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## MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 20 MARCH 2024 AT 6.00 pm

Attendance:

The Mayor (Pepper ) (in the Chair)

Councillors Beavis, Bradley, Burgess, Casey, Chegwyn, Mrs Cully, Earle, Hammond, Herridge, Mrs Huggins, Hutchison, Hylands, Jessop, Miss Kelly, Mrs Morgan, Philpott, Raffaelli, Scard, Westerby, Durrant, Gledhill, Marshall, Maynard, Bradley and Cox

Also in attendance: Honorary Alderman Dickson

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### TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR MEMBERS FOR THEIR INABILITY TO ATTEND THE MEETING

An apology for non attendance was received from Councillor Johnston.

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### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

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### MAYORS COMMUNICATION

The Mayor advised that he would reserve these to be discussed under any other items.

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### TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 7 FEBRUARY 2024

The Mayor advised that he had been formally written to by a Member detailing an omission from the minutes and had been asked to correct it. He advised that he had spoken to the Borough Solicitor to discuss the request and invited the Member to advise the Council of the request.

Councillor Raffaelli advised that he had asked a question at the previous Council meeting that drew attention to a letter from the Deputy Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer that identified that the Leader of the Council had breached the Members Code of Conduct using language that could have been misinterpreted and misrepresenting the facts regarding the cost of the redesigned logo.

He advised that the question had been read but that the minutes did not reflect that the Leader had interjected when reading it the statement 'No I wasn't' after the question had stated he had breached the Councillors Code of Conduct. In addition, his answer he advised 'Like I have already said, I didn't'

He has denied the legitimate findings of the Deputy Monitoring Officer. He requested that the Leader admit that he was in breach of the Councillors code of conduct, otherwise an additional formal complaint would be made.

The Leader advised that the minutes advised what wa said at the meeting.

The Mayor advised that he had not been aware of the complaint, nor of the outcome at the last Council meeting and requested that Councillor Raffaelli read out the findings of the Deputy Monitoring Officer and Borough Solicitor.

Councillor Raffaelli detailed the letter as follows.

***I write further to the meeting of the Initial Filtering Panel which met on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2023 to consider the submitted complaint.***

***As it was a complaint by another member the Panel consisted of 2 Independent Persons as per the policy and have reviewed the evidence and documentation supplied as part of the complaint.***

***I, as Deputy Monitoring Officer, taking into account the views of the Independent Persons present, along with the information before me, came to the view that the complaint was such that it did engage the Local Assessment Criteria, as the Panel does have jurisdiction, you were a Councillor at the time of the complaint and that you were subject to the Councillors Code of Conduct at the time of the complaint.***

***My view, as Deputy Monitoring Officer, having consulted the Panel, is that the evidence is such that the Code has been breached. It was found that you breached the code by bringing the Council and your role as Councillor in to disrepute by your actions. It is accepted that some of your wording was political jostling but that the wording in respect of the use of funds for the logo was open to misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the actual position.***

***This said, I, as Deputy Monitoring Officer, was of the view that it would not be appropriate to institute a formal investigation, or arrange training or conciliation, but that it would be appropriate for you, as the Subject-Member, to discuss the use of wording within social media posts to avoid difficulties arising in the future with Peter Baulf Borough Solicitor and provide a short written confirmation of the fact that whilst it might not have been your intention that the wording of your Facebook posts could have been misinterpreted by members of the public as suggesting that no funds left Gosport Council.***

The complaint had been considered by the outside independent persons and the view of the Deputy Monitoring Officer was that the Council in to disrepute as a result of actions taken. The Code of Conduct had been breached and misrepresentation had occurred.

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## DEPUTATIONS

There were none.

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## QUESTIONS (IF ANY) PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER NO. 3.3

4 Public Questions had been received

Question in the name of Mike Ewin

Could the Leader update the Council on progress with the £18 million 'Levelling-Up' project?

You may recall that the previous administration had applied for and not received £18m in Levelling up funding, the current administration has received £18m showing the Government's trust in them to deliver.

Good progress was being made with UK Ports, and the work was moving forward. The £18m would improve the waterfront, the rum store which had been left in a state of disrepair, and was an

important part of the history of Royal Clarence Yard. The floor, roof and walls were in poor condition and with the £13m investment, there was a future for the building. It was hoped that in excess of 200 jobs would be created in the marine sector and that the remaining £5million would be spend on the waterfront, would include the bus station area, including public art and would hopefully generate further investment from the Arts Council.

A question in the name of Lizzie Maynard to the Leader of the Council.

Could the Leader give us an update on how the new People's Park plans are progressing?

The old bus station work was beginning to progress well following delays from the County Council. It was hoped the new facility would be completed in the summer. Once it was complete, focus would move to demolishing the old bus station, designs were being discussed between Councillors and Officers and discussions were being held into making the site a destination for residents meaning that they no longer needed to travel to Portsmouth to enjoy a waterfront view. It was hoped it would be up and running by next summer. Funds were in place and planning permission would be sought and promises delivered on.

A question in the name of Debbie Sherman

Could the Leader give us an update on the new bus station and transport interchange?

It had been delayed by Hampshire County council the bulk of the money spent had been spent on the new station, moved to the old taxi rank site. There were issues to be ironed out that included widening the new road. There was also concerns about the distance between the taxi rank and the ferry pontoon. But there was progress and it was getting there.

A question in the name of Thomas Finn to the Leader of the Council.

Could the Leader please update the Council on progress in providing new Council allotments?

The allotments were progressing and promises were being delivered on, machinery was on site and it was hoped they would be operational by the summer. This was good news for the excess of 100 people on the waiting list in Lee on the Solent and the allotment officer had done an excellent job in supporting the progress. Additional work was being undertaken to ensure as many plots as possible were viable to be used. Clearing rubbish and undertaking remedial work to make them useable again.

Members' questions – there were 14 Members questions

A question in the name of Councillor Hammond to the Leader

Could the Leader give us his views on the derogatory comments being made about the Criterion public consultation / survey which was carried out by non-political Council officers? Will the Leader respond to the falsehoods that the Conservative Party are continuing to make in their Conservatives out of touch leaflets?

I cannot give my views to a family audience but they are constantly bashing and running down the progress. The survey into the criterion was independent and non-political and the officers involved deserve and apology from the leader of the Conservative Party as they were perfectly entitled to attack the Councillors, but should not be attacking officers. In addition they should also get their facts right.

As a supplementary question it was clarified that the consultation was undertaken was not statutory, there was no consultation on the speed ramps in Lee on the Solent. It was reiterated that an apology should be given to the officers.

The Leader replied that it was up to the Leader of the Conservatives to apologise if he wished to and reiterated that the officers were above politics. 1100 responses had been received on the consultation from across the Borough, from all areas and ages and that there shouldn't be attacks on what the public wanted.

A question in the name of Councillor Westerby to the Leader

Could the Leader give us an update on the success of the Community Skips, especially the number of residents walking to the skips, and how much this especially benefits people without vehicles?

The skips were introduced by the Liberal Democrat and have been a great success. 300 tonnes of waste had been disposed of some that would not have been taken to the tip, and allows residents to dispose of waste without booking and without charge. There had been a 40% reduction in fly tipping. 94.5% of the waste had been recycled, which was 10% more than the tip. People were also able to just walk up to the skips, which they couldn't do to the tip. This had been shown in at the recent Whites Place event, more people had walked than driven. There were 7 sites that people were walking too with disability scooters, shopping trolleys or suitcases with items to dispose of. It was free of charge and people welcomed the opportunity to do so.

Supplementary question

Has the Leader considered expanding the scheme to more sites in the next year?

Yes we ought to take a look at more sites, we can only put the sites on GBC land and in areas where cars will not queue back on the highway. Negotiations could take place with private land owners, such as Bridge Mary School, for additional options.

It was hoped an option was available in Mayfield Road area, but accepted that this would be only one skip, and would be a walk up rather than drive. Grange was another area without a provision but other sites were being looked for and suggestions would be looked at.

A question in the name of Councillor Maynard to the Leader.

Could the Leader give us an update on the consultant's recent visit to the Criterion?

The new consultants had visited the site, CounterCulture, which were one of the best consultants in the country. The Council had been lucky to secure them and they had visited along with officers and were very impressed. They were working on a business case as the previous one had been based on GBC running the venue, when visits to other venues such as the Tivoli in Wimborne, the Regents in Christchurch, and the Plaza in Romsey had shown that a trust model for the venue would be the way forward. It was hoped that this would be progressing through the summer and it was exiting to do so.

Supplementary question

I am confused with the Criterion being identified as such an important part of the heritage of the Borough why the Conservatives would wish to know it down and replace it with flats.

The renovation was important for Gosport Heritage, social media had shown what Gosport had lost previously in the Ritz, and the clock couldn't be turned back on that.

The Criterion dated back to 1912, and the previous, one of the earliest purpose built cinema and theatre. There had been one in London dating from 1909 but this had now closed, which reiterated the importance of the Criterion and retaining it.

It would not have been suitable as flats as it was located on a traffic island and that it was important to protect the town's heritage and that it would bring investment and jobs to the Town and that 73% of the consultation supported it.

Question in the name of Councillor Hutchison

Could the Leader update the Council on the D-Day Fellowship's plans for a new D-Day Memorial at Stokes Bay?

The Leader advised that he was aware that all Councillors had received an email and that there was support for the memorial in the year of the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D Day, it was recognised that they were seeking £40,000 and that Gosport Borough Council would contribute the last £5,000. It was acknowledged that they had a crowdfunded that had raised £420.00 so there was still some way to go. The Council wished them success in their aims and acknowledged that they would need some better promotion to allow them to achieve their targets, but that it shouldn't be too difficult to achieve with the correct marketing.

Supplementary question

With the disappointment of the memorial being incomplete can the Leader confirm that the focus of the Borough's commemoration would be the event at Hardway which would host veterans probably for the last time and a parade?

The Leader confirmed this would be the case.

A question in the name of Councillor Ballard to the Leader

Could the Leader please update the Council on progress in installing new Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCPs) in Council car parks?

The electric vehicle charging points were making good progress, including Beach Road, Pebble Beach, Walpole Road and Green Lane. There had been some issues with payment mechanisms but this was being addressed

Supplementary

Are there any plans for more Electric Vehicles?

There are ongoing discussions with regard to additional points, there were some private ones located at Brockhurst Gate were not yet being used but the important of those in beach carparks for tourists was reiterated, it was felt it was important to get as many in as possible at no cost to the Council tax payer.

A question in the name of Councillor Earle to the Leader of the Council

Could the Leader update the Council on plans to provide free family entertainment across the Borough this summer?

Yes there will be a programme of free to enter events over the summer, with the support of outside organisations such as the Stoke Road Traders and the Gosportarians with the Council supporting when they can. It was important to provide free events to help families at this difficult time. There were talks about ongoing events in the High Street, bigger than previous years. And consideration was being given to arts in the park events.

There would be new art events, there was the marine festival, the criterion, all of which would bring money into the town.

A question in the name of Councillor K Bradley

Could the Leader please confirm that both the Splash Parks will open as normal this summer and that no cuts to funding have been made as alleged by the Conservatives?

Yes both splash parks will be open from 28 March and will continue to be open throughout the year, any information contrary to this was false, they were not built well and this had caused the issues along with the lack of maintenance. Thankfully Councillor Bradley had campaigned to ensure the Lee on Solent one remained open.

A question in the name of Councillor Kelly to the Leader of the Council

Could the Leader give us his thoughts on the false reports that White's Place car park has been earmarked to have charges brought in?

The allegations about charges in Whites Place are not true and the Conservatives should not be spreading false rumours there were no plans to implement charges in Whites Place.

Supplementary question

There was also a rumour that charges would be being made in car parks that facilitate sports pitches, is this something being considered.

Answer: No unlike neighbouring Fareham we will not be charging.

A question in the name of Councillor Johnston to the Leader

Could the Leader give us an update on the Council's pledge to upgrade play parks across Gosport?

Play areas across the Borough were being updated, most recently Tedder Road in Bridgemary had been completed and some remedial work at Griffin Walk had been undertaken as a result of campaigning by Clive Foster-Reed. These were safety improvements that were previously not undertaken. The administration had pledged to upgrade as many play areas as possible.

Question in the name of Councillor Marshall to the Leader of the Council.

Could the Leader please update the Council on progress in bringing parking machines that accept cash and cards back into all the Council's public car parks?

21 of the 24 had now been updated and the three remaining ones were waiting for a new machine. The public had requested the reinstatement and this had been delivered.

As per Standing Order 4.8.6 any Members questions not answered within the 30 minute time frame are answered in writing within 7 days and included in the minutes.

Question in the name of Councillor Morgan to Councillor Westerby.

During the Conservative leadership all play parks were assessed for maintenance and safety under ROSPA criteria and a timetable of repair set up. Are you using this timetable? and if not, can you confirm when will the Rowner rec play area near Griffin Walk be fully upgraded? and when can I see a copy of the last health and safety report on the play park.

Answer

There is a continuing schedule of play park inspections including annual ROSPA inspections. The Griffin Walk play area was last inspected on the 27/2/24, one immediate repair was required and was undertaken on the 28/2/24 and the Grounds Maintenance Team will continue H&S inspections and deal with any necessary repairs should they arise. Griffin Walk has been highlighted for a general upgrade when funds are available.

The report on the play area is an operational report, one of many produced, and will not be released.

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## TO RECEIVE THE FOLLOWING PART II MINUTES OF THE BOARDS OF THE COUNCIL

RESOLVED: That the Part II Minutes of the following Boards

Community and Environment Board – 28 February 2024  
Policy and Organisation Board – 13 March 2024

Community and Environment Board

A Member was advised that there was no update to the Alverstoke and Seafield schemes but there had been an update to the Stokes Bay work, this was all in the hands of the Coastal Partners.

Tenders had been received as part of the procurement process and were moving forward, it was crucial to receive the marine license to allow the work to progress and this was being sought.

Seafield, the scheme was on hold pending match funding, however concern was expressed that the walls in the area were low and deteriorating.

Concern was raised that the Coastal Panel had not met, there and that this was different to the Coastal partners meeting. Enquires would be made with regard to this as it was felt that they were a good opportunity for discussion.

Concerns about the seawall at Fort Blockhouse were also reiterated.

Policy and Organisation Board.

Members reiterated that they were not happy with the EY service and that the audit presented was for 2021/22 and it was acknowledged that this was a national problem for Local Authorities and that it was antedated that audits would skip a year to catch up and that this was not acceptable.

Concern was expressed that no external audit would be undertaken for the year, which was essential to ensure the Council were on the right track.

A Member advised that findings in 2021/22 had identified some issues but these had not been rectified

Members welcomed the biodiversity policy, and also reiterated the suggestion that it should sit within the remit of Community and Environment Board. Members also dealt that that climate change strategy should be resurrected as it seemed to have been lost with the disbanding of the climate change board, along with the action plan. The climate change officer had not had their contract renewed.

The Council were advised that the biodiversity policy was a duty the Council had to undertake.

A Member advised that they appreciated the hard work of the previous conservative council on climate change and understood that the biodiversity was a duty.

The Council was advised that work undertaken on climate change would not be wasted and that was a link between biodiversity and climate change.

A Member reiterated concern they had previously made with regard to the gap between Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 and reiterated the seriousness of the issue, waiting until 2025-2026 was not acceptable and concerning and requested urgent consideration be given to it.

Members recognised that the Policy and Organisations Board minutes reflected the proposed amendments to the National Planning Policy Framework which was one of a number of issues created by the current Government but some Members felt that some of the issues raised were scaremongering

It was clarified that the conversation regarding the future of the LEP would be shared, and the digital strategy and its benefits were recognised.

The LEP functions were being passed to the Local Authorities and there were some outstanding projects that would remain funded so they would not disappear entirely.

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## **CAPITAL STRATEGY REPORT 2024/25**

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Treasurer detailing the Capital Strategy as required by the prudential code.

Members recognised the work undertaken by the Borough Treasurer and the Head of Finance on the report.

A Member identified that under the Governance requirement of the report, it detailed that large scale schemes would follow a full business case process, and ensure that options appraisals with risks had been considered. It was felt that with the criterion had been purchased and was moving forward without any of this and therefore the Council were in breach of their own agreed policy.

The information of the on the business case that had been released was that the venue was unlikely to be viable, requiring input from the Council of £250,000 per annum, at least £550,000 capital spend followed by another £6.7million in capital for the work.

There was no detail of where the finance for this would come from.

£35,000 was being spent on consultants because the first consultant did not report what had been desired and there was still no viable business case, or if there was it had not been seen.

The People's Park proposal had caused the Council to lose significant funding as they had been required to hand back £1.35million to One Public Estate as proposals for new housing had been removed.

The report was welcomed and a named vote was requested.

A Member advised that they were unhappy that the Conservatives were constantly critical of arts and culture in the Borough and that the People's park would create opportunities for families at a time that was difficult and that following World War II, another difficult time investment was made and the importance of culture recognised to overcome adversity and consider better times ahead.



A Point of Order was requested under standing order 4.11.11 in that the Member advised the Conservatives were not against culture, but were stating that the Council was unable to uphold the recommendations it was being asked to consider because no business case had present for the criterion.

A Member advised they felt that the Conservatives were negative towards everything positive being done in the Borough.

A Member advised the Council that procedures were being followed as this had led to the delay in the new Council houses being constructed.

The Leader reiterated that it was inappropriate to attach officers and that the Conservatives did not want improvement in the Borough.

Under Standing Order 4.11.11 a Point of Order was raised. It was clarified that no attack was being directed at officers, the concern was how the governance of the report was being carried out by the administration.

The Leader advised that the Government were supporting the Council's commitment to culture and calls had been undertaken with the DCMS praising Culture. Culture budgets were being reduced and removed at struggling Councils but Gosport was stepping up and delivering.

It was requested that a name vote be undertaken.

**RESOLVED:**  
That the Capital Strategy for 2024/25 be approved.

For the recommendation:

Councillors Ballard, Bradley, Bradley, Burgess, Casey, Chegwyn, Cox, Cully, Durrant, Earle, Gledhill, Hammond, Herridge, Huggins, Hutchison, Hylands, Jessop, Kelly, Marshall, Maynard, Morgan, Philpott, Raffaelli, Scard, Westerby.

**ABSTAIN:**  
Pepper.

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## **INVESTMENT STRATEGY REPORT 2024/25**

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Treasurer detailing seeking the approval of an investment strategy as per the prudential code for capital finance in local authorities.

**RESOLVED:** That the Investment Strategy be approved.

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## **ANY OTHER ITEMS**

Members thanked the Mayor as it was his last meeting as a Mayor and a Councillor.

Members paid tribute to outgoing Councillors Beavis and Gledhill and thanked them for the work they had undertaken.

The Mayor reflected on his year and reiterated the importance of the voluntary sector to the town and extended thanks to both officers and Members of the Council.

The Meeting concluded at 8.13 pm

The Mayor.