



**WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL**  
**ASSETS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

**1 NOVEMBER 2016 – 7.30 pm**

**MINUTES OF MEETING**

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

**Apologies:** Councillor Hill.

**In attendance:** Mrs S Farmer, Operations Manager, and Mr M South, Assets Manager. Councillor Miss Hoy attended as an observer.

**Public Participation:** None requested.

The minutes of the meeting of the Assets Management Committee held on 4 July 2016 were confirmed and signed.

**A7/16 Wisbech Town Hall**

Further to minute A3/16, the Clerk updated members on progress in delivery of the actions agreed at that minute, as follows:

- the “non-historic” framed “pictures” which hung on the wall (between the Gents toilet and the first floor landing) alongside the stairs had been removed
- the Chairman of this committee and he had sought 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. She had indicated the need for a management plan in that regard and offered to assist the council with the production of such a plan. She makes the point that it is important that the council applies “good conservation principles” in any plan produced
- officers of the council had discussed with the company which maintains the alarm system at the Town Hall 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.

The council’s Operations Manager reported to members on information that she had obtained through discussion with representatives of the National Trust and through attendance at a recent training event in relation to the repair and maintenance of historic buildings. She commented that there are good guidance notes available, to assist the owners of historic buildings in keeping those buildings in a good state of repair. It is important to “know your building”; this can be achieved by undertaking a condition survey of the building; the next step is then to identify the priority areas and address them in that order.

Councillor Human expressed the opinion that work is required to the heating system at the Town Hall, to improve its efficiency and effectiveness.

A suggestion was made that the council should possess an Evacuation and Conservation Plan for the contents of the Town Hall in the event of an emergency. It is understood that the National Trust would be able to provide guidance in that regard.



Members are mindful of the fact that if the council is to take seriously its responsibilities as the custodian of a historic building it needs to provide a budget for the funding of repair and maintenance works to the Town Hall.

Members decided that

- (1) the current situation be noted;
- (2) the agenda for the next meeting of this committee would include an item in relation to security of the Town Hall;
- (3) an Evacuation and Conservation Plan for the contents of the Town Hall be produced.

### **A8/16 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 Place in the financial year 2016/17 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 will continue to trade.

The number of traders at Wisbech Market Place has remained fairly constant during the financial year 2016/17 to date. However, a number of new traders had begun trading at Wisbech Market in recent weeks and discussions are underway with other potential new traders. The council's Assets Manager provided further details to members in terms of the number of new traders and their goods; he commented that a number of enquiries from potential traders are being received and that the diversity of the goods being sold at Wisbech Market is increasing.

Although Thursday, Friday and Saturday are the busiest days currently, increases in trade are being seen on other days. The number of stalls trading at the market on Fridays is increasing but the number on Thursdays is reducing. The council's Assets Manager expressed the opinion that, given the reduction in the level of market activity on Thursdays, there is no longer justification for preventing vehicular access on Thursdays. In addition, he mentioned that the officers of the Local Highway Authority (LHA) had indicated that the LHA no longer has financial resources available to meet the cost of repairing or replacing defective highway bollards.

The council's Assets Manager mentioned also the difficulties which can be caused to setting-up of the market as a result of persons parking vehicles overnight on the Market Place; he suggested that this committee may wish to give thought to how such situations could be prevented.

Members will recall deciding at minute A4/16, having examined the outcome of the trial period of one year, that the Sunday Market would become a permanent arrangement. This means that Wisbech Market has become a seven days per week operation.

The level of income generated by the market has remained stable; the income received in the period 1 July to 30 September 2016 was £16,102.06; the income received for the same period in 2015 was £16,352.36.



The level of expenditure on market operations (rates, maintenance and utilities) during the period 1 July to 30 September 2016 was £14,242.88 which shows an increase over the same period in 2015 (at £12,904.77).

Members decided that the current situation be noted.

### **Community events and festivals**

The Clerk mentioned that Wisbech Market Place continues to be used as the location for a number of community events and festivals.

Since the last meeting of this committee the Market Place was used as the location for the Arles Festival and it will be used further this year as the location for the annual Christmas Lights Switch-on event (to take place on Sunday 27 November 2016) and the Wisbech Christmas Fayre 2016 (to take place on 11 December 2016). He mentioned that bookings for space at the Christmas Fayre close on 11 November 2016 and that in excess of 100 bookings had already been taken.

In addition, arrangements had been made by council officers for this year's Halloween Spooktacular event (held on 29 October) to "spill out" from the Horsefair Shopping Centre into the Market Place. This event had proved to be extremely successful.

The Clerk mentioned that officers continue to look for other activities which could take place on Wisbech Market Place and would welcome any ideas from members in that regard.

Members decided that the situation be noted.

### **The future of the Cleansing Contracts**

Further to minute A4/16, the Clerk informed members that officers of the council had been progressing the decisions reached at minutes R19/15 and M9/15 in relation to the future of the contracts for the daily cleansing of Wisbech Market Place and the public toilets at Exchange Square and Wisbech Park (all currently undertaken by one private-sector contractor based at King's Lynn).

Members were reminded by the Clerk that the council's agreed approach to this matter, when combining the decisions reached 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 the current position in this matter is

- a revised contract specification for the cleansing of the toilets has been produced
- the current contractor has been invited to submit quotations for the council's cleansing works, on the basis of the revised specification
- the District Council has been invited to submit quotations for the council's cleansing works, on the basis of the revised specification
- expressions of interest in tendering for this work have been published and, as a result, four contractors indicated that they wished to submit quotations to the council



- officers of the council have met, in recent weeks, with representatives of each of these four companies
- to date, quotations have been received from the council's current contractor, Fenland District Council (for Market Place so far; toilets to follow) and three of the other four contractors. A quotation from the fourth contractor is expected next week
- it is proposed that work on seeking to establish the feasibility of employing staffing and purchasing equipment instead of using the services of a contractor awaits the outcome of the current tendering process
- it is hoped that decisions in respect of this matter can be made by the relevant committees early in 2017.

Members decided that the current situation be noted and that the approach being taken by council officers to conclude the exercise be endorsed.

### **Market Place enhancements**

Further to minute A4/16, members considered the current position with regard to the preparation of design concepts for enhancement of Wisbech Market Place.

The Clerk informed members that a meeting between some members of this committee, the consultants which had been engaged to produce the design concepts and council staff (as agreed at minute A4/16) had place on 24 August 2016. At that meeting the consultants had presented a draft version of the "Wisbech Market Place: Scoping Study". Following the meeting, the consultants produced, having regard for comments made at that meeting, a final version of the document; this had been circulated by the Clerk to all members of the council, who had been invited to submit their comments to him in relation to the content of the document and the recommendations contained therein.

As a result of the consultation with members of the council, two responses had been received to date. The Clerk read those responses to the committee.

Councillor Tierney expressed the opinion that the scoping study demonstrates creative thinking by the consultants and he is generally supportive, but with some reservations, of the proposals within the study document. He suggested that it would be important for the council to ascertain the views of market traders before implementing any changes to the Market Place. He feels that the document is a very useful "tool" by which to obtain public opinion.

With regard to the content of the scoping study, Councillor Tierney made the point that there are a number of operational issues which would need to be considered (such as operation and management of the suggested communal seating area). He added that he is supportive of the initial ideas; this is a good time to make changes to the Market Place; a comprehensive approach must be taken.

Councillor Human expressed the view that it is time to bring Wisbech Market Place into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and that the design concepts within the scoping report do, in his opinion, suggest a positive way forward.

Members decided that

- (1) the current situation and the content of the scoping study be noted;
- (2) a Task and Finish Group be established (to include not only town councillors but also appropriate representatives of the local community) to consider the content of the scoping study and feasibility of its implementation and to organise a public consultation exercise.



## **Development plan for Wisbech Market**

The Clerk reminded members that this committee had decided at minute A4/16 that it would work on the production of a formal development plan for Wisbech Market following conclusion of the consultancy work relating to enhancement of the Market Place.

Members decided that this matter continue to be progressed in accordance with minute A4/16.

### **A9/16 Public toilets**

Further to minute A5/16, the council's Assets Manager reminded members of the repair works required to one window and one door and frame at the toilets in Exchange Square, Wisbech and informed them of his preferred methods of repair and of the quotations he had received for such works.

Members decided that

- (1) the information reported be noted;
- (2) the necessary repair works be approved;
- (3) because the toilet block is located within a Conservation Area, the Clerk would seek advice from Fenland District Council's conservation Officer prior to any works being undertaken.

### **A10/16 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 reminded 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 new access arrangements are in place and it is planned that the new gates to the site would be installed later this week.

With regard to the allotments site at Dowgate Road, the Assets Manager informed members of works necessary in terms of dyke clearance, which would result in some existing trees and bushes being removed; such removal would result in the site being "exposed", with the risk of unauthorised access and consequent impact upon the security of the site. Therefore, the council's Assets Manager is recommending that fencing (of approximately 70 metres in length) be erected along the site boundary, following the dyke clearance/vegetation removal works, to preserve security of the site. He informed members of the estimated costs of both timber and metal mesh fencing and the comparative benefits of each type of material.

The council's Operations Manager raised with members a number of operational issues in relation to the allotments sites. She suggested that

- since the council had introduced variable (smaller) plot sizes, which had resulted in some tenants paying low rents, a minimum annual rent be introduced



- because of some tenants acting irresponsibly when having bonfires at the Dowgate Road site and consequently, causing disturbance to nearby residents, the allotments rules be amended to prohibit the lighting of bonfires at that site
- the council may wish to consider the potential for an alternative use for one its allotments sites, which is small in size and has limited security; she suggested that the small number of tenants be re-located to other sites and this site then be let as a single area of agricultural land.

The council's Operations Manager reminded members that the council had received, a couple of years ago, a request from the tenant of one of the council's allotments site to purchase that site. At that time, the council decided that it would retain ownership of that land. That person is still interested in purchasing the land and so are others. The council's Operations Manager commented that access to the site is difficult and the council had received an invoice for a contribution towards the cost of maintaining the access road. She, therefore, enquired as to whether the council now wishes to consider disposal of this site.

Members decided that the current situation be noted and that

- (1) the council's Assets Manager would arrange for the erection of metal mesh fencing along the length of boundary, as explained, at the Dowgate Road allotments site in the financial year 2017/18;
- (2) a minimum allotment rent of £12 be introduced for new tenants;
- (3) tenants of the Dowgate Road allotments site be informed that if they do not act responsibly when having bonfires at the site and they consequently cause disturbance to nearby residents, the council would amend the allotments rules to prohibit the lighting of bonfires at that site;
- (4) the alternative use of one of the council's allotments sites, in the manner explained to members, be pursued;
- (5) officers would arrange for the area of land in which there is interest in purchase from the council to be valued by a local land agent and this committee would consider the possibility of the land's disposal in the light of the site's value.

*(Members resolved to exclude the public for the part of this item of business which related to the potential land sale on the grounds that it involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended))*

**Meeting finished at 8.50 pm.**

Signed.....

Dated.....