



### CABINET

**5.30pm to 7.07pm**

**12 October 2011**

**Present:** Councillors Arthur (chair), Waters (vice chair), Bremner, Brociek-Coulton, Gihawi, MacDonald and Westmacott

**Also present:** Councillors Lubbock, Stephenson

#### **1. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

##### **Question 1 - Mrs Sue Skipper**

Mrs Skipper thanked the council for the change of direction at the last minute however the chief executive officer explained that no decision had yet been taken and that a decision would be taken at this meeting and the only change was the additional options to be considered.

Mrs Skipper read out her question. The Britons Arms is undoubtedly a "heritage asset" both in itself and in relationship to the wider community. It has been described as "of international importance" (Prof. Brian Ayers) because of its construction and, in particular, to its thatched roof it is a fragile building. In 2010 the thatch was deemed to have only one year left of its functioning life.

There are three main objectives for the full realisation of heritage Capital.

- 1) Public access
- 2) Appropriate usage
- 3) Well funded, expert maintenance

The first of these two objectives, public access and appropriate usage are already in place, the third, well funded, expert maintenance is fully covered by the proposals of Norwich Preservation Trust and Norwich Historic Churches Trust which are before members this evening.

Our question is; how could these three objectives be met if, against the advice of heritage experts, the Britons Arms is sold at auction?

Councillor Waters thanked Mrs Skipper for her question; he explained that a considerable amount of work had been done and that there had been a flurry of activity exploring a new option which had only recently come forward. He said that the Britons Arms was a building of important heritage. However he reminded people that it was also a commercial asset for the council. He explained that it was in need of significant repair which is why the council had to consider all options. He said that

times are difficult for council tax payers in the city and any solution had to be cost effective to protect their interests. He emphasised that the heritage of this building had been central to the discussion to secure the best outcome, all work had been carried out with due diligence and with the advice of heritage experts. He expressed his disappointment that people had been given the impression that this had not been the case with some suggestions being made that the building would come under threat if the council sold the building.

The potential to transfer the building to a partnership that could carry out the necessary repairs had only just come to light and it was appropriate to consider this option.

**Question 2 - Ms Debbie Payne,**

Why is the Briton Arms, with its unique historical status and public support, identified for sale now ahead of many of the other commercial properties in the council property portfolio that could be put forward for sale instead?

Councillor Waters explained that the need to repair this building had brought this to the forefront and the offer to work with the Norwich Preservation Trust had only recently been received.

**Question 3 - Vicky Manthorpe, of The Norwich Preservation Trust**

Ms Manthorpe was not at the meeting but her question was accepted and read out.

Will the city council speak to the Norwich Society and Norwich Preservation Trust about the future of its stock of historic assets?

Councillor Waters confirmed that the city council does consider the importance of its historic buildings and that previous successful partnership working has taken place between the city council and the Norwich Preservation Trust, giving the work done on the guildhall as an example.

**2. PETITIONS**

A petition had been received from Mrs Skipper which read:

"If you believe Britons Arms should be put into the care of Norwich Preservation Trust for the benefit of the people of Norwich and the local community and NOT sold at auction, please sign below:".

Councillor Waters said that there was obviously a lot of interest locally and from further afield, approximately 40% of signatures were from Norwich residents. He explained that as a council a solution had to be found which would not be a burden on tax payers and had this new option not come forward other options would have had to be considered. He accepted the petition and thanked people for involving themselves in the democratic process and said he hoped that the decision to be made would protect the asset into the future.

**3. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED** to exclude the public from the meeting below on the grounds contained in the relevant paragraphs of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

**\*4. DISPOSAL OF INVESTMENT PROPERTY, NORWICH CITY CENTRE  
(PARAGRAPH 3)**

The chair brought this item to the beginning of the agenda so that an early decision could be made known to the members of the public who had attended items 1 and 2.

Councillor Lubbock who was in attendance declared a personal interest in this item as she is the council's representative on the Norwich Preservation Trust.

Councillor Waters introduced the annexed report and circulated a supplementary report with revised recommendations reflecting an offer of working in partnership with heritage bodies. He explained that there had been extensive negotiations with the tenants who had not signed a new tenancy agreement when the previous one expired and that disputes with the council had led to them currently owing more than £12,000 in rent. He said that the tenants had been given the first refusal to buy the building before any further options had been considered but they had not wanted to buy it.

He said that when considering going to auction there had been a lot of interest and it is believed that a price of £250,000 had been achievable with an additional commitment from the prospective buyer to extensively upgrade the building. Therefore the decision to go to open market had been a sensible one.

The decision to go to auction had unleashed an extra range of options and the recommendations on the supplementary report had come to light as a result. The Norwich Churches Trust has said that they might be able to find grant funding. The lead leaseholder would be the Norwich Preservation Trust who would have to have a new tenancy with the existing tenant.

He said that the tenant had made an offer last Friday to buy the building but the offer had fallen far short of the value achievable on the open market and the liability for the £300,000 repair bill would have fallen to them. He said that had the Norwich Historic Churches Trust and the Norwich Preservation trust not come up with this new proposal he would have recommended to cabinet that the building should be sold at auction.

In reply to questions and comments from Councillors Stephenson and Lubbock, Councillor Waters said that the offer had been received at the last minute; serious repairs were urgently required and there was extensive regulation in place to protect against inappropriate development.

Councillor Arthur said that that the new recommendations were the result of a much hard work by both officers and Councillor Waters.

**RESOLVED**

- (1) to submit a grant application to English Heritage for funding to undertake structural and associated works to 9 Elm Hill; and
- (2) subject to the approval of this application, negotiations be concluded with the Norwich Preservation Trust for them to take a full repairing head lease on this property for a period not exceeding 15 years on terms and conditions to be agreed by the Director of Regeneration & Development, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources.

(The public were readmitted to the meeting and advised of the decision above.)

#### **4. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2011 subject to the following two amendments from Councillor Stephenson.

- (1) Item 3 - The first sentence of the final paragraph should be amended to:

“Councillor Stephenson said that it was good that £400,000 had been saved from the windows replacement programme but she asked whether consideration had been given to more window replacement rather than the provision of bin stores.”

- (2) Item 9 – The second sentence to be amended to read:

“She also expressed her disappointment that the council would not be getting income from the fitting of photovoltaic panels. The council’s income would be higher if a private company were not involved in this way.”

#### **5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Bremner declared a prejudicial interest in item 9 on the agenda, the Earlham Hall area, vision and development document.

#### **6. QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Councillor Arthur, leader of the council, introduced the annexed report and said that the new telephone system had gone live and early feedback was very positive. She said that the VOIDS had been reported as 27.69 days however this was incorrect and should read 34.24.

The head of strategy and performance said that there were two errors in the reported figures due to the collection cut off period and apologised for this. The figure referred to by Councillor Arthur above was the BVPI212 (average void turnaround time) which was quoted on page 17 section 2.1 and also on page 61. The second error was the HLPI19 (% reduction in antisocial behaviour cases) on page 61 which was quoted as -6.26 and should read -3.25.

Concerns were raised by Councillor Lubbock about the delays in the time to deal with minor planning applications as she has been receiving complaints and wanted to know if it was purely down to the staffing issues or if other problems had been identified through the “lean” review that has been taking place.

The head of planning explained that the problems had started last year with the staffing issues and this had been addressed by transferring staff from other areas of work. This had resulted in a slow clearance of the backlog. Quarter 2 results were substantially better than quarter 1 and it was expected that quarter 3 would be much better. The work on reviewing processes alongside the staffing issues had not resulted in major changes yet but these changes will start to come in soon. The work done on front end processes earlier in the year had resulted in improvements with planning applications being processed within one week of receipt; however it was acknowledged that there are still some problems later in the process still to be addressed.

**RESOLVED** to:

- (1) note progress against the Corporate Plan priorities
- (2) agree to stop detailed reporting of those corporate priorities that are complete as shown in paragraph 3.1

## **7. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2011/12**

Councillor Waters, deputy leader and cabinet member for resources, introduced the report.

**RESOLVED** to note the financial position on the revenue account for the period April 2011 to July 2011.

## **8. ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY**

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for planning and transport, introduced the annexed report and acknowledged the excellent work that had already taken place and the key achievements from the last strategy.

Councillor Stephenson said that while the Joint Core Strategy (JCS) includes the Northern Distributor Road (NDR), it will result in more carbon emissions, and asked what was proposed to mitigate this. She also said that some parts of the JCS were deleted during its Examination in Public and asked whether the cabinet had taken this into account.

Councillor Bremner said that the NDR comes from the Norwich Area Transportation Strategy (NATS) and this includes cycling and pedestrian initiatives, bus lanes to reduce car usage reducing car pollution. There are risks with the JCS but there was work being done on back up plans and if the JCS does fall it would have knock on effects.

The director of regeneration and development said that it was expected that the judicial review should be resolved by the end of the year.

**RESOLVED** to approve the Environmental Strategy 2011-2014.

## **9. DRAFT NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK**

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for planning and transport, introduced the report.

Councillor Stephenson said on behalf of the green party that this was a good response and asked if the response to the question “The policy on planning for transport takes the right approach. Do you agree?” could be changed from disagree to strongly disagree.

The head of planning explained that because there was some recognition of sustainability in this section it was not wholly negative and therefore the response had been disagree on these grounds.

After some discussion Councillor Bremner said that another question where the answer was strongly disagree may be diminished if this were changed and therefore it was agreed no change should be made. He thanked for their work on this consultation.

**RESOLVED** to:

- (1) submit this report and the attached appendix as the response of Norwich City Council to the consultation on the draft National Planning Policy Framework;
- (2) delegate authority to the Head of Planning, in consultation with the portfolio holder for planning and transport, to make further representations and suggest detailed wording in support of the points raised in the response.

## **10. EARLHAM HALL AREA – VISION AND DEVELOPMENT DOCUMENT**

(Councillor Bremner left the meeting having declared a prejudicial interest earlier.)

Graham Nelson, head of planning services, introduced the report.

The chief executive officer said that the development of the Earlham Hall areas is key to the economic strategy.

**RESOLVED** to:

- (1) endorse the Vision and Development Document for Earlham Hall
- (2) take it into consideration as part of the evidence base to support the preparation of the Sites Allocation and Development Management Policies Development Plan Documents.

(Councillor Bremner rejoined the meeting.)

## **11. INCREASING PARTICIPATION IN RECYCLING**

Councillor Westmacott, cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods, introduced the report.

Councillor Stephenson said that this was a good project but expressed concerns because the £60,000 was a definite spend but asked where the money was coming from if the projected income was not realised.

The director of regeneration and development said that there is room to improve contamination rates. The improvement would deliver increased income and he was confident it could be achieved.

The deputy chief executive said that the money would come from cash flow and if the increase in income is not realised there is a contingency budget available.

The director of regeneration and development said that this was an invest to save strategy and it was a good opportunity to not just increase recycling rates and recover the cost but to be in profit.

Councillor Lubbock agreed that it was a good idea but said that there was a need to embed the idea of recycling, get the key messages over and not keep injecting money.

During discussion it was suggested that all councillors should be involved to get the message to people.

**RESOLVED** to approve the appointment of two waste and recycling officers on a 1 year fixed term contract with the aim of increasing recycling rates to 55% and to increase participation rates in all our recycling schemes to above 50%

## **12. AWARD OF CONTRACT FOR BUSINESS TRAVEL (TAXI SERVICES)**

Councillor Waters, deputy leader and cabinet member for resources, introduced the report.

**RESOLVED** To award a contract for business travel (taxi services) to 1<sup>st</sup> Goldstar.

## **13. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT**

The leader of the council said that she wanted to record her thanks to the people involved at Markham Tower after the recent fire. She said councils practice dealing with major incidents and she had recently witnessed Norwich City Council officers pulling together in a real incident and commended all those who helped to get all residents temporarily re-homed so quickly.

## **14. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED** to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of items 18-21 below on the grounds contained in the relevant paragraphs of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

**\*15. AWARD OF CONTRACT FOR COUNCIL TENANTS' CONTENTS INSURANCE (PARAGRAPH 3)**

Councillor Macdonald, cabinet member for housing, introduced the report which she said was timely considering the recent fire at Markham Tower.

In reply to a question from Councillor Stephenson the head of procurement and service improvement explained that the commission would cover the council's internal administration costs of collection and handling payments.

**RESOLVED to**

- (1) approve the commitment to renew the tenants contents insurance scheme contract
- (2) delegate authority to the director of regeneration and development, in consultation with portfolio holders, to award the contract subject to a satisfactory evaluation process.

CHAIR