

# Minutes

## Council Meeting



5<sup>th</sup> October 2020

These Minutes principally record decisions taken and, where appropriate, the reasons for the decisions. A webcast of the meeting is available for six months at [www.braintree.gov.uk](http://www.braintree.gov.uk).

Present:

<b>Councillors</b>	<b>Present</b>	<b>Councillors</b>	<b>Present</b>
Councillor J Abbott	Yes	Councillor Mrs J Pell	Yes
Councillor J Baugh	Apologies	Councillor I Pritchard	Yes
Councillor Mrs J Beavis	Yes	Councillor M Radley	Yes
Councillor D Bebb	Yes	Councillor R Ramage	Yes
Councillor K Bowers	Yes	Councillor S Rehman	No
Councillor G Butland	Yes	Councillor F Ricci	Yes
Councillor J Coleridge	Yes	Councillor B Rose	Yes
Councillor G Courtauld	Yes	Councillor Mrs J Sandum	Yes
Councillor Mrs M Cunningham	Yes	Councillor Miss V Santomauro	Yes
Councillor T Cunningham	Yes	Councillor Mrs W Scattergood	Yes
Councillor Mrs C Dervish	Yes	Councillor Mrs W Schmitt	Yes
Councillor P Euesden	Yes	Councillor P Schwier	Yes
Councillor T Everard	Yes	Councillor Mrs G Spray	Yes
Councillor Mrs D Garrod	Yes	Councillor P Tattersley	Yes
Councillor A Hensman	Yes	Councillor P Thorogood	Yes
Councillor S Hicks	Yes	Councillor N Unsworth	Yes
Councillor P Horner	Yes	Councillor R van Dulken	Yes
Councillor D Hume	Yes	Councillor D Wallace	Apologies
Councillor H Johnson	Yes	Councillor T Walsh	Yes
Councillor Mrs A Kilmartin (Chairman)	Yes	Councillor Mrs L Walters	Yes
Councillor D Mann	Yes	Councillor Miss M Weeks	Yes
Councillor T McArdle	Apologies	Councillor Mrs S Wilson (Vice-Chairman)	Yes
Councillor J McKee	Yes	Councillor J Wrench	Yes
Councillor A Munday	Yes	Councillor B Wright	Yes
Councillor Mrs I Parker	Yes		

A few items of general note for the meeting were made by the Chairman prior to the commencement of the Agenda Items. Members were also informed that Agenda Item 6, 'Motion by Councillor James Abbott - Cycling Motion,' had been formally withdrawn and subsequently removed from the Agenda.

## 25 **MINUTES**

**DECISION:** The Minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2020 were approved as a correct record.

## 26 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**INFORMATION:** The following interests were declared:-

Councillor J Abbott declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 9, 'Horizon 120 – Enterprise Centre' as a member of the Project Reference Group, and in Agenda Item 10, 'Cabinet Report to Full Council,' as an Elected Member at Essex County Council. Councillor Abbott was also an administrator of the Green and Independent Facebook Group.

Councillor Mrs J Beavis declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest as a facilitator of the Facebook pages 'Better Braintree Together' and 'Residents for Braintree District.' Councillor Mrs Beavis also declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 10, 'Cabinet Report to Council,' as an Elected Member at Essex County Council.

Councillor G Butland declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 9, 'Horizon 120 – Enterprise Centre' and Agenda Item 10, 'Cabinet Report to Full Council,' as an Elected Member at Essex County Council and a Director of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) Ltd.

Councillor T Cunningham declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 9, 'Horizon 120 – Enterprise Centre' as Chairman of the Project Reference Group.

Councillor Mrs W Schmitt declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 10, 'Cabinet Report to Full Council,' as an Elected Member at Essex County Council.

Councillor F Ricci declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 9, 'Horizon 120 – Enterprise Centre,' as a member of the Project Reference Group.

Councillor B Rose declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 9, 'Horizon 120 – Enterprise Centre,' as a member of the Project Reference Group.

Councillor P Schwier declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 9, 'Horizon 120 – Enterprise Centre' as a member of the Project Reference Group.

Councillor P Thorogood declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 10, 'Cabinet Report to Council,' as he was a licence holder with a Private Hire taxi company.

Councillor N Unsworth declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest as an ordinary member of the Earls Colne to Kelvedon Cycling Group (EC2K).

Councillor R van Dulken declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 9, 'Horizon 120 – Enterprise Centre,' as a member of the Project Reference Group.

Councillor T Walsh declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 8, 'White Paper - Planning for the Future. Braintree District Council consultation response,' as a member of the Coggeshall Neighbourhood Plan Group. Councillor Walsh declared a further Interest in respect of Item 10, 'Cabinet Report to Full Council,' as a member of the EC2K Cycling Group.

In response to a Point of Order raised by the Leader, the Council's Monitoring Officer, Kim Cole, clarified that it was not a requirement for Members to declare their membership on a Reference Group, unless necessitated by a specific recommendation of the group that had been brought forward for consideration by Full Council.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, Councillors remained in the meeting, unless stated otherwise, and took part in the debate and decision when the Items were considered.

## 27 **QUESTION TIME**

**INFORMATION:** There was one statement made. Mr Peter Kohn made a general statement on cycling and the new Government paper, 'Gear Change 2020,' which set out an approach for a wholesale modal shift in respect of cycling and walking. A number of suggestions were made as to how the Braintree Cycling Policy could be updated and expanded upon in order for the District to increase its cycling footprint and become a contender for a bid to be a 'Mini Holland,' as had been implemented across London.

Councillor F Ricci, Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture and Tourism, thanked Mr Kohn for his statement and gave a verbal response. In his reply, Councillor Ricci stressed that although the Council needed to focus on addressing the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, there was positive work was continuing to take place on the cycling strategy that was set out in the Motion passed at Full Council on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged that although the Council recognised that national cycle network routes offered important longer distance cycling opportunities, these were confined to the South West of the District only. It was also recognised that there were a number of existing strategies at local and national level in respect of cycling, as well as related projects and strategies that the Authority was already leading on or supporting, such as Gear Change, the Essex Cycling Strategy, the Braintree District Cycling Plan, the Open Spaces Action Plan, the Active Green Travel Plan and the Active Essex Strategy. Furthermore, the Council had also been engaged with Essex County Council (ECC) in the development of a high level funding bid as part of the Government's Emergency Active Travel Funding Bid (EATF initiative); it was added that the current indicative financial allocation to ECC was in excess of £7.7m. Work was also being conducted with ECC to develop future cycling routes across the District. The Cabinet Member was confident that with confirmed funding, sound stakeholder engagement and a solid business plan, the Council could deliver District-wide connectivity in order to ensure that there was safer, greener and more sustainable means of travel available for all, which included safer cycle routes.

Finally, the Cabinet Member listed the next steps of the Authority; the first would be the establishment of a local reference group for the delivery of the EATF initiative, and the second was the development of a cycling plan to coordinate the actions of the aforementioned strategies, the plans of which were due to be presented at the upcoming meeting of Full Council on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021.

Principally, these Minutes record decisions taken only and, where appropriate, the reasons for the decisions.

## 28 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS/STATEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND/OR LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

The Chairman's announcements covered the following:

The Chairman announced that since the last meeting of Full Council on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2020, she had been involved in a number of different meetings and events, many of which were held virtually or in new, socially distanced settings. The events included: a cricket quiz for the Braintree Mosque and Chelmsford City Cathedral; a fitness club opening on 20<sup>th</sup> August; the Active Essex Holiday Play-Scheme Event, which was also attended by the Braintree MP, Mr J Cleverly, on 28<sup>th</sup> August; a Civic Service Remembrance and Recognition event held via Zoom on 7<sup>th</sup> September; the opening of a new nursery located opposite Causeway House on 12<sup>th</sup> September; and prizes presented at a recent meeting of the Halstead and District Photographic Society. A written submission for inclusion within the 2,000<sup>th</sup> edition of the Mid-Essex Talking Newspaper was also made by the Chairman on 28<sup>th</sup> August.

The Leader's announcements covered the following:

The Leader made a short statement in regard to some of the challenges currently being faced by the District as a result of Covid-19 and the latest Government developments. Members were advised that there had been a significant increase in cases of Covid-19 nationally, and that the number of cases was also starting to rise across Essex and within the District. Although the number of cases in the Braintree District remained comparatively low with other Authorities, it was nonetheless important for residents to remain aware of risks associated with the increase in local cases. The District Council was now discussing plans with its partners as to how it would approach new restrictive measures such as local lockdowns and the reintroduction of shielding, should the need arise. As of 10<sup>th</sup> October 2020, the incidents of Covid-19 per 100,000 of the population of the Braintree District was 14.42, whereas in northern areas of the country, the numbers were in excess of 200.

It was reported that the Government had announced a new package of support for those people required to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace who were on a lower income and had suffered financial hardship as a direct result of the need to self-isolate. Such people would now be supported by a payment of up to £500, and the Council was working quickly to set up Test and Trace payment support schemes, of which were expected to be in place by 12<sup>th</sup> October 2020. It was added that those people who were required to self-isolate from 28<sup>th</sup> September would receive backdated payments if they were deemed eligible for this.

In concluding his statement, the Leader reiterated essential Government advice to all for the washing of hands, wearing of face coverings and adhering to social distancing rules. Mention was also made of the organisation-wide team which supported

businesses and partners in response to Covid-19. The Council was in regular communication with businesses in respect of the latest updates to guidance and regulations, and weekly newsletters continued to be distributed to residents, Parish Councils, businesses and partners with updates, key messages and links to further information. It was noted that demand on services across the Council had increased, especially in light of new enforcement responsibilities in some areas, with the number of complaints received by the Authority also having risen. The Leader stressed to Members that the Council would continue to monitor the demand on its individual teams and to work with its partners to help mitigate some of the issues being experienced, either as a result of or exacerbated by Covid-19.

## 29 **UPDATE TO APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES OF COUNCIL**

**INFORMATION:** Councillor G Butland, Leader of the Council, was invited to introduce a report which pertained to a review of the Council's Committee Membership arrangements and appointments to Outside Bodies.

At the Council's Annual General Meeting (AGM) of 21<sup>st</sup> May 2019, seats were appointed to committees in accordance with the proportion of Councillors in political groups at that time. These appointments were amended following a further decision of Full Council on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic and the implementation of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 (the Regulations), the Chief Executive by delegated authority agreed that no AGM would be held for 2020/21. As a consequence of this decision, all Committee appointments and appointments to Outside Bodies made at the AGM for 2019/20 were to continue during the 2020/21 Civic Year.

Following the resignation of Councillor R Ramage as District Councillor, it was necessary for the Monitoring Officer to review the Council's political proportionality on committees. The opinion of the Monitoring Officer was that there were no significant changes to the existing arrangements, and as such, the current distribution of committee membership did not require alteration; however, there were a number of committee vacancies and one vacancy in relation to outside body appointments. As the committee vacancies were the result of the resignation of a Conservative Group Member, the proposed replacements were obligated to be selected from Members of the same Group. The same rule did not apply to the outside body vacancy.

In respect of the Licensing Committee vacancy, the proposed replacement Member for former Councillor R Ramage was Councillor R van Dulken. In addition to this, it was advised that there had been an amendment to the proposed replacement member of the Licensing Committee; the new Member of the Licensing Committee would instead be Councillor S Hicks, and the report would be updated to reflect this.

The new proposed Member of the Partnership Development Group would be Councillor A Hensman. The resignation of former Councillor R Ramage had also created a vacancy for the Vice-Chairman position of the Partnership Development Group. It was proposed that Councillor I Pritchard be appointed as Vice-Chairman, as he was a current member of the Group. In respect of outside body appointments, it was recommended that Councillor Mrs S Wilson was appointed to fill the vacancy on the Braintree and Greenfield Community Grants Panel.

It was also proposed that the Chairman of the Performance Management Board be changed from Councillor N Unsworth (Green and Independent Group) to Councillor M Radley (Halstead Residents Association), although Councillor Unsworth was to remain a Member of the Board.

As set out in Article 4 of the Constitution, it was a matter for the Leader of the Council to create Sub-Committees to discharge executive functions as set out in the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations. The Local Plan Sub-Committee was a Sub-Committee of Cabinet, not of Full Council, and was therefore not subject to the rules around political proportionality and could as such be altered by the Leader. Accordingly, it was reported that the size of the Local Plan Sub-Committee would expand by two Members, and that the membership of the Local Plan Sub-Committee would also change with Councillors J Abbott, J Coleridge and Mrs J Sandum joining the committee.

The Leader reiterated that he was only required to report any amendments to the Cabinet Sub-Committees, not to seek the approval of Full Council. The changes to the Local Plan Sub-Committee would as such come into effect from 5<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

Prior to the conclusion of his address, the Leader noted that there were a small number of typographical errors within the text of the report. The errors were in relation to paragraph 6.4, as Councillor J Wrench's name had been misspelt, and paragraph 6.9, as the remit of the Manor Street Project Reference Group had since been extended to include the town centre pedestrianisation and was subsequently renamed the 'Braintree Town Centre Reference Group.'

**DECISION:** That the Council:-

1. Noted the political balance requirements and agreed the allocation of seats to political groups as set out in this report;
2. Approved the appointments to the Committees and Outside Bodies as set out in paragraphs 4.2 of the report;
3. Approved the change to the Licensing Committee as set out in paragraph 4.3 of the report;
4. Approved the changes to the Chairman of the Performance Management Board as set out in paragraph 5.1 of this report;
5. Noted the changes to size and membership of the Cabinet Sub-Committee - Local Plan Sub-Committee as set out in paragraph 6.2 and 6.3 of this report;
6. Noted the changes to the Membership of the Cabinet Sub-Committee - Developing Democracy Group and the membership of the remaining Cabinet Sub-Committees as set out in paragraphs 6.6, 6.7 and 6.9 of this report; and
7. Authorised the Head of Governance to amend the Council's Constitution to reflect the changes detailed in this report.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To comply with legislation and to enable the Council to discharge its functions through Committees and Cabinet Sub-Committees.

## **WHITE PAPER: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE. BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

**INFORMATION:** Members gave consideration to a report which regarded the Council's draft response to the Government consultation on the White Paper. Councillor Mrs G Spray, Cabinet Member for Planning, was invited to introduce the report.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> August 2020, the Government instigated a consultation on a White Paper: 'Planning for the Future,' which proposed fundamental reforms to the planning system across three pillars: planning for development (Pillar 1); planning for beautiful and sustainable places (Pillar 2); and planning for infrastructure and connected places (Pillar 3). The consultation was due to close on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2020; a Members' Briefing Session was held on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2020 in order to provide Members with a more in-depth understanding of the content of the White Paper, especially given the scale of the changes proposed, and the need to allow time for it to be considered before being debated in a formal Committee Meeting.

Following the report, Members were given the opportunity to address their comments to the Cabinet Member and to make any suggestions for potential amendments or ways of enhancing the draft response of the Council to the consultation on the White Paper. The Cabinet Member then responded to each Member individually and agreed to a number of actions, as summarised below:-

- It was agreed that environmental issues and matters such as climate change had not been given enough consideration within the White Paper. Furthermore, the sustainability proposal included in the Paper would be costly and timely to the Authority; as such, the Council would seek to replace this with a simpler proposal that would not be at the expense of adequate consideration towards issues associated with the environment and climate change. The Cabinet Member agreed to give further consideration to the issues raised, in addition to concerns over water stress.
- It was inferred that the goal of achieving 'Carbon Neutral' by the year 2050 was not early enough; the Council would instead prefer this to be achieved by 2030. The Council's response to the Paper would therefore be adapted to reflect this.
- On the subject of renewable energy, it was confirmed that there was no content currently within the White Paper that related to any large-scale proposals for the District (e.g. such as wind and solar farms and how the District might approach this). The Cabinet Member would as such include concerns around this topic within the Council's response.
- The Cabinet Member supported the suggestion of protected landscape areas but added that this would need to encompass areas of open countryside, and that the Council would seek clarity as to how this would work.
- The Cabinet Member agreed to incorporate within the Council's response the concerns of Members around nationally produced design codes, as well as the need to maintain the diversity of design that the District currently had. It was added that site notices in respect of new planning developments should also be retained.

- The Cabinet Member would reiterate to the Government the importance of affordable housing within the District and the need to meet target numbers in this area.
- In respect of new developments, it was agreed that there should be some form of financial penalty introduced for developers in instances where progress on developments was continually delayed.
- The Cabinet Member agreed that issues surrounding agricultural land would also be addressed within the Council's response to the White Paper.
- The Cabinet Member agreed to alter the Council's response on the issue of neighbourhood plans, as it was felt by a Member that the wording around this matter in the Paper required improvement.

**DECISION:** The Council:-

1. Noted the publication of the White Paper 'Planning for the Future' and that the Government was seeking responses to its proposals by 29<sup>th</sup> October 2020.
2. Agreed that following the briefing session held for all Members on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and the debate on the White Paper held at Full Council on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2020 the Cabinet Member for Planning, Councillor Gabrielle Spray, would submit the Council's response.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To consider and debate the White Paper: Planning for the Future and agree to delegate responsibility for a final response to the central government consultation questions set out in the White Paper.

### 31 **HORIZON 120 – ENTERPRISE CENTRE - PUBLIC**

**INFORMATION:** Members were reminded that the report was linked to Item 12 in the Private Session of the Agenda and that if any Member wished to refer to the private information contained within the report for that Item, it would be necessary for the meeting to be moved into Private Session.

**DECISION:** That, under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, it was not necessary to exclude the public and press from the meeting on the grounds that it would not involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of the Act.

**INFORMATION:** Councillor J McKee, Cabinet Member for Corporate Transformation, was invited to introduce the report. The report summarised the Council's proposal to develop an Enterprise Centre on the Horizon 120 Business and Innovation Park, which was to be part funded by a grant allocation from the Getting Building Fund and the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP).

It was reported that the Council had held a long-standing intention to create an Enterprise Centre for development on the Horizon 120 site in order to meet its corporate priorities; the plans had been included as part of the District Plan for Growth 2017 to 2022 in order to attract inward investment, increase job opportunities within the District, reduce commuting times and contribute to the overall agenda for growth. The

availability of funding from the Getting Building Fund Programme was not foreseen during 2019/20; therefore, the Project was not included within the Project capital budget which was previously approved by Council on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2020. Despite this, the funding had since become available and as such, the Council wished to include the Project within the Council's Capital Programme, along with the associated allocation of a capital budget. The timescales demanded by the funding authority to secure the funding meant that the Project was unable to be presented at a meeting of the Cabinet prior to its submission to Full Council, as would normally occur. Members were therefore advised that should approval be given for the inclusion of the Project within the Council's Capital Programme, this would still be subject to the approval of a business case by the Cabinet at its upcoming meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2020, and by the SELEP Accountability Board on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

Members were informed that the purpose of the Enterprise Centre was to provide an exemplar working environment and business support services for new and/or small companies in growth sectors, which included the green economy. The Centre would also provide a 'support hub' for other businesses located on the Horizon 120 site and deliver 150 new jobs for Braintree each year. Given the building's prominent location on the northern area of the site, the building's design standards and specifications were being emphasised in order to act as a precedent for the construction of subsequent buildings intended for the site. It was added that the building would also be energy efficient and achieve the minimum standard of 'Very good' under the BREMM certification.

The Council successfully entered an initial bidding process in July 2020 and funding was provisionally under the Getting Building Fund Programme from SELEP. A number of factors were involved which enabled the Council to secure provisional funding; for example, the project supported the recovery of the Braintree economy from the Covid-19 crisis and was deliverable within the shorter timescale that the Fund required. Furthermore, the Horizon 120 site was already owned by the Council and planning permission had been secured. Should the business case for the Enterprise Centre be approved by the SELEP Accountability Board on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020, the Council would be allocated a sum of £7m by way of a grant towards the capital costs.

A key condition of the grant funding by the SELEP was the need for the Getting Building Fund monies to be expended before 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022; as such, the Enterprise Centre would need to be substantially completed by this date. The strict timescale imposed by the SELEP and Essex County Council for the submission and evaluation of the business case meant that the Council had commenced with an accelerated programme of work in order to meet the deadline of 16<sup>th</sup> October 2020; a multi-disciplinary project team at the Council was leading on this.

**DECISION:** That Council:-

1. Noted that the Project was subject to the approval of a business case by Cabinet on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2020 and subsequently by the SELEP Accountability Board on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020.
2. Noted that the proposed building along with ancillary facilities was to be sited on an area of land allocated within the Horizon 120 Business and Innovation Park which totalled two net developable acres.

3. Approved the inclusion of the Project within the Council's Capital Programme.
4. Noted the proposed Braintree District Council funding for the Project was subject to the Corporate Director (Finance) having the flexibility to determine the most appropriate means of financing the Council's overall capital programme.
5. Authorised the Corporate Director (Finance), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Transformation, to accept tenders, for capital works, which would exceed the approved budget by up to 5%.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Council:-

1. To progress the Project by securing the required Braintree District Council capital contribution to its delivery and the Projects inclusion in the authorities Capital Programme;
2. To secure Getting Building Fund grant from SELEP; and
3. To deliver the new Enterprise Centre and secure its resulting impact and outcomes for Braintree businesses and residents.

## 32 **CABINET REPORT TO COUNCIL**

**INFORMATION:** The Chairman invited the Leader to introduce the Cabinet Report to Council. Following this, the Chairman invited Members to ask questions. Questions were not limited to the content of the reports and could be about matters relating to a portfolio, the powers and duties of the Council, or the District.

Councillor G Butland, Leader of the Council had nothing further to add to the Cabinet Report.

Members asked several questions arising from the report. A webcast of the questions to and responses of Cabinet Members is available on the Council's Youtube channel at <https://www.braintree.gov.uk/youtube>

The main topics raised were as follows:-

Councillor Mrs M Cunningham applauded the exceptional work of officers in the Operations Team throughout the course of the pandemic, particularly around fly-tips.

Councillor J Abbott raised a question around Local Government reorganisation and any updates that could be provided.

Councillor A Hensman welcomed new developments in respect of the Council's Cycling Plan and any subsequent improvements to the District's cycling network, such as greater partnership working between the District and County Councils.

Councillor Mrs J Beavis encouraged the relevant Cabinet Member to visit the new children's play area in Sible Hedingham, along with the Chairman of the Parish Council, to discuss next steps.

Councillor Mrs J Beavis queried whether the Council could improve on the number of days it currently took to process new Housing Benefit claims.

Councillor M Radley urged there to be a meeting between local Ward Members and the District's Town Councils to help ensure that town centre improvements could be made by the end of the financial year.

Councillor I Pritchard wished to encourage local residents to continue to inform the Council of any areas for improvement across the town centres.

Councillor B Wright raised a question in relation to the potential impact on affordable housing should the housing numbers threshold be increased to 50 per site as a result of planning reforms.

Councillor T Walsh asked whether the decrease in housing numbers between the 2014 and 2018 ONS projections represented a material change.

Councillor N Unsworth requested an update as to the latest enforcement action that had been taken by the Council following the illegal waste burning and fly tips in Stisted.

Councillor N Unsworth requested further elaboration on the cycling project proposed for Braintree. A query was also raised about the future membership of the reference group, and whether the Council could consider bidding for the 'Mini Holland' project which was remarked upon by the Public Question Time Speaker earlier in the meeting.

Councillor Miss M Weeks queried whether there would be a single verge cut for the wider District in the next financial year.

Councillor J Abbott asked whether the Council could help progress the clearing of litter along the boundary area of Rivenhall and Witham, as had recently been conducted along the A12.

Councillor R van Dulken sought reassurance for residents that the Council's finances were still robust and under control.

Councillor Mrs J Sandum raised a question in respect of the Climate Change Working Group and whether the recommendations of the Group would be prioritised within next year's financial budget.

Councillor Mrs D Garrod commented on the recent life-time skills guarantee announcement by the Prime Minister, and asked whether the Cabinet would acknowledge the importance of addressing the skills requirements for employers and employees locally, particularly as the current business climate had a heavy focus on Covid-19 recovery.

Councillor J Abbott requested an indication as to how improvements within the Planning Enforcement team were progressing, and also an update on the development of the Silver End Conservation Area Design Guide.

Councillor B Rose queried who had responsibility for the maintenance of the regenerated shopping centre in Spa Road, Witham.

Councillor P Thorogood asked whether there were any plans for the Council to begin charging Parish Councils for instances of fly tipping in the budget for the next financial year.

Councillor Thorogood raised a further query around improvements that could be made to the public consultation process for large-scale housing developments.

Councillor Thorogood asked a final question in regard to the state of the Council's finances as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and how this compared with the Council's expenditure on Section 1 of the Local Plan.

Councillor Abbott asked whether the details of the improvements intended for Witham Town Centre would be shared with the County Councillor for the town centre as well.

Councillor Abbott disagreed with the manner in which he felt comments regarding the Green and Independent Group had been made at the meeting and the changes proposed by the Leader in respect of the membership of Committees going forward.

The following actions were agreed in response to questions raised by Members:-

- Councillor K Bowers, Cabinet Member for Homes, agreed to provide a written response to Councillor Wright further to his query around the potential impact on affordable housing should the threshold be increased to 50 per site as a result of planning reforms.
- Councillor Mrs W Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Environment and Place, echoed Councillor Mrs Cunningham's praise for the Operations Team, the comments of which she would share with the officers involved.
- Councillor Mrs W Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Environment and Place, agreed to provide a written response to Councillor Unsworth following his request for an update around the waste burning and fly tips in Stisted.
- Councillor Mrs W Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Environment and Place, agreed to provide a written response to Councillor Rose following his query about who had responsibility for the maintenance of the shopping centre in Spa Road, Witham.
- Councillor Mrs W Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Environment and Place, would provide a written response to Councillor Thorogood in respect of his question around charging for fly tips.
- Councillor Mrs G Spray, Cabinet Member for Planning, would provide a written response to Councillor Abbott further to his queries in regard to the Planning Enforcement team and the Silver End Conservation Area Design Guide.
- Councillor Mrs G Spray, Cabinet Member for Planning, would provide a written response to Councillor Thorogood further to his question regarding the public consultation process for large-scale housing developments.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 10.09pm.

Councillor Mrs A Kilmartin  
(Chairman)