

Annual Assembly of the Town

Held via Zoom

Tuesday 2 March 2021 19:00

Presiding:

Cllr Alan Green (Mayor)

Present:

Cllrs Robert Breakspear, Colin Butler, Neil Coleby, Amanda Frost, Jacqueline Hardie, Graham Parker, Keith Patience and Andy Pearce

Shona Bendix (Clerk), James Cox (Finance Assistant) and Lauren Elliott (Committee Clerk)

Thirty three members of the public

1. Welcome from the Mayor

The Mayor welcomed the meeting. A minute's silence was held in commemoration of the late Cllr Sue Barnard, who had sadly passed away. The minutes of the 2020 meeting were accepted by those in attendance.

2. Town Council report to the electors

Cllr Green spoke of the impact of the pandemic of the town. The Town Council's open spaces remain open for use. The Town Council is hoping to formally open The Ness soon and is working towards its climate emergency declaration; taking measures to protect and support the environment. Commemorative events have been observed in line with Government advice regarding the pandemic. Cllr Green advised the Council remains keen to engage with the electorate and reminded attendees of the current Councillor vacancies. Cllr Green paid tribute to the late Cllr Sue Barnard and her contribution both to the Town Council and the wider town.

Question from Bob Collis to Lowestoft Town Council:

Can the Town Council please give a public update on the situation regarding the local heritage artefacts and consider making a public statement on when it may be possible to view them?

Answer from Cllr Alan Green, Mayor:

Lowestoft Town Council is working with East Suffolk Council to produce a complete inventory of the items. This has been difficult given the current lockdown restrictions. When the renovation of the Town Hall is complete the Town Council would like at least some of the items to be on public display there

3. Presentation from the Member of Parliament for the Waveney Constituency

Mr Aldous spoke of the impact of the pandemic and offered his gratitude to keyworkers. The vaccine rollout is going well in this area so far. Mr Aldous spoke of the £220million investment in and around the centre of Lowestoft, via the flood defences and Gull Wing projects, on which some work has already started. A decision is pending on the Towns Fund funding. Bids for five projects up to £25million have been submitted, which could leverage in £354million of private sector investment. Mr Aldous recognised that towns are facing major challenges and people need to be encouraged to return to town centres. Mr Aldous did however recognise the potential for investment Lowestoft has, and is already seeing the benefits of offshore wind energy. Sizewell C is providing a big infrastructure project nearby, which will create significant employment opportunities during construction, and leaving a legacy of skills here which the town can benefit from in the future. With regard to Britain's exit from the European Union, Mr Aldous reported that the free trade agreement was signed shortly before Christmas. Mr Aldous advised there are challenges which need to be addressed in the coming months, particularly regarding fishing, but thinks there is a future for fishing in Lowestoft. The legislation permitting Councils to hold formal meetings via virtual platforms closes on 7 May. Mr Aldous is aware of the calls from several Councils to extend the legislation or make it permanent. Mr Aldous thanked the Town Council for supporting the community.

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Question from Sonia Barker to Peter Aldous:

Could you outline how much money has been allocated to Lowestoft to attract business into the town under the Enterprise Scheme since 2015, and how many jobs have been created since then?

Answer from Peter Aldous:

Mr Aldous did not have the information to hand but Town Council officers have emailed the question to him and his response will be published here once received.

Question from Christian Newsome to Peter Aldous:

Are there any plans to reintroduce the bus service operators' grant to support the industry coming out of the pandemic?

Answer from Peter Aldous:

Possibly. Mr Aldous has met with the minister responsible and this topic has been discussed. The Government is looking at its own strategy and this issue may be covered.

Question from Keith Patience to Peter Aldous:

Given Mr Aldous' support for the fishing industry and wind farms, does this present a conflict of interest?

Answer from Peter Aldous:

There should be no reason why the two industries could not work together. It would not be good for the town to be reliant on one industry.

Question from Christopher Brooks to Peter Aldous:

Details of the flood protection scheme have been made available, but is there a report about the proposed barrier for the bridge channel itself?

Answer from Peter Aldous:

Some work has already started, and preparatory work for the barrier will begin shortly. It should be constructed over two to three winters, beginning in a couple of years' time. A Public Works Order is required. Over the next few months, members of the public will be given the opportunity to have their say.

Question from Colin Butler to Peter Aldous:

When East Suffolk Council was formed, the Government decreed that due to its size, Lowestoft's own Town Council be formed. Unfortunately the result is an unsatisfactory arrangement of four relatively inefficient parish councils within the urban area. Why weren't these four councils combined under a recreated Lowestoft Corporation with borough status similar to Great Yarmouth, and thus eliminate the extra and unnecessary layer of bureaucracy that East Suffolk Council represents?

Answer from Peter Aldous:

Mr Aldous did not have the answer to this question, but would presume that various alternatives were considered. Personally, he has experienced pros and cons of working with East Suffolk Council. An advantage is that it is a reasonably well resourced Council with the expertise to carry out various projects. A disadvantage is that it would be easier for Mr Aldous to deal with a Council with ward boundaries similar to his own.

Question from Louise Gooch to Peter Aldous:

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If the bid to secure funding from the Government Towns Fund is not successful, what is the next option?

Answer from Peter Aldous:

It is hoped the bid will be successful and it has so far received some positive feedback. If not, the bid will be adjusted and resubmitted based on the feedback received, but it is hoped this will not be the case.

Question from Wendy Brooks to Peter Aldous:

East Suffolk Council's Planning Committee North does not address the real issues of Lowestoft and seems to favour its own agenda. It does not take the views of the Town Council into consideration. The Town Plan is a fantasy. It was drawn up in isolation and favours ideas such as demolishing the building behind the old Post Office. If it fails could the Town Council have more of a say in its future?

Answer from Peter Aldous:

There is a legal process behind formulating the plan. Some areas have never even had a local plan so the fact that it is there at all is important. Public engagement is important in its creation. The problem with planning is that decisions have to be made at a particular point in time, in whatever the current circumstances are. The pandemic has accelerated and produced new trends.

4. Presentation from the Police and Crime Commissioner, and the Police Report to the electors

Mr Passmore spoke of the difficulties presented by the pandemic, but advised that compliance with guidelines in this area had been exemplary. The budget for policing next year will be rising to over £150million, which represents a 30p per week increase in the Police's element of the Council Tax bill for a Band D property. Mr Passmore explained this is necessary to provide an extra 1,400 officers across Suffolk. Suffolk is currently the fourth lowest funded force per head of the population but performs well with the resources it has. Mr Passmore offered thanks to Mr Aldous for trying to lobby the Government for more resources for Suffolk. Lots of work has been done in tackling drug crimes and county lines, but online crime is rising quickly. Suffolk Police is setting up a new fraud prevention unit in the coming year. Roads policing has slightly improved. Mr Passmore has given grants to voluntary and charitable sectors to support victims of crime. The pandemic has had a disproportionate effect on young people. Mr Passmore advised the Youth Intervention Fund is active and work is happening to offer work experience and apprenticeships.

Question from Sonia Barker to Tim Passmore:

It was advised in a public meeting that fifty two police officers would be recruited in Suffolk by April 2020. How many police officers are there in Suffolk now and how many are allocated to Lowestoft?

Answer from Tim Passmore:

A recruitment process was held and there is understood to be approximately one thousand two hundred and forty police officers in Suffolk. Lowestoft should be getting eighteen to twenty extra police officers in the next three years.

Question from Andy Pearce to Tim Passmore:

One of the roles of the Police and Crime Commissioner is to hold the Chief Constable to account. How can the population of Lowestoft be assured that the Police and Crime Commissioner's intentions are police motivated and not politically motivated? Additionally, when will tax payers see visible evidence of what they pay towards the policing budget?

Answer from Tim Passmore:

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Mr Passmore gave reassurance that he is trying to represent the best interests of Suffolk as a whole, and puts those interests before politics. His voting record should demonstrate this. The Chief Constable does need to improve the visible police presence, but not all crimes are visible, and more resources have been allocated to tackling hidden harm. If Suffolk had the same level of funding as Norfolk there would be more police officers in Suffolk on a pro-rata basis, and Mr Passmore is lobbying for this to the best of his ability.

Question from Wendy Brooks to Tim Passmore:

It has been reported that the last precept raised was spent on an experimental scheme to deal with perpetrators of domestic violence. The number of Police Community Support Officers is to be halved and Lowestoft has an office-hours police station with no holding cells. Is it true that the precept was spent on this scheme, and is there a chance the police station could at least be open seven days per week? Additionally, there are still unregulated parking issues in the town, and enforcers do not seem to be interested in enforcing illegal parking at The Triangle.

Answer from Tim Passmore:

Civil Parking Enforcement is responsible for picking these issues up. East Suffolk Council has wardens and this should be an improved scheme for dealing with these issues. Police will get involved with incidents of dangerous parking, but otherwise it is better to report known issues to the District Councillors. The report about the precept is untrue. A comprehensive list of areas where policing money was spent is published annually (this can be viewed via the following link: <https://suffolk-pcc.gov.uk/how-your-money-is-improving-policing-in-suffolk-in-2020-21>). The custody suite in Norfolk serves this area as well. Lowestoft police station does have a front desk but it is not open all the time. The police have to consider the best use of the resources it has available. If more money were available it may be possible to keep the desk open for longer, but data suggests it is not currently well used.

Question from Christian Newsome to Tim Passmore:

Why is it that police cannot tackle incidents of non-compliance with face coverings not being worn on public transport?

Answer from Tim Passmore:

This is something police officers can tackle if they are present, but the difficulty is when they are not present that evidence is required and tracing those who have not complied.

Question from Louise Gooch to Tim Passmore:

How are you helping to bring pressure to bear on the Government to address the link between organised crime and fly-tipping; and organised crime and cruelty to wildlife?

Answer from Tim Passmore:

The police are part of a multi-agency approach to tackle fly-tipping. This needs better enforcement and more people involved. Specialist officers deal with crimes against wildlife.

5. Gull Wing Presentation

Mr Bretherton and Mr Rogers gave an introduction to the Gull Wing bridge and its design. Being higher than the Bascule Bridge it should not cause as much traffic disruption, and is designed to enhance the townscape. The project aims to stimulate regeneration, sustain economic growth, enhance the town, provide more opportunities and better links to both sides of the town. Gull Wing should reduce congestion and improve accessibility to the town centre, reducing the conflict between motorists, cyclists and pedestrians. The location of the scheme and an artist's impression of the bridge were displayed. Construction has been delayed but is due to start shortly, with the main approvals having been secured. It is hoped the bridge will open in 2023. A

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competition to name the bridge held amongst local primary schools was won by Somerleyton Primary School. Construction should begin in April. Traffic management measures will need to be taken as work starts. The next stages of the project were explained. This will include a three week closure of the port, which is disruptive and requires lots of planning. The construction process of the bridge was explained, with accompanying images. Ms Parr (Stakeholder Co-Ordinator) explained the project communications. Regular newsletters will be produced to advise the town on progress, and individuals can register for the e-newsletter. The project also has a website and social media pages, and will engage with local groups, schools and colleges. The project is investing in the local economy via apprenticeships and work experience opportunities, fundraising and sponsorship opportunities and community projects.

Question from Andrew Groom to Gull Wing Project Representatives:

What are the opening and closing times of the current bascule bridge and how do these compare to Gull Wing?

Answer from Gull Wing Project Representatives:

They do not have data for the existing bascule bridge, but Town Council officers will endeavour to find out this information.

Question from Andy Pearce to Gull Wing Project Representatives:

Have the delays with the project resulted in any budget cost overruns? If there are further unexpected delays leading to cost overruns is there an appropriate budget provision? Additionally, Associated British Ports had previously raised an objection. With the requirement for a three week closure of the port can it be confirmed that there is no conflict with Associated British Ports?

Answer from Gull Wing Project Representatives:

A detailed risk assessment was carried out and there was a statistical output to identify the contingency which may be required. There is a level of contingency in the budget for this purpose, which should be sufficient.

Question from Colin Butler to Gull Wing Project Representatives:

Will there be a restriction on opening Gull Wing during high wind speeds?

Answer from Gull Wing Project Representatives:

There has been extensive modelling on the impact of wind and it is not thought there will be any restrictions required.

Question from David Finnigan to Gull Wing Project Representatives:

With the movement of traffic to the bridge what mitigation is planned in terms of air pollution monitoring in the Durban Road area?

Answer from Gull Wing Project Representatives:

There is a statutory obligation to monitor air and noise pollution.

Question from Rodney Duerden to Gull Wing Project Representatives:

Was any archaeology discovered during exploratory work, particularly on the North side?

Answer from Gull Wing Project Representatives:

No, there were no discoveries of this nature.

Question from Christopher Brooks to Gull Wing Project Representatives:

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Is the hard bed rock chalk? Additionally, there was going to be some modification to the design of the bridge to allow wider pedestrian access, to allow vehicles to still pass through, particularly emergency vehicles, in the event of the carriageway becoming blocked. Has this happened?

Answer from Gull Wing Project Representatives:

The geological information can be obtained but it is not thought that the hard bed rock is chalk. It was confirmed that the width of the pedestrian access would be sufficient to allow a vehicle to pass through if required.

Question from Sonia Barker to Gull Wing Project Representatives:

What is the estimated lifespan of the existing bascule bridge, bearing in mind the time it will take to complete Gull Wing?

Answer from Gull Wing Project Representatives:

Simon and Neil do have the information about the existing bascule bridge, but have no reason to believe that it should not be maintained satisfactorily.

Question from Wendy Brooks to Gull Wing Project Representatives:

To what extent do the engineers think it was right for the people of Lowestoft to push for Gull Wing not to be installed next to the existing bascule bridge?

Answer from Gull Wing Project Representatives:

The chosen location seems logical from a traffic and engineering perspective.

Question from David Finnigan to Gull Wing Project Representatives:

Will the emergency services be alerted to either bridge being raised in order to ensure appropriate response times are maintained?

Answer from Gull Wing Project Representatives:

There will be an operations plan drawn up before Gull Wing is operational, and this will include several aspects, including notification to the emergency services.

6. District and County Council Forum

Cllr Green advised that questions can be collated and sent to relevant Councils. Wendy Brooks' question to Cllr Gallant, who was not in attendance, was read out as follows:

'Cllr Gallant, although you couldn't make the Lowestoft Town council meeting could you please answer the following question?

In your report you highlight the development of the Post Office that involves demolition of an historic building. LTC recommended rejection, as did Historic England, Suffolk Preservation Society, your own Conservation Officer and many local historians. ESC ignored this and approved the application. Similarly, LTC and 60 plus local people recommended refusal of High Denes, in Park Road becoming a home for people with complex needs. Again, ESC approved. Why does ESC think it is better placed to understand the needs of a town with 70,000 people and its own town council? Does ESC give any weight to LTC's opinions?'

Cllr Gallant had responded that no comments were ignored. Competing views were taken into consideration and the Planning Committee North had considered the matters openly and taken local views into consideration. Cllr Gallant was satisfied that concerns raised were taken into account.

Question from Kevin Pull to East Suffolk Council

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Can parking officers agree to attend problem areas, such as outside the Gunton Primary Academy on Gainsborough Drive?

Answer from Cllr Louise Gooch:

Please contact your ward Councillor who can raise this with Cllr Norman Brooks and ensure this is taken forward through the officers responsible for parking enforcement.

Question from Andy Pearce to East Suffolk Council

Should the town funding grant be approved the number of planning applications with East Suffolk Council or a partner as an applicant will likely increase. This presents an obvious risk of conflict. The Chair of the Planning Committee North does not offer reassurances that impartiality and objectivity will not be affected, and members of that Committee do not declare an interest in relevant items. In future can a caveat be added and all members of the Planning Committee North declare their position as East Suffolk Councillors as a relevant interest.

Answer from Cllr Louise Gooch

Please formalise this request in an email and send to Cllr Paul Ashdown.

Question from Andrew Groom to East Suffolk Council

When can we expect to hear further details about the proposed Corton Garden Village, as the public consultation closed in February.

Answer from Cllr Louise Gooch

Further information is not available to hand but please contact Cllr Craig Rivett, who is the Deputy Leader and in charge of economic development and regeneration.

7. Community Organisation Forum

Cllr Green read out the list of reports which had been received in advance and welcomed any questions. Cllr Louise Gooch advised that an East Suffolk Council Cabinet Meeting was taking place this evening, with the date having been set some time ago. Andrew Groom praised the work of the Theatres and cultural organisations.

8. Public forum

Question from Christian Newsome to Lowestoft Town Council

Is the Council still intending to close the public conveniences on Pakefield Street?

Answer from Shona Bendix, Town Clerk:

There has been no formal decision to close these public conveniences. The Town Council's Toilet Strategy Working Group is considering the options. Views and comments from the public are always welcome.

Question from Christopher Brooks to Lowestoft Town Council:

Is Lowestoft Town Council involved with coastal defences against erosion?

Answer from Cllr Alan Green, Mayor:

The Town Council has been invited to nominate a representative to join the Pakefield Cliff Protection Steering Group.

Question from David Finnigan to Lowestoft Town Council:

Have the town museums discussed reduced rate entry fee for people who visit all of the museums?

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Answer from Shona Bendix, Town Clerk:

The Town Council's Assets Committee could consider incentives for the museums it has on its land, particularly post lockdown, to encourage visitors back to the museums.

Cllr Pearce requested Mr Finnigan's question be passed on to the Town Hall consultant, who is working in co-operation with museums and local groups, and may be able to incorporate this suggestions into discussions.

Marina Theatre Chief Executive Officer Emma Butler-Smith offered thanks to the Town Council and its staff and the people of Lowestoft for their support over a difficult year. Cllr Green offered thanks to Ms Butler-Smith and the staff at the Theatre for all their work during a challenging time.

Cllr Green thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting was closed.

Signed:

26 May 2022