



WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL

ASSETS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

4 JULY 2016 – 7.30 pm

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillor Human, Chairman; Councillors Bucknor, Mrs MacRae, Oliver, Miss Oliver, Tibbs and Tierney.

Apologies: Councillors Hill and Lay.

In attendance: Mrs S Farmer, Operations Manager, and Mr M South, Assets Manager.

Public Participation: None requested.

The minutes of the meeting of the Assets Management Committee held on 13 June 2016 were confirmed and signed.

A3/16 Wisbech Town Hall

The Chairman expressed the opinion that the time had come for Wisbech Town Council to adopt a more proactive, and less reactive, approach to the repair, maintenance and improvement of Wisbech Town Hall. He commented that Wisbech Town Council is the custodian of this important, historic community asset and that, in his view, maintaining the building in good condition is not optional. He mentioned that, from a brief personal inspection of the internal rooms and public areas within the building and discussions with the Clerk and some members of the council, this committee needs to consider: possible works to (or replacement of) the heating system; undertaking internal re-decoration works; replacement of floor coverings; possible measures to reduce energy consumption etc.

Councillor Mrs MacRae commented that it is not only important for the council to honour its obligation to preserve the Town Hall as a historic building but also to present to visitors to the building a positive “first impression” of Wisbech Town Council.

Councillor Oliver expressed the opinion that one way of helping to create a positive “first impression” when entering the Town Hall would be removal of the “non-historic” framed “pictures” which currently hang on the wall (between the Gents toilet and the first floor landing) alongside the stairs.

The council's Assets Manager made suggestions to members as to possible measures to improve the safety/security of staff whilst working at the Town Hall.

Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Mrs MacRae, seconded by Councillor Miss Oliver, that

- (1) they would give thought, between this meeting and the next, to works that they consider would be essential or desirable to the Town Hall building, for the purpose of formulating, at the next meeting of this committee, a repairs and maintenance programme for Wisbech Town Hall;
- (2) the Clerk would seek the views (via a visit to the Town Hall) of the Conservation Officer at Fenland District Council on matters for which the council ought to have regard in the formulation of a repairs and maintenance programme for Wisbech Town Hall;



- (3) officers of the council would investigate the feasibility (in terms of actual works and associated costs) of undertaking works aimed at improving the safety/security of staff whilst working at the Town Hall.

A4/16 Wisbech Market Place

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

General performance and activity 2016/17

The Clerk informed members of the performance of the trading activities and operational aspects of Wisbech Market in the 2016/17 financial year to date.

Officers of the council continue to operate incentive schemes to encourage new, long-term traders, allowing them lower rent levels initially but increasing them gradually to full rent once it is clear that they would continue to trade. Casual traders are also given incentives for block bookings.

The number of traders has remained fairly constant during the financial year 2016/17 to date. However, a couple of new traders have begun trading at Wisbech Market over the last couple of weeks and discussions are underway with a number of other potential new traders.

Although Thursday, Friday and Saturday are the busiest days currently, increases in trade are being seen on other days.

The level of income generated by the market has remained stable. The income received in the period 1 April to 30 June 2016 was £15,333.84; the income received for the same period in 2015 was £15,007.24.

The level of expenditure on market operations (rates, maintenance and utilities) during the period 1 April to 30 June 2016 was £8,618.97, which shows a decrease over the same period in 2015/16 (at £14,14654.83). The additional cost last year was caused by repairs and replacements to electrical bollards, plus the cost of the Love Your Local Market events.

Further to minute 175/15 (2), officers of the council met on 14 June 2016 with a number of those who trade on Wisbech Market, to listen to operational issues and concerns that they have. As only five businesses were represented at the meeting, officers undertook consultation with those traders who were unable to attend 14 June meeting. The Clerk presented to members a report, produced by the Operations Manager, on the outcome of the dialogue/engagement with traders.

The issues which had been raised by the traders relate to (issue summarised in brackets):

- Pitch fees (a perceived unfairness in the levels of fees paid by different traders)
- Casual trading (ensuring that a Casual trader becomes a Licensed trader after a certain period of trading at Wisbech Market)
- Vehicle movements and trading hours (having a minimum period of operation for market trading (say, 8.00 am until 3.00 pm) and a requirement that no traders leave the market earlier than the closing time)
- Service traders (more control over those individuals or businesses which are not selling items/goods, such as companies offering Will-writing services)
- Events in the town centre (additional advance notification/reminders of the occasions when events would be taking place on the Market Place)
- Sunday Market (a request that the council honours its commitment to review the trial period of operation, in accordance with the timescale that it had agreed)



- Advertising/publicity (a request for the council to provide more information to the public in relation to the days and times of market operations and the types of goods that they would be able to purchase at the market)
- Maintenance of “fixtures and fittings”

The Clerk explained, in turn, each of the issues raised by the traders and the responses/proposals of officers.

The Clerk, the Operations Manager and the Assets Manager responded to members’ questions.

The Chairman expressed the opinion, with which there was concurrence by other members, that the market needs to be seen as acting as a “magnet” to bringing additional shoppers to Wisbech town centre, thereby contributing to this council’s efforts to create and maintain vibrancy and vitality within the town centre.

Members decided that the information reported be noted and, in relation to the issues raised with council officers by market traders, to approve the recommendations of officers that

- (1) the council’s practice of operating concessionary pitch fees (aimed at increasing the level of trading activity at Wisbech Market etc) should remain and that a formalised concessionary pitch fees policy be included as part of a revised traders’ Licence Agreement;
- (2) the council’s practice in relation to Casual trading be made clearer to all traders and be enforced more rigorously by council officers;
- (3) the minimum operating hours (on all days) of Wisbech Market be 8.00 am until 3.00 pm and that there shall be no movement of traders’ vehicles between those hours (unless there are exceptional circumstances and by agreement with council officers);
- (4) officers would monitor the activities of Service traders and ensure their compliance with the market regulations;
- (5) although all traders are provided, at the time of being issued with their annual Licence Agreement, with a calendar of events which involve use of the Market Place, officers would in future provide each trader, one week in advance, a reminder of an event scheduled to take place;
- (6) officers would examine additional methods of promoting Wisbech Market - making it clear that every day is now a Market Day in Wisbech – this would include greater use the council’s new website and social media;
- (7) the Assets Manager would undertake an assessment of any repair and maintenance works required to the Market Place and then arrange (where it is possible to meet the cost from existing budgets) any necessary works.

Sunday market

Further to minute M8/15, members considered, following conclusion of the trial period of operation, whether to continue (in its current form or a modified one) or cease operation of the Wisbech Central Sunday Market.

In accordance with members’ decision at minute M8/15, council officers had continued to monitor the performance of the Wisbech Central Sunday Market, both in terms of the financial aspects and its impact upon the viability and vitality of Wisbech town centre. The Clerk reported to members on the income received and expenditure incurred in relation to operation of this market, the level of



attendance by market traders and car booters and comments – all positive - that had been received by council officers during the trial period of operation. The Clerk pointed out that, according to the President of the Chamber of Commerce, the level of footfall in Wisbech town centre had increased on Sundays (whereas the level had reduced on every other day of the week) and there would appear to be no other obvious reason than the provision of this additional activity in the town centre.

Members share the view expressed by the former Market Place Management Committee (minute M8/15 refers) that the operation of a Sunday Market and associated car boot event on Wisbech Market Place accords with the council's ambitions to both improve its markets offer to the public and play its part in enhancing the vibrancy and vitality of Wisbech town centre for the benefit of all of those who use Wisbech as a place to live, work or visit.

Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Miss Oliver, seconded by Councillor Mrs MacRae, that

- (1) having regard for the information reported by the Clerk in relation to the trial period of one year, that the Wisbech Central Sunday Market be operated on a permanent basis (consequently, the Sunday Market would no longer be viewed as a separate entity but as an integral part of the council's (now) seven days per week markets operation), subject to operation of this market not causing difficulties in the arrangements for the festivals and events which take place on the Market Place on certain Sundays each year;
- (2) the fee for a traders' pitch at the Wisbech Central Sunday Market be set at £10;
- (3) this committee's appreciation of the work of the council's staff, particularly the Assets Manager and the Administrator, in turning the Wisbech Central Sunday Market from a proposal into an integral part of the council's markets "offer" to the public.

Community events

The Clerk mentioned that Wisbech Market Place continues to be used as the location for a number of community events and festivals, including the annual Christmas Fayre. The Wisbech Christmas Fayre 2015 was considered to have been the most successful one to date; all of the feedback from the public has been extremely positive and people say that they are looking forward to it happening again this year. Moving the event from its traditional Monday to a Sunday last year made a real difference in the number of people who were able to attend.

Arrangements for the 2016 event, being led by a multi-agency steering group (upon which Wisbech Town Council is represented by the Clerk and the Operations Manager and Councillor Oliver) are already underway.

The Wisbech Christmas Fayre 2016 will take place on Sunday 11 December.

Wisbech Market Place was also the location for the WisBEACH Day on 5 June 2016, which was considered to have been a major success; the Community Events and Festivals Committee will be planning the 2017 event, with the aim of delivering bigger and better, in due course.

Officers continue to look for other activities which could take place on Wisbech Market Place and would welcome any ideas from members of the council in that regard.

Members decided that the information reported be noted.



The future of the Cleansing Contracts

Further to minutes R19/15 and M9/15, the Clerk updated members on progress in relation to the future of the Cleansing Contracts for the daily cleansing of Wisbech Market Place and the public toilets at Exchange Square and Wisbech Park (all undertaken currently by one private-sector contractor based at King's Lynn).

The Clerk reminded members that the agreed approach, when combining the decisions at minutes R19/15 and M9/15, was that

- (1) the contract for the cleaning of the two sets of toilets be revised to include two-hourly inspections (with cleaning if necessary), in addition to the current unlocking and locking daily and a clean at the time of locking;
- (2) the current contractor be invited to submit a quotation for a more flexible version (see (1) above) of the existing contracts;
- (3) tenders be invited from at least three contractors for undertaking of the council's cleansing requirements split over more than one contract;
- (4) the feasibility of employing staffing and purchasing equipment instead of using the services of a contractor be investigated.

The Clerk informed members that, although it had not been possible, due to other work pressures upon staff, to commence the tendering/feasibility work as early as had been hoped, this process is now underway and, when concluded, a report on the outcome would be presented to this committee and the Policy and Resources Committee (and possibly the Staffing Committee).

Members decided that the information reported by the Clerk be noted.

Parking management arrangements

Further to minute M9/15, the Clerk reported to members in his discussions with Cambridgeshire County Council (as the Local Highway Authority) regarding the possibility/feasibility of Wisbech Town Council putting in place an arrangement whereby it could undertake parking management and enforcement in and around Wisbech Market Place. He had ascertained from the County Council that it would not be possible for Wisbech Town Council to undertake parking management and enforcement on the public highway unless such parking were to be "de-criminalised". He mentioned that he had also explored options for re-introducing parking management and enforcement on Wisbech Market Place but, to date, no suitable arrangement had been identified.

Members are aware that the Constabulary had recently adopted a more proactive approach to addressing parking issues within the town centre.

Members decided that the current situation be noted and that options for re-introducing parking management and enforcement on Wisbech Market Place continue to be explored.

Market Place enhancements

Further to minute M9/15 that, the Clerk reminded members that the firm of consultants which is involved in both the Heritage Lottery Fund bid in relation to the High Street and a project management role in delivery of the Wisbech 2020 Vision action plan had been engaged (in accordance with minute M9/15) to prepare a number of design concepts for enhancement of Wisbech Market Place.

Consequent to the decision at minute M9/15, a meeting had taken place on 12 May 2016 – involving the council's Leader, Clerk, Operations Manager and Assets Manager – with representatives of the consultancy firm which had been engaged by the council. As a result of that meeting, the



consultants had provided to the Clerk a summary of activity already undertaken and proposed next steps.

To date, the consultants had

- spent approximately half a day on site surveying the way that the Market Place works on a day-to-day basis, i.e. desire lines, places people congregate, how the surrounding shops use the Market Place / or not
- reviewed the plans and data provided by council officers in relation to layout and usage
- spoken with the District Council's Conservation Officer and Trees Officer to understand better their aspirations and the existing situation
- begun preparing a series of analysis plans for the council (including pedestrian and vehicular flows, parking and service areas, existing 'furniture' and fixtures, key zones and areas of activity around and within the Market Place)
- spent approximately half a day researching precedent market places from around the UK and overseas to identify best practice and ideas and have begun assembling these into a document which groups examples according to specific issues of relevance to Wisbech Market Place.

The consultants suggest that the key next step is to meet with the members of this committee, to discuss the emerging findings and how the consultants shape their recommendations.

Members decided that the current situation be noted and that the Clerk would make arrangements for a meeting between the members of this committee and the consultants.

Development plan for Wisbech Market

The Clerk reminded members that the former Market Place Management Committee had decided (at minute M5/14) that it would produce a formal development plan (deliverable over three or five years) for the Market Place as both a community space and as a trading area. The plan could be used to identify specific projects, which would help shape the council's budgets for future years.

At minute M9/15 the former Market Place Management Committee decided that it would commence discussions on this matter once enhancement/development "themes" begin to emerge from the consultancy work to be undertaken.

Members decided that this committee would work on the production of a formal development plan following conclusion of the consultancy work relating to enhancement of the Market Place.

A5/16 Public toilets

Members considered whether there are any issues currently with regard to operation and management of the two sets of public toilets (one set at Exchange Square and the other at Wisbech Park) provided by Wisbech Town Council.

The council's Assets Manager informed members of the current condition of the toilets, as well as maintenance works which had been undertaken recently and repair works required; he showed photographs to help explain the situation.

The Assets Manager expressed the opinion that the toilets are generally in good order; however, minor external works are required to windows and external sills at the Exchange Square toilets.

Members decided that the information reported be noted and that the Assets Manager would obtain quotations for the repair works described.



A6/16 Allotments

The Clerk reminded members of the council’s declared ambition to enhance and develop the council’s allotments and invited the Assets Manager to explain to members any operational issues in relation to the council’s allotments sites and the development works which had been carried out to date and are planned for the future.

The council’s Assets Manager informed members that there are currently no proposals for development of the sites at Cox’s Lane and Mile Tree Lane; they would, however, receive maintenance as and when required. The development works to date have focussed upon the sites at Waterlees Road and Dowgate Road.

With regard to the Waterlees Road site, the plans for improvements to the access to the site, which had been agreed by the former Allotments Committee (minute A3/15 refers) are at the implementation stage. In addition, members accepted the offer of the council’s Assets Manager to manufacture and install, at no cost to the council, a sign above the entrance to the site bearing the words “WTC: Waterlees Allotments”. He circulated a sketch plan showing the proposed changes to the access arrangements and informed members of the estimated cost of such works.

With regard to the allotments site at Dowgate Road, the Assets Manager informed members that, the council now has three storage containers, two of forty feet in length and another of twenty feet in length (to provide storage for various items of equipment and the council’s Christmas lighting stock and fixings) located at this site.

The Assets Manager provided each member of the committee with a copy of a sketch plan of the Dowgate Road allotments site, upon which he had shown proposals for the provision of allotment plots for use by disabled persons - providing raised planting areas and an appropriate means of access to those plots - and a “social” area (which could be used for the delivery of horticultural learning events and an area where allotment tenants could meet and share ideas etc). He explained the details of how he thought these arrangements could operate and a possible timescale (over three to five years) for delivery of the scheme. He informed members that the former Allotments Committee had supported in principle this proposal and had requested council officers to produce a business plan for the scheme (minute A5/15 refers); work on the production of the business plan has begun but it is not yet complete.

The Clerk, the Operations Manager and the Assets Manager responded to members’ questions.

Members decided that the current situation be noted and that the Assets Manager would explore options for achieving painting, at minimal cost, to reduce the visual impact upon their surroundings, of the storage containers at the Dowgate Road allotments site.

Meeting finished at 9.35 pm.

Signed.....

Dated.....