

## COUNCIL

Wednesday, 23rd September, 2015

**Present:-** The Mayor. Councillor Sandra Hambleton – in the Chair

Councillors Allport, Bates, Beech, Burgess, Cooper, Cooper, Dymond, Eastwood, Fear, Frankish, Hambleton, Harper, Heesom, Holland, Johnson, Johnson, Kearon, Mancey, Matthews, Naylor, Owen, Parker, Pickup, Proctor, Reddish, Robinson, Rout, Shenton, Simpson, Snell, Stringer, Stubbs, Sweeney, Tagg, J Tagg, Turner, Walklate, Wallace, Waring, Wilkes, Williams, Williams, Winfield and Woolley

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Northcott, Cllr Mrs Astle, Cllr Wemyss, Cllr Eagles. Cllr Bailey, Cllr Mrs Hailstones, Cllr Hailstones and Cllr Loades.

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest stated.

### 3. RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

A petition had been submitted by Cllr Simon Tagg which stated:

'We the undersigned, request that Newcastle Borough Council recognises the community use of the parkland by the junction of sandy Land and Brampton Road. We call on the Council to preserve it in its entirety as public open space.'

The petition was presented to Council by Mrs Janet Lee.

Members thanked the residents for the petition and Mrs Lee for her presentation and agreed that issues such as flooding and traffic were serious concerns that should be considered by the Cabinet. Members requested that Cabinet provide reasons should the request in the petition be rejected.

**Resolved:** That the petition be received.

### 4. QUESTIONS TO THE MAYOR, CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

The following question had been submitted by Councillor Simon Tagg

*Why is the Leader of the Council persisting in her attempt to sell relatively small green spaces that are valued by local people when it is clear that she is wasting taxpayer's money, damaging the reputation of the council and having difficulties getting associated planning applications approved by the planning committee?*

The Leader stated that everything was being done to meet local needs and that the Council was looking to sell smaller sites first in order for the receipts from these to be used to employ a consultant. The Leader also confirmed that there was a Cabinet

Panel set up to look specifically at capital and requested that where applicable the groups provide members to sit on this panel and the other Cabinet Panels.

The following question had been submitted by Councillor Stephen Sweeney:

*Why is the Leader of the Council not bringing larger unused sites owned by the Borough Council forward for disposal that could help to bring in capital receipts and also go a long way to helping the council with its housing requirements?*

The Leader queried whether the Cllr had any specific sites in mind and stated that all members had been encouraged to identify sites for disposal but no suggestions had been received.

Cllr Sweeney questioned why there was no cross party working group to consider this issue.

The Leader reiterated her earlier statement rearing the Capital Cabinet Panel and requested that the opposition take up the seat on the Panel that were available to them.

## **5. RYECROFT DEVELOPMENT**

A report was submitted to provide Council with updated information regarding HDD's planned Ryecroft redevelopment scheme in Newcastle Town Centre with a view to deciding whether to proceed to the next stage of the process.

Members considered that the proposals would bring better flexibility for small retailers and help to bring students into the town. Members thanked all of those who had been involved in the scheme and emphasised the need for good connectivity between this development and the rest of the town.

Some concerns were raised in relation to car parking as mentioned in section 10.2 of the report and it was stated that officers were currently carrying out a full review of all car parking in the town.

### **Resolved:**

**a)** That Members authorise officers, in partnership with the County Council, to take the following steps:

1. To accept the gross capital offer for the overall Ryecroft site (as set out in Part 2 of the report);
2. To dispose of the site to HDD on the basis of the proposals referred to in the report;
3. To extend the period of the co-operation agreement up to the end of December 2015 and to exchange contracts with HDD at the earliest possible opportunity.

**b)** To note that the joint Councils' specialist retail advisor (Cushman and Wakefield) recommends the HDD offer for the Ryecroft site as this demonstrates best consideration (in compliance with S.123 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended));

c) To accept that the Authority's proportion of the Capital receipt is properly based upon a fair and independent valuation of the two parties' interests in the overall site thereby demonstrating achievement of best consideration (in compliance with S.123 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended));

d) To note that in order to bring forward the optimum scheme for this town centre location it has been considered both necessary and appropriate to assume clearance of the current Civic Offices site and to refer to the complementary report in this regard elsewhere on your agenda.

## **6. PROPOSED NEWCASTLE UNDER LYME PUBLIC SECTOR HUB**

A report was submitted to provide the Council with the rationale as to why the provision of a Public Sector Hub (new offices and customer service point) was both necessary and appropriate.

The Leader presented the report and moved the recommendations.

Members welcomed and endorsed the report and thanked the County Council, the Police, Cabinet and the Leader for work on the project.

A request was made to take into consideration the closure of the Seabridge Centre and the dispersal of the many community groups that currently used it.

Members welcomed the recommendations linked with the Guidhall and stated that communications had to be clear that the project would save money (up to half a million pounds per year).

### **Resolved:**

That Members accept the conclusions of the detailed business case exercise in respect of the partners' accommodation requirements and authorise officers to take the following steps in partnership with Staffordshire County Council (SCC) and the Police & Crime Commissioner's Office (PCC):

**A.** To proceed with the construction of a Public Sector Hub on the 'preferred site' of the former St. Giles and St. George's School, Barracks Road, Newcastle-under-Lyme on the basis set out in this report, which will require the following key actions:

(a) NBC (freeholder) to grant SCC a long term ground leasehold interest (or any other interest deemed appropriate, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder) on the preferred site.

(b) SCC to take the lead (developer) role in commissioning the Hub and when completed, NBC and PCC to be granted long term occupational leases of agreed areas of accommodation by SCC on a "not for profit" (cost recovery only) basis (any variation in commissioning approach to be agreed with the relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holder(s)).

(c) That capital and revenue budgets as stated within the business case are made available for the development of the Hub and to prepare services for the transition into new ways of working.

(d) To formalise and implement an organisational cultural change programme on the basis described in the report.

(e) To establish robust project governance arrangements including reporting to relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holders.

**B.** That in addition to the Civic Offices site, the properties below be declared surplus to requirements once the Public Sector Hub is complete and approval is given to release them at the most appropriate time in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder:

a) Offices at Sidmouth Avenue, Newcastle (former SCC leasehold Registrars accommodation) – freehold disposal.

b) Offices at St. George's Chambers, Merrial Street, Newcastle – leasehold disposal on the basis described in this report.

**C.** Customer Service Centre, Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle – that officers be authorised to take all necessary steps to bring forward viable, detailed proposals for the use of The Guildhall for community and/or voluntary sector purposes, on a full-repairing leasehold basis, as summarised in the report.

**7. STANDING ORDER 18 - URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

**THE MAYOR. COUNCILLOR SANDRA HAMBLETON**  
**Chair**