



WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL
ASSETS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

30 OCTOBER 2017 – 7.30 pm

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillor Tibbs, Chairman; Councillors Balsevics, Hill, Miss Hoy, Human, Maul, Oliver, Miss Oliver and Wing.

Apologies: None (all members were present).

In attendance: Councillor Tierney, who the Chairman allowed to speak but not vote on the items of business discussed at the meeting. Mr M South, the council's Assets Manager.

The minutes of the meeting of the Assets Management Committee held on 31 July 2017 were confirmed and signed.

A11/17 Public Participation – Allotments site at Dowgate Road

One of the tenants of the allotments site at Dowgate Road informed the committee of her disappointment at the decision which it had reached at minute A9/17, that it would not undertake security measures - the erection of fencing and the installation of a gate (at an estimated cost of £1,400.00) – at this allotments site.

The allotment tenant explained that there had been, over recent months, a number of break-ins at tenants' sheds, resulting in damage to property and equipment being stolen. She expressed the opinion that a gate and fencing would of great assistance in preventing unauthorised access to this site and she made a plea for the committee to reverse the decision that it had made at minute A9/17 in that regard. She commented that there had been considerable investment by the council at the Waterlees allotments site and expressed the opinion that the Dowgate Road site is the "poor relation".

Members decided that the comments of the allotment tenant be noted and that they be taken into account when discussing, at minute A15/17, issues relating to the council's allotments.

A12/17 Wisbech Town Hall

Further to minute A6/17, the Clerk and the council's Assets Manager informed members of the current situation regarding repairs and maintenance issues in relation to the Town Hall.

The Clerk reported that he had made contact with three local heating companies, inviting them to submit a quotation for repair works to the heating system at the Town Hall. Consequently, representatives of each of the companies had inspected the current heating system. Although all three companies had stated that they would submit a quotation for their suggested method of system repair, only two quotations had been received. Both companies recommend a different remedy to address the current heating problems. One of the companies had suggested that, before contemplating any repair works, the council arranges that for an assessment of the central heating boiler to be undertaken.

The Clerk informed members that, unfortunately, due to ongoing workload demands, it had not proved possible for progress to be made in effecting works which would improve the security of staff at the Town Hall. This would, however, be pursued.



Further to minute 68/17 members considered the issues with regard to ensuring the most effective manner in which the flying of flags at Wisbech Town Hall could take place.

Members decided, on the proposal of Councillor Oliver, seconded by Councillor Wing, that

- (1) the information reported by the Clerk be noted;
- (2) with regard to the repair/maintenance of the Town Hall's heating system, the Clerk would arrange, as the initial measure, an assessment of the condition of the boiler;
- (3) robust versions of the Union Flag and St George's Flag be purchased;
- (4) all flags would be flown, at the appropriate times, from the primary flag pole at Wisbech Town Hall;
- (5) arrangements be made for the secondary flag pole, which is deemed not to be fit for purpose, to be removed from the Town Hall.

A13/17 Wisbech Market Place

Members considered the operational issues in relation to use of the Market Place (both as a community space and a trading area).

General performance and activity 2017/18

The number of traders at Wisbech Market Place has remained fairly constant during the financial year 2017/18 to date. The council's Assets Manager provided further details to members in terms of the number of new traders and their goods.

The Clerk reminded members that the trading activity on Wisbech Market Place is now a seven days per week operation. Although Thursday, Friday and Saturday remain the busiest days currently, and the level of trading on Saturdays is now at its highest level, increases in trade are being seen on other days of the week; officers are, however, keen to increase further the level of trading on those days and the council's Assets Manager explained some ideas in that regard, including the possibility of supplementing one of the weekday markets with a car boot sale.

During 2017 the level of trading at the Wisbech Central Sunday Market (which consists of both a "traditional" market and car boot sellers) has increased considerably and is going from strength to strength; it is anticipated that this trend will continue, despite the onset of the colder, darker days. The council's Assets Manager commented that the maximum number of car booters which had attended the market on a Sunday is 31 and that this activity generates in the region of £6,000 in income for the council.

Officers of the council continue to operate incentive schemes to encourage new, long-term traders, allowing them lower rent levels initially but increasing them to full rent once it is clear that they will continue to trade.

The level of income generated by the market for the period 1 July to 30 September 2017 was £14,521.00, which is at a lower level than for the same period in 2016 (at £16,102.06). The level of expenditure on market operations (rates, maintenance, cleansing and utilities) during the period 1 July to 30 September 2017 was £7,910.42, which shows a decrease over the same period in 2016 (at £14,242.88).



With regard to repairs and maintenance works to the Market Place, three of the lamp columns had been removed recently; one had been removed to accommodate a particular element of the Halloween Spooktacular event on 28 October 2017 and the other two had been removed because they were not only faulty but it was considered to be beneficial from a health and safety perspective to remove them.

The Clerk informed members that one trader who had commenced trading on Wisbech market in recent weeks had enquired as to the possibility of being granted permission by the council to sell beer with certain hot foods. It had been made clear to the trader that he would not only require the consent of this council, in terms of such sales from the market, but also need to obtain the necessary licences (under the Licensing Act 2003) from Fenland District Council in terms of managing the retail sale of alcohol. He had also enquired as to the possibility of being permitted to trade for longer hours on New Year's Eve.

Members decided, on the proposal of Councillor Tibbs, seconded by Councillor Miss Hoy, that the current situation be noted and that

- (1) the request from one market trader to sell alcohol on Wisbech Market Place be refused, on the basis that it would not be appropriate, given the existing concerns regarding street drinking in Wisbech and that, if approved, such a situation could set a precedent for similar requests from other market traders;
- (2) the request from one market trader for permission to trade for longer hours on New Year's Eve (into New Year's Day) be approved, subject to the trader acquiring any necessary licence from Fenland District Council in relation to the sale of hot food after 11.00 pm. That trader would also be required to ensure that any waste that may be generated by the additional length of trading (which would be beyond the time that the daily cleansing of the Market Place would take place) be cleared before his leaving the Market Place;
- (3) in an attempt to increase the footfall at Wisbech Market, the traditional market on Wednesdays be supplemented by a car boot sale and concessions be offered to those existing traders who currently trade on Wisbech Market on at least three other days per week to trade at the market on a free-of-charge basis on Thursdays.

Community events

Wisbech Market Place continues to be used as the location for a number of community events and festivals and will "host" the following events during the remainder of 2017:

- Christmas Lights switch-on on 26 November
- Wisbech Christmas Fayre on 10 December.

Now that both Councillor Oliver and the Clerk possess a qualification which enables them to operate road closures for the council's events and the council had procured the equipment (signs, bollards, sandbags etc) necessary to effect road closures, the council is able to arrange closure of the Market Place area more frequently (because of not needing to engage (and meet the cost of) the services of a specialist contractor to implement the closure). By preventing access to that area by traffic the council is able to achieve additional space in which to accommodate both a community event and trading activity.

Councillor Oliver commented that Wisbech Town Council had already made savings of approximately £1,700 as a result of being able to manage road closures for its community events and festivals.



Officers continue to look for other activities which could take place on Wisbech Market Place, such as musical and other entertainment, all aimed at increasing footfall (and, hence, vitality and viability) in Wisbech town centre; any ideas from members would be welcomed.

Members decided that the situation be noted and that they would inform officers of any ideas they may have in terms of increasing/improving the use of the Market Place for community events.

Market Place enhancements

The Clerk informed members that, further to minute A7/17, the Task and Finish Group which had been set up by this committee had held its first meeting on 2 October 2017, at which it considered the results of the public consultation exercise and other relevant matters, and the next meeting is scheduled for 7 November 2017.

Members were reminded by the Clerk that, ultimately, the Task and Finish Group would make recommendations to this committee in terms of an enhancement scheme for Wisbech Market Place.

Members decided that the current situation be noted and that the Clerk would keep this committee updated on progress being achieved by the Task and Finish Group.

Cleansing contract

The Clerk reported that, further to minute A10/17, the council's new contract for cleansing of the Market Place, the public toilets owned and managed by Wisbech Town Council and the Town Hall commenced on 1 October 2017. Under the arrangements, an improved level of service is being achieved (including inspection and cleaning, if needed, of the toilets every 2 hours).

As a result of this arrangement, there is a noticeable improvement in the cleansing of the Market Place and an improved means of collection and disposal of waste generated by market activities.

Members were reminded by the Clerk that, as has been discussed at minute A13/16, the opportunity exists to cease to provide a trade waste service – which would mean that those traders who do generate such waste would need to take it away with them at the end of each day's trading – which would enable the council to reduce the cost of this contract by around £3,000 per annum.

Members had been made aware at minute A13/16 that the majority of the trade waste is generated by around 6.5% of the total number of traders on Wisbech Market Place; currently, all traders are contributing, through the rents that they pay, towards the cost of this service – cessation of this service would be a more equitable arrangement than possibly increasing the rents for all traders. The Clerk suggested that this is something that members may wish to consider, in the light of the fact that the Policy and Resources Committee would be having initial deliberations at its next meeting (on 6 November 2017) regarding the setting of a council budget for 2018/19.

Members decided that the current situation with regard to operation of the cleansing contract be noted and that, on the proposal of Councillor Wing, seconded by Councillor Balsevics, the council would cease the provision of a trade waste service at Wisbech markets at the end of the current financial year.

A14/17 Public toilets

Further to minute A8/17, members considered matters in relation to the operation and maintenance of the two sets of public toilets provided by Wisbech Town Council; one at Wisbech Park and the other at Exchange Square.



The Clerk reminded members of the decision made at the last meeting of this committee (minute A8/17 refers) that the toilets provided by Wisbech Town Council at Exchange Square, Wisbech be closed for a period of two months for the undertaking of essential maintenance works. It had been indicated by members at that meeting that if the temporary closure resulted in no (or very few) complaints from the public, the committee would consider, at this meeting, permanent closure of those toilets.

Closure of the toilets at Exchange Square would result in annual savings to the council; the cost of cleansing these toilets is £13,812.50 per annum; there may also be potential savings in business rates (currently around £1,300 for both these toilets and those at Wisbech Park), maintenance (£1,500 for both these toilets and those at Wisbech Park), utilities costs (budgeted at £1,500 for both these toilets and those at Wisbech Park) and equipment (budgeted at £1,000 for both these toilets and those at Wisbech Park).

The Clerk reminded members that whether or not the toilets at Exchange Square remain open, the council would need to undertake repair/replacement works to one window and door (and frame), as has been reported to this committee previously.

Members were informed by the Clerk that the council had received positive comments regarding the improved cleansing, under the new contract, of the toilets at Wisbech Park.

Members decided that the current situation be noted and that, on the proposal of Councillor Oliver, seconded by Councillor Wing, the Ladies and Gents toilets at Exchange Square be closed permanently and that quotations be sought for refurbishment of the Disabled toilet (on the basis of it being made available as a facility for all members of the public).

A15/17 Allotments

The Clerk reminded members of the council's declared ambition to enhance and develop the council's allotments and informed members that the improvement works to the allotments site at Waterlees Road, as explained at the last meeting of this committee (minute A9/17 refers), are now complete.

The Clerk reminded members that at the last meeting of this committee (minute A9/17 refers), members had been informed of acts of vandalism and thefts which had taken place at the Dowgate Road allotments site and, consequently, they had considered whether to undertake works to improve security at the site. Members decided against such action at that time. Since the last meeting of this committee, further break-ins have taken place at the Dowgate Road allotments site.

In the light of the latest situation and having regard for the comments made by the allotment tenant at minute A11/17, members considered again whether to undertake works to improve security at the site. Councillor Oliver expressed the opinion that not only is it appropriate for the council to consider providing security for the assets of tenants at this site but also for the assets stored by the council at this site and, consequently, he would now support the installation of a gate and fencing at this site.

Members were informed by the Clerk that insufficient funding remains in the current financial year's budget for allotments to be able to fund this work at this time but commented that this work could be undertaken in the financial year 2019/19, together with the other fencing works planned for this site (minute A10/16 refers).

The Clerk mentioned that the council's current rules of allotment tenancies state that "at the end of your tenancy you must leave the plot in good condition. Compensation may be recovered by Wisbech Town Council if there has been any deterioration of the plot by the failure to fulfil this agreement" (condition 39).



Members were informed by the Clerk that the council is being faced by a situation whereby a tenant had vacated his plot but had not cleared structures from the site. In considering what action the council should take, officers have studied the wording of condition 39 and concluded that it is not sufficiently explicit in terms of former tenants being required to remove all structures etc from the land. Officers are, therefore, suggesting a change of wording (to the one included in the proposed lease between Wisbech Town Council and People and Animals UK CIC for seven acres of land at Lynn Road) to condition 39, as follows: "At the end of the term, the tenant shall return the property to the landlord in the repair and condition required by this agreement and remove from the property all chattels belonging to or used by the tenant".

At minute A15/16 this committee had decided that the request from People and Animals UK CIC, to lease allotment land from Wisbech Town Council (to develop into a community farm), be approved and that the Clerk would discuss with the CIC the associated practicalities and legalities associated with such an arrangement.

Since that time this matter has progressed to the point where a draft lease between Wisbech Town Council (as landlord) and Wisbech Town Council (as tenant) has been prepared by Fraser Dawbarns Solicitors.

The lease provides for a period of tenure by People and Animals of seven acres of the council's allotments land at Lynn Road, Wisbech for a period of 30 years. The initial rent would be £350 per annum (with a mechanism included for rent reviews at appropriate intervals).

The Clerk reminded members of the comments which had been made by the Leader of the Council at the last meeting of Wisbech Town Council that there is only one such other community farm in the UK (at Hereford) and that the delivery of this project would not only provide a valuable support service to vulnerable members of the community but also act as an additional means of "putting Wisbech on the map".

Members decided that

- (1) the current situation be noted;
- (2) the wording of condition 39 of the allotment rules be replaced with "At the end of the term, the tenant shall return the property to the landlord in the repair and condition required by this agreement and remove from the property all chattels belonging to or used by the tenant";
- (3) a gate and fencing be installed at the Dowgate Road allotments site during the financial year 2018/19;
- (4) the Clerk would circulate the draft lease between Wisbech Town Council and People and Animals UK CIC to the members of this committee, who would read the document and then inform the Clerk within 14 days whether they are happy with its contents and that, if no issues are raised by members, the Clerk be authorised to sign the lease on behalf of the Town Council.

A16/17 Land at Somers Road, Wisbech

The Clerk reported that Fenland District Council (FDC) had decided to surrender the lease which it has with Cambridgeshire County Council in respect of the car parking area adjacent to the Somers Road car park and to the rear of the Queen Mary Centre, on the basis that essential maintenance works are required to the car park, for which FDC no longer has a need – it was leased originally at a time when FDC had staff based in offices above the Fenland@your service shop; this is no longer the case.



The Clerk reminded members that the Leader of Wisbech Town Council, Councillor Miss Hoy, had suggested at the last meeting of Wisbech Town Council that, to avoid closure of this car park, which, in her opinion, is a much needed facility for the town, Wisbech Town Council should consider taking on the lease from the County Council when surrendered by the District Council.

The Clerk informed members of the quotation, which had been obtained by FDC, for the necessary repair works on the basis of the car park remaining open temporarily for use by FDC staff. This quotation relates only to the surfacing of the car park; some works may also be needed to the boundary walls. Also, further maintenance works to this site are likely to be required on an annual basis.

Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) had indicated that it would be happy to assign the lease of this car park to Wisbech Town Council (WTC). As the adjoining public car park is free to use, it is not considered by CCC that this small private car park has any significant commercial value and, consequently, the County Council would be willing for the car park to be leased to WTC on a rent-free basis on a term with an end date that coincides with the lease of the Queen Mary Centre to the Ferry Project (to 2022).

In addition, the lease agreement would include clauses requiring the Town Council to

- insure and indemnify the County Council against any claims from users
- confirm that the car park would remain free-of-charge to the public
- give an obligation to maintain the car park in safe condition; the Town Council carrying out any repairs as necessary
- give an obligation to pay rates and all other outgoings.

Fenland District Council has commented that if Wisbech Town Council does not wish to see this car park closed, it would need to make a decision quickly. Wisbech Town Council would also need to decide how it wishes to proceed in terms of whether it wishes to assess and arrange maintenance works itself or to commission FDC to undertake these actions, with WTC meeting the costs involved.

The Clerk informed members that there is currently a lack of clarity as to how the business rates are being collected in relation to this private car park but it has been estimated by FDC that if rated separately, it would be likely to cost Wisbech Town Council somewhere between £2,000 and £3,000 per annum.

Councillor Miss Hoy expressed the opinion that there is a demand in Wisbech for this car parking facility and also that part of the area could be made available for parking of the vehicles by those who trade on Wisbech market.

Members decided, on the proposal of Councillor Miss Hoy, seconded by Councillor Hill, that Wisbech Town Council would take on the lease, when surrendered by Fenland District Council, in respect of the area of land adjacent to the Somers Road car park and to the rear of the Queen Mary Centre for continued use as a car park.

Meeting finished at 9.30 pm.

Signed.....

Dated.....