

Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 14th October 2014 at Pippbrook, Dorking from 7.00pm to 8.10pm and from 8.40pm to 9.03pm

Present: Councillors Emile Aboud (Chairman), Margaret Cooksey (Vice Chairman), Tim Ashton, Lucy Botting, Lynne Brooks, Stella Brooks, John Chandler, Stephen Cooksey, Mary Cooper, Clare Curran, Rosemary Dickson, David Draper, Paul Elderton, James Friend, Paula Hancock, Raj Haque, Valerie Homewood, Mary Huggins, Chris Hunt, Roger Hurst, Howard Jones, Bridget Lewis-Carr, Simon Ling, Mick Longhurst, Tim Loretto, Vivienne Michael, David Mir, Wayne Monkman, John Muggidge (for part of the meeting only), Stephen Musgrove, Paul Newman, John Northcott, Jatin Patel, Philippa Shimmin, Peter Stanyard and Chris Townsend.

Members of the Council observed a minute's silence in tribute to Mr Arthur Wadsworth, a former Member of Mole Valley District Council, who had passed away in September 2014.

22. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd July 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

23. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Corinna Osborne-Patterson, Paul Potter, David Preedy, Sarah Seed and Charles Yarwood.

24. Disclosure of Interests

None.

25. Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman reported that he had attended a number of events since the last meeting of the Council and highlighted some of them. On 6th September, the Chairman had attended a 10km memory walk which was raising funds for the Alzheimer's Society. He congratulated the organiser Mary Shenton, for her commitment and dedication in raising almost £6,000 for the charity.

Secondly, the Chairman reported on his attendance at the Leatherhead Tennis Club finals day presentations. The land had been given to the Tennis Club by Leatherhead Urban District Council and a thriving club with over 100 members had been developed, with Mole Valley District Council being the club's current landlord.

The Chairman advised that he had also attended the Lions Donkey Derby at Polesden Lacey which had been a thoroughly enjoyable event with a large attendance.

Finally, he thanked Councillor Raj Haque for hosting a charity dinner at his restaurant and those Members who had attended. The event had raised £875 each for the Chairman's charity, the National Osteoporosis Society, and for Cancer Research

26. Recommendations of Committees

i) Audit Committee – 25th September 2014 – Treasury Management – Annual Report and Prudential Indicators 2013/14

Councillor Stella Brooks, Chairman of the Audit Committee, introduced the item and proposed the recommendations of the Committee as set out on page 2 of the agenda.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Treasury Management Annual Outturn report for 2013/14 be noted.
- (2) That the actual Prudential Indicators reported for 2013/14, detailed in Appendix A to item 5 at pages 18-20 of the agenda, be approved.

27. Leatherhead Town Centre Masterplan

The Council considered the report set out at pages 29 to 51 of the agenda. The Leader introduced the report, outlining the proposed Masterplan process and funding and investment sources. He advised that a robust and deliverable Masterplan was fundamental to the successful achievement of a subsequent town centre regeneration.

Members welcomed the proposal and saw the Masterplan as critical to the regeneration of Leatherhead town centre. Engagement of the local community and businesses would also be key. Council noted that the Leatherhead Area Partnership had previously undertaken a Health Check of Leatherhead which had produced some useful data. The Leader confirmed that the valuable information arising from the Health Check should be made available to the project team who were already co-ordinating with the Area Partnership.

RESOLVED:

That expenditure of up to £511,000 over the financial years 2014/15 to 2016/17 in order to develop a Master Plan for Leatherhead Town Centre be approved.

28. Mole Valley District Council Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations

The Council received the report of the Returning Officer as set out at pages 29 to 51 of the agenda and the tabled addendum.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Returning Officer's proposals for polling districts and places as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report be agreed.
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Returning Officer, following consultation with Group Leaders and respective ward members, to designate alternative polling places in the event of any polling place not being available/suitable for any particular election.

29. Leader's Statement

The Leader reported that Malcolm Dean, the Council's former Building Control Manager, had left the Council on 4th September, having been with Mole Valley District Council and its predecessor, Leatherhead UDC for an impressive 42 years. He was now enjoying some well deserved rest and relaxation. Malcolm had left the Building Control team in the capable hands of his colleague Andrew Winton who had been promoted to replace him.

Another member of staff had also been in the spotlight last month – though for entirely different reasons. Alex Bagnall, who was spearheading the Council's work on the restoration of the Deepdene Estate, was seen on Sky television on 'Living Surrey'. Alex had delivered an informative and enthusiastic tour of the Estate which viewers would have found fascinating. It was wonderful to see this creative and culturally important project getting the media coverage it deserved.

The launch of the annual Arts Alive festival which was now in its 20th year had been a true spectacle and the Heritage Open Days (also in their 20th year) had been a great success. The Council's commitment and promotion of the arts was plain to see and it was a wonderful celebration of local culture.

The Leader expressed his sadness at the recent death of former Councillor Arthur Wadsworth, who he remembered with great affection. Councillor Wadsworth had represented Ashted Park Ward from 1994 to 2002 and was known to some of the Members present. He was clearly a very popular and well-respected man as there had been nearly 300 attendees at his funeral, including the Leader himself and a number of other councillors, former councillors and officers. The Leader reported that the funeral had been a tremendous celebration of a great life and noted that Arthur would have loved every minute of it! The Council's thoughts were with Sheila, his wife, and his family and friends.

The Leader updated the Council on the work of the Democratic Services team in relation to electoral registration. Following the introduction of individual electoral registration approximately 58,000 residents have had their registration confirmed. Approximately 8,500 electors whose details did not match with information held by the Department for Work & Pensions had received letters inviting them to provide further information to confirm their identity which the team were currently processing. This was a crucial piece of work to ensure our electoral systems were up to date and everyone had the opportunity to vote. Running in parallel to this, electors in Mole Valley's area had been making use of the Government's new online digital service, with well over 3,600 online applications to date. Canvassers would start door knocking around the district towards the middle of October to encourage outstanding registration responses and the new register would be published on 1st December 2014. This was a busy time for the team and they were working hard to ensure that everything was in place in time for next year's May elections.

The Leader reiterated the Council's commitment to supporting those residents and businesses whose properties were affected by flooding during the severe weather experienced earlier in the year. He was, therefore delighted to confirm that following discussions with Surrey County Council (SCC), they had taken the decision to extend the deadline for applying for a Repair and Renew Grant until the end of October. In addition Mole Valley District Council, together with SCC, had written to the DEFRA Minister to request a further extension of the scheme and a response was awaited. This extension gave residents and businesses valuable time to submit their claim for up to £5,000 to help them improve the resilience of their properties against the possibility of future flooding. He also welcomed the reopening of the Burford Bridge Hotel after nine months' closure.

The Leader was pleased to note that Members had had that evening the opportunity to have a demonstration from St John's Ambulance in the use of defibrillators, which would ensure they could respond in an emergency. This followed an announcement made by the Leader earlier in the year about defibrillators being placed throughout the Council's buildings for the safety of staff and members of the public.

Finally, the Leader looked ahead to what was in store for Mole Valley residents over the next few months. There was much to be excited about as the Council never stood still, and he was always impressed by how much such a small authority could achieve by being progressive and forward-thinking. He thanked Members and officers for the hard work that ensured Mole Valley continued to deliver top-class services to all its residents.

30. Reports of Executive Members

Councillor James Friend – Executive Member for Wellbeing

The Executive Member advised that the Parks and Partnerships and Communities Teams were delivering a diverse programme of work which was aligned to, and delivering against, the five Health and Wellbeing priorities for Surrey – prevention, improving the health and wellbeing of children, mental health, safeguarding and improving the health and wellbeing of older people. Projects had been developed around the needs of older people, young people, levels of physical activity and improving mental health.

Councillor Friend referred to the launch of the Workplace Wellbeing Charter across the district in October. The Charter was nationally recognised and endorsed by the NHS and Public Health England. The Workplace Wellbeing Charter was an opportunity for employers to demonstrate their commitment to the health and well-being of their workforce. As the accrediting body across the District for other businesses, the council had taken the Charter on board and was working towards accreditation itself.

£45k had been secured from Sport England's Inclusive Sport Fund to develop a wide programme of activities aimed at increasing participation in sport amongst disabled people. A 'Have a Go' day would be held on 11th November at both Leatherhead Leisure Centre and Dorking Sports Centre in order to get schools and community groups involved in a variety of exciting sports including Goalball for the visually impaired and seated Volleyball.

The Executive Member reported that more external funding had been obtained to enable a range of outdoor fitness equipment to be installed at Kingston Road Recreation Ground, Leatherhead. This provision had been developed through listening to the community. It was known that Leatherhead North has higher levels of year six childhood obesity and this equipment would help to improve the health of young people in the area.

Working closely with Surrey Downs CCG and all GP practices across Mole Valley, the Council was about to launch its new Exercise Referral Scheme which would be available to residents at both Leatherhead Leisure Centre and Dorking Sports Centre. GPs would be able to prescribe exercise for their patients in addition to conventional prescriptions with a view to helping to change their lifestyles. There would also be the introduction of a new programme for 11-15 year olds who were overweight which would be fully supervised by trained professionals.

Members were informed that Mole Valley would be hosting a Surrey wide Childhood Obesity Summit in the new year bringing a wide range of organisations together. Partners from across the sectors would be invited to the event to raise awareness and sow seeds for innovative solutions for how we could work together and generate a number of pledges for real action.

The Council had also been working with the Mary Francis Trust, a Mental Health Charity based in Leatherhead, to deliver a 'Mental Health' Choir at the Wellbeing Centre, and had supported and funded the development of a sensory garden, Vitamin G, at Broome Park in Betchworth which was helping people suffering from dementia.

The Executive Member reported that the Council's Safeguarding Policy was being updated focussing on how the Council safeguarded its residents through services and decision making, and the Policy would be submitted to Scrutiny Committee and the Executive in November.

The Telecare team had been rated in the top 5% nationally through the annual Telecare Services Association (TSA) accreditation audit which was a nationally recognised, independently inspected, quality framework. The Executive Member congratulated the team on this achievement, as they continued to monitor Community Alarms and other telecare equipment for an array of public sector and private sector clients.

Finally, the Executive Member thanked Charlie from St John's Ambulance who had provided training for 14 Members in how to use the public access defibrillators. He also thanked the British Heart Foundation who had placed nine defibrillators around the community, and encouraged Members to get involved in the British Heart Foundation's 'Start a Heart' day on 16th October.

Councillor Simon Ling – Executive Member for Finance and Corporate Services

The Executive Member reported that the external Auditors, Grant Thornton, had recently issued an unqualified opinion on Mole Valley's 2013/14 Financial Statements and accepted our Annual Governance Statement. They confirmed that the Statements gave a "true and fair view" of the Council's financial position; had been properly prepared in accordance with the relevant legislation and codes of practice; and that we had put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. They had been particularly complimentary about the standard of the work, emphasising that they had found nothing to list under their "amended misstatement" section of the report - in their experience - a unique occurrence! The Executive Member thanked all the officers concerned in the preparation of the Council's accounts for this great effort.

The Month five monitoring of the year's budget showed projected underspends of £54,000 on revenue and £268,000 on capital, whilst performance across the priority themes remained strong as evidenced by the performance indicators.

Members were advised that work on the new Corporate Strategy for 2015 onwards was progressing with public consultation commencing this month through the website and elsewhere. The Executive Member encouraged the public to participate in the consultation process and comment on the Strategy. Findings of the consultation would help to demonstrate where Mole Valley District Council could make a difference for its residents. The Strategy would form part of the Budget report to the Council in February.

The Council Tax collection rate at 31 August was 49.8% compared to 49.9% in August 2013. One reason for the slightly lower collection rate was the large take up of the option to pay council tax over 12 instalments rather than the normal 10 instalments. Mole Valley was still projected to reach the target of 99% collection by the end of March 2015. Business rate collection at the end of August was 51.4% compared to 54.3% in August 2013. Again this was largely due to the number of businesses, particularly larger businesses with multiple outlets, taking up the option to pay their rates over 12 instalments. The target for Business rate collection was 98.9% and with expected increases in payments in the second half of the year, it was projected that the target would be reached by the end of March 2015. The Executive Member noted that the Revenues Service was very well respected amongst peers and thanked officers for their work.

Councillor Vivienne Michael – Executive Member for Community Engagement and Resident Services

The Executive Member reiterated Councillor Ling's comments regarding the forthcoming consultation on the Corporate Strategy and encouraged Mole Valley residents to respond to the consultation during October and November.

Councillor Michael advised Members that the new website had gone live that day. Since 2011 the Council's website had been consistently rated in the top 25 out of 429 local authority websites in a quarterly independent ranking. However, this was a very fast moving field and the Council could not afford to be complacent, and had therefore improved the site further, in particular making the site easier for those who access it via a mobile or tablet. The website had a simpler navigation, improved layout and the on-line forms had been improved to ensure they were simpler and easier to use. Feedback would be actively encouraged from residents through feedback forms on every page and an appropriate media launch. Feedback from Members would also be welcomed.

The Executive Member reported that the Customer Services team continued to deliver high levels of customer service. 83% of calls had been answered within 20 seconds and 68% of enquiries resolved at first point of contact. Complaints continued to be robustly monitored and treated as an opportunity to continuously improve service delivery.

Particular mention was made of the Benefits Team. Despite the increase in the volume of work, performance was continuing to improve. The time taken to assess changes in a claimant's circumstances was now just under seven days against a target of 11 days. New claims were now being processed in just over 24 days as opposed to 28 days at the end of July.

The Housing Team was working with applicants on the requirements of the new Housing Allocations Policy which had been launched on 11th September. The Policy was aimed at focussing social housing allocations to those most in need and with a local connection to the District. By reducing the number of people on the housing register who, given their current circumstances, would not be successful in their bids for social housing, the Team would be able to dedicate more time helping those with the most immediate housing needs.

The Executive Member reported that progress continued to be made with the acquisition of emergency housing stock programme reducing the reliance on the use of Bed & Breakfast. So far five new units had been added to the Council's stock, one more property was under offer and work was continuing to identify one final property.

Councillor Michael drew Members' attention to the street poppies which had gone up across the district. Mole Valley's First World War Centenary programme had begun in August with the Lights Out initiative and had continued with many community led events over the last few months. The street poppies supporting the Royal British Legion's Street Poppy Campaign would be up until Sunday 19th November and would return in the next three years as part of the centenary programme.

Finally, the Executive Member encouraged members to refer to her update which would be published on MOSS which included additional information on other aspects of her portfolio, including information about this year's Above and Beyond awards which celebrated exceptional customer service. Nominations could be made by Councillors, Officers and members of the public, the closing date being Friday 7 November.

Councillor Paul Newman – Executive Member for Environment

The Executive Member reported that the Environmental Services team had been implementing a successful communications plan to help give a further boost to recycling in the District. This had included a range of new activities including producing and distributing a new and comprehensive recycling guide, distributed to all households in August, to very positive feedback.

Recycling rates remained one of the highest in Surrey and in the country and we continued to work hard to ensure that our recycling rate continued to rise in the future. Helping the Council to do that was Surrey Waste Partnership, in which Mole Valley continued to play a very active role. Recently the Partnership had undertaken a large-scale waste consultation across Surrey, asking residents for their views. That resident feedback would shape the partnership's revised "Plan for Waste Management", helping us all to reduce waste and to increase recycling. Mole Valley District Council would continue to do whatever it could to make it easier for residents to do the right thing to minimise waste.

Councillor Newman advised that both major contractors (Biffa for waste collection, and Veolia for street cleaning) were performing well. Together with Biffa, the impact of the two major road closures recently experienced in Box Hill and Pebble Hill has been dealt with. That had helped minimise disruption to residents in Box Hill and the same outcome was expected for residents of Pebble Hill.

Mole Valley District Council was also working in partnership with others to support the county wide anti-litter campaign. That had included working with the County Council, Parish Councils, Residents' Associations and with Southern Rail to help tackle the problem of unwanted litter.

Finally, the Executive Member reported that the Environmental Health team continued to work hard protecting residents from a wide range of hazards. The "Scores on the Doors" initiative for food businesses continued to be very successful and the team had recently succeeded in securing additional grant funding from the Food Standards Agency to visit more businesses and encourage them to display their food hygiene ratings. This approach was proving successful in raising standards and providing invaluable information to residents.

Councillor John Northcott – Executive Member for Planning

The Executive Member reported that, on the Planning Policy front, work had continued on evaluating the heavy response to the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan consultation and was now near completion. Work was about to start on the Community Infrastructure Levy draft Charging Schedule.

Looking ahead, responses would be prepared to the consultation by the Airports Commission on the addition of runway capacity at Heathrow and Gatwick Airports, which was expected to be published at the end of the month. The proposed responses would be submitted to Council for its approval early in the New Year. The Planning Policy team would also be heavily involved in the development of the overall plan for Leatherhead Town Centre following the successful bid to the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership as reported by the Leader. Consultants would also be quoting in the near future for developing the feasibility of Business Improvement Districts.

Councillor Northcott advised that the Development Control service was dealing with a 17% increase in applications compared to last year. Performance in recent key indicators remained very good for the first half of the year but it could be difficult to maintain that in the immediate future due to staff shortages.

A ruling from the Supreme Court on the main judicial challenge to the Council's decision to grant planning consent for the Cherkley Court development was still awaited. More recently a challenge by the Cherkley Campaign had been made in respect of the approval of the Landscape and Ecological Management plan. Judge Jay, in the High Court, had ruled that the challenge was an abuse of process and had no merit. Therefore, the challenge had failed and costs were awarded to Mole Valley and the owners of the site, Longshot. Meanwhile work had continued over most of the Cherkley

Estate and there were regular site inspections and liaison with the developer to discharge conditions and monitor progress on site.

Staff had also been engaged in pre-application discussions with the architects for Cherkley Court itself, and Members were advised that the Council's Building Control team had been successful in securing the contract for the building control services for this development. This would bring a substantial and welcome boost to income split over this current financial year and next.

The Executive Member outlined a number of potential financial threats to the Planning and Building Control Service, in particular the Government's proposal that the Land Registry will take over the statutory requirement for the Council to hold the Local Land Charges Register, whilst leaving the Council to continue updating it and also responding to enquiries but with a much lower income. Royal Assent to the current Bill was likely to be obtained before parliament closed on 30th March 2015, in which case the Land Registry would be looking to start 'going live' in the first Councils from 2017. Revenue income would decrease by about 50%. Secondly, since June 2013 there had been a large increase in Prior Approval applications (i.e. covering proposals such as the conversion of offices to residential and residential extensions) for which no fees were payable despite the costs incurred by the Council. It was estimated that the Council had lost fees in the region of £94,000 compared to fees which would have been received for similar applications before Prior Approval was implemented.

Over the last month there had been significant staffing changes within the planning service. This was set against a difficult recruitment market, particularly for planning officers and building control inspectors. Four staff had left the Council's employment, seven internal staff had either been upgraded or re-designated, three external appointments would start shortly and there were two vacancies. It had been a busy period for recruitment with a corresponding impact on workloads. The Executive Member expressed his personal thanks to the Interim Head of Planning, the management team and all the staff in the planning service for keeping the service running at a high level of professionalism during this difficult period.

Despite these pressures, the Service had been able to make an improvement in its service to the public. All representations about planning applications were now acknowledged, not just those received by email.

Finally, the Executive Member updated Members on the Enforcement and Compliance Service. It had been recognised in last year's budget round that the service was under-resourced. This had been reflected in an increased budget for the current year. The Council now had the full-time services of a Tandridge District Council officer working out of Pippbrook alongside the existing member of staff. Mole Valley was also working with the Tandridge Enforcement Manager to co-ordinate and improve its systems. Looking further ahead, Mole Valley was currently engaged in partnership discussions, not only with Tandridge but also with Reigate and Banstead and Epsom and Ewell Borough Councils. A consultant, funded by Reigate and Banstead on behalf of the four councils, was currently carrying out a study into options and opportunities for ongoing partnership working.

31. Questions to Members of the Executive

None received.

32. Motions

Motions 2 and 3/2014

Motions 2 and 3/2014 which had been referred by the Council on 22nd July 2014 to the Planning Policy Working Group had subsequently been withdrawn by their proposers, Councillor Stephen Cooksey and Councillor Chris Hunt.

Motion 6/2014

The following motion was jointly proposed and seconded by Councillor Stephen Cooksey and Councillor James Friend:

“This Council:

Notes:

1. that in the elections held in May 2014 many members of the Council committed publically to policies to oppose development on Green Belt sites which do not have the consent of the local community;
2. the guidance in the 6th March 2014 Ministerial Statement from the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Planning) that Local Plans can include windfalls for each year of the plan; that Local Plans do not need to identify land to meet housing targets for years 11 – 15 of the plan; and that unmet housing need is unlikely to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt such as to justify inappropriate development on a site within the Green Belt;
3. that Government guidance continues to evolve stressing the need for the demonstration of special circumstances before any development in the Green Belt can appropriately outweigh the harm caused;
4. with concern, that Planning Inspectors have elsewhere in the country sought to overturn democratic decisions to prevent development on Green Belt sites which indicates some confusion in the application of Government planning policies.

Resolves:

1. to inform the Planning Policy Working Group of its view that it will not support proposals for the exclusion of land from the Green Belt and its allocation for development in the Housing & Traveller Sites Plan which do not have the support and consent of the local community and which continue to contribute to Green Belt aims;
2. that the search for appropriate brownfield sites be intensified but giving full regard to the importance of reserving and retaining land for industrial, employment, cultural and recreational purposes within our urban communities;
3. to publish on the Council website monthly statistics on housing permissions and completions and to continue to publish an annual statement of housing land supply with a base date of 31st March each year containing information on past rates of new homes completed on windfall sites;
4. to publish as part of the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan and any future relevant Local Plan the implications of the most up-to-date housing land supply position for the level of new land required for development.”

With the consent of the Chairman, the Executive Member for Planning made the following statement:

“Work on the preparation of the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan is continuing and it is currently intended to present a draft Plan to Council on 20th January. If agreed by Council, it would be published and in due course examined by a Planning Inspector.

Members will recall that earlier this year, two rounds of public consultation were held during which comments were invited on around a hundred sites that had been suggested by land owners and developers as suitable sites for new homes. Nearly all the sites are in the Green Belt and all attracted objections.

Although the amount of land considered necessary to exclude from the Green Belt for new homes has more than halved since the January consultation, it is likely that the draft Plan would still have to include proposals for excluding some land from the Green Belt to accommodate new homes. However, if the motion were to be agreed, there is every prospect that a draft Plan which includes proposals for excluding sites from the Green Belt for new homes which attracted objections during the consultation would not be accepted by Council. This would not be an entirely satisfactory situation.

Since the publication of the motions, two things have happened which are causing me to reflect on whether continuing with the preparation of the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan is now the correct way forward.

The first is the way that Planning Inspectors are considering Local Plans which propose housing numbers based on Regional Plans which have been abolished in the light of the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This is important for this Council because the starting point for our Housing and Traveller Sites Plan is the Core Strategy’s housing figure which was taken from the now abolished South East Plan, rather than our objectively assessed housing need which is what is required by the NPPF.

Inspectors conducting the examination of Local Plans have been critical of those which contain pre-NPPF housing numbers. Although the Planning Inspectorate has not been entirely consistent in its approach, in several recent instances draft Plans have had to be withdrawn because Inspectors have taken the view that Local Plans should be based on the requirements of the NPPF.

I am concerned that even if the Council did agree a draft Housing and Traveller Sites Plan, notwithstanding tonight’s motion, it could fall foul of the Planning Inspectorate.

The second thing to have happened in the last week or so is the publication of updated guidance by the Secretary of State on how councils should use their local plan to safeguard their local area against urban sprawl.

It restates advice in the National Planning Policy Framework that local planning authorities should assess their full housing needs and then establish realistic assumptions about the availability of land to meet that need. But it then emphasises that in assessing the extent to which identified housing needs can be met, Councils should take account of any constraints such as the Green Belt, which indicate that development should be restricted and which may restrain a council’s ability to meet its housing need.

So the Government’s latest guidance is emphasising that local planning authorities can take into account development restrictions – such as the Green Belt – when drawing up their local plans and determining how many homes they want to plan for.

My inclination is to conclude that the most appropriate way forward is to propose that work on the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan be halted and work on the new Local Plan which the Council previously agreed would take place after the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan had been completed, should be brought forward and expedited.

This would allow the Council to prepare a Local Plan that is fully compliant with the National Planning Policy Framework and determine how many new homes are needed and how many could be accommodated in Mole Valley without compromising the role

and purposes of the Green Belt. Much of what has already been done on the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan will be rolled forward to inform this work so it has not been wasted effort.

Members may be anxious that halting work on the Housing & Traveller Sites Plan could put the Council at risk from planning applications in respect of the Green Belt sites which have been suggested for inclusion in the Plan. While I recognise and until recently shared this concern, I believe that the improving housing land supply situation and the Government's increasingly robust line against inappropriate development in the Green Belt should be sufficient to see off such proposals.

I am intending to bring a paper outlining my proposals for the preparation of a new Local Plan instead of the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan to the Executive.

In view of this intention and the change in circumstances I ask the movers of the motion to consider withdrawing their motion."

The meeting adjourned between 8.10pm and 8.40pm to enable the proposers of the motion to consider this request.

Councillors Stephen Cooksey and James Friend advised the Council that they each wished to make a statement in response to the Executive Member's statement and that these statements should be minuted. They also confirmed that they would withdraw Motion 6/2014.

Councillor Cooksey made the following statement:

"It is unusual, not, I think, unprecedented, but unusual for the Liberal Democrat and Conservative groups to jointly sponsor a motion and that's happened I think because the green belt is of such critical importance to Mole Valley and one, I think, which the two Groups have come to recognise that they have perhaps more in common regarding their approach than might have been thought at one time, and there is a recognition that a joint approach will help to protect the green belt rather more than the sort of conflicting approaches that we have seen at some stages in the past.

Chairman, in the May elections this year both the Liberal democrats and Conservatives stated that they would not support development on green belt land that did not have the support of the local community. Liberal Democrats used the phrase 'without the consent of the community' and Conservatives said 'unless local communities can demonstrate very special circumstances and full local support for any minor change', and they were quotes from the literature of both parties.

Chairman, Liberal Democrats added that they would not support any site being taken out of the green belt that continued to contribute to green belt aims. I think it is important that both of those things are made absolutely clear in terms of the way in which we will approach any developments so far as green belt policy is concerned, so far as the Council is concerned. Now Government policy is, as the Portfolio Holder has said at various times, somewhat unclear and does continue to evolve and statements by Ministers give the impression that green belt considerations are more important than development priorities, whilst the NPPF is being interpreted as being both in favour and against green belt being sacrificed to meet housing number targets. And that's where the confusion is, that's where our real difficulty is. Local Plans have been rejected or withdrawn as a consequence of this confusion.

However, the good news, and again it has been referred to earlier tonight, is that as policy evolves it appears to be moving more in the direction of protecting the green belt. In the statement of 4th October the Secretary of State said 'when planning for new buildings protecting our precious green belt must be paramount' it's absolutely clear – 'must be paramount' – 'if local people don't want to lose their countryside to urban sprawl'. If that's the statement from the Secretary of state we really have to give it the

credibility that it should have. The guidance accompanying that statement said that in deciding how to deal with housing needs, Councils should take account of any constraints such as green belt which indicate that development should be restricted and which may restrain the ability of an authority to meet its need. Now that again is a very clear statement of moving in the direction of protecting the green belt which actually wasn't the case a year or 18 months ago. So we are in a moving situation, but we are moving in the right direction.

Chairman, this is for the future policy, if a site is only to be included in the future local plan if it has the support and consent of the local community and no longer contributes to green belt aims, that needs to be explicitly stated now or as soon as the criteria for the new local plan are established, and it is now very important that that criteria needs to be stated. If that is the criteria that the Council supports that has to underlie any policy development which produces the local plan itself. That is very, very important.

Chairman, there are always risks with development, there are always risks to developing a local plan, but to my mind the greatest risk is to continue with a policy that might result in the sacrifice of green belt land to housing development which might not in the longer term have been proved to be necessary. And again that is something that would be significant if we were to continue with the policy that the Council has been developing up until now.

I think, Chairman, there has been a clear divergence of view between the election commitments made by many members of this Council and the objectives of the green belt review as it has been carried out during the course of the last year or so. The green belt consultation resulted in a clear rejection by the public of many of the sites that were submitted for potential development, so I think it's for us to take appropriate action to ensure that the views of residents are respected and implemented.

Chairman, I think that is a clear statement that so far as we are concerned, and I hope so far as members of the Council are concerned, that any future policy with regard to green belt development must indicate very clearly that sites will not be available to development unless there is clear support from the local community, and if they continue to serve green belt purposes, and I want that to be recorded because that is the view of our Group and I hope that's the view of most members of the Council."

Councillor James Friend made the following statement:

"As Councillor Stephen Cooksey has said, an awful lot has changed since the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan process started. We heard from the Executive Member earlier this evening that the land required has more than halved in nine months. We also heard during this conversation the latest government guidance which sets out very clearly that green belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. It also states that housing need including for traveller sites does not justify the harm done to green belt by inappropriate development.

Tonight I want to send a very clear message to our communities. If your local area is most in need of affordable housing so that the community is sustainable then champion sites and show that exceptional circumstances are there. This is your opportunity communities. I want to send a message to developers that are out there as well. You need to focus on redevelopment, our brown field areas, innovation and investment in our communities to reduce, reuse and recycle land demands. These are simple messages. The new process, that we've heard the Executive Member set out this evening, needs to start with this clarity and leadership from day one. And I would like the Council leadership to perhaps reconsider how this clarity and leadership might be brought back particularly around the chairmanship of the Planning Policy Working Group.

It is important that as a Council we hear the message that may have been encompassed in perhaps an alternative way forward this evening after what the Executive Member has

said had Councillor Cooksey and I carried on to amend our motion. Our resolutions may well have said:

To inform the Planning Policy Working Group that the future relevant local plans must demonstrate that the Council and local people together are deciding where a development should and should not go;

That the search for appropriate brown field sites be intensified, giving full regard to the importance of reserving and retaining land for industrial, employment, cultural and recreational purposes within our urban communities;

To publish on the Council website monthly statistics on housing permissions and completions, and to continue to publish an Annual Statement of Housing Land Supply with a base date of 31st March each year, containing information on past rates of new houses completed on windfall sites; and

To publish, as part of the future relevant local plans, the implications of the most up to date housing land supply position for the level of land required for development.

Let us be clear there is a sufficient feeling, it is my view, within this Council Chamber that another motion will come forward if the process doesn't now progress with these resolutions in mind and these motions will come forward at every Council meeting until the will of the majority is seen. This is Conservatives and Liberal Democrats working together to protect the green fields and character of Mole Valley. The Government have put local plans at the heart of the reformed planning systems. Mole Valley District Council and the local people can now decide where development should and should not go. And on that basis I am happy to support the withdrawal of the motion this evening."

Motion 5/2014

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Stephen Cooksey and seconded by Councillor David Draper:

"Council notes:

- a) the strong and enthusiastic participation shown by the people of Scotland in a remarkable democratic process leading to the Referendum on 18 September;
- b) the resulting increased discussion on the devolution of powers from central government in Westminster and Whitehall.

Council believes:

- I. That power should be devolved to the people in all parts of the United Kingdom;
- II. That England is currently ruled over by an over-centralised state that fails to reflect localities and regions;
- III. That concentrating more power to English MPs in Westminster is not the only answer for English devolution and that passing power down to the local areas of England is essential.

Council therefore calls for:

Mole Valley's MPs, the Leader of the Council and the Executive to lobby for urgent major devolution of power, including tax raising and spending, from central government to the regions, counties, boroughs and districts and cities of England.

And that such lobbying should emphasise:

that the devolution of powers and finance to English councils be carried out in ways that enhance and strengthen local democratic bodies. This must include agreement that it shall be for local people and communities to decide their form of democratic leadership without having a specific model imposed (for example directly elected Mayors) in return for more powers;

a recognition that English devolution must include both large cities and county areas, as the many councils not within city regions must also gain greater powers and finance in order to build successful and prosperous futures.”

In accordance with Standing Order 9.6, a motion that the Council should deal with motion 5/2014 at the meeting was proposed by Councillor Cooksey and seconded by Councillor Draper. This motion failed to secure a majority of those Members present, so motion 5/2014 was referred to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

RESOLVED: That motion 5/2014 be referred to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

.....
Chairman

.....Date