

CABINET

FRIDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2024 - 10.00 AM



PRESENT: Councillor C Boden (Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor A Miscandlon, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor C Seaton and Councillor S Tierney

APOLOGIES: Councillor S Wallwork

Councillor Boden announced that Agenda Item 12: Proposed use of Land at North Drive, March for Community Uses would be considered first due to the presence of members of the public with a particular interest in that item. Also, as both Councillor Boden and Councillor Mrs French had interests in this matter for which they would leave the room, then in accordance with paragraph 2.1 of the Cabinet Procedure Rules which constitute Rule 4 of the Council's Constitution, it was proposed by Councillor Mrs Laws, seconded by Councillor Tierney and agreed that Councillor Hoy chair this item.

CAB22/24 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The public minutes of the meeting held 30 September 2024 were agreed and signed.

CAB23/24 PROPOSED USE OF LAND AT NORTH DRIVE, MARCH FOR COMMUNITY USES (WITH CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX)

Members considered the Proposed Use of Land at North Drive, March for Community Uses report presented by Councillor Murphy.

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

- Councillor Tierney commented that whilst the proposals are good, he is drawn to the skate park. This area of March is high on the deprivation index and if members get behind the project it delivers a strong message that the Council is investing in young people.
- Councillor Mrs Laws said the Platinum Jubilee Wood is in her ward. It has been successful but that is because it is in the right location, on FDC owned land, and cannot be developed for anything other than a planted area. It is maintained by a strong voluntary group with a constitution and many good consultants offering their time freely. There are daily visits by volunteers who gather any uncollected fruit to prevent rotten food attracting vermin. It requires a lot of planning so is not as straightforward as planting an orchard. She is inclined to agree that more focus needs to be given to young people in the area. Her concern is that a community orchard in the location of North Drive may be misused and attract antisocial behaviour, but the location should be fully scrutinised before anything is done.
- Councillor Miscandlon agreed with Councillor Tierney and Councillor Mrs Laws, saying the Jubilee Wood is a beautiful place but took a lot of planning. Meanwhile the youth need to let off steam. In his view, he does not think North Drive is the right location for an orchard and supports the skate park.
- Councillor Hoy said that there are two community orchards in Wisbech. One is in the park and in her view that is a terrible location, it is poorly used and blocks a number of key facilities. The orchard on Lynn Road is well used and a lot of projects are undertaken there.

Councillor Hoy said that members are being asked to note the report and then decide which of the

options presented they would like officers to explore further.

The outcome of the vote showed a unanimous preference for the skate park.

Proposed by Councillor Murphy, seconded by Councillor Miscandlon and AGREED to note the report and as there is a clear preference for the option of exploring a skate park, officers are instructed to undertake a more detailed assessment in relation to this option and bring this information back to Cabinet for further discussion.

(Councillor Boden declared an interest by virtue that he is a trustee of FACT and retired from the room for the duration of this item, taking no part in the discussion and voting thereon).

(Councillor Mrs French declared an interest and retired from the room for the duration of this item, taking no part in the discussion and voting thereon).

(Councillor Seaton declared an interest by virtue that he is a trustee of FACT and retired from the room for the duration of this item, taking no part in the discussion and voting thereon).

CAB24/24 PROPERTY PURCHASE TO SUPPORT MEETING THE COUNCIL'S HOUSING DUTIES

Members considered the Property Purchase report presented by Councillor Hoy.

- Councillor Mrs French said she assumed the properties would be spread across the district rather than located in one town or village. Councillor Hoy agreed that ideally they would be spread across the whole of Fenland.
- Councillor Tierney asked if Councillor Hoy could clarify the use of these properties, being aware there may be a public assumption that they would be for the benefit of asylum seekers. Councillor Hoy responded that the purpose was to meet local housing needs, assisting people with a local connection to Fenland, some of whom may currently be in B&B accommodation. She confirmed that the scheme is not to house asylum seekers.
- Councillor Miscandlon asked if the scheme could be extended to 2-bedroom properties to accommodate some families who might otherwise be placed in a B&B. Councillor Hoy replied that there is now less demand for families as the Council has a statutory duty to move them on faster and has been working with housing associations to free up their properties for families. Also, local authority housing fund monies were received where the focus has been on 2–3-bedroom properties for families, hence the current emphasis on 1-bedroom properties for single person accommodation.

Proposed by Councillor Hoy, seconded by Councillor Mrs Laws and AGREED to:

- **Set aside up to £1.2 million from reserves to purchase up to 10 x 1-bed properties from the market and to delegate to the Leader and Section 151 Officer the funding of such purchases.**
- **Consult with the Leader, Portfolio Holder for Assets and Portfolio Holder for Housing on any proposed purchase.**
- **Delegate any increase needed to the £1.2 million to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Leader, Portfolio Holder for Assets and Portfolio Holder for Housing.**

CAB25/24 ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGIC REFRESH 2025-28

Members considered the Economic Growth Strategic Refresh 2025-28 report presented by Councillor Benney.

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

- Councillor Tierney commented that the portfolio is in safe hands with Councillor Benney and the Economic Growth team, and he thanked them for the clear report, but he would like to know what challenges are coming forward and what concerns there are for the future.
- Councillor Benney responded that there were some missed opportunities arising from Brexit, and the Covid pandemic caused huge financial and employment issues in Fenland. There is now a green strategy, much of which is common sense, but there are good businesses in the area struggling because of taxes placed on them by the green agenda. Furthermore, rises in national insurance will be detrimental, businesses will struggle faced with higher employment costs and taxation. Councillor Benney pointed out that a rise in apprenticeship wages will restrict the number of apprenticeships available as many employers scale back their apprenticeship programmes to save money. Young people are an important part of the Fenland economy, and this will rob them of life skills and the opportunity to get on. Councillor Miscandlon commented that although the issue of wages is problematic it is essential to encourage companies to keep apprenticeships or they will flounder in the future. Having benefitted from an apprenticeship himself, he is a great advocate for them.
- Councillor Seaton pointed out that transport infrastructure is also important. His portfolio constantly pushes the CPCA and County Council regarding the state of the current infrastructure. Better transport links will aid economic growth in the area; it would encourage new companies into Fenland and allow present ones to expand. A lack of suitable transport infrastructure hinders such progress.
- Councillor Benney agreed with Councillor Seaton and pointed out that the road network also holds Fenland back, being a long way from main arterial routes. There has been much emphasis by the CPCA on public transport but not enough on the road network which is overlooked.

Proposed by Councillor Benney, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED to recommend the Economic Growth Strategic Refresh 2025-28 for approval by Full Council.

CAB26/24 DEVELOPMENT OF PLAYZONE PROJECTS

Members considered the Development of PlayZone Projects report presented by Councillor Miscandlon.

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

- Councillor Miscandlon said that he had been very impressed by the project, having visited a PlayZone site in Peterborough; it is a potential community asset for the whole of Fenland and will likely also be utilised by people from outside the area as it is that good.
- Councillor Boden asked if Councillor Miscandlon could comment on the length of the pitches. Councillor Miscandlon said when visiting the Peterborough site, he was informed by managers of the facility that they had mistakenly shortened the pitch by 1metre. If extended by a further metre, it would have qualified as a games pitch for Netball England to be able to hold competitions. Therefore, the longer pitch length has been added to the criteria for Fenland in order to qualify for that additional asset.
- Councillor Boden asked Councillor Miscandlon to explain that 75% funding is available and the further 25%, being £62,500, would need to be found for each of the pitches. Councillor Miscandlon responded that the funding stream is being sought so there should be very little, if any, cost to the Council.
- Councillor Hoy said she was not happy to read that the project may be cancelled if match funding sources decline to provide support. She believes £62,500 is very good value for money in terms of how these pitches and sport in general do wonders for young people and has been particularly effective for those who are hard to reach. It will be great if the money can be obtained from elsewhere, and she does not know if the Wisbech Town Board will say yes, but it would be sad not to go ahead on the project and she would like to see this come back to Cabinet if that was the case.

- Councillor Boden confirmed the proposal requires 25% external funding to be found but not necessarily from the sources listed within the report. There are other sources that could be looked at, but he agreed that it should come back before Cabinet for further discussion if the remaining 25% could not be found. However, this will mean it will have to be considered along with all the other financial pressures and requests of the Council.
- Councillor Mrs Laws stated that she agreed with all that had been said so far, this would be a missed opportunity and PlayZones provide much needed safe spaces for children.
- Councillor Mrs French welcomes the report but noting the proposed locations of Whittlesey, Wisbech and March asked if this meant nothing would be provided for Chatteris. Councillor Miscandlon responded that Chatteris is not currently designated, but this is a light touch proposal and may be selected in the future. Councillor Mrs Laws agreed that Chatteris should be explored as an option.
- Councillor Mrs French asked if there is something under Section 106 that applicants can be asked the possibility of funding this. Councillor Boden answered it is theoretically possible but in practice he would rather find external funding. Care must be taken to fulfil the requirements of specific S106 agreements, and the money cannot just be allocated to something else.
- Councillor Tierney stated his support for the proposal, it ticks all the boxes in terms of community benefit and such an intervention can make such a difference to people's lives.

Proposed by Councillor Miscandlon, seconded by Councillor Mrs Laws and AGREED to:

- 1. Note the report and the benefits that PlayZone development in Fenland will have, 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**
- 2. Approve the submission of a grant funding application to the Football Foundation to develop PlayZone sites with the initial tranche of two PlayZone project applications based at the Manor Field in Whittlesey and Barton Road in Wisbech.**
- 3. Note that the necessary alternative sources of match funding will be pursued.**
- 4. Delegate authority to the Corporate Director, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Environment and Leisure to commence a procurement exercise to engage a contractor to deliver the PlayZone sites and thereafter, subject to full funding having been secured, award, mobilise and implement such proposal with further authority to take all reasonable ancillary actions to ensure implementation.**
- 5. Authorise the Monitoring Officer to execute and complete all requisite legal documentation in relation to the matters outlined above.**

(Councillor Hoy declared that she has met with the Football Association about the development of PlayZone projects but has an open mind and will take part in the debate).

CAB27/24 TAXI TARIFF

Members considered the Taxi Tariff report presented by Councillor Hoy.

Councillor Hoy proposed that the tariff remain unchanged and be reviewed again in another year. Her opinion is that this is a mistake; she is aware that some people have claimed she has an

interest in this but that is not the case. She does not drive a taxi, she does not intend to drive one, she is not related to anyone that does and only occasionally has used one. If drivers are stopped from being able to charge the fare that they need to charge, they will not be a taxi driver anymore and she believes that holding the fares will only help private hire and she predicts that in a year there will be very few hackney carriage drivers left. However, the Council said it would listen to what people wanted and this is what they claim to have wanted, hence her proposal.

Councillor Boden thanked Councillor Hoy and responded that it is a fundamental point of local government that when setting the maximum tariff for hackney carriages, the Council listens to the public, particularly those who use taxis, and the hackney carriage trade itself and not act off its own bat.

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

- Councillor Tierney commented that this is a sad situation that has arisen out of fabrication and an attempt to manipulate the trade. The Council does not control the trade, and no one has to charge the maximum fare. He believes that the issue has been manipulated for political purposes. This does not affect the Council but is a death knell for the hackney trade and private hire cars will thrive as a result.
- Councillor Benney said he did not understand why the Council should even be involved in setting the maximum fee, this is interference in private commerce, and they should be left to sort their own fees out. The trade should charge what they want and advertise their own rates; this would prevent Fenland District Council from being unfairly accused.
- Councillor Tierney said Councillor Benney had made an important point; some of the hackney carriage laws are over a century old. It is human nature to want to protect your livelihood and drivers are nervous about the onset of Uber. He agreed that setting the fare should be reviewed in a year's time and does not know if it is legally possible for the Council to step down from setting the fares, but it is a bizarre situation and one he would ask officers to look at.

Following a vote, a majority of members did not support the proposed fee increase. A further vote followed in which a majority of members did support a further review of the proposals and agreed the timeframe of a year.

Proposed by Councillor Hoy, seconded by Councillor Tierney and AGREED to take no action at this time and determined that a further review should take place in a year's time.

CAB28/24 WISBECH HIGH STREET UPDATE

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

Councillor Mrs French said she was pleased to finally see a completion date on 24 High Street and congratulated the team for their work on this project to date.

Proposed by Councillor Seaton, seconded by Councillor Laws and AGREED to note the monthly update relating to the works at 24 and 11-12 High Street, Wisbech.

CAB29/24 DRAFT 6 MONTH CABINET FORWARD PLAN

Councillor Boden presented the draft Cabinet Forward Plan for information.

CAB30/24 RENEWAL OF OPERATIONAL LEASE IN WISBECH (WITH CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX)

Members considered the Renewal of Operational Lease in Wisbech report presented by Councillor Mrs French.

Councillor Mrs French thanked officers for trying to get this resolved over the last twelve months.

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

- Councillor Hoy thanked Councillor Mrs French and officers for their very important work on the car park. She is interested in the National Trust position regarding fairs. In respect of the repair costs, she would suggest a piecemeal approach, undertaking work that is legally required only due to their astronomical costs. She would like to reassure the public and the Showmen's Guild that the Council wants to keep fairs and will not discuss sites without speaking to them first. All three suggested sites need exploring, the next fair is due in March but by the end of January a location should be known.
- Councillor Tierney said that Councillor Hoy has been a huge champion for the importance of this car park. It plays a prime role being located so closely to a doctors' surgery and local shops; it is busy, well-used and we run the risk of losing it. Meanwhile, the fair remains important to Wisbech and agrees that the public must be consulted. However, there are not many places it can go, and each area will have its supporters and detractors so once the Council gets a good idea of what is best supported then work can be done to make that happen.
- Councillor Mrs French agreed the costs of repairs are outrageous and she would look to officers to gain realistic costings for the works that are necessary.
- Councillor Hoy suggested that Councillor Tierney work with the Communications Team regarding consultation with the public on future locations for the fair.
- Councillor Boden asked Councillor Mrs French if she will be willing to look with officers at the conditions of termination of the proposed lease as compared with conditions of the lease being held over to ensure the Council gets the best deal. He agreed the amount of money in terms of repair and upgrading are eye watering. It is essential to keep tables on the capital expenditure and whilst works need to be done to keep the car park in a safe condition, it does not have to be gold-plated.

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

- **Note the update on lease negotiations as reported**
- **Approve the lease terms as now reported and authorise the Head of Property, Assets and Major Projects in consultation with the S151 Officer and Portfolio Holder for Revenues, Benefits and CPE to complete the required legal documentation.**
- **Give a steer on the capital works referred to in Section 2 for inclusion in the draft budget for 2025-26 which was for essential spend only.**

CAB31/24 CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

The confidential minutes of the meeting held 30 September 2024 were agreed and signed.

11.07 am

Chairman