

COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON

TUESDAY, 19 DECEMBER 2023

Councillors Present: Adrian Abbs, Antony Amirtharaj, Phil Barnett, Dominic Boeck, Jeff Brooks, Patrick Clark, Heather Codling, Martin Colston, Jeremy Cottam (Chairman), Iain Cottingham, Carolyne Culver, Paul Dick, Lee Dillon, Nigel Foot, Denise Gaines, Stuart Gourley, Clive Hooker, Owen Jeffery, Janine Lewis, Ross Mackinnon, Alan Macro, David Marsh, Geoff Mayes, Biyi Oloko, Erik Pattenden, Vicky Poole, Christopher Read, Matt Shakespeare, Louise Sturgess, Clive Taylor, Martha Vickers, Tony Vickers and Howard Woollaston

Councillors Present on Zoom: Dennis Benneyworth and Justin Pemberton

Also Present: Nigel Lynn (Chief Executive), Sarah Clarke (Service Director (Strategy and Governance)), Paul Coe (Interim Executive Director – People), Clare Lawrence (Executive Director - Place), AnnMarie Dodds (Executive Director - Children and Family Services), Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager), Melanie Booth (Group Executive (Lib Dems)), Jake Carpenter (Group Executive (Cons)), Gordon Oliver (Principal Policy Officer (Corporate Policy Support)), Honorary Alderman Tony Linden and Honorary Alderman Graham Pask

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Nick Carter, Councillor Laura Coyle, Councillor Billy Drummond, Councillor Paul Kander, Councillor Jane Langford, Councillor Richard Somner, Councillor Stephanie Steevenson, Councillor Joanne Stewart, Honorary Alderman Graham Bridgman, Honorary Alderman Hilary Cole, Honorary Alderman Adrian Edwards, Honorary Alderman Gordon Lundie, Honorary Alderman Rick Jones and Honorary Alderman Quentin Webb

PART I

63. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

64. Withdrawal of Local Plan Review (C4478)

The Council considered a report (Agenda Item 3) concerning the proposed withdrawal of the West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2022-2039 (LPR) which was submitted to the Secretary of State on 31 March 2023.

The report outlined the current Administration's concerns about the strategic approach of the LPR in planning for new development in the District. These concerns were submitted by the Liberal Democrat Group (in Opposition) through the Regulation 19 consultation. The report explained these concerns which could not be addressed within the context of the current LPR and therefore, the need for the Council to develop a new local plan with an alternative spatial strategy to deliver new development.

The implications and risks associated with the withdrawal of the Local Plan Review in respect of appeals and unplanned development and the associated costs were addressed in the report. The report also outlined the process and financial cost of delivering an alternative new local plan.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Tony Vickers and seconded by Councillor Christopher Read:

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That the Council “withdraw the submitted Local Plan Review 2022-2039; and begin preparations for developing a new Local Plan for West Berkshire that reflects the aspirations of the Administration to plan positively for new development in the District”.

Councillor Jeremy Cottam, Chairman of Council, advised that before a vote was taken on the item, he would be asking the Council’s Monitoring Officer to provide advice regarding correspondence received today from Central Government relating to this item. However, debate would first be permitted on the item in accordance with the proposal that had been moved.

The Chairman then proposed a procedural motion to extend the speaking rights for Councillor Tony Vickers and Councillor Ross Mackinnon to a period of five minutes each (procedural motion 10.6 applied). This was seconded by Councillor Mackinnon.

The procedural motion was put to the vote and declared carried.

The Chairman confirmed that an extended speaking right was not afforded to the Minority Group as the time was allocated on a pro-rata basis.

Councillor Tony Vickers then introduced the report. The implementation of the LPR was one of the most important decisions the Council would take. However, the LPR submitted by the previous Conservative Administration was not an appropriate plan for the District and was objected to by the Liberal Democrat Group at the time. While the LPR did contain many good policies, far too much development was proposed for one site. He felt the submission of the LPR was an irresponsible action of the previous Administration which was taken prior to the May 2023 elections. It lacked serious political input.

Post the elections, the new Administration had explored ways to amend the LPR and avoid its withdrawal, but unfortunately this proved impossible. The withdrawal of the document was the only route available by which to make amendments.

The proposed action showed that the Liberal Democrat Administration was willing to make difficult decisions, but only after considering all available options. Concerns were recognised such as potential cost implications and risks, but it was considered that these could be dealt with.

Councillors on the Executive had already helped to identify in year savings for the Council that would not impact on front line services. These totalled well in excess of the potential costs that could be incurred by withdrawing the LPR. Councillor Vickers added that the costs of withdrawal would be one-off, whereas the benefit achieved from the savings would be felt year on year.

Councillor Vickers stated that he had been hands on with this process from the outset, including attending officer meetings with developers. He held a good knowledge of planning and development systems, and how best to achieve truly sustainable development.

He considered the current system to be ineffective and unfair, particularly on families. Government legislation was the main cause of this. The Council should be striving for high quality and affordable homes for its residents.

It was acknowledged that much of West Berkshire was protected, however the development of a number of houses on one site, by one developer was not appropriate. This was a matter of high concern for the area in question, North East Thatcham.

West Berkshire’s residents deserved better and the Council could do better for its residents. Councillor Vickers therefore proposed withdrawal of the LPR.

Councillor Read spoke as seconder. He was saddened to hear of the interference to the proposals from Central Government which did not take account of views from the people

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of West Berkshire. Objections to the level of development for North East Thatcham were very valid. They included a significant loss of wildlife habitat, a lack of a strategic gap that defined existing communities, increasing pressures on the biodiversity of Bucklebury Common, on the AONB and on local healthcare provision.

Councillor Read considered the interference from Central Government to be an injustice to local democracy.

Councillor Paul Dick had considered how the Local Plan had been developed over time. This had been with much cross-party support. He felt that the Liberal Democrat Group had changed its mind on proposals at a very late stage.

Anxiety had been expressed on the housing numbers proposed. Councillor Dick clarified that 1500 homes were proposed for Thatcham (not 2500) and the two sites in Theale of 60 and 40 homes were not a cause for major concern. The site for 60 dwellings was a former sewerage works.

The report mentioned other concerns including the need for greater use of brownfield sites, however these sites had not been identified previously. A more flexible approach to development was mentioned as were vibrant villages but without any accompanying detail.

It had become apparent that the Government was not going to permit withdrawal of the LPR. He felt there was full awareness amongst the Administration that this would be the outcome making this debate redundant. Councillor Dick felt that this uncertainty was of great concern for West Berkshire's residents.

Councillor Carolyn Culver voiced criticism of both main parties. She felt that the Conservatives should not have submitted the LPR so near to the local elections. While there had been cross party support at Planning Advisory Group, the action should have waited until after the elections.

She considered the Liberal Democrat proposal to be a cynical move with the strong awareness that the Government would block the move to withdraw the LPR. The report expressed concern of increased costs and this showed that the Administration was willing to take risks on this highly important matter. Alternative plans to develop in flood zones contradicted with highlighting flood risks in Thatcham.

The proposal also carried the risk of the Council operating without a Local Plan and updated key policies, such as for climate change.

The benefits of potential development in rural areas were not mentioned.

This proposal served to make members of the public aware of the risks that the Liberal Democrats were prepared to take.

Councillor Culver made reference to the Liberal Democrat's submission on the Regulation 19 consultation to the Planning Inspectorate, specifically on broadband where they stated that internet access was available in rural areas. However, people still needed to meet face to face and gain physical access to local amenities.

Councillor Culver held the view that the Council should retain the submitted LPR and make the best of it.

Councillor Dominic Boeck stated that it was clear that the Liberal Democrats had made a promise they knew they would be unable to keep, i.e. to fix the flawed Local Plan. However, it was not flawed. The LPR was produced following four years of hard work by officers and cross-party Members. This proposal was to cover up for the embarrassment of not keeping this promise with a clear expectation that Central Government would step in to prevent its withdrawal.

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If it had been withdrawn then the Council could have been without a Local Plan and would have no evidence of a five year land supply making it very difficult to defend applications at appeal.

The report outlined the risks, highlighted by Council officers, of withdrawal, including costs in the region of £1.6m to produce a new Local Plan.

The Administration had looked to push development from Newbury and Thatcham to local villages, with potentially no Local Plan in place. Proposals could have followed for the build of 2500 across West Berkshire, including in villages.

Councillor Boeck applauded the move by Central Government as this would keep a level of certainty of much needed homes for the District. The Administration needed to focus on what was best for West Berkshire's residents.

Councillor Owen Jeffery clarified that a viable village should include a public house, a church, a viable school and local employment opportunities reducing the need for residents to commute to work.

Councillor Jeffery pointed out that the LPR would result in the addition of a population the equivalent of Hungerford within Thatcham. Clearly not a good plan.

The Government intervention was a disappointment and was a negation of plans intended to benefit voters. A continuation of the submitted LPR could result in 2500 homes being built within an unsustainable location in Thatcham.

Councillor Alan Macro noted that the proposed 100 homes for Theale would be on top of the 429 dwellings already allocated and approved for the area. Overall, this would amount to a 30% increase in Theale.

Residents wanted Theale to remain a village and not become a town. They wanted to be able to make Doctors appointments and send their children to Theale Primary School. The submitted Local Plan would make this difficult. It would be far better for the LPR to be withdrawn for the benefit of residents in Theale and across West Berkshire.

Councillor Adrian Abbs, whilst on the Executive, was part of the discussion on viable villages. There was a need for a community led system with consultation with the public to assess local need and consider social aspects. The system should not be developer led.

If the LPR was withdrawn then there would be an opportunity to take this forward.

Councillor Heather Codling's Ward consisted of four rural parishes. Heavy traffic was an issue and this pressure would increase if the houses proposed for Thatcham were built. Would it be possible to get a doctors or dentist appointment?

Villages needed to be populated to help keep schools open and avoid closure, maintain pubs and local shops.

Development needed to be spread across the District.

Councillor David Marsh explained that he had previously objected to the draft plan due to concerns over the development continuing to be proposed in Sandford for 1500 homes.

However, he considered there were many positive points. A green thread went through the document, carbon neutral housing was a priority and 40% of housing would be affordable.

The report highlighted a number of risks, including financial, at a time when local authorities were facing financial difficulty. He was unclear on the location of brownfield sites and development in the countryside would be a concern to rural areas. A concern of

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withdrawal was a developer free for all. This would be as unsuitable a situation as what was intended for Sandlesford.

Councillor Biyi Oloko expressed his disappointment at this high risk proposal both as a Councillor and resident. This was a futile debate without purpose. However, the Government intervention was a blessing as it gave residents the opportunity to see how the new Administration was running the Council. There was the cost of £1.6m, but at a time when cuts of £1.75m were being proposed to front line services.

Councillor Howard Woollaston agreed that thankfully the Government had come to the rescue. If not, there would be the situation of a number of developers coming forward with proposals. Those rejected would go to appeal, be difficult to defend without a Local Plan and the Council would likely face costs.

Lambourn was a substantial village with many local amenities. This was not the case for many other villages without the facilities to cope with increased housing.

Councillor Martin Colston stated the LPR had been rushed through despite the concerns of many residents and parishes. There was a flawed settlement hierarchy that focussed on the three main towns at the expense of villages.

Affordable housing was needed in rural areas so that people could afford to live near to their workplaces, rather than having to live in towns and commute back. The right houses were needed in the right places. The LPR was at odds with Council priorities. The Liberal Democrats were fully supportive of this Motion.

Councillor Clive Taylor considered the difficulties from different sides. He held some sympathy with the views of the Administration and the impacts of the LPR for Thatcham and Theale. However, he was concerned at the number of speculative applications that could be received if the LPR was withdrawn and the impact this could have.

Councillor Clive Hooker was disappointed that this step was being proposed, particularly when considering the level of planning experience held by senior Members of the Administration. That experience should have been used to prevent this withdrawal being put forward.

This was an insult to the hard work of the Council's planning officers who had been tasked with finding alternative options. The cost of withdrawing the LPR, alongside proposed budget cuts, was an insult to residents. Councillor Hooker believed this had sown a seed with voters well ahead of the next local elections.

Councillor Janine Lewis felt that more was needed in the Local Plan for the east of the District to help it develop, grow and flourish. While there had been some development in the area, the houses built were expensive. Some local amenities had been lost with others being stretched, such as doctors and dentists. Housing in the AONB was also expensive and not affordable to young people who were having to move away from their families. More needed to be done for them.

Councillor Phil Barnett described the significant changes that had been faced by Greenham over a number of years. These included from the Racecourse development and the ongoing development at Pinchington Lane. This had led to some enhancement of Greenham but a continuation of this practice could lead to Greenham becoming part of an enhanced Newbury.

It was therefore appropriate to seek to accommodate housing in other areas and make smaller villages more sustainable.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon expressed the view that the Liberal Democrats were feigning disappointment at the Government's intervention. He believed this was the gamble the

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Administration had been willing to take, and they had won. Earlier in the day, the Government had intervened to block the LPR withdrawal. The alternative, if this had not taken place, was a 'nuclear' option, wording used by the Administration. The proposed withdrawal was not in the best interests of residents. The only advantage, again in the words of the Administration, was to show residents they were serious.

Councillor Mackinnon did not believe the Liberal Democrats wanted to withdraw the plan. They were sure the Government would intervene and thankfully they had done so.

However, the fact that the Administration were willing to risk this 'explosion' meant they had lost their moral authority. Councillor Mackinnon felt the Liberal Democrats no longer had the right to complain about a lack of money when considering the significant costs of withdrawing the LPR and the ongoing costs this would incur from appeals. He believed the Administration had shown its true colours to voters and this would have a lasting impact.

Councillor Jeff Brooks referred to the accusation of cynicism. His response to that was that putting a plan in place four weeks prior to the local elections was cynical.

It was necessary to withdraw the LPR created by the Conservatives, but this had been stopped by the Conservative Government. The Liberal Democrats did not take the view that the LPR was too difficult to fix. They wanted to fix this flawed plan but had been stopped from doing so.

He gave some examples of why it was considered flawed. There would be no secondary school places for children living in the newly developed homes in Thatcham to attend. The land identified for a secondary school was only big enough to accommodate a relatively small number of children and was not viable.

Pressure on GP surgeries. The site for a GP surgery was not viable. In response to the Regulation 19 consultation, the existing local surgeries and the Integrated Care Board had stated the site as being too small.

This flawed Conservative plan created concerns for thousands of residents, but the Government prevented it from being withdrawn.

Councillor Lee Dillon stated that he had hoped this debate would lead to the opportunity to fix the flawed Local Plan prior to Examination. However, this option had been taken from locally elected Members by the Government.

It was important to consider why it was flawed. The Local Plan should be formed upon a sound evidence base. The LPR looked to development in towns but without associated infrastructure at a time when access to local amenities was already reducing. Urban development would result in greater levels of congestion.

The viability of villages would be put at risk. Local residents could be priced out of local housing. The Administration wanted better for West Berkshire's residents. This would include a manageable growth in towns and the ability for villages to flourish. People should continue to be able to live near to their families. It was important to help the rural economy.

The Liberal Democrats had committed to taking all available action to fix the flawed LPR. Options had been pursued but withdrawal was the only available option. The Administration had hoped this could be taken forward for the benefit of residents.

Councillor Dillon concluded by referring to the recent discourse on social media. He felt that Councillor Mackinnon, in trying to score political points, had lost integrity. Councillor Mackinnon had leaked an e-mail, sent to him in error, that he had agreed to delete.

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Councillor Mackinnon was permitted to speak to offer a personal explanation. As stated he had received an e-mail in error on 26 May 2023. He communicated this fact at the time and agreed to delete the e-mail, he did so. He then received the e-mail on a second occasion but did not communicate that. He stated that he had not acted dishonestly.

The Chairman then asked the Monitoring Officer for her advice following the receipt of the correspondence from Lee Rowley MP, the Minister of State for Housing, Planning and Building Safety.

Sarah Clarke read out the following statement:

Under Section 27 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Secretary of State had the power to intervene if it was felt that a local planning authority was failing or omitting to do what was necessary for the preparation, revision or adoption of a local plan.

At approximately 3pm today, the Council received a letter from the Minister stating that the Secretary of State was exercising this power and was directing the Council to not take any steps to withdraw the Local Plan from Examination (in accordance with Section 27, Sub-section 2b).

Her opinion, as Monitoring Officer, was that should withdrawal of the LPR be passed then it could be contrary to this direction.

She added that the Secretary of State also held the power to intervene and take control of the local plan process from local planning authorities, including taking the plan through to Examination and Adoption. The Secretary of State would be entitled to recover its costs in these circumstances.

Her advice was that the Motion should not be passed as it would be contrary to the direction given by the Secretary of State, putting the Council at further risk of Government intervention and incurring financial implications beyond the Council's control.

Councillor Dillon made a point of clarification with regards the accuracy of the letter. It stated, in section one on page two, that the Council would need to respond by September 2023. The inclusion of this date was felt to be in error.

The Chairman then returned to Councillor Tony Vickers as mover of the Motion.

Councillor Vickers felt that there was no alternative but to withdraw the Motion. He did however respond to some of the points raised in debate. He clarified, that in response to the Regulation 19 consultation, he had not said development should be moved away from Newbury and Thatcham. Rather, development should be split into smaller sites in and adjacent to those areas.

The proposal for North East Thatcham was a serious flaw and needed to be addressed. It was not initially realised that fixing this flaw would result in having to withdraw the LPR. It was not a cynical step that had been taken as the Government's action could not be predicted. It was however not clear if the Planning Inspector would accept the plans for North East Thatcham.

The e-mail that had been referred to by Councillor Mackinnon contained only the initial thinking on some of the options before the new Administration in the very early days after the local elections.

Liberal Democrat Members had worked very hard to fix the Local Plan and avoid withdrawal. The risks were acknowledged.

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The Executive contained a number of well qualified colleagues who had analysed the Council's finances and found year on year savings. It was therefore not financially irresponsible to propose withdrawal of the LPR.

Councillor Vickers noted that some withdrawals had been permitted by the Government, of Conservative run councils.

Regrettably, Councillor Vickers moved to withdraw the proposed Motion and prevent any further intervention from Central Government. However, the Council still had until 12 January 2024 to consider any further action and withdrawal could still be pursued if the Council could demonstrate exceptional circumstances. Withdrawal could be managed by the Council.

Councillor Read, again with regret, seconded withdrawal of the Motion.

The Chairman added his agreement. The Council needed to avoid the risk of losing control of the local plan process and incurring significant financial implications. He accepted the withdrawal of the Motion.

The Motion to withdraw the submitted Local Plan Review 2022-2039; and begin preparations for developing a new Local Plan for West Berkshire was withdrawn.

65. **Creation of Service Director for Children's Social Care and Service Director for Education and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (C4481)**

The Council considered a report (Agenda Item 4). The report explained that it was crucial for the Council to have sufficient capacity at senior level to continue the operations of the organisation, fulfil statutory responsibilities and respond to challenges that faced the Council. The changes to our services, expectations of our customers and partners, and the workings of the Council had all changed significantly in recent years. The increasing level of demand and complexity of need, pace of change, accessibility and availability of current and potential services, and latest inspection frameworks placed new and increasing demands from children and families on the Council.

The senior management structure of the Council had been subject to a variety of reviews over recent years. This report set out the proposed senior management structure across the Council, focussing on the need for greater resilience in Children's Services (People Directorate) to respond to the challenges facing Social Care, SEND (Special Educational Needs & Disabilities) and Education. As part of the SMR 2019 report, a decision on the Head of Service posts in Education and Children's Services was to be made in the future, as the original report had a single joint Service Director for Children and Young People.

The proposed structure would bring Children's Services in line with the wider Council senior directorate structures. The latest Council senior management structure was appended to the report.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Heather Codling and seconded by Councillor Martha Vickers:

That Council:

"Approve the creation of two Service Director (SD) posts in the Children's (People) Directorate; a Service Director Children's Social Care and a Service Director Education and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Subject to the above recommendation, approve the latest senior management structure shown at Appendix B(ii).

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Note the deletion of the existing Head of Children and Family Services and Head of Education posts.”

Councillor Codling introduced the report. In October 2022, an independent review was conducted into the structure and delivery of education services in West Berkshire. A recommendation from that review was the creation of two Service Director posts, one for Children’s Social Care and the other for Education and SEND. These would replace the interim Heads of Service.

The financial and operational challenges being faced in these areas clearly demonstrated the need for greater strategic capacity to assist the Executive Director. The Service Directors would manage the increasingly complex demands and challenges being faced by the Directorate. These were high cost services with many areas of strategic responsibility and were subject to inspection regimes.

Approval to create these posts would bring the Council’s senior management structure for these services in line with comparative local authorities. The posts would be advertised internally and externally simultaneously. They would be widely advertised via a number of different mechanisms.

The Service Directors and Executive Director would be undertaking a full strategic review of the structure of Children’s Services which would include a zero based budgeting exercise. This would ensure services were fit for purpose and able to meet the needs of children and families.

Councillor Carolyne Culver voiced concerns of creating an overly vertical management structure, concerns she had also expressed at a prior debate on the Resources Directorate. Financial pressures were being felt and these high level posts attracted a high salary. It would have been useful for the report to provide some detail on the next level down of senior management. Scrutiny input would therefore be useful when the Senior Management Review was considered

Councillor Culver concluding by stating that she respected and valued the Council’s senior officers, she did however urge caution at the senior management structure, with an operational as well as strategic focus needing to continue.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon noted that this initiative had begun with the Conservative Administration. He was therefore pleased to see this coming through.

Councillor Martha Vickers fully reinforced the proposals before Council. Caring for and protecting young people, and supporting their carers were rightly among the most important functions held by the Council. It was therefore appropriate to have these posts in place to manage such serious areas of work.

Councillor Codling reiterated that a role for the Service Directors, with the Executive Director, was to review existing structures. She was very pleased to propose this additional leadership for the Directorate.

The Motion was put to the meeting and duly **RESOLVED**.

66. Update on the Appointment of and Allocation of Seats on Committees for the 2023/24 Municipal Year (C4477)

The Council considered a report (Agenda Item 5) concerning the Council’s duty, under section 15 of the Local Government Housing Act 1989, to review the allocation of seats as soon as practicable following any change to the groups. Following the formation of a new political group, known as the Minority Group, the report proposed a number of changes to the allocation of seats and appointments to Committees.

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MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Lee Dillon and seconded by Councillor Jeff Brooks:

That the Council:

“Notes that under paragraph 8 of the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990, notice has been received that the Members set out in paragraph 5.2 are to be regarded as Members of the Liberal Democrat, Conservative, and Minority Groups respectively.

Approves the allocation of seats to the Political Groups in accordance with section 15(5) of the Local Government Act 1989, as set out in Table A at paragraph 5.8 of the report.

Approves the changes to the membership of Committees detailed in Appendix A to this report.”

Councillor Dillon explained that the report was brought to this meeting of Council to give the Minority Group the opportunity to make amendments to their allocation of seats on Committees. This was the earliest opportunity to do so following discussion at the last Council meeting.

The amendments were detailed in Appendix A and included Councillor Adrian Abbs becoming a Member of District Planning Committee and the Western Area Planning Committee, with Councillor Carlyne Culver’s role changing to that of Substitute for both Committees.

At the last meeting of Western Area Planning Committee, Councillor Culver explained that she had decided to cease being a full Member of the Committee in order to give full focus to her role as Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission. She received a warm send off from fellow Western Area Members for her work to date.

Councillor Abbs, till recently Chairman of the Western Area Planning Committee, added his thanks to Councillor Culver for all her hard work on the Committee. He looked forward to returning to the Committee.

He noted that Councillor Patrick Clark was elected the new Chairman of Western Area Planning Committee at the special meeting held earlier in the evening. He congratulated Councillor Clark on his election. Councillor Abbs did however question the need to hold the special meeting when the membership was due for change.

Councillor Culver stated that she was very sorry to be stepping down from the Planning Committee. In her four and a half years on the Committee she had not missed a single meeting. She had learned much from her time on the Committee and enjoyed being a part of it. She thanked her fellow Committee Members and gave thanks to officers for all their hard work in what was a difficult area. However, she wanted to give full focus to her role as Scrutiny Chairman in order to perform it to the best of her ability.

Councillor Brooks had nothing to add as seconder to the Motion. It was a procedural report.

Councillor Dillon responded to the point raised about the Extraordinary Western Area Planning Committee. It was important to call this meeting as soon as possible in order to appoint a new Chairman. The election of Councillor Clark meant he was able to perform such tasks as chairing site visits, receiving officer briefings and approving call-in notices. It was expedient and efficient to hold this meeting in advance of Council.

The Motion was put to the meeting and duly **RESOLVED**.

In closing the meeting the Chairman took the opportunity to wish all present the best of the Season and a Happy New Year.

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(The meeting commenced at 7.00pm and closed at 8.25pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature