

Lowestoft Town Council

Full Council Meeting

First Floor, Hamilton House, Battery Green Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1DE

18:30 on 26 November 2024

MINUTES

Present: Cllrs Sonia Barker, Nasima Begum (Mayor), Wendy Brooks, Neil Coleby, Janet Craig, Jen Jones, Christine Moore, John Murray, Graham Parker, Andy Pearce, Deborah Ray, Nick Webb and Elise Youngman

In Attendance: Lauren Elliott (Senior Committee and Project Clerk) and Taylor Williams (Committee Clerk & Planning Assistant)

Also in Attendance: Sheila MossKing (Project Manager for the Town Hall Project) and Emma Bellward (Project Manager for the Marina Theatre Project) were in attendance via zoom.

171. Welcome

The fire evacuation procedure and public right to report was explained and the meeting was welcomed.

172. To receive and consider approval of apologies for absence from any Councillors not in attendance

Apologies were received from Cllrs Connor Blowers, Robert Breakspear, Christian Newsome, Paul Page, Keith Patience, John Pitts and Bernadette Rappensberger with reasons provided. Cllr Parker proposed approval of the apologies received; seconded by Cllr Jones; all in favour.

173. Declarations and dispensations

173.1. To receive declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary, Other Registerable and Non-Registerable interests from councillors on items on the agenda – Cllrs Craig and Parker declared they were members of East Suffolk Council (ESC). Cllr Moore declared she was an employee of ESC. Cllrs Barker, Brooks, Ray and Webb declared they were members of Suffolk Wildlife Trust. Cllr Pearce declared he was the Lowestoft Town Council (LTC) representative on the Lowestoft Kittiwake Partnership.

173.2. To consider written requests for dispensations for interests and note dispensations granted – No written requests for dispensations had been received.
For item 176.5, the Town Council would require a dispensation, which can be provided by the Clerk, in order to consider the submission of a response to ESC's consultation on the payment of an allowance to Councillors. The Clerk provided the written dispensation for Councillors to sign and the meeting proceeded.

174. To consider the draft minutes and confidential note of the Extraordinary Full Council meeting on 12 November 2024, and the confidential notes of the Extraordinary Full Council meetings on 27 August, 24 September and 8 October 2024

The minutes of the Extraordinary meeting on 12 November 2024 were not yet ready for approval, but the confidential notes from 27 August, 24 September and 8 October had been provided for approval.

Cllr Pearce proposed approval of the confidential notes on 27 August, 24 September and 8 October.

Cllr Brooks requested her statement be recorded expressing her frustration on the tardiness in sharing of the confidential minutes.

Cllr Barker seconded the proposal and a vote was held with twelve votes in favour and one abstention.

175. Public forum

An opportunity for the public to make comments on any matters on this agenda, and to

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consider any advance comments from the public – Advance comments had been received regarding the Post Office consultation, which would be discussed under item 177.3. No members of the public were in attendance.

176. Finance and Governance

176.1. To receive and consider the following:

176.1a. 2024 – 2025 budget and reserves – Cllr Pearce proposed to accept the budget and reserves report as a true and accurate record; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

176.1b. Any bank reconciliations – September 2024 was under review with the relevant Councillor and the October 2024 reconciliations were underway.

176.1c. Payments and income for the month ending 31 October 2024 and November 2024 to date (see schedules) – Cllr Pearce proposed to accept the payments and income report as a true and accurate record; seconded by Cllr Jones; all in favour.

176.1d. Payments for approval – There were no payments for approval.

176.2. To receive and note the draft minutes of the Finance and Governance Committee meeting on 12 November 2024 – The minutes would be signed off at the next meeting of the Committee.

176.3. To consider the following recommendations from the Finance and Governance Committee:

176.3a. To consider a request for sponsorship from the Kirkley People's Forum over three years, noting the Finance and Governance Committee has already approved the funding for the first year – Cllr Brooks noted the worthwhile work of Kirkley People's Forum and proposed approval; seconded by Cllr Pearce, who noted the Finance and Governance Committee had approved the first year for 2025/2026 and this sponsorship would cover 2026/2027 and 2027/2028; all in favour.

176.3b. A recommendation relating to a commitment on the funding options for the Marina Theatre (confidential) – This item would be discussed in confidential session.

176.3c. To amend the meeting schedule of the Finance and Governance Committee, for meetings to take place on the second Monday of the month at 15:00 – Cllr Brooks proposed approval; seconded by Cllr Parker; eleven votes in favours and two votes against by Councillors who would be unable to attend the new schedule. Cllr Begum tendered her resignation from the Committee as she was unable to attend meetings on a Monday.

176.4. To consider submitting a response to the Government consultation on enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at Local Authority meetings – The deadline for the consultation was 19 December 2024.

A comment was raised regarding the difficulty in permitting remote attendance as it was not equitable and in person meetings were essential to democracy.

There was support from some members for remote attendance as hybrid meetings could provide the flexibility to enable more Councillors to attend meetings and thus provide the opportunity for democracy to be exercised. However, it was agreed that care would need to be taken with the running of the meeting, such as requiring all members on the meeting to have their video on.

A further comment was raised in favour of exploring remote attendance, noting the need for significant investment in the technology to support the meetings.

The Committee agreed that proxy voting should not be permitted.

Cllr Pearce proposed this consultation be sent to the Finance and Governance Committee

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for further debate and to make a recommendation to Full Council in December when it would be decided how to respond to the consultation; seconded by Cllr Begum who noted that even if legislation was passed to permit remote attendance, the Town Council could still decide it would not permit remote attendance for its meetings; twelves votes in favour and one abstention.

- 176.5. To consider submitting a response to East Suffolk Council's consultation on the payment of an allowance to Councillors – The Independent Remuneration Panel had invited ESC to a consultation on whether Councillor allowances, including for town and parish Councillors, should be permitted. The purpose of this discussion was to decide if LTC would make a response to ESC's consultation in relation to how they would determine what allowance would be paid and how it would be paid. The deadline for the consultation response was 2 December 2024.

There was broad support expressed for an allowance to Councillors for particular circumstances, examples raised by members included the covering of expenses based on commitment, not a flat rate allowance, and a carers or childcare allowance to enable participation, payment of expenses such as the hiring of a hall for a Councillor Surgery as that services the constituents, and an allowance for people of working age to encourage more people to join their local council.

Cllr Brooks proposed to not submit a response due to the complexity of the subject which the Town Council has not been given an appropriate amount of time to consider, and to inform ESC the Town Council should have been given more time to consider the consultation properly; seconded by Cllr Pearce.

Cllr Coleby requested an amendment to state it would be helpful if the Independent Remuneration Panel who asked ESC for a consultation had also extended the consultation directly to town and parish councils. Cllr Brooks accepted the amendment. A vote was held with eleven votes in favour and two abstentions from the ESC members.

Cllr Pearce proposed the Budget and Loan Working Group consider whether to factor in contingency allowance in the 2025/2026 budget (should an allowance be permitted but require the council to self-fund) and present this to the Finance and Governance Committee and Full Council in the budget recommendation. A vote was held with all in favour.

- 176.6. To consider a recommendation from the Budget and Loan Working Group for a virement of £25,000 from the public conveniences refurbishment budget to the Normanston Park capital budget – The Budget and Loan Working Group had identified a joint amount in the Normanston Park budget for the refurbishment of the changing rooms and toilet. Grant funding was due to be sourced for the changing rooms but it would need to be match-funded. The indicative amount for maximum match funding would mean, if taken from the Normanston Park budget, there would not be enough funding left to refurbish the toilets. Therefore, a request was made to virement £25,000 from Public Conveniences Refurbishment to the Normanston Park Capital budget so the budget would be adequate to also undertake the toilet refurbishment.

Cllr Pearce proposed to defer a decision until the indicative costs have been received and indicate the virement would be necessary; seconded by Cllr Coleby; all in favour.

177. Town Hall Project

- 177.1. To receive and note the draft minutes of the Town Hall Project Committee meeting on 14 November 2024 – The minutes would be signed off at the next meeting of the Committee.

- 177.2. To consider the following regarding the delivery stage of the redevelopment of the Town

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Hall:

- 177.2a. To receive and note a progress report from the Project Manager (some aspects may be confidential) – The Project Manager reported the standstill period for the procurement of a main contractor has been completed with no legal challenges and the project could be progressed with the preferred bidder, though this was still subject to securing further funding. No queries were raised.
- 177.3. To consider making a response to the Post Office North Lowestoft NR32 1JA – 460136 consultation, taking account of feedback from the Town Hall Project Committee and Planning Committee – Cllr Brooks proposed the Town Council challenge the relocation of the Post Office as it would remove footfall from the High Street, which was intended to be a regeneration zone. The proposal would also highlight a statement made by the Most Easterly Community Group that the Town Council had not been consulted through this process. Furthermore, despite the consultation, the relocation seemed to already be in progress with works beginning on Tennyson Road, therefore the Post Office were in breach of their own rules on consultations. Cllr Pearce seconded the proposal, on the basis that the points raised by the Town Hall Project Committee and the Planning Committee be taken into account, namely the threats to the aims of regeneration and the query on whether planning consent would be required and if work had already commenced, which was confirmed by Cllr Brooks. It was agreed to include the public comment from the Most Easterly Community Group in the response where it supports the remit of the Town Council, rather than make any allegation against the Post Office. Furthermore, if a response has been made by the MP, then that would also be referenced. A vote was held with all in favour.
- Officers were asked to contact the Most Easterly Community Group to make them aware of LTC's response.
- The consultation expired on 5 December 2024.

178. Marina Theatre

- 178.1. To receive and note the draft minutes of the Marina Theatre Project Committee meeting on 14 November 2024 – The minutes would be signed off at the next meeting of the Committee.
- 178.2. To consider the following in relation to the Marina Theatre Redevelopment Project:
- 178.2a. To receive and note a progress report from the Project Manager – The contractor was now onsite and had completed the set-up and work has commenced on the demolition of the existing link building. The Project Manager will receive regular updates from the contractor to monitor the timeframe and project budget. The Project Manager reported that from the Committee meetings both parties were content with the status of the project.
- 178.2b. To note commencement of RIBA 5 and JCT contract issue (some aspects may be confidential) – The Project Manager confirmed there was no confidential information to be discussed and confirmed the JCT contract had recently received the second Councillor signature required. It was noted the joint insurance payment had been authorised on the Town Council's system and should have cleared the account. The Project Manager confirmed the additional amount would be allocated as a project cost.

179. Assets, Inclusion and Development

- 179.1. To receive and note the draft minutes of the Assets, Inclusion and Development Committee meeting on 4 November 2024 – There were no comments.
- 179.2. To consider whether to apply for a Public Works Loan Board loan for refurbishment of the Denes Oval wall and turrets – It was agreed to discuss this item in public session but not discuss the amounts at this time as a tender process would be required.
- The pavilion building would also be included in the refurbishment.

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This resolution would consider if funding options should be explored for the refurbishment work, with the Facilities and Contracts Manager to provide specifications of works that have been costed up. Once the costs have been received, then there could be a discussion on whether to apply for the Public Works Loan with consideration of its current rates and an appropriate repayment term. A public consultation would be required before the application is made to the Public Works Loan Board.

Cllr Pearce proposed the Facilities and Contracts Manager continue to work on the specifications and costings and return with a report to Full Council in January or February 2025, when it would be decided whether to in principle proceed with the loan application and initiate public consultation. Cllr Pearce confirmed this proposal was to in principle explore the possibility of Public Works Loan funding and obtain specifications to enable this. Cllr Brooks seconded the proposal.

It was queried if there could be considerations for alternatives to refurbishing the wall. Cllr Pearce further amended his proposal to allow the consideration of alternatives for the wall refurbishment, subject to officers clarifying with ESC if this was feasible due to its position in a conservation area. If either option is viable then both options would be presented as part of the public consultation.

A vote was held on the proposal with all in favour.

180. Planning

180.1. To receive and note the draft minutes of the Planning Committee meeting on 24 October and 14 November 2024 – A comment was raised on the number of HMO applications received by the Planning Committee in the past year.

181. Personnel

181.1. To receive and note the draft minutes of the Personnel Committee meeting on 7 November 2024

181.2. To consider a request from Cllr Coleby to join the Personnel Committee – Cllr Pearce proposed approval of the request; seconded by Cllr Parker; all in favour.

181.3. To consider the following from the Personnel Committee:

181.3a. A proposal relating to staff terms and conditions (confidential) – This item would be discussed in confidential session.

181.3b. To note completion of the 2024 staff appraisals – The completion of the 2024 staff appraisals was noted.

182. Climate and Ecological Emergency

182.1. To receive and note the draft minutes of the Climate and Ecological Emergency Committee meeting on 18 November 2024 – There were no comments on the minutes.

182.2. To consider a request from Cllr Coleby to join the Climate and Ecological Emergency Committee – Cllr Pearce proposed approval of the request; seconded by Cllr Jones; all in favour.

183. Outside bodies

183.1. To receive and note Cllr Pearce's report of the Lowestoft Kittiwake Partnership meeting on 16 October 2024 (confidential) – It was agreed to defer receipt of the report to the next meeting in December.

183.2. To consider appointing a representative to the National Literacy Trust in Suffolk – Cllr Pearce proposed Cllr Connor Blowers be appointed the representative; seconded by Cllr Begum; all in favour.

184. To consider the following legal matters (confidential):

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184.1. To consider matters relating land ownership and coastal defence (confidential) – This item would be discussed in confidential session.

184.2. To consider any land transfers or lease arrangements – This item would be discussed in confidential session.

185. Date of next meeting

17 December 2024 at 18:30

186. Items for the next agenda and close

An item was requested for a future Climate and Ecological Emergency Committee or Planning Committee meeting (whichever would be most appropriate) to discuss whether actions and preparations available were sufficient to face the flooding risk to the town, in light of the MPs comments that the previous flood defence plans were cancelled. Officers could contact the MP for her view on the matter and request information on the Government's current position.

187. To resolve that under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, namely any legal and employment issues relating to the matters on this agenda, including the following:

187.1. Any matters, including those above as required – Cllr Coleby proposed the meeting be moved into confidential session; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour.

The Chair closed the meeting to the public and moved into confidential session at 19:55

176.3b. A recommendation relating to a commitment on the funding options for the Marina Theatre (confidential) – It was agreed this item had already been addressed at a prior meeting.

181.3a. A proposal relating to staff terms and conditions (confidential) –

The Committee Clerk temporarily left the chamber at 19:59

The Committee Clerk returned to the chamber at 20:01

184. To consider the following legal matters (confidential):

184.1. To consider matters relating land ownership and coastal defence (confidential)

184.2. To consider any land transfers or lease arrangements

An update was provided to the Committee regarding land ownership, transfers and lease arrangements.

Cllr Pearce made a confidential proposal regarding land ownership with a further update to be provided at the next Full Council meeting in December 2024; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

The Chair closed the meeting at 20:11

Signed:

28 January 2025