

THAME TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of Thame Town Council held on 16 January 2018 at 6.30pm in the Upper Chamber, Thame Town Hall

Present: Cllrs B Austin, D Bretherton, M Deacock, N Dixon, D Dodds, M Dyer, L Emery (Deputy Mayor), H Fickling, P Lambert, A Midwinter, M Stiles and T Wyse (Town Mayor).

Officers

G Hunt, Town Clerk
A Oughton, Committee Services Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Butler (Unwell), Champken-Woods (Holiday), Cowell (Business) and Jones (Holiday).

2 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

Cllr Lambert declared an interest in item 13 as the Cross Keys Public House was one of the venues for the Thame Town Music Festival 2018. Cllr Midwinter declared an interest in item 13 as she was involved with St Mary's Church which was also a venue for TTMF18.

3 Public Participation and Public Questions

A number of applications had been received to speak; Mrs Sarah Taylor and Dr Ken Burch on items 10 and 11. Mr Will Taylor of Bidwells on item 10. Mr Jake Collinge of JCPC and Mr Matt Sutton of Blakelands LLP on item 11.

It was agreed that public participation would take place at the beginning of the relevant agenda item.

Item 10 – Planning Application P17/S4415/FUL:

Sarah Taylor and Ken Burch spoke as a resident of Rycote Park and Moreton respectively on the planned relocation of Thame Livestock Market. Sarah Taylor stated that she had only heard about the two applications on tonight's agenda through the grapevine and had not received any formal notification even though Rycote Park was located one field away from the proposed site.

The main concerns were; that the applications represented unplanned major industrial development on green field sites with no reference made in the Thame Neighbourhood Plan (TNP) or the District Local Plan. Sarah supported Thame having a cattle market but the proposed site was not the right place.

Not enough consideration had been given to the drainage of effluent from the site and the commercial units planned alongside the cattle market would generate traffic movement on days when the market did not operate. The Accident and Traffic Survey submitted with the plans covered only a small area of the A329, The increase in traffic, including large lorries going to and from the site, would affect the whole of the A329 not just the immediate area around the development. It was a dangerous road which had experienced a number of accidents, at least 2-3 per year. The prospect of more slow lorries travelling along the A329 on blind bends was an accident waiting to happen. A number of lorries already backed up on the road near the turn to Moreton village when entering the existing industrial area.

Finally the effect of light pollution had transformed the character of the area over the years and it was hoped that careful consideration would be given to the lighting for this development.

Ken Burch added that the residents of Moreton were broadly in support of the cattle market. Thame had a good agricultural market, although the present site was not ideal the idea of moving the market out of the centre of town freeing up space and parking was a good one. It was disappointing that the site on the Showground had not progressed as 70% of the usage of the cattle market came from Buckinghamshire and Aylesbury and so a site on the eastern side of town would be more appropriate.

One car passed the Moreton turn every 4 seconds in the busy morning and evening periods and although the consensus of the village was broadly supportive of the farming community, the main two concerns were that of additional traffic generation and the commercial units planned alongside the cattle market which may expand over time.

Will Taylor of Bidwells spoke for the Thame Farmers Market in support of the application. Picking up on the point raised about locating the cattle market to the Showground opposite the Rugby Club. Will stated that a scheme was supported and funded but due to difficulties related to a leasehold ransom strip the site was not forthcoming.

An economic report commissioned by Bidwells supported the location of a cattle market in close proximity to the town and would be a significant benefit for Thame. From pre-application work carried out in 2016 and an updated site analysis the proposed site had been identified as being the most suitable.

With regard to the drainage, Bidwells had commissioned a specialist firm of engineers who dealt primarily with cattle market sites to prepare a report and proposals to deal with effluent and hard and grey water. The options identified were for either treatment that allowed drainage into the main sewerage system or a more comprehensive treatment that allowed discharge into the main water course. The applicant would provide whatever is appropriate and required by the District Council.

The commercial units were needed as the development had to be wholly funded by the Thame Farmers Market who needed to identify alternative streams of funding, further details were set out in the Design and Access Statement. The businesses would align with the agricultural and rural economic community, providing agricultural services. There may also be chattels and fixtures auctions. Very few livestock markets across the county now only dealt in livestock.

The transport assessment provided with the application answered the queries raised this evening but Will would note the concerns that had been raised regarding traffic.

Item 11: Planning Application P17/S4441/O:

Ken Burch spoke against this application on behalf of the residents of Moreton asking two questions: Does Thame need this development? And is this the best site?

The application argued that Thame had grown in size and lost employment land to housing development. The TNP provided 3ha of replacement employment land which had been occupied by two companies who moved from the Long Crendon Industrial site, this implied that their vacated space was available to backfill. Our local MP has said that this area has the second lowest unemployment rate which again did not add up.

Do we really need new employment land on this site? There were already industrial sites in Thame, Haddenham, Long Crendon and Milton Common. The links to the M40 may be attractive but Junction 7 only allowed access to the southwest direction. The proposed usage on the site would increase the number of heavy lorries, vans and cars using the A329 and local roads. Added to this the proposed cattle market site and possible development at Harrington would only increase congestion.

The A329 required maintenance work on the surface and areas of subsidence in order to cope with the extra heavy lorries. Despite the 50 mph speed limit people drove too fast.

The application site appeared overcrowded with very little buffer provided between the road and the first buildings. There was insufficient parking. People already used the verges to park opposite the ASM site. There were better pre-existing industrial areas in the town that could be developed.

In conclusion the residents of Moreton would ask that a robust and independent traffic survey is undertaken, including the egress from Moreton Road. That more parking is provided on site to avoid overspill onto surrounding verges and there is a reduction in the footprint to give a larger landscaped buffer between the road and the site.

Sarah Taylor commented that she had the same concerns about this application as that of the cattle market. The application was proposing a high number of industrial units and although the plans showed a lot of parking space it would be inadequate. The A329 was a very dangerous road with a number of blind bends. The road surface was poor and inadequate to cope with the increase in traffic, especially heavy lorries.

It was an unplanned creation of a major industrial area outside of Thame which had the potential to spread all the way to Rycote Lane Farm. Is that what local people really wanted?

Jake Collinge spoke on behalf of the applicant and gave some context and background to the scheme stating that a planning application for 200,000 sq ft of employment had been submitted on the site in 1985 but ultimately had not gone ahead due to the then employment restraints. The economic climate was now very different, since 2011 over 1100 houses had been built or committed in Thame. In the same period there had been a loss of 11,000 sq ft of employment space equating to 595 jobs. Even with the gain in employment land at Cotmore Wells the result was a net loss of 416 jobs, to compensate for this loss would require an employment area of 5.5ha.

The propose site, providing 180,000 sq ft of floor space had been the subject of pre-application talks. Although the application was submitted in outline it was anticipated the site would provide a range of units varying in size. The site was deliverable and represented a logical extension to the existing industrial site. It related well to the strategic highway network and the traffic generated by the scheme would be comfortably and safely accommodated. A footpath link from the Moreton junction to the site would also be provided.

Matt Sutton of Blakelands LLP spoke for the application. An option had been taken on the site 18 months ago and a marketing survey had shown a demand for small and medium high quality employment premises in Thame.

At present there was 98% occupancy and 2% vacancy in the Thame market area including Long Crendon and Haddenham and an overwhelming need for premises to cover the TNP and SODC Local Plan period to 2033. When the TNP was adopted in 2013 the allocation of 3ha of employment was immediately taken up.

There was support from the District Economic Development team who had a list of small and medium sized businesses who wanted to expand but remain in the town or move to Thame. This site would provide the right accommodation.

4 Oxfordshire Lowland Search & Rescue (OxSAR)

Patrick Conafray, vice chair of the OxSAR Lowland Rescue gave a presentation. The Lowland Rescue was part of the UKSAR Operators Group, other members of the group included the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, the emergency services, MoD, RNLI, Mountain Rescue and British Cave Rescue. Together they provided the search and rescue framework for the UK.

OxSAR had 62 volunteers on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The group worked closely with Thames Valley Police, Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue, Oxfordshire County Council Emergency Planning Office and teams along the borders of neighbouring counties.

Lowland rescue worked alongside the police to help find high risk vulnerable missing people such as those suffering from dementia, mental illness and teenage children. Working with the fire and rescue service the group helped to raise public awareness and performed rescues from flooded areas.

Volunteers came from all walks of life and included postmen, RAF personnel, engineers, teachers, bankers, electricians, gardeners and university students. OxSAR was a charitable organisation, dependent entirely upon public donations, money being raised through corporate funding / sponsorship and community fundraising. Volunteers also raised funds by marshalling at public events such as triathlons and sponsored bike rides.

OxSAR were looking for permanent headquarters, preferably in the centre of the county with room for a training area and equipment store. The group were currently based at the fire station in Thame. Annual running costs ranged between £15-16k.

After Patrick had answered a number of questions, Cllr Wyse thanked him for providing an informative presentation.

5 Childrens Assessment Centre

Paul Jacobs, Manager and Catherine Partlett, Assistant Manager of the Childrens Assessment Centre on Chinnor Road gave a presentation. Paul commenced by offering apologies on behalf of James Collins who had intended to be present but was unwell.

The Centre was one of six homes in Oxfordshire and employed 18 staff; three social workers and 15 family support workers. The staff supported between 5-6 families each, with the help of other agencies, to support parental management of the child in their own home. Assessment can take up to three weeks during which time the decision may be taken to bring the young person into the house. The young person may spend between 2 to 3 nights at the house, the rest of the assessment period (up to 90 days) being spent at home. Residents are encouraged to cook and share meal times with staff and parents / siblings who are also encouraged to visit.

Since opening 16 months ago 25 young people had used the house and staff were currently working with 74 young people in the community. Placements were shared with the sister home in Eynsham. The Centre worked closely with other agencies and also the Riverside Centre which provided educational support and outdoor activities.

Young people aged between 12-17 years stay at the Centre with younger children being placed in foster care. Although the Centre did work with younger children in these cases the assessment would not involve a residential stay at the Centre. There was a mix of ages at any given time in the house and great care was taken before admitting a child to make sure the reasons and circumstances for their referral did not adversely impact on them or the other residents.

Young people had been involved in the design of the building which was light and airy. Each resident had their own room with en-suite facilities and TV which provided them with some private space. There were also communal areas, an art room and an open plan kitchen.

A residents' meeting took place once a week and children were invited to talk about their placement, what's working and what's not working quite so well. The children were involved in their personal plan and had the opportunity to raise issues or complaints with staff, members of the social care team and the County Council.

The Centre had enjoyed a good relationship with the Book Shop in Thame who donated books when the Centre opened and also with the rugby club and leisure centre. Bicycles were available for residents and the Phoenix Trail was well used. Because the young people only stayed for short periods of time it was difficult to interact with local services provided in Thame. However the Centre was keen to develop and build stronger links with the town.

After Paul and Catherine answered a number of questions including agreement that the Centre should offer an invitation to Councillors to visit, Cllr Wyse thanked them for the presentation and insight into the work carried out at the Assessment Centre.

6 Minutes

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 14 November 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

7 Budget and Precept for 2018-2019

The Town Clerk presented the report. The 2018-2019 Revenue Budget had been prepared by the Budget Working Group through an iterative process. The draft budget was circulated to Councillors and widely publicised via a press release. A Budget drop-in session was held on 12 December 2017 for members of the public to comment. Seven people attended and made comments following which the Budget Working Group concluded that no further change to the budget was needed.

Cllr Dyer pointed out that a great deal of work had taken place over many months. The budget had been through exhaustive consultation and had been subjected to a robust public consultation.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The 2018-2019 budget be approved.***
- ii) £684,141 be raised for the precept for 2018-19.***

8 External Audit

During the Audit the External Auditor had found errors in the presentation of the Annual Return associated with the double counting of the loan to the rugby club, this was reported to Council at the meeting on 14 November 2017. The corrections had been made and submitted to the External Auditor. It was disappointing that these corrected presentational issues had again been referred to in the Issues Arising Report, as they had been fully dealt with.

BDO LLP had now completed the audit for year ending 31 March 2017. Their report noted that the information submitted within the Council's Annual Return was in accordance with proper practices and no matters had come to their attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements had not been met.

It was a legal requirement for the Council to accept the External Auditor's Report and note the proposed action in relation to the Issues Arising Report.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The 2016-17 Annual Return, including the External Auditor's Certificate and Report, be approved and accepted.***
- ii) The External Auditor's Issues Arising Report be reviewed and the proposed action noted.***

Cllr Dixon left the meeting during discussion of this item.

9 Community Led Housing

Cllr Austin presented an Interim Report on the progress made since the Council meeting on 15 August 2017 when it was agreed to support the investigation of Community Led Housing.

Since then discussions had taken place both within the working group and with SODC Housing. The meeting with SODC had been positive and it had become clear that funds may be available for revenue items if a site was identified. SODC would also consider supporting a housing needs analysis though this would have to incorporate the other market towns in the District.

Cllr Austin proposed that the three immediate next steps as set out in the report be approved.

RESOLVED that:

- i) Approval be given for the formation and launch of a Community Land Trust, the identification of a potential site and to carry out a housing needs analysis.*

10 P17/S4415/FUL – Land off Rycote Lane Christmas Hill, Rycote Lane nr Thame

Relocation of Thame Livestock Market with buildings to accommodate agricultural sales, lairage, administrative offices, welfare facilities, business units, and associated external works to include highway access, roadways, vehicle parking, vehicle washing and other ancillary works.

During discussion of this item the following comments / concerns were raised. The increase in traffic due to the development along the A329 which was already a busy and dangerous road. The road narrowed at some points making it difficult for large lorries to pass travelling in opposite directions. Particular attention should be given to the safety of traffic accessing and egressing the site, turning right onto the A329 and the effect on the junction to Moreton village.

The Farmers Market should not be allowed to operate until the approved landscaping is completed.

The Thame Market Charter did not allow a market to take place within a certain radius of the town, this application falls within the parish of Great Haseley.

Members agreed that the Officers present would collate the comments and forward them to the District Planning Officer.

11 P17/S4441/O – Land North of Rycote Lane, nr Thame

The erection of up to 180,000 sq ft (up to 16,722 sqm) of B2/B8 with ancillary B1(a) and B1(c) together with parking, drainage, landscaping (structural and incidental) and highway works.

During discussion of this item the following comments / concerns were raised. The increase in traffic due to the development along the A329 which was already a busy and dangerous road. The road narrowed at some points making it difficult for large lorries to pass travelling in opposite directions. Particular attention should be given to the safety of traffic accessing and egressing the site, turning right onto the A329 and the effect on the junction to Moreton village.

The traffic concerns raised could easily apply to any of the arterial roads around the town.

There was a need to provide employment land in the town to replace that lost through permitted development rights and to ensure existing companies had the opportunity to expand and remain in the town. A condition should be placed on any new employment development that removes permitted development rights.

It was a pity this unplanned development could not wait until a proper consultation had taken place and be included in the next TNP. However, employment space was needed now and if not provided there was a danger that Thame could lose its character and become a dormitory town with residents having to travel further afield to work.

The buffer zone on the site along the A329 should be widened to lessen the impact of the proposed development. Parking provision should be increased to avoid overspill onto the surrounding verges.

Concern was raised regarding the creep of employment sites along the A329 and into the countryside. The creep may be attributed to the high level of control the TNP has had since its adoption. The parish of Great Haseley did not have a Neighbourhood Plan which left it open to speculative applications.

Sustainability, how easy will it be to walk or cycle to the site?

Members agreed that the Officers present would collate the comments made and forward them to the District Planning Officer.

12 Annual Town Meeting Plan

The Town Clerk had circulated an email to Councillors on 27 March 2018 suggesting that the Annual Town Meeting would provide an opportunity to hold a workshop to launch the new Thame Neighbourhood Plan.

The Town Clerk had also received a suggestion that the County Council is invited to give a presentation on how they maintain the highway and pavements.

A further suggestion was made at the meeting to invite Thames Valley Police to give a presentation. The Town Clerk reported that an invitation had already been extended to the Police to attend the Council meeting on 27 February 2018 to answer questions from the Council and members of the public but confirmation had yet to be received. Councillors suggested that in the event that the police were unable to attend an invitation to attend a Council meeting is sent to the Police & Crime Commissioner.

It was agreed that the format of the Annual Town meeting be as discussed.

13 Thame Town Music Festival

A request had been received from the organisers of the Thame Town Music Festival for practical support for this year's event, similar to that provided in 2017. A summary of the practical help requested was set out in the report.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The request for practical support beyond the £5,000 allocated budget for the Thame Town Music Festival to be held on Saturday 14 July 2018 be approved.***

The meeting concluded at 8.32pm [An extension beyond 8.30pm had been agreed]

Signed
Chairman, 27 February 2018