



WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL
ASSETS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

5 AUGUST 2019 – 7.30 pm

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillor Tibbs, Chairman; Councillors Hill, Human, Meekins, Topgood and Wing.

Apologies: Councillor Ketteringham.

The minutes of the meeting of the Assets Management Committee held on 4 February 2019 were confirmed and signed.

A1/19 Election of Chairman

On the proposal of Councillor Wing, seconded by Councillor Human, it was decided that Councillor Tibbs be elected as Chairman of the Assets Management Committee for the municipal year 2019/20.

A2/19 Election of Vice-Chairman

On the proposal of Councillor Topgood, seconded by Councillor Human, it was decided that Councillor Wing be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Assets Management Committee for the municipal year 2019/20.

A3/19 Wisbech Town Hall

Telephony

Further to minute A16/18, the Clerk informed members that, given levels of workload and other priorities since that time, it had still not been possible for officers to undertake further investigations into options (including cost) for increasing the capacity of the council's telephone system (to address the situation which had been explained to members at minute A24/17 (i.e. the operational difficulties which can result from having a single telephone line into the Town Hall being shared by three members of staff)); however, it is intended that such investigations would be undertaken and conclusions reached by the time of the next meeting of this committee.

Members decided that the situation be noted.

Flag poles

Further to minute A16/18, the Clerk reported to members on the current situation with regard to the provision of new flag poles for Wisbech Town Council. He reminded members of the decision which had been reached by the committee at minute A11/18, i.e. that the Clerk would obtain quotations for new flag poles (for a type which could be affixed to the Town Hall and for a type which could be installed at ground level) and ascertain the need for any permissions or consents from the Local Planning Authority and the Local Highway Authority in relation to affixing or installing flag poles on or in the vicinity of the Town Hall.

The Clerk informed members that, since the time of minute A11/18, officers had made contact with appropriate suppliers/installers of flag poles (one quotation has been received and another company has requested plans which would show any underground services at the potential ground level site



before submitting a quotation) and had made enquiries of the Local Planning Authority and the Local Highway Authority. The Local Planning Authority had stated that the installation of new flag poles would require planning permission; as part of the planning process, there would be consultation with the District Council's Conservation Service and the County Council's Highways Service.

Councillor Meekins expressed the opinion that an appropriate arrangement needs to be put in place as soon as is possible; he commented that it is important that Wisbech Town Council has respect for the flags that it flies and is in a position to be able to fly appropriate flags at the appropriate times.

One member made the suggestion, with which there was concurrence by others, that the council should also consider the option of affixing "replacement" flag poles to the flood wall on North Brink, opposite the Town Hall; this would remove the need for "disturbing" land (adjacent to the flood wall) in the ownership of the Local Highway Authority.

Members decided that the situation be noted and that the Clerk would progress this matter, pursuing not only the possibility of installing flag poles on land in the ownership of the Local Highway Authority but as attachments to the flood wall (in the ownership of the Environment Agency).

Repairs and Improvements

Members were reminded by the Clerk that the council's annual budget for 2019/20 contains a sum of £5,000 for repairs and improvements to the Town Hall. He mentioned that over the financial years 2017/18 and 2018/19 the majority of that budget provision had been utilised to meet the cost of replacing the central heating boiler and making other improvements to the heating system at the Town Hall.

The Clerk reminded members that work had been undertaken at the beginning of 2019 to repair one of the windows of the Council Chamber. Because of that situation, officers had sought to obtain quotations for repair and maintenance (where necessary or desirable) of the other windows of the Town Hall. Unfortunately, no quotations had been forthcoming.

It is clear to members that there are a number of potential works from which the Town Hall would benefit – not surprisingly with a Grade II Listed Building constructed in 1811.

Members decided that the current situation be noted and that, as suggested by the Clerk, a schedule of potential repairs and improvement works to the Town Hall be produced by the council's Operations and Assets Officer, for consideration at a future meeting of this committee.

A4/19 Public Toilets

Further to minute A17/18, the Clerk reminded members of their previous deliberations regarding the operation and maintenance of the public toilets owned by Wisbech Town Council (minutes A14/17, A20/17, A4/18, A7/18, A12/18 and A17/18 refer) and summarised the current situation in that regard, as follows:

- the toilets at Exchange Square remain closed, pending decisions by the council on repair and maintenance, improvement of the facilities or alternative use of the building; at minute A7/18 this committee had indicated that this situation would not change during that financial year
- it had been necessary for the council to utilise part of the Exchange Square toilets building for the storage of certain items of equipment (including gazebos, road signs, traffic cones and crowd barriers); the building (in private ownership) which had been used by the council as a storage facility for this equipment is no longer available for that purpose
- toilets had been made available at Wisbech Castle



- the toilets at Wisbech Park remain open and are operating successfully; repairs and maintenance works are being undertaken as and when required
- at minute A12/18 members had supported the Clerk's proposal that the same level of financial provision (but increased in line with the new Cleansing Contract) for cleansing of the toilets and continuation of the budget allocation (of £10,000) for improvements be included within the Town Council's budget for 2019/20. This proposal was approved by the Town Council, when setting a budget for the financial year 2019/20, at minute 119/18.

Members were informed by the Clerk that, since the last meeting of this committee, the council had experienced issues with youths attempting to start fires in the public toilets at Wisbech Park (generally using toilet paper or other combustible materials and some type of solvent). This had resulted in the toilets being closed, in the interests of public health and safety, on couple of occasions in recent weeks – one of those occasions had been the day of an entertainment event (on 16 June 2019) at the Bandstand.

It is clear to members that, whatever the future of the toilets at Exchange Square, repair and maintenance works need to be undertaken to the exterior of the building; especially given that it is located within a Conservation Area.

The Clerk informed members that, in addition to general "wear and tear", the building had been subjected recently to damage caused by persons unknown. The damage is "ripping down" of some of the guttering. Given the location of this building, the Clerk had taken advice from the District Council's Conservation Officer; this is included in his report to the committee.

With regard to public toilet provision in the town generally, members are aware that it had been announced at the beginning of 2019 that the toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre, which had been re-opened in August 2018, had been closed again (because of continued incidents of serious anti-social behaviour) and are unlikely to ever be re-opened. This is a matter which members consider to be relevant when considering the level of public toilets provision in Wisbech by the Town Council.

Members decided that the current situation be noted and that

- (1) the council's Operations and Assets Officer would obtain quotations (for each of the options suggested by the District Council's Conservation Officer) for replacement of the guttering of the toilet building at Exchange Square;
- (2) quotations be obtained, for consideration by this committee, for the cost of undertaking the repair and improvement works that would be necessary to enable the current Disabled toilet at Exchange Square be re-opened (on the basis of it being made available as a facility for all members of the public).

A5/19 Allotments

Maintenance and improvements

The Clerk reminded members that he had informed them at minute A13/18 that the two sets of planned improvement works to the Dowgate Road allotments site - one being to install fencing and a gate at the Dowgate Road allotments site (minute A15/17 refers) and the other being to repair the access road at that site (minute A5/18 refers) - had been undertaken.

Members were informed by the Clerk of his understanding from comments which had been made by some of the tenants of the Dowgate Road allotments site that they are very satisfied with the new fencing and gate which had been installed but have some concerns regarding the likely longevity of



the repair works to the access road. He mentioned that he had anticipated that some of those tenants may attend this meeting to inform the committee, during the public participation element of the meeting, of their views on this matter; however, that had not proved to be the case.

Members were informed by the Clerk that the repair works to the access road had been undertaken in accordance with the specification set by the council; however, the works seem to have been insufficient to address the situation.

The Clerk informed members that council's Operations and Assets Officer is in the process of producing a plan, for consideration by members at a future meeting, for maintenance, improvement and development works that are essential or desirable at the council's allotments sites; this would be with a view to establishing an effective regime of routine maintenance and specific projects for improvement and development works which are achievable within the current (and anticipated) level of budgetary provision.

Members decided that

- (1) the situation in general be noted;
- (2) the council's Operations and Assets Officer would make an assessment of the works required to bring the access road at the Dowgate Road allotments site up to an acceptable standard and, consequently, obtain quotations in that regard.

Tenancy matters

Members were reminded by the Clerk that this committee had considered, at its last meeting, an application from one of the tenants at the Dowgate Road allotments sites for permission, in principle, to keep pigs and goats on the allotments site (minute A18/18 refers). The committee had decided that the applicant be invited to submit a detailed application (including at least the following information: the number of each breed of animal that would be kept on site; how the animals' welfare needs would be met; the measures that would be in place to prevent animals from escaping; evidence that the applicant is suitably "qualified" to keep farm animals and possesses any appropriate licences/consents (say from DEFRA) in that regard. The informed members that the council had, to date, heard nothing further from the applicant.

The Clerk informed members that, as some tenants of the Dowgate Road allotments site had reported theft of produce, the council's Operations and Assets Officer had inspected the site boundaries; as a result, she discovered that it is possible for persons to access the site via the public footpath which runs between Pickards Way and plot numbers 45 and 46. Members are of the opinion that the council's Operations and Assets Officer should take this matter into account when producing the plan for maintenance, improvement and development works that are essential or desirable at the council's allotments sites

The Clerk informed members that one of the tenants at the Waterlees allotments site had contacted the council with regard to a problem on his plot with Mares Tail (a persistent weed which is hard to control and eradicate). The tenant is spending money on trying to address the situation and is asking whether the council is able to assist him (financially), not only to address the situation that he is facing but to prevent it spreading to other plots.

Members were informed by the Clerk that the council's Operations and Assets Officer has been working hard to promote the Town Council's allotment sites and, as a result, there is only one vacant plot at the Waterlees site and three small plots available at Dowgate Road. As soon as there is full occupancy at these two sites, the focus will be the sites at Cox's Lane and Mile Tree Lane.



The Clerk informed members that a local charitable organisation known as 50 Backpacks wishes to occupy an allotments plot at the Dowgate Road site, for the purpose of enabling homeless persons to grow, under supervision, their own food. Given the nature of this organisation, the Clerk invited the committee to consider authorising him to waive the rental for the plot.

Members decided that the current situation in general be noted and that

- (1) the tenant who is experiencing the problem of Mares Tail on his plot be awarded a temporary reduction in rent, at the level specified;
- (2) the Clerk be authorised to waive the rent for the allotment plot to be tenanted by 50 Backpacks.

Rents

The Clerk suggested to members that now may be the appropriate time for the council to review its allotment rents.

Members were informed by the Clerk that rent payable by tenants is based upon the size of the plot; the overall rate is currently £264.00 per acre; some tenants are paying as little as £12.00 per annum.

The Clerk informed members that an allotments authority is able to review rents at no more than three yearly intervals and tenants must be given no less than one year's notice of any changes to rent levels. The current rents (which had been increased by 10%) came into force in October 2016. If increases were agreed at this meeting, notice could be served upon tenants no later than October 2019, allowing revised rents to come into force for the allotment year commencing in October 2020.

Members decided that the council's allotment rents be increased by 10% with effect from October 2020 and that the minimum amount payable be increased to £15.00 per annum.

A6/19 Land at Somers Road, Wisbech

The Clerk informed members that the area of land which is leased by Wisbech Town Council from Cambridgeshire County Council (for the period 18 January 2018 to 30 December 2022) for use as a public car park continues to be used successfully.

Members were reminded by the Clerk that the council had approved, as part of its overall budget considerations (at minute 119/18), a repairs and maintenance budget for this car park of £2,000 for the financial year 2019/20; that level of funding should be sufficient to enable the site to be kept safe and tidy.

The Clerk informed members that there are currently no repair and maintenance works required to the surfacing of the car park but there is a need to address the growth of weeds. Members were informed by the Clerk that, as the removal/ treatment of the weed growth in 2018 had been undertaken voluntarily by The Wisbech Street Pride group, he had enquired of that group as to whether it would be willing and able to undertake the same action this year. The group had responded in the affirmative and has scheduled the activity provisionally for Sunday 11 August.

Members decided that the situation be noted.



A7/19 Old Market, Wisbech

The Clerk reminded members of the suggestion which had been made by a parishioner at this year's Annual Town Assembly (on 28 May 2019), that Wisbech Town Council should seek to acquire the car parking area at Old Market, Wisbech.

Members were reminded by the Clerk that, in making the suggestion that Wisbech Town Council should seek to acquire the car parking area at Old Market, Wisbech, the parishioner had expressed the opinion that this area of land could be a useful asset for the Town Council because of the potential to generate an income from levying car parking charges (either on a daily basis or through a parking permit system). The parishioner had suggested that access to the area could be controlled through the installation of an entrance barrier, so that the land could be used for other purposes also; such as for an "overspill" of the town's market.

The parishioner had expressed the opinion, at the Annual Town Assembly, that it is unlikely that there would be any cost to Wisbech Town Council in acquiring this land from Cambridgeshire County Council and that the repair and maintenance costs of the land over the next ten years would be minimal.

At the Annual Town Assembly it had been decided that the parishioner's suggestion would be referred to this committee for consideration.

Councillor Wing commented that he would be loath to suggest that Wisbech Town Council should take-on something for which it has no current need and could incur the council in expenditure. He made the point that the land operates successfully in the ownership of the County Council and can see no reason to seek to change that situation. In addition, it would not be appropriate to consider levying car parking charges for this piece of land when public car parking elsewhere in the town is free-of-charge.

Councillor Human concurred with the comments made by Councillor Wing with regard to car parking charges.

Councillor Tibbs expressed the opinion that Wisbech Town Council should only consider seeking to acquire this piece of land in the event that the County Council wishes to dispose of the land or to change its use.

Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Tibbs, seconded by Councillor Topgood, that Wisbech Town Council would not seek to acquire the car parking area at Old Market, Wisbech.

Meeting finished at 9.00 pm.

Signed.....

Dated.....