



WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL

14 October 2024 – 7.30 pm

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillor Imafidon, Chairman; Councillors Edwards, Foice-Beard, Hoy, Human, Ketteringham, Meekins, Monger, Oliver, Patrick, Pehlivanova, Rafique, Read, Roy, Sagoo, Tanfield, Tierney and Wallwork.

Apologies: None (all members were present).

Public participation: None requested.

41/24 Avis Gilliatt

The Mayor referred to the recent death of Avis Gilliatt, a former member of Wisbech Town Council who had been Town Mayor for the municipal year 1999/2000.

Members stood, at the invitation of the Mayor, for a minute's silence in memory of Mrs Gilliatt.

42/24 Committees of the Council

Councillor Hoy, in her capacity as Leader of the Council, proposed that

- (1) Councillor Oliver be replaced by Councillor Foice-Beard on the Resources Committee
- (2) Councillor Rafique be replaced by Councillor Oliver on the Wisbech Town Centre Committee
- (3) the Staffing and Communications Committee (which only meets as and when necessary) and the Community Events and Festivals Committee (which generally meets only once a year, to agree an annual programme of events) be disbanded
- (4) the terms of reference of the council's other committees be revised, as necessary, to include the responsibilities of the Staffing and Communications Committee and the Community Events and Festivals Committee.

Members decided that the Leader of the Council's proposals be approved and that in relation to (4) above, the Clerk would produce revised terms of reference for the council's committees.

43/24 Fenland District Council

(1) Information

The Clerk reported that the District Council's Environment newsletter for the month of September 2024 had been circulated, by e-mail, to all members of the council on 8 October 2024.

Members decided that the situation be noted.

(2) Gambling Act Policy

Members considered the submission of a response to Fenland District Council's consultation exercise in relation to a review of its Gambling Act Policy (Statement of Principles).

The Clerk had circulated to members, in advance of the meeting, a copy of the draft policy document.



Fenland District Council (FDC) states that the review of its Gambling Act Policy (Statement of Principles) is a requirement under Section 349 of the Gambling Act 2005. In preparing the statement, officers of FDC had given full regard to both the requirements of the Gambling Act itself and the revised guidelines issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Gambling Commission and, where relevant, District Council strategies (such as crime and disorder).

The Clerk reminded members that the objectives of the Gambling Act 2005 are:

- To prevent gambling from being a source of crime and disorder, being associated with crime or disorder or being used to support crime
- Ensuring that gambling is conducted in a fair and open way
- Protecting children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling.

The Gambling Act Policy (Statement of Principles) would form the basis of any decision taken by Fenland District Council in respect of applications or enforcement under the Gambling Act 2005 by officers or any committee or sub-committee of the council involved in licensing decisions.

The consultation period will conclude on 20 October 2024. Once adopted by the District Council, the new policy would cover the period 2025 to 2028.

Members decided that Fenland District Council be informed that Wisbech Town Council has no comments to make in relation to the proposed Gambling Act Policy (Statement of Principles) for the period 2025 to 2028.

(Councillors Hoy, Meekins and Oliver declared their respective non-pecuniary interest in this item of business, by virtue of membership of Fenland District Council's Licensing Committee, and took no part in the voting thereon)

(3) Memorial Gardens

Councillor Tierney, in his capacity as a member of Fenland District Council, informed members that the District Council is looking to review the provision of benches within the Memorial Gardens, an area which does suffer from anti-social behaviour. He invited members' ideas and comments in that regard.

The conclusion reached by members was that perhaps there ought to be fewer benches and improvements to lighting. Councillor Tierney undertook to share members' views with those at the District Council who are dealing with this project.

Members decided that the situation be noted.

44/24 Cambridgeshire County Council

(1) Local Highway Improvement schemes 2025/26

The Clerk informed members of his understanding that the Local Highway Improvement (LHI) schemes application process for 2025/26 would open on 1 November 2024 and he suggested that members may wish to give thought to possible schemes.



The Clerk reminded members of the LHI application process.

Members were informed by the Clerk that the Local Highway Improvement (LHI) programme covers all districts in Cambridgeshire and invites any groups or organisations that represent the local community to apply for funding. The schemes are community driven and give local people the opportunity to put forward proposals for highway improvements in their area.

The schemes are delivered by the County Council, as Local Highway Authority, on a joint funded basis and applicants can apply for funding of up to either £25,000 for complex projects or £10,000 for non-complex projects, as a contribution to their scheme. The applicant is expected to provide a minimum contribution of 10% towards the total scheme cost.

Applications from Town Councils are limited to one bid per County Council electoral division in the town. Wisbech Town Council can submit three applications.

Members considered the submission of applications for Local Highway Improvement (LHI) schemes for Wisbech for delivery during the financial year 2025/26.

Five schemes were initially suggested by members and, following discussion of each proposal, three were selected; those being:

- the implementation of parking restrictions (DYLs) at the top of Westmead Avenue
- “beefing up” the No Entry signs and road markings at the junction of Wilberforce Road and Norwich Road
- the installation of bollards on the grassed area opposite Meadowgate School.

Members decided that applications be made to Cambridgeshire County Council under the Local Highway Improvements scheme for the financial year 2025/26 in relation to the three schemes listed above.

(2) County Councillor updates

Councillors Hoy and Tierney, in their capacity as members of Cambridgeshire County Council, updated members on some of the matters being discussed, planned or implemented by the County Council.

In particular, Councillor Hoy mentioned that she had raised at a recent meeting of the Children’s Committee the considerable amount of money, millions of pounds each year, that is spent by the County Council on unregistered childcare provision.

Members decided that the information reported by Councillors Hoy and Tierney be noted.

45/24 Cambridgeshire Constabulary

Members took the opportunity to consider any matters relating to crime and disorder in Wisbech, for reference to Cambridgeshire Constabulary.

Councillor Meekins mentioned the difficulties which are caused by the parking of vehicles in the immediate vicinity of schools and he expressed the opinion that police officers ought to visit those locations more often.

Councillor Tierney expressed the opinion that the difficulties caused by the parking of vehicles in the immediate vicinity of schools is not their fault. The fault lies with the County Council; because of its desire to minimise car usage, it does make adequate parking provision at schools. He suggested



that the County Council should acknowledge that there will be parents who need to take their children to school by car and, consequently, that should be taken into account when planning schools.

Councillor Monger expressed the opinion that inconsiderate parking is not unique to schools; there are many such issues in and around the town; also, lorries making deliveries in the Church Terrace area. Councillor Edwards commented that the West Street area is also badly affected in that way.

Members decided that councillors' comments be noted and that they be forwarded by the Clerk to the local Policing Inspector.

46/24 Minutes of the Town Council meeting of 2 September 2024

Members decided, on the proposal of Councillor Edwards, seconded by Councillor Read, that the minutes of the Town Council meeting of 2 September 2024 be confirmed and signed.

47/24 Minutes of committees

Members received, for information, the minutes of committee meetings held since the last meeting of the Town Council, as follows:

- (1) Planning and Community Infrastructure Committee – 2 September 2024
- (2) Environment and Public Spaces Committee – 16 September 2024
- (3) Planning and Community Infrastructure Committee – 23 September 2024
- (4) Wisbech Town Centre Committee – 23 September 2024
- (5) Resources Committee – 30 September 2024.

Members decided that the contents of these minutes, including the decisions made by the committees, be noted.

48/24 Biodiversity Policy

Members considered, in accordance with the duty imposed upon town and parish councils by Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, updated by Section 102 of the Environmental Act 2021, the adoption of a Biodiversity Policy for Wisbech Town Council.

The Clerk informed members that, under the Environmental Act 2021, public authorities (including town and parish councils) operating in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

The Clerk had circulated to members, in advance of the meeting, a draft policy.

Government guidance published on 17 May 2023 clarifies that, as a public authority, town and parish councils must:

- consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity
- agree policies and specific objectives based on their consideration
- act to deliver their policies and achieve their objectives.

Members were informed by the Clerk that town and parish councils, unlike other authorities, are not obliged to publish a report on their actions but the Government guidance required all public authorities to complete their first consideration of what action to take for biodiversity by 1 January 2024 (although this is not being "policed" for town and parish councils). Such councils were required to agree their policies and objectives as soon as possible after this date and must then re-consider



the selected actions within five years of completing their previous consideration, or more frequently if they choose.

The Clerk mentioned that the requirement for town and parish councils to possess a Biodiversity Policy had been brought to the attention of local councils in the County very recently by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils.

Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Human, seconded by Councillor Monger, that the Biodiversity Policy for Wisbech Town Council, as set out in the appendix to these minutes, be adopted.

49/24 Mayor's report

The Mayor informed members of the activities and events that he had attended since the last meeting of the council.

Firstly, the Mayor expressed his thanks to Councillors Foice-Beard, Meekins and Monger for "manning" the Council Chamber on 7, 8, 14 and 15 September 2024 as part of the national Heritage Open Days scheme. He mentioned that more than 100 people had visited the Council Chamber over those 4 days.

The Mayor mentioned that his Afternoon Tea event held at Wisbech Castle on 22 September 2024, the first civic event that he had hosted, had been very successful despite the poor weather conditions. It had been attended by many members of the council. He informed members that he and Councillor Meekins (in his capacity as Chairman of Fenland District Council) had met the Duke of Gloucester, who had been visiting various places within Wisbech, on 26 September 2024 at the Nestle Purina factory.

Members were informed by the Mayor that he continues to support/promote local businesses in the town. He commented that he tries to show the town in a "good light". He informed members also that he had attended yesterday an event held by the Lithuanian Community; he expressed the opinion that this group undertakes great community work in the town and plays a vital part in the community.

The Mayor mentioned that the funeral of the late Avis Gilliatt (see minute 41/24) would take place at 11.00 am on 24 October 2024 at the Church of St Peter and St Paul in Wisbech and he encouraged members to attend if possible, to express the council's appreciation of what Mrs Gilliatt had done for the town in her role as a Town and District Councillor.

Mention was made by the Mayor that he had attended the High Sheriff's Justice Day yesterday, at which there had been numerous dignitaries in attendance.

Members decided that the comments of the Mayor be noted.

(The Mayor requested it be recorded that during this item of business a member of the public had been orally disruptive by audibly giggling and that, in response to that behaviour, he had said to her "I do not appreciate you interrupting this meeting (by giggling loudly). Thank You")

50/24 Leader of the Council's report

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Hoy, informed members that

- preparations for this year's Christmas lights switch-on event, to take place on 1 December, are going well; it is "shaping-up" to very a very exciting event. She mentioned that there are a number of health and safety issues which are being addressed



- the Wisbech Park Pavilion now has a number of regular evening bookings. The tenant of the café has been given notice and the search for a new tenant is going well
- Wisbech Castle is very busy; there are a significant number of bookings for paranormal investigations. A number of tours for infants' schools' pupils had been carried out recently and there had also been visits by officers of the Fire Service. There would Christmas-themed events taking place at Wisbech Castle on 15 and 17 December
- the council's acquisition and operation of the St Raphael Community Hall is going well. There are regular bookings by Youths of Fenland CIC and discussions are ongoing with the Early Years Team at Cambridgeshire County Council in relation to delivery at the hall of pre-school provision.

Members decided that the comments of the Leader of the Council be noted.

51/24 Clerk's report

The Clerk reported to members on: updates in relation to council projects/initiatives; correspondence received which would be of interest to councillors; advance notice of events/activities etc.

Projects and service delivery

Community Support

Council officers continue to share other partners' information and undertake "sign posting" to other services/organisations as appropriate, particularly at a time when life is more difficult for many people. To this end, the Town Clerk attends various meetings, including those of the Fenland Charities Network and the Cambridgeshire Financial Capability Forum.

Other "sign posting" and information-sharing takes place within the membership of the Love Wisbech partnership (which is chaired by the Town Clerk), as well as the groups mentioned above.

The council provides financial support to charitable organisations and community groups and its budget for the financial year 2024/25 includes a sum of £19,000 to provide financial support to projects which benefit the local community. Some of that funding was allocated by the council's Resources Committee on 15 April 2024 (minute R27/23 refers), 15 July 2024 (minute R7/24 refers) and 30 September 2024 (minute R11/24 refers). The remaining balance on the Financial Support budget is £5,280.

Wisbech Market Place

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. At its meeting on 23 September 2024 the Wisbech Town Centre Committee decided (at minute T21/24) that the council would seek tenders for the Wisbech Market Place Cleansing Contract; the committee made minor amendments to the requirements of the current contract.



The new contract will 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.

Tenderers have 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).

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.

The Clerk (and RFO) publicised on 10 October 2024 an invitation to tender for this contract and the closing date (and time) for the receipt of tenders is 25 October 2024 (at 5.00 pm).

Wisbech Market

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.

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 the Wisbech Town Centre Committee decided to put in place some measures aimed at attracting more traders and potential shoppers to the town; one of those measures had been to implement a financial concession for new traders (set out at minute T7/23).

On 2 October 2023 that committee decided (at minute T12/23) that the concession arrangement agreed at minute T7/23 be publicised/promoted again.

On 18 December 2023 the 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).

As another means of seeking to increase the vitality and viability of Wisbech market, the Wisbech Town Centre 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).

At minute T6/24 the Wisbech Town Centre 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, T17/23 and T24/23 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. That was tried but with no success.



Two new traders did join the Market Place as Licensed Traders during the summer. Ayaan's Ices, selling ice cream, lollies and soft drinks, as well as Kuya's Catering, selling Filipino and Spanish food. Ayaan's Ices were due to trade be trading until the end of September but, due to adverse weather conditions, ceased trading early in that month. Kuya's Catering ceased trading at Wisbech Market after a few weeks.

At its meeting on 23 September 2024 the Wisbech Town Centre Committee approved (at minute T16/24) 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 was 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.

Allotments

The council continues to receive enquiries in relation to plots at the council's allotment sites. With the cost-of-living crisis having an impact upon people's lives, new tenants have been extremely grateful for the opportunity to rent allotments from the council, to enable them to grow their own fruit and vegetables.

All allotment sites are now full and, to try to reduce waiting times for a plot, only 3 preferences for a site are being taken. The Environment and Public Spaces Committee decided on 29 July 2024 (at minute E3/24) that, in future, whilst waiting lists are being operated, the council would accept applications for allotment tenancies only from residents of the parish of Wisbech and restrict applications to one per household; any non-parishioners who had already been accepted onto a waiting list would, however, not be removed.

At its meeting on 19 February 2024 (at minute E3/23), the council's Environment and Public Spaces Committee decided to undertake a review of allotment fees, for implementation in October 2025. Officers had obtained comparison fees from other local councils in Cambridgeshire, to assist the committee's deliberations. This matter was considered by the committee on 29 July 2024 (at minute E3/24), at which it was decided that allotment rents be increased (from £0.06 per square metre) to £0.12 per square metre per annum with effect from October 2025. The committee agreed also that the allotment rent concession (whereby persons aged 60 years and above can apply for a 25% discount on the level of rent that they pay) be no longer offered to tenants, except for those who are currently in receipt of that concession.

Because of complaints received over the summer regarding unauthorised burning of household items on certain allotments sites, the Environment and Public Spaces Committee reviewed, at its meeting on 29 July 2024, the council's policy in relation to bonfires on allotment sites.

The Environment and Public Spaces Committee decided (at minute E3/24) that, with immediate effect, the lighting of bonfires at allotment sites be no longer allowed; Rule 37 of the "You and Your Allotment" document being amended to read "The burning of garden rubbish or any other items on an allotment plot is not permitted. Any tenant who lights a bonfire on an allotment plot will be deemed to have breached the Tenancy Agreement". The banning of bonfires has proved controversial with some tenants but, in the main, has been accepted. Officers have received written representations from some tenants and these will be reported to the next meeting of the Environment and Public Spaces Committee.

There have been reports of horsetail (mare's tail) weed on Waterlees and Dowgate allotments. It is understood that roots of established horsetail plants can grow to 2 metres in depth and spread rapidly. This is likely to dissuade potential tenants from taking on these plots. There is no quick



remedy, and it takes intense work to control. The Environment and Public Spaces Committee may wish to consider allowing a rent-free period of one year in relation to renting any affected plots to enable new tenants to tackle the situation to prevent further spread.

A full survey of all allotment sites took place during August, which identified many plots that had not been kept in a cultivated state. Letters/e-mails have been sent recently to those tenants informing them that they will not be invited to “renew” the tenancy from October 2024. This will create vacant plots for those on the waiting lists for each of the sites.

Debbie Clark, the council’s Customer Services and Liaison Officer, has met with some tenants on site, as the maps for both the Dowgate Road and Mile Tree Lane sites are insufficiently clear in terms of location and numbering of the plots. This can result in misinterpretation as to which plot is tenanted by whom. Councillor Oliver has offered to take up-to-date and clearer aerial photographs of those two sites, which will assist officers when identifying plots. The Clerk has accepted an offer from James Burton, Architect at Swann Edwards Architectural Services, to produce, on a free-of-charge basis, a detailed map of Dowgate allotment site (where he is also a tenant). This will be extremely helpful to officers in correctly identifying individual plots during the re-letting process.

The tenancy “renewals” process is underway, with quite a number of plots becoming vacant, either due to refusal for the Council to renew tenancies where there has been non-cultivation, or people surrendering their tenancy of their own accord. It is hoped that in the forthcoming weeks, the waiting list will become shorter. There are currently 71 people on the list.

Some tenants at Cox’s Lane and Halfpenny Lane sites had requested upgrades to the entrance barriers at these sites to become full gates. This matter was considered by the council’s Environment and Public Spaces Committee on 29 July 2024 (at minute E3/24) and the committee decided that officers would obtain quotations for the manufacture and installation of gates at those sites. Quotations are still awaited.

When the long grass at the Halfpenny Lane allotments site has been cut, it should be possible to identify some additional plots. This work is yet to be carried out.

Community events and festivals

The planning meeting – chaired by the Town Clerk - in respect of this year’s Remembrance Sunday (10 November 2024) event took place on 19 September 2024. This year’s event will generally replicate the one which took place last year, except that there will be no church service following the event at the War Memorial.

The Community Events and Festivals Working Party recently commenced the planning of the Christmas Lights Switch-on event, scheduled for 1 December. This year’s event will follow the usual format of a programme of entertainment etc in the Market Place, concluding with the town’s Christmas lights being switched-on. It was, however, agreed by the working party that this year’s event would include some different and exciting types of entertainment.

The planning for this year’s Wisbech Christmas Fayre (which will take place on Sunday 8 December 2024) is underway. The arrangements are, as usual, being made by a steering group (Chaired by the Town Clerk) which includes representatives from Wisbech Town Council, Fenland District Council, The Horsefair Shopping Centre, the Library Service, Wisbech Lions, Wisbech Rotary Club, National Trust, Wisbech and Fenland Museum etc. The last meeting of the steering group took place on 17 September 2024 and the next is scheduled for 15 October 2024.

The Town Council will, once again, be running the Wisbech Unsung Heroes Awards and the Community Events and Festivals Working Party has commenced the planning of the event.



The aim of the Wisbech Unsung Heroes Awards is to recognise those townspeople who go the extra mile for their community. Nominations will open on 21 October and close on 6 December 2024.

Those who are shortlisted will be invited to a presentation evening on 25 January 2025. To reduce costs for this event, sponsors for the trophies and other items are being sought. It is hoped that the event will be held at the St Raphael Community Hall.

Councillor Read reported that he had managed to secure sponsorship for the cost of the trophies for the Unsung Heroes Awards.

Town Hall/office

Maintenance work to the Town Hall is undertaken as necessary.

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 will be arranged.

At its meeting on 23 September 2024 the Wisbech Town Centre Committee decided that 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 (minute T17/24 refers).

Council officers are seeking quotations from local contractors for this work. One contractor visited the Town Hall last Thursday (10 October 2024) to assess the work required, for the purpose of submitting a quotation.

Toilets

The toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre, which have been open under the management of Wisbech Town Council and operated on behalf of the council by a contractor since 11 July 2022, continue to operate successfully.

Repair works are undertaken as necessary, often undertaken by the contractor which operates the toilets for Wisbech Town Council.

The old lighting units in the toilet building are starting to malfunction, reaching the end of their useful life. The Wisbech Town Centre Committee decided (at minute T4/24) that quotations be sought for replacement of the lighting units within the toilets. At its meeting on 23 September 2024, that committee accepted a quotation for those lighting units to be replaced (minute T20/24 refers).

At minute T4/22 the Wisbech Town Centre Committee decided that there be a contract, 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.

That contract, which had an initial term of 6 months, commenced on 11 July 2022. At minute T16/22 the Wisbech Town Centre Committee extended the contract, on the same terms and conditions, for a further period of 24 months with effect from 11 January 2023. This 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.



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.

At its meeting on 23 September 2024 the Wisbech Town Centre Committee considered the situation regarding this contract and decided (at minute T14/24) that it be extended to cover the remaining period of the lease between Wisbech Town Council and New River Retail; that being midnight on 6 June 2027.

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.

Wisbech Castle

Further to minutes T26/23 and T8/24, the re-decoration of the Clayton Room is now complete. The intruder alarm at Wisbech Castle had been problematic but the replacement of a few alarm sensors seems to have solved the problem (for now).

At minute T19/24 the Wisbech Town Centre Committee accepted a quotation from the supplier of the intruder alarm system to undertake additional works to increase the coverage of the system. At minute T8/24 the Wisbech Town Centre Committee accepted 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. These works have been completed.

The Castle Café entrance side window shattered recently and has been replaced.

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 2024 are now full, with only 26 Saturday dates available for 2025. Some recent enquiries will hopefully come to fruition, reducing the number of dates available. A number of tours have been carried out for educational purposes and thanks go to Steve Tierney and Susan Wallwork for delivering those tours. Trevor Ketteringham remains a stalwart in undertaking the caretaking of Wisbech Castle and he receives many compliments.

Land at Somers Road, Wisbech

The Town Clerk is still seeking to secure renewal of the lease (with Cambridgeshire County Council) for the area of land, off Somers Road, adjacent to the Queen Mary Centre, which leased by Wisbech Town Council for the purpose of increasing the amount of car parking provision in the town. The Town Council’s solicitors have received recently from the County Council’s solicitors a final version of the lease and have sent to Fenland District Council (FDC) the licence element (see below) for signature. The Town Council’s solicitors continue to pursue a response from FDC.

In accordance with the decision of the Environment and Public Spaces Committee at minute E10/22, this site has been in use since 5 June 2023 by Fenland District Council’s contractor (for a period of 77 weeks) as the works compound in association with the re-development of 24 High Street, Wisbech. That arrangement is covered by way of a licence agreement between Wisbech Town Council (as lessee of the land) and Fenland District Council (as the client for the re-development scheme) and will be referenced in the new lease between Cambridgeshire County Council and Wisbech Town Council.



The contractors which are using the land off Somers Road as a works compound will, before “handing-back” the land to Wisbech Town Council, ensure that it is in no worse condition than it was at the beginning of that use. It is understood that there is some “slippage” on the programme of re-development works at 24 High Street, which means that this land will be needed as a works compound for a period longer than the 77 weeks originally proposed; possibly continuing until March 2025, as opposed to November 2024.

New pavilion at Wisbech Park

The opening of the cafe at the pavilion took place on 26 March 2024, the operator of the café being Crazy Cow Catering Limited.

The Heads of Terms of a lease between Fenland District Council and Wisbech Town Council and the subsequent draft lease allow Wisbech Town Council to “hire-out” both the community room and the office elements of the pavilion. At minute E6/23 the Environment and Public Spaces Committee decided that the fee for hire of the community room be £20 per hour and the fee for rental of the office be £325 per month.

The community room at the pavilion is receiving bookings; there are now bookings for every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings by local groups. The room has also been used for ad hoc meetings and a small number of parties. Thanks go to Lucie Foice-Beard and Sidney Imafidon for undertaking the unlocking and re-locking of the pavilion in connection with the bookings on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings.

A couple of viewings of the office took place some months ago but the room did not meet the respective needs of those enquirers. The opportunity to hire/rent the community room and the office is being shared regularly on social media but despite the continued advertising of the availability of the office, there had been no further interest expressed. Given that situation and the fact that there is a lack of storage space in the building, the Environment and Public Spaces Committee decided on 16 September 2024 (at minute E7/24) that it should no longer be considered as an office for rental but as a storage space associated with the use of the community room.

The new public toilets at the pavilion opened on 2 May 2024. Consequent to that opening, the existing toilet block in Wisbech Park was taken out of use.

There have been several “teething troubles” with the building – the only issue currently outstanding is replacement of the drainage and flooring in the changing places toilet facility; that work is scheduled for undertaking today and tomorrow by the construction contractor.

On 16 September 2024 the Environment and Public Spaces Committee considered issues in relation to the operation of the café at Wisbech Park Pavilion, including the relationship between Wisbech Town Council and Crazy Cow Catering Ltd, the operators of the café (minute E7/24 refers).

The committee had always intended to review the arrangements in relation to the Wisbech Park Pavilion café after approximately six months of operation (the Tenancy at Will between Wisbech Town Council and Crazy Cow Catering Ltd had been signed on 18 March 2024).

Members of the committee shared and discussed their concerns regarding how the cafe is being operated and the impact that such operations are having upon the wider community use of the pavilion building and the council's service delivery. Some of the matters discussed related to potential breaches of the terms of the Tenancy at Will.

The committee concluded that the arrangements covered by the Tenancy at Will had not worked satisfactorily, nor as the council had hoped.



The committee decided that the Tenancy at Will between Wisbech Town Council and Crazy Cow Catering Ltd in relation to operation of the café at Wisbech Park Pavilion be terminated - one month's notice of that termination to be given by the Clerk – and that the Clerk would take the necessary action to secure a new operator for the café.

Subsequently, the Clerk published on 9 October 2024 an Expressions of Interest notice. Those who express an interest in becoming the operator of Wisbech Park Pavilion café will be sent a bid/application form (through which potential operators can “pitch” their offer). The closing date (and time) for the council’s receipt of completed bid/application forms is 25 October 2024 (at 5.00 pm). Seven Expressions of Interest have been received so far.

St Raphael community hall

At minute R3/24 the Resources Committee considered the possibility/feasibility of Wisbech Town Council taking-on the operation and management of the St Raphael community hall, which is owned by Fenland District Council.

The Resources Committee considered a draft Heads of Terms for a lease between Fenland District Council (the Landlord) and Wisbech Town Council (the Tenant), together with estimates of income and expenditure for the building.

The committee decided, at minute R3/24, that Wisbech Town Council would offer to lease from Fenland District Council (on the basis of the Heads of Terms produced by that council) the St Raphael community hall, the Clerk (and RFO) being delegated the authority to undertake all matters necessary (such as agreeing the final version of a lease) to achieve the arrangement.

At minute T11/24 the Wisbech Town Centre Committee considered matters associated with Wisbech Town Council taking-on the operation and management of the St Raphael community hall. Following Wisbech Town Council’s agreement to the Heads of Terms of a lease for the building, 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.

At minute T11/24 the Wisbech Town Centre Committee had decided 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.

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 were completed on 18 September, which means that the building is now “open for business”.

Councillor Foice-Beard and the Town Clerk have been involved in discussions with officers of the County Council’s Early Years service and representatives of the Youths of Fenland CIC in relation to potential regular, ongoing hirings of the building. Youths of Fenland CIC commenced its use of this building last week.



Christmas lighting in Wisbech

At minute R18/23 the Resources Committee decided 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 were invited by the Town Clerk and the deadline for his receipt of expressions of interest from contractors had been 22 July 2024.

7 expressions of interest were 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 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 tenderers on 4 September 2024 to discuss their respective proposals.

The three tenders were considered, firstly, by the Wisbech Town Centre Committee on 23 September 2024 (at minute T22/24) and, secondly, by the Resources Committee on 30 September 2024 (at minute R12/24). As a result of those considerations, a quotation has been accepted and, consequently, a contract between Wisbech Town Council (the client) and TS Services Ltd (the contractor) has been produced by the Town Clerk (and RFO).

Cycling Working Party

At 22 July 2024 meeting of Wisbech Town Council, members received a representation from Sean Finlay and Sue Beel, through which they shared with councillors their comments and opinions about issues faced by cyclists in Wisbech (minute 20/34 (1) refers). Consequent to that representation, the Council decided (at minute 22/24 (4)) that a Cycling Working Party be formed (the membership to be determined jointly by the Town Clerk and the Leader of the Council).

Those who have indicated a willingness to be members of the Cycling Working Party are Councillors Foice-Beard, Hoy and Roy and Mrs Beel and Mr Finlay). The Town Clerk has producing draft terms of reference for the working party and has consulted its members as to regarding their availability for a first meeting.

However, given current levels of workload, which are not expected to reduce between now and the end of 2024, the Leader of the Council and the Town Clerk share the opinion that there is little possibility of this working party meeting until the New Year.

Correspondence

The Clerk had no items of correspondence to bring to Council's attention at this time.

52/24 The council's electricity generators

Councillor Hoy informed members of a situation relating to the two electricity generators which the council uses to provide power to some of the town's Christmas lighting display. The situation that she described to members had involved actions by one of the council's contractors. She mentioned that the Clerk had written to the contractor with the aim of addressing the issue.



Members decided that the council should, regrettably “put this situation down to experience”, put in place a procedure for the loan of council equipment to third parties and that the Clerk would write again to the contractor to express the council’s disappointment regarding the situation that had been described by Councillor Hoy.

53/24 Town Council office – Christmas closure

Councillor Hoy proposed that, as a Thank You to the council’s staff for their hard work during 2024, the council’s offices be closed for an additional period at Christmas. She suggested that the offices be closed for the whole of the week commencing 23 December 2024, not only 25 and 26 December 2024.

Members decided that the “Christmas closure” of the council’s offices in 2024 be for the whole of the week commencing 23 December 2024.

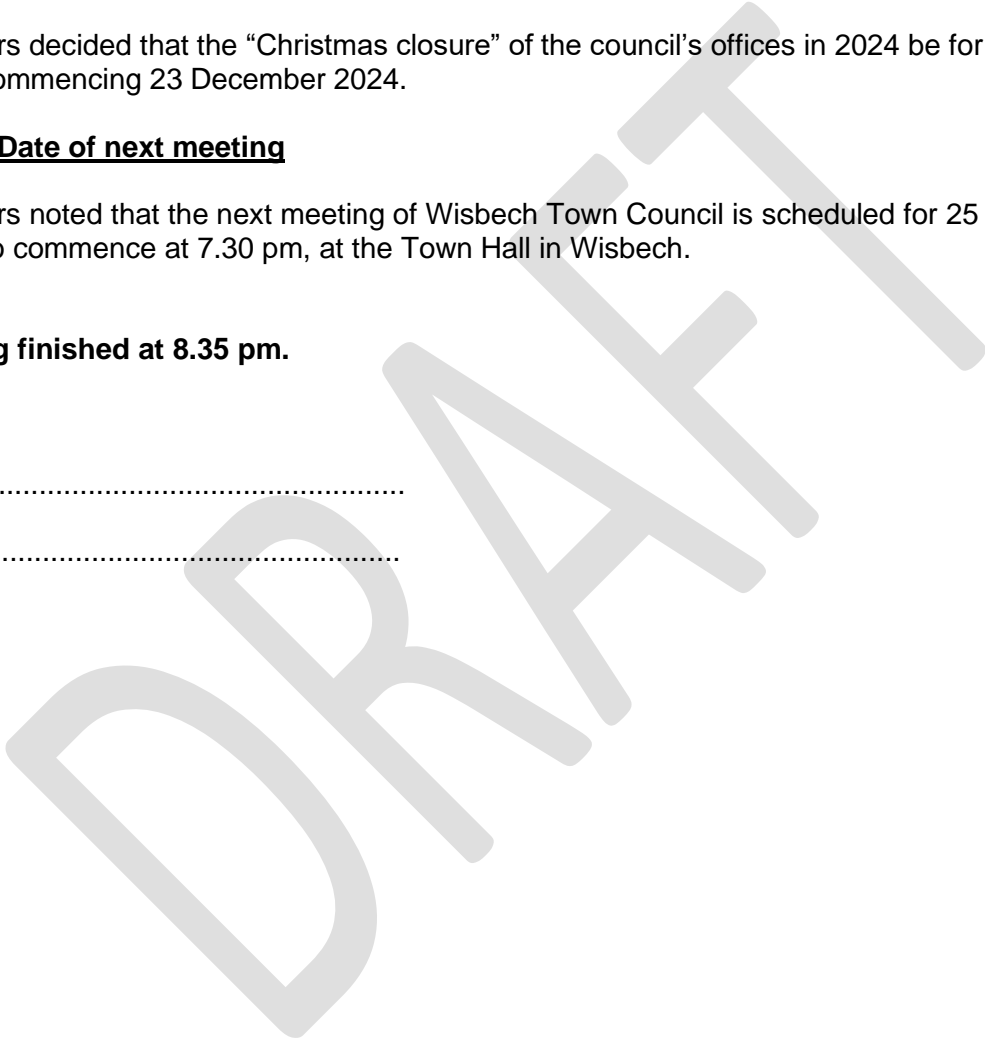
54/24 Date of next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting of Wisbech Town Council is scheduled for 25 November 2024, to commence at 7.30 pm, at the Town Hall in Wisbech.

Meeting finished at 8.35 pm.

Signed

Date





Biodiversity Policy
(minute 48/24 refers)

WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL

BIODIVERSITY POLICY

BACKGROUND

In accordance with the duty imposed on town and parish councils by Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, updated by Section 102 of the Environmental Act 2021, Wisbech Town Council (hereinafter referred to as the Council), which has any functions exercisable in relation to England must, from time to time, consider what action the Council can properly take, consistently with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the general biodiversity objective.

DEFINITION

According to Defra (Biodiversity 2020) biodiversity is the variety of all life on Earth. It includes all species of animals and plants – essentially everything that is alive on our planet.

Biodiversity is important for its own sake and has its own intrinsic value. Numerous studies have shown this value also goes further. Biodiversity is the building block of our ecosystems that, in turn, provide us with a wide range of goods and services that support our economic and social well-being. These include essentials such as food, fresh water and clean air, but, less obviously, services such as protection from natural disasters, regulation of our climate, and purification of our water or pollination of our crops. Biodiversity also provides important cultural services, enriching our lives.

AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

The object of this policy is to work towards conserving and enhancing the biodiversity of the Council's area.

The full Council and committees of the Council will consider sustainability, environmental impact and biodiversity when making decisions and will develop and implement policies and strategies as required.

In particular, the Council will aim to improve the biodiversity of the town of Wisbech through the following actions:

- when commenting upon planning applications, support site and building design that benefits biodiversity through the conservation and integration of existing habitats or provision of new habitats and consider what any development might make in terms of BNG (biodiversity net gain)
- when considering planning applications, it shall support protection of sensitive habitats and consider whether the development would result in the loss of important habitats
- manage its land and property using environmentally friendly practices that help promote biodiversity
- support local business and Council operations in the adoption of nature positive practices
- encourage and support other organisations and community projects within the town to manage their areas of responsibility with biodiversity in mind



- support residents and local organisations to enhance and promote biodiversity
- assess chemicals used/use of chemicals in general when maintaining council-owned land/facilities
- encourage allotment tenants to use natural methods to assist and protect biodiversity
- compost green waste produced from maintaining Wisbech Town Council land/facilities where possible
- consider best practice to support pollinators
- maintenance contract specifications will ensure work undertaken is not detrimental to the natural environment whilst delivering acceptable standards of work
- sourcing sustainable materials and environmentally friendly products when procuring supplies for the Council's use.

PARTNERS

Wisbech Town Council will work in partnership with other organisations to protect, promote and enhance biodiversity within the council area.

MONITORING

This policy was adopted on 14 October 2024 at minute 48/24) and will be reviewed in two years (or sooner if legislation so requires).

DRAFT