

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, REGENERATION AND PROPERTY SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Tuesday, 27th May, 2025

Present: Cllr D Harman (Chair), Cllr M R Rhodes (Vice-Chair), Cllr A G Bennison, Cllr T Bishop, Cllr P Boxall, Cllr R I B Cannon, Cllr L Chapman, Cllr J Clokey, Cllr S A Hudson, Cllr W E Palmer, Cllr B A Parry, Cllr S Pilgrim and Cllr C J Williams

Councillors R P Betts, P M Hickmott, M A J Hood, Mrs S Bell*, M D Boughton* and Mrs A S Oakley* were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

(*participated via MS Teams)

An apology for absence were received from Councillors K B Tanner

PART 1 - PUBLIC

FRP 25/8 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Notification of substitute members were recorded as set out below:

- Cllr S Hudson substitute for Cllr K Tanner

In accordance with Council Procedure Rules 17.5 to 17.9 these Councillors had the same rights as the ordinary member of the committee for whom they were substituting.

FRP 25/9 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

FRP 25/10 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Select Committee held on 25 February 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

FRP 25/11 RIVERSIDE ROUTE LIGHTING PROJECT, TONBRIDGE

The report brought forward a List C Capital Plan Evaluation for riverside lighting between Town Lock and Vale Road in Tonbridge and sought

approval to move the project forward for construction later in the calendar year.

Members considered the feasibility study report (Annex 2) and the Capital Plan Evaluation (Annex 1) and welcomed the provision of high-quality lighting for pedestrians and the opportunity to create a safe and secure environment and reduce crime. The lack of lighting, combined with a narrow path lined with trees and shrubbery and unprotected river edge, made this an uninviting area and there had been a long-term aspiration from successive Ward Members to improve safety along this section of the riverside route.

Discussions had taken place with Kent County Council Public Rights of Way and it was confirmed that lighting may be installed on the route using powers under s161 of the Public Health Act 1875.

The Committee was assured that lighting levels would be consistent but would be low to protect and maintain the environment for wildlife, such as bats. The feasibility study provided a guide that developers should follow. In addition, comments from Kent Police would be reflected in the scheme.

On the grounds of understanding whether the introduction of a lighting scheme would impact local residents, Cllr Rhodes proposed that Members should have physical sight of the likely intended lighting columns by means of a demonstration in a low light at a future meeting of the Committee. This was seconded by Cllr Cannon and supported by the majority of Members.

Subsequent to the vote and for reasons of practicality it was agreed that a future meeting of the Committee could mean a visit to the project site.

***RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) Phase 1 of the project be taken forward through the design stages up to and including the preparation of tender documents;
- (2) the scheme be transferred to List A of the Capital Plan;
- (3) the use of the Borough Council's powers under s161 of the Public Health Act 1875 for the delivery of the project, with agreement from Kent County Councils Public Rights of Way Team, be authorised; and
- (4) Members had physical sight of the likely intended lighting columns by means of a demonstration in a low light at a future meeting or a site visit.

***Recommended to Cabinet – Council Decision**

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

FRP 25/12 WORK PROGRAMME 2025/26

The Work Programme setting out items to be scrutinised during 2025/26 was attached for information. Members were invited to suggest future matters by liaising with the Chair of the Committee and the Scrutiny Officer.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

FRP 25/13 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chairman moved, it was seconded by Cllr Rhodes and

RESOLVED: That as public discussion would disclose exempt information, the following matters be considered in private.

PART 2 - PRIVATE

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

FRP 25/14 GIBSON BUILDING WEST FUTURE

(Reasons: Part 2 Private – LGA 1972 Sch 12A Paragraph 3 – Finance or business affairs of any particular person)

The report of the Director of Central Services set out potential options for the Gibson West building at Kings Hill as part of the Borough Council's office accommodation consolidation project.

Careful consideration was given to the options presented and due regard was given to the financial and value for money considerations and the assessed risk, especially in respect of Local Government reorganisation. There was also detailed discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of leasehold and freehold, the value of applying for planning consent before disposal, the significant annual costs related to the maintenance of the listed building and a general recognition that the layout of the building was an inefficient use of space and freehold disposal removed the ongoing financial concerns.

***RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) the freehold option to dispose of Gibson West building be progressed; and

- (2) any offers received presented to the Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Committee for ratification and recommendation to Cabinet for a final decision.

***Recommended to Cabinet**

The meeting ended at 8.14 pm