



WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL

18 February 2019 – 7.30 pm

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillor Human, Chairman (and Town Mayor); Councillors Balsevics, Miss Cobb, Hill, Miss Hoy, Oliver, Miss Oliver, Prest, Tibbs, Tierney and Wing.

Apologies: Councillors Mrs Cox, Hodgson, Lynn, Maul and Rackley.

Public Participation: None requested.

126/18 Wisbech Police Station

Members received a presentation from Mr J Ablewhite, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, in respect of police station provision in Wisbech.

Mr Ablewhite reminded the council that he had been considering, for some time, what would be the most effective and efficient manner to achieve continued police station provision in Wisbech and that this had resulted in Cambridgeshire Constabulary obtaining planning permission last year for the erection of two-storey side/rear extension to the town's existing fire station to provide a "blue-light hub". However, operational thinking and circumstances change and it is important, he commented, that policing and associated estates are "future proofed"; consequently, he had re-evaluated the proposal for expansion of the fire station building as the means of providing a police station. He gave an assurance that, whatever form it were to take, there would be continued police station provision in Wisbech.

Mr Ablewhite mentioned that it is now the first time that growth in the police force had happened since 2005 and he commented that it is essential to ensure that the service possesses the infrastructure capacity for future growth. He made the point that Cambridgeshire Constabulary possesses a long-term lease, at a peppercorn rent, for the current police station in Wisbech and that, having re-evaluated the situation, it is no longer deemed appropriate to re-locate from that building; instead, the Constabulary would invest significantly (circa £250,000) in the current building rather than construct a new building which would not be able to support, in the longer-term, a growing police force in the town. Furthermore, the estimated cost of creating the "blue-light hub" in Wisbech had risen (from around £500,000) to around £1,000,000.

The council was informed by Mr Ablewhite that the new Chief Constable for Cambridgeshire had worked previously at Norfolk Constabulary, where he had led on a review of that constabulary's estates; it is anticipated that, through closer working between neighbouring police forces, some of the activities of Norfolk and Lincolnshire Constabularies would be delivered from Wisbech Police Station.

Mr Ablewhite responded to members' questions.

Councillor Wing enquired as to whether it would be possible to re-introduce cells provision at Wisbech Police Station. In response, Mr Ablewhite made the point that such a situation would not be possible unless the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) arrangement with Norfolk Constabulary were to be terminated; also the current cells at Wisbech Police Station no longer meet Government standards; furthermore, there would costs in operating a custody suite.

Councillor Tierney commented that he had liked the plan to create a "blue-light hub" at Wisbech but is able to see, having heard the information presented by the Police and Crime Commissioner, the logic in now choosing to remain in the current location. He expressed the opinion that the most



important matter is the effectiveness of the police service in the town, rather the building at which it is based.

In response to a question from Councillor Human as to whether it is the intention of the Police and Crime Commissioner to continue to increase the number of police officers locally, Mr Ablewhite responded in the affirmative.

Councillor Miss Hoy expressed the opinion that some people might look at the decision of the Police and Crime Commissioner (not to pursue the provision of a “blue-light hub”) in a negative way, thinking that he would be making a lower level of financial investment in Wisbech. In response, Mr Ablewhite commented that he still supports the principle of creating “blue-light hubs” but only where there is the opportunity to do so and where it would be in the best operational needs of all of the services involved. He made the point that in many cases when re-locating a police station, the police force is able to generate a capital receipt from the sale of the premises; this is able to support the new investment; in the case of Wisbech, because the current police station is not in the ownership of the constabulary, re-location would not generate a capital receipt. In any event, the constabulary would still be making a significant investment in police station provision in Wisbech.

Members decided that the information presented and the responses to their questions be noted and they indicated their support for the Police and Crime Commissioner’s latest proposal in relation to police station provision in Wisbech.

127/18 Fenland District Council’s Customer Services Review (March and Wisbech)

Members received a presentation from Anna Goodall, Head of Legal and Customer Services at Fenland District Council (FDC), and Councillor Mrs Anne Hay, FDC Cabinet member with responsibility for Finance (which includes Customer Services), in relation to the District Council’s Customer Services Review (March and Wisbech).

Mrs Goodall informed the council that the Comprehensive Spending Review which had been undertaken by Fenland District Council (FDC) in 2015 had produced a savings requirement of £100,000 in relation to the Customer Services function and, to achieve that target, FDC is proposing re-location of the one-stop shops at March and Wisbech; this would replicate the approach which had been taken in both Chatteris and Whittlesey (where the services are now delivered in the towns’ libraries) in recent years. She mentioned that the lease for the current shop at March expires in July 2019 and the one for the Wisbech shop does so in September 2019.

The council was informed by Mrs Goodall that the footfall to the March and Wisbech shops had fallen significantly (by around 81%) since their opening in 2004. She made the point that customers’ ways of accessing council services had changed since that time; for example, “hits” on the District Council’s website had increased by 542% since 2004.

Mrs Goodall informed the council that officers of FDC had discussed with the owner of the Wisbech shop the possibility of a new lease of that building but this had not proved to be feasible as the owner had been seeking rent at an increased level (at a time when the District Council is needing to reduce costs). Consequently, the District Council had “ruled out” the possibility of continuing to use the current premises and had sought to identify alternative premises in Wisbech from which a customer service function, which would meet the current level of demand, could be delivered. The two possible locations identified from which to deliver a customer service function in Wisbech are Wisbech Library (owned by Cambridgeshire County Council) and The Boathouse (owned by Fenland District Council). The re-located shops would be known as a Customer Services Centre, have the same opening hours as the current shops and provide the same services to local people.

The council was informed by Mrs Goodall of the issues which had been taken into account by Fenland District Council in evaluating the two options for re-location of the Wisbech one-stop shop



(including the manner in which the services could be delivered in the premises, the impact upon services which are delivered currently from those buildings, operational costs and the revenue savings to FDC. It is anticipated that the new arrangement would be in place by late July/mid-August 2019.

The costs of re-locating to Wisbech Library would generate revenue savings for FDC of approximately £45,890 per annum; this figure would be £58,390 for The Boathouse. The District Council makes the point that it would be possible to achieve the Comprehensive Spending Review savings without any diminution of service to the public. FDC acknowledges that a move to The Boathouse would represent a greater degree of change for its customers than a move to the library; however; it makes the point that although The Boathouse is not located in the town centre, it possesses accessible on-site parking facilities and is located equidistant from the bus station as the town centre.

Councillor Tierney informed members that this matter had been the subject of debate by Fenland District Councillors, who had concluded that FDC had no option but to re-locate its shops at March and Wisbech; he mentioned that FDC members are keen to see continuation of the services delivered currently by way of one-stop shop provision. He mentioned that the preference of the members of FDC is re-location of the Wisbech shop to The Boathouse (because of its location, the parking provision and the higher level of revenue savings that could be achieved).

Councillor Miss Hoy informed members of her concern that location of a one-stop shop at Wisbech Library could have a detrimental impact upon the existing services and activities which take place there. She expressed the opinion that, all things considered, the most appropriate building to which to re-locate the Wisbech shop would be The Boathouse; she commented that this is now even more appropriate, given that Wisbech Police Station would not now be re-locating (minute 126/18 refers). Councillor Miss Hoy expressed the opinion that particular benefits of The Boathouse are the on-site parking provision and the excellent disabled access; in addition, the increased use of that part of Wisbech could assist with its continued enhancement and re-generation.

Councillor Wing stated his concurrence with the comments of Councillors Miss Hoy and Tierney and he expressed the opinion that, given the information which had been presented, re-location of the Wisbech one-stop shop to The Boathouse is a "no brainer". Councillor Human commented that he shares the views which had been expressed by other members.

District Councillor Mrs Hay stated that she is pleased to hear Wisbech Town Council's support for the proposed re-location of the Wisbech shop to The Boathouse and she commented that this building offers a greater degree of privacy to customers than could be achieved at Wisbech Library. She expressed the opinion that it is likely that the number of visits to the District Council's shops would continue to reduce as more people make use of on-line services, so by re-locating the shops to council-owned properties, FDC is able to make significant financial savings whilst still offering face-to-face services to those who want them.

Members decided the information presented be noted and that Wisbech Town Council supports the District Council's proposal to re-locate the Wisbech one-stop shop to The Boathouse.

128/18 Cambridgeshire Constabulary

Although no officer of Cambridgeshire Constabulary attended the meeting, the Constabulary had provided to the Clerk, via e-mail, the new Fenland Neighbourhood Policing Team Monthly Review report (minute 4/18 refers) on recent incidents of crime and disorder and other matters in Wisbech and the northern villages in Fenland. The Clerk summarised briefly the report.

The report mentions that the Neighbourhood Policing Team's priorities over the last month had been:



1. High visibility patrols in the Park Road area, due to reports of anti-social behaviour by youths
2. Targeted patrols in the Horsefair Shopping Centre and town areas, due to persistent anti-social behaviour by youths
3. Engaging with the homeless and those victims of homeless assaults and investigating the associated crimes.

Included within the report were details of incidents and crimes which had taken place within the geographical area covered by the Neighbourhood Policing Team (NPT) during the last month, including:

- a series of robberies/burglaries in Wisbech and surrounding villages, also affecting villages in the Norfolk area. These had been targeted robberies/burglaries on properties where known individuals/criminals believed that drug dealers were living. The perpetrators had since been arrested
- 5 homeless people had been assaulted over a number of nights in early January 2019.

Mention is made within the report that NPT officers continue to undertake day and evening patrols of the Horsefair Shopping Centre and the town, engaging with youths and businesses. During the last month there had been a significant reduction in calls for service relating to youth anti-social behaviour. The team had issued a number of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) to youths who had been identified as perpetrators in anti-social behaviour. Also, officers had dealt with many youths who had been involved in ASB, with them being removed and then taken home to parents.

The report mentions that daily patrols had been carried out by NPT officers in the Park Road/Wisbech Park area and a meeting had been held with Fenland District Council (FDC) to identify problem areas and work to be carried out to reduce the risk to the location. This partnership approach by the Police and FDC has led to some identified opportunities and action being taken to design-out anti-social behaviour (such as providing improved lighting) and improve the area for local residents who use the park.

The NPT had been engaging regularly with the homeless, ensuring that they are aware of services available to them and also ensuring that they stay safe in the evenings when they are most vulnerable.

Given their attendance at this meeting for minute 126/18, Jason Ablewhite, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, accompanied by Superintendent Andy Gipp and Inspector Ian Lombardo, invited and responded to members' questions on policing issues relating to the area.

Inspector Lombardo commented that he is aware that youth-related anti-social behaviour in Wisbech is still happening but it is being tackled; 2 ABCs had been issued in that regard. He added that local officers are working with the multi-agency Problem Solving Group to address some of the anti-social behaviour issues; a request for a Dispersal Order, to operate over the half-term school holiday, had been approved. The Inspector mentioned that a presentation had been made by the constabulary at the Thomas Clarkson Academy, giving the message that the behavioural choices made by people when they are young can have an effect upon the choices that they are able to make in later life.

Councillor Tierney expressed the opinion that the local NPT had been successful in tackling the anti-social behaviour of juveniles on bicycles, which had been an issue during the latter part of 2018;



however, a different group, which consists of older, more “threatening” individuals, had emerged; this situation needs to be addressed by the constabulary as a matter of priority. In response, Inspector Lombardo commented that the police are aware of the situation and are working with Fenland District Council to try to address the matter.

Councillor Miss Cobb enquired as to whether the presentation which had been delivered at the Thomas Clarkson Academy could also be delivered at Marshland High School (as a number of youngsters who live in Wisbech attend that school). In response, Inspector Lombardo commented that, as Marshland High School lies within Norfolk, there would be a need to liaise with Norfolk Constabulary in this matter; however, given the close working relationship between Cambridgeshire and Norfolk Constabularies, it should be possible for the presentation to be delivered at Marshland High School; he undertook to pursue the matter.

Councillor Wing expressed concern with regard to the potential for evidence not being obtained if there are no “specialist” services (such as Scenes of Crime Officers) located in the Fenland area. In response, Superintendent Gipp commented that he would very much like to have specialist services in all geographical areas within the County but, because of financial restraints, that is no longer possible. He made the point that the collaborative approach to the provision of such services operates very effectively.

Superintendent Gipp commented that he is impressed with how speedily and effectively the Neighbourhood Policing Team and the District Council work together in Fenland to tackle issues. He added that he would ask the local Inspector to share more information (to include such matters as domestic abuse incidents) in future monthly reports to the council. The Superintendent commented that the constabulary’s current recruitment campaign is generating a need to increase its infrastructure (such as the provision of vehicles).

Councillor Wing enquired as to whether there is a sufficient level of key worker housing in the area to assist in attracting new recruits to the Fenland area. In response, Mr Ablewhite commented that this had not been seen as a problem to the recruitment of new officers in Cambridgeshire. In addition, Superintendent Gipp commented that issues such as housing are discussed with probationers in the early days of their employment; one difficulty, which applies to everyone, is that the level of deposit required to access a mortgage is much higher now than had been the case historically.

Members decided that the content of the report from the Constabulary, the questions asked by members and the responses received from the representatives of Cambridgeshire Constabulary be noted.

129/18 Fenland District Council

The Clerk reported that he had been sent, by e-mail, information in respect of CCTV performance, Section 106 Planning Obligations details and the council’s Environment newsletter and that he had forwarded, last week, the e-mail and attachments to all members of the council.

Members decided that the situation be noted.

130/18 Cambridgeshire County Council

Further to minute 76/18 (2), the Clerk read to members an e-mail that he had received from Cambridgeshire County Council, as Local Highway Authority, providing an update with regard to that council’s consideration of Local Highway Improvement (LHI) applications for the financial year 2019/20.



The Clerk informed members that the County Council has stated that LHI applications (the two submitted by Wisbech Town Council being implementation of parking restrictions on Cherry Road, Wisbech (in the vicinity of Orchards Academy) and implementation of parking restrictions at the junction of Station Drive and Victoria Road, Wisbech) would be considered by the County Council's Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee on 12 March 2019. That committee would be making decisions in the light of the recommendations of the district-area member assessment panels which had met in November 2018.

Councillor Tierney, in his capacity as a member of Cambridgeshire County Councillor, informed members that with regard to one of this council's approved LHI schemes for 2018/19 (improvements to the Colvile Road/Trafford Road junction arrangements (minute 79/17 refers)), local residents had raised objections to the proposed scheme (minute 116/18 refers) on the basis of the reduction in car parking that would result; consequently, officers of the Local Highway Authority are reviewing the proposed scheme.

With regard to Wisbech Town Council's other LHI application for the financial year 2018/19 (that being the implementation of parking restrictions in Ramnoth Road/Money Bank (minute 79/17 refers)), Councillor Miss Hoy, in her capacity as a member of Cambridgeshire County Council, informed members that the proposed scheme had generated objections from some local residents. Consequently, she had undertaken a "letter drop" as a means of obtaining a majority opinion on the proposal; she commented that the responses that she had received to date show around 50% in favour and 50% opposed to the proposal.

Members decided that the current situation with regard to this council's Local Highway Improvement schemes for the financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20 be noted.

131/18 Minutes of the Town Council meetings of 21 and 28 January 2019

Members decided

- (1) on the proposal of Councillor Oliver, seconded by Councillor Miss Cobb, that the minutes of the Town Council meeting of 21 January 2019 be confirmed and signed;
- (2) on the proposal of Councillor Oliver, seconded by Councillor Prest, that the minutes of the Town Council meeting of 28 January 2019 be confirmed and signed;

132/18 Minutes of committees

Members received, for information, the minutes of committee meetings held since the last meeting of the Town Council, as follows:

- (1) Planning and Community Infrastructure Committee – 21 January 2019
- (2) Planning and Community Infrastructure Committee – 4 February 2019
- (3) Assets Management Committee – 4 February 2019
- (4) Community Events and Festivals Committee – 11 February 2019.

Members decided that the contents of these minutes, including the decisions made by the committees, be noted.

133/18 Mayor's Report

The Mayor informed members of the civic events that he had attended and activities in which he had participated since the last meeting of Wisbech Town Council. He mentioned that he had attended 17 events since the last meeting of the council, including attendance at:



- the Wisbech Lions Ball; at the event, the Mayor had congratulated the Lions on the wonderful work which they undertake
- Guyhirn Primary School; the visit had included the Mayor answering pupils' questions on what it is like to perform that role
- local cadet presentation evenings.

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

134/18 Leader of the Council's report

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Miss Hoy, informed members that the council's committees continue to work hard, both in terms of ensuring delivery of the council's current projects and also looking to the future. She mentioned that members would receive at the next meeting of the Town Council the quarterly update from the council's Committee Chairman on the work of their respective committees.

Councillor Miss Hoy mentioned that, following agreement, on 11 February 2019, by the Community Events and Festivals Committee of a programme of events and festivals for the financial year 2019/20, a meeting of the working party had been arranged for 4 March 2018 to begin planning those events and festivals.

Members' attention was drawn by Councillor Miss Hoy to the decision which had been made by the Community Events and Festivals Committee on 11 February 2019 (minute C4/18 refers) that, instead of delivering a St George's Day event, it would look to deliver something else (on a different date) in 2019 which would complement the activities provided by way of the council's other events. She commented that she would welcome any ideas or suggestions from members as to the type of event which they feel would be enjoyed by the people of Wisbech; any such ideas and suggestions received would be referred to the Community Events and Festivals Working Party for consideration.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Miss Hoy, reminded members that the nominations process for this year's Wisbech Unsung Heroes awards would "go live" (with publicity in the Fenland Citizen newspaper) on 27 February 2019; the date for the awards ceremony had now been fixed for 12 April 2019 (7.00 pm); the venue would be St. Peter and St Paul's Church Hall. Councillor Miss Hoy urged members to "spread the word" regarding the awards and to encourage the local community to submit nominations. She expressed the opinion that it is important that this council is able to give recognition to those members of the public who support, without financial reward, the community of Wisbech.

Councillor Miss Hoy commented that she had been both pleased and honoured to have been present at the special meeting of Wisbech Town Council on 28 January 2019, at which the council decided unanimously to confer the Honorary Freedom of the Town of Wisbech upon both the Wisbech in Bloom team and the Vivien Fire Engine Trust. She expressed the opinion that the meeting had gone extremely well and it had been great to see the members of both groups being recognised, through the ultimate honour that can be awarded by a local authority, for what they do for Wisbech.

The Leader of the Council reminded members that Wisbech Town Council is working with Fenland District Council (FDC) on proposals to improve the level of recreational equipment in Wisbech, including the provision of a new skate park at Bath Road. She stated her understanding that the construction work on the skate park, which began last month, is now complete and that, although the official opening had not yet taken place, it is already being enjoyed by local youngsters. Councillor Miss Hoy commented that she is keen to see improvements to the provision of recreational equipment at Jasmine Close Spider Park and at the West Parade/Burcroft Road play area.



Finally, Councillor Miss Hoy reminded members that the Mart Fair would arrive in town on 24 February. All members of Wisbech Town Council would be invited to the official opening, at 6.00 pm on 28 February 2019, by the Mayor. She expressed the hope that there would be no repeat of the weather conditions which had been experienced at the time of last year’s Mart Fair, which had resulted in the official opening being re-scheduled initially and cancelled subsequently.

Members decided that the comments of the Leader of the Council be noted.

135/18 Correspondence

National Trust meeting

The Clerk reminded members that he had forwarded to them, on 11 February 2019, an invitation from the National Trust to a meeting of local stakeholders and community representatives which had been arranged to take place on 19 June 2019 (4.00 pm at Wisbech Rugby Club, Chapel Road, Wisbech) to facilitate a discussion on ways of addressing some of the issues being faced by the Peckover estate in terms of persistent anti-social behaviour, rough sleeping, trespass, etc at the Harecroft playing fields and the Chapel Road car park.

Members decided that the information reported by the Clerk be noted and that they would inform the relevant officer at the National Trust (whose details had been provided in the invitation) if they proposed to attend the meeting.

136/18 Notice board/information update

Wisbech Town Guide 2019

The Clerk reported that the latest version of the Wisbech Town Guide had been published recently and that the process of copies being delivered to all properties within the town is underway. It is also available on-line at http://www.localauthoritypublishing.co.uk/flip_guides/wisbechguide/index.html or via the website of Wisbech Town Council and its Facebook page.

In addition, council staff had begun providing copies of the guide to various community and public buildings; these include, the Fenland@yourservice shop, Wisbech Library, the Oasis Centre, Rosmini Centre, Queen Mary Centre, the Boathouse and the Horsefair Shopping Centre.

Members decided that the situation be noted.

137/18 Date of next meeting

Members were reminded that the next meeting of Wisbech Town Council is scheduled for 18 March 2019, to commence at 7.30 pm, at the Town Hall in Wisbech.

Meeting finished at 8.30 pm.

Signed

Date