



Soham Town Council
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SOHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Presentation from RJS Corporate – Land Agent

Robert Spriddell gave a presentation on his services as a retained Land Agent. Mr Spriddell works for the Council on a retainer basis one day per month but presented options to increase this to one day per week in order to expand the services he offers. This would include general estate management (of the Council's land, buildings and other assets, project management, grant applications and contractor engagement), land acquisition and sales, and planning consultancy and response service.

Minutes of the Soham Town Council Meeting held at the Walter Gidney Pavilion, Fountain Lane, Recreation Ground, Soham, on Monday 12th February 2024.

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.

In attendance: District & County Cllr Mark Goldsack.
District Cllrs Lucius Vellacott, Ian Bovingdon & Keith Horgan.
There were 10 members of the public present.

MINUTES

The meeting was opened at 7:15pm.

84/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
None.

85/24 CO-OPTION OF COUNCILLOR

Members of the public were asked to wait outside the meeting room whilst this item of business was transacted.

- a. To consider application for co-option onto the Council from Mr Charles Warner. Mr Warner had previously served on the Council and introduced himself and answered questions from members. He then left the room while a vote by secret ballot was taken. Mr Warner was duly co-opted as a Central Ward Councillor by a majority vote and was invited to join the meeting upon signing his Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

Members of the public were invited to return to the meeting room.

86/24 COUNCILLORS' DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

87/24 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS & TOWN CLLR UPDATES

- a. Cllr Woricker reported on a positive meeting held with the Highways department regarding road lining issues in Soham. It was agreed to hold monthly meetings to review highways matters in the town in order to highlight any safety issues or other problems needing to be addressed. Reporting issues online remains the best way for residents to bring matters to Highways' attention.
- b. Coronation Committee re: return of funds from grant. Cllr Pallett said that £424.22 had been returned to the Council from funds it had granted towards the Coronation event last year. It is the Coronation Committee's wish that these funds are used towards a project which directly benefits the residents of Soham.
- c. Cllr Horgan provided a summary of a budget webinar held by Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) which he attended. Key points included: CCC Council Tax will increase by 4.99% in 2024-25, including 2% ringfenced for adult social care; CCC's total annual expenditure exceeds £1bn. A £5.6m. overspend is projected this financial year; a budget gap of £43.3m. has been forecast for 2024-25; demand for services is rising faster than available funds, compounded by inflationary pressures, and CCC needs to identify £24m. in savings annually over the next few years.

Other matters reported at the meeting: -

- Cllr Aitchison reported that 300 hedge plants had been planted this week at Drayton Meadows by the Community Payback team. The team is returning on Wednesday to clear rubbish and complete the planting.
- Cllr Woricker reported that hedge cutting along the route of the Wicken to Soham Cycleway had begun in preparation for resurfacing work to begin later this year.
- Cllr Woricker will feed back to the Combined Authority's bus strategy bus-related concerns raised in Soham, including issues with local buses and higher education buses. The Council aims to work with Highways and the Combined Authority to improve roads and public transport links for Soham residents.
- Cllr Chouler reported that bird boxes had now been installed in St Andrew's churchyard.

88/24 PUBLIC COMMENT TIME

A member of the Coronation Planning Committee said that unspent funds from the event organised last year had been returned to the Council to be used to benefit residents of Soham.

A member of the public spoke on the Eastern Gateway, specifically regarding the noise impact assessment which, they said, included serious data inconsistencies and inadequate data readings. They asked the Council to consider an item on its next agenda to resolve to either support or not support the Eastern Gateway and the new medical centre. Another member of the public also spoke on the Eastern Gateway to ask how construction vehicles would access the site without having to use Brewhouse Lane.

A member of the public spoke about the problem with litter throughout the town which, they said, is an ongoing problem particularly in the churchyard despite the Council's grounds staff's best efforts to clear it. A community wide 'Great British Spring Clean' event is being organised by Soham Community Association for Saturday 23rd March.

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COUNTY & DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORTS

District Cllr Keith Horgan had sent in a consolidated report from all District Councillors and this was NOTED. Cllr Horgan highlighted one point from his report: installation of the Changing places toilet in the Fountain Lane car park is now complete and will be of great benefit to residents and visitors to the town.

District & County Cllr Mark Goldsack gave a verbal report and answered Town Councillors' questions on the following: -

- There are plans to move the crossing at The Shade as part of the Townsend Manor development. Cllr Goldsack believes a review of the traffic calming in this location should be reviewed.
- CCC will be meeting tomorrow to discuss its budget for the ensuing financial year.
- ECDC has agreed to grant £125k for a new floodlit, all-weather, 3G pitch at Soham Village College. This will also be available for the general public to hire.

District Cllr Lucius Vellacott reported the following: -

- He is working with the CPCA to try to obtain a bus service that goes via Wicken in order to connect the village with the rest of the public transport network.
- Ely Sing! Together Choir, for those living with dementia and their carers, will soon also be operating in Soham.
- ECDC is carrying out a waste services review and has included the provision of black wheeled bins in its budget for the coming year.
- The planning application for the new medical centre has been submitted.

Cllr Ross said that This Land had not gifted part of the Eastern Gateway land for a new medical centre as they would have in return the land that the current centre stands on.

District Cllr Ian Bovingdon said that most local enquiries he receives from residents are to do with planning matters and perceived inconsistencies in the planning process.

90/24

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. APPROVED by a majority – the minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 11th December 2023. Proposed Cllr Aitchison, seconded Cllr Dyer.
- b. NOTED – the minutes of the Finance & Policy Committee Meetings held on 15th January and the draft minutes of the meeting held on 5th February 2024.
- c. NOTED – the minutes of the Planning Committee Meeting held on 18th December 2023 and the draft minutes of the meeting held on 29th January 2024.

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MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES.

- a. NOTED – Clerk's Report.

FINANCE & GOVERNANCE MATTERS

- a. APPROVED by a majority – Receipts & Payments for January/February (as listed at the end of the agenda). Proposed Cllr Johnston, seconded Cllr Horgan.
- b. APPROVED by a majority – bank reconciliation and financial reports to 31st December 2023. Proposed Cllr Woodbridge, seconded Cllr Jones.
- c. NOTED – Health & Safety Activity Report July-December 2023.
- d. APPROVED unanimously – increase of 5% in charges for Pavilion & Recreation Ground hire, including allowing community groups, the Soham Carnival and the Pumpkin Fair free hire for 2024-25. Proposed Cllr Warner, seconded Cllr Chouler.
- e. APPROVED unanimously – 5% increase in Cemetery fees and allotment rent for 2024-25. Proposed Cllr Dyer, seconded Cllr Woodbridge. The regulations regarding the interment of infants will be reviewed at the next meeting.
- f. To consider and approve Local Highways Initiative lead Councillor. Cllr Keith Horgan was nominated, and the nomination was APPROVED by a majority (2 abstentions being the current lead, Cllr Pallett, and Cllr Horgan). Proposed Cllr Jones, seconded Cllr Woodbridge.
- g. APPROVED unanimously – delegated powers to the Clerk and Assistant Clerk, in liaison with the Chairman, Vice-Chair or Chairman of Cemetery & Allotments, regarding reduction of burial fees in exceptional circumstances, up to £1,000.00 per occasion. To be reviewed in one year. Proposed Cllr Horgan, seconded Cllr Aitchison. Cllr Woodbridge requested a review of fees relating to infant interments and this will be tabled at the next meeting.

RECREATION GROUND/PAVILION/TOWN MATTERS

- a. APPROVED unanimously – Draft Neighbourhood Plan for Soham & Barway for submission to ECDC for independent examination. Proposed Cllr Woodbridge, seconded Cllr Ross. Cllr Aitchison said that all responses to the consultation had been analysed and resulting amendments made. Cllr Aitchison thanked the NDP Working Group for all their hard work on the Plan.
- b. Pavilion Phase II – to consider proposals from two architects for the rebuilding of the rear of the pavilion to provide a community space with kitchen, storage and toilet facilities, and to appoint an architect to take the project forward to submission of a planning application. Two proposals had been submitted. Cllr Horgan asked that the previous plan, which already has planning permission (granted in September 2020), also be considered on the grounds that all the reports for planning had already been carried out. However, after consideration, this was rejected by Councillors. Following discussion of the two architects' proposals and quotations, it was AGREED to appoint Andrew Fleet Architects to take Phase II of the Pavilion project forward to planning and through to build completion. Proposed Cllr Chouler, seconded Cllr Ross. Councillors voted 9 in favour and 2 against and the proposal was CARRIED. The decision was based on clearer costs and the Council's desire to use local businesses wherever possible.

- c. To consider cash offer of £25,000 for land at Guntons Close. Cllr Johnston proposed to accept the offer with the addition of asking the purchaser to pay the Council's legal fees in addition to the offer price. Councillors asked for a recorded vote as follows: In favour – Cllrs Woricker, Chouler, Dyer, Pallett, Horgan and Ross; against – Cllrs Aitchison and Woodbridge; abstained – Cllrs Johnston, Jones and Warner. The motion was CARRIED by a majority. Proposed Cllr Pallett, seconded Cllr Chouler.
- d. To consider budget for D-Day 80th anniversary commemoration - £5k to £6k – Cllrs Aitchison and Chouler. Cllr Chouler said that the focus of this event would be the civic commemoration of the 80th anniversary of D-Day with a Drumhead Service and a display of memorabilia in the Pavilion. The cost of this would be significantly less than the previously planned larger event on the recreation ground. It was agreed to defer this to the Community Amenities Committee meeting next week when a revised estimate of costs would be available.

It was APPROVED unanimously to waive Standing Order 3x. and extend the meeting beyond 2 hours. Proposed Cllr Horgan, seconded Cllr Aitchison.

- e. APPROVED unanimously – donation to the Conservation Volunteers re: provision of trees for Drayton Meadows, £150.00. Proposed Cllr Aitchison, seconded Cllr Horgan. Cllr Aitchison will pass on the Council's thanks to the Volunteers for the provision of free trees, (plus canes and guards) which have been planted in Drayton Meadows.
- f. APPROVED by a majority – quotation for urgent repairs to the boundary wall between the cemetery and Pet Doctor's, £6311.25 +VAT. Proposed Cllr Dyer seconded Cllr Woodbridge.
- g. APPROVED unanimously – request from Larry Gray Funfair for hire of the recreation ground April or July (depending on ground conditions). Usual charge £500 +VAT. It was proposed to increase the fee to £525.00 +VAT in line with the agreed rise in hire fees under item 92/24d. above. Proposed Cllr Johnston, seconded Cllr Jones.
- h. CONSIDERED and approved unanimously **not to** allow use of the recreation ground for Holi Festival (including the throwing of paint powder and paint). Cllrs agreed that the paint would be detrimental to the environment of the grounds and may also spoil other users' enjoyment of the area. It was stressed that there were no religious reasons for refusal.
- i. DEFERRED – update from meeting with Mereside Medical re: planning for new medical centre.
- j. CONSIDERED and agreed **not to** approve enhanced retained services from RJS Corporate to include Estate Management of the Council's assets at a cost of £2,166.00 +VAT per month (an increase from one day per month to one day per week). Councillors agreed that the Council should first determine which services it requires and then to obtain specific costs for these on a project-by-project basis rather than by an increased retainer.

Cllr Woodbridge left the meeting at 9:28pm.

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CORRESPONDENCE FOR INFORMATION

- a. NOTED – Viva re: thank you for supporting solar panel application.
- b. NOTED – Resident volunteer re: thank you for recreation ground Christmas tree.

95/24

MATTERS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION AND DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

- Community Amenities – Monday 19th February, 7:15pm.
- Planning Committee – Monday 26th February, 1pm.
- Finance & Policy Committee – Monday 4th March, 10:30am.
- Full Council – Monday 11th March, 7:15pm.

The meeting was closed at 9:31pm.