

WHITTLESEY TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 21st December 2023 at 7.30pm at Peel House, 8 Queen Street, Whittlesey, PE7 1AY.

Present: Cllr Mayor, Arman, Black, Boden, Dorling, Gerstner, Nawaz, Wainwright, Wicks

Officer in Attendance: Sue Piergianni – Town Clerk & RFO

Recording: The recording is made as an aide memoir for the Clerk

F175/2023. Apologies for Absence

Cllr Laws, Turner, Sennitt-Clough, Mockett, Dickinson (all personal)

F176/2023. To receive members' declarations of disclosable pecuniary, non-disclosable pecuniary or non-pecuniary interests in relation to any agenda item.

There were no declarations.

F177/2023. Presentation from Matt Page on arrangements for Armed Forces Day 2024.

This item will be moved to the January meeting.

F178/2023. Street Scene Officer Report & CCTV report.

Members received the Street Scene Officer Report and CCTV Report

F179/2023. Police Report

Members received the police report and were advised this item was confidential.

F180/2023. To confirm and sign the Minutes from the Full Council Meeting held on Thursday 23rd November 2023.

Ratified: The Minutes were approved and signed as a true record.

F181/2023 Public Forum

Four members of the public were present.

F182/2023 Agenda items for Discussion.

1. Budget

Cllr Boden asked members for their comments on version zero of the budget and advised the following:

The insurance payment for the cancelled Coates event in 2023 would be ring fenced for the Coates event in 2024 and will have a separate line entry in the budget.

Cllr Gerstner asked if FDC or WTC would receive any of the 6% uplift in funding that has been advertised by central government. Cllr Boden advised he was unable to ascertain yet what this will mean to FDC, he did advise the funding will have no effect on town and parish council funding.

Cllr Mayor asked how many music events there would be in 2024 and was an additional budget line necessary. Cllr Boden requested this item be held over until the January 2024 meeting, but added the draft budget would not change with the insertion of an additional line which would show the funds from the insurance claim.

2. Meeting Dates

Cllr Boden proposed we fix the dates to the AGM in May, then we will have the dates for CCC and FDC. However, we will be starting the Full Council at 6.30pm. Seconded Cllr Mayor with a unanimous vote in favour. The Chair advised members the planning meeting will be on 15th January as the Clerk as obtained an extension. The projects meeting will be the 3rd of January, the Clerk will confirm this with the Chair of Projects.

3. Weekly Market Town Heritage Talks (Cllr Sennitt-Clough), presented by Cllr Nawaz.

The Fenland Market Town Heritage Talks are a series of talks commencing on Tuesday, January 9th. They will run every Tuesday for twelve weeks rotating through the four market towns. They are completely free to attend, and any Fenland resident can attend any of the talks in any of the towns. Each talk will be different even if they are given by the same person.

There is free transport available to those who genuinely need it from FACT.

The idea behind these events is to promote local historical awareness and provide some much-needed socialisation for Fenland residents who might be chronically lonely in the bleak winter months. All the talks will be an hour long, followed by a Q&A session to facilitate discussion. All the talks commence at 7pm, except for Whittlesey which starts at 6pm.

The funding for these talks comes from Arts Council England. More Muzic Radio and the Whittlesey Rotary Club offered support-in-kind by way of advertising.

Tickets are available from Ticket Source by doing a search for events on in Whittlesey, Wisbech, March or Chatteris or see the FDC press release with direct links for bookings. Please could everyone promote these events as much as possible -- they are for the community to enjoy!

Whittlesey: 9/1/24, 6/2/24, 5/3/24, 6pm, Childers
Wisbech: 16/1/24, 13/2/24, 12/3/24, 7pm, Wisbech Castle
March: 23/1/24, 20/2/24, 19/3/24, 7pm, Braza Club
Chatteris: 30/1/24, 27/2/24, 26/3/24, 7pm, Kind Edward Centre

4. Fenland Poet Laureate Awards (Cllr Sennitt-Clough), presented by Cllr Nawaz.

The Fenland Poet Laureate Awards are a free-to-enter annual poetry competition with two categories: U17 and adults. They have been described as the most prestigious literary awards in Cambridgeshire and for the first time in their history, FDC are organising and hosting the awards.

Entrants may submit a poem of approximately forty lines in any poetic form that references Fenland in some way (open to interpretation). Entrants must live, work, or attend school in Fenland in order to be eligible for entry.

The new FDC Culture, Arts and Heritage Committee will be reading the competition entries, putting forward a shortlist that the current Fenland Poet Laureate Qu Gao and Committee Chair Elisabeth Sennitt Clough (a 2023 Forward Prize shortlisted poet) will judge. There will be awards for 1st, 2nd & 3rd place in each of the two categories, along with publication in an anthology. Shortlisted entries will also be published in the competition anthology.

An Awards Ceremony will take place on Friday, 15th March from 7pm in March Town Hall.

Please could all members and residents promote these awards, particularly encouraging the young entrants to take part. As Laureates, the young and adult winners will be invited to a host of different events throughout the year as ambassadors of Fenland.

Funding for these events is coming from the Arts council of England.

Cllr Black arrived at 6.55pm

5. Review of HR Group

Cllr Nawaz advised all members the HR committee is there to manage the affairs of the office and council administration. Cllr Gerstner has been doing this on his own, he feels be reconstituted and he proposed three new Cllrs, Black, Mockett and Sennitt-Clough, seconded Cllr Black with a majority vote in favour, there were four abstentions (Cllrs Dorling, Gerstner, Wainwright, Wicks).

6. Bus Service

Cllr Wicks asked Cllr Boden for an update on the letter that had been submitted to the CPCA Mayor. Cllr Boden advised there had been several meetings over the past few weeks and made comment about the deterioration of bus services in rural areas and the general concern over this, meetings are taking place regarding the Sunday services and the home to school services.

The CPCA do not believe they have the right to subsidise a service which would be in competition with a nonsubsidised service, Cllr Boden has pushed for better early morning, evening, and Sunday services outside of the normal service by stagecoach. Perhaps a subsidy be provided direct to stagecoach? The service between Pondersbridge and Whittlesey is currently subsidised. Stagecoach did not take away our service but reduced it by 50% and this is a situation is unique to Whittlesey.

Cllr Wicks - villages to the east of Whittlesey totally rely on the bus coming from March, which invariably is empty! They have changed the times of the bus, therefore people in Coates / Eastrea cannot get to work, children are struggling to get to school. Why are stagecoach hanging onto a bus service that does not seem to be viable. Cllr Boden, the weekday frequency of buses serving the villages has not changed.

CCC schools transport provision is now speaking with CPCA about working together to resolve the issue of children walking to school from Eastrea as the bus that comes from Turves is not allowed to pick them up whether for free or the children pay. Cllr Wicks suggested the people making the decisions at CCC come to Whittlesey and view the topography, the problems, and the effect this has on the villages. The CPCA rely on various operators for information, the majority given to them is by stagecoach. The next CPCA meeting is being held at Fenland Hall, Wednesday January 31st this an opportunity for any councillors to submit a question which will be responded to, they may then ask a secondary question.

7. Road Safety

Cllr Gerstner advised WTC has spent a lot of money on MVAS cameras which are picking up excessive speeds through Whittlesey and the villages and the impact it has on its residents. County officers and the police need to be accountable. Planning agents do not always respond to any issues regarding speeding, some of the reports they generate regarding the vehicles and the speed are very inaccurate. Cllr Gerstner advised between 28% and 30% of drivers are over the speed limit when entering the village of Coates, if average speed cameras were present through Coates, fixed penalty fines could be issued. Cllr Boden advised the average speed cameras were not subject to any council decision, there was no member involvement with this. There was no consultation, information, or anything before the installation of these, he therefore cannot give any further information on this. Cllr Wicks advised this was an upgrade to the static speed cameras. The Clerk will send out the pie chart showing the percentages of speed limits and how they are broken down on the next set of MVAS figures.

8. Local Highway Improvement (LHI)

Closure date is 12th January 2024 – Cllr Boden proposed LHI for the bollards for High Causeway, seconded Cllr Arman, members voted unanimously in favour of this submission.

F183/2023. To receive Councillor & outside body written reports.

There were no outside body reports.

F184/2023. To report the draft minutes from the Finance & Policy Meeting on Monday 16th December 2023 and receive the minutes from Monday 13th November 2023

- Consideration was given to the furniture in the Chamber has the correct safety standard, the Clerk had already acted and removed them from the building. Should new furniture be required, this figure would need to be added to the budget.
- Cllr Boden advised the Clerk had spoken to many organisations regarding the 85K deposit, many organisations did not accept LA accounts or required a deposit of one million. The Clerk has obtained a favourable rate from Metro bank. The Chair proposed that Clerk visit the metro bank to set up the account, this may take half a day. Seconded by Cllr Wicks with a unanimous vote in favour.

F185/2023 To report the financial documents.

- To report the bank reconciliations to 30th November 2023 – Members received the balanced bank statement.
- To report the list of payments & receipts. – Vouchers 190 – 217 to the value £23354.40
- To report the year-to-date figures 30th November 2023 – Members received the YTD figures.

F186/2023. To report the draft minutes from the Planning meeting on Monday 16th December 2023 and receive the minutes from Wednesday 6th December 2023.

Ratified: The minutes were approved and signed as a true record.

F187/2023. Consultations

Proposed County Council new development survey at Bassenhally Farm – permission to use WTC logo, proposed by Cllr mayor, seconded by Cllr Boden is going to speak to Gareth Martin.

F188/2023 Information only

Community Pantry updated information.

Cllr Mayor advised that finally the issue with the brick planters on Lovells Court will be resolved. The Agent has been in contact with the owner and the planters will be removed and new bollards and solar lighting will be installed.

F189/2023 Invitations.

There were no invitations.

F190/2023. Date of next meeting – Thursday 18th January 2024 at 6.30pm

Closed: 19.52.

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Cllr Mrs Kay Mayor
Mayor of Whittlesey