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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL HELD IN THE ARUN CIVIC CENTRE ON 6 NOVEMBER 2024 AT 6.00 PM

Present: Councillors Walsh (Chair), Tandy (Vice-Chair), Ayling, Batley, Bence, Birch, Bicknell, Mrs Bower, Bower, Brooks, Butcher, Mrs Cooper, Cooper, Edwards, Elkins, Goodheart, Greenway, Gunner, Harty, Haywood, Huntley, Jones, Kelly, Lawrence, Lloyd, Long, Lury, Madeley, McAuliffe, May, McDougall, Needs, Northeast, O'Neill, Oppler, Partridge, Patel, Penycate, Purser, Mrs Stainton, Stanley, Turner, Wallsgrove, Wiltshire, Woodman, Worne, Worne, Warr and Yeates.

[The following Members were absent from the meeting during consideration of the matters referred to in the Minutes indicated:-
Councillor Jones - Minute 242 to Minute 243 (Part) and Minute 258 to Minute 261, Councillors Goodheart, Bower, Mrs Bower, Elkins and Bence - Minute 258 (Part) to Minute 261 and Councillors Warr, Batley, Madeley and Stainton - Minute 259 (Part) to Minute 261].

242. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Councillors, representatives of the public, press and officers to the meeting.

243. FORMER AND EXISTING STAFF MEMBERS, FORMER COUNCILLORS AND HONORARY ALDERMAN ENGLISH

The Chair stated that it was with great sorrow that he had to commence the meeting by announcing so much sad news. He confirmed that there were five tributes that needed to be made and that he would be making these in the order in which the sad passings of those concerned had taken place.

The first tribute was to announce that former Councillor Pat Dillon has passed away on 22 July 2024 following a long period of illness. Pat had become a Councillor on 7 May 2015 serving the Pevensy ward until May 2019. During that time Pat had sat on many Committees and would also be remembered as a Bognor Regis Town Councillor and former Mayor of Bognor Regis. Pat had also been Vice-Chair of this Council from 2018 to 2019 and had been a popular and dedicated servant to the local community including roles as Trustee of the Regis Centre and Bognor Regis Shopmobility as well as the Bognor Community Action Network.

The Chair confirmed that Pat would be greatly missed, and he extended the Council's condolences to Pat's family and friends. Tributes were then paid to Pat by Councillors Bence, Goodheart, Greenway, Stanley, McDougall, Cooper, Brooks and Stainton.

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In recognition of Pat's commitment to the Alexandra Theatre, a request was made for a feature or room to be dedicated to Pat on the completion of the regeneration works.

The Chair then announced the death of former member of staff Cliff Robinson who passed away on 6 August 2024. Cliff had been responsible for the area planning office at Bognor Regis from 1974 until it merged with the Littlehampton office in 1987. This sad news had been confirmed by the Council's former Chief Executive Ian Sumnall who had been a great friend of Mr Robinson's and his family. On behalf of the Council, the Chair extended its condolences to Cliff's family and friends. A tribute was paid to Cliff by Councillor Bower.

The Chair then announced, with great sorrow, the death of staff member Charlotte Hardy whose very sudden and unexpected passing had come as the most dreadful shock to all her colleagues here at the Council. Charlotte or Charlie as she had been known passed away on 24 September 2024. She had been a member of the Planning Policy team; had been the Council's Senior Environmental Assessment Officer had been with the Council for over 12 years. For that time, Charlie had been dedicated in assisting with the preparation of the current Local Plan and would be massively missed by her immediate colleagues and all the staff at the Council. The Chair extended the Council's thoughts and prayers to Charlie's family and friends at this very sad time. Councillor Lury, as Leader of the Council, and the Vice-Chair of the Planning Policy Committee, paid tribute to Charlie and her work undertaken.

The Chair confirmed that it was with sorrow that he had to announce the death of former staff member Chris Lawrence who passed away on 22 October following a long period of ill health. Chris had joined Arun on 13 November 1978 as a Finance Assistant in the Treasurer's Department before moving into the world of IT as an IT Advisor. He became Assistant Head of Technology on 23 October 2009 before moving up to IT Manager in 2013. He left Arun due to ill health on 20 July 2017 having given 39 years of service. The Chair extended the Council's thoughts and prayers to Chris' family and friends at this very sad time. Councillor Northeast paid tribute to Chris in recognition of his long service given to the Council.

The Chair confirmed that with the greatest sorrow he needed to report that having fought bravely for a long time, Honorary Alderman and former Councillor Paul English had sadly lost his fight and passed away in hospital on Sunday, 27 October 2024. Paul had been a district councillor since 2005 serving the residents of Felpham East. Paul had sat on a range of Committees here at Arun and would be fondly remembered for his passionate chairing of the Standards Committee and the former Overview Scrutiny Committee and also as a Member of the Constitution Working Party. Paul also served as a Member of Felpham Parish Council for 36 years and had been Chair of that Council on numerous occasions. Paul had been given the honour of becoming an Honorary Alderman of Arun District Council on 29 November 2023 in recognition of his long and elite service to the Council and the District of Arun.

As a Council, the Chair asked those present to extend thoughts and prayers to Councillor Joan English and to their family and friends at this very sad time. Tributes to Alderman English were then made by Councillors Gunner, Bence, Goodheart, Lury, Stanley, Andy Cooper and Northeast,

The Council then conducted a minute's silence to the memory of all who had passed.

244. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Blanchard-Cooper, English, Hamilton, Nash and Pendleton.

Apologies for Absence had also been received from the Council's Honorary Alderman Mr Dingemans.

245. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Declaration of Interest Sheet set out below confirms those Members who had made a declaration of their personal interest as a Member of a Town or Parish Councillor or a West Sussex County Councillor, as confirmed in their Register of Interest as these declarations could apply to any of the issues to be discussed at the meeting.

Name	Town or Parish Council or West Sussex County Council [WSCC]
Councillor Kenton Batley	Bognor Regis
Councillor Trevor Bence	Aldwick and WSCC
Councillor Paul Bicknell	Angmering
Councillor Billy Blanchard-Cooper	Littlehampton
Councillor Jim Brooks	Bognor Regis
Councillor Alan Butcher	Littlehampton
Councillor Andy Cooper	Rustington
Councillor Alison Cooper	Rustington and WSCC
Councillor Roger Elkins	Ferring and WSCC
Councillor Steve Goodheart	Bognor Regis
Councillor Keir Greenway	Bersted and WSCC
Councillor Thomas Harty	Felpham
Councillor June Hamilton	Pagham
Councillor Shirley Haywood	Middleton-on-Sea
Councillor David Huntley	Pagham
Councillor Anita Lawrence	Aldingbourne
Councillor Lesley-Anne Lloyd	Rustington
Councillor Jill Long	Littlehampton
Councillor Martin Lury	Bersted
Councillor Maralyn May	Littlehampton

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Councillor George O’Neill	Littlehampton
Councillor Roger Nash	Bognor Regis
Councillor Claire Needs	Bognor Regis
Councillor Mike Northeast	Littlehampton
Councillor Peggy Partridge	Rustington
Councillor Jacky Pendleton	Middleton-on-Sea and WSCC
Councillor Guy Purser	Aldwick
Councillor Matt Stanley	Bognor Regis
Councillor Freddie Tandy	Littlehampton
Councillor Sue Wallsgrove	Barnham and Eastergate
Councillor James Walsh	Littlehampton and WSCC
Councillor Jeanette Warr	Bognor Regis
Councillor Christine Wiltshire	Littlehampton
Councillor Bob Woodman	Littlehampton
Councillor Amanda Worne	Ford and Yapton
Councillor Amelia Worne	Littlehampton
Councillor Gillian Yeates	Bersted and Bognor Regis

Councillor Bence declared a Personal Interest in relation to Agenda Item 15 [Motions – Motion 2] as a Member of West Sussex County Council.

246. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair confirmed that five questions had been submitted for this meeting. The questions have been very briefly summarised below:

- 1) From Mr Burt to the Chair of the Planning Committee, Councillor McDougall regarding the Council’s involvement in persuading owners of empty/derelict properties to improve them and in relation to three sites in Bognor Regis. This question was read out by the Committee Services Manager on the questioner’s behalf;
- 2) From Mr Chester to the Leader of the Council and Chair of the Policy & Finance Committee, Councillor Lury regarding the estimated annual revenue costs of the two top ups of £3m in respect of the Alexandra Theatre in Bognor Regis. This question was read out by the Committee Services Manager on the questioner’s behalf;
- 3) From Mr Chester to the Leader of the Council and Chair of the Policy & Finance Committee, Councillor Lury regarding the likely annual rent to be paid by Arun Arts on completion of the Alexandra Theatre project. This question was read out by the Committee Services Manager on the questioner’s behalf;
- 4) From Mr and Mrs Smith to the Chair of the Planning Committee, Councillor McDougall asking the Council to explain why it has taken so long to decide not to prosecute the case outlined in the question;
- 5) From Mr and Mrs Smith to the Chair of the Planning Committee, Councillor McDougall asking why the Council has decided not to prosecute the case mentioned in the question.

The Chair confirmed that in line with the Council Procedure Rule 12.4, he would not be allowing supplementary questions to be asked with regard to questions 5 and 6 in view of the fact that they related to live planning applications.

The Chair then drew Public Question Time to a close.

(A schedule of the full questions asked, and the responses provided can be found on the Public Question Web page at: [Arun District Council](#))

247. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS WITH PECUNIARY/PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS

The Chair confirmed that there were no questions for this meeting.

248. PETITIONS

The Chair confirmed that no petitions had been received.

249. MINUTES

The minutes from the last Meeting of the Council held on 17 July 2024 were approved by the Council as a correct record, subject to the very slight amendment below:

Under those listed as present, to remove the reference to Councillor Batley being absent from the meeting during consideration of matters referred to in Minutes 129 to 133.

The Chair confirmed that he would sign the minutes at the conclusion of the meeting.

250. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair confirmed that he had attended the following events since the last Full Council Meeting held on 17 July 2024:

- 14 September - Littlehampton Town Show
- 19 September - WSCC Chairman's Reception, Mannings Heath, Horsham
- 11 October - West Sussex Armed Forces Covenant briefing Horsham. (AM) and Sussex Judges Annual Service, Chichester Cathedral (PM)
- 13 October - Rustington Parish Council Annual Civic Service and Awards
- 19 October - Arun Choral Society Concert, Arundel Cathedral
- 26 October - Littlehampton Bonfire Society Judging floats and procession
- 30 October - Southeast Reserve Forces and Cadet Association Presentation and Awards evening, Lancing College Chapel

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- 4 November - NSPCC Annual General Meeting and Awards, Arundel Castle

The Chair confirmed that he wished to conclude his announcements by reminding everyone that this Sunday was Remembrance Sunday and that on Monday, 11 November it was Armistice Day. To mark these two key dates of remembrance, at the conclusion of the meeting, a video compiled by Councillor Turner, the Council's Armed Forces Champion, Dawn Hudd, as Chief Executive and Cathryn French, the Council's Safeguarding Officer would be played mark these most special events and the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant.

251. URGENT MATTERS

The Chair confirmed that there were no urgent matters for the meeting to consider.

252. AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - 23 JULY 2024

The Chair, Councillor Stanley, presented recommendations following the meeting of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 23 July 2024.

Councillor Stanley referred Members to recommendations at Minute 159 [Treasury Management Annual Report 2023/2024] which he duly proposed. The recommendations were then seconded by Councillor O'Neill.

The Council

RESOLVED – That

- (1) the actual prudential and treasury indicators for 2023/24 contained in the report be noted;
- (2) the annual treasury management report for 2023/24 be noted; and
- (3) the treasury activity during 2023/24 which has generated interest receipts of £2.43m (4.94%). Budget £1.54m (3.2%), be noted.

253. PLANNING POLICY COMMITTEE - 26 SEPTEMBER 2024

The Chair, Councillor Yeates, presented recommendations following the meeting of the Planning Policy Committee held on 26 September 2024.

Councillor Yeates referred Members to a recommendation at Minute 243 [Community Infrastructure Levy [CIL] Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP 2025-2027)] which she duly proposed and urged Members to support its publication to the Council's web site. The recommendation was then seconded by Councillor Lury.

In debating the recommendation, a question was asked relating to the length of time involved in implementing the Littlehampton Fire Station replacement project as it was felt that this should be considered as a priority. Councillor Yeates confirmed that she was not able to provide any further update on this since this item having been raised at the Planning Policy Committee on 26 September 2024. An update was also requested on the Aldwick cycling route with Councillor Yeates confirming that she would ask the Interim Head of Planning Policy to provide further information.

The Council

RESOLVED

That The Arun Infrastructure Investment Plan (for the period 2025-2027) be agreed by Full Council before publication on the Council's website.

(During the discussion on this item, Councillor Walsh declared a Personal Interest as a Member of West Sussex County Council).

254. AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - 3 OCTOBER 2024

The Chair, Councillor Stanley, presented recommendations following the meeting of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 3 October 2024.

Councillor Stanley referred Members to recommendations at Minute 257 [Treasury Management – Quarter 1 Report 2024/25] which he duly proposed. The recommendations were then seconded by Councillor O'Neill.

The Council

RESOLVED – That

- (1) the Quarter 1 treasury management report for 2024/25 be noted;
- (2) the treasury activity for the quarter ended 30 June 2024, which has generated interest receipts of £563,000 (5.15%) against a budget of £1,896,310 (4.63%), be noted; and
- (3) the quarter 1 prudential and treasury indicators for 2024/25 contained in the report be noted.

255. STANDARDS COMMITTEE - 17 OCTOBER 2024

The Chair, Councillor Huntley, presented a recommendation from the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 17 October 2024.

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Councillor Huntley referred Members to a recommendation at Minute 204 [Recruitment of Independent Persons]. In formally proposing the recommendation Councillor Huntley informed Members that following a recruitment process undertaken by the Group Head of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer, in full consultation with the Standards Committee, interviews had been held on 4 October 2024 with the interview panel consisting of himself, as Chair of the Committee, Councillor May as Vice-Chair and Councillor Turner as a volunteer from Committee. Sandra Prail, who would be stepping down as an Independent Person, on 6 November 2024 had also made up the interview panel.

Councillor Huntley confirmed that at the Standards Committee on 17 October, Members had been asked to approve recommending to Full Council that John Thompson, MBE John Cooke and Alan Ladley be appointed as independent persons to the standards committee for a period of 4 years from 7 November 2024.

Councillor Huntley in recommending the appointments to Council confirmed that he wished to thank Sandra Prail for her work as an independent person over recent years and that he was happy to welcome back John Thompson and John Cooke for another term. The recommendation was then seconded by Councillor May.

The Council

RESOLVED

That Alan Ladley, John Cooke and John Thompson, MBE be appointed as Independent Persons for the period of 4 years from 7 November 2024.

256. CONSTITUTION WORKING PARTY - 21 OCTOBER 2024

The Chair, Councillor Yeates, presented recommendations following the meeting of the Constitution Working Party held on 21 October 2024.

Councillor Yeates referred Members to the first recommendation at Minute 7 [Recommendation from the Special Meeting of the Economy Committee held on 12 September 2024] which she formally proposed. This recommendation was then seconded by Councillor Haywood.

The Council

REOLVED

That the frequency of meetings for the Economy Committee in each municipal year be increased from 4 to 5 meetings with this taking effect from the Annual Council Meeting on 21 May 2025.

Councillor Yeates then drew Members' attention to the next recommendations at Minute 8 [Updates to the Council's Constitution] which she duly proposed with Councillor Haywood then seconding the recommendations.

In debating these recommendations, a request was made for the voting on the recommendations to be undertaken separately. This was because there were Councillors who could not agree to accepting the first recommendation regarding the West Sussex Business Rates Pool. There had been much debate on this when this had been discussed at the Policy & Finance Committee and there were Councillors who strongly disagreed with the delegation that had been given to the Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer and the Chief Executive Officer. As the Business Rates Pool held tens of millions of pounds of taxpayers money, which had not always been spent, Councillors felt that the spending of any money from the pool should be decided by the Policy & Finance Committee. There was also a debate to be had in terms of the Council's future membership of the pool.

The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 was invited to comment. He reminded Members that the decision to delegate authority to himself and the Chief Executive to decide future participation in the West Sussex Business Rates Pool had already been made by the Policy & Finance Committee meaning that the delegation referred to in Recommendation (1) already existed and was in place. This recommendation was to formally include and confirm that delegation within the Council's Constitution. A report on the West Sussex Business Rates Pool could be brought to a future meeting of the Policy & Finance Committee if requested. There were other Councillors who spoke airing concerns about the West Sussex Business Rates pool generally. This was because it was felt that the district did not benefit greatly from the pool, though it had recently. Councillors confirmed that they needed to see more benefit for communities within Arun arising from the pool and acknowledged that if the Council ceased to be a member of the pool, this would mean that business rates collected would automatically be returned to Central Government. This was a strong reason for the Council to remain in the pool.

Following further discussion,

The Council

RESOLVED – That

- (1) The delegated Authority given to the Section 151 Officer and Chief Executive Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Policy & Finance Committee to decide future participation in any West Sussex Business Rates Pool be formalised within the Council's Constitution as part of the Chief Finance Officer delegations within the Officer Scheme of Delegation at Part 7, Section 2 (delegations to the Group Head of Finance); and
- (2) The Joint Staff Consultative Panel be disbanded and any reference to it removed from the Constitution.

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Councillor Yeates then referred to the last set of recommendations at Minute 9 [Protocol for Councillor Contact with Applicants, Developers, Contractors, Agents and Investors] which she duly proposed. The recommendations were then seconded by Councillor Haywood.

The Council

RESOLVED – That

- (1) It endorses and approves the 'Protocol for Councillor contact with Applicants, Developers, Contractors, Agents and Investors' with the Protocol being included within the Council's Constitution; and
- (2) Future reviews of the Protocol are conducted by the Standards Committee.

257. POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE - 24 OCTOBER 2024

The Leader of the Council and Chair of the Policy & Finance Committee, Councillor Lury, presented recommendations from the meeting of the Policy & Finance Committee held on 24 October 2024, which had been circulated separately to the agenda as a supplement pack and uploaded to the Council's web site on 31 October 2024.

Councillor Lury drew Members' attention to the first set of recommendations at Minute 230 [Environment Committee – 19 March 2024 – Minute 720 Combined Cleansing Services Contract] which he formally proposed. The recommendations were then seconded by Councillor Stanley, in the absence of the Vice-Chair of the Committee, Councillor Nash.

In discussing the recommendations, a question was asked as to whether the Council should stall approving adding the £1.82m to the Capital Programme until such a time that the Council received the grant funding from DEFRA. The Chief Executive responded providing reassurance that the Council would receive the amounts set out in both recommendations back from DEFRA, however, to purchase the food waste receptacles, the amounts needed to be included within the Council's capital programme.

This response was queried, as this was new news to Councillors, and it was confirmed that the amount that the Council could receive back from DEFRA would be to cover the £1.82m in recommendation (1), it would not include the £1.2m referred to in the second recommendation. This would be funded from borrowing if the Council was unable to secure further funding.

Varying concerns were expressed by Councillors over borrowing and the provision of a bin to all residents, as many would already have them. It was confirmed that at the meeting of the Environment Committee in March 2024, and at the briefing held for Members in advance of that meeting, an opt-out scheme could be offered. Reassurance was sought that an opt-out clause would be in place. The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer highlighted that in terms of the £1.2m that would be funded from borrowing, the expectation was that the contract specification had been written to minimise budgetary risk and the savings achieved by the new contract should ensure that the new contract would be cost neutral. The food waste collections would achieve cost savings, and funding would be received from DEFRA.

Discussion returned to the provision of an opt-out clause and that if this was rolled out money could be saved if there was not the need to provide new bins to everyone. Councillor Lury reminded Councillors that the recommendations before them were to approve adding amounts to the Council's Capital Programme in 2025/26, the decisions relating to the Combined Cleansing Services Contract and the detail of the new contract had already been made by the Environment Committee. The Chief Executive reinforced this message confirming that the new contract's specification had been set to meet the requirements of new legislation which was the Environment Act 2021. The size of the bin to be provided had been based upon being able to facilitate a fortnightly residual collection service and had been based upon recycling targets. She confirmed that all HMOs and flats would have bespoke needs which would be assessed. These and some properties in Arundel would have options allowing them to opt out. This had been discussed in depth at the meeting of the Environment Committee in March 2024.

Councillors asked for complete clarity as to whether an opt-out clause would be added as this was a commitment that had been given. Having had further questions raised over the provision of 180 litre bins, the Chair of the Environment Committee, Councillor Wallsgrove provided some clarity. She confirmed the reasoning behind the Committee's decision to opt for 180 litre bins and that the Committee had received assurance that an opt-out clause would be provided.

Following further discussion,

The Council

RESOLVED – That

- (1) It approves the addition of £1,820,000 to the Capital Programme in 2025/26 to fund the purchasing and delivery of food waste receptacles and purchasing of vehicles necessary to provide the weekly food waste collection service as part of the CCSC to be funded by a grant received from DEFRA; and

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- (2) It approves the addition of £1.2 million to the Capital Programme in 2025/26 to procure and roll out 180 litre residual bins for residents to facilitate a fortnightly residual collection service. This will be funded from borrowing if the Council is unable to secure further funding.

Councillor Lury then alerted Members to the next recommendations at Minute 239 [The Regeneration of the Alexandra Theatre, Bognor Regis – Progress Report] which he formally proposed. The recommendations were then seconded by Councillor Stanley.

The Chair invited debate which saw varying Councillors raising concerns. Although Councillors were keen to see the project delivered, it could not be ignored that this was another project that was running late in terms of its delivery and would be significantly over budget and not for the first time either. If Council chose to approve the additional £3m spend, and the Council spent the full £2m contingency this equated to a project spend of £18.8m. In the absence of any alternative options clarifying how the project could be brought back to within its budget coupled with concerns over financing the additional costs, this was difficult to support and would subject the Council to a lifetime of borrowing.

Questions were asked as to how and why the project had exceeded its original budget. The financial challenges associated with delivering the project were explained with Members being reminded that the economy had weathered major challenges which had massively impacted capital projects. A request was made to continue to liaise with specialists in the theatre industry field to ensure that the project could be completed.

Although Members expressed disappointment at the decisions that were needing to be made, there were comments made that the project must proceed. Concerns were also raised in terms of having a professional team in place who would know how to promote the theatre and attract visitors.

Although the financial pressures were of concern, many Councillors confirmed that they were happy to support the theatre and its ability to deliver something uniquely special for Bognor Regis and the wider area. Mention was made again to the substantial rises in the cost of construction materials which could increase further and before any work commenced on site. It was felt that the variation in costs must be reviewed as the Council could not continue to use its finances in this way. A review in terms of what the other options and opportunities were should be undertaken as the Council had a duty to reassure its residents that it was fiscally responsible in terms of all that it did. There was some anxiety expressed about spending further money when there could be no guarantee that further funding might be needed further down the line. The Chief Executive explained that the project had received significant Government funding and that there was a window of opportunity to spend that money. The Council had already drawn money down from the LUF funding received. In view of spending

timescales, the project could not afford any further delay without risking losing the funding and needing to borrow more money. Significant value engineering had been undertaken to bring costs down resulting in limited alternatives for the Council without changing the project significantly resulting in the Council then not meeting the objectives laid down in LUF funding agreement.

The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer provided information around the project totals and the cost of borrowing if the remaining amount was to be funded in this way over a period of 50 years and if the full amount was borrowed. He stated that it would be unlikely that the Council would seek to borrow the full amount as it used its reserves and cashflow balances to fund expenditure until there was a need to use those monies for their designated purposes. The Council's robust treasury management practices and policies were also referred to and he urged Members to familiarise themselves with the regular Treasury Management reports provided to the Audit & Governance Committee confirming the Council's borrowing position and as this would provide assurance that all practices were underpinned by code of practice requirements and local government finance statutes.

Further concerns were aired over value engineering being applied to the project and whether the same results and outcomes would be achieved using this method. Equally, the Council had to assess the costs of not approving the additional funding required in terms of paying back LUF money to Government and the cost of returning the theatre back to an operational state. In terms of the debate on borrowing, it was acknowledged that interest rates were likely to reduce further, but there was also risk that rates could increase in response to global events. Councillors were torn in terms of wanting to the project to proceed versus the financial responsibility of doing so.

Councillor Stanley, as seconder to the recommendations spoke. He reconfirmed the advice provided by the Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer in terms of addressing concerns and nervousness over borrowing. He stated that robust measures were in place in terms of spending the additional £3m out of which £2m of contingency would only be used to fund contingency related costs and not increases in the scope of the project. Time constraints were in place in respect of spending the £12m of LUF funding. Councillor Stanley felt that the question was simple, did Councillors want a theatre in Bognor Regis or not? He focused on how wonderful it would be to have a high tech theatre on the seafront that would benefit the entire district. The concerns over project delays had been well debated with many of these being national and global issues not relative to just Arun. He urged Members to approve the recommendations.

Councillor Lury, as the proposer of the recommendations, reinforced what he had said at the meeting of the Policy & Finance Committee in that the people of Bognor Regis would not thank the Council if it chose to abandon the project. He accepted that this was a difficult decision for Members to make and he reminded them of the national circumstances that had developed leading to the situation the Council now found itself in.

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A recorded vote had been requested. Those voting for the recommendations were Councillors Ayling, Batley, Bence, Bicknell, Birch, Mrs Bower, Bower, Brooks, Butcher, Edwards, Goodheart, Greenway, Harty, Haywood, Huntley, Jones, Lawrence, Long, Lury, Madeley, May, McDougall, Needs, Northeast, O'Neill, Oppler, Partridge, Patel, Penycate, Stainton, Stanley, Tandy, Turner, Wallsgrove, Walsh, Warr, Wiltshire, Woodman, Mrs Worne, Miss Worne and Yeates [41]. Councillor Gunner voted against the recommendations [1]. Councillors Cooper, Mrs Cooper, Elkins, Kelly, Lloyd, McAuliffe, and Purser abstained from voting [7].

The Council

RESOLVED – That

- (1) An additional budget provision of £3 million be included in the capital programme for the Regeneration of the Alexandra Theatre project; and
- (2) The Council retains control of the contingency sums for the project and thus retains responsibility for funding any matters that fall outside of the agreed construction contract.

The Chair then called a ten minute adjournment.

258. MOTIONS

The Chair confirmed that two Motions had been submitted for this meeting.

The Chair confirmed that with the approval of Council he wished for Motion 2 to be heard first. This was approved.

The Chair invited Councillor Bower, as proposer, to present his motion, which is set out below:

This Council therefore agrees to request that the Leader, on behalf of the Council:

- (1) Writes to the Prime Minister expressing the gravest concern of the Council and local businesses regarding the cancellation, including the lack of consultation and alternative measures to alleviate the issues caused by the lack of capacity on the A27 at Arundel.*

(2) Requests a meeting between the District Council and other parties with the Highways Minister in order to discuss Government plans to provide real and lasting improvements to enable a long term resolution to congestion and safety issues on the A27 at Arundel and protect the character and environment of the villages and communities around the A27 from threats such as increased rat-running. This Council is to make it clear to the Minister and the Government that Arun District Council is open to any viable route that will alleviate the issues at Arundel.

Councillor Bower outlined that Council had discussed the reasons and needs for the A27 Arundel Bypass on numerous occasions as the district's economy was under tremendous strain due to severe congestion. Any incident on the A27 resulted in traffic redirecting onto the A259 causing significant delays. This overbearing volume of traffic was destroying Arun's economy, which would steadily worsen without the enhancements to the bypass taking place. Councillor Bower explained how necessary his motion was and that this was because many people do not know that heavy goods vehicles travelling to and from the Ford area had an agreement with West Sussex County Council (WSCC) that their route should be via the A259 travelling east along that road and then moving up through Wick to reach the A27 or the A280 at Angmering. Much work had been progressed in passing the Local Plan in place precepting that the Arundel Bypass would be delivered. The Government's decision to withdraw progression of the scheme had portrayed a message to West Sussex that it did not care about the future viability of the area. Of concern was the result of a survey which showed that driver's perception was that the A27 was the second most dangerous road in the country after the A12 and so this provided additional evidence as to why the urgency of the enhancements needed to be urgently reinstated, especially as the congestion impacts were felt well beyond Arundel from Polegate through to Chichester. This meant that the Council had a duty of responsibility in ensuring that the Government were aware of the economic impacts for the district which could only be resolved by the bypass being reinstated within the roads programme. Councillor Bower stated that he had heard suggestions that active travel should be incorporated within this option, however, he had to disagree as active travel was a local and not a national issue and was funded by Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 contributions.

All the concerns and issues presented due to a lack of the bypass were issues that were much wider than this. The increasing amounts of traffic using villages around the A27 as rat-runs to avoid using the A27 around Arundel needed to be addressed. Councillor Bower stated that the Council had been fighting hard for the bypass for many years and he urged Councillors to continue in pushing this fight forward by supporting the motion.

The motion was then seconded by Councillor Cooper.

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The Chair then invited debate. The first to speak was Councillor McAuliffe who confirmed his view that the motion proposed was not forward looking and did not address the needs of the district in the future. He outlined that the wards he represented did not want a dual carriage that would decimate the Binsted valleys and parts of other villages. His constituents were asking for realistically deliverable solutions that would keep traffic flowing at the well-known pinch points allowing residents to be able to access the A27 from villages without congestion and avoiding the need to use minor roads as rat runs. Councillor McAuliffe hoped that all Councillors could agree on that fact. He repeated the point that residents wanted alternatives to access villages; they wanted safe active travel; many were elderly with no access to a car and needed alternatives which this motion did not provide. More public transport was needed and more independent and active travel. In response to the points raised, Councillor McAuliffe confirmed that he wished to make some amendments to both parts of the motion to address these gaps and he hoped that their inclusion would assist in finding much needed solutions.

The amendments have been shown below with additions shown in **bold** and deletions shown using strikethrough :

- (1) Writes to the Prime Minister expressing the gravest concern of the Council **its desire to consult with Ministers** and local businesses regarding the cancellation, including the lack of consultation and **on** alternative measures to **that alleviate congestion** the issues caused by the lack of capacity on the A27 at Arundel, **including options that expand active travel and public transport.**
- (2) Requests a meeting between the District Council, **local stakeholders**, and other parties **and** with the Highways Minister, in order to discuss Government plans to provide real and lasting improvements on **to** the A27 at Arundel to enable **that address** congestion and safety issues and enable a long term resolution to congestion and safety issues on the A27 at Arundel **whilst protecting** the character and environment of the villages and communities around the A27 **in Arun** from threats such as increased rat-running, **pollution and significant ecological harm.** This Council is to make it clear to the Minister and the Government that Arun District Council is open to any viable route that will alleviate the issues at Arundel.

Councillor Wallsgrove then seconded the motion.

The Chair invited debate on the amendment. The first to speak was Councillor Bence who provided key background facts surrounding the A27 and moves for a bypass. Those supporting the amendment explained that it would push for a positive way forward for the A27 addressing the concerns expressed by residents that the original motion would not achieve. Other Councillors speaking in support agreeing that it sought to achieve what was needed with enhancements. Reference was made to the deferment of the A27 scheme from the highways programme with much needed funding being used to address other highways issues such as the repair of potholes and rectifying the state of highways. Areas that the public wanted to see improved to reduce spend on damage to vehicles as a result of potholes and making highways safer for all to use.

Other Councillors spoke confirming that they had some concerns with the changes proposed. This was because active travel was not a National Highways issue. It was a local issue supported by local councils. The concern expressed was that by removing the words 'gravest concern' watered down the strength of feeling and message to Central Government. The message that needed to be delivered was that the A27 Arundel Bypass be reinstated and plans to address the much needed improvements confirmed.

Following further debate, Councillor Gunner confirmed that he wished to make a small amendment to the first part of Councillor McAuliffe's amendment to the motion as follows:

Additions have been shown using **bold** with deletions using strikethrough

- (1) Writes to the Prime Minister expressing the gravest concern of the Council **its desire to consult with Ministers** and local businesses regarding the cancellation, including the lack of consultation and ~~on~~ alternative measures to **that alleviate congestion** the issues caused by the lack of capacity on the A27 at Arundel, **including locally complemented options that expand active travel and public transport where feasible.**

Councillors McAuliffe and Wallsgrove confirmed that they were happy for this further change to be added to their amendment.

The Chair then returned to the substantive motion and invited debate.

Councillors confirmed that they were of the view that the changes made to the motion watered down its true meaning and that firmer language was required. The concern expressed by many residents in the district was that the A27 Arundel Bypass was needed urgently to ease congestion and to prevent over usage of the A259 which was the alternative route available. It was also highlighted that the motion was not just to address the concerns and needs of residents but also businesses in the district. It had to be accepted that the A27 scheme had not been deferred it had been cancelled. The words 'gravest concerns' in the original motion should have remained to reflect the strength of feeling.

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Councillor Gunner then raised a Point of Order in relation to Part 5 – Rules of Procedure (Meetings), Section 1 – Council Procedure Rules – Rule 11 – Duration of Meeting in that as it was nearly 9.00 pm, he proposed to extend the meeting by 30 minutes to 9.30 pm. This was seconded by Councillor Tandy, and this being put to the vote it was declared CARRIED.

Councillor Cooper then spoke as seconder to the amendment. He confirmed that as the motion had now been watered down, it was important to ensure that the Council did all it could to get the A27 enhancements back on track for the benefit of the entire district. Urgent action was needed to get traffic moving around the district to enhance economic growth. If this meant that it would be necessary to look again at route options again, then so be it, the point being strongly made was that action was required now and so he hoped that all Councillors would support the motion.

Councillor Bower, as proposer of the motion, outlined that he was delighted that the sentiment of the motion which was for the council to continue to push as best it could for an enhanced A27 bypass would be supported, having listened to the debate. This scheme needed to be reinstated, discussed and considered by national government. As a district the Council could not afford to see this not being delivered. All Councillors had a responsibility to listen to residents and their pleas to improve the district's economy. Councillor Bower pledged that he would continue to bring this matter before council until action was forthcoming.

The Council

RESOLVED – That

- (1) It writes to the Prime Minister expressing its desire to consult with Ministers on alternative measures that alleviate congestion on the A27 at Arundel, including locally complemented options that expand active travel and public transport where feasible;
- (2) It requests a meeting between the District Council, local stakeholders and the Highways Minister, in order to discuss real and lasting improvements to the A27 at Arundel that address congestion and safety issue whilst protecting the character and environment of the villages and communities around the A27 in Arun from threats such as increased rat-running, pollution and significant ecological harm.

(During the course of the debate Councillor Bence redeclared his interest made at the start of the meeting.)

(Councillor Elkins declared his Personal Interest as a Member of West Sussex County Council).

The Chair then invited Councillor Gunner to present his motion. The wording of the motion is set out below:

Council Notes:

- The Labour Government's recent decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits like Pension Credit, as announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves, which impacts up to 32,000 people in Arun.
- The estimated impact of this decision, which Age UK says will mean 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it.
- The significant role that Winter Fuel Payments play in helping older residents of Arun and across the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health.
- The criticism from Age UK, the Countryside Alliance and other charities, highlighting the social injustice and potential health risks posed by this sudden policy change.
- The additional strain this decision will place on vulnerable pensioners, many of whom do not claim Pension Credit despite being eligible, further exacerbating their financial hardship.
- That three of the four MPs whose constituencies include all or parts of Arun, voted in Parliament on 10 September 2024 to stop the removal of the Winter Fuel Allowance, but that one did not - the Labour MP for Worthing West.

Council believes:

- That the Winter Fuel Payment has been a lifeline for many older people across the UK and that restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship.
- While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, many thousands across Arun sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their allowance.
- The decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments, especially with such short notice and without adequate compensatory measures, is deeply unfair and will disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents.
- The Government's approach fails to consider the administrative barriers and stigma that prevent eligible pensioners from claiming **Pension Credit, leaving many without the support they desperately need.**

Council resolves to:

- Bring forward a Council-led local awareness campaign to alert those eligible of Pension Credit which in some respects will help access to the Winter Fuel Payment for those most in need.
- Request that the Leader of the Council write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the Government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.

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- Commit the Council to signing the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK, with the Leader signing on behalf of the Council, and write to all members offering them the opportunity to sign the petition themselves.
- Encourage local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in Arun are supported in claiming their entitlement.

Councillor Gunner presented his motion stating that it was with great sorrow that he had felt the need to present and propose it to Council. He outlined that everyone knew that results of the General Election would result in changes being made by the new Government, however, the decision to restrict winter fuel payments to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits like Pension Credit had too much of an impact that could not go unchallenged. This change had been unforeseen, and it would have devastating impacts with Age UK and other charities already reporting that millions of pensioners who were badly needing to receive the payments would no longer receive them and would struggle to not only stay warm but to stay fed. Such charities had reported an unprecedented increase in enquiries where pensioners were looking for support to offset their increasing cost of living.

Councillor Gunner reminded Members of the district's large elderly population out of which many would be losing this much needed income. He hoped that the Council could come together to provide support and help and enhance its promotion of alerting eligible pensioners on how to apply for Pension Credit which would provide a step forward in claiming the winter fuel allowance.

The motion was then seconded by Councillor Greenway.

The Chair then invited debate on the motion. Mention was made of the work already undertaken by the Council in promoting pension credit and how this could be applied. Media releases had been issued and benefits staff had all received training to assist with increases in applications and the help that would need to be given to those that required it.

Partnership work was also taking place with Age UK and the Citizens Advice Bureau to further promote this work. Debate also focused on the previous Government who could have enhanced its approach to addressing winter fuel allowance issues. Fuel poverty had been in existence for many years it was confirmed that this was not a new issue.

Although this motion and the last had been well intended and the issues raised could be generally supported, there were Councillors who confirmed concern that both motions were draped in national politics. The point was made that motions before Council should be reserved to areas that the Council was responsible for.

Councillor Greenway, as seconder to the motion, emphasised that some good discussion points had been raised and especially in terms of the good work that the Council was already doing to promote pension credit and in assisting those that needed it in applying for it. He asked if the Council's communications could include reference to the West Sussex Community Hub that administered the Household Support Fund as part of the Council's overall awareness campaign. Councillor Greenway urged Councillors to support what he saw as a factual motion that did affect a large part of the district of Arun.

Councillor Gunner, as proposer of the motion, referred to the need to protect Arun's overwhelming elderly population which had been massively and negatively affected by the changes. In concluding Councillor Gunner stated that the Motion was directed to protecting this sector of the community within Arun.

The Council

RESOLVED – To

- Bring forward a Council-led local awareness campaign to alert those eligible of Pension Credit which in some respects will help access to the Winter Fuel Payment for those most in need.
- Request that the Leader of the Council write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the Government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.
- Commit the Council to signing the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK, with the Leader signing on behalf of the Council, and write to all members offering them the opportunity to sign the petition themselves.
- Encourage local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in Arun are supported in claiming their entitlement.

(During the course of the debate on this item, Councillor Greenway declared a Personal Interest as a Member of West Sussex County Council).

259. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

The Chair referred Councillors to the Questions from Members that had been submitted in line with Council Procedure Rule 14.3 and the schedule of questions that had been circulated to the meeting. This confirmed that two questions had been received. Both questions had been submitted by Councillor Greenway.

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The Chair confirmed that as the questions and responses had been circulated to the meeting, in view of time constraints, that they be noted and taken as read. Councillor Greenway was invited to submit his supplementary questions in writing outside of the meeting.

The schedule of questions would be updated to include the responses provided to the Council's web page within ten working days of the meeting, in line with the Council's Constitution.

The questions have been summarised below:

Question (1) To the Chair of the Environment Committee – Councillor Wallsgrove regarding the dredging of the Aldingbourne Rife.

Question (2) to the Chair of the Policy & Finance Committee – Councillor Lury regarding a range of concerns at the Trees Estate.

260. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS

The Chair confirmed that there were no changes to Committee memberships to report to this meeting.

261. REPRESENTATION ON OUTSIDE BODIES

The Chair invited the Leader of the Council, Councillor Lury, to confirm any changes to representations on Outside Bodies to the meeting.

- Councillor Lury proposed that:

Councillor Wallsgrove, as Chair of the Environment Committee, be this Council's nominated representative on the Portsmouth Water Customer Scrutiny Panel, a new outside body for the council; and

Council notes that the following Outside Bodies will be or have been disbanded:

- Keystone Centre Management Committee will be disbanded on 30 November 2024;
- Bognor Regis Regeneration Board;
- Bognor Regis Regeneration Steering Committee;
- Coastal West Sussex Partnership Board;
- Rural West Sussex Partnership

- Councillor Lury then proposed that these changes to representation to Outside Bodies be approved. The changes were then seconded by Councillor Stanley:

The Council

RESOLVED – That

- (1) Councillor Wallsgrove, as Chair of the Environment Committee, be this Council's nominated representative on the Portsmouth Water Customer Scrutiny Panel, a new outside body for the council; and
- (2) Council notes that the following Outside Bodies will be or have been disbanded:
 - Keystone Centre Management Committee will be disbanded on 30 November 2024;
 - Bognor Regis Regeneration Board;
 - Bognor Regis Regeneration Steering Committee;
 - Coastal West Sussex Partnership Board;
 - Rural West Sussex Partnership

In concluding the meeting, a short video was played to mark Remembrance Sunday, Armistice Day and the Council's signing of the Armed Forces Covenant.

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(The meeting concluded at 9.34 pm)

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