

CABINET



MONDAY, 19 MAY 2025 - 2.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor C Boden (Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman), Councillor G Christy, Councillor S Count, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor S Imafidon, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor S Tierney and Councillor S Wallwork

CAB72/24 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 14 and 24 March 2025 were approved and signed.

CAB73/24 SHARED PROSPERITY FUNDS - TRANSITIONAL FUNDING

Members considered funding from the CPCA for a period of one year to fund Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) projects presented by Councillor Count.

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

- Councillor Tierney expressed the opinion that going forward, as it might be too late now to do anything this time, it would be nice if there are grants like this or helping businesses in the future that the Council could build into the conditions that they undertake a little bit of publicity about what they did with the money so it shows residents what their taxpayer funds are being used on and it would be good to showcase some of the positive ways that businesses are helped with this funding.
- Councillor Boden stated that it is unlikely that there will be any further SPF after 2025/26 but as far as 2025/26 is concerned it may not be too late and suggested that Councillor Tierney asks officers to see if something can be actioned along these lines.
- Councillor Mrs Laws agreed with the comments of Councillor Tierney so frequently the Council does hear of good messages and good reports and she feels the Council is poor in promoting what has been undertaken and how taxpayers money is spent and she welcomes any promotional work.
- Councillor Count thanked members for their valuable contributions and he will pursue this along with Councillor Tierney as Portfolio Holder for Media.

Proposed by Councillor Count, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED to accept Shared Prosperity Funding from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority for a one-year period 2025-26.

CAB74/24 GROUNDS AVENUE DEVELOPMENT AND LEASE TO SUPPORT HOUSING DUTIES

Members considered a proposal to commission Cornerstone Place to develop land at Grounds Avenue, March and enter relevant legal documentation to lease the land to a Registered Provider (RP) for 125 years with the Council providing directly the required management and support to residents in the properties presented by Councillor Hoy.

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

- Councillor Tierney requested clarification on who would use these properties? Councillor Hoy responded that they would be for local housing need, for a local person who is made homeless to avoid them being placed in a hotel which is costly and not for asylum seekers.

Proposed by Councillor Hoy, seconded by Councillor Count and AGREED to delegate to the Section 151 and Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Portfolio holder for Housing and the Leader to:

- **enter into agreement with Cornerstone Place to develop the Grounds Avenue site to provide 12 properties to support the housing duties;**
- **enter into a 125-year lease with an RP for the land;**
- **enter into a management lease with the RP to enable the Council to control the nominations into and undertake the management and support responsibilities; and**
- **allocate at-risk costs of circa £92k dependent on a planning permission, securing a RP and the relevant grant funding and private finance, all to be refunded at funds drawdown.**

(Councillor Mrs French declared that she is a member of Planning Committee and took no part in the discussion and voting thereon)

CAB75/24 DECISION TO ENTER A CONTRACT THROUGH THE FOOTBALL FOUNDATIONS PLAYZONES FRAMEWORK TO CONSTRUCT PLAYZONES AT BARTON ROAD AND MANOR FIELD

Members considered supportive match funding for Playzone projects in Whittlesey and Wisbech presented by Councillor Boden.

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

- Councillor Hoy expressed concern with the Barton Road scheme as she was told by the previous portfolio holder that the Wisbech Park scheme is not suitable but that is contradictory to what the report says because the report is clear that a scheme is viable there. She feels Wisbech Park is a great location given that it is in the centre of town and a lot of people in the area do not have access to transport, with in the deprived areas there being a reliance on walking. Councillor Hoy stated that her concern with Barton Road scheme is that it is out of town and how will people access it and also that there was a lot of objections to when the secondary school was proposed in this area, she is not sure if there has to be a planning application for Playzones, but if it does there could be problems in the planning process for the Barton Road scheme. She requested that members think about which of the two Wisbech schemes progressed first rather than necessarily naming one of them.
- Councillor Boden made the point that matter for consideration before members today is to consider the offer of financial support for these two specific schemes and whilst there were originally five schemes put forward to the Football Foundation, it has decided that these two should be the first ones. He added that it is not to say that the other three do not qualify, it is merely that in making their decision these are the two they decided to put forward first and they have not given the Council the option to say that the choices can be swapped and it is a case of accepting it or not accepting it. Councillor Boden felt that Councillor Hoy would be favourable to accepting the money for Wisbech rather than not accepting it, noting that Barton Road is in Wisbech town itself regardless of what some people may think in the locality and the Council is not the one who made the choice about which sites to go with first and part of the proposal coming forward is asking that Cabinet to agree that further bids should be supported to the Football Foundation for a Playzone facility in Wisbech Park and a location in March or Chatteris.
- Councillor Tierney agreed with the comments of Councillor Hoy, he does not have any problem with the Barton Road scheme and is not sure the residents will be as upset about this as they were about a school but he does think Wisbech Park is a far better location and although it cannot be changed it is a big mistake.
- Councillor Mrs French expressed her disappointment that Estover was not chosen in the first place and she was told by the previous portfolio holder last week that it had been discounted totally. She stated that she has received an e-mail from the Netball Association,

which outlines what the youth of March do and March Town Council has agreed to give Estover £80,000 per year over the next 3 years. Councillor Boden reiterated that a recommendation will be coming forward about whether to support further bids to the Football Foundation including for a location in March, with the most obvious location being Estover.

- Councillor Count stated that he has received the e-mail from the Netball Association which he has replied to today with a holding response whilst he looks into the matter further. He expressed concern that an application was submitted for a Playzone and that has been rejected because it is 2 metres too big to use as a netball facility but in the Cabinet report it says that Estover has been turned down because they are considering another facility. Councillor Count questioned whether when the paper was written was something else to be undertaken with the netball courts instead or is there something else being proposed for Estover in which case could there be an update to all Cabinet members after the meeting or if not what does the paper actually mean by they are considering an alternative facility at Estover? Councillor Boden stated that to his knowledge nothing has been ruled out for the future, there may need to be an amendment to a proposal made but all five sites were made available for the Football Foundation to consider and it was for them to make the decision about which ones it moved forwards so depending upon what is agreed at the recommendation a location in March will continue to be put forward and as far as he is aware this will continue to be Estover, if it turns out that another one is appropriate March members will be made aware of this and it will be subject to Cabinet debate before anything is actually put forward.
- Councillor Mrs French expressed her belief that the other facility is a 3G pitch.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Seaton and AGREED to:

- **note the report and the benefits that the development of PlayZones in Fenland will offer, namely;**
 - **increasing community physical activity levels and subsequently community health**
 - **encouraging under-represented groups such as women and girls, disabled people and older people to become more physically active**
 - **supporting a reduction in anti-social behaviour**
 - **supporting community cohesion;**
- **note the General Fund Budget Estimates and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Report, agreed by Cabinet and Council in February, which projects a financial shortfall for 2025/26 of £1.432m increasing year on year amounting to around £3.4m by 2027/28. Although there are currently many uncertainties regarding the budget for 2025/26 and the MTFS, there remains a significant structural deficit which the Council will need to address. Any additional costs for items not already included in the budget will incur additional revenue costs of circa. £81k p.a. for every additional £1m required based on an assumed 30 year borrowing profile;**
- **provide the necessary match funding requirement of £80,925.29 for the Manor Field facility and the match funding requirement of £74,988.99 for the Barton Road facility;**
- **identify that this project is a capital project as the original PlayZone report was dated November 2024;**
- **delegate authority to the Corporate Director, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Environment and Leisure and the Leader of the Council in his capacity as Portfolio Holder for Finance to develop the PlayZones as required in paragraph 3.3, through the Football Foundation PlayZones Framework and to award, mobilise and implement such proposal with further authority to take all reasonable ancillary actions to ensure implementation;**
- **authorise the Monitoring Officer to execute and complete all requisite legal documentation in relation to the matters outlined above; and**
- **to support further bids to the Football Foundation for a PlayZone facility in Wisbech Park and a location in March or Chatteris and instructs officers accordingly, noting**

that any successful funding for two facilities will also be likely to require match funding from the Council in the region of £80,000 per facility if other funders decline to support the projects.

(Councillor Mrs French declared that she is a member of Planning Committee and took no part in the voting thereon)

CAB76/24 WHITTLESEY RELIEF ROAD PROJECT

Members acknowledged the completed Whittlesey Relief Road Strategic Outline Business Case (SOC) and its recommendations and consideration of the next steps to source funding for the completion of further, more detailed work presented by Councillor Seaton.

Councillor Boden drew members attention to a slight revision to the final recommendation of the report, which was agreed by members.

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

- Councillor Mrs Laws stated that she supports the recommendations as she feels it is essential to move forward as increase in traffic is happening daily, especially HGVs, and it needs to be recognised that if growth and economy are required to open up Fenland then improvement is needed to the road structure between the west to the east. She added that a lot of work has gone into this, thanking both the consultants and particularly Belinda Pedlar who is to be applauded on how she has kept all members of the group involved, up-to-date and it has been a positive and worthwhile exercise.
- Councillor Tierney endorsed the comments of Councillor Mrs Laws as members need to support all of Fenland, this is a great start and good news but there is a lot of work to be undertaken.
- Councillor Count expressed the opinion that the most you can do to achieve economic growth is strategic interventions, it is not grant funding or skills, it is strategic interventions that means that people, goods and information can get around the District better so he is very much in support of this and looks forward to the SOC being advanced and getting the relief road built.
- Councillor Boden stated that the SOC did not show at this time there was value for money in the proposal as it currently stands, however, there is the possibility that the number can change if the proposal is changed and additionally the cost benefit ratio is no longer the be all or end all for a decision about whether something should or should not go ahead. He feels it has been an extremely valuable exercise and he shares Councillor Mrs Laws comments about thanking Belinda Pedlar in particular for the amount of hard work that has been put in over a long period of time. Councillor Boden stated that officers are being asked to explore alternative potential approaches to securing the £220,000 required and his suggestion is to firstly speak to the newly elected Mayor of the Combined Authority. He stated that in relation to the slightly amended recommendation, it is important that the conclusion that was reached concerning the increasing unviability and unsustainability of the traffic situation in the centre of Whittlesey that this matter is brought before the Planning Committee whenever it is appropriate so that it can be one of the considerations which is taken into account both by officers in making their recommendations and by members in making their decisions on future significant planning applications.
- Councillor Mrs French made the point that with regard to the road it would be a County Council planning application and not a Fenland District Council one. Councillor Boden responded that it is a long way from that at this stage and what is being discussed is additional funding to expand the SOC after which there would be an Outline Business Case and a few stages until the planning process is reached.
- Councillor Mrs Laws expressed the view that she does not think there is any harm in engaging with County Council to inform them where this Council is with the southern relief road and also to put this advisory note in. Councillor Boden responded that he was planning

to do this on a personal basis as the local county councillor for the area in a very public way.

Proposed by Councillor Seaton, seconded by Councillor Boden and AGREED to:

- **note the report and its recommendations;**
- **support in principle the proposal for further work to refine the scheme and assess further benefits;**
- **ask Officers to explore alternative potential approaches to source the £220,000 required to complete the work recommended in the Whittlesey Relief Road Strategic Outline Business Case (SOC); and**
- **bring to the attention of the Planning Team the wording of paragraph 2.2 of the Agenda Report and request that officers include this conclusion of the SOC and take this into account within officer reports for any applications of 20+ houses and any significant commercial developments in Whittlesey, Eastrea and Coates.**

CAB77/24 FENLAND FUTURE LTD - APPOINTMENT OF DIRECTOR

Members considered approval of the appointment of a new Director to fill a vacancy on the board of Fenland Future Limited (FFL) presented by Councillor Boden.

Members conveyed their thanks to Mark Saunders for his years of service to the Council and that he will be sadly missed.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs Laws and AGREED to the appointment of Sian Warren to the Board of FFL and delegate to the Company Secretary all necessary arrangements to make his happen.

(Sian Warren left the room whilst this item was being discussed)

CAB78/24 WISBECH HIGH STREET UPDATE

Members received an update on the ongoing construction work at 24 High Street, Wisbech presented by Councillor Seaton.

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

- Councillor Tierney expressed the view that a fair portion of his life has been taken up by this development and it is good news to see it finally come to a close. He hopes that the public recognise that it has finally be achieved and whilst it has taken a long time there have been good reasons for this.
- Councillor Hoy expressed the opinion that the Rose Fair road closure might have to wait as the County Council do have some reservations regarding this. Councillor Seaton expressed the view that it would only be a very short wait after the amount of years it has taken to get the building developed.

Proposed by Councillor Seaton, seconded by Councillor Tierney and AGREED to note the report, recognising that progress on the build continues with completion of construction works due imminently.

CAB79/24 DRAFT 6 MONTH CABINET FORWARD PLAN

Members noted the Forward Plan for information.

CAB80/24 PORT FEES AND CHARGES (WITH CONFIDENTIAL APPENDICES)

Members considered the fees and charges for port operations at Port Sutton Bridge and Wisbech Port for the financial year 2025/26 presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Boden referred to the options available to members in the report, one of which suggests that there should be no increase at all and another suggesting that there be a 10% increase but he is recommending that neither of those two options are supported. He recommended that, given that there is a significantly extra higher overall costs for the Wisbech Port and in an attempt to recover the costs, the increases for Wisbech Port be set at 10% but the increases at the Port of Sutton Bridge should be set at 0%.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED that the fees and charges for the Wisbech Port be increased by 10% and for the Port of Sutton Bridge they remain the same.

(Appendices 2 and 3 to the report involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 3 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended))

CAB81/24 PORT OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE (CONFIDENTIAL)

Members considered an update and options relating to investment and repair of the suspended quay at Wisbech Port presented by Councillor Boden.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED to:

- **note the issues and options outlined, acknowledging and balancing the competing financial and statutory obligations and liabilities identified; and**
- **authorise officers to act accordingly to the recommendations agreed and a further report be brought back to the July Cabinet meeting.**

(Members resolved to exclude the public from the discussion on this item of business on the grounds that it involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 3 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended))

(Councillors Boden, Christy and Tierney declared that they had been contacted by an interested party but had not entered into any discussions with them)

3.25 pm

Chairman