure provision were driven by demand data, considering current levels and an element of future growth. The project costs were expected to cost approximately £2.6m utilising S106 monies together with £650k from the Council's Reserves. Additionally, the Council was requesting £200k from the Inclusive Growth Reserve for district wide sports provisions which could possibly enhance the 3G football pitch element of the project.

This proposal had already been considered at the recent Cabinet meeting where it was unanimously agreed to endorse this project.

All recommendations were then read aloud.

Rob Walker, the Monitoring Officer then explained that Members were only being asked to consider the recommendations to Full Council (recommendations 3 to 6), the first two recommendations had already been approved by Cabinet.

The recommendations were seconded by Councillor Bambridge, the Executive Member for Housing and Homelessness.

Councillor Martin, a Ward Member for Attleborough hoped that the necessary funding could be released as he felt that this had been a long while coming and the town deserved better leisure facilities. He had been disappointed with the lack of assistance from the Town Council and asked for more information on the 3G artificial grass pitch project.

Members were informed that Officers were still liaising with the Town Council as the 3G pitch was not in the scope of this project but could develop into a further project phase.

Councillor Dale, also a Ward Member for Attleborough but as a resident of the town

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she felt this was a superb opportunity not just for Attleborough but for the hinterlands too and would help increase footfall in the town. The history of the present sports hall was highlighted, and she wanted some reassurance that these facilities would be available for residents during the day and not just for schools.

Members were assured that residents and visitors would be able to access the facilities as there would be schedules in place and there was no reason not to work alongside schools.

Councillor Bambridge had been pleased to support these recommendations at the Cabinet meeting. He had spent a great deal of his time in Attleborough and felt that it was a growing, vibrant town and the work that Breckland Council was doing in getting this sports centre moving was to be applauded.

Councillor Oliver, another Ward Member for Attleborough also wholeheartedly supported this and echoed Councillor Martin's comments around the lack of support thus far from the Town Council. He then asked the following two questions, the first, specifically for any residents listening, related to an explanation of why the academy site had been chosen and secondly, was there any further insight as to what the current discussions were between the Town Council and Breckland Council on funding.

Councillor Webb explained that the academy site provided a greater value for money investment as it would use the frame of the existing building and would build upon it. The S106 funding had been specifically allocated for leisure facility use and could not be used for anything else and would benefit the people of Attleborough. As far as the Town Council was concerned, Councillor Webb explained that she attended a Town Council meeting where a number of questions had been raised with Breckland Officers. These were currently being worked on and once completed, they would go back to the Town Council with a response. Councillor Webb said that she remained optimistic and was positive that some of the issues that had been raised could be addressed.

Councillor Cowen, the Executive Member for Finance, Revenue & Benefits stated that most Members may not be aware of the fact that just this week he had signed off the feasibility study to be carried out for the 3G pitch and had signed off appropriate funding.

Councillor Borrett felt that in this time of financial hardship it was really heartening to see the financial strength of this Council in continuing to support its residents, as not all councils would be able to do so and felt really proud that it reflected on the well-informed decisions that Members had made in the past.

Councillor Wilkinson, the Vice-Chairman of the Council mentioned the unsustainable issues in Swaffham over the years and asked if the Council was putting sustainable measures in place for this project going forward.

Members were informed that sustainability measures were important and although the Council did not own the building it had been recognised that a sustainability report would be required, and it would be included.

Councillor Jermy, although not an Attleborough Member, felt that it was important to think about these projects district wide. He pointed out that every time he visited Attleborough, there had been more development and he felt that it was very important to provide the infrastructure before the housing but was pleased to see this project being funded by S106 monies and wholeheartedly supported the

recommendations.

Councillor Taylor, another Ward Member for Attleborough thanked everyone involved for their support on this project but asked for it to be confirmed the 3G pitch was a 9-a-side or an 11-a-side as had been included in the Town Council's newsletter.

Following confirmation, Members were informed that it would be an 11-a-side pitch.

Councillor Atterwill felt that the new facilities would be good for the town.

Follow a unanimous vote in favour of the recommendations, it was:

RESOLVED that:

1. Full Council agree to the progression of the Attleborough Leisure Project as outlined in the Cabinet resolution;
2. the capital budget of £2,612,900 and the associated funding as detailed in the Proforma B (Appendix E of the report) be approved;
3. £650,000 be released from the Inclusive Growth Reserve for the Attleborough Leisure Centre and seek contributions from interested parties to cover the residual funding requirement; and
4. £200,000 be released from the Inclusive Growth Reserve for district sports provisions and delegated authority be given to the Executive Member for Health and Communities and the Assistant Director for Contracts and Operations to allocate these resources to designated projects.

109/22 BRECKLAND BRIDGE BUSINESS PLAN REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 11)

Councillor Cowen left the room whilst this item was being discussed.

Councillor Hewett, the Executive Member for Property, Projects & Procurement was delighted to introduce the report but as also identified at the Cabinet meeting not every element of the Breckland Bridge Business report had been included but those appendices had been provided to those Members who requested them. In his absence at that Cabinet meeting quite a lengthy introduction had been provided in respect of this report and there had been some good discussion points raised including environmental aspects as well as some excellent conversations around the quality of the homes that the partners continued to develop including the high level of consultation that Breckland Bridge undertakes as part of its day-to-day business.

He then referred to a couple of onerous comments that had been made at the time in the local press – this was a Business Plan and the Business Plan for Breckland Bridge tried to extract as much value out of all land, small and large and assured Members that not all the land/assets in this Business Plan were earmarked for disposal, what the Plan identified was, should land come up for disposal, it showed what the next step would be in the process and as the Cabinet Minutes demonstrated, property and land that the Council owned helped local communities meet other objectives and would continue to ensure that local needs were addressed whenever any land suitable for disposal was considered. Councillor Hewett looked forward to Members approving these recommendations that he then read aloud.

Councillor Borrett seconded the proposal.

Councillor Jermy had been very pleased regarding the points that had been picked up at Cabinet, as it was absolutely crucial to build good standard eco-friendly homes as well as a mixture of housing types. However, he had been looking through the list of some of the sites in Thetford which in his opinion were not at all suitable and as a Ward Member for Thetford, he felt that there were not enough safeguards in place and would therefore be voting against the recommendations.

Councillor Hewett said that it was a shame as he agreed with everything that Councillor Jermy had said but a standard of build did have to be set and dictate what good practice should look like. Value should be measured but not just in financial terms as Breckland Bridge had been designed to extract financial value for the district but also as a community value. It was noted that consultation would not start until the Business Plan had been agreed.

Referring to consultation, Councillor Jermy pointed out that there was already a Breckland Bridge planning application going to Planning Committee that Members had not been aware of.

Members were informed that, that particular site had been identified over 2 years ago so Members should have seen sight of it.

Councillor Morton still had concerns that the environmental issues had not been considered thoroughly such as heat pumps being installed instead of being reliant on gas and electric charging points for vehicles.

Councillor Hewett advised that this was an aspiration going forward, he wished that EV charging points could be installed everywhere but unfortunately commercial considerations had to be taken into account too.

Councillor Borrett said that he had been keen to second this proposal as Breckland Council was very different from other authorities. As far as environmental standards were concerned, he mentioned the project that Norwich City Council had embarked on that lost them £27k on every property that had been built due to the overspend on environmental installations and prevented this Council from making such catastrophic decisions. Also, in respect of Thetford, this Council had invested heavily in the heart of the town in terms of the Riverside development for community value and its partnership with Breckland Bridge had a track record of delivering more than financial value. He then reminded Members of the time that Breckland Bridge first came about, and it was a risk, but Members had supported it for the delivery of community benefits.

Councillor Atterwill drew attention to paragraph 1.5 of the report and shared Councillor Jermy's concerns regarding the consultation with Members and local Town & Parish Councils as he knew that villages did value their smaller pieces of open space. To provide assurance he asked if it would be possible to add a slight amendment to para 1.5, along the lines of 'proactive consultation will be undertaken with Members and local Town & Parish Councils concerning land in their Wards' or something to that affect.

Councillor Hewett stated that this had always been done and although not best placed in the Business Plan all local consultation should take place at the outset.

Councillor Land had noted that 8 of the sites on the Business Plan fell within his

Action By

Ward and felt sure that residents were going to be very concerned by this and asked what assurance could be provided to residents that already fairly intensive housing on the Woodlands and Fairfields estates were not going to be subsumed with large scale even more intensive housing.

Members were reassured that every piece of land that made it through the process had to have a value attributed to it, and the value attributed to it was the market value based on what the local needs were. If the ambition or the intention was that the land might be best served for the whole of the community, that was where the Breckland Bridge element of the process would start. The whole purpose of the Breckland Bridge venture was to make sure that the Council got the best value for everyone not the best financial value. Some land that had been considered in the Breckland Bridge small sites programme had been offered to Parish or Town Councils or had been auctioned and had therefore been acquired by local communities. Some land never came forward due to viability issues, but a decision could not be made until it could be determined what the value actually was.

Councillor Wilkinson agreed with Councillor Borrett's comments and urged Members to support the recommendations and reminded everyone that conditions could be added when and if it came through to the Planning Committee for a decision.

Councillor Hewett thanked Councillor Wilkinson for the above comments and pointed out that this Council did not control Breckland Bridge it was a joint venture and this Council had a voice.

For the record, Councillor Atterwill asked Councillor Hewett if he could clarify and provide Members with some assurance that any parcel of land that came through the process would be brought to the attention of all Ward Members and Parish and Town councils prior to any planning application being submitted.

Councillor Hewett gave Members that assurance.

Councillor Plummer said that he had spent many years trying to build passive houses which were not expensive to build but had not heard anything about these in any planning applications, and asked Councillor Hewett if he could do anything about this.

In response, Councillor Hewett said that he was a big fan of passive housing, but they were not for everyone and there were some challenges around them, but he would do all he could to promote them.

The recommendations were then read aloud again, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED that the updated Breckland Bridge Ltd Business Plan for 2022 – 2027 be approved.

**110/22 PURCHASE OF PROPERTIES FOR USE AS TEMPORARY
ACCOMMODATION FOR HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS (AGENDA ITEM 12)**

Councillor Bambridge, the Executive Member for Housing & Homelessness said that it gave him great pleasure to present this report to Members to purchase properties for use as temporary accommodation for homeless households.

The recommendations were read aloud and were seconded by Councillor Webb, the Executive Member for Health & Communities.

Action By

Councillor Kybird understood that by Breckland owning the property it could access a higher level of government funding.

Councillor Bambridge stated that he thought that by owning the properties that this was the case but would have to check and there were officers in the room who could provide Councillor Kybird with an answer to that question.

Rob Walker, the Monitoring Officer explained that if the Council owned the property as compared to the nightly privately paid arrangements, it was not funding in a sense but was access to housing subsidy and benefit rebate.

Councillor Jermy very much supported this as the principle of this formed part of the Opposition Groups budget amendment. The Council could have saved a great deal of money if it had happened when the amendment had been put forward a few years ago. He highlighted the many issues in Breckland which thankfully were not as serious as other Districts and provided details of another form of assistance for single homeless people called spareroom.co.uk. He asked Councillor Bambridge if there was any on-going support provided for these people who would be residing in these properties.

Members were informed that it would depend on the individual circumstances, but he would provide a response via email after the meeting.

Councillor Borrett felt that this Council was very lucky to be able to spend millions of pounds on this project unlike other councils that did not have the finances or the resources and all this was the result of the monies made by the Council's commercial portfolio. He endorsed the recommendations and hoped that it received unanimous support.

Councillor Atterwill said that he was aware of the conversations that were being had about homes being released on the Robertsons Barracks site and felt that it would be good for this Council to purchase some of these properties and asked if this could be funded through existing reserves.

Councillor Bambridge said that he could not possibly comment as it was beyond his remit.

Following a unanimous vote for approval, it was:

RESOLVED that:

1. £1,439,808 be released from capital funding and £228,432 be released from the Growth and Investment reserve to fund the acquisition of up to 11 properties in the Breckland area for the use of temporary accommodation;
2. delegated authority be given to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing & Homelessness, to complete the purchase of up to 11 properties in the Breckland area for the use of temporary accommodation; and
3. an additional one full time equivalent (FTE) be added to the establishment overall to manage the properties from both a housing and property services perspective.

111/22 NOMINATIONS FOR COMMITTEE AND OTHER SEATS (AGENDA ITEM 13)

Licensing Committee/Committee of the Licensing Authority

RESOLVED that Councillor Taylor be appointed to the Licensing Committee and Committee of the Licensing Authority and Councillor Colman be removed.

Norfolk Rivers Internal Drainage Board

RESOLVED that Councillor Borrett be removed as substitute and appointed as a shared Member of the Norfolk Rivers Internal Drainage Board.

112/22 AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION (IF ANY) (AGENDA ITEM 14)

Councillor Atterwill felt that some parts of the Constitution should be reviewed as it was somewhat clunky and was definitely not user friendly.

The Monitoring Officer explained the rules in respect of Standing Order No. 7 and further explained that it was only during 'questions without notice' where officers were not permitted to comment.

Councillor Atterwill said that was exactly his point, it was not user friendly.

Councillor Borrett suggested that Councillor Atterwill put something in writing to the Governance & Audit Committee for consideration.

An alternative was then suggested which was not supported.

113/22 ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT (AGENDA ITEM 15)

None.

The meeting closed at 12.15 pm

CHAIRMAN