

# CABINET



**MONDAY, 20 MAY 2024 - 2.00 PM**

**PRESENT:** Councillor C Boden (Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman), Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor A Miscandlon, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor S Tierney and Councillor S Wallwork.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor I Benney and Councillor Mrs D Laws.

## **CAB69/23 PREVIOUS MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2024 were approved and signed.

## **CAB70/23 WISBECH - GOVERNMENT LONG-TERM PLAN FOR TOWNS FUNDING**

Members considered the funding from the Government's long-term plan for towns initiative for Wisbech and to make the necessary arrangements for delivery of the project presented by Councillor Boden. Councillor Boden drew members attention to the revised report that had been tabled, highlighting the amendments that had been made to the recommendation and some of the terminology, together with a new Appendix 6 outlining the composition of the Town Board.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- Councillor Seaton questioned who Iain Kirkbright is. Councillor Boden responded that Iain is the individual that is being proposed to be Chair of the Town Board and other members could provide further details.
- Councillor Boden stated that this is the first formal step for Wisbech to benefit from the Government's promised £20m towards Wisbech Town under its long-term plan for towns initiative, with there being a list of procedures to be followed and one of those is to delegate to officers the powers to accept the initial capacity revenue funding, which will allow the Council as the accountable authority to be able to operate and give guidance to the Town Board. He advised that the Government has produced a fair amount of guidance and supplementary guidance on how Board must operate and one of those is appointment of an independent Chair. Councillor Boden added that there is also the need to ensure the Chair's suggested appointments to the initial Board are all in order and that the draft Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct are agreed. He stated that once constituted the Board will carry out the functions including membership and the Council as accountable body can provide assistance to the Board on various administrative and secretarial matters and this is an opportunity for £20m to be spent under local control to achieve many things that local residents want. Councillor Boden expressed the view that it should be minimised the amount of money that get dissolved into administration and it is important that the Board consists of local members, local residents and local businesses to monitor the sums that go into actual projects that benefit the town and its residents. He made the point that the Chief Executive of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) is unhappy with the arrangements that have been made, but the Government guidance is clear, it does not even mention the CPCA at all in terms of Board membership but does give the Chair the opportunity if he so wishes to make appointments to organisations associated with the area and he has decided so far as the CPCA is concerned to make a seat available to an elected member associated with the CPCA. Councillor Boden added that the Chief Executive of Cambridgeshire County Council has also expressed his concern that they have not chosen

their own representative on the Board but the guidance does not say that the County Council has nomination rights only that there should be a county councillor on the Board, and it is clear from the guidance that there is always a preference to keep the Board as local as possible, with the Chair deciding upon a County Councillor, which is Councillor Tierney, who he believes is the appropriate person to be on the Town Board but Councillor Tierney will not be a representative of the County Council, he will not be an appointee of the County Council, he will not be answerable to the County Council, he will be there in his own right as a County Councillor under the terms of the guidance which has been set by DLUHC. He expressed the opinion that this is a positive opportunity with the first meeting of the Town Board taking place imminently and the Town Board will then be free to start working towards the various plans and start making a real difference to the residents of Wisbech.

- Councillor Hoy stated that she takes issue with one thing she has seen online with a blogger over the weekend criticising two of the Town Board members as being just a gardener and just a hairdresser. She made the point that a hairdresser knows a lot about running a successful business and community engagement talking to hundreds of people a week and to be able to run a business, especially in this current climate, is a skill so she takes issue with people who have a snobbish attitude that you have to have some sort of degree or some sort of status to be able to have an opinion or care about your town and she feels this view should be challenged as it is not fair on those people with no one having heard what they have to say yet and they could come up with some amazing ideas. Councillor Boden agreed that it is a prime example of snobbishness, questioning why a gardener or a hairdresser should be any more or less qualified than anyone else within the area to give their opinion and to give their help and advice, and attention should not be given to random bloggers online.
- Councillor Tierney explained that Iain Kirkbright, the proposed Chair of the Town Board, he knows through his work as a councillor and has been approached by him as he has seen something the Council is doing and asked to assist. He stated that he is a local businessman, he runs a travel agency which has shops in Wisbech and Kings Lynn and elsewhere, he also has expertise in IT, in communications and tourism, which he believes are areas where there is some value. Councillor Tierney stated that he has always been impressed by his character as he is always willing to help and engage, he does not isolate himself in his business and focus only on that but he looks outwards in how can he help the town and when a business helps a town the business improves. He expressed the view that Iain Kirkbright is bright, communicative, quite young and willing to get out there and get involved, having the right traits, in his view, to be the Chair of this Town Board.
- Councillor Tierney agreed with the comments made by Councillor Hoy, being surprised to see those comments being made online. He stated that Wisbech is a small town and one of the comments made is that the hairdresser has a client who is a councillor making the point that he has visited most of the barbers in the town so he is the client of many of these establishments, shopped in most of the retail businesses and spoken to most of the businessmen who are in businesses where you would engage and as Wisbech is not a massive town councillors do know one another so it is not unusual to expect that on a Board like this that people will know one another, which does not mean there is anything preferential going on and he was shocked by the attitude of some people and feels it is a shame given this fantastic opportunity.
- Councillor Miscandlon agreed with the comments of Councillor Hoy as he believes the perception that you have got to be a highly intelligent academic to be a councillor is not true and people who have this bigoted attitude towards people who sit on the Council is out of order.
- Councillor Wallwork expressed her excitement over this initiative and she thinks it will be good to get local people making local decisions on some of the things they would like to see happen. She does feel it is unfortunate that some people make disparaging remarks to people who are trying to give a helping hand to their local community.
- Councillor Seaton referred to the comments from the CPCA and County Council and expressed surprise that they feel they have a right to be on this Wisbech Town Board, with

the money being for Wisbech and it should be run by people who are from Wisbech and have a commitment to the town.

**Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Hoy and AGREED to:**

- **Note the contents of the report relating to the Government's Long-Term Plan for Towns Initiative for the town of Wisbech;**
- **Delegate powers to accept the capacity revenue funding for FY 2024/25 to the Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer;**
- **Appoint Iain Kirkbright as Chair of the Wisbech Town Board;**
- **Notes the proposed Independent Chair's suggested appointments to the Wisbech Town Board as set out within Appendix 4 (selected in accordance with the DHLUC guidance summarised in Appendix 6), such appointments to be made prior to the inaugural meeting and subject to the recommendation at Paragraph 4.3 being agreed. Appointments after this date will be made by the Independent Chair in consultation with the Town Board; and**
- **Approve the draft Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct for the Wisbech Town Board, to be adopted by the Town Board at the inaugural meeting in May 2024.**

*(Councillors Boden, Hoy, Tierney and Wallwork declared that they are named as being an appointed member of the Town Board)*

### **CAB71/23 WHITTLESEA STATION ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME**

Members considered the Whittlesea Station enhancement programme presented by Councillor Seaton.

Members made comments as follows:

- Councillor Miscandlon stated that this is a good way forward for Whittlesea station as it has suffered for many years from underinvestment and bringing it forward as a main station due to the fact that Whittlesey is growing will give it a better transport system out of the area for work and leisure.
- Councillor Boden stated that it is a matter of 'chicken and egg' situation in that the poor facilities together with the short and disjointed platforms at the station discourage people from using it, therefore, additional trains are not put on because the service is infrequent so people do not tend to use the station so it is important that the cycle is broken and one of the ways to do this is through initiatives such as this to enable specific improvements to take place at the station to encourage more people to be able to use the station which may be able to be used to encourage the train operators to stop more frequently at the station. He added that it is not that trains are not passing through the station but too many passenger trains pass through and do not stop and it will be a big battle ahead that the Council has been fighting for some time but these proposals will assist in ensuring the battle is eventually won.
- Councillor Mrs French stated this is a great idea, March was fortunate to obtain investment and wishes Whittlesey well.
- Councillor Seaton made the point that one note of caution is Ely Junction, which is still the 'elephant in the room' and it is still awaited for these monies to come through from the Government to start that process as it is still a big block in what is trying to be achieved.

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

- **Approve the delivery of a £3m programme of enhancements at Whittlesea railway station supported by CPCA Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) funding available between April 2004 and March 2027;**
- **Authorise the S151 Officer to enter into a grant agreement with CPCA for FDC to deliver the enhancement programme for Whittlesea Station;**
- **Reconfirm the June 2019 decision of FDC Cabinet relating to the Governance of the**

**Whittlesea Station project. Enabling the existing governance arrangements and a Project Board to oversee the development and delivery of the £3m programme; and**

- **Delegate authority to the Cabinet member for Transport, Heritage, and Culture to approve associated procurement in accordance with FDC procurement procedures, the terms of the GFA with CPCA and decisions by the Project Board.**

**CAB72/23 WISBECH HIGH STREET UPDATE**

Members considered the Wisbech High Street update report presented by Councillor Seaton.

**Proposed by Councillor Seaton, seconded by Councillor Miscandlon and AGREED to note the progress in relation to the building of 24 High Street in Wisbech and note the ongoing work regarding the development of a viable option for 11-12 High Street, Wisbech.**

**CAB73/23 DRAFT 6 MONTH CABINET FORWARD PLAN**

Members noted the draft 6-month Cabinet Forward Plan.

2.36 pm

Chairman