

COUNCIL



MONDAY, 12 DECEMBER 2022 - 4.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor A Miscandlon (Chairman), Councillor N Meekins (Vice-Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor C Boden, Councillor J Clark, Councillor S Clark, Councillor D Connor, Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor S Count, Councillor Mrs M Davis, Councillor D Divine, Councillor Mrs J French, Councillor K French, Councillor A Hay, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor M Humphrey, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor D Mason, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor D Patrick, Councillor M Purser, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor R Skoulding, Councillor M Tanfield, Councillor S Tierney, Councillor S Wallwork and Councillor S Wilkes

APOLOGIES: Councillor Mrs S Bligh, Councillor G Booth, Councillor C Marks, Councillor A Maul, Councillor Mrs K Mayor, Councillor J Mockett, Councillor W Sutton and Councillor R Wicks

C33/22 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 3 October 2022 were confirmed and signed.

C34/22 CIVIC ENGAGEMENTS UPDATE.

Councillor Miscandlon drew members' attention to the civic activities undertaken by himself and the Vice-Chairman in the weeks preceding Full Council.

C35/22 TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AND/OR THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE.

Councillor Miscandlon paid tribute to Ray Griffin and Norman Topliss who had sadly passed away. He stated that Ray Griffin was a Conservative Councillor for the Waterlees Ward of Wisbech from May 2007 until May 2011 and served on the Licensing Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Policy Panel.

Councillor Miscandlon informed members that Norman began his career in Local Government in 1962 and joined Fenland District Council in 1974, fulfilling the roles of Deputy Treasurer, Treasurer, Director of Finance and Administration and ultimately Chief Executive from 1993 until his retirement in 2002. He offered condolences to Ray and Norman's families and members observed a two minutes silence in their memories.

Councillor Miscandlon thanked everyone who was able to attend and support his carol service on 2 December, which was a well-attended and enjoyable event and a wonderful way to commence the festive season. He paid special thanks to Deputy Lieutenant Mark Knight MBE, Mayor of Whittlesey Councillor David Mason, Mayor of Chatteris Linda Ashley and the Council's Chief Executive, Paul Medd, who all read at the service. Thanks was also made to the Chatteris Community Choir, Kingsfield School Choir and soloist Clare Grant who all performed magnificently as well as the vicar, Wendy Thompson, and Member Services for their excellent planning and assistance in arranging and supporting the event.

C36/22 TO RECEIVE QUESTIONS FROM, AND PROVIDE ANSWERS TO, COUNCILLORS IN RELATION TO MATTERS WHICH, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIRMAN,

ACCORD WITH THE PROVISIONS OF PROCEDURE RULES 8.4 AND 8.6.

Councillor Miscandlon reported that there had been no questions submitted under Procedure Rule 8.6. Under Procedure Rule 8.4, Councillor Cornwell asked the following questions as Leader of the Opposition:

- he sees from the sadly depleted local media that colleagues in East Cambridgeshire have managed to obtain £2.3million from Cambridgeshire Horizons and asked if Fenland had made any applications and received monies from Cambridgeshire Horizons and if not why not? Councillor Boden responded that as far as Cambridgeshire Horizons is concerned he was instrumental in ensuring that the monies that had been lying there unused for the best part of 9 years were made available to the constituent councils and he also proposed the way in which the monies should be distributed, which was favourable as far as Fenland District Council was concerned, with it receiving £3.35million in total of which £1.05million will need to be paid back to the Department for Transport over the next 25 years and the remainder is to be made available for various specified objectives consistent with the objectives of Cambridgeshire Horizons so Fenland did end up in the same position as East Cambridgeshire District Council. Councillor Cornwell stated he was pleased to hear this but asked why East Cambridgeshire should get the publicity? Councillor Boden responded that this Council is not in the habit of always necessarily putting out or pushing publicity, which some members of the authority might think is party political, but the Council achieved what it needed to achieve, there was no need for it to be publicised widely and the Council will ensure the money is spent wisely.
- recently he has been approached by a number of the ex-members of the old Fenland Tourist Board who have pointed out that since the Board was disbanded, and the subject was supposedly included in Fenland's Creativity and Cultural Strategy from February 2021, little seems to have happened on the tourism front and asked when something touristy is likely to happen or is the Council's line that the industry itself is required to take a lead in re-establishing a partnership arrangement? He further asked if there should be an update to the Strategy as well? Councillor Boden agreed that not much has happened recently but there has been Covid which put a stop on a whole host of things to do with tourism over a period of 2 years or more, but there will be more to be undertaken with cooperation of the existing tourist providers in the area but it will not be imposed on people. Councillor Cornwell made the point that the question has come about because there has been a resurgence of activity in this industry and some are questioning what is happening and should this resurgence be matched in some way to show that the Council are trying to help the industry recover lost ground.

C37/22 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM AND ASK QUESTIONS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH PORTFOLIO HOLDER RESPONSIBILITIES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULES 8.1 AND 8.2.

Members asked questions of Portfolio Holders in accordance with Procedure Rules 8.1 and 8.2 as follows:

- Councillor Miss French stated that she has heard that the Combined Authority Mayor will be bringing in a Council Tax levy and asked Councillor Boden if this is true and if so does he have any indication on the value? Councillor Boden responded that the Combined Authority Mayor has a legal power to introduce a precept and there has been discussion and suggestion that because of the Combined Authority Mayor's failure to receive any bus money from Central Government last March and April that obtaining money directly from local residents in the form of a precept could be a way forward but there is yet to be any firm indication that it will actually take place or how much it would be, with it being harmful to speculate the cost. He made the point that at this time when so many people are struggling to make ends meet due to inflation levels and high heating costs the last thing they want is another tax to appear on their Council Tax bills so he personally deprecates the suggestion that the Mayor considers it may be necessary to do this. Councillor Boden made the point

that the previous Mayor, James Palmer, never found it necessary to use this legal power and he is very unhappy with the prospect that residents may see a Council Tax precept from the Combined Authority Mayor which all residents will have to pay.

- Councillor Wallwork referred to the congestion charges proposed for Cambridge and asked Councillor Tierney to confirm that this was not heading into Fenland? Councillor Tierney responded that the biggest aspiration of the ruling group in control of the County Council is fighting global warming and it does not appear that there is any price that is too great to pay, with one of the things they want to firmly do is clamp down on cars and some of the groups in the Cambridge area are upset and angry about it as it is a cost to just travel in and out of your house or work every single day and a cost that affects the most vulnerable. He stated that there is talk about doing something similar or the same at this end of the County and when in the past he has heard these rumours they have always come true, but it is too early to say what the proposals will be but there are papers suggesting right now on some sort of car control or taxation they feel is necessary but he would certainly oppose it and would hope this whole Council would unite against such a proposal.
- Councillor Hay added that she was at the Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny meeting last week and a report was considered on a bus review, which has taken 4 years to be produced when members were told it would take less than a year, but as part of this review they are looking at congestion charges and she was told afterwards by the officer from the Combined Authority that they feel they will not get any funding from Central Government unless they include congestion charging. She does not believe this is a true statement and she believes they are using it as an excuse.

C38/22 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT AND ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY MID-YEAR REVIEW 2022/23

Members consider the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy Mid-Year Review for 2022/23 presented by Councillor Boden. Councillor Boden stated this year, as last year, the Council has undertaken no additional borrowing so the total amount of borrowing has been reduced and it is not anticipated that the Council will borrow any money in this financial year as it currently stands. He added that it is assumed that there will be some element in borrowing needed in the three and a half year period up to 31 March 2025 but that very much depends on some of the decisions that members make about the Council and what it does.

Councillor Boden stated that it is not surprising that the Council's investment income has been significantly greater in the current financial year than had been anticipated in the budget, which is due to the higher inflation rates than was anticipated when the budget was set in February. He made the point that officers work extremely hard on a day by day basis to identify the best location to place the money available to the Council and this has been undertaken extremely successfully, with their initially being a budget figure for the current financial year of £100,000 of investment income with it now being anticipated to achieve £500,000, an improvement of £400,000, with in the first six months the Council managing to achieve £164,000.

Councillor Boden stated that a lot of work was undertaken by officers to ensure that every penny earned enough money for the Council as was possible and that is a positive to be on target now towards £½ million of investment income. He stated that when he first came onto this Council he was very surprised to see the residual debt being carried over from years ago and it became clear to him that the reason the Council had such debts outstanding was it was borrowed at such rates that it was uneconomical to buy it out or reschedule, but now the whole of yield curve has shifted higher over the course of the last 6-8 months and it now means that the Council is within sight of possibly being able to reschedule one of the two remaining debts on long-term high interest rates. He added that this will be monitoring and an eye kept on how the markets change and if they change in a certain direction which makes it prudent and successful for the Council to make a change it shall do so otherwise these two old debts will continue.

Councillor Boden advised that the overall position is that officers on a day to day basis have managed the resources of the Council as effectively as possible and the Council is in a much stronger position now in terms of the income received this year from investment than was ever thought possible in February when the budget was set.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Connor and AGREED that the report be noted.

C39/22 FDC FORMAL RESPONSE TO FENS RESERVOIR CONSULTATION

Members considered the Council's formal consultation response to the proposed Fens Reservoir to be located north of Chatteris.

Members made comments as follows:

- Councillor Count expressed the view that this is a great project and it really needs to be embraced, with the consultation response being accurate in his opinion and he also agrees with the letter and the way the Council is embracing this. However, the one thing that concerns him is the word 'potential', this is a fantastic project with a lot of potential and Anglian Water in their documentation talk about potential for water sports, potential for a media space, potential for biodiversity and cycleways and it would be great to obtain all this but he is worried about whether the main interest is in delivering a reservoir and it is up to somebody else to supply the potential. Councillor Count feel this is a fantastic opportunity but it is up to councillors as local members to keep an eye on the potential and find a way that it gets delivered and something that needs to be explained to Anglian Water as the journey is moved on together is that they might be thinking of this as something for somebody else but the Council feels it is much part of an entire package and one goes hand in hand with the other.
- Councillor Tierney endorsed the comments of Councillor Count and stated that everyone has to realise this is an epic project coming to Fenland, being the largest public works project since the draining of the Fens and the benefits, not just for the security of the water, with all of the leisure facilities will be amazing and everyone should be doing everything it can to ensure that what the area ends up with is just as good as was promised at the start.
- Councillor Cornwell stated that the thing that attracts him in particular is the fact for many years people have said why is so much water wasted each year by diverting it out to sea and this proposal satisfies this as the water that is going in the reservoir will be water that is handled by the area's superb drainage system so it is being reused. He thinks it is an incredible project and seems to be the biggest one since the drainage of the Fens, agreeing with the previous speakers about making sure the whole package is delivered together and residents having a say on what is provided. Councillor Cornwell stated that he has noticed from some of the other installations that Anglian Water has is that car parking is a headache at some of them because people have to travel to them and if the spin offs such as cycleways can be provided it would be fantastic but it must be part of the whole package and it is inherent on members responsibility to make sure that complete package goes ahead.
- Councillor Mrs French totally agrees with all the previous speakers, she attended a flood meeting this morning, with Anglian Water and Middle Level being in attendance, and she asked the question about the hundreds of thousands of money that is used for electricity to pump the Fens up to St Germans and would they be looking to work together so that water will be pumped into the reservoir and the answer was yes they are working together so hopefully this will save Middle Level some money, with as part of the discussions today, Middle Level stating that are spending £24 million investing in Fenland, which is superb.
- Councillor Boden referred to the difference in the debate in Fenland compared to the debate going on about the other so called Fens reservoir which is being proposed by Anglian Water. He stated that this debate about where there should be a new reservoir has been going on for 2 years now in detail by Anglian Water, starting with 70 potential sites cut down

to 36 eventually coming down to 4-5 and finally to the 2 that are now being proposed, with Fenland fighting very hard to get one of the reservoirs due to the potential value it could have. Councillor Boden made the point that the other reservoir being proposed in Lincolnshire has a lot of local opposition, with thousands of residents signing petitions against it, and the differences between what is happening in Lincolnshire and here in Fenland is stark and there is superb potential here and it will be encumbant on all members and their successors to ensure that the potential is realised. He stated that the area does not to wait until the reservoir becomes operational before receiving value from it as hundreds of direct jobs and many hundreds of indirect jobs will be secured by this proposal for Fenland's reservoir and many of those jobs will be very skilled, in short supply at the moment, and will involve individuals getting highly transferrable skills for the future and it gives a great opportunity to get local jobs for local people to skill people up, reskill them if necessary, skills them from school if necessary in order to ensure those jobs do come as they should to local people, which involves working with the CPCA which has a large training budget and discussions have already started with the CPCA on what is going to be required to ensure those jobs come to local people and there are individuals trained up to do jobs they will be able to do for the rest of their lives. Councillor Boden expressed the view that there is also the indirect effect that this is going to have on the supply chain and in a whole host of different ways this is going to have a significant positive financial effect on Fenland starting in the fairly near future. He referred to the comments of Councillor Tierney in that this is the largest infrastructure programme that there has been in Fenland since the 17th Century when the Fens were drained and to put it in context the cost of what is being proposed for Fenland's reservoir is just about the same as the cost of the A14 extension which has recently been built from the A1/M to Cambridge, which shows it is a massive programme and investment into the area and can have massive spin offs not merely in the long-term but also in the shorter term where it can make a real difference to the lives of the area's children, residents and local communities. He feels that the approach that the Council has got is the appropriate one to be followed and he endorses it.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED that:

- **the Council's formal response to the Fens Reservoir consultation and the draft letter from the Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth be approved**
- **authority be delegated to the Corporate Director in consultation with the Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth where any changes might be required.**

C40/22 CARBON REDUCTION AND CLIMATE ADAPTATION

Members considered the Carbon Reduction and Climate Change Action Plan presented by Councillor Tierney which had been produced as a result of the Motion agreed by Council on 11 July 2022.

Councillor Tierney stated how proud he was that the Motion received such cross-Council support and a direction of travel was agreed with regards to how the challenges would be dealt with. He stated that the focus is on things that can be achieved, things that are real and will have an effect, things that are cost effective and things that will deliver for the people of Fenland rather than the virtual signalling that you might see elsewhere and the bloated plans that can never be afforded, the focus at Fenland is on things that can be undertaken to make a real difference to better people's lives to provide a cleaner, safer environment and mitigate pollution in an achievable way. Councillor Tierney thanked officers for taking such a clear steer from Council.

Councillor Boden welcomed the report and stated it differs from what other councils have produced as it is identifying changes which are deliverable and quantifiable and the Council is measuring what it is trying to do in order to achieve the objectives that the Council is obliged to achieve by

law. He expressed the view that when this is compared to what a number of other authorities are doing, where they are producing papers which are not quantifiable, they have no means of quantifying the cost effectiveness of what they are doing and they are not prioritising the different strands of work, this Council's approach is a far better one as it allows the Council to work out how it can manage to afford to do what it can and measures the cost effectiveness to prioritise the different opportunities available.

Proposed by Councillor Tierney, seconded by Councillor Boden and AGREED that:

- **the draft Climate Change Action Plan be approved;**
- **the Monitoring Officer be authorised to amend the Constitution so as to include reference to the Environment Act 2021 within Appendix A of Part 3, Table 4 so as to enable officers to fulfil the Council's obligations under that Act in accordance with their ordinary delegations; and**
- **responsibility be delegated to officers for reviewing and updating the Climate Change Act Plan in consultation with the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for the environment.**

C41/22 POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW

Members considered the review of polling districts and places following the Local Government Boundary Commission for England review presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Boden thanked officers, particularly Anna Goodall and Elaine Cooper, for the amount of time and effort put into the review including the careful consideration of the comments and responses which have been made by members of the public detailed in Appendix B. He feels that the review has produced in Appendix C new polling districts and where necessary new polling places to mark the fact that the ward boundaries will be changing for the Elections in May 2023.

Councillor Boden made the point that unlike all the previous reviews there is an unusual situation in that the passage of the Elections Act 2022 means that there will be some regulatory changes and the Council has yet to discover exactly how this will in a practical way change how polling stations will operate. He made the point that it may be that there needs to be more individuals at a polling station or the space constraints will change and an attempt has been made in this review to ensure that enough leeway has been allowed for the recommendations which will eventually come from Government to be effected without any further change and that is the reason why there is a recommendation delegating authority to the Returning Officer to make changes to the proposals at short notice should it be necessary as a result of the advice received from Central Government about the way the Elections Act 2022 will be put into effect.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Tierney and AGREED that:

- **the outcome of the review and consultation undertaken be noted;**
- **the changes recommended to polling districts and polling places be approved;**
- **authority be delegated to the Returning Officer to make changes to polling districts and polling places at short notice should it be required due to the implications of the Elections Act; and**
- **the next compulsory review of all polling districts will be undertaken from 1 October 2023 to be completed at the latest by 30 January 2025 be noted.**