

SOHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Soham Town Council meeting held at the Walter Gidney Pavilion recreation ground, Soham in person on Monday 13th December 2021.

Present: Cllrs E Johnston (Chairperson), D Woricker (Vice Chair), C Warner, P Lane, K Horgan, P Leonard and Mesdames A Pallett, C Simoes and R Aitchison.

Apologies: Cllrs H Ross, G Woodbridge and A Woricker.

In Attendance: CCllr/DCllr M Goldsack, DCllr A Jones and DCllr I Bovingdon.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm.

147/21 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS AND TOWN CLLR VERBAL UPDATES INCLUDED:

Cllr Johnston, along with many other councillors from STC, ECDC, CCC and higher tier authorities and members of the public, attended the opening of the new Soham railway station. This has been a long awaited and much needed and supported amenity by residents for the town.

Cllr Pallett informed the council of the most recent communications on the reduction of number and height of the CCC North Angle Solar Park mast heights. The acknowledgement of updated information was proposed by Cllr Aitchison and seconded by Cllr Warner with full council agreement.

148/21 PUBLIC COMMENT TIME

NOTED a resident made representation regarding the recent Remembrance Day Drumhead Service held on Sunday 14th November at 2pm and general Remembrance suggestions going forward.

NOTED The resident was asked by the Chair to email the statement given, for possible inclusion/reference in these minutes.

NOTED a resident made representation regarding PRO 751 (traffic calming at Townsend). Concerns included: raised zebra crossing and the controlled element at the existing crossing. Speeding in the area, the removal of the chicane, traffic matters outside of school drop off and pick up times, increase in speeding and dangerous use of the road by drivers as well as structural impact on houses along this stretch of highway. It was noted that STC (Soham Town Council) and CCC (Cambridgeshire County Councillor) M Goldsack have been copied into all correspondence on this matter.

149/21

COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORTS:

The Chairperson thanked CCllr/DCllr M Goldsack and DCllr A Jones for their reports as CCC and ECDC representatives. She did remind CCC and ECD delegates present respectfully, that STC is non-political and all reports should reflect this going forward.

These reports have been previously circulated by email to all Town Councillors and are reproduced on the Town Council's website: [County & District Cllr reports - Soham Town Council \(soham-tc.gov.uk\)](http://soham-tc.gov.uk). The Chairperson then asked members if they had any queries or questions for those CCllr and or DCllrs present.

NOTED: Cllr M Goldsack answered some of the matters mentioned in the residents' public comment time in relation to PRO 751. He had personally walked the area concerned which is populated by, a school, businesses and residential areas including the CLT and emerging Care Home development. He mentioned the use of 'stop, pause and think' scenario going forward. Cllr M Goldack will also be walking the route in January with a colleague and report back.

NOTED: Cllr Warner asked about enforcement and use of existing CCTV facilities to view these 'bad' practices by drivers. The facility is there and can be used remotely if needed by the Police. Cllr M Goldsack said he would mention this to Darrel Preston to see if he can help and send details through the Chairperson. He also highlighted Suffolk's efforts to Cllrs with links and deterrents.

NOTED: Cllr warner asked about the status of the green bin collections and requested an assurance that the collections would be reinstated. Cllr M Goldsack said that matters were being addressed and services will return as stated on 28th January 2022.

IN SESSION AND UNDER LISTED AGENDA ITEMS

150/21

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs H Ross, G Woodbridge and A Woricker.

151/21

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST TO ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

None

152/21

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 8th NOVEMBER 2021

Approved and will be duly signed by the Chairperson.

153/21

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE CURRENT AND WHERE NECESSARY PREVIOUS FULL COUNCIL MINUTES

(A) Neighbourhood Plan (Working Group)

Representatives from ACOM paid a site visit to Soham, accompanied by Soham and Barway Neighbourhood Members, for design code

purposes which is the next step that needs to be taken in this process. Several areas in Soham were visited as was Barway, Cllr Aitchison informed councillors that the Barway residents survey has revealed that they would like the hamlet to stay as it is. Therefore, no more development, river alterations etc. Cllr Aitchison also informed councillors that developments of 150 dwellings and above, are required to have more than one access point. Cllr A Pallett noted to all that it is a recommendation rather than condition.

154/21

(A) INCOME AND PAYMENTS OF ACCOUNTS MADE (FP 22/20),
STATEMENT OF BALANCES AT 30th NOVEMBER 2021.

NOTED: Cllr R Aitchison requested a Queens Jubilee budget for £7,000 and a deposit/holding payment for a large screen needed at the planned event. The deposit payment is to ensure the booking of the screen (£936.36) with the remainder to be paid in April 2022. If the event does not go ahead, we will lose this deposit only.

NOTED: That Cllr D Woricker asked Cllr R Aitchison for an outline of proposed festivities – games/activities, timeline, evening music and prayers with a national beacon lighting at 9.15pm. On Saturday there will be a beer festival and the large screen showing the Buckingham Place celebrations/party (2nd June). Cllr A Pallett proposed we agree the deposit amount (£936.36) to secure the large screen, seconded by Cllr P Leonard and unanimously agreed by full council.

NOTED: Cllr A Pallett's request for £5,000 to cover the costs of the skate park and goal post for insurance and maintenance. Cllr R Aitchison proposed the request for (£5,000), seconded by Cllr P Lane and unanimously agreed by full council.

(B) To acknowledge receipt of annual financial review. Includes currently only expenditure budget for overheads and running costs 2022-23 (as per approvals made at October 2021 meeting attached)

NOTED: Acknowledged by the raising of hands by all councillors and that this item will be revisited at our next full council meeting – either 10th or 17th January 2022, where it will be addressed in full with additional information/costs and budgets where and when applicable.

(C) To set budget and precept for Soham Town Council 2022-23 or under Chairperson's entitlement under standing orders motion to consider these matters at EOM.

Noted: The Chairperson, Cllr E Johnston reminded councillors that we have to make a decision as it needs to be before the 17th January 2022 and that we must be able to justify any raise in precept. The current rate of inflation was asked for and given along with all the details outlined by STC's Clerk in her report piece on Band D's. A long and detailed discussion between all councillors ensued. Cllr R Aitchison requested clarification on the amount on the rate demand as stated

before in the accompanying leaflet that went out with the demand. Cllr Horgan questioned the difference in the figures given in the Clerk's report and the ones we were discussing. Cllr A Pallett read out pages 27 and 28, column C of the report. Cllr C Warner challenged this and stated that we, STC, will be 'scrapping by' under current forecasts and we might fall short of our legal requirements. Cllr R Aitchison then related all the projects and things we, STC, have and will have to fund and that therefore, regrettably, we will have to increase the precept. Cllr D Woricker also stated that STC are affected by inflation rises in its efforts. The current Government inflation rate was stated as 3.8%.

Cllr R Aitchison proposed a rate raise of 4% which was seconded by Cllr P Leonard. A vote was taken and passed by majority Cllrs A Pallett (absented), C Simoes and K Horgan wished their names to be recorded as objecting to the rise. All Cllrs voted to have an accompanying leaflet and explanation sent with the ECDC rate demand, as before from STC.

155/21

PLANNING

Lead delegated councillor (A Pallett). Report was previously circulated and on our website, available at: <https://www.soham-tc.gov.uk/monthly-updater-report-planning/>

(a) Land to the rear of 81-111 Brook Street Soham (up to 80 dwellings)

Noted: Cllr A Pallett's request for approval to meeting with representatives of Pigeon Developments on 17th December at 2pm in the Pavilion with Cllr C Warner, as a working party. No decisions will be made, and a full report taken and given back to full council. Proposed by Cllr A Pallett, seconded by Cllr A Aitchison and approved unanimously by full council.

NOTED: Cllr A Pallett informed the council of Persimmons appeal in regards to their most recent portal document disputing ECDC's method of calculating the five year land supply. In that they are including lapsed developments within it.

(b) PR751 NOI noted under correspondence.

(c) PRO749 noted under correspondence.

(B) Allotments

(1) A verbal update was given by the delegated lead councillor – Cllr C Warner. He informed the council that there is a holding budget for maintenance for next year. ECDC working group is progressing with several agencies now engaged and the help given for mental well being is also positive. Cllr C Warner will be asking for help from this group in due course.

NOTED: A thank you letter has been received from Mr & Mrs Curtis who have been selected to receive a 'Pride in our Town Award' due to their long-standing commitment and work. This will be presented at our February meeting.

CCTV - NOTED: With the agreement of the delegated Lead Councillor for Community Amenities (Cllr D Woricker), Cllr C Warner updated the council on our CCTV. Cllr C Warner said that we need to have a proper protocol in place. STC's CCTV, can supply the evidence for bad practise/parking issues/vandalism etc., remotely to the Police, but can they act upon it, and can we achieve that?

(2) Soham Mobility scooter.

NOTED: That this donated item is currently being held by a local business which they no longer accommodate. Cllr E Johnston highlighted to council, who the donator was and the history behind the donation, as some councillors are new to the council and unaware of the history behind the donation. She also mentioned that The Pavilion is not suitable for continued storage of this and another scooter mentioned by Cllr C Warner; due to space constraints and unsuitability of the back hall etc. Cllr C Warner explained the issues with insurance and maintenance. Cllr C Warner therefore proposed to nominate the Staploe Social Provider to see if he/she would like the scooter(s). This was seconded by Cllr E Johnston and unanimously agreed by council.

(C) Community Amenities – Update previously circulated and placed on our website.

NOTED: Lead Delegated Councillor, Cllr D Woricker updated the council as follows:

Pavilion Phase Two Working Group - He gave thanks to all those who attended the Pavilion Working Group zoom meetings (two), and that all feedback will be reported to full council at its February meeting for discussion.

Electronic entrance gates – Cllr D Woricker then introduced Cllr C Simoes to give her update on the Recreation Ground electronic gates (project). The best option investigated seems to be a solar powered gate that also has a soft close system, which both Cllrs D Woricker and C Simoes have looked at and tested in person. The outlined cost for the gate is c.£2,500, £3,000 with installation. Comparison quotes are hard to achieve as this is a bespoke system. Cllr C Warner asked if they are code operated? Cllr D Woricker said that they are in fact programmable with override fobs if needed. A technical specification was requested by Cllr C Warner to Cllr C Simoes, so STC can read and absorb before a decision is made under the project budget. Cllr A Pallett also asked Cllr C Simoes for any 'testimonials' which would also be beneficial before a decision is made. Whilst Cllr P Lane asked if the back up battery is also secure to which Cllr D Woricker replied in the affirmative.

High Street - NOTED: That Cllr D Woricker then asked if Cllr P Leonard if he could update on his current projects. Cllr P Leonard said that all were on going and progressing well. He also highlighted the fact that two new business had opened on our High Street, which have been asking for, so we now need to make sure they are supported, or again, we could lose them.

Christmas Lights - NOTED: That there have been a raft of issues connected with the gaining, installation and use of this years Christmas Lights. A short discussion ensued of the issues around the lights and the extreme efforts of the office to bring some kind of conclusion and to get them all working together, during this years festive season. This will be an item on February's agenda for discussion and resolutions.

Pavilion Loft insulation – NOTED: Cllr K Horgan related the absence of insulation within the building. He has two quotes and a third is on its way. The approximate cost seems to be less than £5,000 and is obviously needed as soon as possible. Cllr P Leonard asked about possible grants that could be applied for and DCllr A Jones said that he would investigate via ECDC and look into this for us and report back. The council agreed they would like to see the quotes and make a decision at its next meeting.

(D) Cemetery (updates and further approvals – full council)

(1) Chapel repairs (Cllr Woodbridge)

NOTED: Cllr G Woodbridge was unable to attend and update the council in person. He rang Cllr E Johnston earlier in the day and asked that she relay his report and suggestions to council. Cllr G Woodbridge suggested that due to on going in action by contractors to finish outstanding work in relation to part of the South Chapel (Roof works) that we, as a council write a strong letter to the contractor with our concerns. Cllr D Woricker then suggested a response time. Cllr D Woricker then proposed the writing and sending of a 'strongly' worded letter from STC to the contractor with a response time being our next scheduled meeting (10th or 17th January 2022 TBD), seconded by Cllr C Warner and agreed unanimously by council.

- After the conclusion of the Delegated Leads updates for Planning, Allotments, Community Amenities and full council on the Cemetery; the Chair asked the assembled to proceed with the F&P report and updates with exclusion of the public due to the commercially sensitive nature and content of her report. This was agreed by all and therefore, the Chair suspended the meeting, then asked the public and remaining DCllrs/CCllrs to kindly depart, use the facilities if needed before hand and to have a Merry Christmas and the hope of seeing everyone healthy and happy back in the New Year. Whilst the public proceeded to leave the building, The Chair also asked if any councillors wanted to avail themselves of a comfort break before beginning. This was

declined and when the building was left to STC councillors only, the meeting was re-opened.

(E) Finance and Policy – Update previously circulated and placed on our website.

This update was given with the exclusion of public and press (see note above).

(1) Budget 2022 – 23

A first pass budget sheet was circulated to councillors at our November 2021 meeting, as an attachment. It only included running (operating costs) and overheads for the Town Council's consideration to any strategic plans or projects by delegated leads/councillors which will occur at our December meeting, where the precept will be finalised. December agenda item number – 154/21 B and C). This will be part of our 10th/17th January or February 2022 meeting (see 154/21 B)

(2) Budget – Staffing

Decision - RFO (Responsible Finance Officer)

The Clerk has continued to provide RFO duties outside her formal contract (see minute FP88/19 December 2019) when the previous RFO retired under the understanding the post would be filled within 2-3 year time frame.

NOTED: A brief discussion ensued, and a decision quickly made to advertise for an RFO. Cllr E Johnston will liaise with the Clerk and formulate advert contents, needs and hours etc. Proposed by Cllr C Warner and seconded by Cllr R Aitchison, unanimously agreed by council.

(3) Administration Staff

The possibility of an amenity officer able to undertake as part of their duties, allotment and venue management (community room and Pavilion bookings). This is to help free the office and decrease current workload of the current 2x part time FTE's staff members. A decision needs to be made/approved by full council in the matter. NOTED: All agreed on more investigation as to role, hours, job spec etc. Cllr E Johnston will liaise with the Clerk and Assistant Clerk as soon as convenient, to find requirement going forward. Proposed by Cllr E Johnston, seconded by Cllr C Warner, unanimously agreed by council.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUCNIL: Staff budget to be increased from £125000 to £141000. Proposed by Cllr R Aitchison, seconded by Cllr C Warner, approved unanimously by full council.

(4) Budget – STC website including server (hardware upgrades)

Currently under December's agenda within the financial report. NOTED: Councillors wanted to see the IT report on costs which the Chair did not have to hand. Therefore, it will come under the financial report at our next meeting for consideration. Also a short reminder was made by Cllr E Johnston on receipt of councillor bio's for input on the website.

(5) Budget HR and Employer Representation

STC has already approved the re joining of CAPALC by majority at our November meeting. We now need to determine the recommendation in the November F&P report, of the possibility to provide an independent HR person/company, in all matters including: dispute, grievance, and disciplinary.

NOTED: Cllr E Johnston was asked by the council to find suitable businesses/candidates to take on this role and with quotes and report back to council at our next meeting.

(6) Strategic Plan

For infrastructure and amenity improvements approved by this and previous councils' administrations is listed on our website and gives the council a roadmap and flexibility to add and remove but always be mindful of the benefits to Soham residents. The list is no way complete or finished and with the emergent Soham and Barway Neighbourhood Plan there are likely more projects to be added in the future. Decision/approval needed. NOTED: Cllr E Johnston was asked by council to supply strategic plans made by other local councils for information and circulate/report back at our March 2022 meeting. In the meantime, Cllr E Johnston has suggested that all councillors come up with three points or needs that should help form any strategic plan in readiness for our February meeting. These should be directed to Cllr E Johnston (STC email) for collating in readiness.

(7) Land Update

As this is commercially sensitive information, details and updates will be listed in a very concise manner below. There are two things to consider - previous minutes FP25/20.

Drayton Meadows: The ongoing and near conclusion of the purchasing of this land parcel by STC for community benefit use(s). Cllr E Johnston read out all final costs, details and the total amount provided by our solicitors and payment required to achieve exchange and completion. The payment of this with all associated costs included was proposed by Cllr E Johnston to full council and seconded by Cllr C Warner. Approved unanimously.

Hopkins/Cemetery: NOTED: The transfer information of land for cemetery use from Hopkins Homes was relayed to full council and the final costs associated will be given to councillors at a later date. A map of the site section was handed to and around to all councillors for information. Cllr E Johnston also briefly spoke about the progression of the larger cemetery site acquisition as an information update, although this too is on going with the vendor and our solicitors/Land Agent.

156/21

CORRESPONDENCE

NOTED: No comments were made or received on any of those listed.

The meeting closed at: 9.20pm – Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to everyone.