



Soham Town Council
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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 11th December 2023.

Present: Cllrs D Woricker (Chairman), E. Johnston (Vice Chair), K Horgan, A Jones, H Ross, T Chouler, R Aitchison, G Dyer, G Woodbridge and A Pallett.
M Strand, Town Clerk, M Francis, Assistant Clerk.

In attendance: District & County Cllr Mark Goldsack.
District Cllrs Lucius Vellacott & Keith Horgan.
There were 5 members of the public present.

Presentation of Pride in our Town Award to the Retained Firefighters of Soham.

Cllr David Woricker, Mayor of Soham, presented a Pride in our Town Award to Richard Powell and five members of the Retained Firefighters team in recognition of their outstanding service to the residents of Soham over many years. This was greeted with a warm round of applause by all those present.

The meeting was opened at 7:15pm.

74/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

75/23 COUNCILLORS' DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

76/23 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS & TOWN CLLR UPDATES

- a. Scout hut lease – Cllr Johnston confirmed that the Scout Hut may not be hired for private or business use due to restrictions placed on the funding received when it was built. However, this will not be included as a clause in the new lease. A meeting had been held with representatives of the Scout Group and terms of a new lease had been agreed. These can now go forward to the Council's solicitor for a lease to be drawn up.
- b. Neighbourhood Plan (NDP) Consultation – Cllr Aitchison reported that 6,000 leaflets about the consultation had been distributed to households but so far only 45 responses had been received. The responses will be evaluated once the consultation has closed on Wednesday 13th December and the NDP will be amended if

necessary. The NDP will then go to ECDC for independent examination and then to referendum, hopefully in Spring 2024. Cllr Aitchison thanked residents and Councillors who had worked very hard on putting the NDP together, and also the Clerk and Assistant Clerk for their help and support. The Chairman thanked Cllr Aitchison for all her work on this.

Other matters reported at the meeting: -

- Cllr Aitchison had attended an online training course on planning matters which had focussed on new legislation coming into force. This includes a relaxation of planning law to allow more permitted development, including change of use from retail to residential without the need for planning permission. It was reiterated that the Council must use material planning considerations and include references to the Local Plan in its response to applications.
- Cllr Woricker had attended a meeting with County Cllr Mark Goldsack and CCC Highways regarding the proposed 20mph scheme for the town. The meeting had been very positive, and the Council had been asked to conduct further public consultation on the scheme (see item 82/23h. below). Cllr Woricker thanked Cllr Goldsack for keeping the Town Council involved in the discussion of this scheme.

77/23

PUBLIC COMMENT TIME

A member of the public said that he wanted to speak to the Council on a particular subject but felt that his opinion would not be considered.

A member of the public spoke about problems with speeding on the High Street and road lining, and the proposed 20mph zone which they do not support.

78/23

COUNTY & DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORTS

The consolidated District & County Councillors' report was NOTED.

County Cllr Mark Goldsack reported the following: -

- The Local Highways Officer for East Cambs is currently behind schedule for actioning repairs but should be back on track by Christmas. Potholes and other highways issues should be reported on the online reporting system.
- CCC Highways are extremely behind schedule with road lining which is making the roads dangerous and causing a rise in inconsiderate driving and parking because of a lack of enforcement.
- Soham has been selected to trial a 'demand-led' bus service; more details to follow at a future meeting.

District Cllr Lucius Vellacott said that the Combined Authority's Local Transport Connectivity Plan had been voted through despite containing proposals for 'fiscal measures on the roads of Cambridgeshire'. Cllr Vellacott also highlighted ECDC's 'Support for Ukraine' web page.

District Cllr Horgan said that he had reported 49 potholes, all of which had been repaired. Cllr Horgan is working with officers at ECDC to update the Environmental Plan (as an amendment to the Local Plan) whilst also making it more reader-friendly and usable as a template for other authorities.

79/23

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. APPROVED by a majority (one abstention) – the minutes from the Full Council Meeting held on 13th November 2023. Proposed Cllr Chouler, seconded Cllr Johnston.
- b. NOTED – the draft minutes of the Planning Committee Meeting held on 27th November 2023.

80/23

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES.

- a. NOTED – Clerk’s Report. The Clerk updated Councillors on the Christmas lighting as several issues had arisen. Blachere Illumination UK Ltd had fitted the motifs and connected them to the commando switches and timers. However, not all motifs were lit at the correct time. Blachere and Balfour Beatty had been contacted to investigate issues with the installation and the columns’ infrastructure respectively.

It was noted that planning permission is awaited for placement of the portacabin at the pavilion.

81/23

FINANCE & GOVERNANCE MATTERS

- a. APPROVED unanimously – Receipts & Payments for December (as listed at the end of the agenda). Proposed Cllr Johnston, seconded Cllr Chouler.
- b. APPROVED unanimously – bank reconciliation and financial reports to 31st October 2023. Proposed Cllr Jones, seconded Cllr Aitchison.
- c. To consider, finalise and agree budget and precept for 2024-25. The following proposals had been made in addition to percentage increases on all running costs: -
 - Cemetery chapel repairs (including overspend on previous budget, internal decoration and soakaways) - £51,000.
 - Purchase of land - £50,000 to increase earmarked reserves.
 - Festive lighting - £15,000.
 - Community ground care (weed spraying and verges) - £20,000.
 - Additional staff - £39,000.
 - Pavilion maintenance - £10,000.
 - Electronic noticeboard - £6,500.
 - Access from Gardeners Lane to the Scout Hut - £10,000.
 - Civic and ceremonial - £5,000.
 - Defibrillator contribution - £750.00.

This would leave an overspend of £51,916 over the year which would come from the Council’s General Reserves which currently stand at £486,000.

Cllr Horgan proposed to balance the budget by not earmarking a further £50,000 for the purchase of land. However, the proposal was not seconded and therefore not taken to a vote.

Cllr Jones proposed to accept the budget with the overspend and the proposal was seconded by Cllr Woodbridge. Councillors voted 9 in favour and 1 against. CARRIED.

It was further proposed by Cllr Chouler to increase the precept by 3% to £441,334, an increase of £3.26 per annum on a Band D property. The proposal was seconded by Cllr Aitchison. Councillors voted 8 in favour and 2 against. CARRIED.

- d. APPROVED unanimously – signatories for CCLA investment account. Signatories will be Cllrs Woricker, Johnston and Dyer. The Clerk and Assistant Clerk will also be added to the account for administration purposes. Proposed Cllr Aitchison, seconded Cllr Ross.
- e. APPROVED unanimously – Rialtas year-end closedown support for 2023-24, cost £868.00 +VAT. Proposed Cllr Pallett, seconded Cllr Horgan.
- f. To consider request from the High Sherriff of Cambridgeshire for donation towards creating opportunities for young people. It was agreed to investigate how much benefit this would bring directly to the town before giving a donation.

82/23

RECREATION GROUND/PAVILION/TOWN MATTERS

- a. Soham to Wicken Cycleway – to agree Grant Funding Agreement (GFA) with CCC Highways. Cllr Woricker said that he is awaiting a written amendment to the current GFA which would share any additional cost risk associated with the project equally between Soham Town Council, ECDC and the Combined Authority. The risk of the project overrunning its budget is small given that there is already a large contingency built into the proposal. It was APPROVED unanimously for Cllr Woricker and the Clerk to sign the GFA once the appropriate amendment has been received in writing. Proposed Cllr Jones, seconded Cllr Pallett.
- b. APPROVED unanimously – to write a letter in support of Viva’s application for funding of solar panels, and to confirm that the Council’s Community Infrastructure Levy funds have been reserved for the rebuild of the rear hall at the Pavilion.
- c. To consider request from resident to set up a community orchard at the Berrycroft allotments site – It was agreed **not to** allow this because there is no access to the allotment site for the general public, and fruit trees are not allowed to be grown on allotments plots. However, Councillors agreed that a community orchard would be an asset to the town and would consider alternative locations if any became available.
- d. APPROVED unanimously – expenditure of up to £1,500 for work on acquired cemetery land. Proposed Cllr Woodbridge, seconded Cllr Jones.
- e. To consider and respond to the Weatheralls Primary School admissions consultation – Councillors had no specific comments to make regarding the proposed changes to the school’s admissions policy.
- f. APPROVED unanimously – to invite Ms Louisa Wood (Chief Operating Officer, Mereside Medical) to a meeting to discuss the future of Staploe Medical Centre. Proposed Cllr Chouler, seconded Cllr Aitchison. Cllr Ross read out answers given by Ms Wood to County Cllr Mark Goldsack in response to questions raised at the last meeting concerning current and future patient numbers, and the planning process for a new medical centre.
- g. To consider request for road closure on 2nd June 2024 for 80th anniversary of the Soham Train Explosion – this event will be arranged by members of Soham Museum and was therefore NOTED for information only.

- h. APPROVED unanimously – public consultation on proposed 20mph zone and expenditure up to £500.00. Proposed Cllr Jones, seconded Cllr Horgan. It was agreed that the Council would stand behind the results of the consultation whether for or against the scheme.

It was APPROVED unanimously to waive Standing Order 3x. and extend the meeting beyond 2 hours.

- i. APPROVED by a majority – purchase of a replacement bench in St Andrew's churchyard, cost up to £800 (subject to approval from the Diocese). Proposed Cllr Chouler, seconded Cllr Aitchison. Councillors voted 8 in favour and 2 against. CARRIED.

83/23

CORRESPONDENCE FOR INFORMATION

- a. NOTED – Viva Arts & Community Group re: Viva Family arts and Music Festival, 2nd June 2024.

84/23

MATTERS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION AND DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

- Planning Committee – Monday 18th December 1pm.
- Finance & Policy Committee – Monday 15th January 2024, 10:30am.
- Full Council – Monday 12th February, 7:15pm.
- Community Amenities – Monday 19th February, 7:15pm.

The meeting was closed at 9:20pm.