

Annual Assembly of the Town

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

Thursday 2 March 2023 18:00

Presiding:

Cllr Alan Green (Mayor)

Present:

Cllrs Andy Pearce, Robert Breakspear, Wendy Brooks, Sonia Barker

Shona Bendix (Town Clerk), Michael Winter (Communications Officer), Lauren Elliott (Project and Committee Clerk) and Taylor Williams (Committee Clerk)

Ten members of the public

1. Welcome from the Mayor

The fire evacuation procedure was explained and the meeting was welcomed.

2. Town Council report to the electors

Cllr Green highlighted the Town Council's continued investment into its parks and open spaces, with new fitness equipment installed in Normanston Park and Fen Park, and the joint project with East Suffolk Council at Whitton Green that consisted of a refurbishment play area and installation of adult gym equipment. Play Areas had received investment with new play equipment in St Margaret's Plain, with further improvements currently taking place at Sparrows Nest and Bentley Drive. Lowestoft Town Council showed its commitment to creating access to its facilities for everyone with the free-to-access outdoor facilities. The Town Council were disappointed by the reports of continued vandalism in several areas, which occupied resources that could have contributed to improvements elsewhere. The enhancement of the environment is central to all decisions made by the Town Council, with Lowestoft declared an Earth Protector Town in October 2022, the implementation of which is ongoing. 2022 had seen the celebration of Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, followed by her passing in December with the correct protocol followed and the proclamation duly read to the people of Lowestoft. The Town Council had continued its focus on climate awareness, with the first Green Event held in September 2022, and remains keen to engage with the community. The Town Hall Project designs, the Neighbourhood Development Plan and the plans for the Triangle Market are in progress and the Town Council welcomed comments and ideas from the public. Cllr Green thanked his fellow Councillors and officers for their hard work and dedication over the past year.

Cllr Green asked those in attendance to approve the minutes of last year's Annual Assembly, which had been published on the Town Council's website. Cllr Barker proposed approval of the minutes; seconded by Cllr Pearce; the minutes of the 2022 meeting were approved by those in attendance.

- 3. Lowestoft Food Bank Presentation** – Cllr Green read the presentation as the representative was absent. The Lowestoft Food Bank has been running since 2018 and in 2022 they fed over 14,000 people three meals for three days, totalling 126,000 meals, almost a 50% rise since 2021. The Food Bank had been seeing regular clients, despite both parents working, due to the increasing costs of food, energy and fuel, and with recent funding a full-time Citizens Advice worker had joined the Food Bank. The presentation concluded noting that the Food Bank is a well-supported charity and their aim is to end the need for food banks. They thanked their volunteers and Lowestoft Town Council for their continued support.

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Question from Andy Pearce to Lowestoft Food Bank representative

Lowestoft Town Council are aware of the situation surrounding poverty and have provided grants for food banks, with funds in place for the coming year in anticipation of the need for food and community relief. The Town Council would welcome further suggestions from the Food Bank on how the Town Council can continue to support them.

Question from Sonia Barker to Lowestoft Food Bank representatives

Cllr Barker thanked them for the report, noting that the local community organisations, churches and mosques were also helping to support the local people. Cllr Barker highlighted that though there is the welfare state, organisations are requesting funding from the local Town Council, which demonstrates the severity of the situation.

4. Lowestoft Neighbourhood Development Plan

A presentation was delivered by Andy Robinson (Consultant in the development of the Neighbourhood Plan) who explained that the local plan is prepared by both the District Council and the Neighbourhood Plan. Lowestoft already has the Waveney Local Plan, approved in 2019 and covers the following period until 2036, and is currently preparing the Lowestoft Neighbourhood Plan.

The Waveney Local Plan is focussed on the regeneration of Lowestoft and the redevelopment of sites. The Lowestoft Neighbourhood Plan would add value with a focus on open spaces and detailing the development of sites, their design and conservation. There are four main stages and the plan is currently at the first stage of consultation on the draft (Section 14) wherein comments on the plan are received from the public via the Lowestoft Town Council website. This first stage is due to end 7th March 2023, followed by Lowestoft Town Council reviewing all received comments in order to decide how and where changes should be made in the plan before it is submitted to the District Council. The Plan is published for the next period of consultation, estimated to open again around June 2023, and members of the public can review it for any changes made and make further comments. The independent examination, appointed by the District Council, begins in autumn 2023 wherein all comments are supplied and checked that they conform to the local plan and the National Planning Policies, with any changes recommended to the District Council before being published for the referendum in winter 2023 - 2024. If over 50% of voters in the referendum agree then the plan is made and becomes part of the development plan.

Question from Wendy Brooks to Andy Robinson

As this is a critical period regarding the environment and considerations need to be made on the affect this has on their planning. This plan concentrates on open spaces and parks as per the declared climate emergency and the aim is to stop devastation of wildlife.

Answer from Steve Gallant to Wendy Brooks

There are several supplementary planning documents, with further draft planning documents recently created, that contribute to this process, one of which focusses on sustainability. Everything is checked against the supplementary documents and the Local Plan is followed for all allocations and development.

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Question from Wendy Brooks to Steve Gallant

The policies need to be implemented, but it is how they are interpreted and where the priorities lay.

Question from Andy Pearce to Andy Robinson

Cllr Pearce thanked Mr Robinson for his presentation and his work on the plan, expressing his hope that it allows for input on protecting open spaces within the parish. After the Neighbourhood Development Plan is approved and works in conjunction with the Waveney Local Plan and supplementary regulations, it is assumed that there will be a Neighbourhood Development Plan that has been produced by the Parish Council and adjudicated by the District Council as the Planning Authority. However, if the Town Council felt that the Neighbourhood Development Plan was not respected and subordinated to the other priorities, is there a legal right to make a representative on how the Neighbourhood Development Plan is being used to decide applications?

Answer from Andy Robinson

Mr Robinson commented on the value of the Neighbourhood Plan and noted that the District Council would respect the plan and must consider the plan in any decisions or recommendations made to the Committee. If it is felt that a wrong decision was made, then the Town Council would have the right to be challenged it via the High Court. There would be ongoing dialogue between the two councils (Lowestoft Town Council and East Suffolk Council) on the implementation of the plan.

5. Community Organisation Reports and Marketplace

Heritage Open Days – Is grateful to Lowestoft Town Council for their support via grants for their promotions and materials, with a successful Heritage Open Day Festival, and a future celebration planned for September 2023. There has been great achievements by the museums this year and thanks were due to Lowestoft Town Council for helping the museum. The Lowestoft civic heritage artefacts are currently being held in storage and it is hoped to see them reinstalled at the Town Hall, with the support of the Town Hall Heritage Group. Through the heritage events to be held in 2023, we will reaffirm the commitment to looking after our history.

Question from Andy Pearce to the representative from Heritage Open Days

Cllr Pearce thanked the representative for the presentation and noted there were many organisations involved in the heritage of this town. The Town Hall Heritage Group hope to continue to be part of the project.

Answer from the representative from Heritage Open Days

The representative thanked the Lowestoft Town Councillors who had been proactive in organising the heritage events.

Lowestoft Museum – Thanks were given to Lowestoft Town Council who supported Lowestoft Museum through match funding. With a special display in May 2022 celebrating the 70th Jubilee and the 50th anniversary of the museum, which has been in its current location since Queen Elizabeth II opened it in 1985, 2022 saw over 10,000 visitors to the museum.

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Question from Andy Pearce to the representative of the Lowestoft Museum

Cllr Pearce thanked the representative and complemented them on their work and diverse display of artefacts in the museum. Cllr Pearce noted that if the Town Hall Project moves to the delivery phase, then there would be an opportunity for Lowestoft Town Council to build on their relationship with the Lowestoft Museum, other museums and local heritage groups.

Answer from the representative from Lowestoft Museum

The representative noted that volunteers had been engaged on the Town Hall Project and was supportive of relevant artefacts being displayed in the Town Hall but not to permanently relocate the artefacts from the museum to the Town Hall.

East Anglia Transport Museum – There has been an improvement over the years with this volunteer-run organisation, since opening in 1972. After the challenging years of 2020 and 2021, 2022 was a successful year with over 20,000 visitors and four events. Leaflets detailing upcoming events and news will be available during March 2023.

Question from Andy Pearce to the representative of the East Anglia Transport Museum

Cllr Pearce was pleased to hear of their plans to build an exhibition hall and queried if there was an update on fund raising and if the project was on track for its opening.

Answer from the representative of the East Anglia Transport Museum

As part of the development plan of the museum, with the legacy received, they have purchased a field next to the museum and started building an additional tram depot in Summer 2022. By the new season they expect progress to have been made on the tram depot and next to that they planned to have an exhibition hall about eastern coach works. The museum has an educational role and different types of transport, and it is hoped that this could expand the future possibilities of transport.

East Suffolk One Radio – This volunteer-based radio station has been focussed on local news and promoting events in Lowestoft and the surrounding area. Thanks were given to Lowestoft Town Council, whose grant last year helped fund a studio that is due to open in the spring.

Question from Andy Pearce to the representative of East Suffolk One Radio

Cllr Pearce thanked the representative for promoting and assisting with community events, and Lowestoft Town Council hopes to continue their mutual support.

Answer from the representative of East Suffolk One Radio

The representative noted that local people were passionate about the area and wanted this station to continue.

6. District and County Council Reports to the Electors

Cllr Steve Gallant (Leader of East Suffolk Council) spoke on the heritage focus of East Suffolk Council, with money being invested into Lowestoft. Cllr Gallant was encouraged by the enthusiasm of the local groups that supported the residents and businesses.

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Question from Andy Pearce to Steve Gallant

It has been less than ten years since both Lowestoft Town Council and East Suffolk Council were formed and therefore both Councils are dealing with legacy issues whilst undertaking their respective duty to their Councils.

Answer from Steve Gallant

Cllr Gallant recognised the fractious nature due to the history between the different councils and in the future the District Council look forward to collaborating with Lowestoft Town Council to improve the outcomes for residents and the wider county.

Question from Andy Pearce to Steve Gallant

The Lowestoft Town Council are having to deal with repairs and upgrades as the assets were handed to them in various states of dilapidation.

Question from Wendy Brooks to Steve Gallant

The work on the Jubilee Bridge seems to have stopped due to an engineering issue and further information has been requested. It may be preferable to consider providing regular public updates going forward.

Answer from Steve Gallant

There are regular meetings with the management team at East Suffolk Council and Cllr Gallant requested Andy Jones provide comments on this question.

Answer from Andy Jones

Work on the bridge is progressing but historic plating had been found at the end of the bridge and once removed revealed two large holes. The work will progress, but the structural engineer advised that supports will be needed under the bridge to progress the repair.

Question from Wendy Brooks to Andy Jones

Can we receive regular updates?

Answer from Andy Jones

Regular updates can be provided to Lowestoft Town Council.

Answer from Steve Gallant

East Suffolk Council's Communications team will respond to any updates requested by Lowestoft Town Council.

Question from Andy Pearce to Steve Gallant

Lowestoft Town Council and the residents are interested in this bridge repair, and whilst information received by Lowestoft Town Council can be put on their media outlets, would East Suffolk Council provide updates on their own website?

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Answer from Steve Gallant

As East Suffolk Council manage twelve market towns, such local developments would not be relevant to the rest of East Suffolk.

Cllr Green wished Cllr Gallant well on behalf of Lowestoft Town Council.

7. Public Forum

No comments were made by the public in attendance.

Cllr Green thanked everyone for their attendance and those who provided presentations.

The meeting was closed at 19:12

Signed:

30th April 2024