



WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL

WISBECH TOWN CENTRE COMMITTEE

16 DECEMBER 2024 – 7.30 pm

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillor Tierney, Chairman; Councillors Edwards, Foice-Beard, Hoy, Monger and Wallwork.

Apologies: None.

The minutes of the meeting of the Wisbech Town Centre Committee held on 23 September 2024 were confirmed and signed.

T24/24 Wisbech Castle

Further to minute T14/24, members considered matters in relation to the management, operation and development of Wisbech Castle.

The Clerk reported that repair and maintenance work to Wisbech Castle is undertaken as necessary; so far this year there had been re-decoration of the Clayton Room, repair and extension of the intruder alarm system, lighting works to Wisbech Castle and the vaults etc. He provided members with a copy of a quotation from a local contractor in relation to undertaking repair and maintenance work to guttering, addressing an area of internal damp, unblocking drains, and pruning trees.

The Chairman mentioned other areas of repair and maintenance work required, in relation to some interior painting and repair of an external banister.

The Clerk commented that Wisbech Castle continues to be an extremely popular venue for paranormal investigations and almost every weekend this year has a booking for such an event. Enquiries continue to be received regularly, and bookings are being taken for 2025. There are now only around 20 Saturday dates available for paranormal events in 2025 and 4 of those are likely to be reserved shortly. Trevor Ketteringham remains a stalwart in undertaking the caretaking of Wisbech Castle and he receives many compliments.

The only wedding at Wisbech Castle this year was on 2 November. It had been an 'alternative' wedding with a Halloween theme and was run smoothly by Trevor Ketteringham and Amanda Scott, both of whom were also guests of the bride and groom. There is also a booking for a wedding in March 2025.

It was noted by members that interest had been expressed by a local person in relation to using Wisbech Castle as the venue for Afternoon Tea events; Councillor Hoy agreed to meet the interested party to discuss the matter.

The Chairman expressed the opinion that Wisbech Castle is operating successfully. He mentioned that, as agreed at minute T14/24, a Christmas-themed event had been held at Wisbech Castle on 15 December 2024. He commented that the event had been extremely successful, with possibly as many as 500 attendees, and that all comments made by attendees had been positive in nature.

Members are appreciative of the staff of The Retreat hair salon who had decorated Wisbech Castle for Christmas with decorations that had been donated by the business.



Councillor Monger mentioned a proposed visit to Wisbech on 30 April 2024 by a Norfolk heritage group and its intention would be to view historic buildings in the town; to include, if possible, Wisbech Castle. He asked whether a visit to Wisbech Castle on that date would be possible. In response, the Chairman requested Councillor Monger to provide more details of the proposed visit so that arrangements to open Wisbech Castle to those visitors could be organised.

Members decided that

- (1) the situation regarding the management, operation and development of Wisbech Castle be noted;
- (2) the quotation submitted by AJ Build Property Maintenance and Renovations Ltd, in the total sum of £1,632.00 (plus VAT), in relation to the repair and maintenance works at Wisbech Castle, as set out within this minute, be accepted;
- (3) quotations be sought in relation to the additional repair and maintenance works now identified.

T25/24 Toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre

Further to minute T15/24, members considered matters in relation to the council's operation and management of the toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre, which have been open under the management of Wisbech Town Council since 11 July 2022 and continue to operate successfully.

The Clerk reported that, in accordance minute T4/24, the old lighting units in the toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre, which had reached the end of their useful life and had started to malfunction, had been replaced. Other minor works required to keep the toilets operational (such as removing a blockage in the urinals and repairing dripping taps) had been undertaken also.

Members were reminded by the Clerk of this committee's decision at minute T15/24 that the contract between Wisbech Town Council and Hibernian Property Management Limited in relation to the daily operation and supervision of the toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre be extended to cover the remaining period of the lease between Wisbech Town Council and New River Retail (the owners of the shopping centre); that being midnight on 6 June 2027.

The Clerk commented that, from "feedback" received from the council's contractor, it is clear that most members of the public are very appreciative that the council had taken action to secure the re-opening of these toilets.

Members decided that the situation regarding the council's operation and management of the toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre be noted.

T26/24 Wisbech Market Place

Further to minute T16/24, members discussed matters in relation to the Wisbech Market Place enhancement scheme and the associated "pedestrianisation" arrangements.

The Clerk reminded members that the final element of the highway works associated with the Wisbech Market Place enhancement scheme is the installation of a new gateway at the Church Terrace entrance to the Market Place. However, the Local Highway Authority (LHA) is not able to undertake the work until such time as the security fencing to the front of the former "Cashino" building is removed; a matter which is in the hands of the developer of the site and CNC Building Control.



Members were reminded by the Clerk that this committee had decided at minute T22/24 that tenders be sought for the Wisbech Market Place Cleansing Contract; at that minute the committee had made minor amendments to the requirements of the current contract (as set out at minute T22/24).

The Clerk informed member that, as had been agreed at minute T22/24, tenderers had been given the option to submit quotations/proposals for undertaking the daily cleansing of the Market Place by hand sweeping, mechanical sweeping or a combination of both (say, hand sweeping in the mornings and mechanical sweeping in the evenings). At minute T22/24 this committee had agreed that the contract would initially be for a period of 12 calendar months, with continuation beyond that period being subject to the agreement of both parties. Two tenders for this contract have been received, to be considered at minute T30/24.

Councillor Tierney updated members regarding the difficulty being experienced in being able to update the content of the electronic notice board on the Market Place; he had tried four different memory sticks to perform the update but without success, but he would try one more. He is of the opinion that if the further attempt is unsuccessful, the notice board has a fault; a matter which would need to be remedied by the company which supplied the notice board.

The Clerk reminded members that the council had secured funding from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) to install two footfall counters in the town centre. The money awarded was for purchase and installation of the cameras and three years of operating costs. The three years contract (with Springboard) expires this month, and the council has been invited by Springboard to renew that contract at a cost of £7,600 for a further three years. There is no budget provision for this cost.

Members were informed by the Clerk that he had informed Springboard that the renewal of this contract would need to be considered by this committee; he had also enquired of the company as to whether the contractual payment for this service could be made on an annual basis rather than at three-yearly intervals but has received no response to that enquiry.

Members considered whether it is necessary or appropriate for the contract with Springboard for operation of the footfall counters and the provision of associated data to be renewed. They concluded that although the possession of up-to-date, ongoing footfall data may be useful, it is not worth the cost to the council. The council now possesses three years of "historical" footfall data, which shows general footfall trends in the town centre.

Councillor Tierney reported that Fenland District Council had recently secured renewal of the lease with the National Trust for the continued use of land at Chapel Road as a public car park; however, one of the conditions imposed by the National Trust upon renewal of the lease is that the land could no longer be used to accommodate the annual Mart and Statute Fairs; consequently, Fenland District Council is seeking to identify an alternative location for these fairs and is undertaking public consultation in relation to the potential sites identified.

Members were informed by Councillor Tierney that the three possible alternative sites identified by the District Council are Church Terrace car park, Somers Road car park and Wisbech Park.

The preferred option of this committee would be to use Church Terrace car park to accommodate the annual Mart and Statute Fairs in Wisbech (with the fairground rides etc being located towards the Alexandra Road end of the car park and the Showmen's caravans and vehicles being parked towards the Church Terrace end).



Members decided

- (1) that the situation with regard to Market Place issues in general be noted;
- (2) unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Hoy, seconded by Councillor Wallwork, that the contract with Springboard, for the operation of the council's two footfall counters and the provision of associated data, be not renewed;
- (3) that, if Wisbech Town Council is consulted by Fenland District on the three possible alternative sites identified for accommodating the annual Mart and Statute Fairs, the response of this council would be a preference for Church Terrace car park (with the fairground rides etc being located towards the Alexandra Road end of the car park and the Showmen's caravans and vehicles being parked towards the Church Terrace end).

T27/24 Wisbech Market

Further to minute T17/24, members discussed matters in relation to the operation of market activities.

The Clerk reminded members that, following various changes during the last three years or so due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Wisbech Market has been operating "as normal" since 12 April 2021 but, in common with trading levels in most town centres, trading had not returned "pre-lockdown" levels.

Members are aware that Council officers continue to explore ways of attracting not only market traders for all days of the week but to encourage car booters on Thursdays and Sundays. This is important both in terms of generating income for the council and contributing towards the viability and vibrancy of the town centre.

The Clerk reminded members that between June 2023 and June 2024 the council had operated a financial concession arrangement aimed at attracting more traders to Wisbech market (minutes T7/23, T12/23, T17/23 and T24/23 refer). However, at minute T6/24 this committee decided that, given the lack of take-up of the concession arrangement which had been offered by the council, officers would not continue to devote time to promoting that arrangement in general but would offer the arrangement specifically to those traders which attend the council's community events and festivals. That had been tried but with no success.

Members were reminded by the Clerk that this committee had supported (at minute T17/24) a proposal from the council's Markets Officer for the closing time of the market to be brought forward to 2.00 pm (instead of 3.00 pm) for the months of November to February inclusive. The Clerk informed members that this arrangement had been implemented on 1 November 2024 and has been well received by the traders.

Councillor Hoy mentioned the Wisbech Christmas Fayre which had been scheduled for 1 December 2024 but had been cancelled in the light a forecast for severe weather conditions and consequent safety concerns and that she had contacted Fenland District Council to secure reimbursement to Wisbech Town Council of the £1,500 that it had contributed towards the cost of delivering the event.

Councillor Hoy informed members that the money would be returned to Wisbech Town Council and she suggested that this committee may wish to utilise that funding to meet the cost of delivering some themed markets. That suggestion was discussed briefly by members, who concluded that the matter is worthy of further consideration. Some members felt that such a proposition may be more attractive to potential traders if the council were able to provide pre-erected stalls; however, they do



acknowledge that the purchase of stalls, as well as erecting and dismantling stalls, would have cost implications for the council.

Members decided that

- (1) the situation regarding Wisbech market activities be noted;
- (2) consideration be given, at a future meeting of the committee, as a means of contributing towards the viability and vibrancy of the town centre, to arranging a programme of themed markets;
- (3) the Clerk would seek to obtain costs for the purchase of market stalls.

T28/24 Town Hall/office

Members were informed by the Clerk that maintenance work to the Town Hall is undertaken as necessary.

The Clerk reminded members that this committee had decided at minute T18/24 that quotations be sought for re-decoration works to the ceilings of the Council Chamber and the Mayor's Parlour and the re-decoration of the walls and ceiling of the stairway between the ground floor and the first floor of the Town Hall.

Members were informed by the Clerk that, in accordance with the decision at minute T18/24, council officers had been seeking, since that time, to obtain quotations from local contractors for this work. One contractor had visited the Town Hall on 10 October 2024 to assess the work required, for the purpose of submitting a quotation, but no quotation has been received.

Another contractor attended the Town Hall on 11 November 2024; no quotation has yet been received. A contractor who made an appointment to attend the Town Hall on 12 November was a "no show". A contractor who attended the Town Hall on 13 November decided that he would not submit a quotation as the job is "too big" for him.

Another contractor visited the Town Hall on 12 December and a further contractor is scheduled to visit on 30 December 2024.

The Clerk informed members that the main roof of the Town Hall had recently suffered some storm damage and that he had arranged for the situation to be inspected over the weekend by a roofing contractor. The Clerk is awaiting the contractor's assessment of the situation and what remedial works may be required.

Members decided that the information reported by the Clerk be noted and that he be authorised to arrange any necessary roofing repair work deemed necessary, provided that he considers the cost to be reasonable and that sufficient budgetary provision exists.

T29/24 St Raphael community hall

Further to minute T19/24, members considered matters associated with Wisbech Town Council taking-on the operation and management of the St Raphael community hall.

The Clerk informed members that the lease between Fenland District Council (as landlord) and Wisbech Town Council (as tenant) has now been signed by both parties and came into effect on 4 December 2024.



Members were informed by the Clerk that, following Fenland District Council (FDC) undertaking all the external repair and maintenance work that had been required to the community hall and installing the fire-fighting equipment recommended by way of a Fire Risk Assessment, the building had been “open for business” since 18 September 2024.

Councillor Foice-Beard mentioned that the Clerk and she had been involved in discussions with officers of the County Council’s Early Years service and representatives of Youths of Fenland CIC in relation to potential regular, ongoing hirings of the building. Youths of Fenland CIC are now hiring the building two evenings per week.

The Clerk informed members that Councillor Foice-Beard and he would be meeting, virtually, with relevant officers of the Early Years service, early in the New Year (date to be agreed), to discuss the progress of the Early Years service’s proposal for hire of the building. He mentioned that proposals for building works to accommodate the needs of Early Years service would be considered by an Assessment Panel at Cambridgeshire County Council on 14 January 2025.

Mention was made the Clerk that a fridge and a cooker had been purchased and installed in the building and that tables and chairs had been procured.

Members decided that the current situation be noted.

T30/24 Wisbech Market Place – Cleansing Contract

Further to minute T22/24, members considered the two tenders which had been received by the council in relation to the Market Place Cleansing Contract.

Members expressed their disappointment that only two tenders had been received but acknowledge the difficulty that the council experiences in seeking quotations or tenders for most types of works.

The Clerk (and RFO) reminded members of the financial provision within the Market Place Cleansing budget for the current financial year (2024/25) and for the financial year 2025/26 and pointed-out that neither of the two tenders received would exceed the budgetary provision.

Although members acknowledge that both tender figures are within the budget available, they had hoped that savings could be achieved through this tendering exercise.

Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Tierney, seconded by Councillor Hoy, that

- (1) the financial and operational aspects of both tenders be noted;
- (2) the Clerk would seek to negotiate with the company which had submitted the lower of the two tenders a reduction in the proposed annual tender sum, on the basis of an initial contract period of two years (instead of the one year proposed originally);
- (3) in the event of the negotiations at (2) not being successful, a further tendering exercise be undertaken.

(Members resolved to exclude the public for this item of business on the grounds that it involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972)



Meeting finished at 8.20 pm.

Signed.....

Dated.....

DRAFT