

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

COUNCIL

**Held on Thursday, 13 July 2023 at 10.00 am in the
The Breckland Conference Centre, Anglia Room, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke,
Dereham, NR19 1EE**

PRESENT

Cllr Peter Wilkinson (Chairman)	Cllr Tina Kiddell
Cllr Terry Jermy (Vice-Chairman)	Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris
Cllr Judy Anscombe	Cllr Robert Kybird
Cllr Tristan Ashby	Cllr Terry Land
Cllr Roger Atterwill	Cllr Hazel McCambridge
Cllr Gordon Bambridge	Cllr Linda Monument
Cllr Peter Bate	Cllr Jacob Morton
Cllr Bill Borrett	Cllr William Nunn
Cllr Claire Bowes	Cllr Ray O'Callaghan
Cllr Mike Brindle	Cllr Paul Plummer
Cllr Marion Chapman-Allen	Cllr William Richmond
Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen	Cllr Ian Sherwood
Cllr Harry Clarke	Cllr Samantha Taylor
Cllr Paul Claussen	Cllr Taila Taylor
Cllr Kendra Cogman	Cllr Stuart Terry
Cllr Philip Cowen	Cllr Mitchell Thurbon
Cllr Richard Duffield	Cllr Lynda Turner
Cllr Stephen Fraser	Cllr Alison Webb
Cllr Chris Harvey	Cllr David Wickerson
Cllr Paul Hewett	Cllr Nigel Wilkin

In Attendance

Jason Cole	- Executive Director
Rory Ringer	- Democratic Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Julie Britton	- Democratic Services Officer
Teresa Smith	- Democratic Services Team Leader

51/23 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Askew, A Blackburn, D Blackburn, Crane, Eagle, Gilbert, Oliver, Suggitt and Sarah Taylor. Apologies for absence were also received from the Chief Executive and the Deputy Chief Executive.

52/23 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 May 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

53/23 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Phil Cowen, the Executive Member for Finance, Revenue & Benefits declared an interest in Agenda item 13 due to him being a Member Director for

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Breckland Bridge and would leave the room whilst this item was being discussed.

54/23 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

A number of photographs were shown from the Sports Experience Day that the Chairman attended. This event took place in Thetford where up to 2,000 disabled children from schools across East Anglia were given the opportunity to take part in over thirty different sporting activities. Frank Bruno, the President of these Experience Days, together with former international footballers, Sir Trevor Brooking and Peter Shilton attended this event.

The Chairman thanked Ben Cooper-Welch, the Centre's Manager and students from the Thetford Academy who supported him throughout the day.

The Chairman then informed Members that during his year in office he had chosen to support the following charities, the Swaffham & Litcham Hospice and SANDs, a baby bereavement charity who worked to improve bereavement care across the UK. He welcomed Georgina Roberts, a representative from the Hospice, who provided Members with information on what the charity provided. A representative from SANDs would be invited to a future meeting. From a personal perspective, Councillor Atterwill said that SANDs had been very supportive to his family after the sad loss of his granddaughter, and he hoped that Members would support these charities going forward.

He would also be continuing with the former Chairman's community champions certificate of special recognition for invisible heroes, and he asked Members that if they knew of anyone in their community that deserved such recognition to put their names forward.

The Chairman then announced the sad passing of former district councillor and Mayor of Thetford, Derek Mortimer. His funeral for those that knew him would be held on Friday, 14 July at 11am at St Cuthbert's Church in Thetford followed by a private burial. If Members wished to make a personal donation, in support of St Nicholas Hospice, donations could be made at <https://derekmortimer.muchloved.com>

A Minute's silence was held.

55/23 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader made the following announcements:

LGC Award

He was delighted to announce that Breckland Council had won a national award for the excellent support it provided to the people of Breckland. The award was in the Health and Social Care category of the Local Government Chronicle Awards 2023, held in London in June 2023.

The prize had been awarded in recognition of the integrated work delivered by this council, and through its strong partnerships with the NHS, local charities and other partners, to tackle health inequalities in Breckland. In particular, through this Council's Inspiring Communities programme, where hundreds of people who were experiencing domestic abuse, isolation or loneliness, or those in need of mental health support had been helped.

The Leader then thanked all Members for supporting this work and investment in

such an important area. He also thanked the Council's partners for their sterling efforts over the last few years and for the officers involved for delivering what was now an award-winning programme of activity.

Breckland Build Together Families Programme

The innovative mental health support programme for young people and their families in Breckland had been re-commissioned. Following a successful pilot project, this Council was working with not-for-profit wellness and therapy service Cup-O-T and the Breckland Youth Advisory Board to deliver the Breckland Build Together Families programme. This would deliver interactive workshops and support for up to 100 young people and their families who were on local mental health waiting lists.

Temporary Accommodation

10 temporary accommodation flats had been refurbished and brought into use for people in need of a short-term home. For those people who were going through the upheaval of living in temporary accommodation, it was important that they were in a property that was safe and well managed. The investment by this Council increased the number of homes that it owned and there was more to come, with shared homes for a further 7 people coming into use at the end of the month.

This built on the previous successes in this area, including opening the Elm House site in Thetford and the newly built temporary homes on the same site.

Housing enforcement

In terms of housing provision, the Leader was pleased that this Council had been on the front-foot in tackling rogue landlords who put their tenants at risk. The quality of housing in Breckland was generally high and it worked positively with the vast majority of local landlords who did an excellent job in supporting local tenants.

However, recently this Council dealt with a case in which officers found a rented property with a blocked fire escape, damaged fire doors, dangerous electrics and broken and rotten windows. This led to this council issuing a £40,000 fine to the landlord responsible, sending a clear message that it would not stand by while Breckland residents were put at risk. He was pleased to inform Members that the repairs had since been made to the property, and the money from the fine would be used to support further investigations and in turn help increase the quality of housing in the district.

Food inspections

Breckland Council worked day in and day out behind the scenes to deliver for residents that sometimes goes unseen.

For example, during a routine inspection of a local food businesses, a significant amount of unsafe food was found but thanks to the work of this Council, this food had since been removed from sale keeping residents and visitors to Breckland safe.

Through numerous Food Hygiene Inspections, it had been found that 98.5% of premises in Breckland had been rated 3, 4 or 5 out of 5. And those not meeting the legal standard were being provided with advice to help them improve and, as the previous housing case showed, enforcement action would be taken where necessary.

Safe Summer

So, whether residents and visitors were eating a meal out in Breckland; or making

the most of shopping in the towns; visiting local attractions; or attending special events like the Stage and Screen Festival in Thetford; people could have confidence that Breckland Council continued to work hard behind the scenes to ensure that they had a safe and enjoyable summer.

56/23 QUESTIONS ON NOTICE UNDER STANDING ORDER NO 6

None received.

57/23 QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE UNDER STANDING ORDER NO 7

Councillor Jermy, the Leader of the Labour Group directed his question to the Leader of the Council. He mentioned the plans that were afoot to close ticket offices at train stations in a number of quieter locations and asked if Breckland Council would be responding to the consultation and through social media channels.

Members were informed that these closures affected 4 stations across the district; therefore, Breckland Council would be responding to the consultation. He was frustrated as these ticket offices played an important role for those people who needed help and that face-to-face contact.

Councillor Atterwill, the Leader of the Independent/Green Group stated that it had been several months since Members received any information on Barnham Broom and asked Councillor Hewett, the Executive Member for Property, Projects & Procurement for an update. Councillor Hewett advised that Barnham Broom was still going through the disposal program process, and he would update Members as soon as he heard anything more.

In Councillor Crane's absence, the Executive Member for Waste, Environmental Health, Licensing & Sustainability, Councillor Land directed his question to the Leader. He said that he had received repeated complaints from residents about Serco in terms of not picking up litter prior to cutting the hedges and grass and asked the Leader to confirm if anything was being done to remedy this. The Leader explained that this authority was working with Serco as to what checks and balances were in place and would keep Members informed.

Councillor Clarke asked Councillor Hewett a question about the car park review and how to best support the market towns and whether the Executive Member could rule out the sale of one of the main car parks in Dereham for housing. Councillor Hewett advised that discussions were taking place about the challenges that the market towns faced in terms of short or long stay parking solutions and this new survey would enable up to date information to be gathered to ensure that this districts public car parking provision continued to meet the needs of residents, businesses, taxpayers and visitors alike. The last survey was undertaken in 2016 and there was no decision to move away from the current model in place in all of the market towns, but the data received would be critical moving forward.

Councillor Cogman was aware that Breckland Council was represented on the Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance and asked if the Leader had received any further information on the issue of flooding under the Moorgate underpass that affected many residents in her Ward. She was aware that this was a Highways England matter and Norfolk County Council were helping without prejudice but when this area flooded school children were having to take a different route adding a mile on their journey and were taking risks. As a local Councillor she had been unable to get a proper written response from the County Councillor for Dereham South and

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asked how this matter could be escalated, and she along with other neighbouring Ward Councillors would be happy to meet with the Leader, the Portfolio Holders and Norfolk County Council to discuss this issue further. The Leader explained that Members did not have to wait until a Full Council meeting to raise these concerns with him. He asked for the details to be emailed to him to start the process with National Highways and if not himself, one of his Cabinet colleagues would join her and other Ward Members with those representatives to find a solution sooner rather than later.

Councillor Richmond asked Councillor Webb, the Executive Member for Customer & Corporate Services for an update on how this Council was supporting the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board. Councillor Webb, as the Council's representative on the Board, advised that she had been delighted to take up this role since the elections in May. This Council had achieved Gold Status in 2022 in the Armed Forces Covenant Employer Recognition Scheme and since then a number of changes had been made including a new program of activities that had recently been rolled out to the armed forces community. She pointed out that this authority now employed more armed forces staff than before, and she thanked everyone who had supported these activities and she looked forward to updating Members with more information in future.

Councillor Terry directed his question to the Leader. He was aware that many young people with learning difficulties or disabilities wanted to have some form of employment and to achieve this goal they would most probably need additional support during their training or in the workplace. With the shocking statistic that just 4% of such young adults with special educational needs or disabilities were in full-time or part-time work, he asked what Breckland Council could do to support businesses who were aiming to employ these young adults. The Leader thanked Councillor Terry for meeting with him to discuss these challenges. He informed Members that Councillor Claussen, the Executive Member for Economic Development & Growth, was already working through his directorship on how this Council could continue to raise awareness across the business sector in the district. He knew that some Members might not be aware that DWP had a budget allocated to them to get processes and practices and/or changes around a workforce or equipment to support anyone that might have a disability to get them into work or if they were already in work, if anything changed in terms of their circumstances, to allow that to take place. This was not predominantly an activity for a district council; however, just like the Inspiring Communities programme, this Council had an opportunity to target and focus its approach and support some of the district's most vulnerable and he was hopeful that this would be coming forward as a programme of activity in early Autumn after going through the relevant processes. He was sure that Councillor Claussen and the relevant director would be happy to meet with Councillor Terry to discuss this further and the Assistant Directors would be happy to release such details to all Members in due course.

Councillor McCambridge directed her question to Councillor Cowen, the Executive Member for Finance, Revenue & Benefits. She asked who this Council banked with and how the pensions were being invested as both provided huge financial support to the fossil fuel industry which was one of the main contributors to the climate crisis. There were many alternative banks and pension providers who did not invest in such matters, and she asked Councillor Cowen to confirm this authority's arrangements. Councillor Cowen understood the nature of this question but the banking arrangements for this Council were not just for this Council as it had an arrangement with all Norfolk councils where banking facilities were tendered, and all were tied into by a contract for a period of time which was due for renewal in the not-too-distant future and would be re-tendered along with all other

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councils. As far as the pension arrangements were concerned, the pension arrangements for this Council and all others in Norfolk were not in our direct control and if Councillor McCambridge wanted any additional information on this matter he was sure that he would be able to provide it as it was quite a complex issue.

Councillor Jermy directed his second question to the Leader. He was aware that the Government had recently scrapped plans to employ twelve Levelling-up directors who were meant to drive forward the Levelling-up agenda across the UK. Not going forward with such roles indicated to him that this Levelling-up programme had been wound down and that in turn led him to believe that given both Breckland applications for funding had been turned down, was it likely that the Levelling-up programme had been abandoned before Breckland Council had been able to receive any financial support from the Government.

Members were informed that the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) had looked at how this service could be delivered and had found that it could be done through existing resources and therefore twelve directors were now not required, saving money in the long-term. In terms of the Levelling-up programme, the final Bill was still awaited and was due in September 2023, Royal Assent would then have to be passed in October or November which would provide a clear position for any future activity. The Secretary of State (SoS) had made a statement around future funding models to ensure that areas such as Breckland who had ambition could still make a bid and round 3 would be announced in the next couple of weeks and he hoped through the work of this Council that the bid submitted would be successful this time round.

On the same subject, Councillor Atterwill had read in the national press that the Levelling-up Department was having to hand back millions of pounds of funding to the Treasury due to the lack of schemes coming forward from local councils for affordable housing and wondered with the Leader's work with the District Council's Network if this was a failure of Government or was this the failure of local authorities.

The Leader was aware that Homes England had to return some money back to the Treasury but as he understood this had been paused and could have changed since the article in the press had been written. This Council had a good relationship with Homes England and the house building had fallen due to Nutrient Neutrality issues which had slowed the property market down together with land values and the cost of building materials.

Councillor Jermy was aware that the Leader had contributed to the recently launched Levelling-up 2.0 book along with a number of other Conservatives and congratulated the Leader on this work. He knew that the Leader had criticised the directly elected Leader model with devolved structures into the County Council, due to the fact that parts of the local government family had been bypassed and he asked the Leader if he felt that Breckland Council had been bypassed and which governance structure did he support.

In relation to the Levelling-up Devolution deal, the Leader did not know how this could move forward when the constituted body responsible for planning and housing was not a constituent member of that organisation or group. He was not concerned what it looked like as long as this district council and others were able to exercise its' full power to ensure that all were providing those much-needed homes, driving growth and economy and to ensure that all were delivering those great services for all communities. He had made his views and opinions very clear publicly and privately and he felt that the offer for this county of Norfolk for a

county devolution deal would place this council in a position where it was not competitive in terms of the rest of the country. This deal was only being offered to 5 possibly 6 localities and therefore this council would be doing itself a disservice as an equal playing field was required around the governance structure so that everyone was clear that Norfolk was not a special case and that this County, like the rest of the country, through the levelling-up agenda, was driving forward growth and homes. Norfolk was not part of that process and all would be on the sidelines watching and waiting on how this would progress and move forward.

Councillor Atterwill asked Councillor Claussen for an update on the latest position on the painting of murals in Dereham town centre. Councillor Claussen advised that the Market Town Initiatives (MTI) had finished at the start of this financial year and he would be having a meeting with the Dereham Members to discuss the matter of the murals further.

58/23 MINUTES (FOR INFORMATION ONLY)

(a) Cabinet: 30 May 2023

The recommendation under Minute No. 54/23, would be considered under Agenda item 10.

The Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 30 May 2023 were noted.

(b) Overview and Scrutiny Commission: 8 June 2023

The recommendation under Minute No. 34/23, would be considered under Agenda item 10.

The Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 8 June 2023 were noted.

(c) Licensing Committee: 14 June 2023

The Minutes of the Licensing Committee meeting held on 14 June 2023 were noted.

59/23 TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUT-TURN REPORT 2022-23

Councillor Phil Cowen, the Executive Member for Finance, Revenue & Benefits presented the report.

The report had been considered and discussed at great length by the Governance & Audit Committee and was for Full Council to approve the recommendations as listed in the report.

No questions were raised, following a unanimous vote in support of the recommendations, it was:

RESOLVED that:

1. the actual 2022/23 prudential indicators within this report be approved, and
2. the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2022/23 at Appendix B and Appendix C of the report be noted.

60/23 FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23

Councillor Phil Cowen, the Executive Member for Finance, Revenue & benefits presented the report.

This report had been considered at Cabinet and the Overview & Scrutiny Commission and had been recommended to the Full Council for approval.

The report reflected the financial position that this Council found itself in at the end of the fiscal year 2022/23. It also reported on the performance data for the same period but in this particular forum it was only the finance report that should be considered.

The recommendations were read aloud.

It had been anticipated that the Council would have to draw down a significant contribution of just over £500k from the General fund to balance the accounts. This figure had been set against some escalating housing costs and significant inflationary pressures. It also showed the importance of reporting on a regular basis to understand and appreciate the changing patterns of finance during the financial year, and to develop policies that were agile and meaningful to address the changing face of costs and effectiveness on local government finance.

Fast forward from March 2023 to this present day, it could be seen at Appendix C that the budget deficit had fallen to £196k a reduction of £346k on the position that this Council was perhaps anticipating in the last quarter, despite the health & housing costs having risen within the same period. This Council had invested in some emergency housing provision in Thetford and in Dereham and that had resulted in reducing costs of between £300K and £375k on an annual basis.

The details behind the figures were highlighted in the report and the work of the Finance Team was commended.

Councillor Atterwill drew attention to Appendix B on page 82 of the agenda pack in terms of health & housing. He had noticed that there was a £700k underspend on disabled facility grants (DFGs) and asked for this to be explained as he was aware that this Council had a significant waiting list and anyone who was deemed in need of such a grant had to wait for over a year for any works to be completed.

Also, on the same appendix, under Capital Loans, he had noticed the loans for Local Asset Backed Vehicle (LABV) and asked what rate of interest this Council was charging.

Councillor Cowen said that Alison Chubbock, the Assistant Director of Finance & S151 Officer would be able to provide the exact figures in terms of the latter question after the meeting.

As far as the DFGs were concerned, Councillor Bowes, the Executive Member for Housing & Homelessness advised that the figure of £700k was not an underspend but a carried forward figure. The funds had already been allocated to work and would be allocated and distributed to the Council's contractors. Some of the funding had been held back to enable a timely response to any priority work cases. She confirmed that the budget from last year and for this year would be spent and that officers were managing the work appropriately and fairly.

Councillor Atterwill was grateful for the response. He drew attention to page 78 of the agenda pack section 4.2, the disabled grants applications where it stated that this Council continued to explore ways of funding this additional demand. He was aware that Councillor Bowes' predecessor had been talking to MPs about this issue but asked Councillor Bowes if she could be more specific about any future funding and where this might come from.

Councillor Bowes informed Members that she did not have a specific update but could confirm that she had been having conversations with George Freeman MP and she and the Assistant Director had recently met with him to brief him on the situation, and he would be raising this issue in particular the allocations methodology used with the Secretary of State. Councillor Sam Chapman-Allen, the Leader of the Council, had also written to the Secretary of State.

The Leader explained that the most recent position was around the formula used to allocate funding as there was not enough money to go round, and this Council was working very hard to get this funding increased ahead of the winter season.

Councillor Kybird felt that as DFGs were health-related matters he had included such matters in the Norfolk Health & Scrutiny Committee of which he was a member to widen this concern.

Following a unanimous vote to approve the recommendations, it was:

RESOLVED that:

1. the Capital budgets and associated funding sources of £4,364,264 be carried forward into 2023- 24 to support approved capital projects;
2. the revised capital budget and associated funding for the 2023-24 capital programme as detailed in appendix A of the report be approved; and
3. the final capital out-turn and funding for 2022-23 as detailed in appendix B of the report be approved.

61/23 LEISURE CENTRES DE-CARBONISATION

Councillor Hewett, the Executive Member for Property, Projects & Procurement presented the report.

This report sought to release the sum of £530k towards the installation of de-carbonisation technology at the Leisure Centres in Thetford and Dereham. Not only would this project reduce 'Scope 3' emissions, but it would also provide this Council with a real long-term investment and was the best immediate revenue benefit. It would also assist with the reduction of the current benchmark figure that was taking place within the Council's current benchmark exercise with Parkwood. Energy costs were one of the largest expenses in running these Leisure Centres and whilst Parkwood had made significant improvements and had demonstrated an on-going energy usage the reality was that the cost of energy continued to outstrip the reduced usage and would continue to adversely affect the operation of leisure offering should this Council do nothing.

Councillor Jermy asked if the Executive Member could expand on the second recommendation as he felt that this was a significant amount of money and also asked what measuring mechanism would be put in place to establish that this Council was getting what it set out to get.

Members were informed that Officers would look at any grant funding available and information would be reported back on a monthly basis in terms of the savings that were being achieved. A benchmarking exercise would also form part of the reporting process.

Following a unanimous vote, it was:

RESOLVED that:

1. the release of funds up to £530,000 from Growth Reserves to enable the delivery of the preferred technology mix (Option 2 of this report) to ensure improvements at both PFI sites for carbon reduction and/or energy cost-saving be agreed;
2. delegated authority to accept the terms and conditions of any future grant funding secured be given to the Executive Member for Health & Communities in consultation with the Assistant Director of Contracts and Operations as officers continue to explore all external funding opportunities; and
3. delegated authority be given to the Assistant Director of Contracts and Operations and the Council's Solicitor in consultation with the Executive Member for Property, Projects and Procurement, to carry out negotiations with Parkwood Leisure and associated companies to obtain the best benchmarking outcome for the Council.

62/23 THETFORD 3G

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

The recommendation sought to release Capital funding of £109k towards the conversion of the existing multi-use games pitch at the Leisure Centre in Thetford to a 3G football pitch.

This capital investment would allow the Council to match against funds released from the Leisure Operator, Parkwood, and enable this Council to submit the funding application to the Football Foundation later on in the year.

This was the second time that this project had come forward, following an approach from the Football Foundation who had identified the site as a key strategic location for the provision of such a pitch.

Officers had engaged with England Hockey and the local hockey clubs to provide advice and support about the potential move from their existing location, and a facility report had been commissioned that identified an opportunity for the provision of an all- weather hockey pitch in an alternative location.

Councillor Land was pleased that this Council would be providing this facility.

Councillor Harvey was also pleased to see this investment in Thetford but stressed that the Hockey Club must not be lost.

Councillor Terry fully supported the recommendations as many matches had to be cancelled due to the weather conditions so this new pitch would allow play to

continue all year round.

Following a unanimous vote, it was:

RESOLVED that:

1. the release of funds up to £109,000 from the Inclusive Growth reserve and the Growth and Investment Reserve for the redevelopment of the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) site at Breckland Leisure Centre & Waterworld, Thetford with a third generation (3G) Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) being installed as its replacement be agreed;
2. all grant funding following the football foundation application (c.£487,000) and contribution from the leisure operator (c.£100,000) and set up necessary budgets to spend be accepted;
3. delegated authority to accept the terms and conditions of the football funding be granted to the Executive Member for Leisure in consultation with the Assistant Director of Contract and Operations; and.
4. delegation be given to the Assistant Director of Contracts and Operations and the Council's Solicitor in consultation with the Executive Member for Property, Projects and Procurement to carry out negotiations with Parkwood Leisure and associated companies to obtain the best benchmarking outcome for the Council.

63/23 BRECKLAND BRIDGE LTD BUSINESS PLAN

Councillor Phil Cowen, the Executive Member for Finance, Revenue & Benefits declared an interest in this item due to him being a Member Director for Breckland Bridge and left the room whilst this item was being discussed.

Councillor Hewett, the Executive Member for Property, Projects & Procurement was delighted to present the report and the recommendation to approve the updated Breckland Bridge Ltd Business Plan 2023 - 2028.

The approval process was an annual requirement for the joint venture partnership. This Business Plan had been reviewed at the recent Cabinet meeting which explored the commercial focus of Breckland Bridge, the main outputs of the partnership, the challenges of the partnership and the ambition for an exemplary environmental policy.

As a Council and for the benefit of residents it was decided to enter the property market using an innovative joint venture with its partner, the Land Group. In presenting this report, two important aspects of this partnership were highlighted.

The first was how the Council obtained the best return from its property and land assets. The focus of the Business Plan was to ensure that the land worked for the Council, and to be able to deliver this focus, a clear commercial remit was required. Through Breckland Bridge commercial returns could be generated for this Council, its residents and taxpayers which might not ordinarily be achievable. However, within this overarching ambition, as a Council, it also recognised that the property and land that it owned also helped to support its local communities. This was reflected in the Council's small sites disposal programme. There were other returns that could be gained from the land other than pure financial ones, in particular the small sites disposal programme was a process that this Council

controlled not Breckland Bridge.

Details of these small sites had been shared with Members and had been included on the Council's website. Every land asset was unique, but its route was to provide value for money for all Breckland residents. There would need to be dialogue, compromise and some give and take, so that everyone's interest could be met but not everyone would get what they wanted. But working together, an ambition could be achieved to share resources in the district; for example, if a bigger more suitable site was available nearby for a community use it would be reasonable for one site to be developed and the other site to be left.

He urged all Members to engage in this small site's consultation process as each site came forward not only in the communities that Members represented but also with the knowledge that this Council had to obtain best value for all Breckland residents, and not just for those who would be immediately affected.

Notwithstanding all of the above, the Breckland Bridge Business Plan needed to be open and transparent and needed to include every single piece of conceivable land within reason in the small sites list even if there was a limited likelihood of the land being delivered or not. He acknowledged, as did other Members, that this transparency could cause concern, but everyone should be made aware of what could be or not be on a planned agenda within Breckland Bridge.

The second area was the outputs and benefits that this joint venture produced. This Council's current focus was for residential housing delivery. Breckland Council was not a large housebuilder but as a partner of the joint venture and could lead on good design and sustainability standards in its schemes, as requested by Members and residents. The Environmental Policy formed part of this Business Plan renewal which sought to minimise the environmental impact whilst complying fully with legislation, and, at the same time, trying to improve building standards overall. Sustainability and environmental protection in every aspect from design through to completion were key elements of this Policy along with the Council's targets for all homes built directly by Breckland Bridge to have an EPC 'A' rating.

In summary and in supporting the recommendation, to update the Breckland Bridge Ltd Business Plan for 2023-28, Councillor Hewett recommended the Plan to all Members for approval.

Councillor Jermy mentioned two main locations that had been identified in Thetford Priory Ward that he represented. The first was in Ben Culey Drive that consisted of many properties nearly all of which were flats with no gardens with only one green space in the area but this report had clearly identified that this land no longer formed part of Breckland Bridge, not due to the fact that this Council recognised its community value, but because it had already been sold to a nearby resident so no doubt in time there would eventually be a fence put round it so access to that area would be denied.

The other location was in Glebe Close which Breckland Bridge had attempted to gain planning permission on but this had been abandoned, not due to the fact that dozens of objections from local residents and local Councillors had been raised, but due to the fact that a gas pipeline ran underneath the land and the pipeline company had submitted a major objection; however, rather than accepting that this was unsuitable for development Breckland Council had since approached Thetford Town Council, stating that this space was surplus to requirements offering it for sale and if the Town Council did not want to buy it, it would be put up for public auction. No commuted sum had been offered for on-going maintenance just a 4-

week window for the Town Council to respond.

He had no issue with the principle of Breckland Bridge but best value should be considered and as these examples demonstrated, Breckland Council's ability to recognise value was highly questionable – a space used by the community had value, a space important for the environment had value and he had no faith in the process for selecting sites for sale or disposal, no faith that residents or local Councillors views were taken into account and felt that Breckland Bridge offered a short-sightedness approach with little regard to the wishes of local people and little regard for democratically elected Councillors. The crucial point to consider was when these sites were gone, they would be gone for good, and this was a high risk for very little financial gain and for that reason he would be voting against the recommendation.

Councillor Clarke commented that last October 2022, Councillor Jermy expressed his concerns about the small sites disposal process which was why he would be voting against this report. Nothing had changed from last year, and as far as residents were concerned, the process of evaluating the disposal of small sites seemed to him to be completely opaque and not transparent. There was no criteria for how community value was decided or judged, no link to the Local Plan for outdoor space for sport etc and amongst other concerns, land was precious and not just in terms of monetary value.

Councillor Terry raised an observation especially during the pandemic that people recognised the value of open green space particularly in terms of health and wellbeing, the wildlife and the environment. Green spaces played an important role in all communities more so in the towns as they helped promote an active lifestyle and improved environmental conditions. There were a number of green spaces that had been identified in the Plan in the Boudica Ward in Thetford all of which were valued by the community and residents would be devastated if these were sold for development. Breckland had a responsibility to its residents not just now but in the future to take care of nature in the towns and therefore he would not be supporting this recommendation.

Councillor Brindle said that when he was young, he was able to play in the streets but that was impossible nowadays due to the amount of traffic, children needed the green spaces, and felt that if there were no other suitable green spaces in the area they should be left alone.

In response to all the above concerns, Councillor Hewett advised that the small sites disposal programme was not a Breckland Bridge programme it was Breckland Council's disposal programme. There were 4,000 sites in Breckland that had been identified some of which were very small and could be transferred to residents who lived next door, and some were appropriate to be transferred to Town & Parish Councils as had very often happened over the years and which had been supported by Members, and there were other sites that should remain as open space. Some of these sites might not be appropriate for any such transfers and at this point, this would be where Breckland Bridge would be tasked to dispose of this land at the best possible value. He agreed with all of the conversations thus far as he was very supportive of local communities taking control and ownership of local land within their remit if it was the right use for that land. The whole picture needed to be considered to ensure that all of the land was appropriate for all residents within the district and not just for those who lived next door to it.

In response to Councillor Jermy's concern, Councillor Hewett was hopeful that Thetford Town Council would accept the land transfer in Glebe Close as it was a

critical piece of land within the town for the community to enjoy.

Councillor Atterwill had raised concerns at the Cabinet meeting in terms of three pieces of land that had been added to the list for Swanton Morley. This had caused a great deal of concern for residents and the Parish Council as all believed that this land had been designated as green open space in the Swanton Morley Neighbourhood Plan.

He also raised concern about the open and transparent nature of the Business Plan itself. The Business Plan itself as much of the information contained with the Plan had been redacted and would have preferred such information to be considered in closed session as if it was commercially sensitive at least Members would have been able to view it and make a judgement.

Councillor Atterwill then thanked the Leader of the Council for his question earlier on in the meeting about the affordable housing schemes as the Leader had agreed and acknowledged that this Council needed to play its part in bringing forward affordable housing schemes. However, he had noticed that on page 84 of the finance report in the agenda pack, that this Council had spent £1.4m in 2022 on housing benefit claims and temporary accommodation against a budget of only £500k and felt that the demand was rapidly outstripping what had been provided in the budget.

Councillor Atterwill said that he had recently attended a Housing Allocations Policy workshop and had found that this year there was 1,634 people on the housing register and only 400 people had been housed. Additionally, there were 118 people on the register who were classed as emergency cases, and he had not seen anything in this Business Plan that addressed this desperate need to try and build more housing. As had been stated, Breckland Council owned the land, and some land would most definitely not be suitable for development and would remain as green open space, but some pieces did warrant development, however, he could not see how this Plan could build this Council the affordable housing that was required.

Councillor Hewett explained that the redactions in the plan as presented was due to the fact that this Council wanted to be absolutely clear that everything brought to Council meetings relating to Breckland Bridge could be as open and transparent as possible and if Members had raised this before the redacted information could have been provided privately. Every single piece of conceivable land had to be identified in the district that might or might not fall under the Bridge remit over the next 5-year part of the Plan. Car parks had been included as a car park survey was currently being carried out. The affordable housing provision was not in the remit of Breckland Bridge, the partnership had been set up specifically to generate commercial returns. There were other workstreams within the Council that were involved in the delivery of affordable housing so that the Council's corporate priorities could be met.

Councillor Atterwill thanked Councillor Hewett for his response but as Councillor Clarke had mentioned earlier, when the land was gone it was gone, and the problem he had with this Plan was that this Council owned the land and therefore it was extremely affordable to build the affordable housing.

In response, Councillor Hewett felt that Councillor Atterwill had articulated really clearly the challenges that Breckland Bridge had. The Council did own the land but the process of determining whether the land may or may not be appropriate for local development for local building projects or for community space was a

Action By

Breckland Council process. However, when it came to exploiting the value of the land, having gone through the process, this was when a commercial hard-edged view would have to be adopted. Councillor Hewett acknowledged the fact that there were occasions when determining the value of the land for community use there needed to be an understanding of what the said land was actually worth, and the reason for not developing it, which was an on-going challenge.

Councillor Borrett pointed out that if Breckland Bridge did not make the Council any money Members would not be able to support other projects in the district such as the cinema in Thetford that the Thetford Members had voted against at the time. He was in full support of the Business Plan, and he hoped other Members would support it too as all Members had the opportunity to be involved in the land allocations.

Councillor Wickerson said that he would not be supporting this for one specific reason in that the Plan should have been considered in private session as a proper judgement could not be made without seeing all the financial information.

Councillor Jermy felt that Councillor Atterwill had put the case forward rather well in terms of affordable housing provision and temporary accommodation at a cost that was growing. The potential financial returns on these sites compared to the amount that was being spent on housing benefit claims was minimal yet across the district, land was going to be lost forever for a very small financial return.

He proposed that a recorded vote be taken which was seconded by Councillor Clarke.

The Leader stated that this Plan was reported annually, and Members were aware that there had been a number of successes and it was this Council's aim to deliver much-needed housing across the district as well as having open spaces, but all needed to go through the proper process.

A recorded vote was then taken.

IN FAVOUR	AGAINST
Cllr Anscombe	Cllr Atterwill
Cllr Ashby	Cllr Bate
Cllr Bambridge	Cllr Brindle
Cllr Borrett	Cllr Clarke
Cllr Bowes	Cllr Cogman
Cllr M Chapman-Allen	Cllr Harvey
Cllr S Chapman-Allen	Cllr Jermy
Cllr Claussen	Cllr Land
Cllr Duffield	Cllr McCambridge
Cllr Fraser	Cllr O'Callaghan
Cllr Hewett	Cllr Terry
Cllr Kiddell	Cllr Thurbon
Cllr Kiddle-Morris	Cllr Wickerson
Cllr Kybird	
Cllr Monument	
Cllr Morton	
Cllr Nunn	
Cllr Plummer	
Cllr Richmond	
Cllr Samantha Taylor	

Cllr Taila Taylor	
Cllr Turner	
Cllr Webb	
Cllr Wilkin	
Cllr Wilkinson	

Subject to 25 votes in favour and 13 votes against, with no abstentions, it was:

RESOLVED that the updated Breckland Bridge Ltd Business Plan for 2023-2028 be approved.

64/23 NOMINATIONS FOR COMMITTEE AND OTHER SEATS

The Leader announced the following changes to the Outside Body appointments:

- A47 Alliance – Councillor Gordon Bambridge to be removed as the substitute and replaced by Councillor Sarah Suggitt
- Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance – Councillor Bambridge to be removed and replaced by Councillor Sarah Suggitt
- Restorative Approaches Strategic Board – Councillor Bambridge to be removed and replaced by Councillor Tristan Ashby
- Water Resources East – Councillor Bambridge to be removed and replaced by Councillor Helen Crane.

No further changes were announced.

65/23 AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION (IF ANY)

None.

66/23 ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT

None.

The meeting closed at 12.20 pm

CHAIRMAN