



## **SOUTH NORFOLK COUNCIL**

**Minutes of a meeting of the South Norfolk Council of South Norfolk Council, held on Thursday, 13 April 2023 at Time Not Specified.**

**Committee Members Present:** Councillors: J Easter (Chairman), Y Bendle (Vice-Chair), D Bills, C Brown, D Burrill, A Dearnley, M Dewsbury, M Edney, R Elliott, Ellis, D Elmer, J Fuller, J Halls, P Hardy, T Holden, J Hornby, C Hudson, K Hurn, W Kemp, K Kiddie, J Knight, T Laidlaw, N Legg, K Mason Billig, G Minshull, L Overton-Neal, S Nuri-Nixon, J Overton, S Ridley, J Savage, R Savage, I Spratt, T Spruce, A Thomas, V Thomson and J Worley

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillors: J Amis, B Bernard, S Blundell, G Francis, J Rowe, J Wilby and M Wilby

**Officers in Attendance:** T Holden (Managing Director), E Hodds (Chief of Staff), D Lorimer (Director of Resources), J Sutterby (Director of People and Communities), R Fincham (Assistant Director of Finance), E Pepper (Transformation and Innovation Manager) and C White (Democratic Services Manager)

**Also in Attendance:** Mr Kingston (representative from Roche)  
Mrs B Buck (Long Stratton Town Clerk)

### **3695. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Amis, Bernard, Blundell, Francis, Rowe, M Wilby and J Wilby

### **3696. BARRY DUFFIN**

The Chairman referred to the recent sad news that Cllr Barry Duffin had passed away. Cllr Duffin had become a district councillor for the Fornsett Ward in 2015 and had sat on numerous committees and represented the Council on several outside bodies. He had served as Chairman of the Council in 2017/18 and was elected to Norfolk County Councillor for West Depwade in 2021.

Cllr John Overton reminded members that Cllr Duffin was his brother-in-law and Cllr Lisa Neil's uncle. Both paid tribute to Cllr Duffin, reflecting on some of the personal memories they had of him.

Council then stood and observed a minute's silence in tribute to Cllr Duffin.

### **3697. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

*Minute number 3699 - The Sale of the South Norfolk House Site*

Cllr J Fuller declared an interest as the Council's Shareholder Representative for one of the bidders and left the meeting whilst the item was being considered.

Cllr K Mason Billig and Cllr R Elliot declared an interest as non-executive directors of one of the bidders and left the meeting while the item was being considered.

The Managing Director declared an interest as a director of one of the bidders and left the meeting while the item was being considered.

### **3698. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS**

#### **RESOLVED**

To exclude the public and press from the meeting under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended).

### **3699. THE SALE OF THE SOUTH NORFOLK HOUSE SITE**

Mr S Kingston, from Roche Chartered Surveyors, presented the report, which set out options for the sale of the South Norfolk House site.

He advised the meeting that following the appointment of Roche as agents, marketing of the site had commenced on 5 July 2022.

Following the six-month marketing requirement for existing use, and despite several viewings and enquiries, no offers were received for the site with its current usage. However, several prospective buyers had expressed an interest in the site for alternative use or for redevelopment and they were invited to submit bids as part of an informal tender process by the end of January 2023.

Attention was drawn to the bids that were set out in the table at paragraph 3.3 of the report, and Mr Kingston outlined each of them in detail, providing reasoning as to why some of the bids had been deemed as more favourable than others.

He then responded to a number of questions from members on points of detail.

Members noted the legal advice attached to the report and were advised that that in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972 the Council was required to obtain the best consideration obtainable and other issues such as social value and employment should not be a factor in the decision.

The Chairman thanked Mr Kingston for his time and then members **AGREED** that the meeting should return to public session.

The Chairman then invited Mrs B Buck, the Clerk for Long Stratton Town Council, to address the Council with the following presentation.

*When Long Stratton Town Council became aware that South Norfolk House was being marketed for sale, we held a poll with the local community and the overwhelming result was to see either a supermarket or something to support the community in the form of a shared space which provides continued employment and a way for Long Stratton residents to utilise the building. This was especially important with the 1,800 plus housing development coming to the Town.*

*The Town Council would, therefore, not welcome a bid of additional housing.*

*This was supported by the following policies, both from central Government and the local plans;*

*Paragraph 7 of the National Planning Policy Framework states: 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*

*Paragraph 8 states: 'to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure'.*

*Accepting a bid of housing without suitable infrastructure in place would compromise the ability of future generations by overpopulating a town whose economy was compromised by the loss of South Norfolk District Council and for local businesses who were struggling with the rising cost of living.*

*The 1,800 plus homes approved meets the social objective for paragraph eight, therefore, additional housing at the South Norfolk site was not appropriate.*

*Moreover, Long Stratton had an adopted Neighbourhood Plan where extensive evidence was gathered to support the housing need and there was no additional evidence to support housing above and beyond the 1,800.*

*The foreword to the Long Stratton Area Action Plan written by Cllr Fuller stated that,*

*'Planning for growth isn't just about a bypass. It's also planning for improvements to the village centre including improvements to public transport, new leisure and education facilities and local employment opportunities.*

*Developing a robust Area Action Plan means that we can control growth in housing, employment, services and infrastructure and make sure that they are completed in a co-ordinated way. Controlled development means that Long Stratton can become one of the best places to live in South Norfolk.'*

*Allowing a bid for additional housing would mean that Long Stratton would not grow in a co-ordinated way. However, a bid for a community building would support the growth of Long Stratton and meet the objectives Cllr Fuller identified.*

*The Town Council representing the community would like to see a bid to support local infrastructure and the local community and promote the local economy whilst keeping South Norfolk House which was iconic, distinctive and unique in culture and heritage. South Norfolk House was steeped in history, which included a small copse where Roman remains had been found. It also won the prestigious 1979 Premier Award and was later opened by Princess Alexandra in an historic and much celebrated event.*

*The following policy extracts supported what Long Stratton Council and its residents would like:*

*“Paragraph 81 of the National Planning Policy Framework states: ‘Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth’.*

*Chapter 3 of the Long Stratton Area Action Plan states that: ‘provision will be made to support a mix of local job opportunities and economic growth in Long Stratton including further opportunities for small businesses and new commercial development relating to the enhanced Town Centre.’*

*Long Stratton on behalf of its community would strongly object to a bid of housing for the site. We would encourage the District Council to give weight to any bid that supported the struggling economy and infrastructure by producing extra footfall for local businesses and providing job opportunities and security for residents. A bid to retain South Norfolk House as a community space, could be a resource for young people, adult learning and tackle mental health issues and loneliness in Long Stratton. This would meet the obligations of the Public Services Social Value Act of 2013, which required all public sector organizations and their suppliers to look beyond the financial cost of a contract and consider how the services they commissioned and procured could improve the economic social environmental and well-being of an area.*

*The 2023-24 Band D Council Tax base rate for Long Stratton was 1,432 properties which with an additional 1,800 plus houses had the potential to increase to 3,232. Diss currently had 2,838 households and Poringland 2,062. Both Diss and Poringland currently had successful community facilities that were widely used to support and serve their communities, Long Stratton has not.*

*Long Stratton had a village hall and a pavilion, which were already well utilised with minimal opportunity to grow. We would, therefore, welcome the community bid and would be willing to discuss how we could reflect the service and support which Diss and Poringland provide to meet the needs of an ever-growing community*

In response to a query, the Town Clerk confirmed that the Leisure Centre in Long Stratton was very well utilised, but it was not under the control of the Town Council, and it had minimal opportunity for expansion. The Leisure Centre had a community space, but it was used for leisure purposes. There were also some meeting rooms, but these spaces were minimal.

Members were advised that the Village Hall, the Pavilion and the Co-op supermarket in Long Stratton were facilities already very well used, and this was before the completion of the 1,800 additional homes planned for the town.

In answer to a question, the Town Clerk confirmed that the Town Council's opposition to further dwellings extended to social accommodation such as children's homes and older people's care facilities. She acknowledged that sheltered accommodation would not impact on the schools, but they would have an impact on health care facilities that were already overstretched in Long Stratton.

A member reminded the meeting that it was unfair to expect the Town Clerk to answer specific questions on behalf of the Town Council, as her role was to report decisions not to make them.

In answer to a query about the consultation held by the Town Council, members were informed that this had been held via social media, which had been the quickest way to garner opinion. The results of the consultation had indicated that most were in favour of using the site for community use. Mrs Buck reminded the meeting that there were very few places for young people in Long Stratton, so any more facilities would be welcomed.

A member commented on the fact that more housing would lead on to more infrastructure, and the area would then become more attractive to local businesses.

The Town Clerk advised the meeting that the Town Council was seeking to be proactive by utilising an existing building for community space, so that any further infrastructure money coming from development could be put to better use by supporting initiatives such as retirement homes, healthcare facilities and making the Town as attractive as possible. This would be the preferred route for the Town Council, rather than demolishing South Norfolk House for housing development and building a community facility elsewhere.

A member emphasised that South Norfolk House was an asset for the District as a whole and the wider community also needed to be taken into account when a decision on the future of the site was made.

A member noted that the Town Council would receive a substantial amount of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) from the development of 1,800 houses and he asked if the Council had any plans for how this would be spent.

In response, the Town Clerk informed members that there had been plans for a community centre on the east side of the new development to support the additional 8,000 people that are going to move into the 1,800 new homes. There were also plans to pedestrianize parts of the old A140 following the completion of the bypass, as well the introduction of some road safety measures. However, these initiatives would require significant investment and the estimated £2.2m in CIL would not go far for such large projects. Making use of South Norfolk House, as a community space, would help to reduce these costs and would allow the CIL money to be spent in other areas.

She stressed that Long Stratton would be receiving 1,800 additional homes on land that had been already allocated and the Town Council did not want any more in an area that did not have sufficient infrastructure to cope.

In answer to a question about the possibility of the Town Council putting forward a bid, it was confirmed that prior to the sale of South Norfolk House. the Town Council had considered building a community centre with services such as the library, a police presence, a community café, a youth café, a space for meetings and exercise classes. The Town Council was only made aware of a community bid for the site through a story in the *Eastern Daily Press* that contained very little detail. However, the Town Council would welcome the opportunity of discussing how they could support the bid in order to retain the facility.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Buck for her presentation.

## **RESOLVED**

To exclude the public and press from the meeting under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the following discussion would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended).

(Mrs Buck then left the meeting)

During discussion, Cllr J Worley pointed to the fact that there had been a material change in the situation at Long Stratton now that it was known that an additional 1875 houses were to be developed, and that there would be an opportunity for the Town Council to draw down on future CIL receipts. He therefore proposed an alternative recommendation, to defer the decision on the sale for 90 days or until the next appropriate Council meeting, to allow for more information to be provided. This amendment was duly seconded.

Some members demonstrated their support for the amendment and considered that it would be fairer to allow more time for some bidders to demonstrate additional evidence of funding. Members also expressed support for an outcome, if viable, which would add social value to the community.

One member reminded Council that bidders had been aware of the intended disposal of South Norfolk House since June 2022, and they felt that ample time had already been given for viable bids to come forward. They also referred to the ongoing costs of maintaining South Norfolk House.

Other members reminded the meeting of the need to carefully consider the commercial viability of all the bids.

On a show of hands with 24 in favour, 7 against and 1 abstention the amendment was carried.

Members then voted on the substantive recommendation and with 25 in favour and 7 against it was

## **RESOLVED**

That a decision on the sale of South Norfolk House be deferred for 90 days or until the next appropriate Council meeting, to allow for more information to be provided for members.

(The meeting concluded at 8.32 pm)

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Chairman