

WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL
WISBECH TOWN CENTRE COMMITTEE

23 SEPTEMBER 2024 – 7.30 pm

MINUTES OF MEETING

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

Apologies: None.

The minutes of the meeting of the Wisbech Town Centre Committee held on 8 July 2024 were confirmed and signed.

T13/24 Public participation: public mural

Members received a presentation from Kath Nightingale, Director of 20Twenty Productions, and Richard Savage, a street artist, in relation to a proposal of Fenland District Council for the painting of a mural (possibly a map of Wisbech) on the wall which runs between the Somers Road car park and Alexandra Road, Wisbech.

Mrs Nightingale mentioned that 20Twenty Productions had secured the necessary funding for the project and an artist to deliver the work and she is now seeking the opinion of Wisbech Town Council about what members would like to see provided. She commented that the ideal timescale for the delivery of this piece of public art would be within the next three weeks or so. In addition, to the mural, Fenland District Council (FDC) would install one new notice board in place of those older boards which had been removed from the wall by FDC.

Members were asked by Mrs Nightingale what, if the mural were to be a map of Wisbech, they would like to see as the extent of coverage – say, only the town centre?

A number of views were expressed by members, not only in relation to a map but whether the mural could feature portraits of historic people of the town, such as Joseph Medworth and Octavia Hill.

Members decided that they would send their ideas to the Town Clerk, who would forward them to Mrs Nightingale.

T14/24 Wisbech Castle

Further to minute T3/24, members considered matters in relation to the management, operation and development of Wisbech Castle.

The Clerk reminded members that this committee had accepted, at minute T26/23, a quotation for re-plastering and decorating the Clayton Room. That work had been undertaken. The quotation which had been accepted at minute T26/23 had, however, not included painting of the woodwork (doors, skirting boards, windows etc) of the Clayton Room. Members were reminded by the Clerk that a quotation for that work had been accepted by this committee at minute T8/24. That work had been completed last week.

Members are aware that the intruder alarm at Wisbech Castle had been problematic, regularly sounding unnecessarily at various times of the day and night. A few alarm sensors have been replaced and that seems to have solved the problem (for now).

The Clerk reminded members that this committee had accepted a quotation (at minute T8/24) to relocate the alarm system control panel from the downstairs room to the top of the staircase and he informed them that the work had subsequently been undertaken.

Members were informed by the Clerk that a quotation had been obtained from the supplier of the alarm system for additional works to the system, which would be considered at minute T20/24.

Members were reminded by the Clerk that this committee accepted (at minute T8/24) a quotation for replacement of the external doors of Wisbech Castle Café. The work is yet to commence. At the same minute, a quotation for lighting works to Wisbech Castle and the vaults was also accepted. The lighting works to the main building have been undertaken and those to the vaults are to be completed.

The Chairman expressed the opinion that there may be a need to consider undertaking further tree-cutting works at Wisbech Castle.

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 an event. Enquiries continue to be received regularly and bookings are being taken for 2025. Bookings for events in 2025 have slowed a little recently, although a booking for a wedding in March 2025 has been taken. There is also a long-standing booking for a wedding in November 2024.

Amanda Scott continues almost single-handedly in tending to the Castle gardens and has many ideas to enhance them. Members feel that she is to be congratulated for her dedication and hard work, as are Trevor Ketteringham and Steve Tierney in overseeing most of the paranormal investigations.

The Chairman mentioned that a number of tours for infants' schools' pupils had been carried out recently and he expressed his thanks to Councillor Wallwork for assisting in the delivery of those tours. He mentioned also that there had also been visits by officers of the Fire Service.

Further to minute T12/24, members considered the delivery of a Christmas-themed event at Wisbech Castle.

Members propose that there be activities in four rooms at Wisbech Castle and the visit would conclude by meeting Santa Claus in the Clayton Room, on 15 December. They also propose holding a smaller event on 17 December 2024.

Councillor Hoy informed members that the operator of The Retreat hair salon would be decorating Wisbech Castle for Christmas this year.

Members decided that

- (1) the situation regarding the management, operation and development of Wisbech Castle be noted;
- (2) Christmas-themed events be held on 15 December (between 11.00 am and 5.00 pm) and 17 December 2024 (between 6.00 pm and 8.00 pm) and that a working party (comprising Councillors Edwards, Ketteringham, Monger, Tierney and Wallwork) be formed to finalise the details and make the necessary arrangements;
- (3) a sum of £1,000 be allocated from the Wisbech Castle expenditure budget to meet the costs of the Christmas-themed events.

T15/24 Toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre

Further to minute T4/24, 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 latest update report from the contractor, in summary, informs the council that

- most users of the toilets are satisfied with the service that is being provided. There are still moans from a small number of people about the 20p admission fee
- minor repairs have been undertaken as necessary
- it has been noticed that the replacement taps which had been fitted do not always shut-off and the contractor's staff have monitored the situation. As the situation is not improving, Town Council staff would arrange for a plumber to remedy the situation
- 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.

The Clerk reminded members that this committee had decided, at minute T4/24, that quotations be sought for replacement of the lighting units within these toilets. A quotation for this work has been received, to be considered at minute T21/24.

Members were reminded by the Clerk that this committee decided, at minute T4/22, that there would be a contract, incorporating appropriate conditions, between Wisbech Town Council and Herbie Hut Limited (now trading as Hibernian Property Management Limited) in relation to the daily operation and supervision of the toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre. Contractual conditions included:

- an initial term of 6 months, with continuance thereafter being a matter for agreement between the two parties
- the contractor being required to ensure that the toilets are subject to continuous on-site supervision by a person engaged by the contractor for the whole time that the toilets are open to the public (i.e., 5 hours per day, 7 days per week)
- the contractor being required to ensure that the toilets are always kept clean and tidy and are provided with all necessary consumables.

The Clerk reminded members that the contract, which had an initial term of 6 months, commenced on 11 July 2022 and that at minute T16/22 this committee had extended the contract, on the same terms and conditions, for a further period of 24 months with effect from 11 January 2023. That means that the current contractual arrangement is due to finish at midnight on 10 January 2025. The contractor has indicated a willingness to continue to deliver this service for Wisbech Town Council.

Members were reminded by the Clerk that the period of the current lease between Wisbech Town Council and New River Retail (the owners of the Horsefair Shopping Centre) in relation to these toilets is 5 years from 7 June 2022; thus, expiring at midnight on 6 June 2027.

Members considered whether to extend the current contractual arrangement beyond January 2025.

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

- (1) the situation regarding the council's operation of the toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre be noted;
- (2) 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, i.e. until midnight on 6 June 2027.

T16/24 Wisbech Market Place

Further to minute T5/24, 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.

Towards the end of June 2024, the demolition contractor reduced the size of the area which is enclosed by the security fencing. Although this action has not made it possible for the new gate to be installed by the LHA, it did have the effect of increasing the width of the carriageway at that location; potentially allowing vehicles to access the Market Place. The LHA was alerted to that situation immediately by Town Council officers and, as a result, highway barriers were installed by the LHA at that location and will remain in place until such time as the new gate can be installed.

Members decided that the situation be noted.

T17/24 Wisbech Market

Further to minute T6/24, members discussed matters in relation to the operation of market activities.

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 has not returned “pre-lockdown” levels.

The Clerk commented that the general “feedback” from traders is that, although the footfall in the town is relatively high, most people appear to be visiting the town centre for leisure/recreational/social uses, not for retail purposes.

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.

On 5 June 2023 this committee decided (at minute T7/23) to put in place some measures aimed at attracting more traders and potential shoppers to the town. One of those measures was to implement a concession for new traders whereby, for the remainder of 2023, the trader would be able to occupy a “standard” size pitch for £5.00 per day on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, provided that the trader does not need to access the council’s electricity supply and does not park a vehicle on the Market Place.

At that time, the initiative had attracted only one enquiry, which did not, however, result in the enquirer deciding to trade at Wisbech Market.

On 2 October 2023 this committee decided (at minute T12/23) that the concession arrangement agreed at minute T7/23 be publicised/promoted again. As a result, two businesses had begun trading on Wednesdays. Regrettably, those businesses did not, subsequently, take-up the offer to become licensed traders.

On 18 December 2023 this committee decided (at minute T17/23) that the concession arrangement agreed at minute T7/23, which had been due to finish at the end of 2023, be extended for a further six months (to 30 June 2024). This concession for new traders had been publicised on an occasional basis. Despite re-advertising the offer for concessions on trading, there was no uptake.

Members were reminded by the Clerk that as another means of seeking to increase the vitality and viability of Wisbech market, this committee decided, at its meeting on 4 March 2024, that those businesses which have premises around the Market Place or on Market Street be offered the opportunity to have, free-of-charge, a standard size pitch at Wisbech market, on days where space is available (and where such trading would not be in direct competition with licensed or paying casual traders), subject to the retailer not accessing the council's electricity supply, not parking a vehicle on site and operating in accordance with the council's market trading rules and regulations (minute T24/23 refers). There was no take-up of that offer.

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 (minutes T7/23, T12/23 and T17/23 refer), which had been scheduled to end on 30 June 2024, 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. This was tried earlier in the year but with no success.

Members were informed by the Clerk that two new traders had recently joined the Market Place as Licensed Traders. Ayaan's Ices, selling ice cream, lollies and soft drinks, as well as Kuya's Catering, selling Filipino and Spanish food. Ayaan's Ices would be trading until October, when Autumn weather arrives.

Members considered a proposal from the council's Markets Officer that the closing time of the market be brought forward to 2.00 pm (instead of 3.00 pm) for the months of November to February inclusive. The officer's rationale for the proposal is that such an arrangement would be beneficial to traders, who often need to get back to their base of operations and unload/re-load in the darker afternoons of winter. The Markets Officer had sought the views of market traders prior to making this proposal; the majority are supportive of the arrangement and two existing traders had said that they would attend the market on additional days through that period if they were permitted to leave at the earlier hour.

Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Wallwork, seconded by Councillor Sagoo, that

- (1) the situation with regard to Wisbech market in general be noted;
- (2) the closing time of Wisbech market be brought forward to 2.00 pm (instead of 3.00 pm) for the months of November to February inclusive.

T18/24 Town Hall/office

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

The Clerk informed members that the local roofing contractor which undertook repair works to the main roof of the Town Hall had undertaken an inspection of another section of the roof. The initial inspection did not reveal any specific repair work required but a more detailed inspection would be arranged.

Members were reminded by the Clerk that this committee had decided, at minute T7/24, that in the event that repair works are deemed necessary to another section of the Town Hall roof, the Clerk be authorised to accept, in liaison with the Chairmen of the Wisbech Town Centre Committee and the Resources Committee, subject to there being sufficient financial provision within the Town Hall Maintenance budget, such a quotation.

The Clerk informed members that Councillor Meekins had asked that this committee considers requesting the Town Clerk (and RFO) to obtain quotations for re-decoration works to the ceilings of the Council Chamber and the Mayor's Parlour and the walls and ceiling to the stairway between the ground floor and the first floor of the Town Hall and for those quotations to be referred to a future meeting of this committee.

Members decided that

- (1) the information reported by the Clerk be noted;
- (2) the council would obtain quotations 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.

T19/24 St Raphael community hall

Further to minute T11/24, members considered matters associated with Wisbech Town Council taking-on the operation and management (via a lease with Fenland District Council) of the St Raphael community hall.

Following Wisbech Town Council's agreement to the Heads of Terms of a lease for the building (at minute R3/24), a formal lease from Fenland District Council (FDC) is awaited (currently being prepared by that council's solicitors). In the meantime, a Tenancy at Will has been produced by FDC and has been signed by the Town Clerk.

The Clerk (and RFO) reminded members that this committee had decided, at minute T11/24, that the fee for hire of the building be £20 per hour but the Clerk (and RFO) be delegated the authority, in liaison with Councillor Foice-Beard (the councillor who is leading on this project), to offer a discounted rate for those groups and organisations which hire the building on a regular basis. The committee decided also, at the same minute, that the Clerk (and RFO) be delegated the authority, in liaison with Councillor Foice-Beard, to procure the furniture and equipment etc necessary for the building to become operational.

Members were informed by the Clerk (and RFO) that Fenland District Council (FDC) has now undertaken all the external repair and maintenance work that had been required to the community hall; in addition, all the toilets are now operational and the issues with the electricity supply have been resolved. FDC had also commissioned a Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) of the building and would install the necessary fire-fighting equipment recommended by way of the FRA. Upon completion of those works the District Council would "hand-over" the building to the Town Council. Those works had been completed on 18 September, which means that the building is now "open for business".

Councillor Foice-Beard expressed her thanks to the Town Clerk for the work that he is undertaking, on behalf of the council, to ensure that the operation and management of the St Raphael community hall will be a success.

Members decided that the current situation be noted.

T20/24 Wisbech Castle – repair and maintenance works

Members considered a quotation for additional works to the intruder alarm system at Wisbech Castle.

Members decided that the quotation for works to increase the coverage of the intruder alarm system at Wisbech Castle, in the sum of £214.77 (plus VAT), be accepted.

(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)

T21/24 Toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre

Further to minute T4/24, members considered a quotation for replacement of the lighting units within the toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre.

Members decided that the quotation for replacement of the lighting units within the toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre, in the sum of £1,095.27 (plus VAT), be accepted.

(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)

T22/24 Wisbech Market Place – Cleansing Contract

Further to minute T9/24, members reviewed the arrangements for the daily cleansing of Wisbech Market Place.

The Clerk (and RFO) informed members of the provisions of the current contract and of the costs associated with those contractual arrangements.

Members decided that

- (1) the council would seek tenders for the Wisbech Market Place Cleansing Contract;
- (2) the new contract would require:
 - sweeping/cleansing of the Market Place to be undertaken twice per day (once before 7.00 am and again, more thoroughly, after 5.00 pm), seven days per week (365 days a year)
 - twice-daily (mornings and evenings) emptying of the waste bins which are sited on the Market Place and disposal of their contents
 - a “deep clean” of the Market Place on a quarterly basis
 - the contractor to provide all consumables, such as bin liners and cleaning products;
- (3) tenderers be 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).

(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)

T23/24 Christmas lighting in Wisbech

The Clerk (and RFO) reminded members that the Resources Committee had decided, at minute R18/23, that a new Christmas Lighting Installation Contract be prepared for 2024 – which would specify (based upon the 2023 lighting scheme) all the works to be undertaken as part of the contract and include financial penalties in respect of works not undertaken prior to the switch-on – for which tenders would be invited.

Expressions of interest for the receipt of tender documents for the Christmas Lighting Installation Contract 2024 had been invited by the Town Clerk and the deadline for his receipt of expressions of interest from contractors had been 22 July 2024.

Members were informed by the Clerk (and RFO) that seven expressions of interest had been received; each of those contractors were sent the tender document. The deadline for the council's receipt of completed documents was 5.00 pm on 7 August 2024.

The Clerk (and RFO) informed members that the council received three completed tender documents.

Councillor Wallwork (the councillor who had been leading on this project), Councillor Tierney (Chairman of the Wisbech Town Centre Committee) and the Town Clerk met with those three tenderers on 4 September 2024 to discuss their respective proposals.

Copies of the three tender documents, with an accompanying report from the Clerk (and RFO), had been circulated to the members of this committee in advance of today's meeting.

The Clerk (and RFO) drew members' attention to the Financial Regulations which apply to procurement activities undertaken by the council, as set out in his report. The report from the Clerk (and RFO) also included his assessment of each of the tenders, based upon the content of the respective tender documents and the discussions which had taken place with the three tenderers on 4 September 2024.

Members were reminded by the Clerk (and RFO) of the total cost of the installation and removal of the town's Christmas lighting in the financial year 2023/24 and of the financial provision for such activity in that year and the current one.

Mention was made by the Clerk (and RFO) that tenders 1 and 2 could be funded from within the Christmas Lighting Installation budget for 2024/25; however, tender 3 could not.

Detailed consideration was given by members to each of the three tenders, not only in terms of cost but also in terms of anticipated performance by the respective contractors.

The Clerk (and RFO) made the point that, generally, the practice of a local authority would be to accept the lowest tender unless there is a business case for not doing so. Members are of the opinion that, overall, it would be in the council's best interest to award the contract to tenderer 3.

Members decided, on the proposal of Councillor Hoy, seconded by Councillor Wallwork, that they wish to award the contract to tenderer 3 and, consequently, this committee would put a case that supports the necessary budget considerations, in accordance with Financial Regulation number 5.17, to the Resources Committee.

(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 8.55 pm.

Signed.....

Dated.....