

Annual Assembly of the Town

Whitton Hall, Hawthorn Avenue, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR33 9BB

Thursday 26 May 2022 19:00

Presiding:

Cllr Alan Green (Mayor)

Present:

Cllrs Sonia Barker, Robert Breakspear, Wendy Brooks, Colin Butler, Janet Craig, Christian Newsome, Paul Page and Andy Pearce

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

Eighteen members of the public

1. Welcome from the Mayor

The fire evacuation procedure was explained and the meeting was welcomed. Cllr Green paid tribute to former MP for Waveney, Bob Blizzard, who had sadly passed away.

2. Town Council report to the electors

Cllr Green spoke of the ongoing effects of the pandemic and how the Town Council has adapted to hybrid working. The Town Council has been disappointed by the regular reports of vandalism in its parks and open spaces, but continues to implement its climate emergency declaration. The lifting of restrictions linked to the pandemic have enabled public events to be planned, particularly to commemorate Remembrance and the Holocaust. Cllr Green gave details of the Town Council's forthcoming event to commemorate Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. The Town Hall project is progressing and a more detailed presentation will be given later in the Assembly. Lowestoft Town Council remains keen to engage with the electorate and local organisations for the betterment of the town. The Town Council currently has one Councillor vacancy and Cllr Green advised anyone interested to seek further information on the Town Council's website.

3. Presentation from the Member of Parliament for the Waveney Constituency

Peter Aldous MP began by paying tribute to Mr Blizzard. Mr Aldous spoke of the cost of living crisis and the need to support the most vulnerable members of society, including supporting more residents to insulate their homes. Mr Aldous spoke of his concerns regarding the windfall tax on energy companies and advised that the Government will be shortly be publishing detailed proposals regarding its 'levelling up' plans. Lowestoft has not been identified as an area prioritised to benefit from the levelling up funding, which Mr Aldous will be trying to lobby for. Mr Aldous will also be challenging the Government's decision to move its focus on research and development away from London and the South East, which Lowestoft seems to have been included in. Mr Aldous will also be looking to ensure Gull Wing serves its intended purpose of bringing more opportunities to Lowestoft. Connectivity is important for the town, and the City Fibre project should improve that. The 150th anniversary of the railway coming to Lowestoft is approaching, and Mr Aldous would like to see more of a focus on Lowestoft's railway connections rather than its roads. Lowestoft should also stand to benefit from new emerging technologies, such as offshore wind. Mr Aldous reported that the issue he receives the most complaints about is difficulties in securing an appointment with an NHS dentist. Some additional resources have been secured in the short term and a new contract is being considered in the medium term, but wider reform is needed.

Question from Christian Newsome to Peter Aldous:

Why is Greater Anglia not able to do a through service to London?

Answer from Peter Aldous:

There is not the capacity on the lines south of Ipswich to put in an extra service. Mr Aldous does however continue to lobby, at least to have this service provided during holiday periods.

Question from Sonia Barker to Peter Aldous:

Is there any update on improvements to sewerage and drainage?

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Answer from Peter Aldous:

An update has been requested and updates will be passed on as they are received. Anglian Water is continuing its work to map sewers.

Question from Andy Pearce to Peter Aldous:

The update on the train service is positive. With any project, resourcing needs to be made for legacy planning. The new Garden Village community will need to have access to resources it requires, as existing services in the town are already struggling.

Answer from Peter Aldous:

The new train stock has better acceleration and deceleration, but signalling now needs to be reviewed. Network Rail need to undertake an exercise about the number of crossings. Mr Aldous agreed the importance of planning the Garden Village.

Question from Wendy Brooks to Peter Aldous

Some residents in the town are living in appalling conditions. Applications for new developments seem focussed on single bedroom accommodation, with no provision for large families. The Town Plan does not seem to address the issues with the declining town centre.

Answer from Peter Aldous

Mr Aldous agreed this is an issue and would like to see more imaginative and vibrant schemes for town centres, including more residential accommodation.

Question from a member of the public to Peter Aldous

Thanks were offered to Mr Aldous and the Government for their support through the Cultural Recovery Fund. The member of the public would like to see the rail service extended to later in the evening.

Answer from Peter Aldous

With there being a train station in the middle of town, evening services would make a big difference. Part of the future of Lowestoft is its culture and leisure facilities.

4. Gull Wing Presentation

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 Pearce proposed approval of the minutes; seconded by Cllr Brooks. The minutes of the 2021 meeting were approved by those in attendance.

A presentation was delivered by Simon Bretherton (Project Director) and Katherine Potts (Consultation and Engagement Officer). Attendees were shown images of how Gull Wing will look upon completion, details of its structure and a map of its location. The Gull Wing project aims to improve the traffic flow and benefit the community, aesthetic and culture of Lowestoft. The objectives of the project are to stimulate regeneration, help sustain economic growth and enhance Lowestoft as a place to live and visit. The project should open regeneration opportunities, reduce congestion and improve the accessibility of the town centre. Both sides of the bridge will have walking and cycling facilities. Mr Bretherton gave an update on the progress of works to date, including the arrival of the 'NAV1' section of steel which will cross the railway, and the completion of the southern road network. Ms Potts gave information on community work which has been taking place away from construction of the bridge itself, and the project's education outreach programme. Tree planting has taken place at Woods Meadow Country Park. An update was given on local employment opportunities created by the project, and details of how the project has invested in the local economy, contractors and suppliers.

Question from Wendy Brooks to Gull Wing representatives

The focus of the project seems to be on the south of Lowestoft. There seems to be a lack of local suppliers from Lowestoft and disappointing statistics on employment opportunities created.

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Answer from Gull Wing representatives

The sequence of the build started in the south and a lot of work had to be completed there to ensure access to the business park. There is work on the north side still to do and the work which has taken place there so far has not been as visible. There will still be opportunities for local suppliers as part of the project, still opportunities for local suppliers, but some of the work is quite specialised, which limits who can be procured.

Question from Andy Pearce to Gull Wing representatives

Is it correct that traffic calming measures are to be introduced around the existing bascule bridge once Gull Wing opens, as this could impact efforts to encourage visitors to the town centre? Also, how much longer will the bascule bridge be maintained, particularly if it is approaching end of life?

Answer from Gull Wing representatives

The bridge can be maintained beyond its expected life if there is a commitment to do so. The design life for Gull Wing is one hundred and twenty years but it still needs to be maintained. Once Gull Wing is constructed there will be a period of evaluation to measure the impact on traffic flows. Mr Aldous advised there are no plans to decommission the bascule bridge, and any changes will require public consultation. It was requested that the cycle lane provision in the north of the town is also reviewed and improved where possible.

5. Lowestoft Town Hall Project Presentation

A presentation was delivered by Sheila Moss-King (Project Manager). The project has received lots of support, which is testament to its importance. An update was given on progress so far. Development funding has been secured to work up the detail of the project. A Design Team and Heritage Project Manager have been appointed and work is underway to submit the stage 2 funding bid. A community survey was undertaken in 2021. The majority of those who responded were local. The survey asked users what they would like to see the Town Hall used for, how frequently they would use those facilities, and what history topics interested them. A graph of the results was displayed. A design brief was developed based on this, incorporating ideas feasible for the building. Architects have confirmed the ideas put forward could be accommodated. The Design Team contract has been awarded to HAT Projects, who will be working designs up to the stage where an application can be submitted for planning and listed building consent. This will involve a public consultation. Members of the public will be given the opportunity to be involved in heritage activities, which will focus on recent history. The bid for funding will be submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in spring 2023. If the bid is successful, detailed design work can begin in autumn 2023, with construction work anticipated spring/summer 2024 and the Town Hall due to reopen in Summer 2025.

Question from a member of the public to Sheila Moss-King

Will land to the rear of the Town Hall be used for parking facilities?

Answer from Sheila Moss-King

The land belongs to East Suffolk Council, who intend for it to become a landscaped car park.

Question from a member of the public to Sheila Moss-King

A member of the public expressed concerns regarding the water table beneath the Town Hall and enquired whether a list of heritage groups and authors had been compiled.

Answer from Sheila Moss-King

A start-up meeting with the Design Team is being held shortly, who could address concerns regarding the water table and will work out where the constraints are that will limit what can be

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done on site. The Heritage Project Manager has been making contact with heritage groups and authors.

Question from Andy Pearce to Sheila Moss-King

Cllr Pearce offered thanks to Ms Moss-King for her work on the project, and would like to retain as many of the positions created through project as possible. Cllr Pearce was pleased to see the involvement of local independent heritage and culture bodies, but had seen several projects recently producing poetry and would like to see a more unique outcome from this project.

Answer from Sheila Moss-King

Part of the bid was demonstrating how the Town Hall could generate revenue to continue these roles. Ms Moss-King noted Cllr Pearce's request for more original outcomes from this project.

Question from Wendy Brooks to Sheila Moss-King

Cllr Brooks had some concerns regarding some of the proposed activities.

Answer from Sheila Moss-King

The activities will be discussed and planned according to what could be achieved within the timescales.

6. District and County Council Reports to the Electors

A presentation was delivered by Cllr Steve Gallant (Leader of East Suffolk Council) and Cllr Craig Rivett (Deputy Leader of East Suffolk Council). Cllr Gallant spoke of the negative views people still have of the town and encouraged attendees to promote the positive projects which are happening and the organisations working to benefit the town. Cllr Gallant advised that a £350million investment had been secured for Lowestoft and explained the purpose and priorities of the Lowestoft Place Board. The Town Centre Masterplan will provide the blueprint for the plans. An update was given on the plans to renovate the East Point Pavilion. Cllr Gallant spoke of positive events for the town, including the First Light Festival and the reopening of the leisure centre. Cllr Brooks would like to see the leisure centre offer an increased variety of classes and not just those aimed at younger people. The new beach huts had become a talking point in the town and beyond. East Suffolk Council's contract with Norse is coming to an end and will be replaced by a Local Authority Trading Company, to give East Suffolk Council more control over its services and to deliver them with less delay. Cllr Gallant explained what the Lowestoft and Northern Parishes Community Partnership is, its priorities and some of the outcomes it has achieved so far. The District Council has started to set aside funding to support those affected by the cost of living crisis. Cllr Gallant suggested community halls could be used as a social space and to provide meals. Free to use public Wi-Fi is being rolled out across the town. This provides the opportunity for football tracking and for businesses to improve their digital technology.

Question from Andy Pearce to Steve Gallant

Regeneration projects must include legacy planning. Both East Suffolk and Lowestoft Town Councils should look to work together more seamlessly.

Answer from Steve Gallant

Cllr Gallant agreed that both authorities should look to future and not dwell on matters in the past.

Question from Robert Breakspear to Steve Gallant

Cllr Breakspear requested the contact details for the Conservation Team, to report non-compliance with an enforcement notice.

Answer from Steve Gallant

Cllr Gallant will take this matter forward.

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Question from Wendy Brooks to Steve Gallant

There have been a lack of answers and updates regarding the Tingdene enforcement issue, which need to be raised.

Answer from Steve Gallant

Cllr Gallant will take this matter forward.

Question from Sonia Barker to Steve Gallant

Can the presence of the RNLI at the beach be extended throughout the year? Cllr Barker also expressed her disappointment at Lowestoft losing its Blue Flag status.

Answer from Steve Gallant

The Community Partnership decided not to apply for Blue Flag status due to Lowestoft's water quality. The Town Council could however submit an application.

Question from Andy Pearce to Steve Gallant

If Lowestoft Town Council were to submit an application for Blue Flag status and it is unsuccessful would East Suffolk Council take action to make improvement on any areas within its remit?

Answer from Steve Gallant

Yes, but Peter Aldous MP would have more authority to make the improvements needed.

Question from Wendy Brooks to Steve Gallant

Does East Suffolk Council hold data on how many people commute in and out of Lowestoft daily?

Answer from Steve Gallant

The Town Council could carry out a survey on this, with advice from the Economic Development and Communities Teams.

Question from a member of the public to Craig Rivett

Does the design of the new beach huts create the potential for vermin?

Answer from Craig Rivett

The ambitious design is part of the appeal and there has been a lot of interest in purchasing them, including from local residents.

7. Community Organisation Reports and Marketplace

Cllr Green read out the list of written reports which had been added to the Town Council's website, and invited representatives from community organisations in attendance to provide an update:

Jack Rose Old Lowestoft Society – Is pleased to be working with Lowestoft Town Council on various projects. Forty heritage plaques are being procured, including to commemorate the centenary of Kensington Gardens.

Lowestoft Players – Are performing this week and are excited about the plans for the Cultural Quarter, which they would like to be involved with.

Lowestoft Town Tennis Club – Has been working for nine years to make improvements to the Denes Oval. The Lawn Tennis Association is putting funding towards resurfacing the tennis courts in Lowestoft and installing electronic gates. The Club has been liaising with the Town Council and a planning application has been submitted. Pickleball courts will be included in the plans to improve the Denes Oval, which will be the largest provision of Pickleball facilities in Suffolk.

Sparrows Nest Bowls Club – Has been running Saturday morning sessions to encourage more involvement in the sport. The Club has experienced anti-social behaviour but appreciates the support of Lowestoft Town Council and Mr Aldous. The Club has found the Town Council's decision to waive leisure fees a benefit to the community.

Lowestoft Rising – Advised that their full report is available on the Town Council's website. The oral health project has been particularly important to Lowestoft Rising, and they have been

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working with a range of partners. Culture is important for the town and Lowestoft Rising welcomes the First Light Festival.

First Light Festival – Offered thanks to all those who are supporting the Festival. Over one hundred and forty free activities are taking place across the event, and over sixty partners are involved. Details of some of the events taking place during the Festival were given. Cllr Pearce advised against the Festival referring to Lowestoft as a ‘cultural cold spot’, given its independent heritage and culture scene. It had previously been explained that this was in reference to the lack of cultural investment and the statement had been used try to leverage funds nationally.

Marina Theatre – Offered thanks to the public, Mr Aldous, East Suffolk Council and Lowestoft Town Council for their support, particularly during the pandemic.

Royal Naval Patrol Service Association Museum – Used the period of closure during the pandemic to make improvements to the Museum. Thanks were offered to the Town Council for making improvements to the bandstand.

East Suffolk One – Explained what the radio station is and how the broadcast can be accessed. East Suffolk One is looking to promote what is happening in the town and is currently funded via donations, sponsorship and self-funding.

8. Public forum

Cllr Green advised attendees that a ‘People’s Party in the Park’ was taking place in Sparrows Nest on 2 June to commemorate Her Majesty the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee. The Sparrows Nest beacon will be the first in the country to be lit. Cllr Green advised attendees that the torch relay as part of the Festival of Suffolk would be arriving in Lowestoft tomorrow.

Question from a member of the public to Lowestoft Town Council

Thanks were offered to East Suffolk Council for the grant funding it has been offering as part of the Heritage Action Zone project. Civic artefacts have been in storage since 2016 and the member of the public requested an update on what is being done to trace the missing artefacts and the status of the Police involvement.

Answer from Lowestoft Town Council

Cllr Green advised that the Town Council has a list of the artefacts, which are being stored carefully. Work is ongoing regarding the missing artefacts and the Police are involved. It is the intention of the Town Council to reinstate some of the artefacts back into the Town Hall.

Cllr Green thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting was closed 22:20.

Signed: 

Date: 2 March 2023