

Minutes of a meeting of the
Worthing Council
17 October 2023
at 6.30 pm

Councillor Jon Roser (Chairman)
Councillor Ibsha Choudhury (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Helen Abrahams	Councillor Dr Heather Mercer
Councillor Noel Atkins	Councillor Nigel Morgan
Councillor Caroline Baxter	Councillor Richard Mulholland
Councillor Ödül Bozkurt	Councillor Richard Nowak
Councillor Sophie Cox	Councillor Dale Overton
Councillor Ferdousi Henna Chowdhury	Councillor Hilary Schan
Councillor Claire Hunt	Councillor Dawn Smith
Councillor Russ Cochran	Councillor Emma Taylor-Beal
Councillor Dr Beccy Cooper	Councillor Samuel Theodoridi
Councillor Dan Coxhill	Councillor Hazel Thorpe
Councillor Cathy Glynn-Davies	Councillor John Turley
Councillor Dan Hermitage	Councillor Steve Waight
Councillor Margaret Howard	Councillor Carl Walker
Councillor Daniel Humphreys	Councillor Vicki Wells
Councillor Charles James	Councillor Rosey Whorlow
Councillor Kevin Jenkins	

Absent

Councillor Mike Barrett, Councillor Rita Garner, Councillor Elizabeth Sparkes and Councillor Andy Whight

C/31/23-24 Apologies for Absence

The Mayor had received apologies for absence from Councillors Mike Barrett, Rita Garner, Elizabeth Sparkes and Andy Whight.

C/32/23-24 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Noel Atkins declared interests as an elected Member of West Sussex County Council and as the Borough's Armed Forces Champion.

Councillor Caroline Baxter declared an interest as an elected Member of West Sussex County Council.

Councillor Richard Nowak declared an interest as a member of Shoreham District Ornithological Society.

C/33/23-24

Confirmation of Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meetings held on 18th July and 24th August 2023 be approved as correct records and that they be signed by the Mayor.

C/34/23-24

Questions from the Public

1. *Question submitted by Lionel Harman, a Worthing Resident, to the Leader*

You have stated that you want to remove every barrier to ensure maximum participation of residents in our democratic processes, and that you believe that 21st-century democracy must evolve and re-establish its mandate as a true reflection of how people feel and think about our society. To achieve this, you said you would make it possible to pass power and control over what happens within communities, to our communities.

However, you are ignoring a large part of the Community in Worthing. According to the National Census 3.2%, or in numbers, just short of 4000 residents Serve or have served in our armed forces.

This must make them the largest minority group in the Borough. Unlike some other more vocal groups in the Town, we do not make too much of a fuss about political concerns. All we ask is that the Borough Councillors show the respect owed to anyone who was willing to put their own lives on the line in defence of our country, and respectfully remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice for the freedoms we enjoy today.

Remembrance Day holds significant importance in our town, centred around the military, veterans, and those residents remembering their loved ones who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. The attire of veterans, serving soldiers, and cadets and other youth organisations on this day reflects their commitment, respect, and the traditions that have shaped our society.

Your decision to scrap the Councillor and Mayoral Robes did not take into consideration the views of the people, in fact they were not even consulted on this issue. Considering the outrage of the public, which by the way is continuing to grow, as demonstrated by, and published in the local press, towards your decision on this matter, will you listen to the people and reconsider your motion to scrap the robes and ensure those Councillors who wish to wear them at the Remembrance Service are allowed to do so both this year and in the future?

The Leader thanked Mr Harman for the question and all those who had attended the meeting in relation to this matter.

There was no question that the Council did not understand and respect the importance of our veterans and those who gave service and thanked them for it. Councillors fully intended to be in attendance on remembrance Sunday, alongside veterans, remembering the sacrifices made by veterans and those they fought with. The decision regarding robes was in no way meant or intended to be disrespectful.

Stopping wearing the robes was about extending the Council into the Community. The Leader fully appreciated that those in attendance at the meeting were engaged, able to attend Council meetings to ask questions and understood how the Council operated.

However, there were a lot of people in the community who didn't have this experience and understanding, or the confidence to come into the Council Chamber. Those people felt excluded from the Council.

As a listening Council for the Community, Councillors have heard this time and time again. It was in no way disrespectful or a lack of understanding of the service veterans had given for the country and the great debt owed to them for doing so.

This decision was about opening the Council's doors to communities, it was about saying, Councillors would not wear the robes in order to allow more people to come in. The Council didn't want to exclude anybody.

The Leader understood that change was incredibly difficult and she did not expect everybody to agree with the decision to stop wearing the robes. However, the Leader pledged to keep conversations going with the veteran groups and asked veterans to share their wisdom, understanding and all of their experience to help others in the community understand how the Council wished to work for them and with them.

A supplementary question was asked in relation to the storing / preservation of the robes for future use, should another administration wish to reintroduce their use.

The Leader confirmed that the robes would be kept in storage.

2. *Question submitted by Margaret Brewster, a Worthing Resident, to the Leader*

At its meeting in July the Council passed two motions dispensing with the wearing of Ceremonial Robes and the cessation of the tradition of conferring the title of Alderman or Alderwoman on past Mayors of Worthing. This came as a great shock to many residents who, like me, reacted with anger when news of these decisions were subsequently reported in the media.

As a Council for the community, naturally you will have consulted on these prospective changes before they were implemented. When did the Council consult the residents of Worthing before these specific changes were implemented, how many of the 87,900 residents older than 20 years old responded to the consultation, what percentage of respondents were aged 50+ (43% of Worthing residents), and how many respondents supported the proposed changes?

It was noted that Margaret Brewster had been unable to attend the meeting, so the Leader agreed to provide a written response to the question.

3. *Question submitted by Sean McDonald, a Worthing Resident, to the Leader*

It is clear that Worthing is drifting into becoming a lawless town with a rise in serious crimes such as the stabbings we have seen recently and the most recent only two weeks ago. Almost daily there are unregistered motorbikes in the Durrington area, many of which I have personally witnessed riding through my local park and on highways.

Anti social behaviour is at an all time high throughout the town.

And this article appeared in a national newspaper describing an area of what they call South Durrington as "Englands worst shoplifting hotspot". The area they refer to is actually in Castle ward but close to where I live in South Durrington.

The manager and staff of local shops are terrified as they have been threatened with swords and they do not feel supported.

(I have the newspaper cutting)

Can you tell me what is being done by this Council to work with partner agencies to support the local community in dealing with this serious problem?

The Leader advised that the question fell under the Community Wellbeing portfolio but she was happy to respond and challenged the assertion that Worthing was becoming a lawless town.

The Leader advised that Sussex Police were the lead organisation for tackling criminal behaviour and had been working in partnership with the Councils, Neighbourhood Watch, Police Crime Commissioner and local businesses to address the issues that affect them. Tackling shoplifting had been a priority for some months, hence the increase in reported cases as police and the Safer Communities Partnership supported local businesses to report incidents, regardless of a prospect of a sanction or resolution.

The recent implementation of the PCC's "One Touch" reporting system, being trialled in Co-op stores, had led to a disproportionate number of reports due to current and retrospective incidents being logged, hence the peak in figures.

The council was a key partner in tackling ASB and youth disorder and current measures included leading community based intelligence building, supporting businesses to report, commissioning projects through Safer Streets 4 funding and bespoke data analysis to better understand the drivers of crime. The issues Worthing was experiencing followed national trends but Worthing had recently seen a 4% decrease in violent crime, contrary to the national picture.

The Council was committed to working in partnership to identify opportunities for prevention and early intervention in such matters, despite a challenging landscape.

4. *Question submitted by Paula Mitton, a Worthing Resident, to the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency*

The National Planning Policy Framework has sustainability at its core. Paragraph 152 of Chapter 14 says that 'the Planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future...' The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and the Worthing Local Plan also seeks to 'support the move to zero carbon', with Strategic Objective 19 claiming to 'ensure development helps the borough to adapt and increase its resilience to the effects of climate change...'

The Council has approved at least six 5G installations in Worthing (and the Planning Inspectorate has approved several more, on Appeal). These use enormous amounts of energy. It has been calculated that a single 5G base station uses as much power as 73

average homes, which is a threefold increase over 4G (the source of this is a publication by the Institute of Electrical & Electronics Engineers).

Does the Council agree that there is a conflict of interest between the huge power requirements of 5G base stations and the Council's priority of aiming for net zero by 2030 and that the Telecoms companies should be required to give details of the energy use of each mast when they submit their application?

The Cabinet Member replied that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) mentioned sustainability in different ways. The paragraph quoted was one part of the Framework, but it was important to note that the Council had specific requirements in terms of how it dealt with telecommunications applications.

One part of the framework, paragraph 114, stated that planning policies and decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including 5G.

In paragraph 118 of the NPPF, it also said that planning authorities must determine planning applications on planning grounds only. This meant that the Council were therefore unable to require telecoms companies to submit their energy usage details.

The challenge here was that most of these applications, where they require permission at all, were only for the council to consider where to site and the appearance of these masts.

If there was an energy usage with them then that was a broader issue. Additionally, given the government guidance, and the way it was written - the other benefits of mobile technology, including increased accessibility around the borough and district would also have to be taken into account.

Since 2019, the Council had refused five applications for mast installations in Worthing. Four of those refusals were subsequently allowed on appeal. In each case, the Inspector restricted their considerations to the siting and appearance of the proposed structures in accordance with national planning policy.

The Council was extremely committed to its net zero targets but on these planning matters it was an area where we were guided by national government policies and had to take this into account.

5. *Question submitted by Adrian Price, a Worthing Resident, to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration*

A letter from Public Health England's solicitors DLA Piper to Leigh Day Solicitors dated 8 August 2019 [[PDF attached](#)] clarified how their Guidance, the central element of which is to follow ICNIRP guidelines, should be used. It states that referring to their Guidance 'is entirely a matter for the discretion of the relevant body and it must determine what weight to place on the Guidance given the clear indication as to the sources from which the advice and recommendations in the Guidance are derived. Equally, that body must determine what other evidence from your clients or other members of the public or interested parties to consider in making any decision.'

The Council has been furnished with many objections to the installation of 5G masts and letters citing evidence of potential harm to human health and wildlife. If the Council has been given evidence of harm from research studies, do you not think it unwise to be ignoring it?

The Cabinet Member replied that in each of the appeal decisions referred to in the previous answer, the Inspector had not given any weight to health concerns following the submission of the ICNIRP certificate by the respective applicants.

Paragraph 118 of the National Planning Policy Framework states:

*Local planning authorities must determine applications on planning grounds only. They should not seek to prevent competition between different operators, question the need for an electronic communications system, or **set health safeguards different from the International Commission guidelines for public exposure.***

Therefore there was little justification to resist applications on such grounds and lobbying the government was the best way forward.

*** The Mayor used his discretion to extend the time allowed for public questions to receive the final pre-submitted question.*

6. Question submitted by Barbara Lowe, a Worthing Resident, to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration

According to the [Worthing Borough Council \(WBC\) website](#): "All telecommunication development must be built in accordance with the guidelines of the [International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection](#) (known as ICNIRP Guidelines)"

According to [ICNIRP](#): "Mobile telecommunication technologies (e.g. mobile phones and masts) transmit and receive radio-frequency electromagnetic fields (known as RF EMFs) in ways that allow communication to occur."

The ICNIRP Guidelines are accepted by [Ofcom](#) on the advice of the UK Health Security Agency (formerly PHE) as the standard for public exposure to RF EMFs in the UK.

Each telecom mast in Worthing requires a signed [ICNIRP Declaration of Compliance 'self-certification'](#) (known as the 'ICNIRP Declaration or Certificate') to be submitted to WBC Planning by the telecom mast operator certifying that the mast:

"shall be operated to be in full compliance with the requirements of the radio frequency (RF) public exposure limit of ICNIRP and UK legislation". (See https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1048957/C ode of Practice for Wireless Network Development - annex B and C.pdf)

However, the ICNIRP Certificate, based on the ICNIRP guidelines, categorically DOES NOT apply to, or protect, anyone with metal in their bodies!

Here is the relevant statement from the [2020 ICNIRP Guidelines](#) (see 2nd Page under Purpose and Scope):

"The main objective of this publication is to establish guidelines for limiting exposure to EMFs that will provide a high level of protection for all people against substantiated adverse health effects from exposures to both short- and long-term, continuous and discontinuous radiofrequency EMFs.

However, some exposure scenarios are defined as outside the scope of these guidelines... metallic implants may alter or perturb EMFs in the body, which in turn can affect the body both directly (via direct interaction between field and tissue) and indirectly (via an intermediate conducting object)".

*This means people with *metallic implants, dental work, pacemakers, metal pins, plates, rods, discs, screws, joint replacements etc. - the list goes on - have no assurance of safety.*

As there is no disability impact assessment regarding this technology, it could be argued that provisions of the Equality Act 2010 and the council's obligations under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 have been breached.

In light of the above, how does Worthing council propose to help those people with 'metallic implants' in their bodies who are NOT protected by the ICNIRP Guidelines, being especially vulnerable to RF EMFs from mobile masts, and in need of extra protection under the council's obligations within the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and the Equality Act 2010?

*Shared for information (by the resident) *metallic implants: There are many scenarios in which metal is used in the human body for medical reasons:*

Surgical – metal pins, plates, rods, discs, screws e.g. scoliosis surgery and joint replacement of knees and hips. Urinary, gynaecological and intestinal repairs – e.g. mesh repairs and copper contraceptive coils. Cardiovascular – implantable heart loop recorders, stents and pacemakers.

The Cabinet Member advised that as per the answer to the previous question, the relevant paragraph of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) stated Local planning authorities...should not...set health Safeguards that were different from the International Commission guidelines for public exposure.

As Inspectors were fully reflecting this approach in their appeal decisions, it was a matter for the central government if there was any deficiency in the guidelines referred to in the NPPF.

In the circumstances and given current Government advice and supporting legislation, the Council was unable to consider the wider health impacts of those residents with 'metallic implants'. The Council did not hold information on residents' health records and therefore could not be seen to be failing in its obligations under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and the Equality Act 2010. This was a matter that needed to be taken up with Central Government and relevant health authorities.

The Mayor informed Council that he had attended a number of events since the July Council Meeting, the highlight being a meeting with the Mayor Les Sables d'Olonne, Worthing's French Twin.

From a cultural perspective, the Mayor had the fortune of attending a variety of events, ranging from Shrek the musical to a performance by the Worthing Symphony Orchestra.

The Leader of the Council proposed the following changes to the membership of the Planning Committee following Councillor Andy Whight's decision to step away temporarily in order to attend to personal matters:-

- That Councillor Odul Bozkurt be appointed as Chairman of the Planning Committee;
- That Councillor Helen Abrahams be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee;
- That Councillor Cathy Glynn-Davies will replace Councillor Andy Whight on the Planning Committee.

The proposed appointments were seconded by Councillor Noel Atkins and approved by Council.

There were a number of announcements made by the Cabinet Members updating the Council of the following:-

- An upcoming CIL Neighbourhood Fund event;
- Ongoing work in relation to the Cost of Living Emergency;
- Montague Place;
- The Worthing Development Forum;
- Summer Beach Surveys;
- Trees for Streets Initiative - 36 street trees had been sponsored under the trees for streets initiative; and
- Public Toilet Improvements; and
- Recycling Awareness.

The Head of Paid Service advised that in addition to the recommendation to Full Council from the Joint Audit & Governance Committee at agenda item 7B(i), a report concerning performance management would be taken to the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee in the near future.

The Leader of the Opposition advised Council of the following changes to Committee Memberships:-

- Councillor Dan Coxhill would replace Councillor Richard Nowak on the Licensing & Control Committee; and
- Councillor Richard Nowak would replace Councillor Dan Coxhill on the Planning Committee.

C/36/23-24 Items raised under Urgency Provisions

The Mayor announced that there were no urgent items.

C/37/23-24 Recommendations from the Cabinet and Committees to Council

Council had, before it, recommendations from the Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee and the Joint Audit & Governance Committee.

Extracts of these minutes had been circulated as items 7A, 7B(i) and 7B(ii).

Item 7A Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee - 12 September 2023

Financial Performance 2022/23 - Capital and Projects Outturn

The Leader proposed the recommendations from the Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee meeting held on 12 September 2023.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor John Turley and supported following a vote.

Resolved,

That Worthing Borough Council

- a) Noted the overall capital final outturn for 2022/23;
- b) Agreed the net carry over of General Fund Capital underspends for Worthing Borough Council as detailed in paragraph 4.3.2;
- c) Approved the financing of the Worthing Borough Council 2022/23 Capital Investment Programme, including the use of capital receipts as set out in paragraphs 5.1 and 5.2; and
- d) Approved the carry forward of Council resources underspends to fund budget pressures as detailed in Appendix 1 and summarised in paragraph 5.4.

Item 7B(i) Joint Audit & Governance Committee - 26 September 2023

Organisational design and capability building - progress update

The Chair of the Joint Governance Committee, Cllr Hermitage, proposed the recommendation from the meeting held on 26 September 2023. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Hazel Thorpe and noted by the Council.

Resolved,

That Worthing Borough Council, in compliance with the Councils' Constitutions, noted the overall departmental structure of the Councils, the management structure and the deployment of Officers.

Item 7B(ii) Joint Audit & Governance Committee - 26 September 2023

Conferment of Honorary Alderman

The Chair of the Joint Audit & Governance Committee, Cllr Dan Hermitage, proposed the recommendation from the Joint Audit & Governance Committee meeting held on 26 September 2023.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Noel Atkins and unanimously supported by the Council.

Resolved,

That Worthing Borough Council approved 'That a special meeting of the Council be arranged under section 249(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 for the specific purpose of conferring the title of Honorary Alderman to Lionel Harman'.

** The meeting was adjourned at 8.05pm and reconvened at 8.10pm.*

C/38/23-24 Report of the Leader on Decisions taken by the Executive

The Leader of the Council presented their report on decisions taken by the Cabinet since the last meeting of the Council, which were detailed in Item 8.

Questions were received in relation to the 1st Quarter Capital Investment Programme and Projects Monitoring report; New Leisure Principles; the projected budget overspend and work associated with the declared ecological emergency.

C/39/23-24 Members Questions under Council Procedure Rule 12

The Mayor announced that the Proper Officer had received 9 questions from Members in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12. He advised that one supplementary question could be asked which must arise out of the original question, or, the reply.

It was noted that there were 30 minutes allowed for questions with 3 rotations of speakers possible. At the end of 30 minutes the Mayor explained that he would extend the time to conclude the current rotation of questions.

The Mayor advised that the following Councillors had submitted questions:

Councillors Atkins, Cochran, Jenkins, Nowak, Sparkes and Thorpe.

First rotation:

Question 1 from Councillor Kevin Jenkins to the Cabinet Member for Housing & Citizen Services

On the 15th June you, as cabinet member, co-hosted a public meeting at the East Worthing Community Centre to discuss the Council's joint plans with SDR Living for the use of the Windsor House Hotel as a large 44-bed HMO. That meeting didn't go well and large numbers of members of the public couldn't gain entry to see the plans or ask questions.

Along with colleagues you promised another meeting. Here we are 4 months later and no public meeting has been held.

Can you tell us when this will happen?

The Cabinet Member replied that the initial meeting could have gone a lot better and that it was the Council's intention to hold another public meeting in November.

The Council was keen for any meeting to be constructive rather than divisive and would be inviting all participants, including the leader of the opposition, to play their role in hosting a space where everyone could be heard and respected.

Question 2 from Councillor Hazel Thorpe to the Cabinet Member for Housing & Citizen Services

However commendable it may be, in these hard times the administration is spending a large amount of the Council's budget on the homeless sector, whilst there are plenty of other sectors that are also suffering.

Firstly, what is the administration doing about supporting young families, many who have young children. These people are facing massive increases in the rent they must pay just to keep a roof over their heads. Secondly, what is the administration doing about young families with mortgages who have experienced a near 5 % hike in their interest rates and who could lose their homes. Finally, what is the administration doing about those trying to get on the housing ladder and at the other end of the scale, the pensioners who are on fixed and often low incomes?

The Cabinet Member replied that The Council's homelessness services were discharging the council's statutory duties and the council was legally required to provide them.

The Council did not have control or influence over market rents and Local Housing Allowance (LHA) levels were set by the government, along with the rents the Council could charge for temporary accommodation, which were set at 90% of 2011 LHA. It was not possible to charge more than that for temporary accommodation. This remained a key challenge for local authorities and had led to a number of financial pressures in terms of discharging the Council's housing duties

The council had its Opening Doors service, offering grants, guaranteed rents (for 2yrs) as well as a service for landlords at no charge and support to tenants, to attract landlords to rent PRS properties at an affordable rent. Since the scheme started, the Council had let over 100 properties through this scheme to households homeless or threatened with homelessness, not only providing settled accommodation for homeless families at an affordable rent, but also reducing the Council's temporary accommodation costs.

With regards to mortgage costs, any household that is threatened with homelessness as a result of mortgage arrears will be entitled to assistance under the Council's Homelessness Prevention duties as stipulated by the Homelessness Reduction Act, as well as Homelessness Prevention Grant. The Council had secured Household Support Fund monies for those struggling to meet mortgage or rent repayments and a short term intervention from the service would be sufficient to rectify the situation or give the household time to secure another housing arrangement. Despite the Council's concerns that mortgage % increases would result in homelessness, so far the Council had not had any cases present for assistance. In the first instance, those struggling with their repayments should first contact their lender.

With regards to supporting families, the homeless team works with West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) colleagues in Children's Services as well as other services which may be supporting families e.g. CAHMS and health visitors. As part of the process of creating a Personalised Housing Plan, the team also refers households to support services as well as signposting to community groups to help meet support needs. Pensioners receive the support available to all homeless client groups, in addition the service works with Adult Social care for those who need care packages and/or Extra Care housing and Registered Social Landlords to access sheltered housing where appropriate.

As well as the work of the Homeless Service, the wider council facilitates a range of work to support families through e.g. Proactive where the team speaks to residents to make sure they are claiming what they are entitled to or offer advice, support and referrals to community groups ie food banks or other council services as required, Social Prescribing, grants to community groups and funding for services such as No Interest Loans Scheme via credit union Boom - all of which are set up for anyone in our communities in need, which includes pensioners, but to note, whose incomes are subject to the 'triple lock' to ensure they keep pace with living costs.

In relation to assisting people onto the housing ladder, the Council's Planning Department works with developers through the Planning process to secure mixed developments which include affordable housing as well as shared ownership.

Question 3 from Councillor Noel Atkins to the Leader

What has happened to the Mayoral Robes and the Councillors gowns can I have the Leader's assurance that they are being kept safe or put in the museum?

Cllr Atkins withdrew his question as it had been answered by the Leader's response to an earlier public question.

Question 4 from Councillor Russ Cochran to the Deputy Leader

Will the leader pass on mine and my colleagues sincere thanks to the officer responsible for the recent CIL payments.

I am sure it is a fairly hard yet rewarding task, working out allocations of what funds are best designated to who in our communities.

I have had prior correspondence with the officer regarding several applicants' referrals and I'm sure as others have had to, it puts every councillor in this chamber in a delicate and responsible position when supporting the needs of the community we serve.

Sadly one email revealed that even as a councillor, I am not permitted to share the same celebrations by congratulating those who have been awarded CIL payments in my ward, this is due to GDPR.

I ask as some CIL applications were not placed in front of me for support when applying and as a ward councillor for the greatest area with much of the pot available in the borough, I am unaware of what many of these elements are within the area I serve and how they will impact the community.

So, for clarity, will the leader be able to reveal to each member whom CIL has exactly been distributed to by award in each ward of the borough as at present CIL payments are listed by a non ward specific geographical location on the Council website as well as in communications to councillors.

It is not entirely clear to me what is being benefited in my own electoral ward.

The Deputy Leader replied that he would arrange for the information to be shared with Cllr Cochran so that he could contact the relevant Community Groups.

Question 5 from Councillor Elizabeth Sparkes (question put by Councillor Jenkins in Councillor Sparkes absence) to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration

At the meeting of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7th September your colleague, Cllr Taylor-Beal was asked whether she supported the leader's opposition to house building on Chatsmore Farm.

Cllr Taylor-Beal replied that she did support the leader on the basis that building on Chatsmore Farm would contribute to the climate emergency and that it would be a loss of green space which is already in short supply in the borough.

As the cabinet member with responsibility for the local plan can you tell us whether you agree with the comments of the leader and Cllr Taylor-Beal?

The Cabinet Member replied that councillors across the Chamber were united in support for the retention of Chatsmore Farm and the arguments for and against had been robustly tested through the Local Plan and found to be sound.

Chatsmore represented a strategically important piece of land - its open aspect marked the break in the built up area on our western boundary - it helped define Worthing and it framed important views in and out of the National Park and from Highdown.

To answer more directly, responding to the climate change emergency and greening Worthing were top priorities for the Council and so yes, the Cabinet Member did agree with the comments of her colleagues.

And this is where the question is perhaps flawed because this was not a case of "either, or"Building new homes - real homes at social rents - also remained a top

priority of course, both for Worthing and throughout the UK. As you will be well aware, the Local Plan sought to make the very best use of the land that does become available on brownfield sites and where appropriate, it identified suitable greenfield locations with a requirement to deliver a higher proportion of genuinely affordable homes.

So, to come back to Chatsmore, the point here is, its strategic importance and value to our local communities. I am sure the previous administration would have had that in mind when they started preparation of the Local Plan.

Question 6 from Councillor Richard Nowak to the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency

At the 6th March 2023 Joint Strategic Sub-Committee (Worthing) meeting the committee approved the extension of the July 2019 declaration of a Climate Emergency by adding an Ecological Emergency. According to Councillor SilmaN, the Cabinet Member for the Climate Emergency at that time, this declaration was to be a second “golden thread” running through all of the Council’s policy and decision making.

What are the residents of Worthing to make of the Labour administration’s sincerity regarding this golden thread commitment when, unlike Adur District Council’s proposed revenue budget of £400k to be spent on nature restoration projects between 2024 and 2029, Worthing Borough Council has allocated absolutely no budget whatsoever to such projects and furthermore what does this mean for the Cissbury Fields project which so many residents and interested parties have invested so much of their own time and effort in coming up with a management plan – will the cabinet member give a categorical assurance that the management plan will be implemented as already published?”

The Cabinet Member for the Environment responded to the question as the subject matter fell within the Environment portfolio.

There are two parts to your question and I’ll respond to both. In reverse order;

The quick answer is that yes, I can give you my categorical assurance that the Cissbury Management plan is being honoured.

Your point about budget and resource allocation is a good one and I’m glad you’ve raised it. In real terms - allowing for inflation, Council’s spending power had reduced by 40% in the past 13 years.

And again in real terms, central government funding had reduced by 72% in the same period. There is no question that Worthing Council finances were strained as a direct consequence of the national government - and this couldn’t have happened under worse circumstances than an ecological and climate crisis.

That said, the Council’s dedicated officers were brilliant at leveraging external funding and partnerships as part of our commitment to restoring nature - a shining example of this was the Sussex Bay project which was externally funded by Esme Fairbarne. Moving forward, the Council’s teams together with South Downs National Park, would apply for the next round of government funding needed to help pay for fencing and other materials to progress with the conservation grazing scheme which was laid out within the

management plan. Further work would be undertaken before the application was submitted in Spring / Summer of 2024.

In the meantime, and to update you on management plan milestones - the Council had been awarded a Trees for the Downs grant from the South Downs National Park Trust that would fund 35 local variety apple and pear trees, which would be planted in field 2, creating the Cissbury Fields Community Orchard. It will be a great community asset to be used and cared for by the local community and was fully supported by the Findon Valley Residents Association and Friends of Findon Valley greenspaces group.

In addition, the Cabinet Member had already joined the volunteers to plant new hedgerows along the western edge of the site (adjacent to Shepherds Mead and Long Meadow residential roads), and supplement and diversify existing hedgerows.

It had been wonderful to see nature returning to the fields, with wildlife experts sharing that field 6 was particularly diverse in wildflowers, and the whole site was considered a hot-spot for adders that were currently thriving there. Butterfly experts counted 19 species of butterfly, including the notable Chalk Hill Blue and Brown Hairstreak.

There would also be opportunities coming soon for local residents to get involved in sowing sacks of native wildflower seeds - funded by a Bee Lines grant from the South Downs National Park Trust.

The Council would continue to invest in nature restoration via the work and resources available within the sustainability and parks teams and by external partners.

*** Councillor Jenkins moved a motion without notice under Council Procedure Rule 15.1(p) to extend the 30 minutes for Members Questions. The motion was seconded by Councillor Coxhill and supported following a vote. The Mayor confirmed that the time would be extended until 9.30pm.*

Rotation 2

Question 7 from Councillor Kevin Jenkins to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration

At the last Joint Strategic Sub Committee, you proudly announced your administration's decision to discharge responsibility for Teville Gate and pass it potentially on to Homes England. In your media release you state that your minimum expectation was for the delivery of 250 homes in line with the Local Plan. This is 93 homes less than the previous plan that your administration quashed.

Given that your leader is on public record as stating "We know there is an acute need for new homes in Worthing" (council press release 31.8.23). Why is your aspiration for Teville Gate to provide much needed homes for Worthing residents so low?

The Cabinet Member replied that it was important to establish a minimum figure for the delivery of new homes in line with the Local Plan. The Council's work with Homes England continued and it was very pleasing to see the project team Homes England had assembled actually 'on site' with the Council's team in recent weeks, undertaking various surveys and tests to inform their plans.

The Council was taking a responsible approach to, at last, securing the delivery of this strategically important site, working directly with the key national agency responsible for homes-led regeneration to help ensure that the scheme that emerged reflected the aspirations of Worthing.

As the report the Councillor referred to expressly indicated, Homes England were interested in working with the Council in the context of a masterplan. It wasn't a case of simply stacking them high to make a profit, but to consider what makes a successful place and what additional benefits the Council could secure to help link the station and the town and deliver an attractive welcome for residents and visitors alike.

It was also a responsible approach financially. When the decision was taken to purchase the site, it was indicated that this was not for the long term. But how much better to have the certainty and commitment that Homes England provides than repeating the cycle of selling to the highest bidder without any guarantees or sense of when the new homes would come forward.

Question 8 from Councillor Hazel Thorpe to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration

Over the past few weeks, I have been approached by residents who all live in Central Ward. Note, I will always act for Worthing residents whether they live in my Ward or not. Each one has talked about the parking problems in Town. Southern Rail is reducing the train service locally, so other forms of transport need our support more than ever.

I'm sure that the cabinet member will agree with me, that visitors and tourists are the backbone of a vibrant Town economy.

Since the withdrawal of the parking shop, Central Ward residents of all ages who are not online have to contend with a lengthy visit to Portland House and go through a constrictive and convoluted process which I am told, is not customer friendly.

When will this administration review the current on street parking in Town particularly with regard to renewal of parking permits and related issues to ensure that all sectors and ages groups can access a space in front of their house and get value for the £51 they currently pay just to get the permit let alone the price of tickets for family and visitor parking.

The Cabinet Member replied that she met officers from the Parking Service last week to talk through the systems that the service relied on and the accessibility of the service for people who were not digitally enabled.

In terms of background, the withdrawal of the parking shop in February 2022, was ultimately a decision by the county council as the highway authority.

The move to virtual permits and the implementation of the current online system was also led by the county council. Since it went live in March last year 10,358 digital resident permits had been issued (including renewals).

A total of 170,509 digital transactions through MIPERMIT had been made for various permits for On-Street parking for example residents permits, resident visitor permits,

healthcare permits, carer permits, non-resident permits, bay suspensions, Traders permits.

There were a number of options available for customers who were either not digitally enabled or who did not have access to a computer to be able to purchase their parking permit or visitor permits.

Customers could telephone the council's parking team for assistance with setting up an account. Customers may need to provide proof of residency and their vehicle registration document (which was a similar requirement when the parking shop was in place).

Customers could either send copies of the documentation to the council's offices or attend the council offices with the documentation and the staff at Portland House would scan a copy over to the parking team on their behalf.

The parking team would set the customer's account up and arrange for payment to be taken. The MIPERMIT team was also available Monday to Sunday to assist customers with activating visitor permits.

Whilst the Council had limited influence over the system, the Cabinet Member had asked officers to make immediate improvements to make the service more accessible. These included:

- Reiterating that people who were not online could either call the parking team who would manage the permit application on their behalf, either over the phone or face to face; and
- Ensuring that customers who chose this way of accessing the service received a letter, confirming their permit start and finish dates, and details of how to contact the service and renew their permit.

The Cabinet Member was also pleased to say that the Council's officers were working with West Sussex County Council to produce user guides and videos to help people who did wish to use the online system.

*** The Mayor called for a vote (under Council Procedure Rule 10.1) to be taken at 9.28pm to determine whether the meeting should continue past 3 hours in duration. The next Member Question would have taken the meeting beyond 9.30pm. The Council agreed by majority not to extend the meeting.*

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm