

Full Council Meeting 25th May 2021

Agenda Item 9: Subsequent Information following publication of our Agenda.

1. Agenda Item:

Malmesbury Neighbourhood Plan: To note and consider action, if any, on the following

(i) James Gray MP has not offered dates to meet Malmesbury Town Council to discuss the Future of Neighbourhood Planning as requested by the Planning & Environment Committee and Full Council, and

(ii) James Gray MP's comments on 17th May 2021 that the Government's Planning Bill announced in the Queen's Speech on the 11th May 2021 'risks taking the right to decide on development away from local people in favour of pre-set goals and targets. If not handled well, that not only has a negative effect on local democracy (Neighbourhood Planning, for example, becomes redundant)'.

(iii) To confirm membership of the Joint Parish Working Group.

2. Subsequent Information for Council:

In my role at the time as Chair of the Council and Mayor I sent James Gray MP a courtesy email to advise him that items (i) and (ii) of this agenda item would be part of our Full Council Meeting on the 25th May 2021. This email and the subsequent emails are below.

In summary James Gray MP:

(i) Has made clear that he sees no merit in meeting with Malmesbury Town Council to discuss our concerns on the Future of Neighbourhood Planning at this time.

(ii) Is not giving us feedback, for example, following the joint approach to Government he advised that Wiltshire MPs would be taking in support of the concerns we have raised or of his direct discussions with Government on these matters.

(iii) Has confirmed the Government's proposals as announced in the Queen's Speech risks making Neighbourhood Planning redundant.

(iv) Has asked that his email to Malmesbury Town Council of the 20th May 2021 is tabled with this agenda item. This email contains statements about the conduct of Malmesbury Town Council (Para 3 of his response) which he has been made aware of, (see email 20/05 at 18:01 below), but which he has so far declined the opportunity to correct.

3. Proposal:

3.1 For P&E to

(i) Consider the implications of the Government's proposals in the Planning White Paper for the future of the Malmesbury Neighbourhood Plan and the view of James Gray MP that these proposals make neighbourhood planning redundant, and

(ii) Propose to the next Full Council (15th June) the appropriate steps for Malmesbury Town Council to take in relation to the current Malmesbury Neighbourhood Plan and the development of planning matters affecting Malmesbury following the Government's announcement of its Planning Bill and the obvious concerns it raises for the future of Neighbourhood Planning.

3.2 For P&R to consider the comments made by James Gray MP on the conduct of Malmesbury Town Council in Para 3 of his email of 15.55pm on the 20th May which he has asked to be tabled at this meeting and to propose to the next Full Council (15th June) what steps, if any, should be taken in response to these comments.

3.3 To confirm membership of the Joint Parish Working Group leading the review of the Malmesbury Neighbourhood Plan, and to ask for an update from the Group at the next Full Council (15th June) on the progress being made on the review of the Malmesbury Neighbourhood Plan and the latest information available from Wiltshire Council that is informing the review.

4. Financial Considerations:

There are no direct financial considerations as a consequence of these proposals.

Cllr Campbell Ritchie

Emails with James Gray MP following publication of the Full Council Agenda for 25th May 2021:

25th May 2021

Emails with James Gray MP subsequent to the publication of the Agenda for our meeting on the 25th March 2021.

Re: The Future of neighbourhood Planning - Meeting with Malmesbury Town Council - Urgent - Please clarify and/ or correct factually incorrect statements in the third para of your reply

20/05/2021, 18:01

Dear James

Thank you for your swift response.

I would like to give you the opportunity to clarify the context of the third paragraph of reply and to correct factually incorrect statements in this same paragraph, and to send Malmesbury Town Council an amended response tomorrow.

(i) I wrote to you this afternoon as Mayor of Malmesbury and in accordance with previous decisions taken by Malmesbury Town Council. I did not write to you as an individual. It is not clear in this paragraph if you are writing to me as an individual or as the representative of Malmesbury Town Council. Can you please clarify.

(ii) Irrespective of (i) neither I as an individual or Malmesbury Town Council invited Ed Davey, the Leader of the Liberal Democrats to Malmesbury. Can you please withdraw your statement that 'you have nonetheless sought to politicise the matter, for example by inviting the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Party to Malmesbury to use it in the recent local government campaigning.'

(iii) Irrespective of (i) neither I or Malmesbury Town Council had any responsibility for the claims you have referenced made by the Liberal Democrats during the recent Wiltshire Council election campaign. Can you please withdraw your implication that either I or Malmesbury Town Council had any such responsibility.

Thanks again and best regards

Campbell

Campbell Ritchie
Mayor, Malmesbury Town Council

07802638424

On 20/05/2021 15:55, GRAY, James wrote:

Dear Campbell,

Many thanks. I think that I have made my position very clear in repeated exchanges with you. I cannot see any point in any such meeting at this stage in the national debate over planning.

You know, I think, of my strong support for Neighbourhood Planning; and of the work I have done over many years in support of Malmesbury's battle against inappropriate development. I have written to Ministers on the matter, had a series of discussions with Wiltshire Council over a very long period about it, and have raised it in the House of Commons on several occasions. Very much of my 24 years incumbency as your MP has been spent battling against developers' unwanted invasion of the countryside. It is my view that the Planning Bill which the Government are proposing would have very worrying consequences for the preservation of our rural areas and I am very actively engaged with many of my Conservative colleagues in discussions about how to ameliorate those consequences. In every way I am a passionate supporter of the battle against housebuilding in the countryside.

However I am concerned that despite my very active support for your concerns in this whole area, you have nonetheless sought to politicise the matter, for example

by inviting the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Party to Malmesbury to use it in the recent local government campaigning. Lib Dem leaflets went to lengths to allege that “the Tories were planning to concrete over Wiltshire”, and that “only a Lib Dem vote would prevent it”. I am very glad that the electorate chose to ignore that absurd claim, returning a Conservative Administration to the Unitary authority with a substantial majority. You can be certain that despite that unwise politicisation of the issue, I will maintain my strong stance of many years in campaigning alongside you in favour of Neighbourhood Planning (introduced by a Conservative Government) and against unreasonable development.

I cannot see any purpose in the meeting which you have requested, and am suspicious about the political agenda which seems to me likely to lie behind it. The motion which you propose putting before the Town Council would seem to me to be factual enough if a little unenlightening. Perhaps you would be kind enough to table this letter alongside it.

Yours sincerely,

James Gray

From: Campbell Ritchie <campbellrmtc@gmail.com>

Sent: 20 May 2021 15:04

To: GRAY, James <JamesGrayMP@parliament.uk>

Cc: admin <administration@malmesbury.gov.uk>

Subject: The Future of neighbourhood Planning - Meeting with Malmesbury Town Council

Dear James

I hope you are well.

I am sorry you have not yet offered dates for a meeting with representatives of Malmesbury Town Council to discuss our concerns on the Future of Neighbourhood Planning as previously requested.

This is a courtesy note to let you know that the following item is on the agenda of Malmesbury Town Council Full Council meeting on Tuesday 25th May.

9. Malmesbury Neighbourhood Plan: To note and consider action, if any, on the following (i) James Gray MP has not offered dates to meet Malmesbury Town Council to discuss the Future of Neighbourhood Planning as requested by the Planning & Environment Committee and Full Council, and (ii) James Gray MP's comments on 17th May 2021 that the Government's Planning Bill announced in the Queen's Speech on the 11th May 2021 'risks taking the right to decide on development away from local people in favour of pre-set goals and targets. If not handled well, that not only has a negative effect on local democracy (Neighbourhood

Planning, for example, becomes redundant)'. (iii) To confirm membership of Joint Parish Working Group.

I am sure all members of the Town Council would welcome a date being agreed for a meeting before we get to this discussion if at all possible.

Thanks and best regards

Campbell

Cllr Campbell Ritchie
Mayor, Malmesbury Town Council

07802638424