

Full Town Council

Present: Cllrs Slade (Chair), Bolanz, Collins, Dundas-Todorov, Dunford, Goodman, Hitchin, Maslen, Pitt, Simonis, J Smith, and S Smith

Absent: Cllrs Banks, Chapman, Cooper-Marsh, Crompton, Johnson, Kumar, Macnab-Grieve, Mascarenhas and Terry

In attendance: Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk, Project Delivery Manager

Minutes of the meeting of St Neots Town Council held on **Tuesday 28th January 2025** at **7.15pm** in the Eaton's Centre, The Maltings, St Neots, PE19 8ES.

Public Participation

There were four members of the public present.

A volunteer for FLAG addressed the Council on Agenda Item 6 which was a request that the Town Council act as registered address for a new Charitable Incorporate Organisation (CIO) of FLAG. The resident commented that the report incorrectly stated a new Community Interest Group was being set up and asked that Members note the correction.

194 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received and noted from Cllrs Banks, Chapman, Cooper-Marsh Johnson, Kumar, Macnab-Grieve and Terry. Admin

195 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

196 Council Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the meeting of 17th December 2024 as a true and accurate record.

197 County and District Councillor Reports

Members received verbal updates or reports from County and District Councillors on matters of significance to St Neots.

County Councillor G Seeff addressed the Council, reporting;

- The Local Government reorganisation will see powers devolved down to regions with unitary authorities, with CCC and HDC merged into bigger authorities. Proposals for local arrangements are still being developed. CCC elections will go ahead in May 2026.
- The County Council budget and funding from the government has not yet been settled and there continues to be a pressure on resources and funding.



- £1million in Section 106 funding intended for education use in St Neots has been recovered from a developer. Due to tight budgets the allocation of these funds is under discussion, but it may be used to offset funds already spent.

HDC Cllr Davenport-Ray addressed the Council, reporting;

- She had helped put together a response from combined authorities to the Eats West rail consultation. The response highlighted that if the line goes ahead where it is suggested there will be a bit of land in-between two bits of infrastructure. There should be a push for station at this point. A map was circulated.

HDC Cllr Pitt spoke on the Local Government Organsiation stating that it would definitely be going ahead. Discussions on the future set up for our area is ongoing but it is understood it will most likely result in two or three unitary authorities in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, rather than a very large multi-counties authority.

Committee Minutes

- 198** i) Members received and noted minutes of the Planning Committee held on 17th December 2024
- 199** ii) Members received and noted minutes of the Planning Committee held on 14th January 2025
- 200** iii) Members received and noted minutes of the Environment & Emergency Committee held on 14th January 2025
- 201** iv) Members received and noted minutes of the Operations & Amenities Committee held on 21st January 2025
- 202** v) Members received and noted minutes of the Finance & Governance Committee held on 21st January 2025

Members considered recommendations arising from the Finance and Governance Committee and resolved as follows;

- 203 RESOLVED** that up to £5,300 is allocated from the Council's Community Buildings Earmarked Reserve to progress those actions for which there are no existing revenue budgets or insufficient funds in current year revenue budgets.
- 204 RESOLVED** that for those buildings where the Council has tenants recommended actions which relate to the tenant's responsibilities are only progressed if paid for by the tenants. Actions for which a landlord is typically responsible are progressed by the Council.



The Chairperson of the Operations and Amenities Committee introduced a recommendation on allocating funding and for the replacement of vehicles to hybrid and electric, explaining the rationale behind the proposal which had been approved by the Environment and Emergency Committee, Operations and Amenity Committee and Finance and Governance Committee. Investing in fleet is a good use of general reserve, strengthening our position and lowering emissions.

205 **RESOLVED** that the Council allocates £115,000 for the replacement of diesel vehicles with plug-in hybrid and electric alternatives from the following funds:

- 1) 34,567 from the vehicles and lawnmower earmarked reserve
- 2) £30,000 from the current year revenue budget for vehicles and lawnmowers.
- 3) £50,433 from the General Reserves

206 **RESOLVED** that the Council approves the following vehicle replacements:

- 1) To replace the two oldest diesel vehicles (2010 Ford Ranger and 2013 Nissan Navara) with second-hand plug-in hybrid panel vans.
- 2) To replace one diesel ride-on lawn mower with new fully electric ride-on alternative (96" deck)
- 3) To purchase and install two charges for vehicles (EVs and Plug-ins, 7.2kW)
- 4) To purchase special charger for lawn mower batteries

207 **RESOLVED** that the replaced vehicles (2010 Ford Ranger and 2013 Nissan Navara) are to be disposed of by sale on the open market or with any buying service or used for part-exchange when buying the replacement.

208 **RESOLVED** that the Town Council approve an overspend of up to £5,244 in the Town Council's insurance budget due to the requirement to insure the Oast Building as vacant property following the purchase.

209 **RESOLVED** that the Town Council adopt the draft Councillor Travel and Expenses Policy subject to the following amendments;

- Inclusion of St Neots Car Share Scheme expenses for a Councillor to return to their residence following a Council meeting at the Eatons Community Centre.
- 3.2 to include "any duty the councillor is appointed to attend on behalf of the Council,..."
- 4.2 to include "authorised...in advance ...by the Town Clerk"



- 6.3 deletion of “This authorisation should be attached to your claim for reimbursement.” As this is not relevant in this section.
- 7.2 to include “...permission must be sought in advance in writing from the Town Clerk”
- To include “When the Clerk is unavailable the Deputy Clerk or RFO can fulfil the duties assigned to the Clerk”
- Change date to a review of policy to September 2025.

210 St Neots Flood Action Group (FLAG)

Members received and considered a request that St Neots Town Council acts as the registered office for a new St Neots Flood Action Group (FLAG) CIO.

RESOLVED that the Council approves the St Neots Flood Liaison Action Group can use the Town Council Office address as part of registering a newly formed Charitable Incorporated Organisation for the purpose of obtaining and managing funding to support flood prevention and awareness actions in St Neots.

211 St Neots Fire Station Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy Application

Members received and considered a request from St Neots Fire Station that St Neots Town Council supports the St Neots Fire Station’s bid for Huntingdonshire District Council Community Infrastructure Levy funding.

RESOLVED that St Neots Town Council supports St Neots Fire Station’s application to Huntingdonshire District Council for strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding and that the project expending and developing the station is suitable for CIL funding.

The Town Clerk was asked to issue a letter of support to Huntingdonshire District Council.

212 St Neots Neighbourhood Development Plan

Cllr Smith, a member of the Local Plan Working Group introduced a report recommending that the Council prioritise the review and renewal of its Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) over the next 16 months and that a Working Group is established to work with officers and bring forward recommendations.

Members noted the importance of having a local NDP and the benefits it can provide. Several Members commented on what they saw as compelling reasons to review and renew the plan, including the age of the current plan, upgoing local government re-organisation, HDC’s ongoing Local Plan review, and ensuring ongoing 25% CIL contributions.

Members noted that agreed responses to Huntingdonshire District Council’s Local Plan have been submitted.

RESOLVED that St Neots Town Council prioritises the review and renewal of the St Neots Neighbourhood Development Plan as one of its strategic priorities over the next 16 months.

RESOLVED that the Town Council establishes a Working Group to begin work on reviewing and renewing the St Neots Neighbourhood Development Plan.

It was agreed the following Members would form the Working Group: Cllrs S Smith, Goodman, Bolanz and Dunford

The Town Clerk was asked to circulate an invitation to join the Working Group to Members who were not present at the meeting.

212 St Neots Oast Building Feasibility

Members received and considered a recommendation from the Finance and Governance Committee that the Council approves funding from the General Reserve to progress the Oast building project.

The Project Delivery Manager outlined the proposal commenting the plan is still to do remedial work that won't impact on any future redevelopment or uses while the project continues to be developed. The Town Council has already done a lot of feasibility work, the work proposed as part of the next stage is to allow for good consultation. The approach outlined is positive and good progress forward. The work undertaken will allow Andrew to give a shortlist of realistic ideas that could be developed as part of future use for the building. Not all ideas will be suitable and feasible, and it is important this is understood. It was noted that completing the heritage statement is key as this will be needed to get anything done, including remedial works.

RESOLVED that the Council approve up to £25,500.00 (incl. contingency) in funding from the General Reserve to appoint an architect and conduct Step 1 of the proposed Project Plan which will focus on feasibility studies for final shortlisting of ideas for the Oast Building redevelopment.

RESOLVED that the Council approves the Company 2 as a preferred contractor to conduct Step 1 of the Project Plan (Appendix A) - Feasibility Studies for Final Shortlist of Ideas for the Oast building Redevelopment.

RESOLVED that the Council forms a Working Group to work together with Officers on the Oast building project delivery. That the following Members are appointed;

Cllrs Maslen, Bolanz, Dundas-Todorov, Pitt, Hitchin, Dunford.

213 Project Status Summary

Members received and noted a project status report.

A Member asked that the format of the report be changed to include RAG status of projects, so deadlines and changes can be easily identified.



A Member noted that the Building Development Group (BDG) created had not been active over a long period and it would be good for this to be re-established for various reasons, but particularly around look and feel of the new building. It was commented that a lot needs to align to create a finished product. The Project Delivery Manager advised Members that Town Council officers would be arranging meetings with the BDG as it progresses with its side of the project, a meeting is due to be arranged in February to look at detailed budget lines ahead of the Council's confirmation of its funding towards the project.

214 Approval of Unbudgeted Expenditure from Earmarked Reserves

RESOLVED unbudgeted expenditure of £820 from the defibrillator earmarked reserve following authorisation of payment by the Town Clerk under 5.17 of the Financial Regulations as an 'emergency repair'.

Members noted the payment was to ensure active defibrillators had working batteries.

215 Reports from Outside Bodies

There were none.

216 Mayoral Engagements

Members received and noted a list of upcoming Mayoral engagements to be attended by the Mayor and/or Deputy Mayor, including;

- Freedom of the Town Award
- Charity Bingo Night

217 Date of Next Meeting

Members received and noted that the date of the next Full Council meeting would be 25th February 2025 at 7:15pm.

218 Private Session

RESOLVED In terms of Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972, the following items will be likely to disclose exempt information relating to establishment or contractual matters and it is, therefore, **RESOLVED** that pursuant to the provisions of the Public Bodies (admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 the public and press be excluded.

219 Priory Centre Lease

Members received and considered a recommendation from the Finance and Governance Committee on a response to Huntingdonshire District Council's proposed Heads of Terms for a new Priory Centre lease and the agreement of options set out by the Council's appointed valuer for consideration by Huntingdonshire District Council as acceptable to the Town Council.



Members received an update from the Town Clerk with amended Heads of Terms put forward by Huntingdonshire District Council which were more in line with a single lease option set out in the recommendation from the Finance and Governance Committee.

It was commented that the District Council had responded constructively, and the Heads of Terms presented for a 90 year lease with no break clause and the inclusion of clauses around parking and sub-letting fundamentally addressed concerns the Town Council had over risk, access and value.

Huntingdonshire District Council's Corporate Director of Place and Cllr S Wakeford were present to answer queries from Members.

- Discussions was held around parking permits provided for in the Heads of Terms which were in line with the current leases. The Town Council asked that the wording be amended to ensure the continuation of parking passes in an alternative car park in the event the 'adjacent' car park was not available (e.g. sold). HDC Corporate Director of Place confirmed he was happy to look at the wording.
- Members discussed an ongoing contribution to the deficit of the Priory Centre from HDC to SNTC (capped) which was not included in the Heads of Terms. The Town Council had requested that the contribution continues until the redevelopment is complete and the installation period after that, matching the length the current lease funds for.
- HDC responded that they needed to ensure best value as a duty and that the project should be a sustainable asset with the investment that is going in. There is a willingness to be constructive and discuss continued funding during the construction period, but that this subsidy element did not need to be included in the Heads of Terms. Officers would continue discussion around this point with the Town Clerk.
- A Member raised a point around sub-leasing and operational service agreements. It was suggested that the Council would be able to put in place operational service contracts that would allow it to outsource running of functions or parts of the building beyond the sub-lease allowance. HDC advised this did not need to be specified in Heads of Terms as the Council would be able to do this as a tenant.
- Members discussed the tenant contribution in the Heads of Terms, noting that the Town Council would not be resolving the funds it would be committing towards the project until the next Full Council meeting. It was noted that signing of the Heads of Terms, if approved, would be subject to confirmation of this amount and plans for what will be delivered.

HDC representatives left the meeting.



Proposal and seconded that the Town Council accept the Heads of Terms issued on 28th January 2025 for a 90-year lease, that the Council surrender existing leases when required, with signing of the Heads of Terms subject to confirmation of the Town Council's 'tenant contribution' and confirmation of final plan to be delivered.

An amendment was proposed and accepted that completion of the signing of the Heads of Terms is also subject to amending wording on parking to address concerns raised over the limitation of 'adjacent car park' and for the Clerk to confirm the Heads of Terms do not need to specifically identify the right to enter operational service contracts as this is in the right of a tenant to engage as part of operation.

Proposed and seconded and **RESOLVED** to suspend standing orders to allow the meeting to continue for a further 20 minutes.

Members debated the motion.

RESOLVED that the Town Council approves the Heads of Terms presented on 28th January 2025 for a 90-year lease of the redeveloped Priory Centre and Town Council Offices. The Council agrees to surrender existing leases as required, with the signing of the Heads of Terms being subject to confirmation of the Town Council's 'tenant contribution' and the final plan for delivery. Additionally, the signing of the Heads of Terms is contingent upon legal confirmation that the tenant may enter into operational service contracts for the management and delivery of functions within the building, without the need for this to be explicitly stated in the Heads of Terms.

RESOLVED that agreement of final wording in the Heads of Terms on the provision of parking passes is delegated to the Town Clerk to agree alternative wording to 'adjacent' car park to protect the Council's interest in the long term.