

Lowestoft Town Council
Extraordinary Meeting of the Town Hall Project Committee
First Floor, Hamilton House, Battery Green Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1DE
10:00 on 15 October 2024

MINUTES

Present: Cllrs Sonia Barker, Nasima Begum (Chair), Wendy Brooks, Andy Pearce and Bernadette Rappensberger, plus non-Councillor members Helen Johnson and Ben Porter (East Suffolk Council)

In attendance: Christopher Meek (Events and Office Manager), John Chamberlain (Town Hall Heritage Officer) and Lauren Elliott (Senior Committee and Project Clerk)

Also in attendance: Sheila Moss King (Town Hall Project Manager)

Public: There were no members of the public in attendance

62. Welcome

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

63. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Neil Coleby, with reasons provided. Cllr Pearce proposed approval of the apologies received; seconded by Cllr Barker; six members voted in favour; one member voted against.

64. Declarations of Interests and dispensations

64.1. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary, Other Registerable and Non-Registerable interests from members on items on the agenda – With regard to item 70, Cllrs Barker and Brooks declared they are members of Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

64.2. Written requests for dispensations for interests and note dispensations granted – There were none.

65. The draft minutes and confidential note of the meeting on 12 September 2024

Cllr Rappensberger proposed approval of the minutes and confidential note; seconded by Cllr Barker; six members voted in favour; one member abstained from the vote.

66. Public forum

No advance comments had been received and there were no members of the public in attendance.

67. A recommendation from the moderation panel on the appointment of the main building contract

The moderation panel had been held the previous day. There would be recommendations for the Committee to make to Full Council, but further discussion in confidential session would be required for commercial reasons. Four good quality responses had been received in response to the tender.

68. An update report from the Project Manager, including the following:

68.1. Any planned actions to be authorised for progression – There were no specific planned actions other than those which were outlined in the report, including the ongoing running of the project and taking forward the main construction tender.

68.2. The risk register – Regarding project team and officer interactions, Cllr Pearce requested for the likelihood to be increased from one to three for an interim period, and be monitored for three months. Details would be discussed during the confidential session, but officers would be required to leave the meeting for this. Cllr Pearce advised he would leave the meeting and return for the consideration of this item.

Cllr Pearce left the meeting 10:07

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- 68.3. Receive updates on any revisions to the Business Plan – Work was continuing to look at the commercial elements of the business plan, including the café organisation. This has moved on from looking at the competitor analysis within the local market, to the different ways a café can be delivered, whether this be via directly employed staff or contracted out. The Project Manager would present the pros and cons of the different options to the Committee at a future meeting.
- 68.4. An update on Registrars – Suffolk County Council’s Property Planning Board was due to consider a proposal from the Registrars to move into the Town Hall at a meeting at the end of September. The outcome of the meeting was not yet known.
- 68.5. Note the Interim Activity Plan update and consider any actions arising – The new Heritage Officer had joined the previous day and was welcomed. His liaison with the community had already begun. The next step would be agreeing the Volunteer Handbook to enable the recruitment of volunteers.

69. Finance, budget monitoring and payments (see report):

69.1. Income and expenditure, including:

- 69.1a. Monitoring the budget – The expenditure to date was £681,868, in line with normal invoices, design team and project management fees, the development of the interpretation plan and the Quantity Surveyor. Expenditure would increase significantly upon commencement of the main build contract.
- 69.1b. Any payments for approval – There were none.

70. The Volunteer Policy and Handbook, and discuss its implementation

The full package of supporting documents had been provided to members ahead of the meeting. This would enable volunteers to be brought in on a more formal basis, including an application process, interview, induction and training, and would set out volunteers’ rights and the process for raising any concerns. It was suggested the documents could be made more relevant to the Town Council by removing references to a Human Resources department, and including interaction with Councillors. To make the policy more welcoming, it was suggested it should be made clearer that volunteers would form part of a team. Following discussions as to the amount and length of the documents and whether this would be off-putting to potential volunteers, it was clarified that the policy document was intended to be used by the organisation to set out how volunteers would be managed, to set out volunteers’ rights, to ensure equal opportunities and ensure volunteers are given a voice, whereas the volunteers themselves would receive a handbook with the information they need. It was intended that volunteers would be managed by the Heritage Officer. With regard to the handbook, it was suggested that the language in the code of conduct section could be softened to sit better with the volunteer promise section. With regard to the application form, it was queried whether it was standard practise to require two references for a volunteering position. Whilst this is not uncommon, it could be amended to require only one reference or evidence of the individual’s community links. The Town Council did not have an existing volunteer policy. Generally, DBS checking of volunteers would only happen if they were to be in a situation which required it. Cllr Barker proposed to amend the application form to require one reference, which must be followed up on; seconded by Cllr Brooks. With regard to security checks, it was suggested a sentence could be inserted to advise that appropriate training would be provided and this may include a DBS check, or that certain tasks may require working in pairs. The vote was taken and all members voted in favour. It was considered that applying the formal application and interview process to ‘one-off’ volunteering work would be excessive, and further enquiries would be made regarding this. It was requested that gender neutral terminology be used throughout the documents. The policy would need to be applied appropriately, and more thought will be given to when it is and is not used. Cllr Begum proposed to use the draft documents supplied as the basis to move forward, with the amendments as discussed above; seconded by Cllr Rappensberger; all in favour.

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71. An update on the security measures for the Town Hall (some aspects may be confidential)

Some hoardings to the rear of the property had come down, causing damage. East Suffolk Council had arranged an interim fix and a permanent fix should be undertaken that day. A gull perimeter check would be required to secure any remaining loose panels. Once appointed, the main build contractor would be using the site as a compound, would likely install CCTV and would have a more permanent presence at the site.

72. Any recommendations to Full Council

A recommendation would arise from the confidential consideration of item 67.

73. Date of the next meeting

Thursday 14 November 2024 – 10:00

74. Items for the next agenda and close

There were no requests for items to be added to the next agenda.

Cllr Rappensberger proposed to move the meeting into confidential session; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

75. Resolution to close the meeting to the public:

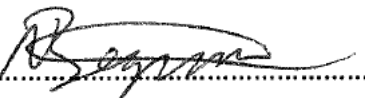
75.1. Any legal issues, including those above as required:

67. A recommendation from the moderation panel on the appointment of the main building contract – A report from the Procurement Adviser had been circulated the previous day, outlining the process and findings. There was a discussion regarding the appointment of the main build contractor. Cllr Brooks proposed a recommendation to Full Council regarding the appointment of the main build contractor; seconded by Cllr Rappensberger; all in favour. There was a discussion regarding project funding and risks. Cllr Brooks proposed a recommendation to Full Council following this; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

68.2. The risk register

All Town Council officers left the meeting 11:07 for the consideration of this item

Cllr Pearce returned 11:07

Signed: 

14 November 2024