

POTTON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Town Council held on
Tuesday 7th November 2023 at 7pm at the Community Centre
following a meeting of the Planning Committee

Present: Councillors Dr C. Craig, Mr J. Day, Mrs L. Fox, Mrs V. Gwilliam, Mr J. Hobbs, Mr A. Inkersole, Mr R. Kett, Mrs C. Leggatt, Mr D. Norman, Mr J. Price Williams (Chairman) and Mr A. Zerny.

Absent: Councillor Mr A. Macdonald.

Also present: The Town Clerk and one member of the public.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Mr 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.

3. Co-option of a Town Councillor (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman altered the agenda to allow members to consider an application from an elector to join Potton Town Council.

It was **resolved** to elect Mr Robert Kett as a councillor of Potton Town Council.

The Chairman invited Cllr Kett to sign the Declaration of Acceptance of Office and join the meeting.

The Chairman proposed a vote of thanks to Andy Gibb for his tenure on the town council and asked the Town Clerk to write a formal letter of thanks to Mr Gibb.

It was **resolved** for the Town Clerk to write a formal letter of thanks to Mr Gibb.

4. Public Participation Session (Agenda Item 3)

The Chairman asked if members of the public had any questions and if members had any questions from the public for the town council.

It was mentioned that Central Bedfordshire Council has still not responded to the request for a litter bin on Biggleswade Road on the roundabout for the Tall Trees development.

It was **resolved** for the Town Clerk to contact Central Bedfordshire Council regarding the request for a litter bin on Biggleswade Road.

5. Minutes of Potton Town Council (Agenda Item 4)

The minutes of the previous meetings held on 5th September and 17th October 2023, which had been previously circulated, were approved and signed as a true and accurate record.

6. Minutes of Town Council Committees and groups where a Cllr(s) is(are) appointed by the town council (Agenda item 5)

Town Council accepted and adopted the minutes and all recommendations contained from the following Town Council Committees:

- Potton Youth Council – 18th September 2023 – approved.
- Events Committee – 18th September 2023 – approved.
- Environmental Committee – 26th September 2023 – approved.
- Planning Committee – 5th September and 3rd and 17th October 2023 – approved.

7. Reports from Central Bedfordshire Councillors

No report from Cllr Wye who had sent her apologies.

The Chairman invited a report from Potton's Central Bedfordshire Councillor who was in attendance.

Cllr Zerny addressed the request for a litter bin on Biggleswade Road.

It was mentioned that the email requested a dog waste bin.

Cllr Zerny questioned if an additional bin is needed given that there is a litter bin by the pub [The Royal Oak] and a dog waste bin at the entrance to Pegnut Woods. Litter and dog waste bins on the Tall Trees development are provided by the management company, including houses on Biggleswade Road.

Cllr Leggatt clarified that residents on the opposite of Biggleswade Road had approached her complaining that there is a lot of litter and dog waste discarded on this section of the road.

Cllr Zerny reported that most of Central Bedfordshire Councillors efforts recently have gone on the budget. There has been a number of meetings with council officers in the course of the last few months to try to reduce a deficit that was in excess of £20M to a more manageable number, which hasn't yet reached its target. Lots of unpopular ideas are being debated and discussed at the moment to get the budget passed in February. For example charging for garden waste and reducing subsidies for buses. Although charging for garden waste would be unpopular, there could be an argument for being charged for garden waste as other neighbouring local authorities do. It is an unproportional tax in that the council provides the service free of charge, it comes out of our council tax, but lots of people don't benefit from it if they live in a flat and don't have a garden. It wouldn't prohibit people from taking their garden waste to the tip, but it would still be an unpopular measure.

Every year Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) puts approx. £1.1M into bus subsidies which essentially means that unprofitable rural routes can continue to run. It has been discovered that some routes exist (not local) where the subsidy is such that the council is paying £15 per passenger to use those routes. There is a question whether there could be alternative methods that would perhaps be a better use of public money.

A new version of the very first stage of the Local Plan will be put to full council in three weeks' time. The last version was approved around three years ago, but it has to be updated regularly, so this will begin a process which will take about five years or so. Cllr Zerny will be looking to persuade CBC councillors that with the new Local Plan, CBC should be looking to consider whether the majority of that development should be on the edges of big towns where there is already infrastructure.

The Chairman asked if CBC is considering increasing council tax and at what level?

Cllr Zerny advised that CBC are considering increasing council tax by 5%. CBC can increase council tax by 3% plus an extra two percentage points based upon adult social care.

A member asked if the £23M cost for the new leisure centre in Leighton Buzzard will be paid from the budget?

Cllr Zerny advised CBC has a Capital Budget and Revenue Budget. The council can pay for big new projects under its Capital Budget. The only way that it can put money into its Capital Budget to pay for them is to sell off [public] land, or via a grant which applies purely to capital. There is £150M in the Capital Budget at the moment. However, it has an effect on the Revenue Budget which is approximately £500M, but if capital is spent and the council needs to borrow to pay for it, there will be interest charges which has to come out of the Revenue Budget. There is incentive to reduce the Capital Budget to a manageable number and every £1 taken from the Capital Budget saves 16 pence from the Revenue Budget. The leisure centre planned for Leighton Buzzard, is expensive – the cost of it has increased from approximately £22M to just shy of £30M – so there will be strong argument to put this project back by a year or two.

It was mentioned that the £23M for the project seems a lot of money to spend in one particular area, when it could be shared across Central Bedfordshire.

The Town Clerk mentioned that he and Cllr Gwilliam attended Precept training in September and were advised that town council would know Potton's tax base by Friday 3rd November. At the time of this meeting the tax base is still unknown.

The Town Clerk also mentioned inflation and the fact that CBC holds S106 monies in their bank accounts; when interest rates were low the town projects / organisations didn't lose a lot. But now interest rates are at 5% and inflation at 10%, the town projects / organisations don't receive any extra money on S106 monies. Bedford Borough Council works on a different system and would pay S106 when a trigger point on a development is reached.

Cllr Gwilliam mentioned that this will affect the Potton Hall for All payments. The town council will have to apply to CBC to draw down the S106 monies when we have been provided with a certificate of staged completion of build so that we can prove that we have spent the money to be able to get the S106 money. That is assuming that the town council can pay those bills and the developer has said that they will have to amend their own terms and conditions to meet the fact that town council has to apply for S106 to be able to pay them.

Cllr Zerny advised that CBC doesn't get S106 money when the development begins, they get staged payments. CBC also doesn't put all of its money in high interest bank accounts. Some money has to be in accounts which are easily accessible and instantly available and some money is in long term investments which may have been invested when interest rates were lower. It is fair to expect that if CBC has benefited from interest on the S106 monies, the town projects should benefit too.

Cllr Zerny asked if there were any thoughts on the two points he has mentioned (garden waste and buses)?

A member commented that residents won't be happy to pay for garden waste if there is an increase in council tax.

It was commented that without a doubt there will be an increase in fly tipping if residents are charged for garden waste or asked to take their garden waste to the tip.

A member mentioned that it is not clear to bus users which routes are subsidised so it would be difficult for the users to have an opinion on bus subsidies.

Cllr Zerny asked regardless of whether you are a user of the service or not, would you expect a public subsidy of that sort of value per passenger to run a service?

In some situations it might well be, if it is a very outlying community and it is the only way of people being able to travel. It might be a very worthwhile public service and might mitigate all sorts of other health costs that you may have. In other areas it may be a waste of money. All bus services are capped at £2.50 until the end of the year.

8. Finance

i. External Auditor – Audit for the year end 31st March 2023

The Town Council noted the correspondence received from the Town Councils External Auditor. A copy of the annual return which had been returned by the External Auditor was presented to the town council in the council papers.

It was **resolved** to approve and accept the Annual Return including the external auditor's certificate which was presented to the town council for year ended 31st March 2023, following its return by the External Auditor now that they had given an audit opinion.

ii. Appointment of Internal Auditor 2023/2024

Members discussed about the appointment of the internal auditor. The Town Council undergoes an internal audit on an annual basis. The council reviewed the appointment of an internal auditor.

It was **resolved** that Haines Watts Chartered Accountants be appointed as Potton Town Council's internal auditor for 2023/2024.

iii. Review of the effectiveness of the Internal Audit

Members had been provided with a copy of the town council's review of the effectiveness of the Internal Audit for them to carry out a review of its effectiveness. Members then discussed and reviewed the effectiveness of the Internal Audit.

It was **resolved** to approve the review of the effectiveness of the Internal Audit.

The town council thanked the Responsible Financial Officer for his work over the last year.

iv. Financial and Management Risk Assessment

Members had been provided with a copy of Potton Town Council's Financial and Management Risk Assessment for them to carry out a review.

It was **resolved** to approve Potton Town Council's Financial and Management Risk Assessment.

v. Verify Bank Reconciliations against statement 1st August – 31st August 2023.

Members proceeded to go through the Bank Reconciliations.

It was **resolved** that the Bank Reconciliation for 1st August – 31st August 2023 be approved.

vi. To receive an income and expenditure by budget heading report showing progress against the budget 2023/24 at the end of August 2023.

Members proceeded to go through the detailed statement of income and expenditure against budget.

It was **resolved** to approve the detailed statement of income and expenditure against budget for the period to 31st August 2023.

vii. Verify Bank Reconciliations against statement 1st September – 30th September 2023.

Members proceeded to go through the Bank Reconciliation.

It was **resolved** that the Bank Reconciliation for 1st September – 30th September 2023 be approved.

viii. To receive an income and expenditure by budget heading report showing progress against the budget 2023/24 at the end of September 2023.

Members proceeded to go through the detailed statement of income and expenditure against budget.

It was **resolved** to approve the detailed statement of income and expenditure against budget for the period to 30th September 2023.

ix. Budget

Members noted the report from the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) with regards to the budget. Members also noted the General Reserve and Ear Marked Reserves.

The Chairman asked the RFO to speak about the draft budget.

The RFO referred members to the budget notes report which highlighted proposed changes to the budget compared to the current financial year. The RFO mentioned he is still waiting for the tax base to be able to advise about the precept.

The Chairman asked if the RFO has allowed for an increase in the precept and at what level?

The RFO has allowed for a zero increase and to keep the precept the same.

It was proposed to look at the current council tax as we know plus 5%.

It was **resolved** to look at the current council tax with an increase of 5%.

Members were reminded to advise what they want to be included in next year's draft budget by the end of December.

9. S106 Funding

The Chairman invited Cllr Gwilliam the Vice-Chairman to speak about this item.

Cllr Gwilliam mentioned that Section 106 monies which are being held by Central Bedfordshire Council have been obtained for various reasons. It would appear that various organisations don't appear to be aware about the monies.

Cllr Zerny spoke about Section 106 with regards to monies being been uncommitted and has advised CBC they should include on the report that they are engaging with organisations about the spending of the monies.

The Chairman mentioned about people complain about the Dr's surgery and it appears that the recipients of the monies for example schools and Dr's surgery don't appear to be drawing the monies to make improvements and need CBC to encourage organisations to spend the monies.

Cllr Zerny advised that CBC officers are talking to the Dr's surgery and the schools and encouraging them to spend the money wisely.

It is mentioned by several local residents that all the Section 106 monies are allocated to a community hall (Potton Hall for All) should be spent on Schools and the Dr's. The Planning Obligations document available on the CBC website mentions what Section 106 monies have been allocated from each development and this includes over £1,000,000 for education and a significant amount of money for the Dr's surgery. Tilia Homes on the Ridgeway / Sutton Mill Road advise on signage, that over £800,000 is coming to Potton via Planning Obligations (Section 106). Maybe the schools and Dr's or CBC need to advise people about the money coming to various organisations in Potton via Planning Obligations (Section 106) and how they plan to spend the monies.

It was mentioned that most people in Potton don't know the information is available on the CBC website.

At the meeting of the Planning Committee earlier in the evening, members noted correspondence received concerning Central Bedfordshire Council's Draft Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) Consultation Notification (Database).

It was resolved to defer the item for consideration at the Town Council meeting which followed the Planning Committee meeting.

The SPD appears to be to do with S106 monies coming in. If the town council wishes to comment, the deadline is by 10am on 11th December.

The Chairman asked members to read the document and email comments to the Town Clerk to enable a response to CBC by 11th December.

The 127-page document will be made available on one-drive.

10. Committee Membership

Members considered membership of committees following the resignation of Cllr Gibb.

It was **resolved** to appoint Cllr Kett as a member of the Environmental Committee.

It was **resolved** to appoint Cllr Craig as a member of the Potton Hall for All Steering Group.

11. Councillor Surgeries

- i. Members noted the report from Cllrs Craig and Gwilliam for the Councillor Surgery on Saturday 16th September.

Cllr Craig noted that Cllr Day responded about the Buddleia problems in the town.

It was **resolved** to defer Cllr Day's response to the Environmental Committee to make a recommendation to the town council at its next meeting on Tuesday 9th January 2024 about what to do about the Buddleia problems in the town.

A member asked if the request for further cold-calling signs to be displayed in the town was because of an increase in cold-calling.

Cllr Craig advised that it was more a comment, but if anyone wants some 'No Cold-Calling' stickers, there are some provided by CBC that can be made available at the next councillor surgery.

- ii. Members noted the date of the next councillor surgery on Saturday 9th December 2023 and that Cllrs Gwilliam and Leggatt will attend.
- iii. Members noted that at the meeting on 5th September, it was resolved for councillor surgeries to be considered by the Events Committee, and to defer setting dates and nominating volunteers for councillor surgeries to the Events Committee.

Cllr Leggatt advised that going forward the Events Committee will nominate councillors to attend surgeries once dates have been set. When dates are delegated to councillors, it will be up to the councillor to swap with other councillors if they are unable to attend.

Cllr Leggatt requested a list of dates for councillor surgeries (historically) so that dates can be set for 2024. Cllr Leggatt also suggested that councillors should arrange to have surgeries with different groups in the town as well as in the Market Square, which will improve engagement.

Cllr Leggatt also mentioned the new town council gazebo, which needs at least four people to help put it up for the surgeries on the Market Square that are held at the Four Seasons Markets.

12. **Potton Hall for All**

The Chairman invited Cllr Gwilliam to give an update on the current progress on the Hall for All.

Cllr Gwilliam reported that the Potton Hall for All Steering Group had its first meeting with Quantity Surveyor (QS)/Employer's Agent and Watson & Cox on 26th October, which went very well.

The QS is now drawing up a draft contract with Watson & Cox and, if all goes according to plan, and Watson & Cox action everything they need to for the planning conditions, they could be starting on site as early as 4th January.

There are still a few parts of the design that need to be ironed out, e.g. mechanical & electrical (M&E) services, and the Hall for All trustees want to approach the user groups to make sure things like plug sockets will be sited in the most suitable place.

The building has to be registered with Building Control and at that point we need to submit the name for the building. The general feeling amongst the joint steering committee is 'Potton Hall for All'. 'Potton Hall' was suggested.

It was **resolved to recommend** 'Potton Hall' as the name for the building at the next meeting of the Potton Hall for All Steering Group.

13. **Hogs Hill, Brook End**

Members noted correspondence from CBC's Rights of Way Officer stating that Hogs Hill, Brook End is privately owned and is neither part of the highway network, nor rights of way. Further correspondence from #mechanic was noted with regard to the installation of a soakaway.

Members were asked to consider if the town council should add an amount to the budget to contribute towards solving the issue of the flooding in the footpath between Tysoe's and the pharmacy.

#mechanic is looking for a contribution to the overall work based on the current estimate of £11,600 ex VAT and is proposing, but would be open to offer, a contribution of £3,500 ex VAT.

The Town Clerk commented that £3,500 is not an equal contribution.

The Town Clerk advised that he has asked for and is still waiting for a copy of quote from #mechanic.

It was suggested that the town council should not commit to spending public money without seeing a schedule of works and how much it is going to cost. The town council would want to see what other parties are contributing before committing funds.

It was **resolved** to contact #mechanic to advise that the town council is willing to consider a contribution, but exactly how much will depend on receiving copies of the formal quotation(s).

A member noted in the reply from the CBC Rights of Way Officer about the procedure to take when it is not clear who owns the land. The town council would need to indemnify itself against any claims where work is being carried out on land of unknown ownership so avoid being embroiled in any legal comeback.

It was suggested that the correspondence from the CBC Rights of Way Officer should be shared with #mechanic and other involved parties.

The town council should make it known that it does not endorse the work, but is merely considering making a financial contribution towards it. The town council is not interested in taking ownership of the land or maintaining it in the future.

14. Magpas Air Ambulance

Members were asked to consider if they wish to make a donation from the General Power of Competence (GPC) following receipt of a request for funding from Magpas Air Ambulance.

The Town Clerk advised that the town council made an award of £100 in July 2021.

It was **resolved** to award £250 to Magpas Air Ambulance.

15. Skateboard lessons at the Skatepark

Members noted the correspondence from Let's Go Skate.

It was **resolved** to contact Let's Go Skate to confirm that they have Public Liability Insurance in place.

16. Christmas Lights Switch-on

Members were asked to advise Cllr Leggatt on their availability including times they can assist at the Christmas Lights Switch-on on Saturday 2nd December.

Cllr Hobbs volunteered to help at midday.

Cllr Craig volunteered to help between 12pm to 1pm.

Cllr Fox volunteered to help at 7pm.

Cllr Price Williams volunteered to help.

Members noted that the Christmas Lights will be taken down on Sunday 7th January.

17. Items for the next meeting agenda

Members were asked to consider items for the next meeting agenda.

The Chairman asked members to email any items for the next meeting agenda to the Town Clerk by 19th December.

18. To arrange a date of the next meeting

It was **resolved** that the date of the next meeting will be on Tuesday 9th January 2024 following a meeting of the Planning Committee which starts at 7pm in the Community Centre.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9.05pm.

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.