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SOHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Soham Town Council meeting held at the Walter Gidney Pavilion, Fountain Lane recreation ground, Soham on Monday 13th February 2023.

Present: Cllrs E Johnston, R Aitchison, K Horgan, A Jones, P Lane, A Pallett, C Warner and H Ross.
M Strand, Town Clerk and M Francis, Assistant Town Clerk.

In attendance: District Cllr Alec Jones.
There were 4 members of the public present.

The meeting was opened at 7:15pm.

MINUTES

177/22. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllrs David Woricker, Glenn Woodbridge and Glenn Dyer (personal).
County & District Cllr Mark Goldsack had also sent his apologies for the meeting.

178/22 COUNCILLORS' DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Cllrs Pallett and Jones declared non-pecuniary interests in item 184/22 (d) – grant application from Jigsaw magazine (had attended the group's meeting at which this had been discussed).

179/22. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS & TOWN CLLR UPDATES

- a. The Chairman asked those present to observe a minute's silence to reflect on the passing of Mr Geoffrey Woollard, a former Town Councillor.
- b. NOTED - Cllr Johnston reported that there had been a significant amount of vandalism of the public toilets on Fountain Lane, with at least 4 incidents of vandalism in the last few months. ECDC had incurred costs of around £2,000 to rectify the damage done. Each incident had been reported to the police and CCTV footage made available, but the police had so far taken no action. It was AGREED to write to the police commissioner to ask why the police were not taking matters further.
- c. NOTED – Cllrs Johnston and Warner had circulated minutes of their meeting with representatives of CCC and This Land Ltd. Cllr Warner gave an overview of the questions raised on behalf of the Council and the answers given. Although all the Council's questions had

been answered, it was agreed that not all answers were satisfactory. This Land Ltd has offered to meet with Town Councillors regularly to discuss any issues arising, particularly in regard to the proposed Eastern Gateway development.

- d. NOTED – update from Cllr Horgan on Community Payback trees. Fifty trees had been supplied (free of charge) and planted by the Community Payback Team in three locations within the town. The ‘Golden Shovel’ had been used as part of the Community Payback Team’s 50th anniversary celebrations. Councillor Horgan thanked Cllr and Mr Aitchison for their work on this project.
- e. NOTED update from Cllr Horgan on High Street trees project. Cllrs Horgan and Dyer had met with a business owner to discuss putting a tree outside their shop as they had previously said they did not want a tree planted there. Unfortunately, the business owner’s view had not changed, and it was therefore agreed to plant only two further trees. The overall cost of these, including planting, is £2,550 +VAT which is well within the budget of £4,000 +VAT agreed at the January meeting.

Other matters raised at the meeting as follows: -

NOTED – the Chairman will attend the Viva Awards Ceremony on 26th February in her capacity as Mayor of Soham.

NOTED – Cllr Woodbridge had sent an update on chapel repairs. The buttress on the East transept has been taken down and there is no need for underpinning as it has only suffered weather damage. The scaffolding will be erected shortly so that work can start on the repairs to the roof. This should take approximately 10 weeks, weather permitting.

180/22. PUBLIC COMMENT TIME

A resident wanted to make the Council aware that there had been a story in a national newspaper recently about a High Street tree planting scheme which had not been successful in drawing more people in to use the High Street’s amenities. The resident said that the Council should reconsider spending money on trees for the High Street in the light of this.

A resident said that Soham had been short-changed by ECDC in favour of Littleport in relation to funding available. The resident also asked if the Council would be able to report at its next meeting any bids it was putting forward to the High Street Renewal Fund as the closing date is 6th March (see item 186/22 (d) below).

Cllr Anne Pallet, speaking as a resident, said that she had gathered a group of volunteers to organise a commemorative event to celebrate HM King Charles III Coronation in May, and asked if the Council would be willing to allow the event to take place on the recreation ground, including the pavilion, free of charge. Cllr Pallett said that she felt it important that the Council be at the forefront of a community event.

181/22. COUNTY & DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORTS

NOTED – written report from District Cllr Alec Jones. Cllr Aitchison asked why ECDC persists in not putting up their portion of Council Tax as this has had a detrimental effect on the standard of services provided. Cllr Jones said that all parties had agreed not to increase it this year due

to the cost-of-living crisis. However, it was anticipated that there would be an unavoidable increase to come once all reserves had been used.

182/22. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. APPROVED unanimously – the minutes from the Full Council Meeting held 16th January 2023.
- b. NOTED – the minutes of the Finance & Policy Meeting held on 9th January 2023.
- c. APPROVED unanimously – the minutes from the Planning Meeting held on 30th January 2023.

183/22. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES.

- a. NOTED – Clerk’s Report (written). It was confirmed that the Changing Places toilet facility at Fountain Lane will be operated by a Radar Key.
- b. NOTED from the minutes of the Planning meeting – Cllr Pallett said that work carried out on a listed building on Churchgate Street had been approved and confirmed by ECDC’s Conservation Officer. However, the Conservation Officer is concerned about other issues within the Conservation Area and will be in touch in due course to discuss these.

184/22 FINANCE MATTERS

- a. APPROVED unanimously – Neighbourhood Plan (NDP) Design Guide and Housing Needs Assessment. Proposed Cllr Aitchison, seconded Cllr Warner. An early draft of the NDP has been produced and the group is working on providing evidence to support the policies within it.
- b. APPROVED by a majority – Receipts & Payments for February 2023 as advised with the agenda. Proposed Cllr Aitchison, seconded Cllr Horgan. Cllr Pallett questioned the payment for Christmas lights. This was a one-off payment due to inclement weather.
- c. NOTED – the bank reconciliation and Q1/Q2 financial reports to 30th September 2022. Since this report had been produced, many of the budgetary anomalies had been corrected. Cllr Aitchison thanked the Clerk for her work on this.
- d. APPROVED by a majority – request from Jigsaw for grant of £500 towards printing costs. Proposed Cllr Lane, seconded Cllr Warner.
- e. HM King Charles III Coronation, 6th May – Cllr Pallett asked whether it was possible to apply for funding towards a commemorative event and this was confirmed by the Chairman. The Chairman also said that the organising group can apply to have the recreation ground and pavilion free of charge, and that an application should be made for consideration at the next meeting. Cllr Pallett also asked if it would be possible for the Chairman, Vice-Chair and Clerk to meet with the organising group but this was not confirmed.

185/22 GOVERNANCE & ADMINISTRATION

- a. NOTED – January Health & Safety report from Adams Payne Safety Ltd.
- b. APPROVED unanimously – appointment of LGS Services to carry out the Council’s internal audit for the financial year 2022-2023. Proposed Cllr Aitchison, seconded Cllr Horgan.

- c. REFUSED unanimously – to offer administrative, office-based learning opportunity (work experience), but to reconsider this at the end of 2024. Proposed Cllr Johnston, seconded Cllr Aitchison.

186/22

RECREATION GROUND/PAVILION/TOWN MATTERS

- a. APPROVED unanimously – to respond to the resident’s complaint in relation to allotment charges in order to clarify that the new charge is a refundable, one-off deposit and not an increase in rent. The resident had written to the Ely Standard and the letter had been published. It was therefore proposed to also respond publicly to correct any misunderstanding. Proposed Cllr Johnston, seconded Cllr Warner.
- b. APPROVED unanimously – to respond to correspondence from resident regarding safe use of the skate park. The resident had written to say that they had suffered an injury whilst using the skatepark which they acknowledged was due to their own error of judgement. It was proposed by Cllr Johnston to thank the resident for bringing this to the Council’s attention and the proposal was seconded by Cllr Ross. It was agreed that there is sufficient health and safety signage at the skatepark, and that safety checks of the equipment are carried out regularly and any necessary repairs made.
- c. APPROVED unanimously – request for Larry Gray Funfair on recreation ground, 9th to 17th April (usual charge, £500 +VAT). Proposed Cllr Jones, seconded Cllr Warner.
- d. High Street Renewal Fund for Soham and Littleport. Cllr Aitchison proposed that the Council apply to the fund for new signage for the town to point to places such as the schools, the Town Council office, the health centre and sports centre. The signs would conform to the same design which the Council would agree. The proposal was seconded by Cllr Jones.

Cllr Horgan proposed that the Council apply to the fund to repair the churchyard wall and obtain a quotation from the contractor working on the cemetery chapel. The proposal was seconded by Cllr Ross.

Both proposals were APPROVED by a majority. The closing date for applications is 6th March.

187/22

MATTERS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Monday 13th March 2023, Walter Gidney Pavilion, 7.15pm

Brewhouse Lane play area – wall repairs.

The meeting was closed at 9:00pm.

Minutes approved and signed by the Chairman, 13th March 2023