

# COUNCIL



**19 SEPTEMBER 2013 - 4:00 PM**

**PRESENT:** Councillor G G R Booth, Councillor D Broker, Councillor M G Bucknor, Councillor Mrs V M Bucknor, Councillor T R Butcher, Councillor J F Clark, Councillor D W Connor, Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor Mrs C R Cox, Councillor M J Curtis (from 5pm), Councillor J R Farmer, Councillor Mrs J French, Councillor S Garratt, Councillor P Hatton, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor B M Keane, Councillor S J E King, Councillor K G Mayor, Councillor Mrs K F Mayor, Councillor A K Melton, Councillor A Miscandlon, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor Mrs F S Newell, Councillor D C Oliver, Councillor C C Owen, Councillor D R Patrick, Councillor T E W Quince, Councillor C J Seaton, Councillor R Skoulding, Councillor W Sutton, Councillor G Swan, Councillor P A Tunley, Councillor F H Yeulett.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor M I Archer, Councillor M F J Cotterell, Councillor D Hodgson, Councillor M J Humphrey, Councillor P Jolley, Councillor D Stebbing

**24/13      TO SIGN AND CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 25 JULY 2013**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of 25 July 2013 were agreed and signed subject to the following amendments:

- **Apologies to include Councillor Patrick;**
- **Minute 16/13 to read that the additional £10,000 had come to an end and not from another source.**

**25/13      CIVIC ENGAGEMENTS UPDATE - INFORMATION ITEM**

Councillor Mayor informed Members of the number of civic activities undertaken by himself and the Vice Chairman in the weeks preceding full Council.

**26/13      TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AND/OR THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE.**

**Membership of Committees and Panels** - The Chairman informed Members that written confirmation had been received from Councillors Booth and Patrick stating that Councillor Patrick remains aligned to the Liberal Democrat Group. As such the report on the Membership of Committees and Panels can be withdrawn, as political proportionality remains unchanged.

Councillor Owen asked for clarification with regard to the Liberal Democrat Group to which Councillor Booth responded stating that the group was called Liberal Democrat Alliance, which consisted of two independent Members and one Liberal Democrat (Councillors Archer and Patrick as Independent Members).

**Statement in relation to the A14** - The Chairman stated he had been asked by the Leader to include an additional item to the agenda as he wished to make a statement in relation to the A14.

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Councillor Booth proposed that questions be asked following the item to which Councillor Melton responded stating he was prepared to take questions on this item.

**Twining** - The Chairman informed Members that the Nettetal Twining visit to Fenland will take place between 19 - 14 June 2014, with further announcements to be made closer to the time.

**Bruce Wegg Memorial Concert** - The Chairman informed Members that a Memorial Concert for Bruce Wegg, who was a well respected long serving Member of this Council, would take place on Sunday 13 October 2013 at 2.30pm at St Peter and St Pauls Church, Wisbech and he hoped that Members would attend.

**Chairman's Coffee Morning** - The Chairman reminded Members that the Chairman's annual coffee morning would take place on 27 September at 9:30am in the Council and is held in aid of MacMillan Cancer Research, all Members are welcome to attend.

**Councillor Cotterell** - Councillor Melton informed Members that Councillor Cotterell had made some improvement this week and it was hoped that he would soon be transferred to North Cambs hospital and on behalf of Council sent their best wishes.

**27/13**      **TO RECEIVE QUESTIONS FROM, AND PROVIDE ANSWERS TO, COUNCILLORS IN RELATION TO MATTERS WHICH, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIRMAN, ACCORD WITH THE PROVISIONS OF PROCEDURE RULES 8.4 AND 8.6.**

Councillor Booth asked the Leader:

- Had the Leader met with the MP that had visited the area last week to look at the A47 to raise the concerns of Fenland District Council to which Councillor Melton responded that he had not but had attended a meeting on behalf of Fenland which had included representation from Peterborough, Yarmouth and Lowestoft. Good discussions had taken place and it was agreed that the Government would put monies into the A47, which resulted in medium and short term plans. Short term included the A47 junctions, bypass and crossroads in the next three or four years. Long term included the Guyhirn to Wisbech road which was the most difficult.
- The press had reported that Philip Hammond had recognised that the A47 was one of the top 10 areas to be looked into; what were the timescales to deliver these initiatives to which Councillor Butcher stated that short term would be in the next few years and the government has put aside £3.5 billion for infrastructure albeit not all of this was for the A47 but that it was a priority for the government.

**28/13**      **TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM AND ASK QUESTIONS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH PORTFOLIO HOLDER RESPONSIBILITIES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULES 8.1 AND 8.2.**

Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked the Leader the following:

- **Rainbow Savers LEP Bid** - If any of us in this room today are given a cheque we just pay it into our bank accounts and there's an end to it yet many people in Fenland are under zero contacts and paid by cheque; many do not have bank accounts. They are forced to go to one of the payday loan companies to cash their cheques for which they are charged - a £250 cheque would cost £26. If they had a Rainbow Savers credit union account it could be loaded onto their debit card at no charge. Fenland operates two Rainbow Savers credit unions with volunteers in Wisbech and very much appreciate the administration support from Fenland District Council. The Government has given additional funding towards

supporting Credit Unions through the Local Enterprise Partnership/European Social Fund. Anglia Rainbow Savers will be submitting a match-funding bid to seek to secure a shop in the heart of Wisbech for six years. There are other groups also competing for the same funding for their credit unions. Will the Council lend its weight and support (no financial commitment) to this bid and would they liaise with Cambridgeshire County Council to seek their support. Banks will not usually lend under £1,000 but Barclays have agreed nationwide to promote credit unions and leaflets will be placed in all Wisbech banks that are supportive. Councillor Melton responded stating that Fenland would be proactive with any bid made under the European Social Fund and representation will be made by the overarching committee of the Leaders Board where Councillor Melton is a member;

- **Mount Pleasant Chapel** - Which Cabinet Member was responsible for the feasibility of Mount Pleasant Chapel which has gone into Wisbech 20/20 as many residents wish to have a meeting to discuss making the Chapel multi purpose and it would be beneficial if the Member responsible would attend the meeting. Is it proposed that following the investigation of Fenland's property assets in Wisbech and given that the chapel has been neglected for many years, it will be disposed of to a property developer? Why has this not gone to Cabinet? Councillor Melton stated that it was Councillor Jolley who was responsible for the investigation of assets; this is yet to be looked at and a decision considered but thus far no decision had been made with regard to the Chapel and with regard to meeting with residents, this will be carried out by either himself and/or a senior colleague where the information you require will be given and any questions answered;
- **Wisbech Court House** - Updates on Wisbech Court House have not been forthcoming for the last two years, yet went to Cabinet recently as a confidential item to which has now been called in by Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Where is the accountability and transparency regarding this property; will Members be provided with the relevant information. To which Councillor Seaton responded stating it was not the intention to make this secret but Fenland is in a sensitive position due to another negotiation that is part and parcel of this and gave the following statement: 'Fenland is working closely with key partners regarding the future of Wisbech Courthouse, however due to these discussions not yet being finalised, are unable to offer any further details at this time. As soon as further information is available this will be communicated to all parties via a press release.' Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated she appreciated that further negotiations were ongoing but it does appear that possible options are being looked at regarding alternative uses for the Court House and this should be open and transparent to which Councillor Seaton responded stating this was nothing to do with the usage of the Court House, just part of an overall picture;
- **Jasmine Close** - Councillor Patrick asked if the two benches in Jasmine Close would be replaced within the next financial year to which Councillor Melton responded stated that there was no reason why a bid cannot be made in the forthcoming round for any further improvements to parks in that area;
- **Freedom of Information Request** - Councillor Patrick asked if the Leader
  - In light of a recent Freedom of Information Request, if he would consider an investigation by the Council's Legal Department of the matter of Viv Salisbury and his continued press attacks on this authority in relationship to the closure of the Palace Bar at Chatteris?
  - If he would please request that the Legal Department examine emails and correspondence between Fenland Council, Mick Gipp (the Safer Fenland Manager) and especially those which mention the name of Councillor John Chambers, Chairman of this Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panel?
  - If he agree that in an email sent by Councillor Owen in 2010 (then Chairman of the Licensing Committee) that his statement that "I have just had a call from Councillor Chambers regarding The Palace and Mr Salisbury in particular" alleging that Mr Salisbury was serving drinks after hours (the times of 3:30am were mentioned) it ought to have been mentioned by Councillor Chambers that he had direct personal

involvement in the Palace as the main contractor for the refurbishment of the building earlier that year?

- If would confirm what costs this Council has incurred during the ongoing issues with Mr Salisbury?
  - If he would agree that the question posed by Councillor Owen (Is Mr Salisbury having a laugh at the Council and police or what?) is inappropriate comment by the Chairman of this authority?
  - If he was aware that an independent police investigation - and seen by the Police Commissioner Sir Graham Bright - exonerated Mr Salisbury of any wrong doing?
  - If he agreed that the final sentence of Councillor Owen's email (can these actions by everyone be co-ordinated and Councillor Chambers and I be kept in the loop) was again inappropriate given the previously asserted and potential conflict of interest concerning Councillor Chambers and Mr Salisbury?
- Councillor Melton responded stating that he would ask the Legal Officers to prepare a report for him.
  - Councillor Booth congratulated the benefits team on their recent performance;
  - Councillor Booth raised concern with regard to the Contact Centre only answering half of all calls within 20 seconds, as this has been raised previously where he was informed this performance would improve, yet it has deteriorated by a further 10%, are there any assurances this would improve to which Councillor Melton stated that every step was currently being taken to improve this performance and was already on an upward path;
  - Councillor Booth asked, regarding the Fenland Community Safety Partnership taking on challenges and supporting Children and Young People; when this would be delivered and what would it consist of; when would an action plan be developed to which Councillor Oliver responded stating that the action plan was currently being update;
  - Councillor Mrs French explained to Councillor King that March Town Council had worked with the police, building contractor, conservation officer and the new owners (who have set the monies aside) with regard to the demolition of a property in the Old Market Square. The Police Liaison Officer was satisfied it could be demolished and a fence erected, unfortunately the planning department have asked for an eight foot fence which is totally unreasonable. This property is used by drug users and suggested that a site inspection with planners take place to see if this could be rectified before someone gets injured. Councillor King stated he understood the issue is whether the building is worth saving and suggested a visit with Alison Callaby from planning, the conservation officer, Councillor Owen and Councillor Skoulding as soon as possible to find a way forward and whether building control is relevant;
  - Councillor Mrs French stated she understood that a new cross Council project had been formed with the aim of tackling hot spot areas across Fenland and that Councillors Murphy, Oliver, King with Richard Cassidy and Gary Garford were on board; when was this likely to be communicated to Members. Councillor King responded stating that a walk around the market towns had taken place to identify areas of concern and they were now in the process of prioritising actions; once these actions are developed they will then be shared with Councillors. Councillor Mrs French stated that Members of the Town Council should have been involved to which Councillor King responded stating that it would have been difficult to invite all Town Councillors as the visit need to be carried out quickly and was primarily a scoping exercise. The next stage would be shared with both District and Town Members; there was not an intention to exclude anyone;
  - Councillor Mrs French thanked Councillor Murphy and all those involved for kick starting the West End Park house and would now like to restart Friends of West End and spend the money left in the kitty;
  - Councillor Mrs French stated that over the last few years that Whittlesey, Chatteris and Wisbech have had vast amounts of money spent on their leisure centres but when would

the March Leisure Centre be updated to which Councillor Melton responded stating that himself, Councillor Jolley, Seaton, Garratt and officers had met regarding the future of the Leisure Centre in March and had instructed officers to come up with a scheme and business plan. The upgrade would be a full refurbishment whilst retaining the pool although the costs or details of funding are not yet known but the monies would be in the forthcoming capital programme;

- Councillor Mrs French stated she had informed Councillor Melton that Section 106 monies could be included and was disappointed this had not been taken forward to which Councillor Melton responded stating he had attended a briefing which had included Section 106 and CIL monies and that the Council would be working together in partnership to do this;
- Councillor Skoulding congratulated the Leader on his new job and asked if he thought that he should now take a drop in his allowance to which Councillor Melton responded thanking both Councillors Skoulding and Connor for asking and that two years previously he had made it quite clear that he was leaving the County Council and gave up his role in Europe and made enquiries into moving back into his old business to which he was offered the opportunity to do consultancy work. Councillor Melton stated that his Fenland career had not suffered and made it clear that when the allowances were set they were endorsed by his group and unanimously by Council and at the last group meeting it was made clear this would be reviewed again in November 2015. Councillor Booth raised a point of clarification that Council had not voted unanimously for the increase; infact the whole of the opposition had said it was not appropriate. Councillor Melton stated the Conservative group had put in place what had been agreed to which Councillor Booth stated that Councillor Melton was getting his timelines mixed up because at the first meeting of the Council it was proposed that the opposition leaders' allowance would be reduced as there were three groups; then in 2011 the Members' Allowance committee was set up and recommended an increase to allowances to which the opposition disagreed. Councillor Melton stated it was accepted by the Council;
- Councillor Owen stated he had received several calls regarding the former Minstrels building in March as it appeared that the wall at the third floor window was concaved out and from a distance looked about to collapse, to which he had called building control who were satisfied with the building. The northern end of the building is cracked and if that collapses and someone is hurt what responsibility will the Council have if action has not been taken. Councillor King responded thanking Councillor Owen for bringing the building to his attention and stated he would ask the legal department as to what the Council's responsibility is and would add the building to the at risk list. Councillor Mrs French added that the building was already registered at risk;
- Councillor Mrs Bucknor raised concern at the amount of Discretionary House Payments that had already been paid out and how many were now losing their homes due to the bedroom tax; will the Council receive further support from the government or liaise with Roddons regarding these problems to which Councillor Melton stated he could not answer this as he did not have the facts but would come back to Councillor Mrs Bucknor once he had received them. Councillor Mrs Bucknor suggested it may be useful to liaise with Roddons for other options;
- Councillor Booth asked if the success within Fenland regarding the Anglia in Bloom would be promoted further to which Councillor Murphy stated that as much promotion is taken out as possible, including online and in the papers. Councillor Mrs Bucknor added that the Wisbech in bloom results were fantastic and stated that the Council would like to thank Bob Ollier and his team for their hard work. Councillor Murphy stated this was the best In Bloom year yet and gave his thanks to all volunteers that had worked so hard;
- Councillor Mrs Mayor stated she supported Councillor Mrs French with regard to the Streets Ahead Project Group and that Town Councillors should have been asked to support it. Councillor King responded stating he apologised if anyone felt excluded and there were plans to include parish and town councillors but some buildings were very dilapidated and motivation was the speed behind visits of which action will come from.

**29/13            MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS**

This item was withdrawn, as previously agreed.

**30/13            STATEMENT IN RELATION TO THE A14**

Councillor Melton gave the following statement:

For the past 40 years successive Leaders of successive administrations have complained, lobbied and sought major improvements to the basic infrastructure of Fenland (the north of Cambridgeshire). Successive partnerships under all governments have argued for and been promised greater accessibility to the Fens. There were some initiatives, such as the Fen roads, but with the demise of the rail network, notably the line between Wisbech and March, accessibility has been severely limited, even the reluctance of rail companies to increase the stopping times at Whittlesey and Manea have been to the detriment of Fenland.

However, today I can announce new initiatives that will greatly improve the accessibility of Fenland and over the long term vastly improve opportunities for business, wealth creation and general mobility.

I shall shortly be submitting a paper to Cabinet, confirming that Fenland District Council will be joining with our partners, Cambridgeshire County Council, The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Enterprise Partnership and all of the shire districts in Cambridgeshire, as well as Cambridge City and Peterborough City in helping to fund the improvements to the A14 Girton and Ellington. (The stretch between Huntingdon and Cambridge.) This much congested route is restraining economic development in Cambridgeshire, including Fenland. Fenland will greatly benefit from an improved A14. The emerging Enterprise Park at Alconbury will provide thousands of jobs; not just for Huntingdonshire but Fenland also, a greater super charged economy around Cambridge and Peterborough will have a significant effect on the economic prospects of Fenland. We must not under estimate the potential for our district. Of course, we shall have to make a contribution, and our contribution will be £800,000 spread over 25 years, (£32,000pa), with the first payment falling due in the fiscal year 2019/2020. This is an interest free loan supported by the treasury and is guaranteed not to increase at any time!

So what do we get for our £800,000?

Firstly, we have a commitment from Cambridgeshire County Council that we will not be required to contribute to the Kings Dyke Crossing at Whittlesey, originally we were expected to contribute £1million, which we have had to fund, either by using our reserves or by borrowing over a 30 year period and in both instances, paying commercial rates of interest.

Secondly, for the first time in my local government career, a senior government minister has committed to support the duelling of the A47, complete from Great Yarmouth to the Midlands. He even, at last, mentioned Wisbech and Guyhirn. The opportunity to connect the north of Fenland with Peterborough road network and the improved A14 has momentous potential.

With the imminent Ely southern by-pass, suddenly, investing in Fenland is an attractive proposition. Of course, the free movement of business, people and goods within Fenland will have to improve, so in turn, the debate of improvements to the rail network will have to be turned up a notch! With more people living in more houses, more people will still need to commute between out market towns and our neighbouring cities.

But, I am not satisfied! As you will know, I run a business based in Lincolnshire and I have witnessed the improvement and opportunities for business and commerce in South Holland, the new A16 link between Spalding and Peterborough has resulted in the planning and building of major commercial parks, including conference centres, hotels and restaurants. The area is buzzing! That is why, now is the time to seriously plan a by-pass for Whittlesey. It is no good improving Kings Dyke, just to encourage more traffic through Whittlesey town. Highway planners have to get real and recognise this without delay. Completion of a new A605 would mean the opportunity for massive business expansion in Whittlesey and March, Magna Park can be brought forward, the expansion of Hostmoor to the western side of the A141 could be moved forward, which would provide the much needed roundabout. Business parks can be planned at either end of the A605. All of this increasing economic activity will generate a bonus in business rates, of which Fenland will retain 50%. This in turn will fund the expansion in infrastructure.

The next steps are:

- Presentation to Cabinet
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee to examine proposals, calling key stakeholder witnesses
- Return to Cabinet with any amendments
- Ratification by Full Council

Mr Chairman, never before has a Leader of this Council been able to make such a positive statement in relation to the infrastructure of Fenland.

I commend this Statement to the Council.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

Councillor Sutton stated the fact that the original sum of £1million had been reduced to £800,000 is credit to the recent Finance Portfolio, Councillor Clark.

Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated she was amazed with the statement given by Councillor Melton as she was unaware that any business in the transport world supported this as it would be a toll road and could not see how it would possibly benefit the people or businesses of Fenland to which Councillor Melton stated that businesses did support the road; Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that they did, but not as a toll road. Councillor Melton stated that in principle it would benefit Fenland; there are high levels of traffic in Chatteris and Mill Hill en route to Cambridge and it would not be viable to increase development within Fenland and expect the traffic to go through Whittlesey which is why there is a need for a Whittlesey bypass.

Councillor Curtis apologised for arriving late and stated:

- He had attended a meeting with John Bridge from the Chamber of Commerce who had stated that they were extremely supportive of the A14 and whilst opposed to this being a toll road, understood the need for it to be a toll road;
- He had spoken to businesses within Cambridge who have also said that that the A14 was vital, whilst hauliers from Fenland had stated the A14 was extremely important too;
- The Government had agreed the A47 should be one of six roads reviewed and included the whole stretch of the A47. A study of viability regarding the March to Wisbech railway was being looked into as these links were currently not adequate;
- Cambridge City was valuable to the Government who are producing an agenda to start the economy moving and reach its full potential; in turn this would have a ripple effect around the district;
- The whole county would benefit from the A14.

Councillor Booth stated he had reservations regarding the announcement from Councillor Melton; it appears a deal has been made where Fenland is in a better situation if contributions towards Kings Dyke have been offset, however, is concerned about what has been received in writing and what will happen in the future. The A47 sounds good but there could be changes in government and policy and therefore how does Fenland protect its position to ensure the upgrade takes place? Fenland has committed to making a contribution before these decisions have been made and these could change therefore how does Fenland ensure it receives the maximum amount from this as soon as possible? Fenland together with County need to take forward and agree a policy regarding the A605 otherwise there is chance this could fall by the wayside. Councillor Melton stated that once this decision has gone to Cabinet then it would be open to scrutiny.

Councillor Bucknor stated that Cambridge City economy was booming which would have a ripple effect but that Wisbech was not affected by this. He asked for Councillor Melton's views about the A14 becoming a toll road. Councillor Melton responded stating that he believed in toll roads but would expect road tax and petrol to be reduced in turn. Councillor Bucknor agreed with Councillor Melton but stated that tolls are not normally cheap and therefore would not add to the economy of the transport companies using the toll. Councillor Melton stated infrastructure was needed and every government had cut capital expenditure on infrastructure; this was part of a £1.5million project and county cannot afford to upgrade all the roads therefore this was the only way forward. Councillor Melton stated he was very proud that Fenland was prepared to invest in a project that would have a significant effect on the whole of Fenland. Councillor Bucknor stated that the whole of Fenland needs to be looked at to which Councillor Melton explained his statement has included all parts of the district, including roads and railway network; there is a need to demonstrate to the government that with the growth of Fenland infrastructure is needed.

Councillor Patrick stated that French tolls were expensive and this leads to other roads being used; this was not a situation that Fenland would want to be in. Councillor Melton stated there would be measures in place for this not to happen.

Councillor Sutton stated Councillor Clark had worked hard for the reduction which would benefit three of the market towns.

Councillor Curtis stated he was working hard regarding infrastructure for Wisbech and that Cambridge's economy would benefit the whole district but Wisbech would struggle the most which was why he was pushing the rail link issue. Regarding tolling, it would be preferable to not have tolling but the government have made it clear that the only way of funding is through tolling although representation can be made into the consultation. The government are aware there is a need to have a clear model of funding that will be used, £1.50 per car and £3 per lorry and this needs to be index linked with assurances that it will not raise.

Councillor Melton reiterated that he had attended a meeting where it was spelt out that it would be a toll road or no road. Greater emphasis was also made regarding the A47 which Cambridgeshire County Council are fighting for.