

**Minutes of the Business, Infrastructure and Growth Committee
5 December 2024**

Present:

Councillor H.R.D. Williams (Chair)
Councillor J.R. Boughtflower (Vice-Chair)

Councillors:

C. Bateson	M. Gibson	A. Mathur
S.N. Beatty	S. Gyawali	S.C. Mooney
M. Beecher	N. Islam	

Substitutions: Councillors R.V. Geach
D. Saliagopoulos

Apologies: Councillors T. Burrell and D.C. Clarke

In Attendance: Councillors L. E. Nichols and J.R. Sexton

19 Apologies and Substitutes

Apologies were received from Councillor Burrell and Councillor Clarke. Councillor Geach attended as substitute for Councillor Burrell while Councillor Saliagopoulos was substitute for Councillor Clarke.

20 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2024 and the Extraordinary meeting held on 16 September 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

21 Disclosures of interest

There were none.

22 Questions from members of the Public

There were none.

23 Forward Plan

Councillor Gyawali arrived at 19:03

The Chair proposed adding the following items as standing agenda items:

HSR/SLR Working Group Updates

Waterfront Development Update

The Committee **resolved** to note the Forward Plan with the addition of the above items.

24 Business, Infrastructure & Growth Budget, Fees and charges, and Revenue Growth Bids for 2025/26

The Committee considered a report from the Joint Financial Services Manager on the Fees and Charges, and Revenue Growth Bids for the Business, Infrastructure & Growth Committee.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that there were no Capital Bids or Savings proposals for this Committee to consider. The Deputy Chief Executive then introduced the Growth Bids and Fees and Charges and invited comments. Members were advised that the default position was for a 4% uplift of fees rounded to the nearest pound but that there were exceptions where an increase would have an adverse impact on activity and income streams.

The Committee requested clarification on the cost to the Council for the Jobs and Skills Hub and were advised that up until March 2025, the cost was nil due to funding from the Department for Works and Pensions and the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF).

The Committee asked what the funding for the Ashford Business Improvement District (BID) would cover and were advised that it would cover the stakeholder consultation, formation of business plans and setting up steering committees. There would be no ongoing cost to the Council.

Councillor Geach arrived at 19:12

The Committee requested a report on outcomes for the SPF. It was agreed that a report would be circulated to all members via the Members' Briefing Pack in Spring 2025.

Committee **resolved** to:

1. Approve the Budget, Fees and Charges, and Growth Bid proposals for Business, Infrastructure & Growth Committee
2. Recommend to Corporate Policy & Resources Committee that they approve the proposed Budget, Fees and Charges, and Growth Bid proposals for Business, Infrastructure and Growth Committee.

Councillor Mooney requested it was noted that she did not agree with the proposed Growth Bids.

25 Council Land and Property Disposals

The Committee considered a report from the Group Head – Assets on disposal options for Ashford Victory Place. Under Standing Order 35, the Chair allowed Group Leaders to attend and take part in the debate but not vote.

The Group Head – Assets advised the Committee that the recommendation to dispose of the Ashford Victory Place site had arisen over the past 12 – 15 months as part of the Development Delivery Strategy which set out timescales and the rationale for prioritisation. A full marketing exercise had been carried out and the offers received had been scored in line with the Development Delivery Strategy criteria to identify the preferred bidder. The proposal from the preferred bidder would be to proceed with the existing planning permission, for 127 units, with 22 of those being affordable.

The Committee queried how the proposed disposal of Ashford Victory Place and Thameside House aligned with the Local Plan and were advised that both sites were in the Local Plan Housing Trajectory for years 1 – 5, as such the proposals were in alignment.

The Committee expressed doubt that any affordable units would be included in the final development. Councillor Boughtflower suggested that any Community Infrastructure Levy funds from the development be ringfenced for projects in Stanwell. The Group Head Place, Protection and Prosperity advised that CIL funds should be spent where the development took place however decisions could only be made on the bids submitted.

The Committee requested that after any property sale a post-sale report is produced which would include a 'lessons learnt' section.

The Committee expressed disappointment over the limited amount of affordable units and queried if there was any way to progress the site with either more affordable or key worker units. The Group Head – Assets advised that two bids had been received which offered key worker housing or 100% affordable but both had conditions attached which made them unsuitable and neither offers had been able to secure a Registered Provider to partner with.

It was proposed by Councillor Boughtflower, seconded by Councillor Bateson and **resolved** to exclude the public and press for the following agenda items, in accordance with paragraph 3 of part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local

Government Act 1972 (as amended) because it was likely to disclose information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information because disclosure to the public would prejudice the financial position of the authority in being able to undertake even-handed negotiations and finalising acceptable contract terms.

The meeting was adjourned at 20:27

The meeting reconvened at 20:37

It was proposed by Councillor Bateson, seconded by Councillor Boughtflower and **resolved** to suspend Standing Order 38.3 to continue the meeting beyond three hours.

The Committee returned to open session.

Councillor Boughtflower requested a recorded vote. The Chair advised the Committee that the two recommendations from the report would be voted on separately.

Recommendation 1:

For	Councillors Beecher, Gibson, Williams (3)
Against	Councillors Boughtflower, Bateson, Beatty, Geach, Gyawali, Islam, Mathur, Mooney, Saliagopoulos (9)
Abstain	Nil

Committee **resolved** to *not* recommend to Council to approve the disposal of Ashford Victory Place in Ashford to the preferred bidders as set out in the appendices attached to the report

Recommendation 2:

For	Councillors Boughtflower, Beatty, Beecher, Geach, Gibson, Gyawali, Islam, Mathur, Mooney, Saliagopoulos, Williams (11)
Against	Nil
Abstain	Councillor Bateson (1)

Committee **resolved** to note the current marketing approach and offers received in relation to Thameside House, Staines which will form the basis of a further report to be brought to the Business, Infrastructure & Growth Committee in the early part of calendar year 2025.

26 HSR/SLR Working Group Terms of Reference

Councillor Geach left the meeting at 22:06

The Committee considered the Terms of Reference for the HSR/SLR Working Group.

The Committee were advised that at the first meeting of the Working Group, Councillor Bateson had been elected as Chair.

Councillor Bateson informed the Committee that they would be aiming to have a recommendation no later than September 2025

The Committee **resolved** to agree the Terms of Reference for the HSR/SLR Working Group.

The meeting ended at 22:11