

COUNCIL

Wednesday, 21st July, 2021
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

Present: Mayor - Councillor Kenneth Owen (Chair)

Councillors:	Gillian Burnett	Dave Jones	Mike Stubbs
	Jennifer Cooper	Tony Kearon	Stephen Sweeney
	John Cooper	Annabel Lawley	Simon Tagg
	Julie Cooper	Helena Maxfield	John Tagg
	Sylvia Dymond	Sue Moffat	June Walklate
	Andrew Fear	Paul Northcott	Paul Waring
	Andrew Fox-Hewitt	Mark Olszewski	Ian Wilkes
	Allison Gardner	Barry Panter	Gillian Williams
	Gill Heesom	Andrew Parker	John Williams
	Mark Holland	Sarah Pickup	Ruth Wright
	Graham Hutton	Marion Reddish	Jill Waring
	Trevor Johnson	Kyle Robinson	David Grocott

Officers:	Geoff Durham	Mayor's Secretary / Member Support Officer
	Martin Hamilton	Chief Executive
	Simon McEneny	Executive Director - Commercial Development & Economic Growth
	Daniel Dickinson	Head of Legal & Governance /Monitoring Officer
	Sarah Wilkes	Head of Finance / S151 Officer
	Nesta Barker	Head of Environmental Health Services

Also in attendance:

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Silvia Burgess, Bert Proctor, Amelia Rout, Elizabeth Shenton, Gary White and Simon White.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest stated.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 19 May, 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

4. **MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor advised that some Members had forms on their tables which needed to be completed and returned.

5. WALLEYS QUARRY - UPDATE ON PROBLEM ODOURS IN THE BOROUGH

The Leader, Councillor Simon Tagg, introduced a report updating Members on ongoing work to address problem odours in the Borough and to report back on actions agreed at the Special Council Meeting held on 18 March, 2021.

The report outlined the history of the problems on the site and gave the number of complaints which had been received. The actions arising from the meeting held on 18 March, 2021 were also listed.

Members all showed concern for the health and wellbeing of the residents. They discussed the financial and legal procedures involved in the action being taken by the Council.

Resolved: That the current position regarding the persistent foul odours from Walleys Quarry and the work being undertaken to address this issue, be noted.

6. RECOMMENDATION OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

Members were advised that the Independent Remuneration Panel were still in the process of considering a draft report. This item would therefore be brought to a future meeting of the Council.

7. STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader submitted a report which provided an update to Members on the activities and decisions of the Cabinet, together with the Forward Plan.

The Statement was taken a paragraph at a time to allow for questions to be asked.

Paragraph 2: One Council Programme.

Councillor Jones stated that he had received concerns from residents regarding digital exclusion and sought reassurance that any process would include an appropriate impact assessment on residents who were less digitally accessible.

The Leader stated that there were no plans to turn off the traditional means of communication. That would also become more streamlined with the One Council approach as it was the back office being digitised as forms and other paperwork would all be electronic.

Councillor Holland asked the Leader if he agreed that it was nice to see that, within the Authority, so many people were working productively and that there was an excellent working relationship in Human Resources between the Council and the Trade Unions.

The Leader agreed that the Unions were working closely with the Council and there was a good relationship with them. A Dying to Work Charter had just been signed which had been a cross-party venture. It was crucial to work with the staff, work with the Unions and keep Members involved.

Councillor Fear asked the Leader if he agreed that a much more streamlined and obvious website was needed.

The Leader agreed that the website, with the multi-click feature needed to be streamlined which it would be under the new website and would have a more professional look. In addition the 'One Front Door' would be launched in September.

Councillor Robinson asked if the Kidsgrove Customer Service Desk would be returning

The Leader stated that no decision had been made, as yet, on the reopening of the Contact Centre in Kidsgrove but it was something that the Leader wanted to see and working with the Town Council, there was - through the Town Deal Fund a commitment for a hub of some description. The future of the centre would be a multi-purpose use with a Council operation in there along the lines of the 'One Open Door'. Therefore, for anything that could be done, now was the right time to take it forward and keep it sustainable in the long term.

Councillor Lawley asked for assurance that the 'contact us' details for the Council's website would be at the forefront and not hidden.

The Leader agreed and would ensure that that would happen on the design for the new website.

Paragraph 3: Back on Track – Coronavirus Pandemic Recovery Update.

Councillor Fear asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth, what was in the pipeline because as High Street's began to change, the Market would play an important part of generating prosperity in the Borough

Councillor Sweeney stated that other events in the pipeline were: Artisan Markets on the third Sunday of the month and there was a waiting list for stalls there; on 29 August there would be an Artisan Pop-up Market which would be family orientated; 7 August would be the Astley Fest; Farmers Markets were held every fourth Friday and again there was a waiting list; a Record Fayre on 27 and 29 August; a Christmas Continental Food Market would be held in December and a Vegan Market would be held next Sunday which was sold out.

Councillor Parker asked the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Heritage if all of the facilities at J2 were now all fully open.

Councillor Jill Waring stated that J2 was now fully open and as Covid safe as it could possibly be. During the lockdown, some of the staff had been redeployed to customer service posts or Covid marshalling and they had also took training in customer care and marketing. The Leisure Centre had, had problems but the faulty pool and pipework had now been sorted out and the roof, which had been leaking for many years had now been repaired. Membership numbers had grown and the average occupancy levels for activities had been in excess of 82%.

Councillor Panter asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth to comment on the financial and footfall success since the reopening of the Market after the pandemic lockdown.

Councillor Sweeney stated that stall occupancies for all markets were increasing. One of the aspirations of the Council was to reinvigorate the market and the Council was making great leaps and bounds in developing it.

The Leader stated that, in terms of getting back on track, the Council was at a crucial stage as, since easing of restrictions on 19 July, more businesses had opened up.

Paragraph 4: Business Improvement District, Newcastle Town Centre – Re-Ballot.

Councillor Maxfield asked if the CCTV and subway art had had any effect on the cohort of town centre beggars and anti-social behaviour that had been a problem prior to and during the lockdowns.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing, Councillor Heesom stated that the CCTV project had provided much needed reassurance to town centre users and had been helpful to police colleagues in monitoring the town centre usage. There had been an introduction of a Rough Sleepers Navigator post and a Rough Sleepers Coordinator. The CCTV installations were underway in the subways and the Council was working with support providers and voluntary sector partners. There was ongoing consultation with market traders to share intelligence. Approval had also been given for the Welcome Back Marshall Pilot Project, using the Welcome Back funding which would provide an additional visual presence to the town centre.

Councillor Julie Cooper asked for an update of the roll out of the new CCTV programme.

The Leader stated that the CCTV system that was worked on with the BID was now fully operational in the town. Any trees that had been blocking the views had been taken down or cut back. Further developments were being made on the routes into the town centre including subways which should be working within the next four weeks. There were many issues in the town and CCTV helped to fight that.

Councillor John Williams congratulated the BID for getting in for a third term. The Town had seen excellent progress especially with the Town Deal coming on. He asked the Leader to thank the Chair, Eddie and to Viv who as unwell at present, to pass on the Council's best wishes and for their excellent work. Also, could the BID be asked to come along and give a presentation to Full Council on the work that they do.

The Leader stated that the Council was working well with the BID them and coordinating market activity with the Council's Town Centre Officer, Nick Moore to move the town centre forward. The Leader agreed that as there was now a new BID Manager and new Board Members and new Deputy Chair, it would be good to invite them again to give a presentation to the Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee and possibly to Full Council in the future. The Leader echoed Councillor Williams' comments about Viv who was still involved with her business but had recently stood down as Vice Chair.

Paragraph 5: Town Deals and Future High Street Fund.

Councillor Burnett stated that the lifts had now arrived at Kidsgrove Railway Station through the Town Deal money and would make the Station fully accessible for all.

The Leader agreed that the work at the Station was a real game changer and it was the money that had come from the Government - the Town Deal Fund and that foresight and investment in not only Kidsgrove but Newcastle as well.

Councillor Paul Waring welcomed the money given by the Government for use in the Borough and asked the Leader if he agreed that, this Council had a once in a lifetime opportunity to make a real difference for residents.

The Leader agreed that it was a once in a lifetime opportunity and needed to make the best use of that which the Council had done through its plans for Kidsgrove and Newcastle through the Town Deal Boards. Both had really exciting plans with £16m+ in Kidsgrove and £23.5m in Newcastle. There was also the Future High Streets Fund which was really important for the regeneration of Newcastle town centre.

Paragraph 6: Kidsgrove Sports Centre Refurbishment.

Councillor Burnett stated that since confirmation of the Town Deal money, the Sports Centre had been coming on leaps and bounds. The Centre had recently been visited by Robert Jenrick MP.

Councillor Sweeney stated that when Robert Jenrick came to visit they had walked around the site and saw that the building had been taken back to bare brick and would be a fantastic facility once completed.

The Leader stated that the Council was using the £2.45m from the Town Deal Fund to compliment the Council's money. The Council had heard today that £175,000 had been received from Sport England. A new Sports Centre had been promised and would be delivered by late Spring 2022.

Paragraph 7: Borough Local Plan.

Councillor Hutton asked the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning for an update regarding the Local Plan and where was the Council in terms of the Five Year housing Land Supply.

Councillor Northcott stated that there were a number of stages that had to be gone through, including the agreeing of a Local Development Scheme and a draft Statement of Community Involvement. The current stage was looking at the evidential database to inform the decisions to go into the timetable that had been set. The next major piece of work would be the Options and Issues paper in Autumn this year. As things stood it was on track for the next major piece of work which the Council's Policy Officers were now working on. The Housing figures and numbers would be part of that process and the Council needed to respond every year in terms of the five year land supply position. The Council did have a five year land supply taking on board the provision for student accommodation. Hopefully that could be bolstered if calls for sites brought in additional applications along the way and identified pieces of land for the future use of the Plan.

Councillor Fear confirmed that, following the recent receipt of an appeal decision, the Planning Inspector had confirmed within the report that the Council did indeed have a Five Year Housing Land Supply.

The Leader was very confident that the Local Plan would be in place in the timescales and it was a refreshing change from what had been happening with the Joint Plan with Stoke.

Paragraph 8: Aspire Housing – Prospectus for Joint Working.

Councillor John Williams asked if any pressure being put onto Aspire to replace association housing which was being demolished and rebuilt, with affordable rented accommodation.

The Leader stated that the agreement that the Council had reached with Aspire was to work together on future development. The Council would make sure that there would be a social element in developments. The Planning rules that would be put into place and through the new Local Plan can ensure the right type of housing, allowing people to get onto the property ladder.

Paragraph 9: Future Provision for Temporary Accommodation.

Councillor Jenny Cooper asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing how the Council was working with the police and other partners to tackle the problems of homeless individuals who came into the town centre to cause trouble.

Councillor Heesom stated that the Council had organised a High Level Engagement meeting with partners and agencies such as the Police, BID, PCC Office and Lyme Trust which would be looking at ways of dealing with anti-social behaviour in a targeted way.

Councillor Panter asked if there was a register of people who provided temporary accommodation and if so, where could he get a copy from.

Councillor Heesom advised that it was Sarah Moore's team that could provide the list.

The Leader stated that the High Level meeting was really important because there were a lot of issues and complaints. Some people weren't homeless as such but were living in accommodation around the town centre so there was a need to get those providers involved, with the police and Council officers to see how it could be dealt with.

Paragraph 10: Urban Tree Planting Strategy and Encouraging Greater Use of Parks and Open Spaces.

Councillor Julie Cooper referred to the Scrutiny Green Space Working Party stating that they had come up with the idea that more trees were required within the area and to make more use of the green space.

Councillor Holland paid tribute to Councillor Moffatt who had chaired the Working Group and also to the Vice-Chair Councillor Julie Cooper and stated that it was good that the Cabinet had been able to take some of that forward which would help with the Queen's Platinum Jubilee next year but also help with the Council's commitment to become carbon neutral.

Councillor Julie Cooper thanked the Japanese Government for their gift of Cherry Blossom trees which had been planted at the Brampton.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt asked, when sustainability commitments were discussed, how were Strategy papers and Motions reconciled with the decisions taken at Cabinet to sell off or market green spaces and fell large numbers of trees in approved plans in spite of local opposition.

The Leader agreed that the Working Party had done a really good job and that it was good to offer some of the smaller green spaces for tree planting, for example at Sandy Lane. This work ties in with the Queen's upcoming Platinum Jubilee and the Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy. The Leader stated that the piece of land referred to by Councillor Fox-Hewitt had been taken out of the Playing Pitch Strategy by the previous administration. Councillors would be asked to nominate bits of green space for potential tree planting programmes.

In future years there would be a carbon offset from the trees which would not only be beautiful to see but also good for the environment. The trees would not just be planted, they would need to be managed long term. If the Queen's Platinum Jubilee could be marked by planting trees it would be a good thing.

Councillor Gill Williams asked, with all of the trees being planted, was there the staff and resources to maintain them.

The Leader agreed that this was a good point and therefore it was important to have the correct species and there needed to be a Management Plan

Councillor Hutton referred to a group that had been set up – 'The Friends of Bradwell Dingle' which was being helped by this Council. The Parks Department were advising them on what could be done. It was wonderful that a group of residents had come together to create something beautiful. Councillor Hutton extended his congratulations to those residents.

Paragraph 11: Forward Plan

Councillor Fox-Hewitt asked when the Council could expect an updated Forward Plan account paying cognisance to the Prime Ministers promise of alpine fresh air in the Borough.

The Leader stated that Aaron Bell MP was working with the Prime Minister on this.

Resolved: That the Statement of the Leader of the Council be received and noted.

8. **REPORTS OF THE CHAIRS OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**

Reports were submitted for the Committees that had met since the last Council meeting.

Resolved: That the reports be received.

9. **REPORTS OF THE CHAIRS OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEES**

Written reports were submitted for the Committees that had met since the last Council meeting.

Councillor Fear gave a verbal update for the Planning Committee which had met on its regular cycle. These had now moved to hybrid style meetings and had been well attended. At the last meeting there had been an excellent set of performance reports from the Committee and officers were thanked for their hard work in very difficult times. However, Enforcement performance figures were slipping. Members were assured that the Planning Committee was addressing this issue with the Head of Planning.

Resolved: That the reports be received.

10. QUESTIONS TO THE MAYOR, CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Councillor Parker asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth for an update on the demolition of the former Civic Offices.

Councillor Sweeney advised that plant and equipment had now arrived on site and was now in the mobilisation stage. Works to start pulling the building down would commence on 9 August, 2021 and would continue for 44 weeks, being completed by mid-June, 2022.

Councillor Parker asked what Business rates would be saved when demolition commenced.

Councillor Sweeney stated that, currently, £157,440 was being paid in Business Rates for the building. As soon as bricks started to be removed, that would become zero.

Councillor Maxfield asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth for the latest figures for the amount of grants given out by the Council, to local business as a result of the recent lockdowns.

Councillor Sweeney advised that £39,422,374 had been passported out from the Council to local businesses. It was an amazing amount of money and showed that the Government had listened to the people. It also did the Council credit that the money had been distributed so quickly.

Councillor Maxfield asked if the Portfolio Holder envisaged any Central Government grants, either for businesses or the Council.

Councillor Sweeney stated that he understood that the general feeling of the officers was that there would be no more grants unless something major occurred.

11. RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions handed in at the meeting.

12. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

COUNCILLOR KEN OWEN
Chair

Meeting concluded at 9.19 pm