



# COLCHESTER ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON: Thursday 23 September at 7pm by Zoom**

**PRESENT:** John Gili-Ross (Chairman), Robert Johnstone (Vice Chairman), Petra Palfreyman (CALC Clerk), Carol Harbach, Jo Beighton-Ems, Roger Mannion, Lance Williams, Simon Dougherty, Emma Coney, Mick Mead, Brian Butcher, Alan Frost, Tim Frances.

## **1. TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES**

Chris Stevenson, Maggie Holmes, John Akker, Dan Jordan

## **2. TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON: Thursday 23 June 2021**

All agreed.

## **3. MEETING TOPICS & GUEST SPEAKER:**

A talk from Paul Dundas, Leader of Colchester Borough Council – The new administration's aims and ambitions for the future of Colchester Borough.

Paul thanked CALC for being invited and provided the following information.

Paul was and still is a Parish Councillor (for Stanway) before becoming a Borough Councillor 3 ½ years ago and becoming the leader of the Conservatives 18 months ago. The appointment to leader of Colchester Borough Council was in May 2021.

CBC is now trying to get back to some sort of normality since COVID 19 started. The Council is reviewing finances due to a huge decrease in revenue from parking, leisure facilities and commercial rents. Funds are tight but the Council is pleased how the Town Centre has bounced back with occupancy rates, and car parks are now being used.

Leisure World membership has fallen as many direct debits were cancelled during lockdown so there is now a marketing drive to encourage membership.

The priority is to ensure the core services are met, properly funded, and ideally improved where possible. There is a recruitment campaign and focus on retaining staff, as some of the waste drivers have been headhunted to go and work as lorry drivers.

Any spare funds are being directed into Neighbourhood Services, cleanliness, and bin collections. A Capital investment of £1M will be made at the Shrub End depot which will save the team's time.

The Council are working on plans for the Queens Platinum jubilee, and it is hoped this will be a good opportunity to encourage visitors to towns and parishes.

There is a £20M town deal which they are deciding how to spend as the criteria is strict, but the priority is to get the money spent appropriately. They hope to be able to bid for a £20M levelling up fund for which CBC are middle priority. This could be used for transport and possibly a new bus station.

CBC have just had the modifications back for Section 2 of the Local Plan which is going to consultation shortly. Towns & Parishes should make sure they get their comments in.

CBC want to work with ECC and Towns & Parishes to build good working relations, ensuring the right authority are doing what they should, which will help everyone.

A question-and-answer session followed:

Q – Are the electric scooters an ongoing project.

A – They are an ECC project and the current trial runs until March 2022. After that date it will depend on funding and if the county wants to continue with the scheme. JGR stated Police were not generally in favour of them because of the various issues, such as safety.

Q – How will relationships between CBC and ECC be improved and what areas of work currently overlap.

A – The Councils are trying to meet and talk more. The CBC owned future regeneration projects in the town centre are Vineyard Gate, Britannia Car Park and ECC own area around St Botolph's - these are good examples of this. There is some S106 money available for these areas so it will be important to masterplan and create a joined-up project.

Q – CBC Planning department gave excellent support to West Bergholt Parish Council with Neighbourhood Plan issues.

A – Darius Laws, portfolio holder has a few schemes which will be advised following a meeting on 30 September 2021. PD has read the planning appeal decision for West Bergholt and was displeased with the decision. The Council are there to offer support wherever they can.

Q – For previous celebrations, one parish was charged £100 to use their Village Green. Will there be some concessions for issues like this for the Queens Jubilee?

A – Every effort will be made to help towns and parishes organise events

Q – What are your views on devolving further powers to towns and parishes that want it.

A – The devolution scheme has not been well received but PD is generally in favour of it. CBC have transferred some freeholds of properties or land for zero cost, where the parish

has been maintaining it. RJ advised the scheme is currently being relaunched and offered to Councils.

RJ advised that a diversion was made in Highwoods Country park so a S106 agreement for phase 1 at Several could be achieved by building a cycle route. The cycle route was never built but the footpath was made shorter and has not been reinstated.

JGR asked if the plans for the Queens Platinum Jubilee is still in progress. Some parishes would like to start the celebrations in February and PD will see if the Culture Portfolio holder, Darius Laws, can speak at a future CALC meeting.

Cllr Dundas said that he is always happy to talk at Town & Parish meetings and would like to attend future meetings

JGR thanks Cllr Dundas for attending the meeting.

#### **4.TO RECEIVE REPORTS**

**a. TREASURES REPORT –** The clerks' fees of £218.00 for the previous quarter to September 2021, were agreed. The last bank statement held to 19 August 2021, showed a balance of £1630.50. Only four members remain unpaid, but they may be shown on the next statement. A credit of £174.00 against hall hire costs at Marks Tey Village Hall is also held. Proposed JGR 2<sup>nd</sup> – MM

**b. LOCAL HIGHWAYS PANEL –** Sonia Church gave a VAS (vehicle activated sign) presentation to advise rules for a VAS system. If a Council would like a VAS, the cost is down to the Council to pay, instal and maintain it, via an approved contractor. Councils can agree to share a mobile VAS between them but there are costs involved in moving it. An application for a VAS can also be made via the LHP but the waiting list is generally about 2 years. The LHP budget of £500000 has been increased by £200000 to £700000. There is £631000 worth of schemes on the list. Funds have already been allocated as follows: £295000 for cycling projects, £79500 for walking projects, passenger transport £37000 and £92500 for Public Rights of Way projects/improvements. A list of all the schemes is available on the LHP website.

**c. GOVERNANCE REPORT –** nothing to report

**d. EALC EXECUTIVE –** The AGM was held today, and a report will follow from the EALC. Next year's AGM will be held at Highlands House.

#### **5.INFORMATION SHARING**

The CIF Fund panel will meet in late November 2021. The Emergency Fund for Towns and Parishes has almost been spent. Langham Parish Council are thinking of arranging a fly past for the Queens Platinum jubilee and is waiting to receive more information about availability of the planes.

**DATES OF NEXT MEETING**

Date – 2 December 2021

Location – By Zoom

Time – 7pm

Speaker – To be decided

There being no further business the Chairman closed the meeting at 9pm and thanked everyone for attending and providing valuable feedback.

Signed..... Date

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