

MINUTES

COUNCIL
THURSDAY, 18 JULY 2024
2.00 PM



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

PRESENT

Councillor Paul Fellows Chairman
Councillor Ian Selby Vice-Chairman

Councillor Matthew Bailey
Councillor Emma Baker
Councillor Rhys Baker
Councillor Ashley Baxter
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Pam Bosworth
Councillor Richard Cleaver
Councillor Helen Crawford
Councillor Steven Cunnington
Councillor James Denniston
Councillor Richard Dixon-Warren
Councillor Patsy Ellis
Councillor Ben Green
Councillor Tim Harrison
Councillor Graham Jeal
Councillor Gloria Johnson
Councillor Anna Kelly
Councillor Gareth Knight
Councillor Philip Knowles
Councillor Zoe Lane
Councillor Robert Leadenham

Councillor Bridget Ley
Councillor Nikki Manterfield
Councillor Paul Martin
Councillor Penny Milnes
Councillor Virginia Moran
Councillor Charmaine Morgan
Councillor Chris Noon
Councillor Habibur Rahman
Councillor Rhea Rayside
Councillor Susan Sandall
Councillor Max Sawyer
Councillor Vanessa Smith
Councillor Peter Stephens
Councillor Lee Steptoe
Councillor Ian Stokes
Councillor Paul Stokes
Councillor Elvis Stooke
Councillor Murray Turner
Councillor Sue Woolley

OFFICERS

Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer
Graham Watts, Assistant Director (Governance and Public Protection) and Monitoring Officer
James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Lucy Bonshor, Democratic Officer
Molly-Mae Taylor-Pearson, Communications Officer
Gary Andrew, IT Services Manager
Louise Case, Sustainability Project Support Officer
Claire Moses, Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits Customer and Community)

20. Public Open Forum

There were no questions or statements from members of the public.

21. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor Pam Byrd
Councillor Phil Dilks
Councillor Barry Dobson
Councillor Phil Gadd
Councillor Jane Kingman
Councillor Nick Robins
Councillor Penny Robins
Councillor Rob Shorrock
Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew
Councillor Sarah Trotter
Councillor Mark Whittington
Councillor Jane Wood
Councillor Paul Wood

22. Disclosure of Interests

Councillor Pam Bosworth declared an interest in item 8 – Community Governance Review for Little Ponton and Stroxtun, as her daughter was assisting the clerk to the Parish Council.

She would leave the Council Chamber for the entirety of this item.

23. Minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2024 on were proposed, seconded and agreed as a correct record.

24. Communications (including Chairman's Announcements)

The Council noted the Chairman's printed engagements.

The Chairman informed Council that the first experiences of being the Chairman had been really positive for himself and his consort. He had attended a number of events

connected to the Council's military history, as well as joining two local schools as they finished term for the summer break.

25. Annual Overview and Scrutiny Report

Members considered the Annual Overview and Scrutiny report for 2023/2024.

During the year there had been an increase of Scrutiny Committees to five, adding the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

All Scrutiny Committees had nine members but welcomed other members of the Council to attend too.

Members had shown their support for public concerns by voicing these at Overview and Scrutiny Committees. They had also supported and attended Joint Scrutiny Committees when required to do so to discuss items on an ad hoc basis.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings were led by Chairmen and Vice Chairmen from across the Council Chamber. Each Committee meeting had an extensive agenda, and they all welcomed members' suggestions and usually worked with political impartiality whilst supporting improvement for residents.

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees acted as a critical friend to Cabinet Members as well as other agencies and external authorities. They could challenge in a constructive, robust and purposeful way and work with the Cabinet to demonstrate public accountability.

There had been some large projects supported via the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, including the Grantham Christmas Lights, as well as Grantham Markets which had seen a vast improvement. Further to this there had been some difficult challenges for Overview and Scrutiny members to discuss such as Purple Bins/Waste Management, Leisure SK, A1 Litter issues, Earlesfield Estate, Waste Depot, St. Martin's Park Stamford, all of which were ongoing.

There had been different Strategies developed including the Climate Action Strategy, Tree/Woodland Strategy, Tourism/Visitor Economy Strategy, Contaminated Land Strategy to name just a few.

In concluding her introduction, the Chairman of the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanked members and officers for their commitment and support.

During debate, the following points were highlighted:

- One member had voted against the increase in the number of Overview and Scrutiny Committees previously due to concerns over the increased number of chairmanships that could be utilised by the administration. However, officer

time was not just spent supporting the administration and investigations on behalf of opposition Councillors were carried out.

- Training courses looking at the Plain English Campaign were being investigated aimed at making reports and agenda packs less verbose and more grammatically correct.
- The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee was new for 2023/2024 and scrutinised many policies and areas of work for the Housing Team. Outstanding repairs had decreased from 6000 to 4500. The Council had also exited special measures. 158 void properties remained, and the average time that properties remained on this list was 69 days, down from 153 days previously.
- When Council properties were not economically viable to repair, they could be sold on the open market following notification, and a reply from the Secretary of State.

Full Council NOTED the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2023/2024.

26. To amend Administration and Monitoring Fees set out in the adopted Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (2012)

Members considered proposed amendments to the adopted Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document in relation to administration and monitoring fees for Section 106 (S106) planning obligations.

Planning obligations were an important part of the planning process, legally binding the process between the owner and the developer. The Council had recruited a new Infrastructure Delivery Officer who would in part be responsible for monitoring planning obligations.

South Kesteven District Council (SKDC) consulted with partners, such as Lincolnshire County Council who would inform SKDC what they needed in terms of Section 106 agreements; this was the same with Highways for road improvements. Every contribution needed to be relevant and necessary, and each local authority would be different.

Having previously been moved and seconded, and following a vote, it was **AGREED**:

DECISION

That Full Council:

- 1. Approves the proposed amendments to the adopted Planning Obligations supplementary Planning Document in relation to Administration and Monitoring Fees for Section 106 (S106) planning obligations as set out in Table 1 of the report.**

- 2. Agrees that the Administration and Monitoring Fees for Section 106 planning obligations are reviewed and agreed annually through the Council's budget setting process**

27. Community Governance Review for Little Ponton and Stroxton

Note: Councillor Pam Bosworth left the Council Chamber for the entirety of this item.

Members received an update on the outcome of the consultation undertaken as part of the Community Governance Review for Little Ponton and Stroxton.

Section 93 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 required Councils to ensure that community governance within the area under review would be reflective of the identities and interests of the community in the area and be effective and convenient.

On 29 February 2024 Full Council resolved to undertake a Community Governance Review (CGR), further to the motion considered at that meeting that had been submitted by Councillor Ben Green. The CGR Working Group met twice. The Council was required by the Act to consult with residents and third parties. This consultation closed on 19 April 2024. The aim of the first consultation stage was to gauge public opinion on the status of the community governance arrangements for the parish of Little Ponton and Stroxton and whether there were more appropriate arrangements that could be put in place. Options included the merger of Little Ponton and Stroxton with Great Ponton, the formal grouping of the two Parish Councils or changing the status of Little Ponton Parish Council to a Parish Meeting.

260 residential properties received a letter, and a total of 334 individuals could take part in the survey. In carrying out the CGR, the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 required the District Council to have regard to the identities and interest of the community. This meant that community governance arrangements should reflect and be sufficiently representative of people living across the whole community. In addition, the Council was required to have regard to the results of the consultation.

Before making any recommendations or publishing draft proposals, the Council was required to take account of the views of local people and stakeholders and ensure that the proposals reflected the identities and interests of the community in the area and were effective and convenient.

The survey indicated support for maintaining the existing arrangements – 65.9% of respondents wished for this. The Working Group suggested that the Parish Council had not held meetings since the commencement of the CGR; similarly the Parish Council had not submitted accounts for a number of years. Community governance arrangements for the area were different to the way in which the Parish Council operated. The Working Group concluded that the issues did not relate to community governance arrangements but were more operational to the Parish Council.

The Working Group asked the Monitoring Officer to write to the Parish Clerk to highlight the following:

- The Community Governance Working Group was concerned that there was no evidence of Little Ponton and Stroxton Parish Council having held a public meeting since the commencement of the Community Governance Review
- The Community Governance Working Group was concerned that the Parish Council had not submitted its accounts for a number of years, despite continuing to receive a precept year on year
- Any Parish Councillor who had not attended a meeting within a six-month period would be disqualified in accordance with Section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, with the District Council able to use its emergency powers to appoint local District or County Councillors as temporary Parish Councillors to ensure that the Parish Council could be quorate and conduct essential business

A response had been received highlighting that the new temporary Parish Clerk had agreed to bring the Parish Council's accounts up to date. The clerk had now filed accounts between 2019-2023 and was working on those accounts for 2023-2024.

The following points were highlighted during debate:

- Residents had chosen the status quo, as there was not a decisive majority in favour of changing governance arrangements in the area. There were new Parish Councillors who would advertise meetings and congregate regularly. There had not been a Parish Council meeting held since February 2024.
- The Parish could not return to the days of no meetings and zero transparency.
- Parish Councils were an entity in their own right; whilst the Monitoring Officer at SKDC had powers to act on complaints against individual Parish Councillors regarding allegations of a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct, SKDC could not have a monitoring role over parish business. The first point of contact for ensuring parish and town councils used their precept correctly would be the Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils (LALC) or the National Association of Local Councils (NALC).

Having previously been moved and seconded, following a vote it was **AGREED**:

DECISION

That Full Council does not propose any changes to the community governance structure for the parish of Little Ponton and Stroxton, ending the Community Governance Review process.

28. Members' Open Questions

Note: Councillor Pam Bosworth returned to the Council Chamber.

Question 1 – Councillor Richard Dixon-Warren to Councillor Rhea Rayside, Cabinet Member for People and Communities

Councillor Dixon-Warren asked the Cabinet Member about the message that SKDC was sending out to its c8000 veterans when the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee decided not to undertake further work on a local proposal to provide targeted council tax support to alleviate poverty for selected veterans.

Councillor Rayside believed the Council had done its due diligence by thoroughly discussing the issue at the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who had recommended not to pursue this area of focus any longer, in part due to guidance from community members.

Question 2 – Councillor Ian Selby to Councillor Ashley Baxter, Leader of the Council

Councillor Selby asked the Leader of the Council to join him in wishing Councillor Elvis Stooke well ahead of his skydive to raise money for Bhive Community, a local Grantham hub aimed at helping mental wellbeing.

The Leader of the Council was happy to support this and encouraged others to sponsor Councillor Stooke in order to raise over £1000.

Question 3 – Councillor Matt Bailey to Councillor Ian Selby, Chairman of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Bailey asked the Chairman of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee whether he would welcome an item on the Committee's agenda related to the tagging of communal bins across the district?

Councillor Selby agreed to this request, and reminded all members that if they were considering requesting an item on the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda, they were always welcome to ask.

Question 4 – Councillor Peter Stephens to Councillor Rhys Baker, Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

Councillor Stephens asked the Cabinet Member whether he supported both battery collection in the district and the re-opening of the Deepings Leisure Centre?

Councillor Rhys Baker highlighted the discussion that had taken place at the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and referenced that battery collection was due to commence in September 2024. If there were any issues with this date members would be informed. The depot development was also continuing apace.

Question 5 – Councillor Susan Sandall to Councillor Richard Cleaver, Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement

Councillor Sandall referenced an investigation into the development of St. Martin's Park, Stamford. The Cabinet Member had previously supported this when Leader of the Council – why had the investigation not commenced?

Councillor Cleaver assured members that no-one was delaying an investigation. It was not the role of Cabinet Members to determine the business of Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Question 6 – Councillor Ben Green to Councillor Richard Cleaver, Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement

Councillor Green requested further information on the re-opening of the Deepings Leisure Centre.

Councillor Cleaver responded by saying that the Deepings Leisure Centre was not within the remit of his portfolio as it was not an SKDC property.

Question 7 – Councillor Gloria Johnson to Councillor Bridget Ley, Chairman of the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Johnson referenced a recent petition on increased car parking charges within Stamford. 100s of people had signed this. Grantham Councillors had recently spoken against increased parking charges, particularly with the upheaval around roadworks in the town. Why were so many people being ignored?

Councillor Ley was not aware of any such petition having been submitted to SKDC.

Question 8 – Councillor Pam Bosworth to Councillor Lee Steptoe, Chairman of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Bosworth asked the Chairman of the Housing Committee when he would start, as Leader of the Labour and Co-operative Group, to scrutinise the present administration?

Councillor Steptoe outlined that politics was about alliances with those that broadly shared your views. When the Labour and Co-operative Group disagreed with the administration they would make that plain.

When the Labour and Co-operative Group had addressed their concerns around bins, they had done it behind closed doors without the use of the press or social media.

Question 9 – Councillor Paul Martin to Councillor Virginia Moran, Cabinet Member for Housing

Councillor Martin opined that the Cabinet Member had spoken strongly in favour of the solar development at Mallard Pass. Did she support the Government decision to approve planning permission on the site?

Councillor Moran responded by saying that she supported solar farms to a certain extent as a way of developing cheaper energy, and as part of a bigger picture when looking at other energy options. If the area covered by the Mallard Pass site was purely prime agricultural land, then she may have thought differently.

The new Government had decided to build many more houses – Councillor Moran's preferred approach was the addition of permanent solar panels to any new housing.

Question 10 – Councillor Helen Crawford to Councillor Rhys Baker, Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

Councillor Crawford asked the Cabinet Member whether anyone was recording the carbon footprint associated with waste collection alongside increased fuel costs?

Councillor Rhys Baker referenced the hard work carried out on this topic by officers. As soon as the information was available on fuel costs it would be reported back to members. A modest increase in carbon footprint would be offset by the carbon savings of a better-quality recycling system.

Question 11 – Councillor Charmaine Morgan to Councillor Virginia Moran, Cabinet Member for Housing

Councillor Morgan requested an update on house building and acquisitions under the present administration, compared to previous years.

Councillor Moran responded that during the last five years of Conservative administration the Council had acquired 42 properties in total. Since May 2023 the Council had built or acquired in excess of 120 properties. One particular site was the biggest investment in social housing in a generation.

Question 12 – Councillor Nikki Manterfield to Councillor Rhys Baker, Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

Councillor Manterfield requested an update on clearing litter from the A1, as a member whose ward ran alongside the road.

Councillor Rhys Baker had sent a letter today to colleagues elsewhere that had responsibility for the A1 road, asking for best practice and suggestions. The A1 was currently not a good gateway into the district. Keep Britain Tidy ran a survey on a three or four yearly basis, and it seemed to be a problem in many locations with

littering. The Cabinet Member would ask for backing to ask the new Labour Government for a funding settlement to assist with the problem.

Question 13 – Councillor Elvis Stooke to Councillor Rhys Baker, Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

Councillor Stooke asked the Cabinet Member to outline the procedure for emptying bins at the earliest opportunity rather than waiting the formal two week period between collections. He feared that the Belmont ward had seen an increase in fly-tipping.

Councillor Rhys Baker sympathised with those residents that experienced missed bins, but unfortunately there was no provision in the Section 47 notice within the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to enact the collection of missed bins as a routine measure. Members were encouraged to submit pictures of fly tipping to the Cabinet Member or the Head of Waste Management and Market Services.

As of today, the Lincolnshire Waste Partnership (LWP) reported that SKDC's bin contamination rates were in line with the rest of Lincolnshire.

Question 14 – Councillor Sue Woolley to Councillor Paul Stokes, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture

Councillor Woolley asked the Deputy Leader to confirm whether any cash was still collected by the Council from market stall holders and as a consequence held over the weekend?

The Deputy Leader confirmed that no cash was held overnight, and almost all stall holders did not pay their pitch fees in cash anymore. Some new stall holders did use cash.

Question 15 – Councillor Zoe Lane to Councillor Rhys Baker, Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

Councillor Lane had witnessed complaints from residents in Bourne about verges not being trimmed. She asked the Cabinet Member whether the Council was equipped to deal with the ever-changing weather this summer?

The Cabinet Member referenced the grey, muggy, warm days that were contributing to the grass growing more prolifically. He would need to identify which verges were affected as SKDC had limited ownership of grass verges. He was happy to update Councillor Lane following these investigations.

Question 16 – Councillor Graham Jeal to Councillor Ashley Baxter, Leader of the Council

Councillor Jeal asked the Leader of the Council whether there was a contradiction in his support for Mallard Pass solar farm whilst championing Lincolnshire food produce?

The Leader suggested that Mallard Pass was 'grade 3b' land, and that more than half of the land was not in SKDC at all; Essendine itself was within Rutland.

He went onto say there was an energy crisis involving fluctuating energy prices affecting the budget.

You could buy food from all over the world. Energy was also an international commodity. Many fields were used for growing flowers, rapeseed etc., but could now also be used to grow energy.

The Leader had been an advocate of renewables all his life. It was possible to produce energy in the UK to create stability. He did not want the nuclear waste site at Theddlethorpe, or nuclear reactors located on the east coast. However, he did accept that there were issues surrounding the number of solar farms proposed for Lincolnshire, and also completely agreed with the approach of placing photo-voltaic panels on buildings where possible.

Mallard Pass solar farm was now an issue for national Government. The decision was made by Ed Miliband MP who had been the Shadow Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero for a number of years. It was therefore wrong to say that he had made this decision without prior knowledge of the development and was also misguided to think that the previous Government wouldn't have made the same decision in time.

Question 17 – Councillor Gareth Knight to Councillor Richard Cleaver, Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement

Councillor Knight asked the Cabinet Member whether he would commit to meeting himself, Councillor Mark Whittington, County Councillor Richard Davies and residents to discuss the Recreation Ground within his ward?

Councillor Cleaver was happy to meet all concerned.

Question 18 – Councillor Tim Harrison to Councillor Graham, Leader of the Opposition

Councillor Harrison asked the Leader of the Opposition whether he would decry social media posts from a member of his group stating that the Chinese empire was 'evil'?

Councillor Jeal was not familiar with the social media posts being mentioned.

Question 19 – Councillor Max Sawyer to Councillor Paul Stokes, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture

Councillor Sawyer asked whether free market stalls were still being offered to charities?

The Deputy Leader highlighted the reduced rate offered to charities for one stall only.

Note: The meeting adjourned at 3:23pm and reconvened at 3:40pm.

29. Notices of Motion

(a) Councillor Vanessa Smith (voting system)

Councillor Vanessa Smith proposed the following motion:

The UK's current voting system (known as First Past the Post, FPTP) originated when land-owning aristocrats dominated parliament and voting was restricted to property-owning men.

Currently in Europe, only the UK and authoritarian Belarus still use archaic single-round FPTP for general elections. Internationally, Proportional Representation (PR) is used to elect the parliaments of more than 80 countries. These countries tend to be more equal, freer and greener.

PR ensures all votes count, have equal value, and that seats won match votes cast. Under PR, MPs and Parliaments better reflect the age, gender and protected characteristics of both local communities and of the nation.

MPs better reflecting the communities they represent in turn leads to improved decision-making, wider participation and increased levels of ownership of decisions taken.

PR would also end minority rule. In 2019, 43.6% of the vote produced a government with 56.2% of the seats and 100% of the power. Fair, proportional votes also prevent 'wrong winner' elections such as occurred in 1951 and February 1974.

The current FPTP system leads to some of the electorate questioning the point of voting since they do not feel their views are represented. This contributes to apathy and subsequent low turnout in elections. Engaging with the electorate is vital for a functioning democracy.

PR is the national policy of the Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, Green Party, SNP, Plaid Cymru, Reform UK and Women's Equality Party along with a host of Trade Unions and pro-democracy organisations. 31 District, Borough, City and County Councils have already passed motions asking for Proportional Representation to be used in General Elections.

PR is already used to elect the parliaments and assemblies of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. So why not Westminster?

South Kesteven District Council therefore resolves to write to H.M. Government calling for a change in our outdated electoral laws and to enable Proportional Representation to be used for UK general elections.

The motion was seconded.

The following views were raised during the introduction to, and debate on the motion:

- The turnout in the recent July 2024 election was low, and a Prime Minister was returned on a low vote share. This did not reflect the views of the electorate.
- The number of people voting for smaller parties had increased. It was no secret that the Green Party had been fighting for PR for a number of years, as under this system they would have been entitled to a higher number of seats at the July 2024 election. The Reform Party, who returned five MPs would have been entitled to a significantly higher number of members of Parliament.
- PR would bring an end to tactical voting.
- It was not just the most recent election that was disproportionate; in 1974 the party with the smallest vote share won the largest proportion of seats.
- PR ensured that seats in the House of Commons were allocated according to the share of the popular vote. There were different systems within PR; the Additional Member System retained the constituency link.
- PR was used in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Electoral Reform Society (ERS) had campaigned for change in the UK for a number of years.
- The Liberal Democrats had regularly polled between 15-20% of the vote and had never seen a proportionate number of seats reflective of this vote share.
- FPTP delivered a clear winner and strong majority governments. It also retained a bond between the MP and their constituency, ensuring a dedicated representative accountable to the electorate.
- FPTP also encouraged broadchurch coalitions.
- Every single voting system had strengths and weaknesses. Under a PR system constituency size would increase.
- PR was used in other European countries where coalitions were often in place. The Netherlands and Belgium had coalition governments, which could take some time to form.

An amendment was suggested to the motion, which was accepted by the mover:

From:

South Kesteven District Council therefore resolves to write to H.M. Government calling for a change in our outdated electoral laws and to enable Proportional Representation to be used for UK general elections.

To:

South Kesteven District Council therefore resolves to ask H.M. Government to

- **Introduce Proportional Representation for UK general elections**
- **Ensure that any future Greater Lincolnshire Mayor is elected by a 'preferential vote' system and not by 'first past the post'**

Debate then continued on the substantive motion:

- Voter ID had added a further complication to the process of voting, with an estimated 400,000 people affected. All efforts to make the voting system more democratic were welcomed.
- All parties are in effect coalitions, even under the current FPTP system.
- In previous elections, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s there was a binary choice between Labour and Conservatives. This was not the case now as there were a number of different parties that voters could choose.
- Diversity of opinion was a good thing and opens up those 'safe seats' where a number of people did not think there was any point to their vote.
- It was unlikely that a Government that had been elected under the current FPTP system would listen to a motion about electoral reform.

Having previously been moved and seconded, there was a vote on the substantive motion, and the substantive motion was LOST.

(b) Councillor Vanessa Smith (divestment)

Note: Councillors Zoe Lane, Anna Kelly and Ian Stokes left the Council Chamber and did not return.

Councillor Vanessa Smith proposed the following motion:

Motion to Divest Pension Funds from Fossil Fuels

SKDC notes that:

- that across the UK, local authority [pension schemes invest over £16 billion into fossil fuel companies](#)¹- driving the climate crisis and risking workers' retirement pots in the process.
- Lincolnshire County Council who manage SKDC pensions via the West Yorkshire Pension Fund invest £94.7m out of a total fund of £3.1bn in fossil fuel production, expansion and exploration. This places them just in the upper quartile as regards amount invested in fossil fuels.
- SKDC has declared a climate emergency and that investing pension funds in fossils fuels is inconsistent with the council's climate ambition
- the United Nations Paris Agreement commits our governments to keep the global temperature increase to under 2 degrees and aim for 1.5 degrees. Carbon budgets produced by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, United Nations and the International Energy Agency show that preventing two degrees of warming relies on not burning the vast majority of all proven fossil fuels reserves.

- former bank of England governor, Mark Carney, has warned that fossil fuel investments risk becoming “enormous, stranded assets”, i.e. worthless, unsellable shareholdings². Pension funds have a fiduciary duty to consider the material risks of continued investment in fossil fuels. Fiduciary duty is defined by the Law Commission as “ensuring the pensions can be paid, ensuring that this is undertaken at the best possible value”. The long-term sustainability of the SKDC should not be put at risk by investing in companies which are in terminal decline resulting in ‘stranded assets’. Nor should the Pension Fund fail to take responsibility for the credibility and financial support it currently provides to fossil fuel companies by continuing to invest in them even as they open up new fossil fuel reserves which the world can no longer afford to burn.
- the UN International Energy Agency (IEA) has called on financial bodies to stop investing in fossil fuel production³ and predicts that global oil demand will significantly fall by 2030. Expected action by governments to limit carbon emissions will ultimately leave fossil fuel reserves unsellable.
- pension funds have a legal duty to treat members ‘fairly as between them’. That means taking seriously the longer-term interests of younger members who will be most affected by the climate crisis.
- the current generation owes it to future generations to ensure we do not exceed the internationally agreed temperature increase threshold of 1.5 degrees C above pre-industrial global heating levels, by removing support for the continued production of new fossil fuels. Climate change is the greatest challenge humanity has encountered. Warming in excess of 2°C will have catastrophic consequences. In order to have a chance of staying below this maximum upper limit of warming 80% of known fossil fuel reserves must not be burnt.
- public divestment from fossil fuel producers supports the introduction of effective climate legislation that would ensure the world achieves the level of carbon reduction required to avoid catastrophic climate breakdown.

The Council therefore commits to

1. Call on Lincolnshire County Council Pension Scheme to urgently put in place and act on:
 - a) A public commitment to immediately freeze any new investment in the top 200 publicly-traded fossil fuel companies with largest known carbon reserves (oil, coal and gas)
 - b) Divest from direct ownership and any commingled funds that include fossil fuel public equities and corporate bonds in the top 200 list and shift these funds to lower risk, ethical investments within 5 years
 - c) Advocate to other pension funds, including members of the Local Authority Pension Fund Forum and Local Government Pension Scheme to do the same
 - d) To do the above in a timely manner - by setting up a working group to report back on a strategy to bring about divestment within three months
2. To put in place a transparent process by which they will carry out this divestment.
3. Work with other local District and County Councils and councillors in Lincolnshire and other relevant employers in the pension scheme, to call on our shared Pension Fund to urgently and publicly end their investment in fossil fuel producing companies.

Sources:

1. <https://divest.platformlondon.org>.
2. <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/10/21/climate-stranded-assets-show-the-need-for-rapid-energy-transition-carney-says.html>
3. <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/05/18/stop-investing-in-fossil-fuels-to-meet-net-zero-target>

The motion was seconded.

The following views were raised during the introduction to, and debate on the motion:

- Lincolnshire County Council managed the SKDC pension fund and invested £94.7 million out of the total fund in fossil fuel expansion, placing them in the upper quartile of pension schemes in terms of total monies invested in fossil fuels.
- Contributions to the pensions fund were made from a number of groups, such as Police civilians, further and higher education bodies, and transport workers.
- SKDC had previously declared a climate emergency and investing pensions funds into the fossil fuel industry was incompatible with this. To avoid global temperatures increasing by more than 2 degrees then 80% of existing fossil fuels should not be burned.
- As demand fell for fossil fuels, so would the value of its shares.
- The transition to low carbon economies was inevitable. Fossil fuel reserves would be left unsaleable.
- Councils in Islington, Southwark, Lambeth, Waltham Forest and Cardiff had already pledged to divest from fossil fuels, as had the Church of England and some 109 leading universities. Other Councils had also passed motions in favour of divestment.
- The Law Commission had confirmed that there were no legal barriers to trustees taking account of environmental and social factors and found that trustees could take account of non-financial factors where there was no risk of financial harm to the fund.
- The switch to 'ethical' banking was becoming more commonplace.
- Fossil fuels were finite, whereas green energy was infinite.
- Whilst the motion was presented in good faith, there was no solution being presented. The financial argument was not proven; the markets would dictate the financial argument for divestment. The Council had a responsibility to pensioners.
- Financial advice was a regulated profession, and there were no regulated opinions within this motion.

Having previously been moved and seconded, there was a vote on the motion, and the motion was LOST.

(c) Councillor Sue Woolley

Councillor Sue Woolley proposed the following motion:

This Council restates and reaffirms its profound concerns regarding the unsustainable proliferation of solar farm developments in South Kesteven.

South Kesteven District Council hereby resolves to:

- 1. Acknowledge the adverse impact of clustering solar farm developments around substations, leading to catastrophic consequences for the landscape, biodiversity and local amenities. Solar farms classed as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), numbering 15 in the Greater Lincolnshire area alone, will contribute to the industrialisation and transformation of open countryside, negatively affecting current and potential residents alike.*
- 2. Affirm that land classified as Best and Most Versatile (BMV) should not repurposed for the development of solar farms. Considering the limited efficiency of solar energy (10-12%), due to the UK's limited sunlight, the Council regards it as a poor investment compromising food security and escalating food imports and costs, resulting in questionable net carbon savings.*
- 3. Promote superior alternatives to solar development on farmland, endorsing the principles set out by the Solar Campaign Alliance. The Council supports the smarter deployment of solar on domestic and industrial buildings and recommend this be added to the local plan.*
- 4. Express concern about international labour practices, union rights and use of forced labour, as well as the adverse environmental impact in the supply chain of solar panels, particularly in NSIP developments.*

This motion underscores our steadfast commitment to safeguarding food supply, preserving the landscape, our heritage and environment, while advocating for responsible and sustainable development within South Kesteven, aligning with our shared goal of achieving net zero carbon reduction targets.

In support of Lincolnshire County Council and North Kesteven District Council, this council resolves to send a copy of this motion to the Minister of Energy Security and Net Zero.

The motion was seconded.

The Monitoring Officer advised those Councillors present who were also members of the Planning Committee of the following:

“Any Councillor that sits on the Planning Committee who make decisions on planning applications must be able to demonstrate an open mind and that they have not pre-determined an application. This means that where Councillors have particular views on certain matters they may not be able to demonstrate this open mind to the merits of a particular application. In relation to this motion, members of the Planning Committee or potential substitutes should be careful in expressing views where, for example, that view might be interpreted as meaning that they were against all

proposed solar farms involving the loss of any agricultural land. All planning decisions must be made in accordance with Local Plan policies and other material considerations, including National Policy. Planning policies allowed balanced decisions to be reached, where the decision maker would need to weigh up the benefits and harms of any development. In the case of solar farms, the temporary loss of agricultural land would be a harm, however that would need to be weighed against the benefits of the solar farm in terms of its contribution towards decarbonising the energy sector. Every application was different and would need to be assessed on its own merits. This might mean that in some cases, the temporary case of agricultural land might be acceptable on balance, and in other cases it might not. If a Councillors felt so strongly that a solar farm on agricultural land was not acceptable in any circumstance, then this would suggest a closed mind and that Councillor would be seen to have been pre-determined in relation to any future planning application.”

The following views were highlighted during the introduction to, and debate on the motion:

- Concerns about the proliferation of solar farms in SKDC and Lincolnshire had previously been raised and debated in various forums. In those debates the majority of SKDC Councillors had not necessarily supported solar farm applications on best and most versatile land. Different views had subsequently been posited at a following Planning Committee on Mallard Pass.
- At the time of submitting this motion there had been 15 Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) applications, including Mallard Pass, a site of over 2,000 acres. There were now 22 NSIP sites covering approximately 30,000 acres – this did not include ‘smaller’ applications.
- Last week the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero announced approval for the site at Mallard Pass.
- There was a possibility that SKDC may not derive any income from the site at Mallard Pass; business rates were only received where connections were sited, which in this instance would be Rutland County Council.
- Mallard Pass had seen opposition from residents in Market Deeping, Stamford and Bourne.
- Solar panels were to be encouraged on every space on buildings where possible. Rooftops were better sites for solar panels.
- The decision on Mallard Pass was a month late, in part due to the recent General Election.

An amendment was proposed to be added to the original motion; this was accepted by the original mover of the motion:

In light of the fast-track decision by the incoming Labour Government to approve the 2,105 acre Mallard Pass solar farm and the total disregard for local consultation – this Council has no confidence in the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Note: Councillor Nikki Manterfield left the Council Chamber and did not return.

A further amendment was proposed to the substantive motion, and this again was accepted by the original mover of the motion and became the substantive motion:

This Council:

- 1. Reaffirm those policies in our adopted Local Plan that seek to protect the district's agricultural land asset, particularly land classified as Best and Most Versatile (BMV).*
- 2. Supports sustainable development proposals where appropriate that help decarbonise the energy sector and reduce energy consumption in new buildings.*
- 3. Agrees to write to our local MPs, the Minister of State for Energy and Net Zero and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, calling on Government to:*
 - a. Adopt a strategic national approach to balance the need to protect agricultural land and food security whilst promoting decarbonisation of the energy sector.*
 - b. Work with the energy sector to urgently resolve current issues around grid connections and capacity as identified by the Environment Audit Committee as two main barriers to the expansion of solar in the most suitable locations.*
 - c. Support the renewables industry in research, development and manufacturing and recycling of equipment here in Britain to both boost the economy and reduce the overall carbon footprint.*
 - d. Recognise the need to reduce demand for energy in existing homes by promoting effective retrofitted insulation schemes and support smarter deployment of solar on suitable buildings and other sites such as car parks.*

As this was now the substantive motion, an amendment previously tabled was moved again, and was accepted as part of the substantive motion. The motion that was being debated now read:

In light of the fast-track decision by the incoming Labour Government to approve the 2,105 acre Mallard Pass solar farm and the total disregard for local consultation – this Council has no confidence in the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero.

This Council:

- 1. Reaffirm those policies in our adopted Local Plan that seek to protect the district's agricultural land asset, particularly land classified as Best and Most Versatile (BMV).*
- 2. Supports sustainable development proposals where appropriate that help decarbonise the energy sector and reduce energy consumption in new buildings.*
- 3. Agrees to write to our local MPs, the Minister of State for Energy and Net Zero and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, calling on Government to:*

- a. Adopt a strategic national approach to balance the need to protect agricultural land and food security whilst promoting decarbonisation of the energy sector.*
- b. Work with the energy sector to urgently resolve current issues around grid connections and capacity as identified by the Environment Audit Committee as two main barriers to the expansion of solar in the most suitable locations.*
- c. Support the renewables industry in research, development and manufacturing and recycling of equipment here in Britain to both boost the economy and reduce the overall carbon footprint.*
- d. Recognise the need to reduce demand for energy in existing homes by promoting effective retrofitted insulation schemes and support smarter deployment of solar on suitable buildings and other sites such as car parks.*

Debate on the substantive motion resumed:

- The incoming government had taken a different view to the previous administration. The decisions on solar panels at this stage would rest on debate and votes in Parliament; this motion was symbolism.
- Civil servants had been discussing this issue for a long period of time. A decision had been pending when the General Election had been called.

An amendment was proposed to remove the wording prior to ‘This Council...’ on the substantive motion was seconded, and following a vote this proposal was **AGREED**.

Debate resumed on the substantive motion:

- Each solar farm application had to be looked at on its own merits. The substantive motion touched on areas that hadn’t been discussed previously, such as ‘3c’ land.
- It would be preferable for SKDC to be affirming policies in the Local Plan, alongside retaining local decision making and consultation.

A proposal to amend the motion back to its original form at the outset of this item was seconded, but following a vote this amendment was LOST.

Having previously been moved and seconded, a vote was taken on the substantive motion, and following this it was **AGREED** that:

This Council:

- 1. Reaffirm those policies in our adopted Local Plan that seek to protect the district’s agricultural land asset, particularly land classified as Best and Most Versatile (BMV).*
- 2. Supports sustainable development proposals where appropriate that help decarbonise the energy sector and reduce energy consumption in new buildings.*
- 3. Agrees to write to our local MPs, the Minister of State for Energy and Net Zero and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, calling on Government to:*

- a. *Adopt a strategic national approach to balance the need to protect agricultural land and food security whilst promoting decarbonisation of the energy sector.*
- b. *Work with the energy sector to urgently resolve current issues around grid connections and capacity as identified by the Environment Audit Committee as two main barriers to the expansion of solar in the most suitable locations.*
- c. *Support the renewables industry in research, development and manufacturing and recycling of equipment here in Britain to both boost the economy and reduce the overall carbon footprint.*
- d. *Recognise the need to reduce demand for energy in existing homes by promoting effective retrofitted insulation schemes and support smarter deployment of solar on suitable buildings and other sites such as car parks.*

(d) Councillor Murray Turner

Note: Councillors Emma Baker and Lee Steptoe left the Council Chamber and did not return.

It was **AGREED** to extend the meeting until the conclusion of the final motion. Speeches for Councillors on the motion were reduced to three minutes, following the agreement of those present in the Council Chamber.

Councillor Murray Turner proposed the following motion:

Free School meals for Primary School children in South Kesteven

It has been proven that well fed children eating nutritious meals achieve a higher standard of educational results. Children growing up in the District of South Kesteven could expect to be more competitive in a nationwide economy having been given a better start in life through the introduction of the simple and effective policy of free school meals.

During the current financial crisis local parents would benefit from not having to fund school meals for their children. This Council notes the approximate £2,000,000 budget underspend by Lincolnshire County Council in the last financial year.

South Kesteven District Council therefore resolves to:

Write to Lincolnshire County Council to ask them to review their policy and funding for free school meals and request that the free school meals scheme be extended to all primary school age children within the South Kesteven District Council area.

The motion was seconded.

The following views were highlighted during the introduction to, and debate on the motion:

- Feeding children nutritious meals would give them a better chance in society and would assist with achieving better results within school.

- Free school meals were the first step towards a more balanced society.
- Every free school meal costed £2.65 to deliver. Research by PwC in 2022 found that free school meals generated billions of pounds for the economy in return. For every £1 invested in providing meals to all children in households on both personal credit, £1.38 would be returned over the next 20 years through core benefits. This would result in around £8.9 billion being added to the UK economy, alongside savings to Lincolnshire County Council. There would also be indirect benefits, such as growing school food economy.
- The financial threshold for qualifying for free school meals currently was very low. There was a far greater need than the current budget allowed. Local food banks in Grantham were issuing a large number of meals, and a proportion of this was going to local children.
- Nationally there was a 'pupil premium'; once young people entered schools they were in receipt of support of school meals, as well as books and other resources. The School Holiday Activity Fund gave money to Councils to share in their area, to ensure food and activities throughout the holiday period. There were currently mechanisms in place to support those from deprived backgrounds.

Having previously been proposed and seconded, following a vote the motion was **AGREED**.

30. Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 5:18pm.