



WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL
WISBECH TOWN CENTRE COMMITTEE

12 DECEMBER 2022 – 8.25 pm

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillor Tierney, Chairman; Councillors Hoy, Human, Oliver and Wallwork.

Apologies: Councillors Maul and Prest.

The minutes of the meeting of the Wisbech Town Centre Committee held on 30 August 2022 were confirmed and signed.

T15/22 Wisbech Castle

Further to minute T10/22, members considered matters in relation to the management, operation and development of Wisbech Castle.

Members were reminded by the Clerk that weekly “organisational planning” meetings at Wisbech Castle which had been introduced in April, to ensure the efficient and effective operation of activities/bookings, continue to take place.

Wisbech Castle continues to be extremely successful in attracting bookings for paranormal events.

Members are aware that the operation of this site is generating a good level of income for the council, a matter for which the Resources Committee had regard in formulating a draft budget for the financial year 2023/24 (minute R12/22 refers).

The Chairman referred to the number of bookings at Wisbech Castle and the level of volunteers’ capacity to support such. He expressed the opinion that the council may need to consider “buying-in” staffing resources to provide the additional capacity as and when required. This would, obviously, incur additional cost to the council, which the Chairman suggested could, if necessary, be met through an increase in fees and charges.

Members considered an issue in relation to the collection of a debt associated with use of Wisbech Castle and agreed a course of action to address the situation.

Further to minute T10/22, members considered a quotation for undertaking paving works at Wisbech Castle, as explained by the Clerk. Members are happy with the cost quoted for the works mentioned in the quotation but would also like the works to include replacement of the front steps to Wisbech Castle and the removal from site of all debris associated with the paving works; consequently, they requested the Clerk to invite a revised quotation to include those additional requirements.

Further to minute T14/22, the Clerk informed members that he had received and accepted a quotation for the tree works agreed by the committee at part (2) of that minute and that the contractor had recently submitted the necessary planning application (reference number F/YR22/1206/TRCA) in relation to such works.

Members decided that

- (1) the current situation be noted;



- (2) the Clerk would invite the paving contractor to submit to the council a revised quotation which would include replacement of the front steps to Wisbech Castle and the removal from site of all debris associated with the paving works;
- (3) with immediate effect, the council would “buy-in” staffing resources as and when necessary to support activities (in the main, these are likely to be paranormal investigation events and weddings) at Wisbech Castle and would consider at the next meeting of this committee the setting of revised fees and charges as a means of recovering the costs involved.

T16/22 Toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre

Further to minute T9/22, members discussed issues in relation to the council’s operation and management of the toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre, which had been re-opened by Wisbech Town Council on 11 July 2022.

The Clerk informed members that the operation of the toilets is going well and, further to minute T9/11, new sink taps (of a type which work only when pressure is applied to them) had been fitted.

All minor repair works are being addressed as they arise.

Members considered extension/renewal of the contract between Wisbech Town Council and Herbie Hut Ltd in relation to the daily operation of these toilets, which had been awarded initially for a period of six months and is due to expire at midnight on 10 January 2023. The contractor, Herbie Hut Ltd, had invited the council to renew the contract, on the current terms and conditions (except for a modest increase in cost, to cover increases in the cost of staffing, consumables etc) for a further period of 24 months with effect from 11 January 2023.

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

- (1) the information reported by the Clerk be noted;
- (2) a contract be awarded to Herbie Hut Ltd in relation to the daily operation of the toilets at the Horsefair Shopping Centre for the period 11 January 2023 to 10 January 2025 inclusive.

T17/22 Wisbech Market Place

Further to minute T11/22, members discussed matters in relation to the Wisbech Market Place enhancement scheme and the associated “pedestrianisation” arrangements.

The Clerk reported that, in accordance with part (1) of minute T11/22, he had arranged the purchase and installation of two new (lockable) bollards and one new bench, together with re-location of one existing bench at Wisbech Market Place. This work had been commenced on 21 November 2022 and the Clerk is waiting to hear from the installation company when the remainder would be undertaken.

Members considered the suggestion of Councillor Meekins (not a member of this committee) that a plaque of some description be displayed in the Market Place which provides an interpretation of the various elements of the coat of arms feature within the new surfacing.

The Clerk reported that, in accordance with part (2) of minute T11/22, local businesses in the town had been informed that commercial advertising on the electronic notice would be permitted, at a cost of £20 per month per “page” of advertising; however, to date, no such requests had been received.



Further to part (4) of minute T11/22, members were informed by the Clerk that the Local Highway Authority (LHA) had undertaken to review the extent of the current Traffic Order, with a view to removing Church Terrace and Little Church Street. To that end, the LHA had produced a plan showing the location (underneath the Market Place archway) and design of the gates (a pair of gates with sufficient space between to allow for cyclists) that would need to be installed (following manufacture) as a means of preventing vehicular access to the Market Place from Church Terrace.

The Chairman expressed the opinion that it is necessary to undertake, as a matter of priority, repair/replacement of the electricity installation at the Market Place, so that it is not only reliable and meets current needs but is “future proof”. He expressed the opinion that this project should be undertaken as soon as is possible in 2023. Firstly, the necessary work needs to be identified and then a tendering exercise, but with a quick turnaround, be undertaken.

Members decided that

- (1) they would not wish to see a plaque (which provides an interpretation of the various elements of the coat of arms feature within the new surfacing) installed within the Market Place but are supportive of the explanatory information being made available to visitors. They suggest that the information be provided as by way of a “poster” for display in the electronic notice board and requested the Clerk to invite Councillor Meekins to produce some text for such a “poster”;
- (2) as a means of stimulating interest, local businesses be offered, as a trial, a page of one month’s commercial advertising on the council’s electronic notice board on a free-of-charge basis;
- (3) the Chairman would ascertain, in January 2023, the repair/replacement works required to the electrical installation at Wisbech Market Place, to enable quotations to be sought from electrical contractors in respect of undertaking such works;
- (4) the proposed location and the design of the additional gates required at the Church Terrace entrance to the Market Place be approved.

T18/22 Wisbech Market

The Clerk informed members that, following various changes during the last couple of years 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 had not returned “pre-lockdown” levels.

A reduction in the level of trading has an impact upon the amount of income generated. This is a matter which had been considered by the Resources Committee when having its initial budget 2023/24 discussions at minute R12/22.

Members were informed by the Clerk that officers continue to explore ways of seeking to increase the level of trading at Wisbech Market. On a positive note, the diversity of food stalls on Wisbech Market is increasing.

Further to minute T5/22, members considered the recommendation of the Resources Committee (at minute R12/22) that this committee considers the re-introduction (no later than the beginning of the financial year 2023/24) of car boot activity at Wisbech Market Place on Thursdays as a means of increasing income to the council. Members are supportive of the recommendation of the Resources Committee that car boot activity at Wisbech Market Place on Thursdays be re-introduced, not only as a means of increasing market income but also, hopefully, having a positive effect upon footfall in the town centre.



Further to minute T12/22, the Clerk informed members that he proposes to arrange, early in 2023, a meeting of the Trader Pack Task Group, which is to be set-up to review the contents of the council's Trader Pack and to have in place a refreshed document with effect from the beginning of the licensing year 2023/24.

Members decided that

- (1) the information reported by the Clerk be noted;
- (2) car boot activity be re-introduced at Wisbech Market Place with effect from the first Thursday in 2023.

T19/22 Wisbech Town Hall and Corn Exchange building

Members received details of three options for the renovation/re-generation of the Corn Exchange building (ground floor of 1 North Brink), one of which includes the Town Hall also (first floor of 1 North Brink).

The Wisbech Corn Exchange Conservation Trust (established since 2018) commissioned local architects Swann Edwards to create plans showing three "options", each one a separate view of how the building could be used best for current-day local community use whilst preserving and incorporating heritage features in the day-to-day life of the building. Option 1, the trust's preferred option, re-integrates the building as a whole.

Members viewed drawings/plans, which had been provided by the Wisbech Corn Exchange Conservation Trust, in relation to the various design options.

The Wisbech Corn Exchange Conservation Trust is seeking the views of Wisbech Town Council on whether it would be possible/feasible for the renovation/re-generation of the Corn Exchange building to include the Town Hall. For that to be possible, the Town Council would need to identify and secure alternative accommodation.

Members decided that they do not wish to see the Town Hall being included as part of the renovation/re-generation of the Corn Exchange building.

T20/22 Christmas lighting

The Chairman expressed the opinion that there is a need to improve the council's Christmas lights "offer" to the public.

It was suggested by the Chairman that a Christmas Lights Working Party be established (of, say, three councillors who would be able to commit the time necessary), which would meet monthly from February 2023, to ensure not only that the council possesses the necessary stock to be able to deliver an improved Christmas lighting display but also that the necessary supporting infrastructure were in place.

The Chairman expressed the hope is that this work could be concluded by May 2023 and that the contractual arrangements for installing the lighting scheme could be in place by August 2023.

Members share the opinion of the Chairman and concur with his suggested approach.

Members decided that a Christmas Lights Working Party be established, with the purpose of ensuring that not only that the council possesses the necessary stock to be able to deliver an improved Christmas lighting display for 2023 and beyond.



Meeting finished at 9.00 pm

Signed.....

Dated.....