

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF BIGGLESWADE JOINT COMMITTEE
HELD IN PERSON AND VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING AT
BIGGLESWADE TOWN COUNCIL OFFICES, THE OLD COURT HOUSE,
4 SAFFRON ROAD, BIGGLESWADE, SG18 8DL
ON THURSDAY 25th APRIL 2024 at 7.00 PM**

Present:	BTC Members: Cllr M Russell (Vice Chairman), Cllr. C. Thomas, Cllr. D. Albone, Cllr. S. Patel (via Zoom). CBC Members: Cllr. H. Whitaker, Cllr. G. Fage, Cllr. R. Hares, Cllr. P. How (via Zoom). CBC Community Engagement Manager: Sarah Hughes. CBC Head of Sustainability: Stephen Mooring. Co-opted Members: Cliff Andrews, Carol Birtwistle. BTC Town Clerk & Chief Executive: Peter Tarrant. BTC Head of Governance & Strategic Partnerships: Karim Hosseini. BTC Committee Clerk: Kathrine Chambers.
In Attendance:	
Members of the public:	3 (1 online)

Following a reminder to Meeting attendees that this is a formal meeting, the Chair advised that members of the public will be given an opportunity to speak during public open session but not at other times. The meeting was being filmed and by being present attendees were deemed to have agreed be filmed and to the use of those images and sound recordings. The Chair advised that attendees should not disclose any personal information of individuals as this would infringe the Data Protection Rights of the individual. The Chair asked everyone to mute their microphones when not speaking.

PART A – ADMINISTRATION

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr. G. Tranter (Chairman), S. Conder.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(a) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests in any agenda item – Cllr. Hares for Item 13b.

(b) Non-pecuniary interests in any agenda item – None.

3. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

4. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

To adjourn for a period of 15 minutes to allow members of the public to put questions or to address the Committee, through the Chairman, pertaining to items listed on the agenda. Each speaker to be allocated a 3-minute speaking slot.

a. Mark Inskip, Representative of Biggleswade FC

Mr. Inskip had three points that he wished to share with Members:

- (1) Mr. Inskip highlighted previous meetings with Town and County Council Members that had influenced Biggleswade FC. He noted there are a lack of sport facilities in Biggleswade, including football, and these will become more strained with increasing housing and population growth.
- (2) Mr. Inskip highlighted Biggleswade FC's programme for young people, with a total of eleven youth sides in the coming year. The existing playing fields in Biggleswade have become oversubscribed and that local teams have to go to surrounding towns to access suitable facilities.
- (3) Mr Inskip also noted an independent survey on sports facilities. They were told that this would be complete by Autumn of 2023 after an eight-month long research period. While the full information pack has not been shared yet, he noted that this has highlighted issues in Biggleswade.

b. Jeremy Reynolds, Chairman of Biggleswade FC

Mr. Reynolds noted the history of the club and its continued work. He explained that the club's current aim is to have football ground in Biggleswade with suitable facilities. Mr. Reynolds asked the Joint Committee to support this project and help Biggleswade FC to find a more local base.

Mr Reynolds finished by noting positive commentary from Ivel Valley School, highlighting their involvement in creating opportunities for pupils and their families, as well as organising a Biggleswade FC led tournament for local SEND schools.

5. UPDATES FROM CBC AND BTC COUNCILLORS

- a. Cllr. Russell asked for any update from CBC regarding the formal application for a safety island on St. Andrew's Street.

Cllr. Whitaker asked that, as the acting lead for Highways, could she be copied into that email thread so that she can chase this with the relevant Officers.
- b. Cllr. Whitaker noted that Land North has returned as an application to CBC with a wide variety of documentation. She is happy to contact residents to make them aware of the application and provide their own arguments to the Town Council if requested. BTC Members noted that a preliminary discussion is scheduled to discuss the Town Council's approach.
- c. Cllr. How provided an update on a business development meeting within CBC, where there was a discussion about ensuring apprenticeships for young people in Bedfordshire. He noted that Cllr. Watkins is taking this idea forward, trying to bridge the gap between local companies and colleges.
- d. Cllr. Russell highlighted that the installation of new play equipment at Kitelands Recreation Ground is progressing, but there was an instance of vandalism in the past week.

6. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

- a. P10 Item 11 – Members noted that the location stated for the next meeting was the Orchard Community Centre, but that this had been reorganised to the Old Court House.

Members reviewed and **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Biggleswade Joint Committee Meeting of **Thursday 18th January 2024**, subject to changes being implemented.

7. MATTERS ARISING

- a. **(P7) Item 5 – Market Square / Bus Stops**

Members asked if only Biggleswade was being reviewed or the wider local area.

Cllr. Fage responded that funding has been allocated to investigate the bus stop, but there has been no further progress. Cllr. Whitaker added that this funding is from last year's budget and that she is pushing for this to be completed in Quarter One 2024/25.

- b. **(P7) Item 5 – Bus Interchange**

Cllr. Fage noted contact with Officers surrounding the Bus Interchange. Herbert's Travel have been using this site, but they have just given notice. He highlighted that CBC Officers are working to ensure that this site is used.

- c. **(P9) Item 9 – CBC Forward Planning: Youth Services**

BTC Members noted previous discussions about youth services and that, while no progress had been made in relation to this, it should be considered as part of a long-term plan.

- d. **(P9) Item 9 – CBC Forward Planning: Public Space Protection**

BTC Members asked for any updates on the Public Space Protection Order.

Cllr. Whitaker confirmed that this Order was approved by the Executive following extensive consultation in the year 2023/24. She highlighted CBC's willingness to include other areas in the documentation and that meetings have been organised for town and parish councils to contribute.

Cllr. Hares added that this is an evidence-led document which is reliant on reported instances to demonstrate need for the Order.

- e. **(P9) Item 10 – Biggleswade Strategic Town Priorities**

Members noted the discussion to create a priorities list for S106. The BTC Chairman confirmed that no progress has been made, but that this remains a high priority.

Cllr. Whitaker noted that there was interest from other town and parish councils to learn more about S106 and the ways they can influence it. Cllr. Hares added that this can be mentioned at the Partnerships meeting to highlight how to evidence need.

BTC Members reiterated its support for Biggleswade FC, who experienced issues regarding a site being identified on Land East but progress stalled. Cllr. Whitaker responded that CBC have a list of what's included in this application, that she will share with Members.

8. CO-OPTION PROCESS

Karim Hosseini noted that BTC Officers spoke to co-opted Members about an induction process or pack and received positive feedback. Both Karim Hosseini and Sarah Hughes are developing an information pack, using existing BTC and CBC induction materials.

9. UK SPF

Stephen Mooring highlighted the three core work strands that are behind the grants provided: community, business and skills.

Mr. Mooring thanked BTC Officers for their application and confirmed that these grants will be formally approved in the coming week and grant agreements sent out.

Mr. Mooring noted that the UK SPF community grant scheme will run again this year. The launch date will be in June 2024 and the deadline for bids in July 2024. Applicants will be able to apply for amounts between £3,000 and £40,000, out of a total fund of £298,155. Members are encouraged to highlight this to local community groups.

Mr. Mooring highlighted a recent meeting with residents from Biggleswade, Sandy, Pottton, and the wider local area regarding setting up an Ivel Valley Community energy group. This meeting featured presentations from Greensand Community Energy Group and Buzz Energy (Leighton Buzzard). There will be a follow up meeting on 1st May.

Mr. Mooring noted that cultural grants have launched in three funding streams: the Test & Pilot, focusing on working with new creatives (up to £7,500); the Creative Development Grant for established organisations in Central Bedfordshire (up to £40,000) (deadline is 24th May); and Grow & Maintain (details to follow).

He also noted the Green Skills Training funding, which will offer three levels of training: Understanding Domestic Retrofit (L2), Domestic Retrofit Advice (L3), and Aware in Assessing Domestic Dwellings for Retrofit (L4). There are also two fixed term posts that were recruited to focus on employment support for those who are economically inactive.

Mr. Mooring's final note was that five intermediary contracts are in delivery and programmes are still live for registrations. This will provide business support and grants for innovation, start-up & scale-up, export and decarbonisation. Mr Mooring indicated that there was a high level of interest and noted that he will try to access a breakdown of the geographic spread of businesses currently participating.

Members noted that the cultural funding could be beneficial to local organisations, such as the Bigg Theatre which is aspiring to make their venue more accessible. Mr. Mooring agreed that this would be a suitable avenue, and that the Place team are working with CVS who can assist previous and new applicants with their applications.

10. S106 REPORT

Due to Cllr. Tranter being absent, Members agreed to place this on the next Joint Committee agenda.

Cllr. Whitaker noted that the S106 from Land East has not changed, with the previous agreement being carried forwarded. She advised BTC Members and Officers to not wait until an application comes in, but rather work alongside CBC two years ahead of time. Members suggested that a list should be developed and shared regularly with CBC, including more allotment and cemetery space.

11. CBC FORWARD PLANNING

Sarah Hughes noted CBC discussions about the role of Joint Committees and how to use their Forward Plan to discuss items important to town and parish councils. She highlighted the provision of these plans in the report for Member consideration.

Cllr. Hares noted that a formal process for town and parish council input to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee was being developed.

Cllr. Russell noted nine items (as below) that the Town Council could discuss:

a. **Transition to Two-Tier Education**

Cllr. Whitaker noted that this is progressing well, with most construction happening over the Easter break. Those that were not completed will be scheduled over the summer where possible. Mitigations have been put in place to ensure suitable buildings are in place in the short and long-term.

Cllr. Whitaker highlighted that developments to Lawnside School could cause issues in terms of accessibility on the Avenue. This road is now owned by Central Bedfordshire as of 2022.

b. **Recreational Open Space Strategy**

Cllr. Russell asked whether a draft document is available related to this project. Cllr. Hares confirmed that it is currently being drafted and will be reviewed by Overview & Strategy, before going to consultation. She confirmed that these could be shared with the group, which should be taken up by Karim Hosseini and Sarah Hughes.

c. **Cultural Strategy**

Cllr. Russell highlighted that this is a collaboration between CBC and practitioners, which could be beneficial to Biggleswade.

d. **Library Strategy**

This will develop a plan for the next five years, which is relevant to Biggleswade library after its recent renovation.

e. **Health Hubs & Primary Care**

Cllr. Russell noted the strong need for a health hub in Biggleswade. Cllr. Hares highlighted that discussion have begun with the ICB to establish their current need and update the policy document to reflect this. There is current a feasibility being completed in Biggleswade to highlight its specific needs and what direction the ICB could head with these. Cllr. Hares also highlighted the importance of establishing multidisciplinary teams within the health hubs.

Cllr. Whitaker noted that once these discussions are complete and the policy documents are updated, the Town Council will be consulted regarding the best location for this setting.

f. **Garden Waste Policy Review**

Cllr. Whitaker noted that uptake of the scheme has been higher than expected, but that there had been some traffic disruption near the Tidy Tip. A review will happen in September 2024 to consider the impact of the policy.

g. **Highways Task & Finish Group**

Cllr. Whitaker explained that this is a cross-party group which looks at all elements surrounding highways, considering a different topic each meeting. The chairman's decision was to bring these to review all together in September 2024. Cllr. Russell noted that it would be beneficial to discuss this as a Joint Committee and could be brought onto the July agenda.

h. Parking Services & Enforcement Strategy

Members agreed that there is a need for more parking enforcement in Biggleswade and the local area. Cllr. Whitaker highlighted that recruitment remains an issue and there is a shortage of enforcement officers. Members recognised the importance of randomised enforcement to reduce unlawful parking.

Cllr. Hares noted that increasing enforcement on engines that are left running would also increase the risk of confrontation for enforcement officers. CBC are instead focusing on advertisement campaigns to help reduce this issue.

Cllr. Whitaker also highlighted that it would be beneficial to CBC to have discussions about which enforcement issues are the main priority, which the Town Council could feed into. Cllr. Russell agreed that this could be placed onto a TCM agenda in the future.

12. LOCAL PLAN WORKSHOPS

Cllr Russell said that she and Cllr Barrett attended one of these workshops. She questioned that all sites identified for development in the adopted local plan remain allocated. Cllr. Russell noted that there are certain circumstances where this can be reviewed, but that criteria for allocating a site are not as stringent as for a planning application.

Cllr. Whitaker recollected an instance in Pottton where an application was refused by DMC, but granted on appeal because it was part of the old local plan. It was recognised that criteria need to be strengthened and increased to help reduce these situations. Cllr. Hares followed this by noting that there are robust inspection processes in place to allow a site to be adopted in the local plan.

Members agreed to NOTE the report.

13. LOCAL PROVISION & SPORTS FACILITIES IN BIGGLESWADE

Members opted to open discussion into general session and move later into exempt.

Cllr. Fage noted that progress in relation to leisure has been notably slow. He highlighted that there is money in the pipeline for leisure, but further discussions are still ongoing in relation to timelines, funds, initiatives, and so on.

Cllr. Whitaker highlighted that there is a clear need for sports facilities, reinforced by the public open session. While new sites have been opened in Biggleswade, there is a need for continued provision for young people.

Peter Tarrant responded that BTC Officers spoke with developers and projects teams but they have not been provided any more information to share with Members. Karim Hosseini added that Kitelands Recreation Ground has been approved as suitable and updates will be shared as a report to Biggleswade Town Council in June. However, there are continued concerns about the future safety of the grounds and the maintenance required for these sites.

Cllr. Fage highlighted the needs of Biggleswade FC in the form of infrastructure, such as a quality football pitch, clubhouse, and stands. Cllr. Russell suggested that Kitelands could have a MUGA facility as a training ground for local football teams.

Cllr. Whitaker asked whether future management strategies have been considered, should the Town Council take over this land. She highlighted that the site must meet the need of the town, but also be feasible in the long-term.

Peter Tarrant confirmed that discussions have happened, including utilising the existing expertise of the Public Realm team, but also noting the costs that would be incurred through staffing and materials. He also noted that external operators could be consulted in future, but these cannot be consulted until more information is gathered. Officers highlighted that further updates will be included in the report, but it will not be inclusive of all possible aspects / infrastructure.

Cllr. Whitaker highlighted that some leisure plans will renew in the coming year and that all leisure should be considered, including football and other sports requiring facilities.

Members **RESOLVED** to:

- a. Urgently feed into the leisure strategy more broadly, with support expressed for Biggleswade FC and,
- b. To explore options to extend near existing leisure facilities where land allows.

Cllr. Whitaker asked that the CBC draft on leisure strategy be brought to Joint Committee to decide if it meets the criteria discussed by Members.

Sarah Hughes noted that there was a Topic Session for town and parish councils last year, which she will share with Members after the meeting.

14. **EXEMPT**

a. **Leisure Provision and Sports Facilities in Biggleswade**

Members **RESOLVED** to bring this discussion back to the next Joint Committee.

b. **Co-option Process**

Members **RESOLVED** to agree to co-opt Nick Gurney.

- c. Cliff Andrews noted that previous discussions spoke about inviting young people to become involved within Joint Committee. Members noted that minimum age limits would be beneficial and to ensure parental consent through the application form. BTC Officers will share the current co-optee application form with Cliff.

15. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on the 11th July 2024 and would take place at the Orchard Community Centre at 7pm.

Meeting Closed at 9:05pm.