



WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL
WISBECH TOWN CENTRE COMMITTEE
10 MARCH 2025 – 7.30 pm
MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillor Tierney, Chairman; Councillors Edwards, Foice-Beard, Hoy and Wallwork.

Apologies: Councillor Monger.

Public Participation: None requested.

The minutes of the meeting of the Wisbech Town Centre Committee held on 24 February 2025 were confirmed and signed.

T32/24 Wisbech Castle

Further to minute T24/24, members considered matters in relation to the management, operation and development of Wisbech Castle.

The Clerk reported that repair and maintenance work to Wisbech Castle is undertaken as necessary and he reminded members that this committee had accepted, at minute T24/24, a quotation from a local contractor for undertaking repair and maintenance work to guttering, addressing an area of internal damp, unblocking drains, and pruning trees.

Members were reminded by the Clerk that this committee had accepted, at minute T31/24, a quotation for maintenance and improvement work within the grounds of Wisbech Castle. After being informed of the committee's decision, the contractor subsequently informed the Clerk that, because of personal circumstances and some operational issues, there would be a delay in commencing the works and potentially additional cost. The Clerk had subsequently received from the contractor an e-mail, which he shared with the members of this committee, explaining the contractor's situation. In that e-mail the contractor had undertaken to submit to the council a revised quotation.

The Clerk shared with members an e-mail that he had received from Amanda Scott, the volunteer gardener at Wisbech Castle, in which she mentioned potential works required to trees within the grounds of Wisbech Castle and possible maintenance works to rear of the building.

The Clerk commented that Wisbech Castle continues to be an extremely popular venue for paranormal investigations and almost every weekend this year has a booking for such an event. Enquiries continue to be received regularly. There are now only around 13 Saturday dates available for paranormal events in 2025. Trevor Ketteringham remains a stalwart in undertaking the caretaking of Wisbech Castle and he receives many compliments.

Members were informed by the Clerk that the only wedding at Wisbech Castle in 2024 had taken place on 2 November. The council continues to receive a small number of enquiries and there are two bookings for weddings so far in 2025, one in March and the other in July.

An Easter Open Day at Wisbech Castle is being planned for 20 April 2025. The Chairman commented that it would be necessary to undertake some cleaning and tidying of Wisbech Castle and the vaults, as well as cutting lawns etc prior to that event.



Members decided that

- (1) the situation regarding the management, operation and development of Wisbech Castle be noted;
- (2) a revised quotation from the contractor for the maintenance and improvement work within the grounds of Wisbech Castle be awaited, to be considered at a future meeting of this committee;
- (3) the content of the e-mail from Amanda Scott be noted;
- (4) the contractor which had undertaken most of the repair and maintenance work at Wisbech Castle be invited to inspect the building, recommend any works required and submit a quotation in that regard.

T33/24 Toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre

Further to minute T25/24, members considered matters in relation to the council's operation and management of the toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre, which have been open under the management of Wisbech Town Council since 11 July 2022 and continue to operate successfully.

The Clerk reminded members that repair and maintenance works are undertaken as necessary and he informed them that there are currently no works outstanding.

Members were reminded that this committee had decided, at minute T15/24, that the contact between Wisbech Town Council and Hibernian Property Management Limited in relation to the daily operation and supervision of the toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre be extended to cover the remaining period of the lease between Wisbech Town Council and New River Retail; that being midnight on 6 June 2027. The Clerk informed members that the new contract, which came into effect on 11 January 2025, had been issued.

The Clerk reported that the contractor had asked whether, in the light of comments which had been made to his staff by members of the public, the council could/would introduce a system whereby payment of the 20 pence charge for use of the toilets could be made by card. Members discussed what they consider to be the advantages and disadvantages of introducing such a system and are of the opinion that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages at this time.

The Clerk commented that, from "feedback" received from the council's contractor, it is clear that members of the public are very appreciative that the council had taken action to secure the re-opening of these toilets.

Members decided that

- (1) the situation regarding the council's operation and management of the toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre be noted;
- (2) the council would not introduce at this time a system whereby payment of the 20 pence charge for use of the toilets could be made by card.

T34/24 Wisbech Market Place

Further to minute T26/24, members discussed matters in relation to the Wisbech Market Place enhancement scheme and the associated "pedestrianisation" arrangements.



The Clerk reminded members that the final element of the highway works associated with the Wisbech Market Place enhancement scheme is the installation of a new gateway at the Church Terrace entrance to the Market Place. However, the Local Highway Authority (LHA) is not able to undertake the work until such time as the security fencing to the front of the former “Cashino” building is removed; a matter which is in the hands of the developer of the site and CNC Building Control.

Members were informed by the Clerk that, further to minutes T21/24 and T30/24, the new Market Place Cleansing Contract – which has an initial duration of two years - commenced on 10 February 2025. The Clerk expressed the opinion that the new contract appears to be operating well.

Councillor Tierney updated members regarding the difficulty being experienced in being able to update the content of the electronic notice board on the Market Place. He mentioned that, following advice from the company which had supplied the notice board, he would be using a different memory stick (one with a smaller data capacity) to try to upload new content to the notice board; he is hopeful that this would resolve the situation.

Members decided that the situation regarding Wisbech Market Place be noted.

T35/24 Wisbech Market

Further to minute T27/24, members discussed matters in relation to the operation of market activities.

The Clerk reminded members that, following various changes during the last three years or so due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Wisbech Market has been operating “as normal” since 12 April 2021 but, in common with trading levels in most town centres, trading has not returned “pre-lockdown” levels.

Members are aware that council officers continue to explore ways of attracting not only market traders for all days of the week but to encourage car booters on Thursdays and Sundays. This is important both in terms of generating income for the council and contributing towards the viability and vibrancy of the town centre.

The Clerk reminded members that between June 2023 and June 2024 the council had operated a financial concession arrangement aimed at attracting more traders to Wisbech market (minutes T7/23, T12/23, T17/23 and T24/23 refer). At minute T6/24 this committee had decided that, given the lack of take-up of the concession arrangement, officers would no longer devote time to promoting that arrangement.

Mention was made by the Clerk that one new trader, Tatty J’s, selling Pie, Mash and Liquor had commenced trading on the market, initially as a casual trader. After an initial “hiccup”, the trader would be returning to the Market Place on 14 March 2025.

Members were reminded by the Clerk that this committee had approved, at minute T17/24, a proposal from the council’s Markets Officer that the closing time of the market be brought forward to 2.00 pm (instead of 3.00 pm) for the months of November to February inclusive. That arrangement, which has now concluded until November of this year, had been appreciated by the traders and had caused no operational difficulties for council staff.

The Clerk reminded members that this committee had decided, at minute T27/24, that consideration be given, at a future meeting of the committee, as a means of contributing towards the viability and vibrancy of the town centre, to arranging a programme of themed markets. The Clerk mentioned that arrangements are underway for a Farmers Market to take place on 16 March 2025. Members are hopeful that some of those who would be participating in the Farmers Market may see the



opportunity to trade at Wisbech market on a more regular basis. The Clerk mentioned also that there would also be a “Minis in the Market Place” event on 23 March 2025.

The Chairman mentioned his awareness that it is likely that two of the large retailers within the Market Place would cease trading in the town by the summer of this year and he expressed the opinion that this committee may wish to give thought, at a future meeting, to the detrimental impact that this could have upon the viability and vibrancy of the town centre and whether there are actions which the council could take to help mitigate such a situation.

Members decided that the situation regarding Wisbech market activities be noted.

T36/24 Town Hall/office

Members were informed by the Clerk that maintenance work to the Town Hall is undertaken as necessary.

The Clerk reminded members that this committee had decided at minute T18/24 that quotations be sought for re-decoration works to the ceilings of the Council Chamber and the Mayor’s Parlour and the re-decoration of the walls and ceiling of the stairway between the ground floor and the first floor of the Town Hall.

Members were informed by the Clerk that he had been seeking since October 2024 to obtain quotations from local contractors for this work. The Clerk has now obtained three quotations, which would be considered at minute T38/24.

The Clerk reminded members that the main roof of the Town Hall had suffered some storm damage in December 2024 and that at minute T28/24 this committee had decided that he be authorised to arrange any necessary roofing repair work deemed necessary, provided that he considered the cost to be reasonable and that sufficient budgetary provision existed.

Members were informed by the Clerk (and RFO) that he had subsequently accepted a quotation for repair works to the roof of the Town Hall and that the repair work had been undertaken on 12 February 2025. The Clerk informed members that, whilst undertaking that work, the contractor had identified repair works necessary to the roof of the Gents toilet; an area which had been the subject of repair works on other occasions in recent years, but those repairs had, however, not proved to be permanent.

The Clerk (and RFO) had invited the contractor to submit a quotation for that work, which would be considered at minute T38/24.

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

T37/24 St Raphael community hall

Further to minute T29/24, members considered matters associated with Wisbech Town Council taking-on the operation and management of the St Raphael community hall.

The Clerk reminded members that the lease between Fenland District Council (as landlord) and Wisbech Town Council (as tenant) in relation to this building came into force on 4 December 2024.

Councillor Foice-Beard mentioned that the Clerk and she continue to have discussions with officers of the County Council’s Early Years service in relation to a potential regular, ongoing hiring of the building.



Members were informed by the Clerk that a surveyor engaged by Cambridgeshire County Council had inspected the building on 14 November 2024, to see what works would be required to enable it to meet the needs of the Early Years service.

Councillor Foice-Beard mentioned that the Clerk and she had met on-line with representatives of the Early Years service on 2 January 2025 to obtain an update on the situation. Proposals for building works to accommodate the needs of the Early Years service had been considered by an Assessment Panel at Cambridgeshire County Council on 14 January 2025.

A couple of weeks later the Town Council received a copy of the surveyor's report; this has been shared with Fenland District Council, as the owner of the building.

The Clerk reported that the officer at the County Council who is leading on this project had informed him within recent days that sufficient funding has been made available, through capital grant monies and Section 106 funding, to meet the capital costs of delivering the project (i.e., works to the building).

Members were informed by the Clerk that the Early Years service has stated that the project will be dependent upon:

1. confirmation from the District Council (as the owner of the building) that it will consent to the necessary structural changes to the building taking place and accepting that no further changes would be made after works had been carried out (e.g., the building would not be returned to its original state if/when no longer needed for Early Years provision)
2. confirmation that a provider could operate from the building for four days per week, for at least the next 5 years
3. confirmation from the District Council that it would address the issues with the roofing that had been identified in the condition survey (estimated to cost circa £53,000), along with improvements which relate to the building's EPC rating, as required
4. identification by the Early Years service of a suitable provider to operate from the premises. The Early Years service has made a financial allocation for the provider to purchase furniture, storage etc.

The Clerk mentioned that it is anticipated that Councillor Foice-Beard and he would meet, again, on-line with representatives of the Early Years service in the not-too-distant future to progress this project.

Councillor Foice-Beard mentioned that there is currently one regular user of the building; the Youths of Fenland CIC.

Mention was made by the Clerk that the St Raphael community hall had been the venue for council's Unsung Heroes Awards ceremony on 25 January 2025 and had worked very well in that regard.

Councillor Foice-Beard expressed her thanks to the Town Clerk for the work that he is undertaking, on behalf of the council, to ensure that the operation and management of the St Raphael community hall will be a success. Councillor Tierney expressed his thanks to both Councillor Foice-Beard and the Town Clerk in that regard.

Members decided that the current situation be noted.

T38/24 Town Hall/office

Further to minute T36/24, members considered



- the three quotations which had been received in relation to re-decoration works to the ceilings of the Council Chamber and the Mayor's Parlour and the re-decoration of the walls and ceiling of the stairway between the ground floor and the first floor of the Town Hall
- the quotation received in relation to repair works necessary to the roof of the Gents toilet at the Town Hall.

Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Hoy, seconded by Councillor Edwards, that

- (1) the quotation for re-decoration works to the ceilings of the Council Chamber and the Mayor's Parlour and the re-decoration of the walls and ceiling of the stairway between the ground floor and the first floor of the Town Hall, in the sum of £5,290, be accepted;
- (2) the quotation for repair works to the roof of the Gents toilet at the Town Hall, in the sum of £750, be accepted.

(Members resolved to exclude the public for this item of business 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)

Meeting finished at 8.25 pm.

Signed.....

Dated.....