

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>HUNTINGDON TOWN COUNCIL</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>RECESS COMMITTEE</u></p>
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A Meeting of the Recess Committee (Council in Committee) was held in the Town Hall, Huntingdon on Tuesday 13th December 2022.

Present: Town Mayor Councillor David Landon Cole (Presiding)

Councillors; K Brockett, J Cole, C Doyle, S Gifford, M Kadewere, P Kadewere, P Kennington (via Zoom), A McAdam, A Norton, G Shiels and P Pearce

Absent: Councillor S Sweek

In Attendance: Philip Peacock, Town Clerk, Natasha Pierson, Assistant Town Clerk, Muibat Babayemi, Finance Manager, Carol Rigden, Properties & Estates Manager, Shilpa Desai Sakaldip (via Zoom), Coneygear Centre Manager, Peter Haynes (via Zoom), Head Groundsman, 1 x Fusion Representative (via Zoom), District Councillor N Hunt (arrived 8.55pm) plus 1 member of the public.

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Baker, A Blackwell, B Luckham, S McAdam, T Sanderson and K Webb.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors J Cole and M Kadewere declared an interest under item 9 as Trustees of the Freemans Charity.

3. **PUBLIC/TOWN COUNCILLOR ADDRESS TO COMMITTEE**

A Member wished to address the Council. It was therefore proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED to adjourn the meeting.

A Member gave thanks to the Estates Services Team for the town centre gritting during the recent icy period. It was noted that the gritting had made a big difference to the safety of pedestrians in the town centre and all Members. Thanks were expressed by all Members.

With no further comments or questions, it was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED to reconvene the meeting.

4. **TOWN CLERK'S UPDATE**

The Town Clerk gave Members two updates:

1. A reminder that the Mayor's Civic Carol Service was taking place on Wednesday 14th December at 7.00pm. Members were asked to confirm their attendance if not already done so.
2. That following a recent Staffing Sub Committee meeting, a staffing review of the Town Hall team had been initiated as requested and would be undertaken in the New Year.

With no comments or questions, the Mayor gave thanks to the Town Clerk.

5. **KING'S CORONATION**

Members had before them a report regarding how Huntingdon Town Council could mark HM The King's Coronation on 6th May 2023. The Town Clerk told Members that there had been a lack of detail provided from the Palace or by the National Association of Civic Officers (NACO) for national plans to mark the occasion, but it had been confirmed that HM The King wanted a 'low key' Coronation.

Members discussed how the 2023/24 budget was extremely stretched, and that local plans needed to take this into consideration. The report outlined two options, both to be located at Coneygear Park and the Coneygear Centre. The first was a 'picnic in the park' style event with a big screen, stage and entertainment and the other was to expand on the existing Pensioners' Summer Tea event, tying it in with the Coronation date with a screen to broadcast the event. Some Members felt that the occasion needed to be marked in the town centre and it was suggested that the BID team might have plans for this area. The Town Clerk confirmed that flags would be flown from the Town Hall and around the Market Square too. It was also suggested that there might be some celebratory Church services, which could be publicised to the community. Members discussed the issue of weather, and how any outdoor plans could be affected if the weather was inclement.

After discussing the options at the Coneygear Centre, and the need for something to happen in the town centre, it was proposed, seconded and unanimously.

RESOLVED to proceed with the option to expand the Pensioner's Summer Tea event and to work with BID to look at marking the occasion in the town centre.

6. **LOCAL HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENTS**

Members had before them a report regarding proposed Local Highway Improvement (LHI) projects to submit for the 2023/24 round of applications.

The Assistant Town Clerk ran through the report with Members, who discussed the proposed areas and which ones would be best to submit. Members were reminded that a total budget of £10,000 had been set for LHIs in 2023/24, so this needed to be taken into consideration when choosing the projects to put forward, as a minimum 10% contribution was required from the Town Council for successful applications.

After discussion regarding each of the listed locations within the report and which forms of traffic calming measures would be most effective and economical for the issues raised, Members agreed to put forward the following applications:

American Lane – Road Narrowing (estimated project cost £14k)

Coneygear Road – Speed Humps (estimated project cost £23k)

Lake Way – Mobile Vehicle Activated Signs (MVAS) (estimated project cost £5-6k)

St Peter's Road – Mobile Vehicle Activated Signs (MVAS) (estimated project cost £5-6k)

It was noted that one of the above applications would need to be applied for by a community group, and it was agreed that either Lake Way or St Peter's Road should be applied for by a community group with the proposed traffic calming measure being less costly than those of American Lane and Coneygear Road.

Finally, the Assistant Town Clerk notified Members that the application process had recently changed, and that data or 'evidence of need' was required to support each application. It was therefore suggested that resident/premises letter drops should be carried out in advance of Christmas with a deadline for comments as Tuesday 3rd January 2023, ahead of the application deadline on Friday 6th January 2023.

With no further comments or questions, it was proposed, seconded and unanimously.

RESOLVED to approve the submission of LHI projects on American Lane, Coneygear Road, Lake Way and St Peter's Road for 2023/24, with letter drops carried out for the locations in advance of 6th January 2023.

7. **FUSION**

Members had before them a report regarding the young people's charity, Fusion, needing a new home in Huntingdon. The report outlined initial meetings that had

taken place between Fusion, the Town Council and Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC), regarding funding of £750k that could be used to help fund the building of a new purpose-built facility in the north of Huntingdon for youth provision. Initial discussion had taken place regarding Fusion sharing the cricket pavilion with the Cricket Club and Hunts Cancer Care Network (HCCN), but it had become evident that Fusion needed their own dedicated space, and that the location needed to be more central to the young people it supported, in the north of the town.

The report therefore proposed that the Town Council could lease a parcel of land at the north-east of Coneygear Park to Fusion, for them to build a building of their own on that site.

The Town Clerk updated Members to explain that since the report was circulated, the £750k from CCC had increased to £1.5m, as funding from another youth project in the County had become available. Members were told that Fusion had initially expressed an interest in building a building on the overflow car park of the Coneygear Centre, but that this wouldn't be possible as the overflow car park was installed as part of the planning conditions. The Town Clerk further explained that if the building was to be built on the north-east side of Coneygear Park, this could also benefit the neighbouring mosque, who could make use of the car parking area for particularly busy times such as Friday prayers, where currently cars park along the main stretch of Coneygear Road.

Members debated the location, raising concern at building on Coneygear Park. It was questioned as to why the building couldn't be in another area of the town, but the Town Clerk explained that the youth funding of £1.5m from CCC had to be spent in the north of Huntingdon due to deprivation statistics provided by central government. Members were in full agreement that Fusion did a fantastic job in the town and that it was important to support their work, but disagreements were had as to where the building should be located. Some Members felt that similarly to the Coneygear Centre, a building for Fusion on Coneygear Park could enhance the outside space, making use of a currently underused area of the park.

Some Members expressed concern at the lack of public consultation, but the Town Clerk explained that there couldn't be a public consultation ahead of Members discussing how they wished to proceed. Members advised that some residents had been upset to read the report regarding the proposal and that there was ill feeling towards building again on the park. Members spent some time talking about the importance of Fusion's work in supporting the youth in the town and that it would be a great shame if the charity was to lose a substantial offer of funding if a location couldn't be agreed.

At the conclusion of the discussions, the Town Clerk suggested amending the recommendation phrasing of the report slightly to read the following, "to approve in principle the leasing of land to Fusion on Coneygear Park to erect a new building

and associated car park at a peppercorn rent, subject to public consultation results”.

The Mayor took a vote on the amended recommendation, and it was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED to proceed with the amended recommendation, to approve in principle the leasing of land to Fusion on Coneygear Park to erect a new building and associated car park at a peppercorn rent, subject to public consultation results.

7 Members voted in favour.

2 Members voted against.

1 Member abstained.

8. **CRICKET PAVILION**

Members had before them a report regarding the proposal of demolishing and rebuilding the existing cricket pavilion on St Peter's Road to build a new purpose-built building for the cricket club and Hunts Cancer Care Network (HCCN). The report detailed two options for the new building, which the Property & Estates Manager ran through; one option to create a new pavilion with an indoor sports hall for multi sports use and a caretaker's flat, and the other to create a new pavilion, minus the indoor sports hall and flat.

Members were advised that Option 1 (with the sports hall and flat) would be of considerable financial risk for the Council since there wasn't confirmed funding for the total project cost, which would likely be up to 30% more than projected, due to rising costs and inflation. Members debated the benefit of both options, and it was agreed that taking on a £2m project was of less financial risk than up to a £5m project. It was however discussed that in time, a sports hall could be added to the building, should future funding become available. One Member advised that the Town Council had ringfenced the £600k from the sale of Sallowbush land and had up to £150k in unspent CIL/S106 to contribute towards the project, therefore no more than £750k should be put forward as the Town Council's contribution, with the rest coming from external funding streams and grant applications.

Members debated the two options and which funding streams would be available to apply for and it was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED to proceed with option 2 in the report, to demolish and rebuild the cricket pavilion without the sports hall or caretaker's flat.

8 Members voted in favour.

2 Members abstained.

It was further proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED to commit up to £750k of funding from the Town Council towards the project cost.

8 Members voted in favour.

2 Members abstained.

9. **SPRING COMMON**

Members had before them a report regarding Spring Common, a parcel of land in Huntingdon owned by the Freemans Charity but leased to Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC). The report detailed, and the Town Clerk explained to Members that the existing lease was in place until 2027, but that HDC were willing to relinquish the lease early, should the Town Council wish to consider taking management of the Common on.

Members discussed that a lot of work was required to get the Common back up to a good standard, and the Town Clerk explained that should the lease be terminated, or expire, HDC would be responsible for bringing the land back up to standard before handing it back.

Members expressed concerns over taking the land on and the financial risk to the Council. It was agreed that should the Council investigate taking on the management and maintenance of Spring Common, it would need to be subject to adequate funding from the Freemans to be a self-financing addition to the Town Council' remit. Members agreed that the Common had huge potential to be a great space for the local community to use and enjoy, boasting a great variety of flora, fauna and wildlife.

After discussing the risks, but potential with investigating taking on the lease, it was proposed, seconded and unanimously.

RESOLVED to enter negotiations and discussion with the Freemans Charity relating to taking over the lease from HDC, subject to full reports on the land being carried out and received.

10. **INTERFACE WITH HDC**

Members had before them a report with updates from recent discussions with HDC from the quarterly meetings scheduled to take place between the Town and District Council to discuss issues, matters relating to Huntingdon. Members were told that the updates from the report were from the November catch up, but that the December meeting, due to have taken place on the 12th December hadn't taken place.

The Mayor asked Members if there were any questions and concerns were raised about installing a pedestrian crossing on Hartford Road near to the bus stop that had recently been crashed into. Another Member highlighted the plans for 'wild verges' to be planted with wildflowers, agreeing that HDC would need to communicate this so that residents/road users are aware of the changes to the currently cut verges.

With no further comments or questions from the updates, the Town Clerk advised that Councillor Sanderson had requested to put forward the following motion:

"This council commences preparatory work to negotiate freehold and/or leasehold ownership of play areas at Bevan Close and Maryland Avenue, Huntingdon currently owned and maintained by Huntingdonshire District Council."

Members questioned the need to declare an interest if both Town and District Councillors and asked whether the Motion could be put forward by a Town Councillor, also representing the district. Members felt that the Motion needed to be proposed by a non-District Councillor, and in the absence of Councillor Sanderson, it was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED to defer the Motion to a future meeting.

11. **CIVILITY & RESPECT**

- i) Following the recent adoption of the Civility & Respect Pledge, Members were asked to approve that the Mayor signed the official Pledge confirming Huntingdon Town Council's support. It was proposed, seconded and unanimously.

RESOLVED that the Mayor should sign the pledge and it was duly signed.

- ii) Members had before them a report regarding an Early Day Motion, calling on the Government to re-visit its responses to the Committee on the Standards in Public Life report on local government ethical standards.

The Town Clerk asked Members for their support with the pledge and to approve the sending of a letter to Jonathan Djanogly MP to request his support with the national issue.

Members were in full support of the Motion, and it was proposed, seconded and unanimously.

RESOLVED to issue a letter to Jonathan Djanogly MP to request his support for the Early Day Motion.

8:55 pm Cllr Hunt arrived.

12. **PRECEPT**

Members had before them a report regarding the setting of Huntingdon Town Council's 2023/24 Precept, to submit the request to Huntingdonshire District Council by their deadline of 6th January 2023.

The report recommended a Precept figure of £1,650,217.00 to make up the difference between the Council's budgeted income and expenditure for 2023/24 of £4,775,890.00 and £3,213,054.00, supported by £62,000.00 from General Reserves.

The Mayor invited the Chairman of the Finance Committee to give a verbal report regarding the setting of the Precept. Councillor Pearce ran through the process of the 2023/24 budget setting process, which Members were reminded had begun several months ago, with numerous meetings of the Finance Sub Committee, and with the Town Clerk, Responsible Finance Officer, and other Officers/Councillors. Thanks were given to all involved for their perseverance and ongoing efforts in getting to the Precept figure detailed in the report, which resulted in a weekly increase of £0.49p per week on a Band D property, or £0.38p on a Band B property, of which most were in Huntingdon.

Members discussed the increase, commenting that with inflation, the increase was reasonable, given the amount of work, services, projects, and events undertaken by the Council to serve the town. One Member suggested that the new Communications Officer post was already greatly assisting in telling residents all that the Town Council does, and it was agreed that this was extremely important in demonstrating what the Council is achieving within the new budget. The Town Clerk expanded on this, from experience that it would be a negative impact to cut budgets and stop providing services, as this would be noticed, but by making small increases to carry on providing a high level of service delivery, this would be welcomed by residents.

One Member highlighted the cost-of-living crisis, concerned that the increases wouldn't be affordable, especially as there would be increases across the County and District Council, along with other authorities such as Police and Fire. Members were reminded that the Town Council's part of Council Tax formed a smaller proportion and that the services undertaken by the Town Council made a big difference to local people's lives. It was noted that the setting of the 2023/24 budget had been the hardest year yet and that a huge amount of work had gone into making the budget as tight as possible. Another Member suggested that 80% of people entitled to support were not in full receipt of their benefit entitlement and it was suggested that the Town Council could produce an information sheet on what support was available and where from. One Member advised that they had

been assisting residents with applications for support and that they would be happy to offer their help more widely.

Finally, the Mayor advised that he had written an article to submit to the Hunts Post regarding the 49p per week increase to explain to residents how this figure had been met, which he hoped would help to demonstrate why the increase was the right thing to do.

With no further comments, it was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED to approve the 2023/24 Precept figure of £1,650,217.00, (14% which is a weekly increase of £0.49p per week on a Band D property) which would be submitted to HDC by 6th January 2023.

7 Members voted in favour.

2 Members voted against.

1 Member abstained.

13. **MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor wished all Members, Officers and residents a Happy Christmas and a good New Year.

MAYOR