

**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
CABINET**

TUESDAY, 8 DECEMBER 2020

Held virtually at 7.00 pm and livestreamed on the
Rushcliffe Borough Council YouTube channel

PRESENT:

Councillors S J Robinson (Chairman), A Edyvean (Vice-Chairman), A Brennan,
R Inglis, G Moore and R Upton

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors B Gray and R Jones

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

P Linfield

Executive Manager - Finance and
Corporate Services

K Marriott

Chief Executive

D Mitchell

Executive Manager - Communities

S Sull

Monitoring Officer

H Tambini

Democratic Services Manager

APOLOGIES:

There were no apologies

25 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

26 Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 November 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 10 November 2020, were
declared a true record and signed by the Chairman.

27 Opposition Group Leaders' Questions

Question from Councillor Gray to Councillor Robinson.

“Given the special status of a Freeport, what would be the likely rates
implications of businesses that are set up within it?”

Councillor Robinson responded by thanking Councillor Gray for raising this
valid point and advised that historically the Ratcliffe on Soar power station had
contributed substantial business rates to the Borough, which would be lost
once the facility is decommissioned. Through the Freeport proposals, which
were as yet in the development phase, there was a clear indication that new
and certain existing business premises that operated within a Freeport facility
would be able to apply for 100% relief from business rates, with the

Government then providing a grant to Councils to make up for that lost income.

Councillor Gray asked a supplementary question to Councillor Robinson.

“In respect of further economic benefits of Freeports, in addition to business rates, how would that effect the Council?”

Councillor Robinson responded by confirming that one of the main benefits of Freeports would involve the attraction of new business opportunities and employment, together with new investment in respect of the local economy, not just at the Freeport site itself but over a wider area, and it was envisaged that Rushcliffe would gain substantial benefit from this development. Given the current economic climate, with Rushcliffe experiencing record levels of unemployment, due to the effect of the pandemic, the prospect of increased economic activity and employment generation should be welcomed and encouraged. In respect of the power station site itself, the Council had aspirations for future research and development potential, which would again benefit the Borough, following the green economic route.

Question from Councillor Jones to Councillor Moore.

“The proposal in the report is for the Council to borrow £7.5million costing Rushcliffe residents, future council taxpayers, £310,000 on each of the following 40 years at current interest rates. Interest rates currently are as low as they get. History shows that interest rates change considerably and cannot be assumed. In 1979, they rose to 17%. Unthinkable now but possible within 40 years ahead.

So if future interest rates rise, will the debt on future taxpayers increase and at an average of 8% what would that mean over the 40 years?”

Councillor Moore responded by advising that currently interest rates were very low, and it was not anticipated that rates would rise in the near future, due to the current economic situation. Current Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) rates were under 2% and when the Council did borrow the expected £7.5m, it would be at a fixed rate for the entirety of the loan period.

28 **Citizens' Questions**

There were no questions.

29 **Chapel Lane Development**

The Leader presented the report of the Executive Manager for Communities, providing an update on the Chapel Lane development.

The Leader gave a brief overview of the project timeline and referred to the factors that had led to the decision to build a facility at Bingham, to meet the needs of a growing community and to provide more up to date employment and leisure opportunities. The Leader referred to the establishment of the cross-party Member Working Group, which had met seven times, to shape the design process, with particular emphasis on reducing carbon omissions going forward. Cabinet was advised that the Group had met on 26 November 2020,

to endorse the tender report, and it had supported and approved that process. It was noted that the tender responses had been comprehensively appraised and reviewed on a cost and quality basis, to ensure that the project would be delivered on budget, on time and to the high standards expected by the Council. The Leader confirmed that following that appraisal, Firm D had been selected and was proposed to be the preferred contractor. It was reiterated that the report did not cover the operational side of the leisure centre development, or for the remaining site at Toot Hill School. It was noted that in respect of financing, there would be two external sources, from the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the European Regional Development Sustainable Urban Development Fund, grant awards pending. Cabinet was reminded that the tender covered the three aspects of the proposed development, the leisure centre, community hall and office hub.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Edyvean thanked the members of the Member Working Group for their hard work and confirmed that the Group would continue to meet until the project was completed. Cabinet was advised that the Council should hear before the end of the year, if it has been successful in bidding for the external grant funding. It was hoped that those bids would be successful and the Council could proceed with Recommendation A. However, if the outcome of external funding was not successful, Cabinet was advised that the development of the office hub would not immediately take place, as other sources of funding would need to be assessed, and that was covered by Recommendation B. Cabinet noted that if it was considered to be feasible and financially viable at a later date, the office hub could still be developed. The importance of not delaying the development of the leisure centre and community hub was reiterated, given their importance to the residents of Bingham and the surrounding areas.

The Leader endorsed the comments of Councillor Edyvean in respect of the work of the Member Working Group, and reiterated how important it was to have that continued input, particularly during the design stage, as previously highlighted, when Councillors had been involved in both the design and delivery of the Arena development. The Leader also stressed how delighted he was that despite the pandemic; the Council remained ambitious, and would be delivering a key strategic and community facility, for both residents in Bingham and the surrounding areas. It was hoped that the office hub would be developed to provide a boost for local businesses, and that the much needed community facilities would be welcomed.

It was RESOLVED that

- a) firm D be appointed as the preferred contractor for the full development, subject to external funding being secured;

Or

- b) if external funding for the office is not secured, the tender be accepted for the leisure centre and community hall build only, with a further report to be submitted to a future Cabinet meeting, to seek a way forward regarding the office element of the development prior to accepting tender for the full development.

The Leader presented the report of the Chief Executive, providing an update on the East Midlands Freeport proposal.

The Leader referred to the Government consultation launched in February 2020, and outlined the work already undertaken in response to that process, including the establishment of a working group made up of key local stakeholders across the East Midlands, including Rushcliffe Borough Council. Cabinet was informed that on 17 November 2020, the Government had released a formalised prospectus, which stated that there would be a maximum of 10 Freeports across the country, and invited bids from local areas. The Leader advised that the East Midlands' formal proposal to the Government would involve two sites, at the airport, and more strategically for Rushcliffe, it would include the Ratcliffe on Soar power station site. The significant economic benefits that a Freeport could bring to the area was reiterated, as a Freeport was a type of special economic zone that would create a favourable business environment. Given the current economic situation, due to the pandemic, the importance of encouraging this proposal was reiterated. Cabinet was advised that within Freeports the customs process was simplified, and delayed the point when duties and taxes would be paid, and given the challenges ahead from Brexit, it was likely that Freeports would become more significant. It was also noted that this proposition was being developed to align with the proposals for the Development Corporation. The Leader referred to the challenges faced at the power station site, as the site was not allocated in the Council's Local Plan, and it was designated as Green Belt, and the site would require careful management.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Edyvean reiterated the importance of this proposal at such a key, strategic site, to bring significant economic investment and employment to Rushcliffe, in conjunction with the work alongside the Development Corporation, and it was vital that the Council supported the D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), which was coordinating the bid.

Councillor Brennan welcomed the proposal, referred to its importance at such a crucial time, given the current pandemic, and stated that it was pleasing to note the cross party support for the future of the Ratcliffe on Soar site..

The Leader stated that it had been pleasing to see the East Midlands working together to produce a unique bid, for an inland site, which incorporated excellent transport links and infrastructure. With the support from key partners, a strong bid would be put forward and it was hoped that it would be successful.

In response to a question from the Leader regarding the timeline for the response to the bids, the Chief Executive advised that the deadline for the submission of the bid was 5 February 2012, and that it was likely that it would be a couple of months before a decision was made.

It was RESOLVED that:

- (a) the submission of a Freeport proposition paper to Government for the East Midlands, to include the Ratcliffe on Soar power station

site, be endorsed, in principle; and

- (b) the Leader would provide a commitment of the Council's support and agreement to the proposed Freeport for those areas for which Rushcliffe has statutory responsibility, including planning and business rates, to support the delivery of the proposal. As the Ratcliffe on Soar power station is not currently an allocated site within the Local Plan and the whole site is washed over by the greenbelt, the letter will give the Council's support for the Freeport bid in this context, whilst not fettering its discretion and statutory duties as the local planning authority.

31 Draft Planning Enforcement Policy

The Portfolio Holder for Housing presented the report of the Executive Manager – Communities, outlining the draft Planning Enforcement Policy.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing reminded Cabinet that planning enforcement was discretionary, although the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) did advocate that local planning authorities should have a local enforcement plan. Currently the Council had a Planning Enforcement Code of Practice, which was due for review in March 2021. It was reiterated that a code of practice was different to a policy, as a policy had more weight, and given the strength of feeling associated with enforcement locally, it had been decided that a policy should be drafted, to replace the current Code of Practice. If approved, the draft Planning Enforcement Policy would be subject to a six-week public consultation, before being referred to Council for adoption.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Brennan stated that she welcomed the drafting of the Policy and referred to the importance of maintaining public confidence in planning and enforcement procedures, by ensuring that processes were robust and transparent. The draft Policy clearly outlined the processes that would be followed to investigate alleged breaches and ensure compliance.

The Leader referred to the timeliness of producing this Policy, given the significant development that continued to take place across the Borough, and the importance of having a resilient policy, which maintained the confidence of the public. The importance of the public and parish councils taking part in the consultation was reiterated.

In response to a question from the Leader regarding the timeline for the adoption of the Policy, the Executive Manager – Communities advised that, subject to the consultation being acceptable, the Policy would be referred to Council in March 2021, and if approved, would be adopted.

Councillor Edyvean reiterated the importance of planning issues and effective enforcement to local residents and welcomed the adoption of the Policy, which would strengthen the current process.

Councillor Moore stated that a robust policy would provide Planning Services with the appropriate support and credibility and was welcomed.

The Leader noted the hard work of the Planning Committee and the conditions that were agreed when applications were approved, and hoped that this Policy would give the Planning Committee confidence that a robust process was in place to ensure compliance of any conditions. The challenge of balancing a budget to ensure that a policy could be resourced to ensure resilience was also noted. The Leader stated that above all it was essential that the public had confidence in the planning and enforcement system.

Councillor Inglis welcomed the Policy, which he envisaged would provide the Council with more support than the previous Code of Practice. He hoped that this Policy would enable the Council to monitor all developments to ensure compliance.

It was RESOLVED that the draft Planning Enforcement Policy be approved, for the purposes of public consultation, to last for a period of six weeks, prior to the Policy being referred to Council for adoption.

32 Covid 19: Progress and Response

The Leader presented the report of the Chief Executive, providing an update on the work completed to date on response and recovery due to the Covid-19 pandemic since May 2020.

The Leader highlighted the key headlines in the report, which reflected the work undertaken both internally and externally by the Council during the pandemic, together with the Council's continued commitment to deliver key capital projects. Cabinet noted the national lockdown timescale measures, and the challenges faced by the Council in implementing the various measures required during the different lockdown stages. The Leader advised that since the end of the second national lockdown, the County had been placed into Tier 3, and it was hoped that following the review on 16 December 2020, the hard work undertaken would be rewarded and the County would be placed into a lower tier. Cabinet was reminded of the impact to the economy, with key headlines including a 38.1% decline in Gross Value Added in Quarter 2, which equated to an unprecedented drop of a third in the Borough's economy. Unemployment claims had increased by 183%, which given Rushcliffe's usually high employment rates, was again unprecedented. The Leader referred to the success of the Government's furlough scheme, which had helped to retain jobs, with 30% of the employed population in the Borough being furloughed. Cabinet's attention was drawn to the important issue of cash flow, and the Leader was delighted with the Council's effort in rolling out the business grants so quickly to effected businesses, once the money had been received from Central Government. In particular, the Leader paid testament to the Executive Manager – Finance and Corporate Services, and his team, and to the Councillors who had worked to implement the various policies, to ensure that they were fair, deliverable and effective. The complexity of the process and the speed and efficiency of the Council in distributing the business grants was welcomed and acknowledged.

The Leader referred to the work of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and highlighted the principles and objectives of this multi-agency group, together with the Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) and the LRF Recovery Co-ordinating Group (RCG). The Council's involvement with those groups was

acknowledged, as was the dedicated hard work and commitment of those groups. The report highlighted the track and trace and vaccination programmes and the Leader expressed his delight that the vaccination programme was now underway. The establishment of a testing facility in the Arena car park was noted, with testing continuing to play an important role.

In respect of internal business operation, the Leader commented that the key issue had been to ensure the continued effective delivery of essential services. That had involved staff redeployment, the creation of Covid secure areas within the authority, and supporting staff. Covid had directly affected some staff, and that disruption had been mitigated. Cabinet was advised of the huge pressures put on some services due to lockdown, with significant increases in waste and recycling, and additional work for the Environmental Health and Finance teams. The Leader referred to the significant impact to the leisure sector, in particular the financial impact, and thanked the Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods and his team for their hard work to lessen the impact as much as possible.

Finally, the Leader drew Cabinet's attention to the essential support given out to businesses and local communities, including the 'Reach Rushcliffe' fund to support local initiatives that aimed to tackle loneliness and isolation, rent holidays for some commercial tenants and hosting virtual business networking events. In respect of the future, it was acknowledged that the Borough would never be the same again, for residents and businesses alike. It was important that the Council remained positive and above all continued to work to revitalise the economy, ensure that all of its facilities were open, and to deliver its capital projects, for the benefit of all local residents and businesses.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Edyvean reiterated the challenges that the Council had faced in 2020 and thanked officers for their hard work in supporting local residents and businesses. It was noted that as the situation continued to evolve, businesses would still require support, and that was referred to in the report. The work undertaken both internally and externally was acknowledged, with the support given to local businesses being very well received. The future priorities for the Council in terms of service delivery in key areas were also noted. Cabinet's attention was drawn to the plight of the hospitality sector, which had been affected in the same way as the leisure sector, and it was acknowledged that both of those sectors in particular would require ongoing support, and Cabinet would continue to be updated.

In response to a question regarding the date of the next update to Cabinet, the Chief Executive advised that depending on the trajectory of the pandemic, which it was hoped would begin to level off, it would be timely to bring a report to the meeting in March 2021, which would be in line with the budget setting timeline for the following year.

The Leader thanked the Chief Executive and drew Cabinet's attention to the Council's Recovery Plan, appended to the report, which was an excellent working document.

Councillor Moore referred to the devastating impact of Covid and thanked officers for the report, which highlighted the tremendous work that had been achieved. The important work undertaken by local communities was reiterated

and the amazing community spirit was acknowledged. It was a concern that so many areas were now dealing with debt, poverty and mental health issues, as a result of unemployment. In respect of the Recovery Plan, the emphasis on healthcare and revitalising communities was essential, the completion of the capital projects, which would benefit local communities and create employment was to be applauded. Cabinet was reminded that the focus now had to be on recovery and that officers were ready to focus on that challenge.

The Leader referred to the important role that parish councils had played during the pandemic, alongside community groups and local Councillors and thanked everyone for their hard work.

It was RESOLVED that

- a) the work of the officers of the Council and partners in responding to and supporting the recovery from Covid-19 be noted; and
- b) the terms of the Covid Business Grants Support Policy be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm.

CHAIRMAN