

GUILDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of an extraordinary meeting of Guildford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Millmead House, Millmead, Guildford, Surrey GU2 4BB on Thursday 16 March 2023

The Mayor, Councillor Dennis Booth

* The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Masuk Miah (in the chair)

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| * Councillor Paul Abbey | * Councillor Julia McShane |
| Councillor Tim Anderson | * Councillor Ann McShee |
| * Councillor Jon Askew | * Councillor Bob McShee |
| * Councillor Christopher Barrass | * Councillor Richard Morris |
| * Councillor Joss Bigmore | * Councillor Marsha Moseley |
| * Councillor David Bilbé | * Councillor Ramsey Nagaty |
| * Councillor Chris Blow | * Councillor Susan Parker |
| * Councillor Ruth Brothwell | * Councillor George Potter |
| Councillor Colin Cross | * Councillor Jo Randall |
| * Councillor Guida Esteves | * Councillor John Redpath |
| * Councillor Graham Eyre | * Councillor Maddy Redpath |
| Councillor Andrew Gomm | * Councillor John Rigg |
| * Councillor Angela Goodwin | Councillor Tony Rooth |
| Councillor David Goodwin | * Councillor Will Salmon |
| * Councillor Angela Gunning | * Councillor Deborah Seabrook |
| * Councillor Gillian Harwood | * Councillor Pauline Searle |
| Councillor Jan Harwood | * Councillor Paul Spooner |
| * Councillor Liz Hogger | * Councillor James Steel |
| * Councillor Tom Hunt | * Councillor Cait Taylor |
| Councillor Diana Jones | * Councillor James Walsh |
| Councillor Steven Lee | * Councillor Fiona White |
| * Councillor Nigel Manning | * Councillor Keith Witham |
| * Councillor Ted Mayne | * Councillor Catherine Young |

*Present

CO137 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from The Mayor, Councillor Dennis Booth, and Councillors Tim Anderson, Colin Cross, Andrew Gomm, David Goodwin, Diana Jones, and Tony Rooth, and also from Honorary Aldermen Catherine Cobley, Sarah Creedy, Jayne Marks, Tony Phillips, Lynda Strudwick and Jenny Wicks.

CO138 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest.

CO139 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

There were no communications from the Mayor.

CO140 LEADER'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Leader reported on the following matters to the Council:

- (a) Crowdfund Guildford project deadline: the deadline to create a project was Wednesday 29 March. The Council had increased its maximum pledge to £10,000 for this funding round, and we were looking for projects that would help the community. Councillors were asked to raise awareness of the project within their local communities.

- (b) Coronation pages live on website: Plans for the Coronation weekend and how residents could get involved were now live on the Council's website. The pages covered information about the Coronation, how to host a Coronation event, activities across the Borough, how to get involved and a link to the official Coronation toolkit.
- (c) Last week of Matisse exhibition: the Matisse exhibition at Guildford House Gallery would run until 25 March 2023. The exhibition showcased 35 posthumous prints of the cut-outs produced by Henri Matisse in the last four years of his life, including many of his iconic images, such as The Snail and the Blue Nudes.
- (d) Voter ID roadshow: The Communications team and staff from Electoral Services had been out in the borough talking to residents about Voter ID. The purpose of the campaign was to make sure residents know that they would need photo ID to vote at a polling station on 4 May 2023. The latest Voter ID roadshow had been held earlier in the day at The Hive. The Council would be announcing more road show dates around the borough very soon. In addition, the Council had arranged for the delivery of a leaflet on Voter ID, produced by the Electoral Commission, to every household in the borough, and a further leaflet, produced by the Council, would be included in council tax bills. The Leader also referred to the cards that had been placed on each desk in the Council Chamber, for every councillor, which included on one side a QR code that linked to further information on the Electoral Commission's website and, on the other, examples of valid photo ID.

In response to an enquiry as to whether the roadshow would include destinations outside of the town area, the Leader confirmed that plans to visit some of the parished areas were in hand and councillors would be informed when these would be taking place.

In response to a question as to whether it would be possible for the Communications Teams to produce the card as a J-peg image so that it could be shared by councillors on social media, and also whether councillors could include them on their email signatures, the Leader indicated that these suggestions would be taken up with the Communications team.

CO141 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Sue Wyeth-Price, on behalf of Ash Green Residents Association, addressed the Council in respect of Agenda Item 7: Ash Road Bridge Scheme update and Budget Approval, and made the following points:

- Councillors were reminded that this project would cost at least £44m and would in debt all residents of the borough for decades, spread pollution over a wide area, and not deliver benefits.
- £9m had been spent to date, with no discernible progress made
- The Council had neither a construction contract, nor a contract with landowners in place, so did not know what the actual cost of the project would be.
- Uncertainty over possible contributions from Surrey County Council, Network Rail, and developers
- The Council hoped that the road bridge would improve safety, but the safety problems were with pedestrians, not cars.
- The bridge would not prevent rat-running or alleviate existing bottlenecks.
- No consideration had been given to alternative traffic solutions.
- Residents had not been asked whether they actually wanted the bridge.

CO142 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

There were no questions, on notice, from councillors.

CO143 ASH ROAD BRIDGE SCHEME UPDATE AND BUDGET APPROVAL

A recorded vote was requested in respect of the motion to approve the budget and funding strategy for the Ash Road Bridge project, which was supported by four other councillors in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 19 (d).

The Council considered an update report on progress with the Ash Road Bridge Scheme, which included a reappraisal of the budget and funding in respect of the project. Councillors noted that the project comprised a long-term infrastructure solution to the current and future issues posed by the Ash level crossing, including increased usage associated with housing growth in the Ash and Tongham area and greater barrier downtime resulting from enhanced rail use of the North Downs Line.

The Scheme was being delivered in two Stages. Stage 1 was the delivery of the road bridge over the railway line (and closure of the level crossing to motorised vehicles), and Stage 2 the delivery of the footbridge in the vicinity of Ash level crossing, to enable Ash level crossing to be closed permanently to all users.

The Council had approved the Scheme in April 2021, with a budget of £33.8 million for Stage 1 (road bridge) and £5.02 million for Stage 2 (footbridge) and funding from Homes England of £23.9 million. Due to challenging economic and market conditions the budget for Stage 1 (road bridge) had increased. Although, the Ash Road Bridge would bring substantial improvements to the local community and economy, the Executive was concerned about how the ongoing annual costs would be met. In noting the progress of this project since it was initially commissioned in 2015 and the benefits it would bring, the Executive had requested that further discussions be held with Surrey County Council as the transport and highways authority, Network Rail and Homes England on the ongoing impact of the costs of the bridge to local public services.

The report had set out, in the exempt appendices, the new budget and funding strategy for Stage 1 (road bridge) of the Scheme. The report noted that the final details of this could be subject to change following ongoing evaluation of the tenders received from the contractors in late January 2023 and their final offer in March 2023, including the impact on the Medium-Term Financial Plan. The report had also set out the funding strategy for Stage 2 of the Scheme (the footbridge).

The Council was informed that the approved budget for the Scheme was £38.91 million, being £33.89 million for the road bridge (Stage 1) and £5.02 million for the footbridge (Stage 2) (excluding borrowing costs.) The road bridge budget was slightly higher than that which had been approved by the Council in April 2021 (£38.79million) as the budget had subsequently combined with a separate approved budget for land acquisition costs for the Ash Road Bridge Scheme equivalent to £0.12 million. The revised budget was £44.5 million, being £44.0 million for the road bridge and £0.5 million for the footbridge (excluding borrowing costs.) The increase to the budget was therefore £5.59 million.

The Order Paper circulated to councillors at the meeting included a further update to the Funding Paper (Exempt Appendix 3 to the Council report) which had set out the implications for the funding strategy of the recent offer by Surrey County Council to make a contribution of £5m towards the scheme.

At its meeting earlier in the day, the Executive had also considered the report, including the further update to the Funding Paper, and had recommended to the Council approval of the budget and funding strategy, as updated.

The Lead Councillor for Regeneration, Councillor John Rigg, proposed and the Leader of the Council, Councillor Julia McShane, seconded a motion to approve the budget and funding

strategy as set out in the Exempt Appendices 2 and 3 to the report submitted to the Council, subject to the revisions to the Funding Paper in Appendix 3, as set out in the Order Paper.

The Council debated the information contained in the public report. The following points were made by councillors:

- The Lead Councillor noted that, in addition to Surrey County Council's contribution, it was possible that further grants might become available next year, but no allowance had been made in the budget and discussions were being held with Network Rail in respect of a contribution to the footbridge.
- The project was hugely important in terms of infrastructure delivery, and it was long overdue
- The bridge would create traffic problems and make rat-running worse
- There was a need to work with the County Council to mitigate against some of the highways issues identified
- Network Rail had previously classified the safety risk as medium-to-high for pedestrians, not for vehicles on this crossing. A footbridge would nullify this risk.
- Concern over the lack of clarity over the final cost of the bridge and the contingency being factored in being too low.
- All the highways and traffic related issues were debated at length and taken into account both as part of the Local Plan, when it was a requirement of Policy A31 and when planning permission was granted in 2021.
- The rat running through local roads was mainly caused by people who want to avoid the delays at the level crossing.
- Whilst it was true that much of the new housing would not directly link to the bridge, people from those properties would be feeding onto the same roads that were already being used to avoid the crossing.
- In response to claims that some local people did not want the road bridge, the Council's attention was drawn to a petition lodged in 2004 to the former Guildford Local Committee from Ash residents asking for a bridge to be built on the basis that it would remove a congestion hotspot delaying vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists caused by the present level crossing.
- Construction of the significant additional housing in the area was not conditional on the construction of the road bridge.
- Failure to deliver a road bridge now, and take advantage of significant government funding, might mean that a bridge would never be built.
- Surrey County Council, as the Highway Authority, should be paying for and building this bridge.
- Delays in getting to this stage had caused the significant increase in cost from £12.9m to £44m.
- The benefits of the bridge had not been set out, neither had the mitigations or the cost of them. There also appeared to be little evidence of public approval for the bridge.
- In response to concerns that further delays and the already tight timescale might prevent the Council from drawing down the Homes England funding, the Lead Councillor reassured the Council that Homes England had indicated that they would be flexible provided there was sufficient evidence of progress being made.
- Concern over uncertainty around construction costs and the cost of the land on which the bridge would be built.
- The bridge would alleviate traffic congestion in Ash and improve air quality

Following the debate in public, and upon the motion of the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Masuk Miah, seconded by Councillor Tom Hunt, the Council

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the public be excluded from the meeting for consideration of Appendices 2, 3, 4, and 5 to the report and the Appendix to the Order Paper on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in paragraphs 3 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the 1972 Act.

Following discussion in private of the contents of the exempt appendices referred to above, the Council resumed the meeting in public, and

RESOLVED: To approve the budget and funding strategy as set out in Exempt Appendices 2 and 3 to the report submitted to the Council, subject to the revisions to Appendix 3 as set out in the exempt Appendix 1 to the Order Paper circulated at the meeting.

Reasons:

This was a unique opportunity to utilise £23.9 million of central government funding towards the Ash Road Bridge Scheme to deliver an alternative road crossing of the North Downs railway line in close proximity to the Ash level crossing. The Ash Road Bridge Scheme formed a requirement of Policy A31 of the Council's Local Plan which allocated land for housing in Ash. Delivery of this scheme would also enable the closure of Ash level crossing to motor vehicles, which would improve safety for highway and rail users and significantly reduce traffic congestion on the A323 and the use of alternative local roads to avoid the Ash level crossing in Ash.

Result of the Recorded Vote:

The motion to approve the budget and funding strategy above was approved, with thirty-four councillors voting in favour, one voting against, and four abstentions, as follows:

FOR:

Councillor Jon Askew
Councillor Christopher Barrass
Councillor Joss Bigmore
Councillor Chris Blow
Councillor Ruth Brothwell
Councillor Guida Esteves
Councillor Angela Goodwin
Councillor Angela Gunning
Councillor Gillian Harwood
Councillor Liz Hogger
Councillor Tom Hunt
Councillor Nigel Manning
Councillor Ted Mayne
Councillor Julia McShane
Councillor Ann McShee
Councillor Bob McShee
The Deputy Mayor,
Councillor Masuk Miah
Councillor Richard Morris
Councillor Marsha Moseley
Councillor George Potter
Councillor Jo Randall
Councillor John Redpath
Councillor Maddy Redpath
Councillor John Rigg
Councillor Will Salmon
Councillor Deborah Seabrook
Councillor Pauline Searle
Councillor Paul Spooner

AGAINST:

Councillor Graham Eyre

ABSTAIN:

Councillor Paul Abbey
Councillor David Bilbé
Councillor Ramsey Nagaty
Councillor Susan Parker

FOR:

Councillor James Steel
Councillor Cait Taylor
Councillor James Walsh
Councillor Fiona White
Councillor Keith Witham
Councillor Catherine Young

AGAINST:

ABSTAIN:

CO144 APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICERS

The Council noted that, under Section 8(2) of the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Council must appoint an Officer to the position of Electoral Registration Officer (ERO). This position was responsible for maintaining the Electoral Register for the area.

The Chief Executive was the appointed ERO for Guildford Borough Council. Under Section 52(2) of the 1983 Act, the Council may approve the appointment of Deputy EROs to perform and exercise any of the duties and powers of the ERO. Due to recent changes in electoral legislation being likely to increase demand for urgent decisions by the ERO, it would be necessary to appoint Deputy EROs to assist with the effective discharge of duties to deliver the forthcoming local elections, and subsequent elections.

In order to provide maximum flexibility in respect of such appointments, and to avoid the necessity of bringing further reports to Council whenever such appointments were required, the Council was requested to delegate authority to appoint Deputy Electoral Registration Officers to the Electoral Registration Officer. This delegation mirrored that in respect of the Chief Executive’s role as Returning Officer in that he may appoint Deputies as required.

Upon the motion of the Lead Councillor for Planning Development, Legal and Democratic Services, Councillor Tom Hunt, seconded by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Julia McShane, the Council

RESOLVED: That the Council delegates authority to the Electoral Registration Officer to appoint Deputy Electoral Registration Officers, subject to such appointees holding satisfactory qualifications and experience as required.

Reason:

In order to provide maximum flexibility in respect of such appointments for the purpose of discharging new requirements following changes in electoral law, and to avoid the necessity of bringing further reports to Council whenever such appointments are required.

CO145 COMMON SEAL

The Council

RESOLVED: That the Common Seal of the Council be affixed to any documents to give effect to any decisions taken by the Council at this meeting.

The meeting finished at 8.59 pm

Signed
Mayor

Date