

Full Town Council

Present: Cllrs Simonis (Chair), Banks, Bolanz, Chapman, Cooper-Marsh, Dunford, Dundas-Todorov, Goodman, Hitchin, Macnab-Grieve, Mascarenhas, Pitt, Slade, , S Smith and Terry

Absent: Cllrs Collins, Crompton, Maslen, Johnson, Kumar, Simonis, J Smith

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

Minutes of the meeting of St Neots Town Council held on **Tuesday 25th March 2025** at **7.15pm** in the Eaton's Centre, The Maltings, St Neots, PE19 8ES.

Public Participation

There were two members of the public present.

ACTIONS

244 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received and noted from Cllrs Collins and Simonis.

Admin

245 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

246 Council Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the meeting of 25th February 2025 as a true and accurate record.

247 County and District Councillor Reports

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

- Cllr Pitt (HDC) provided an update regarding the proposed Market Square stage, advising that HDC is preparing a report to share with the Town Council following the consultation that was carried out. A Member raised concerns about the reported funding from the Combined Authority and questioned if this would be better spent towards the Priory Centre. The Chair noted the Council would wait for the HDC report before further comment.
- Primary School Capacity – Cllr Lara Davenport-Ray (HDC)
Cllr Davenport-Ray presented data from the 2021 census, explaining that while birth rates are growing in St Neots East, they are declining in other areas of the town. This means the infrastructure (schools) are not necessarily located in the areas where most need is. In two years, primary schools are projected to have more places than needed. Schools such as St Mary's may become unsustainable, while newer schools in the east are reaching capacity.



It was questioned whether a new primary school at Loves Farm 2 is necessary given the level of capacity anticipated there, suggesting Section 106 agreements related to new provision in this area might need revisiting.

A Member asked if reputation influenced school choice; Cllr Davenport-Ray noted this is a factor but not the main issue—declining birth rates are the core concern.

Committee Minutes

- 248 i) Members received and noted minutes of the Environment & Emergency Committee held on 4th March 2025.
- 249 ii) Members received and noted minutes of the Planning Committee held on 11th March 2025.
- 250 iii) Members received and noted minutes of the Operations & Amenities Committee held on 11th March 2025.
- 251 iv) Members received and noted minutes of the Grants Sub-Committee Committee held on 18th March 2025.
- 252 v) Members received and noted minutes of the Finance & Governance Committee held on 18th March 2025

Members received and considered recommendations from the Finance and Governance Committee, resolving as follows:

- 253 **RESOLVED** to approve additional funds of up to £3,000 (including contingency) to replace the 2010 Ford Ranger and 2013 Nissan Navara with two new PHEV Ford Transit Custom.
- 254 **RESOLVED** that the Council replace PVC doors at the Council depot with steel doors and that Company B's quote is selected at a cost of £5,231.63. That the Operations Manager further investigate options to increase security of the roller shutter door.
- 255 **RESOLVED** that up to £3,950 in funding is allocated to appoint the preferred professional Neighbourhood Planning consultant to undertake stage 1 Neighbourhood Plan review work, which will include research site visits, workshops, reporting and recommendations to set the scope of the brief and focus of the review and renewed plan, including project timescales.
- 256 **RESOLVED** that the Council approves funding of up to £250,000 from the General Reserve to rebuild the perimeter wall at St Mary's Parish Church, St Neots as required from the architectural and structural engineer reports obtained.



- 257 RESOLVED** that unspent budget at the 31st March 2025 in the following budget codes is transferred to an earmarked reserve for future use;

105 – 4146 Equipment and Furniture (office)
105 – 4365 Carbon Neutral Budget
201 – 4116 War Memorials
210 – 4100 Play Repair Maintenance
210 – 4107 Tree Maintenance
230 – 4118 Gate Lodge Expenses
230 – 4127 Ex-serviceman's Club
230 – 4119 The Cage/Lock Up
301 – 4105 Bus Shelters
301 – 4123 Highways Improvements

258 Neighbourhood Development Plan Working Group

Members received and considered proposed terms of reference for the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group.

Cllr S Smith, Chair of the working group advised the Council the last meeting of the group focused on the technical process of reviewing the Neighbourhood Plan. The appointed preferred contractor, working at risk had provided extensive information, particularly about development plans around the west of St Neots, including Bedfordshire plans. A Member inquired about redefining the town plan boundary, which Cllr Smith confirmed as a complex process but consideration of this would form part of the stage 1 work.

RESOLVED that the Council adopt the Terms of Reference for the Neighbourhood Plan Working group as presented.

259 Priory Centre Building Development Group

Members reviewed and considered a report on the continuation of the Priory Centre Building Development Group (BDG).

The Council reviewed the membership and continuation of the BDG. This group was initially set up to work with HDC (Huntingdonshire District Council) and their contractors on the redevelopment project. As the project progresses to a more physical delivery phase the role of the group may change, and Town Council officers would like to focus the purpose of the group on internal collaboration and direct input on various aspects of redevelopment as it progresses, including design choices and marketing.

The BDG will work with officers and bring forward any required recommendations on marketing, operational matters, and the physical development of the Priory Centre.

This shift reflects the project's transition from planning to active construction and operational setup.

RESOLVED that the Building Development Group continue as an internal Town Council Working Group comprised of town councillors and officers, with current membership continuing.

RESOLVED that the Project Development Manager (PDM) will facilitate the Building Development Group as part of the overall project management of the Priory Centre Redevelopment on the Town Council's part of the Project and the different areas that includes.

Any Member who did not wish to continue to be on the Working Group was asked to advise the Clerk directly.

260 **Priory Centre Redevelopment Project**

Members received an update report from Town Council officers on the Priory Centre redevelopment project and lease. The Project Delivery Manager outlined progress and upcoming steps in the project, which has reached a critical phase with onsite work due to start following detailed preconstruction activities. A preconstruction meeting was set to be held with contractors to ensure all preparations are in place.

It was noted that the onsite set up will start in April 2025 with work set to commence in May and that the last remaining planning condition had been resolved.

Members welcomed the start of site works and commented on the need to ensure timely communication and public information throughout the building process.

Members noted the report.

261 **Annual Town Meeting**

Members received and considered a proposal on the date and format of the Annual Town Meeting and Annual Council Meeting. The Town Clerk explained that it had not been possible to find a suitably alternative location to the Priory Centre to hold the Annual Town Meeting and Annual Council Meeting on the same evening. This was due to the space needed to accommodate a quick turnaround/set up for the two meetings.

RESOLVED that the Annual Council Meeting is held on 27th May 2025 at the Eatons Centre in line with the proposed schedule of meetings for the 2025-26 Council year.

Members noted that the Annual Town Meeting, which is not a Council meeting would be held on 20th May 2025 and that details on location and time would be confirmed and shared with Members.

262 Calendar of Meetings

Members received and considered a proposed calendar of meetings for the 2025-26 Council year. A Member raised a query about amending the meeting dates for the Environment and Emergency Committee and Promotion and Events Committee to increase the number of meetings held during the year.

RESOLVED to approve the Calendar of Meetings for the 2025-26 Council year subject to moving the Environment and Emergency Committee meeting scheduled for 3rd February 2026 to 20th January 2026 and adding an additional Environment and Emergency Committee meeting on 17th March 2026.

263 Projects Status Summary

The Project Delivery Manager presented summary reports on each of the following projects;

- Museum Building Repairs
- New Council Website
- St Neots Parish Church Wall
- Jubilee Garden Mosaic Repair and Remedials
- New Play Park Provision in Eaton Ford
- Oast Building Redevelopment (Pre-Construction)
- Transition of Ops Fleet and Machinery to EV
- Biodiversity at the Old Cemetery
- Retrofitting of SNTC Buildings (quick wins and enabling)

A Member questioned the Oast Building timescales, saying that it could be a good idea to have a charitable or community organisation using the building while plans were developed. The PDM commented that the building is not suitable for use in its current state and that recommendations would be brought forward for some works to the building in the short to medium term, which were both required and would not impact on any future refurbishment or use. I.e external repair and maintenance works to the cone.

Members received and noted the project status report.

264 Reports from Outside Bodies

Cllr Chapman raised issues regarding HDC's attendance at Common Rights Proprietors meetings and was seeking clarity on the position of their Common Rights ownership.

265 Mayoral Engagements

Members received and noted the following list of upcoming Mayoral engagements to be attended by the Mayor and/or Deputy Mayor.

- 28 March — BBC Any Questions radio show
- 4 April — Hunchback of Notre Dame by VAMPS



- 5 April — St Neots Choral Society (Stainer's Crucifixion)
- 6 April — Leicestershire Sportive (72M training ride - St Neots to St Neot)
- 6 April — Chaii Hub second birthday party
- 7 April — Citizenship Ceremony at New Shire Hall
- 28 April — Hunts Forum retirement event

266 Date of Next Meeting

Members received and noted that the date of the next Full Council meeting would be 29th April 2025 at 7:15pm.

267 Committee In Private Session

RECOMMENDED 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, **RECOMMENDED** that pursuant to the provisions of the Public Bodies (admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 the public and press be excluded.

268 Priory Centre Marketing

Members received a report from the Project Delivery Manager and the outcome of a tendering exercise for the appointment of a contractor to develop and deliver branding and marketing work for the redeveloped Priory Centre.

The marketing tender process involved a thorough review of 23 bids. After online presentations and in-person meetings, 6bythree Digital Ltd was chosen as the preferred contractor.

RESOLVED that the Council note the information provided and agree on the appointment of 6bythree Digital Ltd as a contractor for tendered Priory Centre marketing work.

The first creative workshop is scheduled to engage stakeholders and gather their input on the marketing strategy. This workshop will involve activities to capture ideas, opinions, and aspirations for the Priory Centre. The Building Development Group (BDG) will play a key role in the marketing strategy, providing insights and feedback throughout the process. Members were encouraged to participate in the upcoming creative workshop and to engage stakeholders in shaping the marketing plan.