



## Operations & Amenities Committee

**Present:** Cllrs Goodman (Chairperson), Chapman, Collins, Dunford, Hitchin, Johnson and Maslen

**In attendance:** Town Clerk, Operations Manager

**Absent:** Cllr Bolanz, Cooper-Marsh

**Minutes** of the meeting of the **Operations & Amenities committee** held on **Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2025** at **7.15pm** in the Eaton's Centre, The Maltings, St Neots, PE19 8ES.

### Public Participation

There was one member of the public present.

### ACTIONS

#### 123 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were noted from Cllr Cooper-Marsh.

Admin

#### 124 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

#### 125 Minutes

**RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the meeting of the Operations and Amenities Committee held on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2025 as a true and accurate record.

#### 126 Action list

Members received the committee action list.

Members noted that the following actions had been completed;

- Museum roof and air conditioning unit repairs had been completed.
- Cleaning of War Memorials.
- Purchase of replacement operational vehicles with plug-in hybrid alternative.

Members noted that the museum building will be monitored over the coming months to assess the impact of recent repairs before considering any further work, to ensure that the most appropriate and cost-effective issues and solutions are identified and addressed.



## 127 Local Highway Initiative Bids

- i) Members received and considered a report from the Town Clerk, along with feedback from the recent Luke Street Local Highway Improvement (LHI) proposal consultation, provided by the Cambridgeshire County Council Highways Officer.

Members discussed the process for the Local Highways Initiative (LHI) bid, noting that once submitted, it would be reviewed by County Highways in consultation with the County Councillor for the area. With the upcoming County Council election, it was acknowledged that a new councillor could take a different view, potentially affecting the outcome of the bid. Some members suggested pursuing a less contentious option (Option 1), which focused solely on signage, although it would not fully address local congestion issues. Due to a low public response to consultations and the need for clearer input from the County Council, it was proposed and seconded to defer a final decision until after the election. However, some members raised concerns about the impact of further delays on project delivery.

**RESOLVED** to defer making a recommendation on how to proceed with the Luke Street and surrounding roads Local Highways Improvement bid until after the Cambridgeshire County Council elections and confirmation of the elected Ward Member who would work with Highway Officers to approve any scheme.

- ii) Members received and noted that a LHI bid for St Neots East and Gransden ward had been re-submitted to focus on a non-complex bid for a streetlight to improve safety in the vicinity of the Loves Farmhouse entrance. This had been identified by the Loves Farm Community Association as a priority matter which was more likely to get support through the LHI process.

## 128 Tree complaint

Members received and considered correspondence and supporting documentation from an agent acting on behalf of a resident, requesting the removal of a mature oak tree located on St Neots Town Council-owned land at Saxon Gate open space. The request was made on the basis of reported structural damage to a nearby property caused by the tree's roots.

Members noted that the Operations Manager had requested quotes for the removal of the tree, but these had not yet been received. Due to the size of the tree the cost may be considerable.



Members expressed their support for the removal of the tree on the grounds that the reports provided suggested damage was being caused to the property. Members commented that, while no formal liability currently exists, the tree's proximity to residential properties and the risk of future claims due to damage of foundations justified removal. Members agreed that awareness of potential risk now places a responsibility on the Council to act.

Members noted that a planning application would be required for the removal of the tree.

It was proposed and seconded that the Council agree to remove Oak tree T002 on the grounds the damage is being caused to the foundations of a neighbouring property (SNTC tree reference T030)

An amendment was proposed that the council will commit to planting replacement trees in a suitable nearby location as part of its ongoing environmental responsibility. The amendment was accepted.

**RESOLVED** that the Council agree to remove an Oak tree at Saxon Gate open space (T030) for which evidence has been provided that the roots of the tree are causing damage to the foundations of a residential property.

## **129 Solar Panels for St Neots Museum and Gate Lodge**

Members received and considered recommendations from the Environment and Emergency Committee on the installation of solar panels on council owned buildings, along with a report and quotes from the Environmental Project Officer.

Members firstly debated installing panels at the museum building, which is owned by the Council and leased and operated by the Museum Trustees.

- a) Committee members expressed strong support for installing solar panels on the rear roof of the St. Neots Museum, viewing it as an obvious and worthwhile investment. The museum is a non-commercial, community-focused institution that already receives council funding, making it distinct from other properties under council ownership. A Member commented that since the council is already funding some repair and maintenance, court room electricity and grants for an event, the benefits of energy savings from the solar panels could reduce financial pressures and result in less funding requests to the Council. There was a brief discussion around battery storage—some councillors suggested the museum might struggle to fund this and proposed the council could consider covering it as well. However, the Town Clerk commented that the museum is open to the potential of contributing to the battery cost and could grant support for that. Planning concerns were also raised due to the museum's location in a conservation area, but reassurance was given that panels would be placed at the rear of the building and not visible from the High Street.



**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** to the Finance and Governance Committee that the Council installs solar panels at the St Neots Museum building and that the Council funds the cost of the panels and battery.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that company B's quotation is recommended as the preferred company at a cost of £10,509.18.

Members moved to debate the proposed installation of solar panels on the Gate Lodge building, which is owned by the Council and leased to a commercial organisation.

- b) The proposal to install solar panels on Gate Lodge was debated. While council members supported the installation of panels on the building in principle, concerns were raised about using public funds to install infrastructure that would primarily benefit a private tenant. Several members argued that doing so could set a precedent for other commercial tenants expecting similar support. Others highlighted the environmental benefits and the Council's adopted Climate Action Plan which included actions on installing PV panels on buildings within the Council's estate, helping reach net-zero ambitions. Alternative funding models were suggested, such as increasing rent to recoup costs or offering an interest-free loan as part of a new lease agreement. It was noted that the current lease has a short period remaining, and any investment should be tied to renegotiating a longer lease. Councillors acknowledged that the building must eventually meet energy efficiency regulations, but consensus formed around the need to avoid direct taxpayer subsidy. It was proposed and seconded to recommend that the Council does not proceed with the installation of solar panels at this point but offers to negotiate an early renewal of the lease and explores the installation of solar panels through those negotiations.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council does not proceed with the installation of solar panels on the Gate Lodge at this time but instead offers to enter into early lease renewal discussions with the tenant. These discussions should explore options to encourage the installation of solar panels—such as an interest-free loan or revised rent terms—to ensure any investment is recouped by the Council.

### **130 Heating Systems for Gate Lodge and SVDK Building A (Man Cave)**

Members received and considered a report and estimated quotes from the Environmental Project Officer on the installation of new heating systems at:

- Gate Lodge
- SVDK Building A (Man Cave)



Members discussed the report and the Council's responsibility as landlord for both buildings. The recommendations for the replacement of the heating systems resulted from energy efficiency audits of Council owned buildings which were undertaken and considered by the Environment and Emergency Committee.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** to the Finance and Governance Committee that the Council moves forward with the installation of the recommended new heating system at Gate Lodge and that Company C is selected as the preferred quotation at a cost of £5,783.50.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council moves forward with the installation of the recommended new heating system at the Steve Van de Kerkhove Community Building and that Company C is selected as the preferred quotation at a cost of £4,071.00

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the replacement of electric heaters with air-conditioning units at Gate Lodge this is conditional to reagreeing/negotiate the lease for the building.

A Member expressed concerns around the insulation of the Steve Van de Kerkhove building and asked that options be investigated on how this might be improved.

**131 CCTV Data**

Members received and considered CCTV data from Huntingdonshire District Council for February 2025. Members asked that a list of cameras covered by the Council's CCTV agreement with HDC, for which the Council is paying are included with the next data report. Members commented that they would like to see how many incidents the cameras funded were picking up.

**132 Date of Next Meeting**

Members noted that the date of the next Operations and Amenities Committee would be on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2025 at 7.15pm.

**COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON**