

CABINET



THURSDAY, 8 OCTOBER 2020 - 4.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor C Boden (Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor S Clark, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor S Tierney and Councillor S Wallwork

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Amy Brown (Chief Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Peter Catchpole (Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer), Paul Medd (Chief Executive), Carol Pilson (Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer) and Justin Wingfield (Head of Business & Economy)

GUESTS: Nick Dighton and Nick Carver of Floorspan

Councillor Boden welcomed members of the public and press watching the livestream of the Cabinet meeting via YouTube due to Government guidance on social distancing. The meeting was held in accordance with the provision set out in the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 and with Fenland District Council's Virtual Meeting Protocol.

CAB21/19 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held 8 September 2020 were agreed.

CAB22/19 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULE 9A.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9A, Nick Dighton, Managing Director of Floorspan, asked the following question.

“Over 20 years ago in 1998 as a one man band I stood in person before a similar Fenland District Council Committee to make my case for Planning Permission on 3/4 of an acre in Europa Way that I was negotiating to buy from FDC which, if granted, would enable me to move my fledgling business to Wisbech.

I very much remember the kind and encouraging words of the Committee Chairman as he presided over a unanimous approval.

We now employ close to 100 people from a 6-acre operational site, in part facilitated by FDC through the sale of additional land and the granting of various Planning Permissions along the way. However, the existing site is at capacity and we need additional land to facilitate the next phase of the company's growth.

We have been engaged with FDC through your Economic Development Officer for over 3.5 years now in an attempt to identify and purchase a suitable site, longer than the possibility of the incinerator project I imagine and this fact, combined with our demonstrable history with FDC, should undermine the suggestion that there is a connection. The latest setback in the form of a Motion to halt the sale of all land within 500mtrs of the proposed incinerator, proposed on the eve

of the meeting at which the sale of the site was to be considered, is a bitter blow.

Anecdotally, we have heard that some members have imagined a connection between the project and Floorspan which does not exist. I want to make it absolutely clear to members that there is and never has been any connection between Floorspan and the incinerator project. An imaginary connection is simply fanciful and potentially very damaging to us and to FDC.

The current economic conditions are unique and challenging but paradoxically in our opinion present a moment in time for an ambitious and forward-looking company. The Government are keen to support companies like us and are offering various incentives by way of encouragement.

I urge you to continue the support to us that you have shown in past years and demonstrate to the wider world that you really are “open for business”.

Your Standing Order requires that any presentation to this committee on such a crucial matter can only be in the form of a question. So on the basis of what has just been said my question is: ‘On what evidence is the justification for holding up and then refusing the sale of the land to Floorspan with all the added benefits to the Wisbech area really based and will you reconsider the earlier Motion to enable our expansion to proceed within the FDC area.’

Councillor Boden thanked Nick Dighton for both his statement and question, saying that there is a confidential item on the agenda within which Cabinet would consider carefully everything that has been said. Councillor Boden added that when a question is raised in public at a council meeting concerning an agenda item at that meeting, usually it would be the case that a substantive answer would be given to the question, referring to the details of the published report relating to that item. Unfortunately, in this case it is possible that Cabinet will determine that as the agenda report contains legally exempt information, the report and discussion of that item will have to remain confidential, therefore for that legal reason he can say no more at this stage.

Councillor Boden thanked Nick Dighton for attending Cabinet and providing the information that members would take on board.

Nick Dighton asked when he may expect to hear further in relation to his question. Carol Pilson advised that whatever decision was made today; a call-in period of five working days would have to be observed before any decision could be implemented and any decision released.

Councillor Boden thanked both Nick Dighton and Nick Carver for attending the meeting today.

(Nick Dighton and Nick Carver left the meeting).

CAB23/19 DRAFT 6 MONTH CABINET FORWARD PLAN

Councillor Boden presented the Cabinet Forward Plan for information.

CAB24/19 PROPOSED DISPOSAL OF LAND (CONFIDENTIAL ITEM)

Members considered the confidential Proposed Disposal of Land report presented by Councillor Boden.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses.

Cabinet considered the report and RESOLVED to pursue Option 1 which was to retain the Land and the Additional Land and not to enter into any disposal or further negotiations at this time acknowledging the economic implications and strategic significance of the site. In conjunction with this, Cabinet requested that officers provide the organisation requesting

the sale with ongoing assistance in identifying opportunities for expansion within the District.

4.49 pm

Chairman