

POTTON TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of a Meeting of the Town Council held on
Tuesday 31st January 2023, 7.15pm held in the Community Centre, Potton.

Present: Councillors Dr C. Craig, Mr J. Day, Mrs L. Fox, Mr A. Gibb, Mrs V. Gwilliam, Mr J. Hobbs (Chairman from partway through item 5), Ms L. Kitchener, Mr J. Lean, Mrs C. Leggatt, Mr D. Norman, Mr J. Price Williams (Chairman until Cllr Hobbs arrived partway through item 5) and Mr A. Zerny.

Absent: Councillors Mr J. Hobbs, Mr A. Inkersole and Mr A. Macdonald.

Also Present: Eleven members of the public and the Town Clerk.

1 Apologies for absence

Councillors Mr J. Hobbs, Mr A. Inkersole and Mr A. Macdonald.

2 Declaration of Interest

Councillors were reminded that they should declare an interest in any matter of personal or prejudicial interest to be discussed at this meeting.

Note – Cllr Zerny in item 4 declared an interest for the Potton Hall for All item. Refer to the bottom of page 3.

3 Potton Hall for All (Agenda item 4)

The Chairman advised he was going to ask the Chairman of the Potton Hall for All Steering Group to give a briefing on where we stand at the moment with regards to the Potton Hall for All.

The Chairman of the Potton Hall for All Steering Group advised at the January 2023 Management Committee of Potton Town Council, it was resolved to recommend to the rest of the town council to vote in favour of proceeding with the revised design for the Hall for All based on the cost of £1,642,050.51 plus contingency. The trustees are wishing to make one or two amendments to the design and a meeting is taking place on the 1st February 2023 with the Architect. An amount is available above the £1.6 million for contingency. A planning application will need to be submitted. Release of Section 106 requires agreement by Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) a business case and a costed design approved by the planning authority (CBC) by August 2023.

The Chairman thanked the Chairman of the Potton Hall for All Steering Group for the briefing.

The Chairman mentioned that Watson & Cox have provided a project delivery programme and it was agreed when the end of Stage 1 was reached with final concept design and review and approval. This is the point we have nearly reached.

4 Public Participation Session (Agenda item 3)

The Chairman invited members of the public to ask questions.

Question – How long is the quote valid for?

Answer – A fixed price quote is not yet available, a contingency amount has been allowed for price increases.

Question – What is your contingency?

Answer – The contingency is around £100,000.

Member of the public commented that is about 6 or 7 percent. Suggest a contingency of 10 – 15 percent to be safe.

The Chairman advised Watson & Cox who provided the quote had allowed a contingency amount and an additional amount will be allowed for contingency on top of the contingency that Watson & Cox had allowed.

The Chairman of the Potton Hall for All Steering Group advised that the design is constantly being value engineered.

Question – What is your business case?

Answer – There is a business case, which has been revised and will continue to be revised. There are no halls of this size available for hire within the town. The nearest sized hall is Burgoyne School hall and this is regularly not available to hire. The building is planned to have a large hall and two meeting rooms which can be joined. As a venue there is nothing in the town like the Potton Hall for All. Expression of interests submitted by various groups who would be willing to use the hall, whether those groups will want to use the hall when the hall is built. Need for a venue that can cater for larger sporting activities. Groups have moved out of Potton to go to Gamlingay and Biggleswade, a facility in Potton would potentially allow people of Potton to walk to the group. There is a business case, yes it does need updating and the Hall for All is a sustainable business. The proposal is that the town council office would then be relocated from the Community Centre which is owned by Central Bedfordshire Council to the Hall. The town council only owns the public toilets.

Question – How much does the town council currently pay for the Community Centre?

Answer – The town council pays for the Community Centre.

Question – Have the heating costs been factored in to the business case?

Answer – The business case will be revised to take into account the additional cost for heating.

Question – Where do fixtures and fittings lie, are they within the budget?

Answer – A turn key design and build. Items like tables and chairs are not within the budget.

Question – Are you happy that members are going to vote this evening have seen those proposals and are happy with what this is going to buy or has this been sub-let to the Hall for All?

Answer – All the members of the council have provided with all the information we have at this time, including budget and revised drawings.

Question – In making these deductions I assume that via the Hall for All Committee that the various user groups have been consulted to make sure it meets their requirements?

Answer – On a couple of occasions as a committee, we have invited key user groups to have a look at how the building will be changed and whether the building will meet their needs.

The Chairman invited the Chairman of the Hall for All charity to answer.

Answer (Chairman of the Hall for All charity) – We have met with key users to check that the Hall will still meet their requirements.

Question – In times of inflation and a fixed budget, economies now can lead to maintenance costs in the future, by use of cheap materials, reduction in specification and even standards of workmanship?

Answer – We anticipate to appoint a QS (Quantity Surveyor) to keep the contractor honest, for an independent view of what is going on.

The member of the public mentioned that I regard that as a sensible decision.

Question – Vote taken in the community and the community was sold the Hall on one specification, drawings, plans and maps were sent around the community to vote for the increase in the rates, are you happy as Cllrs that the community are getting what they voted for?

Answer – That is a point that is going to be discussed in the following meeting, to make sure all Cllrs are content that what we are doing is appropriate for the community and we believe we are doing the right thing justifiable for the community.

The Chairman thanked the members of the public for their questions and advised it is now the time to open it up to the council.

Cllr Zerny mentioned to the Chairman that as you know I wear two hats as a town cllr and as a Central Beds cllr and there will be occasions however the town council chooses to vote tonight where I will be needing to represent that decision with Central Beds Chief Exec and any from who you seek to get funds for that reason I will not vote in tonight's debate but will happily join in if your comfortable for me to do so.

Chairman mentioned Yes we are comfortable for you to join in the debate.

Cllr Hobbs arrived and took over as Chairman for the remainder of the meeting.

5 Potton Hall for All (Agenda item 4 continued)

The Chairman invited members to speak about this item.

Question – What was the area of the original proposed Hall?

Answer – In the region of 900sq/m.

Question – The replacement is half the size?

Answer – The building is significantly smaller.

Question – Can the dividing between the foyer and the hall be removed for more seating?

Answer – No.

Question – If a meeting is taking place in room 1 and room 2 what is it like for soundproofing?

Answer – That will be depend on the acoustics and materials used.
Instruction given is that you have to meeting in one room, without everyone being able to listen in the next room.

Question – Storage, if we lose the Telephone Exchange where will the Christmas Lights be stored?

Answer – The town council requires provision for storage. The provision for storage at the Hall will be external at this stage.

It was mentioned that if individual groups don't use the building their will be no income for running.

It was mentioned the town council could off set some of the costs for the Hall by not using the Community Centre.

The Town Clerk mentioned that the town council has the Community Centre on a peppercorn rent, though the town council does have to pay for the maintenance of the Community Centre and with this being an old building various items have needed to be replaced and these have included windows and a heating system.

It was mentioned in terms of the Section 106 monies of just over £1,000,000 is that inflation linked.

The Town Clerk advised that the Section 106 monies is been held by Central Bedfordshire Council and the amount will remain the same.

It was mentioned due to inflation what we can buy with the Section 106 is going down. It is about time we get on with the project.

It was mentioned the Neighbourhood Plan is heavily in favour of the Potton Hall for All.

It was mentioned does the town council support the revised design and go ahead using the Section 106 monies to proceed with the Hall for All or try to negotiate with CBC about trying to get some of the money spent on something else.

It was mentioned delaying will result in more money being lost due to inflation.

It was mentioned that Potton has expanded and we constantly mention about no increase infrastructure. Infrastructure that has been put in place previously has been in put in place for our benefit.

It was mentioned that when the Neighbourhood Plan was produced one of the core elements was to improve the infrastructure. Central Bedfordshire Council requested we include support for Potton Hall for All in the Neighbourhood Plan. When planning applications are submitted we mention about the need for infrastructure. Some of the infrastructure in the town the town council cannot affect and this includes the Doctor's Surgery. Section 106 has been secured for the local Doctor's Surgery. The Potton Hall for All is our one chance as a town council to do something positive and leave something behind for future generations.

Cllr Zerny mentioned to the Chairman before you arrived I advised as I wear two hats I will not vote in tonight's debate. Pay tribute to the huge amount of work that the Hall Committee have put in in recent years. It must feel when you read comments online which are very negative and don't appreciate amount of effort. A lot of people do appreciate the effort and I really hope it does come to something. As a town council we shouldn't ignore some of the comments that have been made with regards to the way in which things have changed. The hall is considerably smaller than when the referendum took place. Cost of borrowing if a loan is going to be taken out in the relatively near future is likely to be significantly greater than when the referendum took place. If the hall goes ahead it will be a huge benefit to the community, need to bare in mind that the costs may well be significantly different to what we are budgeting for and the situation in terms of getting the hall let may be very different as well. As a town council we need to be ready for the complaints that will be made if it ends up being a very costly exercise. Whether the town council supports the hall tonight we absolutely must continue to push the alternatives we have been working on. If costs continue to rise for the hall in the months to come and / or planning permission turned out to be difficult. If further obstacles get in the way we absolutely must have something to spend the Section 106 monies on and I think a lot of the money could be retained for the community but we have to make sure we have something in place.

The Chairman of the Potton Hall for All Steering Group advised that whilst we haven't consulted the public again, we have communicated changes via the town council newsletter.

The Chairman of the Management Committee mentioned that the plan at this stage is to take the Potton Hall for All to Riba Stage 2.

It was **resolved** to continue with the Potton Hall for All and attempt to obtain full planning permission.

It was mentioned if planning permission is granted the town council will review the cost plan at that stage, as this limits our exposure.

6 To note the date of the Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Town Council is scheduled for Tuesday 7th March 2023.

The meeting closed at 8.15pm.

Signed: Date:
Chairman Mission Statement

The aim of Potton Town Council is to serve the people of this town to the best of its ability.