

**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
COUNCIL**

THURSDAY, 18 JULY 2024

Held at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Rushcliffe Arena,
Rugby Road, West Bridgford
and live streamed on Rushcliffe Borough Council's YouTube channel

PRESENT:

Councillors A Brown (Chair), J Cottee (Vice-Chair), M Barney, J Billin, T Birch, R Bird, A Brennan, R Butler, J Chaplain, K Chewings, N Clarke, T Combellack, A Edyvean, S Ellis, G Fletcher, M Gaunt, E Georgiou, P Gowland, C Grocock, R Mallender, S Mallender, D Mason, P Matthews, H Om, H Parekh, A Phillips, L Plant, N Regan, D Simms, D Soloman, C Thomas, R Upton, D Viridi, J Walker, R Walker, T Wells, G Wheeler, J Wheeler and G Williams

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

L Ashmore	Director of Development and Economic Growth
D Banks	Director of Neighbourhoods
P Linfield	Director of Finance and Corporate Services
K Marriott	Chief Executive
S Pregon	Monitoring Officer
E Richardson	Democratic Services Officer
H Tambini	Democratic Services Manager

APOLOGIES:

Councillors S Calvert, S Dellar, R Inglis, D Polenta and L Way

13 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

14 Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 May 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 23 May 2024 were approved as a true record and signed by the Mayor.

15 Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor welcomed Sara Pregon, the Borough's future Monitoring Officer and thanked her for stepping in this evening and went on to inform Council about some of the events he had attended since becoming Mayor. Highlights included lunch at the Bishop's Palace in Southwell, afternoon tea with residents of Westdale Care Home, the open gardens event in Lady Bay, the Radcliffe on Trent Carnival, and finally the view from the stage at the recent Proms in the Park event, with residents from across the Borough enjoying the Motown music.

16 **Leader's Announcements**

The Leader also welcomed Sara Pregon and went on to inform Council about the Touch Rugby World Cup that was underway, with over 40 nations taking part, and having attended the amazing opening ceremony, he encouraged all Councillors to attend if they could. The event was organised by the Chief Executive of Nottingham Rugby, which had its base within the Borough and the event had also highlighted to the Leader that Nottingham Touch Rugby ran out of the Borough's Gresham sports facility and he went onto praise the school choir from the Millside Spencer Academy, in East Leake, which had taken part in the opening ceremony.

The Leader went on to inform Council that Chris Boardman, Olympic Gold medallist, cycled through the Borough this week as part of his Pedals to Paris Challenge, which was raising awareness of green issues and he outlined a number of commitments residents were being asked to sign up to in the form of a Green Pledge.

The Leader informed Council that the authority had recently been shortlisted for two awards in planning but had not won. Both categories were recognising the innovative work that the Council had done on the Local Development Order for the Ratcliffe on Soar Power Station.

Finally, the Leader confirmed that he had written to the Borough's new MP following the recent General Election inviting him to visit in the hope of establishing a good working relationship for the benefit of the Borough and obtaining an additional conduit into central government.

17 **Chief Executive's Announcements**

There were no Chief Executive's Announcements.

18 **Citizens' Questions**

No citizens' questions were received for this meeting.

19 **Petitions**

No petitions were presented at this meeting.

20 **Approval of the Scrutiny Annual Reports 2023/24**

The Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Borough-wide Leadership, Councillor Clarke presented the report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services providing a review of the work undertaken by the Council's four Scrutiny Groups during 2023/24.

The Leader informed Council that he had great pleasure in presenting the annual scrutiny reports for approval and referred to the importance of scrutiny in helping to develop policy, address the concerns of residents, and provide the appropriate checks and balances. After Councillor Brennan had been given the

opportunity to second the report, he asked that each of the scrutiny chairs be invited to deliver a brief summary of the year.

Councillor Brennan seconded the recommendation and reserved the right to speak.

Councillor Combellack, Chair of the Corporate Overview Group for 2023/24, reported on a very productive year in which improvements had been made to the scrutiny process, including a simplified scrutiny request form and the opportunity to present those requests to the Corporate Overview Group in person. Councillor Combellack was keen to point out that not all requests to scrutiny were forwarded to a scrutiny group for discussion, some were addressed directly by officers, by other Council groups, or referred to Cabinet. Councillor Combellack urged Councillors to continue highlighting topics for potential scrutiny and asked them to engage with officers in the first instance to ensure requests coming forward were well formulated, within the Council's remit and represented good value for money.

Councillor Edyvean, Chair of the Governance Scrutiny Group, thanked members of the group for their attendance and respectful debate, and his Vice-chair for her support during the year. Councillor Edyvean explained that the Governance Scrutiny Group differed from the other scrutiny groups as it was primarily backward looking, focusing on financial performance and assurance. The Group had also looked at the Constitution, and given the number and complexity of changes, especially in relation to planning matters, a Member Working Group had been established to consider them. Councillor Edyvean stated that Rushcliffe was very lucky to have such skilled officers and encouraged all Councillors to attend the annual Treasury Management Training.

Councillor Williams, Chair of the Communities Scrutiny Group, referred to the wide range and interesting subjects the Group had considered, including Social Housing Models, Smoke Control Areas, Streetwise, East Midlands Airport, and the Council's Carbon Management Plan. Councillor Williams thanked the members of his Group, those that had substituted when needed, and his Vice-chair.

Councillors Matthews, Chair of the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group, had noted the willingness and productiveness of Councillors and officers to work together to scrutinise a range of topics, when he had taken over the position of Chair part-way through the year. He thanked all participants for their enthusiasm and contributions to the meetings and also his Vice-chair and his predecessor Councillor R Walker.

Councillor Gowland, the Vice-chair of Governance Scrutiny Group, informed Council that despite the complex reports being considered by the Group, the presentations and explanations by both officers and external speakers had been excellent.

Councillor Plant, Vice-chair of Communities Scrutiny Group, reflected on the importance of ensuring that appropriate external speakers and officers attended meetings and that all Group members had a clear understanding of

what scrutiny was expected to achieve. She raised concerns that the decisions made by the Group did not appear to impact upon policy or improve the quality of life for residents and suggested that six years after it was introduced, it could be time to review the Council's scrutiny processes.

Councillor Thomas spoke on behalf of Councillor Way, Vice-chair of Growth and Development Scrutiny Group, and expressed concerns regarding the content of the annual report and that some of the issues raised by the Group in relation to the management of open spaces on new housing estates had been ignored. She felt that scrutiny in general had improved and evolved but there was still work to be done. The LGA Peer Challenge earlier this year had suggested a scrutiny review and a scrutiny request had been submitted by Councillor Way to achieve this, but it had been resisted and alternatives such as a workshop and training proposed instead. Councillor Thomas suggested that any training should be provided externally, with both officers and Councillors attending to look at change and to encourage more collaborative ways of working.

Councillor R Mallender supported the views of Councillor Thomas and suggested that it was time to review scrutiny to ensure improvements continued to be made, and that it would be good practice to look at what others were doing and incorporate best practice to continue to improve.

The Leader thanked the scrutiny chairs for their comments and responded briefly to the comments made by Councillor Thomas. He reported that there had been external training for scrutiny members in the past and that this was on the programme again, with a continual cycle of development and improvement within scrutiny led by Councillor Combellack. The Leader stated that he was sure that Councillor Combellack remained open to any suggestions regarding the future of scrutiny but highlighted that those needed to deliver positive change within the resources available to the Council. With regard to the management of open spaces, the Leader reassured Councillor Thomas that this remained a live topic and that, as well as working on a number of different areas locally, he was also lobbying Central Government to improve the situation nationally.

It was **RESOLVED** that the work undertaken by the four Scrutiny Groups during 2023/24 be endorsed.

21 **Productivity Plan**

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance, Transformation and Governance, Councillor Viridi presented the report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services detailing the Council's Productivity Plan.

In moving the recommendation, Councillor Viridi stated that this Productivity Plan was based on the Council's Transformation and Efficiency Plan, which had been agreed at Full Council in March 2024, and if endorsed this evening would be submitted to Government on 19 July 2024. The Plan focused on four key themes, as detailed in the table at paragraph 3.2 in Appendix A to the report. Councillor Viridi also highlighted two additional areas, one of which was the Council's response to the fourth key theme regarding barriers, as detailed

in Section 4 of Appendix A, with the second contextualising the environment that the Council had been working in, including a decrease in its core spending power, as detailed in paragraph 1.4 of Appendix A. Councillor Viridi concluded by advising that despite the challenges being faced, the Council continued to deliver excellent, high quality services to local residents, whilst delivering further efficiencies, as required by this Productivity Plan.

Councillor J Wheeler seconded the recommendation and reserved the right to speak.

Councillor J Walker thanked officers but advised that the Labour Group could not support the document as it 'baked in' the cuts that the Group had opposed in March. She felt that the barriers referred to in the report were important to highlight, as they showed the need for greater devolution, together with the challenges being faced. Councillor Walker stated that devolution would improve local democracy, allow more collaborative working to increase spending power and improve services. She felt that the inclusion of a multi-year settlement and the lack of clarity regarding the New Homes Bonus should have been included, as they were key factors why this and other councils struggled during very turbulent times. Councillor Walker hoped for positive change going forward and for an attitude of recovery rather than retribution.

Councillor Thomas stated that it was a good report but referred to paragraph 4.2 and to the change in terminology to use the term 'reducing discretionary expenditure' rather than 'reducing wasteful spend' and advised that those two things were completely different. She hoped going forward that if the new Government had different requirements, some of the barriers highlighted could be removed.

Councillor Chewings thanked officers but advised that he and Councillor Birch would not be supporting the report for the same reasons as aired at the Council meeting in March. He felt that efficiencies were cuts, the significant increase in parking revenue was effecting both residents and businesses, and the reductions in funding to public conveniences could not be supported. Whilst acknowledging that there was uncertainty and long standing issues regarding funding, he hoped that with the new Government in place things would change for the better.

Councillor J Wheeler thanked officers and stated that the Council had to go forward with the Plan as proposed and savings were being put forward to ensure that the Council effectively managed its finances. Public conveniences were still effectively being delivered by parish councils, and car parking charges had been increased rather than increasing Council Tax to ensure that people using the facilities were paying for them. Councillor Wheeler confirmed that the Council continued to invest in car parking infrastructure, together with other quality services around the Borough, whilst reviewing services to ensure that they were cost effective.

Councillor Viridi confirmed that efficiencies were 'baked into' the budget, given the very challenging situation being faced, with several councils issuing Section 114 notices, it was important that this Council produced a balanced budget, which had been agreed at Full Council. He advised that this Plan would ensure

collaborative working continued and agreed that there should be visibility around one year funding settlements. Councillor Viridi picked up on the points made around discretionary spending, and advised that it was not just that element, as the Transformation and Efficiency Programme was based on a three-fold approach, and since its inception, £7m of savings had been delivered. Councillor Viridi welcomed the positive engagement with members through the budgetary process and stated that he would be happy to go through some of the points and ideas raised tonight. He concluded by thanking the Director – Finance and Corporate Services and his team and referred to the additional £138k funding received as part of this process.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Productivity Plan be adopted and its submission to Government be supported.

22 Notices of Motion

- a) The following notice of motion was proposed by Councillor Birch and seconded by Councillor Chewings.

“The current first-past-the-post electoral system is unfair and undemocratic. It often results in a discrepancy between the percentage of votes received by parties and the number of seats they hold. This often leads to the underrepresentation of minority parties and the overrepresentation of majority parties, which distorts the democratic will of the electorate.

Proportional representation offers a fairer alternative by ensuring that seats are allocated in proportion to the votes received, thus more accurately reflecting the will of the electorate. Proportional representation is a fairer and more democratic electoral system.

Council resolves to:

1. Formally declare that it supports the principle of proportional representation in UK general elections.
2. Formally declare that it supports the principle of proportional representation in UK local elections.
3. Write to HM Government to request a change in our voting system from first past the post to proportional representation.”

Councillor Birch requested a recorded vote and referred to the importance of this issue, given that the recent General Election had been the most unrepresentative since 1928, with 58% of the votes cast being totally unrepresented, which was unacceptable. Councillor Birch stated that this could not be called a true democracy when the voting results did not reflect the will of the electorate, and the current First Past the Post (FPTP) system should be replaced by Proportional Representation (PR).

Councillor Birch reiterated that results in the recent General Election had been greatly distorted, with the largest party having its votes exaggerated, with smaller parties marginalised. He also shared details

of the 2015 General Election results in Belfast South, when the winning party had only received 25% of the vote, which he considered an affront to democratic principles and confirmed that the current voting system was not fit for purpose. Councillor Birch also referred to the results in the 2019 Rushcliffe Borough Council Election and how unfair they had been, with that reflected across the country. He questioned why the current system was defended and whilst acknowledging that there were some reasonable defences of it, he considered that the disadvantages far outweighed any benefits.

Councillor Birch stated that there was considerable misinformation surrounding PR and advised that there was evidence to show that it had worked very well in many countries throughout western Europe since World War II. It usually produced strong, stable, coalition governments, which on average lasted longer than majority governments formed under FPTP. Councillor Birch stated that citizens in those countries also reported greater satisfaction with their political system, with voter turnout measurably higher. Reference was made to ongoing political instability in Italy, and Councillor Birch stated that this was not due to its use of PR, but rather to the very well-known regional, cultural and political differences experienced there, and he felt that Italy should therefore not be used as an example.

Councillor Birch referred to concerns that PR would lead to a break down in the link between constituents and their elected representatives and agreed that it was desirable to have that link and confirmed that he supported a mixed voting system, which would combine the best elements of the two systems. In conclusion, Councillor Birch stated that adopting PR would not just result in more accurate and fair elections, it would be a commitment to a more vibrant and inclusive democracy, moving away from the limitations of the current system to ensure that minority parties received their fair share of representation.

Councillor Chewings seconded the motion and reserved the right to speak.

The Leader, Councillor Clarke stated that no system was perfect and this proposal was not the answer and referred to Italy, which was a prime example of where PR did not work. The Leader stated that he was against this proposal because of the decision making process, as when a coalition was formed it did not necessarily mean that good decisions were made. The Leader also reminded Council that it was up to the Government to decide if the voting system should be reviewed.

Councillor R Walker agreed that the current system failed to reflect the votes cast compared to the proportion of seats held, although it was not always at the expense of minor parties. There were hundreds of systems, none of which were perfect, and it was important not to assume that proportionality was the only measure of how fair and democratic a system was. Councillor Walker agreed that strong, stable governments were good for democracy, whereas coalition governments were weaker and more unstable. A direct connection between the

representative and constituents was good for democracy, and that should be contrasted to many PR systems, which had multiple representatives for a single area. Councillor Walker stated that it was good to use a straightforward system such as FPTP, which had produced results over the years that had reflected the national mood at that time. He felt that PR party lists with preferred candidates could be manipulated, and that many PR systems had built in barriers for smaller parties. Councillor Walker concluded by stating that post-election coalitions were disastrous for democracy, with agreements often made behind closed doors and policies put in place that no one had voted for.

Councillor Parekh stated that the current system had worked well for many years throughout the world and she could not support the motion. The PR system often resulted in a high number of parties gaining seats, which could lead to fragmented, unstable governments, with coalitions having to be formed. Such instability often led to frequent elections being held, which had happened for many years in Italy. Coalition governments often resulted in policy compromises, which served no one and to the empowerment of extremist parties. Councillor Parekh also referred to the complexity of PR systems, which could lead to voter confusion and disengagement.

Councillor Gaunt advised that whilst the Labour Group would be supporting the motion, it did have concerns over the timing and some of its content and reminded Council that the Labour Party had already committed to adopting PR at its conference in 2023. He agreed that the current system needed to be replaced, as it had not been fair for over 100 years, with parties now working out how to skilfully win majorities within the current framework. Councillor Gaunt felt that the motion was over simplified, with more work required to look at specifics and he called for Constitutional reforms and that the motion should demand that the Labour Government went ahead with its various manifesto pledges. Councillor Gaunt concluded by stating that the Council should also be looking at local elections in Rushcliffe, to ensure that they reflected the views of residents.

Councillor Billin stated that he would be supporting the motion, as it went to the core of everything that he had campaigned for over many years, and the motion was asking for the principle to be supported rather than referring to specifics.

Councillor R Mallender stated that this was an issue that many people were interested in, as the current system failed to accurately represent the number of votes each party received, and he agreed that a change to some form of PR system was required. The current system gave an artificially large majority to one party, which resulted in other groups being denied proper representation, which could lead to unrest. Councillor Mallender advised that the current system had worked many years ago, when there were only two parties; however, that had changed as those numbers had increased, with the system producing an inherently unstable representation, and it was now time to look at the principle of having a fairer, more democratic electoral system.

Councillor Grocock stated that he was in favour of an electoral system using PR, as the current system often significantly distorted the preferences of the majority of voters. He felt that the PR system often led to more marginalised parties moderating their views, and it could promote compromise and collaboration, through effective coalition governments. Councillor Grocock reminded Council that a majority of western countries successfully used some form of PR in their elections, included three nations in the UK. Whilst agreeing with the ideals of the motion, Councillor Grocock was concerned that if passed, it would have no influence at a national level, and he failed to see how it would directly serve local residents.

Councillor Simms stated that he was frustrated with the current, outdated electoral system, with smaller parties marginalised; however, he felt after the recent election, it was too early to support this motion.

Councillor Chewings referred to the 2022 survey conducted by the Electoral Reform Society, with 51% in favour of electoral reform. Reference was made to the possible cynicism over the timing of this motion; however, Councillor Chewings advised that he had emailed all candidates before the election regarding this issue. He quoted from a speech by Keir Starmer in 2020, supporting electoral reform and he felt that this was the time to seek change and apply pressure, even at Borough Council level. Councillor Chewings stated that the motion was not asking anyone to choose a specific type of PR, it was asking for the principle to be supported.

Councillor Birch advised that he had been campaigning on this issue for over 20 years and questioned again the fairness of the recent election. He went onto reiterate that coalition governments lasted longer, producing better policies than majority governments, and it was a positive that many parties could win seats using PR. Reference had also been made to the complexities of PR, but Councillor Birch reminded Council that this system was widely used very successfully and he reiterated his previous comments regarding Italy. The motion had been brought to advocate for residents and Councillor Birch felt that it was important to discuss this issue.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, a recorded vote was taken for this item as follows:

FOR: Councillors J Billin, T Birch, J Chaplain, K Chewings, G Fletcher, M Gaunt, P Gowland, C Grocock, R Mallender, S Mallender, L Plant and J Walker

AGAINST: Councillors M Barney, R Bird, A Brennan, A Brown, R Butler, N Clarke, T Combella, J Cottee, A Edyvean, S Ellis, E Georgiou, D Mason, P Matthews, H Om, H Parekh, A Phillips, N Regan, D Simms, D Soloman, R Upton, D Viridi, R Walker, T Wells, G Wheeler, J Wheeler, and G Williams

ABSTENTION: Councillor C Thomas

The motion was lost.

- b) The following notice of motion was proposed by Councillor Thomas and seconded by Councillor S Mallender.

“This Council believes that car park solar canopies could have considerable potential to contribute to solar energy generation in Rushcliffe in an environmentally friendly way. The Council will encourage this by:

1. Including suitable text in relevant policies, strategies, and guidance notes.
2. Undertaking a feasibility study into installation of canopies on its own car parks, with a view to bringing forward a capital project or projects by way of an exemplar.”

Councillor Thomas referred to the pressing need to increase green energy generation in the UK, and whilst solar power was not the most efficient form, it had a part to play. She referred to a briefing note that Councillors had recently received, the “Solar Farm Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study”, which provided guidance on where Rushcliffe’s countryside solar farm developments could be sited. Councillor Thomas felt that where possible, most Councillors would prefer to see solar panels on rooftops, brown field land and carparks, of which Rushcliffe had many, with the Council itself owning much that could be turned to solar generation without any detriment impact. Council was reminded that this motion just looked at car parks, to break consideration down into more manageable chunks.

Council was advised that in January 2023, the French Parliament had approved legislation requiring all new and existing car parks with more than 80 spaces to have at least 50% coverage with solar panels, which could generate as much electricity as ten nuclear power plants and she highlighted some of the companies and councils all over the UK that were introducing car park solar canopy schemes.

Councillor Thomas referred to the first part of her motion, which would encourage other organisations to have solar panels on their existing and new car parks through the inclusion of suitable wording in planning policies and conditions and providing guidance. The second part looked at what Rushcliffe could do directly with its own car parks, and it was hoped that a Feasibility Study would identify a suitable site or sites for future projects.

Councillor Thomas stated that the financial viability of any project would need to be checked, although she advised that this should not be evaluated just as a revenue generating opportunity, as carbon savings and other environmental benefits should be factored in. The possibility of the Council using any generated electricity to reduce its energy bills

should also be considered, together with exporting any surplus energy and battery storage. There would be many factors to consider when looking at individual sites, but if other organisations and councils were looking at this, then Rushcliffe should do the same

Councillor S Mallender seconded the motion and reserved the right to speak.

Councillor Upton proposed an amendment to the motion as follows:

“This Council believes that car park solar canopies could have considerable potential to contribute to solar energy generation in Rushcliffe in an environmentally friendly way. The Council will encourage this by:

1. Including suitable text in relevant policies, strategies, and guidance notes.
2. Undertaking a feasibility study into installation of canopies on its own car parks.”

Councillor Upton confirmed that the Conservative Group supported the spirit of the motion, with solar energy generation already a key part of the Carbon Management Action Plan, and a reference could be made in the Council’s emerging Design Guide, and any other appropriate documents. There was already a small-scale solar canopy installation at Gamston Community Hall car park, linked to EV charging ports; however, it was noted that such installations could be costly, and small wind turbines might be more financially viable. It would be appropriate to do a Feasibility Study; however, until it was completed it would be inappropriate to commit to a capital project.

Councillor Om seconded the amendment to the motion and reserved the right to speak.

Councillor Thomas confirmed that she would accept the amendment.

Councillor Gowland confirmed that the Labour Group supported the motion, although she expressed sadness about the amendment, and stated that if it was cost effective to have solar farms then surely brownfield sites and car parks would be just as good. Although she was not entirely against solar farms, Councillor Gowland felt that it was much better to use brownfield sites, and whilst there were issues with linking to the grid, it was appropriate to undertake a Feasibility Study, which she hoped would led to investment in the Borough.

Councillor Gaunt was also disappointed that the amendment had been agreed as he was hoping that Ruddington could have a car park with solar panels. Council was reminded that in 2006, the Labour Government had put in place a law that required any new housing from 2016 to be net zero but this had been removed in 2011 by the Coalition Government, and if that law had stayed in place, the country would be in a much better position. Councillor Gaunt referred to a sustainable city of

100,000 people in Abiu Dabi, which was sustainable mainly due to its solar panels on roofs of buildings and car parks.

In supporting the amended motion, Councillor R Mallender advised that in the last year, nearly 39% of power in the UK had been produced by renewables, and the use of solar panels in car parks and large buildings should be encouraged, with housing developers required to put them on all new houses. He stated that this was very important and should have been done years ago.

The Leader reiterated support for the principle of the motion and advised that the amendment had been put forward to make it clear that a Feasibility Study was required before any commitment to take action could be made, and as part of the study potential projects could be looked at. Council was reminded that British weather was very different to countries with sunnier climates, which could use solar panels a lot. The Leader stated that reference could also be made to having solar panels on all new industrial and commercial buildings, but he did not want to add this and detract from the spirit of this motion.

Councillor Parekh supported the amended motion and referred to various worldwide case studies, which outlined the wide ranging benefits of using solar panels in car parks.

Councillor Birch stated that in supporting the motion and understanding the reasons for the amendment, he would far prefer to see solar panels in urban environments than on viable farmland. He advised that it was surprising how inefficient solar panels were but this motion was important as it would set a good example to other councils.

Councillor Regan supported this excellent motion and advised that a Feasibility Study had been undertaken on Council owned commercial properties in Bingham, with a payback of between four and five years. To overcome efficiency issues Councillor Regan advised that it was better to have an on-site power bank and he was confident that the Feasibility Study would result in solar panel use being supported.

In seconding the motion, Councillor S Mallender advised that she would have preferred to keep the original motion, although it was better that everyone worked together, as had happened previously. From personal experience Councillor Mallender found solar panels worked very effectively and reminded Council that it was light and not heat that was important. She referred to a report on solar energy by the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), which highlighted that 97% of its members wanted a standard requirement for all new buildings and car parks to have solar panels. Solar car parks produced electricity in areas that were often close to facilities that used lots of energy, which was ideal, rather than more rural solar farms, which required more infrastructure to take power to the grid. The CPRE and UCL's Energy Institute report advised that the potential in the built environment was about 117gigawatts, with 11gigawatts of that from car parks, which equated to sixty million solar panels, powering twelve million homes, and

Councillor Mallender felt that this motion would be a good start and example to developers. She concluded by hoping that the Government would bring in planning legislation to have solar panels on new buildings and even encourage retrospective installation.

Councillor Thomas thanked everyone for their support and stated that in accepting the amendment she still wanted projects to come forward but it was a question of working together to reach a compromise and this motion was a starting point.

On being put to the vote the motion was carried.

23 Questions from Councillors

- a) Question from Councillor J Walker to Councillor Upton.

“Having visited some Metropolitan Housing in my ward this week I have witnessed first-hand how poor attempts at repair from our housing partners have led to leaks and drafts resulting in a young family living in damp and mouldy conditions.

Is it proper that Rushcliffe Borough Council continues to sit on money intended to go to Registered Housing Providers when families are having to spend time chasing up Registered Housing Providers just to get poor workmanship put right whilst living in poor housing conditions?”

Councillor Upton responded that this Council did not sit on any money that could be used to benefit residents' lives and the Council approved the budget each March, a process which all Councillors were involved in. He went on to assume that Councillor Walker was referring to surplus s106 money and highlighted that this was not the Council's money, the Council collected it and acted as banker until such a time that the money could be spent on predetermined, large scale infrastructure projects.

The Mayor asked if Councillor Walker had a supplementary question.

Councillor J Walker clarified that her question was not about the s106 money but the carry forward that should be going to the Registered Housing Providers.

Councillor Upton referenced previous confidential conversations that had outlined the housing projects that the carry forwards referred to. The budget was fully committed, and the Council therefore carried that forward over the end of an accounting year to ensure those important projects remained funded. It was not the Council's responsibility to put capital funding into repairing properties owned by Registered Housing Providers. Councillor Upton informed Council that last week the Cabinet had adopted a new Housing Enforcement Policy in line with the 2023 Social Housing Regulation Act, which gave residents in social housing greater powers to get problems with their homes addressed.

b) Question from Councillor Mason to the Leader, Councillor Clarke

“Could the Leader inform this Council of any discussions he has had with our new MP and the Government, regarding the proposed changes to house building targets and planning laws?”

The Leader referred back to his announcements earlier in the evening and informed Council that he had written to Rushcliffe’s new MP, James Naish, and invited him to a meeting at the Council. The Leader had highlighted the pressing issue of Rushcliffe’s Local Plan renewal and the local passion for protecting the greenbelt, and he was hopeful that meeting would take place soon and that it would be the start of a productive working relationship. The Leader also mentioned that he was working with the LGA to better understand how the new Government intends to move planning issues forward.

The Mayor asked if Councillor Mason had a supplementary question.

Councillor Mason asked if the Leader agreed that, together with the number of local homes proposed in the Local Plan, Rushcliffe had more than met its fair share of new homes and that any further requirements should go to councils that had not been as responsive.

The Leader agreed and reflected that although the Labour manifesto had suggested a return of housing targets across the country he was hopeful that Rushcliffe’s past performance and new Local Plan would protect the Borough from excessive levels of future development. He cited the 9,100 homes the Council had accepted under the Duty to Cooperate from the City Council, and the 500,000 new homes across the country that already had planning permission but building work had not yet started, as examples of why he was hoping for a more appropriate level of demand in the Borough.

c) Question from Councillor Plant to Councillor Upton

“Due to spending pressures on the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants, Cabinet on 12 July 2022, approved the amendment of the policy to temporarily suspend the use of the discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant allocation until the review of the national formula allocation is undertaken. That decision was taken two years ago so can the Cabinet member inform me if the discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants allocation is likely to be reinstated anytime soon?”

Councillor Upton responded that the Council simply did not have the funds at this time for the discretionary elements of the Disabled Facilities Grant.

The Mayor asked if Councillor Plant had a supplementary question.

Councillor Plant asked if Councillor Upton thought it right or appropriate that a temporary decision that affected the quality of life of the Borough’s residents taken by Cabinet two years ago was not minuted if it was to

become a permanent decision.

Councillor Upton sympathised with the point Councillor Plant was drawing attention to and reminded Council that the mandatory elements of this grant were under extreme pressure, with demand rising year on year. That element of the grant was administered by the Country Council and authorities across Nottinghamshire were participating in discussions to develop a more equitable formula for allocation. Councillor Upton informed Council that it had provided half a million of its own money in the form of a discretionary grant to help meet demand but that this level of investment was not sustainable longer term.

d) Question from Councillor Gaunt to the Leader, Councillor Clarke

“How are the Council and officers preparing for the transition to a new Labour government and what levels of strategic planning have taken place for any changes in direction that may need to be brought about?”

The Leader felt that the question was perhaps a little premature given that the new Government had been in place for less than two weeks. However, he recognised that the Labour manifesto had suggested a probable direction of travel and that the King’s Speech at the State opening of Parliament this week had set out over 35 new bills. He reported that officers had been closely monitoring the situation and would continue to do so to ensure that the impact of new legislation on the Borough could be assessed as soon as it became clearer.

The Mayor asked if Councillor Gaunt had a supplementary question.

Councillor Gaunt referenced the recent peer review, which had suggested that the Council should be doing more to prepare for future changes and he asked if the Leader was prepared to be more proactive about that.

The Leader informed Council that given the recent nature of the election and the change of Government he felt that the Council was being proactive and open to change but that it was not yet clear what that might be. He cited a letter he had received two days ago from the office of the Deputy Prime Minister which recognised that local councils were under considerable financial strain following years of under investment and urging councils to willingly embrace devolution. Councillor Clarke shared his belief that this was a generic letter sent to all councils because Rushcliffe was not in a dire financial situation and had already embraced devolution in the form of the newly elected Mayor of the East Midlands Combined County Authority. He said that the new Government needed more time to work out what it was asking of councils before officers or Councillors could prepare for any changes that might be coming forward. He concluded by stating that he was hoping to engage with the Borough’s new Member of Parliament and remained open to potential developments in the future.

The meeting closed at 9.24 am.

CHAIR