

COUNCIL MEETING – 25 FEBRUARY 2020
REPORT OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

5 February 2020

Present: Councillors Griffiths (Chairman), Allebone, Bell, Carr, Emerson, Francis, Graves, Gough, Harrington, Henley, Morrall, Partridge-Underwood, Scarborough and M Waters.

Also present: Mrs L Elliott (Managing Director), Mr S Darcy (Director/Section 151 Officer), Miss K Denton, Mrs V Jessop, Mr A Piper and Mr E Symons (Assistant Directors), Mr R Watson (Senior Revenue Officer) and Mrs C A Mundy (Democratic Services Officer).

(Councillors G Lawman and L Lawman attended as observers).

1. APOLOGIES

An apology was received from Councillor Weatherill.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED to note that in accordance with the Localism Act 2011, the council's code of conduct and the council's constitution, the following declaration was made:

Councillor	Minute no.	Reason
Bell	7 – Nene Valley Crematorium Annual report	Registerable Director of Nene Valley Crematorium

3. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 17 DECEMBER 2019

The minutes of the resources committee of 17 December 2019 were received.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the resources committee held on 17 December 2019, be confirmed and signed.

4. IRRECOVERABLE COUNCIL TAX, HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS, NON DOMESTIC RATES AND SUNDRY DEBTS

The annexed circulated report, with exempt appendices, of the director was received to request approval of the write off, of irrecoverable debts.

Appended to the report were the following:

- Appendix A Council tax cases;
- Appendix B Housing benefit overpayment cases;
- Appendix C Non-domestic rate cases.

The report detailed the total amount of irrecoverable debts as shown below:

Council tax £2,180.47;
Housing benefit overpayments £8,957.77;
Non-domestic rates £8,634.01.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) approval be given to write off the sum of £19,772.25 of irrecoverable council tax, housing benefit overpayments and non-domestic rate balances;
- (ii) it be noted that the sum of £23,154.08 had been written off under the delegated powers of the section 151 officer.

5. MULTI-STOREY CAR PARK

The annexed circulated report of the director was received to update members on the multi-storey car park project and to seek a decision on how to progress the project to the next stage.

Appended to the report was an up-to-date cost plan for the project. This detailed that the additional sum of £2,326.269 was required.

The report referred to the previous decisions made by the committee in June and September 2019. Morgan Sindall (MS) had been appointed to deliver the project as they had experience of developing car parks. They had procured a number of concrete surveys in order to allow for a more accurate estimate of the cost of the works. The estimated budget of £3,026.675 did not include sufficient allowance for design and project management fees and the surveys identified that the costs, for some of the repairs, would be higher than estimated.

MS advised that the increased costs were predominantly due to the size (area and depth) of the concrete repairs, which added £473k to the cost of the project, with a further cost of £97k for design fees, project management fees and contingency. Quotations for the work had already been sought by MS.

Following discussions held between the council, Wellingborough Norse, the police and the owners of the Swansgate Centre, further improvements had been suggested to improve the car park safety, anti-social behaviour and to generally improve the environment of the car park. These items were detailed within the report.

Due to the additional work required the commencement of the work had been delayed. If approval, to progress the refurbishment of the car park, was given by members works could commence in March 2020.

Four options were detailed in the report, as summarised below:

- Option 1 Do not progress this project further;
- Option 2 Progress with a partial scheme within budget;
- Option 3 Progress with necessary works;
- Option 4 Progress with necessary works and additional items.

The chairman welcomed Lindsay Tickner, Swansgate Centre Manager, to the meeting; she had written a letter of support for the refurbishment of the car park and also addressed the committee to give her support to the development and considered that it was essential that work commenced as soon as possible. Ms Tickner commented that customers were often stranded in the lifts. The toilets needed refurbishment, the stairwells were dirty and cars had been vandalised and damaged; the improvements could only benefit the users of the centre.

The chairman also welcomed Rob Cant from Morgan Sindall who was attending the meeting to assist with any technical questions from the committee.

The chairman read letters of support received from the Castle Theatre, Northants Police, and Stephen Mold the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner.

The chairman opened up the debate by asking Mr Cant if an alternative option would be to demolish the current car park and rebuild it completely.

Mr Cant explained that this would be considerably more expensive and that it would result in car parking being lost for a lengthy period of time. The refurbishment work would give a minimum of a further 30 years of life if the work was carried out at a much lower cost than a re-build.

Councillors raised their concern that the previous survey report in 2017 had not raised the issue about the concrete and also queried the future life expectancy of 30 years, as previous indications had been that it would last for a further 50 years.

Members also asked if the work on the concrete was on all floors. Mr Cant confirmed that it would be the bottom metre of each structural pillar on each floor. Mr Cant was asked if his company were specialists in this field; he explained that his company had previously carried out refurbishments but specialist companies were used for different aspects; for example they would use a company who specialised in CCTV for that part of the project. For this project three specialist companies would be engaged should the council agree to proceed with the refurbishment.

Members asked when work would start and conclude. Mr Cant expected work to start in March 2020 and conclude by January 2021. During the refurbishment the car park would remain open with phasing of each floor, starting with the top two floors.

A query was raised over the safety fencing on the top floor of the car park and whether this could be enhanced. There were no plans to change the fencing as it was already high to purposefully prevent anyone from jumping or falling. The police had been consulted on this, other security measures, and prevention. Members queried whether the police would be helping financially with the refurbishment and were informed that funding was not expected.

With regard to anti-social behaviour officers were asked what would be put in place to alleviate this. It was confirmed that the lighting would be improved and there would be additional security and CCTV which would make a substantial difference. It was expected that this would be monitored by Northampton Borough Council.

Members queried why options 1 to 4 of appendix 1 were not included in the original plan as they considered they should have been; and whether the car park would pass as an asset to the new unitary council of North Northamptonshire.

The assistant director clarified that the original report in 2017 gave more emphasis to the repair work, rather than the enhancement and refurbishment of the car park. He also stated that It was expected that the car park would become an asset of North Northamptonshire Council.

Members also raised issues about the reduced current opening times of the car park, which they hoped would be extended once the refurbishment was complete. They also expressed concern over the frequency that the lifts were out of operation. Officers confirmed that opening times could be extended in the future once the refurbishment was completed. The lifts would be improved within the refurbishment to ensure less 'downtime'.

In summing up officers clarified that the car park was no longer fit for purpose, little proactive maintenance had been carried out over the years and improvements were urgently required. Whilst users did not pay for parking, all council tax payers across the borough funded it indirectly. There was a social and economic benefit, to the town centre and people of the borough, should the refurbishment of the car park be approved.

The chairman thanked officers and Mr Cant for answering the questions raised.

A lengthy debate ensued.

Some members expressed their concern over the large increase in the cost and considered that the information about the additional work to the concrete had been presented very late in the day and this had resulted in a huge

increase in the cost. Whilst they were aware that this was capital expenditure, they had not expected this escalation and felt uncomfortable with agreeing to such a large increase and wanted assurances that no further monies would be requested.

Other members considered that the car park was in urgent need of refurbishment and that the improvements needed to be made as soon as possible, with additional lighting, security measures and sprinkler systems being extremely important following the recent issues in the car park. Whilst the additional expenditure was a disappointment the issue with the concrete had to be resolved, with the work being treated as an investment in the future for the town. They concurred that the refurbishment needed to commence as soon as possible, for the benefit of all users, and that this was the 'gateway' to Wellingborough town centre and often the first experience of Wellingborough by the public.

The leader commented that the council was in the fortunate position of having sufficient capital reserves to fund this refurbishment and considered that the council owed it to the people of Wellingborough to leave a legacy of a refurbished and safe car park for all users.

The chairman put the following motion to the vote:

- (i) that approval be given to option 4, to progress the necessary work and additional items, as detailed in the report and appendix thereto, at an estimated total cost of £5,352,944;
- (ii) that agreement be given to the inclusion of additional resources of £2,326,269 to the current capital programme to enable completion of this project.

The motion was put to the vote and declared carried with ten votes in favour, two votes against and two abstentions.

RESOLVED that approval be given to

- (i) option 4, to progress the necessary work and additional items, as detailed in the report and appendix thereto, at an estimated total cost of £5,352,944;
- (ii) the inclusion of additional resources of £2,326,269 to the current capital programme to enable completion of this project.

(Councillors Henley and Scarborough asked that their vote against the motion be recorded; and Councillors Emerson and Francis asked that their abstention from voting also be recorded.)

6. PROPERTY MATTERS

The annexed circulated report of the director was received to update members on the progress of property matters.

Appended to the report was an update on the current projects.

The assistant director gave a verbal update, confirming that the commuted sum had finally been received for the adoption of the roads and sewers at Redhill Farm.

The report made reference to the former site of the Croyland Road swimming pool. Planning consent for the development of 20 dwellings had been approved and a preferred bidder had been selected to develop the site. The proposed developer, a housing association, wished to develop the site with 100% affordable housing, and increase the number of housing units to 24.

The council's policy requires only 30% affordable housing. Development of the site with 100% affordable housing would reduce the residual land value and therefore the capital receipt from the freehold disposal. The council could justify agreeing to a reduced residual value for the land in order to increase the supply of affordable homes.

The report also referenced the site of Doddington Road car park, on which 12 flats were proposed, which was to be transferred and developed by Greatwell Homes. Greatwell Homes intended to deliver the consented scheme, and were working towards the detail of tenure mix and nomination rights. This would also contribute to the supply of affordable housing in the town centre.

Members asked if the planning consent for Doddington Road included a condition about the exterior of the building being in keeping with the surrounding area of Swanspool. Officers would clarify this with the planning department and advise members accordingly.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the progress of the projects as detailed in appendix one be noted;
- (ii) the disposal of the site of the former Croyland Road swimming pool be approved, to the preferred bidder on their terms as detailed in the report;
- (iii) the disposal of the site of the Doddington Road car park, to Greatwell Homes, on terms to be agreed, be approved;
- (iv) the detailed terms of the disposal of both sites be delegated to the assistant director (corporate landlord)

(Councillor Bell left the meeting having declared an interest on the following item.)

7. NENE VALLEY CREMATORIUM – ANNUAL REPORT

The annexed circulated report of the managing director was received in relation to the submission of the annual report of Wellingborough Bereavement Services Ltd, as appended. The report also set out the proposed fees for the coming year.

Members asked for clarity on the definition of a 'simple service' compared to 'no service'. The managing director confirmed that a simple service was very short, and lasted around ten minutes, the crematorium had trialled this for a short period and it had proved to be successful. 'No service' could be, for example, when a church service had been held prior to the cremation.

Praise was extended to all involved with the crematorium, particularly Tracy Lawrence and all her team, previous council employees involved at the inception of the project, and the current managing director and assistant director at the council for the excellent work that had been achieved and which would be ongoing. Members asked that it be resolved that the Board and all staff be thanked and congratulated.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the report of Wellingborough Bereavement Services Ltd be noted;
- (ii) the Board and all staff at Nene Valley Crematorium be thanked and congratulated for their work.

R1 RECOMMENDED that the fees for 2020-2021 be set as follows:

- (a) the core fee for cremation remain at £899.00;
- (b) there be an increase to the 'no service' fee from £675.00 to £699.00;
- (c) that a 'simple service' cremation fee of £600.00 be included in the fees.

(Councillor Bell returned to the meeting.)

8. REVENUE BUDGET 2020-21 AND THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN PROJECTIONS

The annexed circulated report of the Section 151 officer was received to provide members with detailed proposals for the 2020-2021 revenue budget, together with an update forecast for subsequent financial years.

The report also included a proposal in respect of council tax for 2020-2021 in line with the draft budget position, previously presented at the resources committee in December 2019, and a recommendation for future years' council tax increases.

Appended to the report were the following:

- Appendix 1 Medium term financial projections 2019-20 to 2022-23;
- Appendix 2 2020-2021 draft opening budget for consultation;
- Appendix 3 Draft fees and charges schedule;
- Appendix 4 Section 25 report

The report noted that the council had historically made significant savings on its revenue budget each year but had consistently relied upon its reserves for support. All service and corporate budgets had again been reviewed for 2020-21 and this had resulted in the opportunity to propose a balanced budget that would not require any use of reserves.

The report also detailed the medium term financial outlook; central government funding; the new homes bonus; council tax; future funding changes; fees and charges and the 2019-20 forecast outturn and 2020-21 budget.

Details of the recommended community funds, to be allocated for 2020-21, were presented at 6.4 of the report.

Members raised various points of clarity, particularly in regard to cemetery fees, as detailed in appendix 3 to the report as they considered them to be high.

Councillor Scarborough proposed an amendment that the cemetery charges be referred back for consideration, which was seconded by Councillor Emerson.

The amendment was put to the vote and declared lost with five votes in favour and seven against.

The chairman put the motion to the vote, which was declared carried.

R2 RECOMMENDED that approval be given to:

- (I) an increase in the council's average band d council tax, in 2020-2021, of £5.00 (4.33%), as allowed within the referendum limits announced;
- (II) the revenue budget for 2020-21, and the financial projections, both as appended to the report, and following consideration of the S151 officer's section 25 report;
- (III) the fees and charges schedule, as appended to the report.

9. CAPITAL PROGRAMME MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The annexed circulated report of the section 151 officer was received in relation to the capital financing available for the medium term, and the list of proposed capital schemes.

The report formed part of the council's capital strategy process and provided the committee with the opportunity to review the list of proposed capital schemes and agree the level of funding for the capital programme.

The funding was based on the assumption that the council would, at any one time, maintain a balance of £5m in its capital resources.

Appended to the report were the following:

Appendix A Capital outturn report to 31 12 2019

Appendix B List of proposed capital schemes

Appendix C Summary of proposed capital schemes

The report detailed the re-profiling, as requested by budget managers, for the Wellingborough Heritage and shop front grant initiative and BCW's property renovations (shops and other buildings).

Following a recent inspection, a supplementary budget request for an additional £74k for Swanspool roof extension had been received, for additional works, including the replacement of all insulation, installation of access hatches and the moving of internal guttering to external areas. The survey also identified a Health and Safety requirement for hand and knee rails to ensure the safety of contractors when on the roof carrying out repairs and servicing of the air conditioning units.

Capital receipts were detailed along with the main source of these being from the RTB and VAT shelter arrangement with Greatwell Homes following the transfer of the housing stock and sales proceeds from the disposal of surplus property, plant and equipment assets.

It was noted that a significant capital spend would relate to the refurbishment of the multi-storey car park. Members were also advised that additional schemes could be considered and put forward, with emphasis particularly on those that would have long term benefits.

R3 RECOMMENDED that:

- (i) the current 2019-20 outturn report, as appended to the report, along with updates and amendments as detailed within the report, be noted;
- (ii) the list of prioritised capital schemes, as appended at B and C, be approved for release into the current capital programme;
- (iii) the list of proposed capital schemes, as detailed in appendices B and C, be approved for release into the 2020-21 capital programme;

- (iv) capital funding be made available for the financial years 2020-21 to 2023-24, as detailed in the report;
- (v) approval be given to the inclusion of the supplementary budget request, as detailed in the report, in the agreed capital programme.

Chairman

The meeting concluded at 9.15pm.