



WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL

19 June 2023 – 7.30 pm

MINUTES OF MEETING

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

Apologies: None (all members were present).

Public Participation: None requested.

20/23 Fenland District Council

(1) Information

The Clerk reported that the council's Environment newsletter for the months of April and May 2023 and information in respect of CCTV performance for the same months had been forwarded, last week by e-mail, to all members of the council.

Members decided that the situation be noted.

(2) Dog Public Space Protection Order

Members considered the submission of a response to Fenland District Council's consultation exercise in relation to its proposal to renew, for a further period of three years, the Dog Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) which is in operation across the district. The deadline for receipt by Fenland District Council of responses is 30 June 2023.

The Clerk informed members this PSPO, which had been introduced originally in 2017 and replaced with new measures in 2020, expires in October 2023. The need for continuation of PSPOs must be reviewed following each three years of operation.

The purpose of the review, which must include a public consultation exercise (to ensure that what the District Council proposes reflects the needs of the community), is to assist the District Council in reaching a decision on whether to renew the current PSPO.

Fenland District Council states its recognition that dog owners like to be able to walk their dogs in the district's parks and open spaces and are responsible when doing so; however, a small minority of irresponsible dog walkers do not. This can create a number of issues that residents raise with Fenland District Council (FDC). Therefore, FDC is proposing to renew the Public Spaces Protection Order for a further 3 years; this would continue to allow the District Council to manage its open spaces and take enforcement action against those who do not behave responsibly.

Members noted that the existing PSPO sets out clear standards of behaviour that we would all want to see from dog owners and the proposed dog control measures being put forward again include requirements to:

- clean up after dogs, removing dog faeces immediately in all streets and open spaces across the district



- always keep dogs on a lead in specified areas, such as open children's play areas and closed cemeteries
- put dogs on a lead when so directed by an authorised officer
- not take dogs into specified exclusion areas, such as children's gated play areas and open cemeteries.

The Clerk reminded members that Wisbech Town Council supported the introduction of this Order in 2017 and its continuation in 2020 (minute 11/20 (2) refers).

Members are of the opinion that there is a continued need for the measures which are included in the PSPO, as indicated above.

Members decided, on the proposal of Councillor Wallwork, seconded by Councillor Oliver, that Fenland District Council (FDC) be informed that Wisbech Town Council supports the proposal of FDC to renew the Dog Public Spaces Protection Order in its entirety (with no changes to locations or the rules) for a further three years period (to October 2026).

(3) Wisbech Park

Councillor Hoy, in her capacity as a member of Fenland District Council, informed members that works had begun, through the installation last Wednesday of a construction compound, on the provision of the new pavilion in Wisbech Park. She added that new play equipment is scheduled for installation in Wisbech Park this week; during the period of installation works, the children's play area, except for the splash pad, would not be accessible to members of the public.

Members decided that the information reported by Councillor Hoy be noted.

(4) 24 High Street, Wisbech

Councillor Hoy, in her capacity as a member of Fenland District Council, informed members that works had begun, through the installation during week commencing 5 June 2023 of a construction compound, on the re-development of 24 High Street, Wisbech.

Councillor Tierney, in his capacity as a member of Fenland District Council, informed members that as a consequence of the use of the area of land off Somers Road (which is leased from Cambridgeshire County Council by Wisbech Town Council) as a construction compound associated with the re-development of 24 High Street, Wisbech, some of those who had been sleeping rough at that site had re-located to Tillery Field; the Rough Sleeper team at Fenland District Council and officers of the local Constabulary are engaging with those individuals.

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

21/23 Cambridgeshire County Council

Local Highway Improvement scheme 2020/21 - South Brink, Wisbech

Further to minute 43/19 (2), members considered the latest costing, produced by the Local Highway Authority, for installation of the proposed traffic calming on South Brink, Wisbech.

Members noted that the total budget agreed for the scheme is £17,404.41 (£15,000 to be provided by the Local Highway Authority and £2,404.41 to be contributed by Wisbech Town Council). However, the estimated cost of delivering the scheme is now estimated at £30,898.68.



The Local Highway Authority (LHA) comments that the increase in cost is due to two different factors - one being the significant increase in the cost of materials; the second factor is the additional works and additions being required to meet the problems and issues raised within the Road Safety Audit (items such as solar-powered lanterns to light the signage, along with specialised reflective paint and road studs to outline the features during unlit hours).

As the LHA is unable to contribute more than £15,000 (the maximum allowed under the Local Highway Improvement (LHI) scheme criteria in the financial year 2020/21), Wisbech Town Council is being asked whether it would be able to increase its contribution towards the scheme to meet the difference in cost. The LHA makes the point that unless it is possible for Wisbech Town Council to increase its contribution to around £16,000, it would not be possible for the LHA to deliver the scheme.

Councillor Tierney made the point that we are in a situation where a scheme had been costed at circa £17,000 but because of not progressing the scheme until years later, it has almost doubled in price and, hence, become unaffordable. He commented that this is not the first time that this had happened.

The opinion was expressed by Councillor Tierney that there is no point in having the LHI system at all if applicant contributions are not affordable. He added that it may be that if years had not passed since this scheme had been submitted by Wisbech Town Council, the cost might not have escalated so massively.

Councillor Tierney expressed the opinion that the Local Highway Authority seems to have adopted an approach whereby the delivery of approved schemes gets “pushed back” until such time as they are no longer affordable by the applicants. He expressed the opinion that this situation demonstrates that the LHI scheme is “broken” and that Wisbech Town Council cannot afford to contribute around £16,000 (as opposed to approximately £2,400) towards the cost of delivering a traffic calming scheme for South Brink.

Councillor Hoy expressed the opinion that this is a ridiculous situation; costs should not increase to this extent. She commented that this is not the first time that Wisbech Town Council had experienced this situation; she mentioned the 2020/21 LHI scheme for North Brink (minute 43/22 refers).

Councillor Roy questioned why the costs are now so high and commented that he would expect LHI schemes to be delivered within a reasonable timescale, not years after being approved.

Councillor Meekins suggested that the Covid-19 pandemic may have had some impact upon the cost and timescale for delivery but recent cases do, in his opinion, seem excessive in those regards.

Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Meekins, seconded by Councillor Imafidon, that

- (1) the information reported by the Clerk be noted;
- (2) if Wisbech Town Council would need to provide a contribution of circa £16,000 (as opposed to the circa £2,400 that had been anticipated) it would not be able to proceed with this LHI scheme for South Brink; the Local Highway Authority to be informed by the Clerk accordingly;
- (3) the Local Highway Authority be informed, by the Clerk, that Wisbech Town Council is extremely disappointed that this is yet another scheme which, although agreed by the Local Highway Authority, is not deliverable because of becoming unaffordable.



22/23 Cambridgeshire Constabulary

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

Councillor Patrick commented that because of work which had been undertaken by PC Matthew Smart there had been a significant reduction in the amount of anti-social behaviour in Walsoken; he expressed his thanks to that officer.

Mention was made by Councillor Patrick of empty Nitrous Oxide containers being found in Walsoken, particularly in a layby on Old Lynn Road and outside the Village Hall. He asked for additional police patrols in an effort to tackle the misuse of Nitrous Oxide.

Councillor Hoy mentioned the anti-social use of a mini motorcycle on Ramnoth Road; the rider does not wear any protective clothing. She asked that the local police “keep an eye out” for this individual.

Councillor Tierney mentioned drug dealing activities in Wisbech and commented that he would like to hear from the police as to what actions are being taken to tackle the situation. He mentioned his awareness that members of the public are reporting to the Constabulary such activity that they are witnessing but do not feel that any action is being taken by the Constabulary in that regard.

Councillor Patrick commented that he had witnessed people on scooters dealing in drugs in the town.

Members decided that the comments of Councillors Hoy, Patrick and Tierney be noted and that Inspector Morris be invited, by the Clerk, to attend the next meeting of the council to explain how the local Constabulary is seeking to tackle drug dealing in the town.

23/23 Minutes of the Town Council meeting of 15 and 22 May 2023

Members decided, on the proposal of Councillor Edwards, seconded by Councillor Oliver, that the minutes of the Town Council meeting of 15 and 22 May 2023 be confirmed and signed.

24/23 Minutes of committees

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

- (1) Resources Committee – 22 May 2023
- (2) Community Events and Festivals Committee - 22 May 2023
- (3) Environment and Public Spaces Committee – 22 May 2023
- (4) Staffing and Communications Committee - 22 May 2023
- (5) Wisbech Town Centre Committee - 22 May 2023
- (6) Planning and Community Infrastructure Committee – 30 May 2023
- (7) Wisbech Town Centre Committee – 5 June 2023.

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

25/23 Wisbech Town Council’s accounts and AGAR for 2022/23

Members considered the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) in relation to the council’s accounts for the financial year 2022/23.



The Clerk (and RFO) reported that the Annual Governance Statement section of the AGAR document had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting and is ready for “sign-off”. However, further work is required to complete the Accounting Statements, which, subject to Council’s agreement at this meeting, the Clerk (and RFO) proposes to present to the next meeting of Wisbech Town Council for “sign-off”.

The Clerk (and RFO) explained that the council began using a new accounting system for the financial year 2022/23, which had made it difficult to reconcile some of the year-end expenditure figures; hence the Accounting Statements not being ready yet for “sign-off”.

The Clerk (and RFO) mentioned that the council’s Internal Auditor had undertaken the year-end audit on 13 June 2023 and had raised no concerns or issues. Her full report would be presented to 17 July 2023 meeting of the Resources Committee.

Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Patrick, seconded by Councillor Hoy, that the Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 be approved (and signed by the Mayor), and that the Accounting Statements 2022/23 be considered at the next meeting of Wisbech Town Council.

26/23 Mayor’s report

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

Members were informed by the Mayor that he had attended 12 activities and events since being elected as Town Mayor on 15 May 2023; these had taken place not only locally but also at Ely, Godmanchester, Huntingdon, Peterborough and Raunds.

The Mayor thanked the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Imafidon, for attending in his stead an event at Mablethorpe.

The local events attended by the Mayor had included

- the fifth anniversary of the Wisbech Junior Park Run
- the sixtieth anniversary of the Gorefield Show
- the presentation evening at the College of West Anglia
- an event to celebrate completion of the repair works to the Wisbech and Fenland Museum
- officiating, yesterday, at the Armed Forces Day event in Wisbech Park.

Members decided that the comments of the Mayor be noted.

27/23 Leader of the Council’s report

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Hoy, informed members that she had met on a couple of occasions with the Town Clerk since the formation of the new Council to discuss service delivery issues and potential projects etc. To help inform those discussions, the Town Clerk had produced an Actions Log document; some of the issues/matters contained within the document are: Community Speed Watch and Motor Vehicle Activated Signs (MVAS), new pavilion for Wisbech Park, Street Wardens, entertainment at Wisbech Market Place, area of land leased by Wisbech Town Council (for use as a car park) off Somers Road, councillor training. Councillor Hoy expressed the opinion that this arrangement is working well and that good plans, all of which would be of benefit to Wisbech, are coming forward.

Members decided that the information reported by the Leader of the Council be noted.



28/23 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 may be getting more difficult for many people. To this end, the Town Clerk attends various meetings, including those of the Wisbech and Villages Charities Network and the Cambridgeshire Financial Capability Forum.

Other "sign posting" and information-sharing (including publicity for cost-of-living events) takes place within the membership of the Love Wisbech partnership, as well as the groups mentioned above.

The council provides financial support to charitable organisations and community groups through use of the Small Grants, Special Grants and Community Support budgets. The allocation of these funds is undertaken by the Resources Committee.

Market Place enhancements

Work to install new electrical sockets, water pumps and meters and replacement of the main circuit board has now been completed. There had been initial problems with one circuit, but this was rectified quickly by the electrical contractor, and the supply is now working well. Consideration will need be given by the Wisbech Town Centre Committee as to how the new electricity meters will be used (how often and by whom would they be read and to what use would the data be put?).

Given that much of the new surfacing of the Market Place has been in use for around one year (following completion of the scheme in July 2022), it would derive benefit from a "deep clean". Council officers are in the process of seeking quotations for this work.

Minor repair/adjustment works to the highway gates which are used to "control" the traffic management arrangements within the Market Place area are being pursued with the Local Highway Authority, as is the installation of a new gate at the Church Terrace entrance to the Market Place.

Wisbech Market

Following various changes during the last couple of years 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 level of trading had remained constant over recent months, but the council has "lost" a couple of traders very recently. 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.

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.

It is likely that officers will be visiting other markets which are operating relatively locally, to "spread the word" regarding opportunities to trade at Wisbech Market.



At minute T7/23 the Wisbech Town Centre Committee decided to put in place some measures aimed at attracting more traders and potential shoppers to the town. The committee decided 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.

To attract more potential shoppers to the town, the committee decided that it would operate, for a period of six weeks in the summer, a programme of musical entertainment on Saturdays and other forms of entertainment on Fridays (between 11.00 am and 2.00 pm on each occasion).

Allotments

The council continues to receive enquiries in relation to plots at the council’s allotment sites. All the “habitable” plots at the council’s allotment sites (at Cox’s Lane, Dowgate Road, Waterlees Road, Lynn Road, Southwell Road, Halfpenny Lane and Mile Tree Lane) are now full, with one recent vacancy being filled from the waiting list. The waiting lists for each site contain up to 7 people. It is hoped that in the warmer months, marking out of new plots at Halfpenny Lane and bringing some of the Mile Tree Lane plots back into use will take place.

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.

Community events and festivals

Planning for this year’s WisBeach Rock Festival, which will take place on Sunday 6 August, is well underway and the headline act, The Drifters, has been booked. Stall holder bookings are still being received and the council had already received more bookings for this year’s event than the number of stall holders who had attended last year.

The production of publicity and promotional material is underway and social media is being actively used to promote the event.

Although Wisbech Town Council does not have the benefit of the Arts Council funding this year, the WisBeach Rock Festival will, once again, be providing a fun-filled and exciting experience for attendees.

Opportunities to obtain sponsorship and to generate other income to support the cost of this event are being pursued.

Councillors and other volunteers have been approached to help steward on the day.

This year’s Christmas Lights switch-on event – which is likely to follow the usual format of a programme of entertainment etc in the Market Place, concluding with the town’s Christmas lights being switched-on – is scheduled for 26 November.

The planning for this year’s Wisbech Christmas Fayre (which will take place on Sunday 10 December) has commenced. 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, Wisbech and Fenland Museum etc.



The Town Council will, once again, be running the Wisbech Unsung Heroes Awards, with support from the Fenland Citizen, and the aim is to recognise those townspeople who go the extra mile for their community. Nominations will be sought towards the end of 2023. Those who are shortlisted will be invited to a presentation evening on 27 January 2024 at the Queen Mary Centre.

Town Hall/office

Maintenance work to the Town Hall is undertaken as necessary. Arrangements have been made for a local roofing contractor to inspect the roof; to ascertain whether minor repair works may be required.

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 (under contract) by Herbie Hut Ltd, since 11 July 2022, continue to operate successfully.

From “feedback” received from Herbie Hut Ltd, 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

Mr Ketteringham continues to perform the role of Volunteer Caretaker very effectively; with excellent communication and hard work.

Following the success of an Open Day event at Wisbech Castle on 9 April, it is hoped that it will be possible, subject to the availability of volunteers, to hold another Open Day during the summer of 2023.

In accordance with the decision of the Wisbech Town Centre Committee at minute T25/22, a new central heating boiler has been installed at Wisbech Castle and is operating effectively. However, during the installation work it was discovered that two of the radiators require replacement. A quotation for this work was obtained by the Clerk (minute T3/23 refers). That quotation has been accepted and officers are waiting to hear from the contractor as to when the work will be undertaken.

Other maintenance work, including works to toilets and other fittings, has been undertaken during recent weeks. Essential tree works had been undertaken earlier in the year.

At minute T21/22 the Wisbech Town Centre Committee agreed to enter into a tenancy arrangement for the Pump House to be used as a café. The agreement came into effect on 1 May 2023 and the tenant is in the process of undertaking improvements, including internal decoration, to the interior of the building.

2023 is proving to be another very busy year for Wisbech Castle, generating a steady flow of income.

Incinerator

The Planning Inspectorate is currently undertaking the formal process of examination of the planning application submitted by Medworth CHP Ltd for the construction of a Waste Combined Heat and Power Facility – which has been described also as a mega-incinerator – in Wisbech.



The Town Council has, since it first became aware of the proposal, been committed to OPPOSING the proposed incinerator at every opportunity.

To support the council with opposing this proposal, it had engaged an experienced and professional consultant, who had not only helped to prepare the council's submission to the Planning Inspectorate but would be representing, as appropriate, the Town Council as the application proceeds through the various stages of the Planning Inspectorate's examination process.

The examination process commenced on 21 February 2023, with a Preliminary Meeting of interested parties. The Preliminary Meeting on 21 February was followed by an Issue Specific Hearing the following day.

Issue Specific Hearings had also been held on 12 and 13 April and 10, 11, 16, 17 and 18 May 2023. The council's consultant has participated in the Issue Specific Hearings as necessary.

Further Issue Specific Hearings have also been arranged for 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30 (if needed) June 2023. There will also be an Open Floor Hearing on 29 June 2023.

The Examining Authority must complete the Examination of this application by 21 August 2023.

The council had made financial provision of £30,000 to meet the costs of acquiring technical expertise to "fight" the proposal to build an incinerator in Wisbech. Around 50% of that money has been spent on the production of the council's initial submission (of objection) to the Planning Inspectorate and the consultant's input into Issue Specific Hearing 1 (held on 22 February 2023) and Issue Specific Hearing 3 (held on 16 May 2023). It is anticipated that the remaining balance will be sufficient to meet the anticipated costs of specialist consultancy advice and support through to conclusion of the Planning Inspectorate's examination of this planning application.

Land off Somers Road, Wisbech

The Town Clerk is in the process of securing renewal of the lease (with Cambridgeshire County Council) for the area of land, off Somers Road, adjacent to the Queen Mary Centre, which is used by Wisbech Town Council for the purpose of increasing the amount of car parking provision in the town.

In addition, the Town Clerk has engaged the services of Pathfinder Legal (a partnership of local government legal professionals) to pursue the eviction from this land of the rough sleepers. Pathfinder Legal are in the process of gathering the necessary evidence, which will include witness statements from not only certain statutory agencies but nearby residents.

Furthermore, the Environment and Public Spaces Committee agreed at minute E10/22 that this site could be used (subject to agreement with Cambridgeshire County Council, as landowner) 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 commenced on 5 June 2023 and 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).



Correspondence

Wisbech Girls Venture Corps Cadets

The Town Clerk has received a letter from the Unit Officer of the Wisbech Girls Venture Corps Cadets (GVC), thanking Wisbech Town Council for the grant of £500, which had been awarded by the council’s Resources Committee (from the Small Grants budget) at minute R19/22.

The letter says: “We would like to thank you for awarding us the grant we applied for, it will help us greatly. We like to ensure that all girls can attend our camps (and all activities) no matter what their background or family circumstances. So, the more we can get funding to cover the costs the better; thus, allowing us to charge the girls very little or even nothing, as not everyone can afford to pay for extras.

So once again, thank you for your support and please keep us informed of any activities we may be able to assist with”.

Members decided that the content of the letter be noted.

Armed Forces Day

The Town Clerk has received an e-mail from the organisers of the Wisbech Armed Forces Day event, thanking Wisbech Town Council for the grant of £1,000, which had been awarded by the council’s Resources Committee (from the Special Grants budget) at minute R19/22.

The e-mail says: “We would like to thank Wisbech Town Council for its continued sponsorship of Wisbech Armed Forces Day, which was held yesterday.

Would you please also pass on our thanks to the following councillors who gave their time and effort to support us: Councillors Edwards, Foice-Beard, Hoy, Human, Imafidon, Ketteringham, Meekins, Oliver, Tanfield, Tierney and Wallwork.

We thought that the event went very well, even in the heat, and all the participants seemed to enjoy their day. The local youth of the area (i.e., Sea Cadets, Army Cadets, Air Training Corps, Girls Venture Corps and the Police Cadets) were a credit to the town.

We now look forward to next year’s event, scheduled to take place on Sunday 23 June 2024”.

Members decided that the content of the e-mail be noted.

29/23 Date of next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting of Wisbech Town Council is scheduled for 24 July 2023, to commence at 7.30 pm, at the offices of Wisbech Town Council.

Meeting finished at 8.03 pm.

Signed

Date