



WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL

WISBECH CASTLE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

3 APRIL 2018 – 7.00 pm

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillor Tierney, Chairman; Councillors Balsevics, Lynn, Oliver, Miss Oliver, Rackley and Tibbs (from 7.10 pm).

Apologies: None (all members were present).

Public Participation: None requested.

W1/17 Election of Chairman

On the proposal of Councillor Oliver, seconded by Councillor Rackley, it was decided that Councillor Tierney be elected as Chairman of the Wisbech Castle Management Committee for the remainder of the municipal year 2017/18.

W2/17 Election of Vice-Chairman

On the proposal of Councillor Lynn, seconded by Councillor Balsevics, it was decided that Councillor Rackley be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Wisbech Castle Management Committee for the remainder of the municipal year 2017/18.

W3/17 Terms of Reference for this committee

The Clerk drew members' attention to the Terms of Reference (TOR), which had been agreed by Wisbech Town Council (at minute 159/17) for this committee.

The Clerk had circulated to members, in advance of the meeting, a copy of the TOR and he highlighted at the meeting particular aspects of that document.

The Chairman explained that the Wisbech Castle Management Committee would provide the leadership to the Wisbech Castle project and that a working party (comprising not only councillors but also representatives of the local community) would deal with the "nuts and bolts" of the project's delivery. He commented that this approach is similar to that which applies to the council's Community Events and Festivals Committee and its working party and, in his opinion, works very successfully and delivers results.

Members decided that the Terms of Reference for the Wisbech Castle Management Committee and the information provided by the Chairman and the Clerk in that regard be noted.

W4/17 Arrangements for the refurbishment, operation, management and development of Wisbech Castle

The Chairman reported to members on progress which had been made regarding this project, following signing of the lease on 2 February 2018 and the council receiving keys to the building on 26th of that month.



The Chairman informed members that a couple of “fact finding” visits had taken place at Wisbech Castle, undertaken by a number of councillors and staff, and the Chairman had also met with the current property guardian. Inspections had taken place in the main building, the pump house, the vaults and the gardens. As a result of the visits/inspections, a number of issues had been identified and a variety of ideas for use of the various elements of the site had emerged. He mentioned that he had arranged for a “walkabout” of Wisbech Castle and its grounds by the working party on 15 April 2018 at midday. In addition, a photographic project, linked to the HLF-funded High Street project, would be taking place in the vaults on 7 April 2018.

Members were informed by the Chairman that there had been difficulty in accessing some of the rooms at Wisbech Castle and the vaults in its rear garden (because of lack of correct keys); this had resulted in old padlocks being removed and replaced with new ones.

The Chairman informed members that the top floor of Wisbech Castle had generally been used as basic offices in the past and these are not “pretty”; however, subject to some re-decoration, they could be brought back into a similar use relatively quickly. He mentioned that he had already received a quotation from one local decorator to undertake such works. The Chairman mentioned also that he had received an enquiry from a potential hirer of space at Wisbech Castle. With regard to potential uses of Wisbech Castle and its grounds, the Chairman suggested that the council should work with WisARD to achieve re-location of the Information Centre to the Wisbech Castle site (possibly using the pump room); this would not only facilitate the provision of such services at the “heart” of the town but also free-up £5,000 per annum of grant funding which is currently awarded by Wisbech Town Council to fund the Information Centre at its current location (on Alexandra Road).

With regard to the restoration and development of Wisbech Castle, the Chairman made the point that the council would need to be mindful of the relevant planning and conservation issues in that regard. He informed members that he had obtained some advice with regard to providing access for disabled persons to the building; this could be achieved most easily at the lowest floor of the building; it should certainly be possible to provide such access to the pump room and gardens.

The Chairman reminded members that, for the purposes of providing security and safety of the building, Wisbech Castle is currently occupied by property guardians; this is an arrangement that Wisbech Town Council had “inherited” from Cambridgeshire County Council.

These guardians do not possess traditional “housing tenancies”; they can be served notice (by the managing agent), requiring them to vacate a property within 30 days of notice being given.

The Chairman reminded members that the council had decided in September 2017 (minute 90/17 refers) that it wished to acquire Wisbech Castle with vacant possession but had, subsequently, in December 2017 (minute 133/17 refers), decided to reverse that decision. He mentioned that the advantage for the council in having the property guardians in place was not only for “caretaking” the building but also for meeting the costs of Council Tax and the utility bills associated with that occupancy. However, the disadvantage is that flexible access to the property, which is needed to begin the process of refurbishing the building, is relatively difficult and is very likely to have an adverse impact upon achieving refurbishment of Wisbech Castle within a reasonable timescale. On balance, the Chairman is of the opinion that the disadvantage of continuing to have property guardians in place outweighs the advantage.

Councillor Oliver stated his concurrence with the opinion of the Chairman that the council should bring to an end the property guardians arrangement and achieve vacant possession of Wisbech Castle. He added that, now that the financial year 2018/19 had begun, the council has a budget of £35,000 for the financial year 2018/19, from which the costs of Council Tax/Business Rates and utilities could be met.



With regard to the budgetary provision for Wisbech Castle, the Chairman informed members that, not surprisingly, it would be necessary to increase staffing hours (estimated at 5 hours per week initially) at Wisbech Town Council to take on the workload which would be generated by this new project; this matter had already been discussed with the Leader of the Council, the Chairmen of the Policy and Resources and the Staffing Committees and the Clerk; a meeting of the Staffing Committee would be convened to make decisions in this regard.

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

- (1) the information reported be noted;
- (2) the council would serve notice, immediately, upon the managing agents to terminate the property guardians arrangement, so that vacant possession of Wisbech Castle could be achieved.

Meeting finished at 7.25 pm.

Signed.....

Dated.....