

COUNCIL



MONDAY, 23 FEBRUARY 2026 - 4.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor B Barber (Chairman), Councillor S Clark (Vice-Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor C Boden, Councillor G Booth, Councillor J Carney, Councillor G Christy, Councillor J Clark, Councillor S Count, Councillor D Cutler, Councillor Mrs M Davis, Councillor L Foice-Beard, Councillor Mrs J French, Councillor K French, Councillor S Harris, Councillor A Hay, Councillor P Hicks, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor M Humphrey, Councillor S Imafidon, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor C Marks, Councillor A Miscandlon, Councillor J Mockett, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor Dr H Nawaz, Councillor D Patrick, Councillor M Purser, Councillor B Rackley, Councillor D Roy, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor M Summers, Councillor T Taylor, Councillor S Tierney, Councillor S Wallwork and Councillor A Woollard

APOLOGIES: Councillor A Branton, Councillor D Connor, Councillor G S Gill, Councillor R Gerstner and Councillor N Meekins

C46/25 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 15 December 2025 were confirmed and signed.

C47/25 CIVIC ENGAGEMENTS UPDATE.

Councillor Barber drew attention to the civic activities undertaken by herself and the Vice-Chairman in the weeks preceding full Council.

C48/25 TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AND/OR THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE.

Councillor Barber reminded members that she is hosting an Easter Themed Afternoon Tea on 26 March in aid of her chosen charity Damsons, a local dementia support group and tickets were available to purchase from Member Services.

C49/25 TO RECEIVE QUESTIONS FROM, AND PROVIDE ANSWERS TO, COUNCILLORS IN RELATION TO MATTERS WHICH, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIRMAN, ACCORD WITH THE PROVISIONS OF PROCEDURE RULES 8.4 AND 8.6.

The Chairman stated that no written questions had been received under Procedure Rule 8.6. Councillor Booth, as Leader of the Opposition, asked the following questions under Procedure Rule 8.4:

- Following the previous request for a note to be provided concerning the process around the Local Plan this is yet to be received and will that information be provided to explain what the process will entail being particularly pertinent to Fenland? Councillor Boden stated that between himself and Councillor Mrs Laws they will ensure that a note is supplied to all members of the Council to outline what the objectives are with regards to the new Local Plan and an explanation with regards to the proposed timetable. Councillor Booth added that information will be useful for Town and Parish Councils especially in light of the fact that the consultation exercise has commenced, and a number of Parish and Town Councils have responded to that and there is a tight timetable being proposed.

- Why has an extraordinary Council meeting been called on 13 March 2026 which is another Friday afternoon and proves problematic for a number of members to attend? Councillor Booth added that previously there was a commitment given that meetings on Friday afternoons would try to be avoided and it appears that every meeting concerning Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) has taken place at 4pm on a Friday and he asked why this date has been chosen. Councillor Boden apologised for the date which has been chosen and explained that it was not the first choice for the meeting to be held on Friday afternoon and other options had been considered, however, those dates proved to be problematic for some. He added that there is a strict deadline to respond to the Government's consultation about LGR and that was the latest date that could be found in order to be able to hold the meeting. Councillor Boden stated that an earlier date would have meant that there was not enough time to be able to put the motion forward to Full Council and Cabinet and any later date was not available.

C50/25 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM AND ASK QUESTIONS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH PORTFOLIO HOLDER RESPONSIBILITIES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULES 8.1 AND 8.2.

Members asked questions of Portfolio Holders in accordance with Procedure Rules 8.1 and 8.2 as follows:

- Councillor Hicks stated that the BBC have reported that the former Barclays Bank site in March cost the Council £750,000 to purchase and the decision was made by members of the Planning Committee, against officer's recommendation, for the building to be demolished at a cost of £371,000. He added that the decision was then made to place the site up for sale for £295,000 and as a result £800,000 of taxpayer's money is being effectively lost. Councillor Hicks asked Councillor Boden, as Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance, whether he believes that those decisions make good financial sense? Councillor Hicks added that whilst he is aware that the project was never a profit-making scheme, there needs to be some accountability, as a Council, for losing such a significant amount of taxpayer's money. He asked what the original plan for the site was as he has asked and nobody has been able to tell him what the long-term plans were for the actual site. Councillor Hicks asked Councillor Boden if he could explain if there were plans for the site what they were and why were they not carried out? Councillor Boden thanked Councillor Hicks for giving him advance notice that he would be asking a question which required a detailed answer. He explained that transactions relating to the former Barclays Bank site in March very successfully satisfied Government's criteria for spending the grant money they allocated to March under the national Future High Street Fund initiative and they additionally, although not necessarily intentionally, will prove shortly to be significantly financially advantageous to Fenland District Council, but more importantly, they are a key part of a scheme which will significantly benefit the town of March for years to come. Councillor Boden stated that to understand the transactions relating to the former Barclays Bank site in March, it is necessary to look at three different stages of the process, as "success" was defined in different ways in each stage, with the first stage being the use Government authorised under its national Future High Street Fund initiative, the second is the temporary use made of the site after it was purchased and the third stage is the disposal of the site. He referred to the background in which The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (the MHCLG) announced a national £675million regeneration programme, the objective of which was to renew and reshape town centres and high streets in ways that improve user experience, drive economic growth, and ensure long-term sustainability. He continued that the MHCLG identified a number of approved uses and outcomes including:
 - investment in physical infrastructure
 - acquisition and assembly of land, including to support new housing, workspaces and public realm
 - improvements to transport access, traffic flow and circulation
 - supporting change of use, including housing delivery and densification.
 Councillor Boden stated that the Council applied for funding for March Town Centre from the

Future High Street Fund and was successful in obtaining MHCLG funding for March of £6.49 million for public realm improvements, land acquisitions and refurbishment of Council-owned assets, with March additionally receiving £2 million CPCA match funding, Cambridgeshire County Council fully funded new roadways, a mini-roundabout and all associated highways works, and there was investment from Cadent Gas and Anglian Water both of whom fully replaced their aging underground utilities. He stated that the purchase of the former Barclays Bank building was one of ten interventions delivered as part of the March Future High Street Fund scheme and the purchase and demolition of the Barclays site was wholly funded by the Future High Street Fund grant, no Council capital funding was used, with the Barclays site meeting the Government's criteria of targeting regeneration investment at areas or sites demonstrating market failure. Councillor Boden made the point that the Council was not just given £6.49 million of Government money and told to get on with it, Government had to give permission for how the money was spent and it did so on the basis of the Benefit Cost Analysis for the project, calculated strictly according to the Treasury Green Book principles, with the Government approval being required for the details of the scheme in March before they permitted the grant money to be spent. He added that initially the schemes the Council put forward to Government, for which approval was obtained, included development of a site at Acre Road, however, the potential acquisition there fell through and the Council, therefore, sought to repurpose that part of the grant to enhance the wider regeneration strategy by among other things unlocking the Barclays Bank site, which is a key location site in the town centre that the private sector was unable or unwilling to bring forward. Councillor Boden stated that agreement was given by the Government to repurpose the funds previously authorised for Acre Road after the revised calculation of the Benefit Cost Ratio for the scheme as a whole was shown to be even greater than it had been when Acre Road had been included. He emphasised that Government did not authorise any of this investment to make a short-term transactional profit, with the grant monies spent on improving shop fronts, converting above-shop premises into residential units, demolishing and relocating the public toilets and enhancing the streetscene and public realm all being authorised by Government based on the economic and social benefit generated, not on an investment return basis and, for the Government, the March scheme proved a real success, with a Treasury Green Book Benefit Cost Ratio of 3.15, meaning that for every £1 of Government grant money that was spent, £3.15 of economic and social benefit will be generated. Councillor Boden continued that, in the financial terms used by the Government, the March Future High Street Fund grant, as enhanced by substituting Barclays Bank for Acre Road, was a resounding success, as the Government's BCR requirement was 2, whereas the revised March scheme's BCR was almost 60% above that target and, in total, according to the official way Government evaluates grant funding, the £8.49 million of public money put into the scheme delivers almost £27 million in socio-economic benefits in March. He added that the change from funding Acre Road to funding the Barclays site was the subject of a formal Project Amendment Request and was, therefore, separately considered by Government before they gave approval for the use of their grant funding for that purpose, based on the enhanced Benefit Cost Ratio that this achieved. Councillor Boden stated that separately to that Government required evaluation of the proposed redevelopment of the Barclays Bank site, Council officers were required by Cabinet to perform due diligence on the Project Amendment Request in relation to the Barclays site and, as part of this, officers obtained detailed written independent legal advice from a leading firm of lawyers whose work includes specialisation in public authority law so the purchase and redevelopment of the Barclays Bank site was lawful and it more than satisfied the Government's requirement in terms of value for money. He reiterated that Government was not purchasing the site to generate a development profit, they were authorising the site's redevelopment to achieve a substantial, quantifiable and quantified regeneration gain for March. Councillor Boden referred to the second stage of the process, there was a significant additional benefit obtained in that the subcontractors carrying out the physical work in and around Broad Street were able to use the Barclays Bank site as their project office and store, which saved between £250,000 and £300,000 in operational costs for that work, which excludes time-related efficiencies, and the money thereby saved was invested in public realm

improvements which were additional to the original plan and completion of the scheme ended up earlier and better than otherwise would have occurred, with the Barclays site also used for public consultations. He referred to the third stage of the process relating to the former Barclays Bank site, which is the redevelopment phase and he is limited in what he can say about this stage at the moment since tender documents have only recently been received from bidders and are still being evaluated by officers prior to a report being submitted to next month's Cabinet for a decision to be made. Councillor Boden stated it was not the intention of this phase to make any development profit, and the fact that Fenland District Council will make a significant profit is a fortunate by-product of the whole process, but he clearly cannot mention any numbers at this point and within the tender process, potential bidders were all informed of the time requirement both for obtaining planning permission and for building out the new premises on the site, both to avoid any danger of land banking and to bring the advantage of a completed scheme to Broad Street as quickly as possible. He added that, in terms of private sector investment into the site, he has no knowledge at all of the content of the tender responses, but on general principles he would be surprised if the developer investment into building out the site after acquisition will not be in the high hundreds of thousands of pounds. Councillor Boden expressed the view that, once completed, redevelopment of the key site of the former Barclays Bank will have been achieved, to the benefit of Government whose grant money will have produced a high social and economic benefit, to the benefit of the Council, in an amount to be determined next month, and more importantly to the benefit of all those who use March Town Centre and who will benefit for years to come from the improvements generated as a result of the successful March Future High Street Fund schemes. He concluded by listing those significant public realm improvements as follows:

- reduced shop vacancy rates
- new businesses opening and creating employment
- increased footfall and dwell time
- increased town centre spend
- rising land values
- improved greenery and lighting
- additional parking capacity at City Road
- resurfacing of the Market Place car park
- additional taxi bays
- additional bus bays
- heritage protection through reconditioning the Fountain.
- heritage enhancement through war memorial lighting and flag installation
- demolition of old toilets and construction of new modern facilities
- reduced vehicle journey times
- improved road safety through reduced vehicle speeds
- increased pedestrian priority through multiple new crossings
- improved air quality due to reduced standing traffic
- reduced environmental noise
- reduced anti-social behaviour through use of "designing out" principles.
- removal of a key market-failure site widely regarded as an architecturally inappropriate eyesore in a most prominent location
- creation of an attractive, development-ready anchor site
- delivery of additional residential accommodation through "living above the shop" grants
- delivery of improved shop fronts.

Councillor Boden summarised that the Council has achieved almost 60% more socio-economic benefit from the March Future High Street Fund than Government had required, a significant capital receipt will be received by the Council, as well as externally funded improvement to its assets and the benefit from regeneration will be felt in March for a generation or more.

- Councillor Cutler explained that she sits on the Village Hall Committee which recently merged to manage Murrow Playing Field, with Murrow having no facilities for a thriving village and is in dire need of play equipment, gym equipment and picnic benches. She added that she

welcomes hearing young families state that they choose to take their young children to Parson Drove, Gorefield, Guyhirn playing fields or Wisbech Park as that would be wonderful because choice is a good thing but expressed the view that it is very sad to hear families say that they have to travel to other villages or to the town, because there is nothing for them in Murrow. Councillor Cutler stated that she is aware that the Council does not own the playing field, making the point that if residents cannot contact their local council for help when they need it then who can they turn to, and is aware that the Council cannot provide everything but expressed the view that when there is a village within its district which is so badly neglected, it is very sad if the Council does not attempt to do something. She stated that there are other playing fields in her ward that would also be pleased to receive updated play equipment if it is offered but Murrow does have the greatest need, explaining that she has not been asked by residents to put forward a request for the other playing fields, but the residents of Murrow have asked for assistance. Councillor Cutler made the point that she has responded to Councillor Seaton's email concerning Pride in Place Impact Funding which is available for villages and outlined the requirements for Murrow and she thanked Councillor Seaton for his communication. She asked Councillor Boden to advise her whether the assessment for Murrow playing field has been completed yet to form part of the Fenland Inspire project? Councillor Boden stated that he recognises the work that Councillor Cutler has undertaken to promote the need for additional expenditure on play equipment in Murrow, with the Council having been awarded £1.5 million and most, if not all, of that funding will be spent on play equipment and play areas. He added that there is not a comprehensive list of play areas and play equipment in the whole of the district and whilst the Council provides a significant amount of play equipment and play areas in the district there are also several places particularly in the rural areas where charities have provided that equipment and there are also a number of areas, especially in the last few years, where Section 106 Agreements and developers have been used to provide the equipment and continue to support its maintenance themselves or by the introduction of a management company and residents organisations which succeed the developers. Councillor Boden explained that given the fact the completion of the ordering of play equipment needs to be completed by March 2027 as part of the grant conditions it is imperative that the correct decisions are made and the best people who will know what is required, where it is required and where there is land available for equipment to be installed are the elected members as they have the best local knowledge. He stated that at the earlier Cabinet meeting it was agreed that Councillor Imafidon who is the Portfolio Holder responsible will write immediately to all members of the Council to ask for their detailed opinion as to what they feel is required and where and this exercise will need to be undertaken very quickly due to the fact that at the March meeting of Cabinet there will be a list provided of all of the proposed schemes which will be undertaken. Councillor Boden made the point that there is always the risk of danger or perception of favouritism geographically more than anything else and, therefore, Cabinet have also agreed that out of the £1.5 million, a figure of £250,000 will be allocated to each of the four towns and the remaining £500,000 will be allocated to the parish areas outside of the four market towns. He explained that he knows that proportionately, the figures favour the parish areas rather than the town areas, however, he knows that there is more difficulty accessing play equipment in some of the rural areas as opposed to some of the town areas, making the point that all of the towns already have a fair amount of play equipment, whereas in the rural areas it can be some distance away. Councillor Boden stated that members have a thorough knowledge of their own areas and will know what is required and where it is required and he encouraged members to respond to the email that they will all receive from Councillor Imafidon. He stated that whilst he will not give any assurances to Councillor Cutler, he is of the opinion that the circumstances which she has described appear to match exactly what is being looked for and as long as there is the place to be able to locate the play equipment then, in his opinion, he believes that what she is putting forward may stand a very good chance.

- Councillor Miscandlon stated that, 18 months ago, the Corporate Management Team and officers undertook a visit to the Manor Leisure Centre, with it being agreed at that time that there should be a footpath introduced measuring 1.46 metres around the Leisure Centre, considering that is the only park area owned by the Council that does not have a footpath within

it and it is extremely muddy because for 3 to 4 months of the year, parts of the field cannot be used unless you are wearing wellington boots. He added that the decision was made to introduce the pedestrian footpath, costings were obtained but there does not appear to be any further progress and he asked for an update with regards to the proposal in order that he can answer questions being raised by residents and users of the Manor. Councillor Miscandlon added that due to almost 46 days of continuous rain and drizzle it has meant that the lower end of the grassed area at the Manor is now virtually unusable for anybody. He asked for confirmation as to when the footpath is going to be implemented so that pedestrians, pushchairs and wheelchair users can use the facility without having to use wellington boots and waders? Councillor Seaton stated that he agrees that there has been a delay and part of that delay has been due partly to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and where the Inspire projects are now running, with Phase 1 of the projects already being in full progress and Phase 2 will be stalled until the details concerning LGR is known. He stated that originally it was thought the information would be made available in June, however, it appears that the detail will not be known until later in the year, although there is still so much uncertainty. Councillor Seaton agreed that the Manor is the only park in the market towns which does not have a pathway and once further clarification concerning LGR is made available, Phase 2 of Inspire will commence. He explained that there will need to be the requirement for a small amount of funding to implement the pathway as there will be the need to obtain a design, to go out for tender and to obtain permission from Middle Level Commissioners due to the proximity of the river and it will also need to obtain planning permission. Councillor Seaton made the point that as soon as LGR information is known then Phase 2 projects will commence and, in his opinion, he can see the footpath project being given priority.

- Councillor Hoy stated that Wisbech has a higher number of Grade 2 Listed Buildings per square metre than Westminster, which is not in total as Westminster has over a thousand and Wisbech has 266 but her figures are based on square meterage. She added that she has recently ascertained that if there is a Grade 2 Listed Building which is derelict then you do not have to pay business rates, which, in her opinion, seems to be very counterintuitive to get people to repair such buildings. Councillor Hoy asked Councillor Boden whether he would consider writing to Central Government in conjunction with Steve Barclay MP to place pressure on the Government to consider changing the policy as, in her view, it seems a nonsensical policy and that is why so many people leave empty Grade 2 Listed Buildings because if they repair them, they are then liable to pay business rates. Councillor Hoy explained that, with regards to Constantine House, there was work undertaken following a fire and, in her opinion, the building is now starting to look run down. She added that she is unsure whether it is being land banked as a tax write off and asked whether she could be advised whether the owners details are available and if that is the case then can they be contacted to ascertain what their future plans are and also to find out whether they are paying business rates on the building? Councillor Boden stated that the point with regards to Constantine House is outside of his direct responsibility, but he will ensure that she receives a written response to her question. He added that, with regard to the point made concerning Grade 2 Listed Buildings, he is hesitant about giving any support for anything to do with the changes to national non-domestic rate system, it is a horrendously complicated system with many associated checks and balances within it, but added that it may seem advantageous to start taxing owners of buildings to try and encourage them to bring them back into use. Councillor Boden added that there is an effective procedure in place when dealing with Council Tax payments and empty homes but the unended consequences of that could be quite significant in terms of buildings which end up being abandoned, however, he will give some thought to the point raised by Councillor Hoy as a response could be more complicated rather than a simple answer.
- Councillor Taylor stated that he has raised concerns with the Highway Authority at the County Council due to concerns over some of the cambers on the roads which will likely be the cause of accidents involving tractors and trailers during the year. He explained that he is aware that there was a machine called a Pothole Pro offered to the County Council and the manufacturer JCB offered the machine to the Highway Authority for a week as well as the offer of members of staff who are trained to operate the piece of machinery, with to the best of his knowledge this

machine digs the pothole into a square, seals the edges and fills the hole with fresh tarmac before re sealing and it was stated that there could be 900 potholes filled in properly by this machine within one week. Councillor Taylor stated that the Chief Executive of the County Council stated that the machine was not required as the Highway Authority were content to use the dragon patchers and he referred to the Highways Act, questioning whether the Chief Executive of the County Council can make that decision when some of the councillors are stating that they do want it. He stated that when he reviewed the HOPs Guidance which is for highways standards, it would appear that the County Council are on the verge of receiving a financial penalty and potentially claims for damages and he cannot understand why the County Council would not take up the offer of a free machine for a week with just the requirement of providing new tarmac and removal of the old material. Councillor Taylor questioned whether the Chief Executive has the authority and the right to refuse the offer? Councillor Boden stated that the question falls outside of the scope of the Council, making the point that members are all aware of just how desperate the pothole situation is, with it being during the winter months when the potholes appear and it appears that there has no work undertaken by the Highway Authority from December when the potholes began appearing and all the way through to the beginning of February and in some locations, work is still to commence. He expressed the view that the situation is truly appalling and there have many cases of vehicles suffering damage as a result. Councillor Boden explained that in some situations that statutory override of Section 58 of the Highways Act will not apply as the County Council have been aware for a very long time of the defects and they have failed to act in the appropriate timescale to get the defects rectified. He added that as a result he finds the point made by Councillor Taylor to be shocking as he can imagine JCB are offering their equipment as a promotional tool for their own business interest and they are not just doing it for the interests of the people of Cambridgeshire, with JCB trying to showcase their 'Pothole Pro' which they believe is a tool which works well, and he understands their commercial reasons for making the offer. Councillor Boden made the point that he knows that the County Council has brought in extra capacity due to the situation which has now arisen and, in his view, he would have thought that the Highways Authority would have taken up the offer of the free machine and free manpower. He added that there is a contractual issue as the County Council already have a contract in place to undertake highways work, however, that can be overridden as a payment to the contractor for the work for the profit that they lose as a result of the work undertaken by the Pothole Pro machine. Councillor Boden expressed the view that if the allegation which Councillor Taylor is making are true then he finds it truly shocking for the County Council and even more so for the residents of Fenland.

- Councillor Nawaz referred to the Workwell Programme, which is being run in Fenland, appears to be operating quite well and that the statistics which are given are singular and he asked for a breakdown of the statistics relating to each Fenland town and details of the contact centres in each town and how Workwell can be promoted further. He added that the Government's Getting Britain to Work programme is being instituted through the CPCAs committee and he asked whether there is any integration between the two initiatives? Councillor Wallwork stated that she will provide a breakdown to demonstrate where the referrals are coming from. Councillor Nawaz added that Fenland appears to be very low in the socio economic status in deprived areas of UK regardless of the key performance indicators which are used. Councillor Wallwork explained that the figures for the month of January demonstrate that the figures for Whittlesey are quite low when considering the referrals for the whole of Fenland, with there having been three active referrals for Whittlesey where those three individuals have actively engaged in the project and the further detail will be circulated in due course. She added that with regards to the promotion of Workwell, all of the Primary Care Network team who are front facing NHS workers have been engaged along with all of staff who work in the local GP Surgeries and the Workwell team try to attend anything community based to promote the project and, in her view, the reason why there are less referrals from certain places are due to the fact that although they have been operating since October 2024, they are actually quite a new service. Councillor Wallwork added that trust is a large factor and they have to become established before they can engage with partner agencies. She stated that she is unsure as to

whether Workwell and the CPCA have any joined up working to date, but she will investigate that further.

- Councillor Nawaz stated that there was a public consultation undertaken with regards to the Manor Leisure Centre and he asked what the outcomes were of the consultation, including as to whether they were incorporated into the Royal Institute of British Architects third drawing as he would like clarification concerning the mixed gender changing rooms. Councillor Count stated that the consultation responses were fully dealt with in the last paper that went to Cabinet and he agreed to send the papers to Councillor Nawaz so that he could read all of the responses for all areas. Councillor Nawaz explained that he has undertaken his own survey in Whittlesey and he received 315 replies, 277 of the responses were against mixed gender changing rooms, 21 did not mind either way with 17 responses being in favour. Councillor Nawaz asked whether it would be possible for the Council to incorporate his survey findings to reflect the wishes of the residents of Whittlesey and questioned whether the Council knows best and the freedom of choice of the residents of Whittlesey is to be denied? Councillor Count stated that with regards to mixed changing rooms these were brought forward by Sport England who are obviously heavily involved with facilities across the whole of the country and it appears to be working very well nationally. He added that mixed changing rooms are already operating in changing rooms in the Council's leisure centres across the district and members were all invited to visit the other leisure centres to see how well they operate. Councillor Count stated that he appreciates that Councillor Nawaz has taken the time to engage with residents to ascertain their feedback, but his individual survey is not matched by national findings through Sport England and the recommendation of the experience of the whole of the district excluding those who are yet to have them. He added that there will be a non-mixed changing room on the dry side and that facility will be on offer to anybody should that be their preference to enter the pool.
- Councillor Hay stated that there are three public toilets in Chatteris to serve the whole of the town and they are situated near the library in the middle of the town but two of the toilets have not been usable for some months now as they are locked up as she understands that there is a problem with the locks but the third toilet which is the disabled toilet is in a very poor condition and people are refusing to use it. She explained that one man with severe medical needs has written to the Council to advise that the toilet was in such a poor condition he refused to use the toilet and went home instead. Councillor Hay stated that there are also mothers with young babies who will not use the changing facilities due to the condition of the disabled toilet which also does not have a toilet seat and asked when she can expect to see the facilities brought up to an acceptable and usable standard? Councillor Boden stated that he has already spoken to Councillor Hay regarding this matter and he has a great deal of sympathy on the matter and he does not believe that there will be budget availability to undertake work which is why he has been taking steps to find a way outside of the budget to enable work to be carried out. He added that whilst he can not make any cast iron guarantees he will contact Councillor Hay and the Clerk of the Town Council in order to provide an update on when works can be undertaken which he hopes will be fairly soon.

C51/25 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR BODEN

Councillor Boden presented a motion concerning a plan to unlock growth in Whittlesey and Chatteris, which was seconded by Councillor Mrs Laws.

Members made the following comments:

- Councillor Christy stated that he fully supports the motion in his capacity as the Portfolio Holder for Transport and, in his opinion, the motion is associated with a challenge which has been in place for far too long and Fenland's economic future is constrained by the resilience of its transport network. He added that, as the Portfolio Holder, he cannot ignore that fact that the Council is trying to plan for the next 25 years with evidence which is not fit for purpose and if the vision is to deliver the Fens growth triangle then, in his view, all three corners must have the same level of technical rigor which is not the case currently,

however, the motion will correct that. Councillor Christy added that the motion also recognises the emerging pressures around Chatteris with the Fens Reservoir and the other major projects which may come forward. He made the point that there cannot be a reliance on developer led modelling and the Council needs its own independent strategic analysis which protects the community and ensures that infrastructure is designed for Fenland's benefit. Councillor Christy stated that the motion is not just a transport issue it is also an economic issue, it is also a resilience and fairness issue and, in his view, if there is a vision to have balanced growth across Fenland then in the first instance there must be balanced evidence and he believes that the motion provides the tools required to break the bottlenecks literally and figuratively in order to unlock the potential of Whittlesey, Chatteris and the wider district.

- Councillor Booth stated that he supports the motion, and he added that it is disappointing that it will not emerge as a matter of course with the Local Plan. He added that as various stages of the Local Plan are reached then the appropriate evidence will be obtained, however, there needs to be assurances that it is put in place.

The motion was approved.

C52/25 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR MRS LAWS

Councillor Mrs Laws presented a motion concerning reducing the B1040 closure risk owing to flooding, which was seconded by Councillor Boden.

Members made the following comments:

- Councillor Nawaz referred to the state of some of the road connections in Whittlesey and he highlighted that the bridge has been operating a one lane system for well over a year and that was supposed to be the towns main arterial connection between the east and the west of Whittlesey. He explained that to the west is the transport hub of Peterborough, with journeys resulting in huge delays which he has also encountered and has had to allow extra time to make various trips to Peterborough. Councillor Nawaz expressed the view that the roads are riddled with potholes and likened some to the size of craters, resulting in many people suffering damage to their cars in various forms and costing residents hundreds of pounds. He referred to the point made by Councillor Mrs Laws concerning the socio-economic impact and, in his view, that point is very pertinent to the actual reality of today's problems with the roads. Councillor Nawaz thanked Councillor Mrs Laws for bringing forward such an important subject and he will wholeheartedly support the motion.
- Councillor Boden stated that he is unaware whether residents in other parts of the district are aware of the frustration faced by the residents of Whittlesey after having to face almost 20 months of restricted movement on a bridge where initially the restriction was due to be for just over a week. He explained that there is also the perennial problem of the secondary option to travel towards Peterborough, the B1040, which closes on a quite frequent and unpredictable basis which is dependent on the flooding of the Whittlesey Washes, with some residents having reached the point of despair and have made the choice to move away from Whittlesey. Councillor Boden stated that with regards to the road repairs, it is a well-known fact that the County Council have not performed very well, and he would hope that the new Unitary Authority will do a better job under different control. He added that there are significant costs linked to the major infrastructure projects to improve road connectivity and it will take a long time to be delivered, making the point that the motion relates to something much more short term and it relates to the ability of getting the information which is required by local people to monitor if the sluice gates are working properly or not. Councillor Boden added that if it is then found that the sluice gates have not functioned properly then the Environment Agency can then be notified, explaining that there have been instances when they have not worked for days at a time and as has happened previously it results in the B1040 closing for more days than it needs to. He made the point that there needs to be better coordination with the Environment Agency, North Level

Internal Drainage Board and the Highway Authorities in order that the traffic issues that exist in the Whittlesey Washes, because of water management in that area, are recognised and minimised. Councillor Boden expressed the view that the Environment Agency are stretched at the best of times and their focus moves from one thing to another and the idea of setting up a Whittlesey Washes Interest Group is to try and ensure that all those who have a part to play in keeping the B1040 open for as long as possible are able to communicate with each other and have some degree of common purpose.

The motion was approved.

C53/25 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR TAYLOR

Councillor Taylor presented a motion concerning the Government's Animal Welfare Strategy, which was seconded by Councillor Carney.

Members made the following comments:

- Councillor Count thanked Councillor Taylor for bringing this forward, he is no expert in the field of farming and understands that Councillor Taylor has a great deal of expertise which he listens to. He has read this with some concern, because as a complete lay person, the one thing that jumped out at him was stopping the hunting of rabbits, knowing little about farming but he knows what happens when he drives around the area at night time and what happened in the 60's with myxomatosis and if there is not something done about rabbits there will be an explosion. Councillor Count expressed the view that he really does not understand where this is being driven from or what is driving it or how the farming community is going to be expected to carry on and what the alternative plans are. He hopes it can be explained that there is a counterpoint but does think that this is another thinly disguised attack on the rural way of life, with the voters for a Labour Government lying in urban areas and that people who represent them generally coming from urban areas. Councillor Count made the point that the Minister for Agriculture is Daniel Ziechner from Cambridge who has had no jobs in agriculture in his life and is a computer IT expert and a career politician. He referred also to the hunting of birds using birds of prey being stopped, which is not a common practice in his experience, but he has seen it used in places such as football stadiums, Wimbledon, etc, and he struggles to think what the alternative is as this has been an effective management tool. Councillor Count stated that this motion raises concerns with the people who may or may not listen and tells them there is something here that is happening that needs to be looked at.
- Councillor Marks referred to Councillor Taylor making reference to planning and development and questioned that by being on the Planning Committee should he not vote on this? The Monitoring Officer responded that this motion does not have anything to do with planning or the planning system or any decisions that are going to come before Fenland's Planning Committee, so members of the Planning Committee are able to participate.
- Councillor Tierney stated that he would never personally choose to take part in any sort of hunting, even simulated, because he is an animal lover but he does not believe his personal choices should dictate other people's personal choices and he thinks where it is sensible some of these things are appropriate. He expressed the view that the six issues listed in the motion all seem to be reasonably sensible and he agrees with what Councillor Taylor's motion is saying even though he is an animal lover because he feels that this is what birds of prey do and has uses, rabbits can become real pests and this has to be dealt with somehow, controlling pests is something that has to be undertaken and trail hunting is not real hunting. Councillor Tierney queried pig farrowing as he is not an expert and does not fully understand that, he believes it means that pigs are being kept in a very close environment which does not seem fair to him and he would prefer a kind of free range approach but he does understand it is undertaken differently in the UK and he would welcome some clarity from Councillor Taylor.

- Councillor Nawaz stated that he welcomes the motive behind it, which is primarily the welfare of animals, however, in his view, it is a question of balancing particularly the countryside and it is the farmers themselves who know what the best balance is to be had. He expressed the opinion that animals' due to various diseases have to be contained and by a sweeping statement the freedom of choice is being restricted which in this case is exercised as a matter of the welfare of the farmers as well as the welfare of those animals. Councillor Nawaz noted that the motion is to be forwarded to, as well as others, Nigel Farage and Rupert Lowe, who seem to have been two names selected out of a range of other political leaders of other political parties and he fears that such political adulteration will only deflect from the real motives of the motion.
- Councillor Christy stated that he shares some of the concerns raised by Councillors Nawaz and Tierney and did not have time to look at this in too much detail but with all these kinds of debates it is good to have a balanced view and from what he could read in the reform he could not find where it says it is banning the hunting of rabbits and terrier rat packs. He knows there are implications in terms of some of the other reforms that are raised and he shares some of the concerns about is there a right balance of information that is being used to inform this motion. Councillor Christy expressed the view that he is tending towards abstaining from the vote not because he is against animal welfare, but he does not think he has got the information required to make a decision.
- Councillor Hoy referred to myxomatosis, which was introduced by the Government to kill rabbits and control the population and now it is being complained that myxomatosis is spreading and killing things so feels that members should be careful about what they do as Governments or Councils. She made reference to 'rabbit roundabout' in Wisbech, which she has fond memories of and used to make her so happy driving and seeing the rabbits on that roundabout and she was told that a pest controller was employed to dispose of those rabbits. Councillor Hoy stated that it is a difficult decision to make on this motion and she takes on board Councillor Nawaz's point about Nigel Farage and Rupert Lowe as she is a little bit bored of wanting to hear their opinion on everything as they are not going to save the world.
- Councillor Booth stated that whilst he tends to agree with the sentiment of what Councillor Taylor is saying, he feels that some of it is scratchy and he cannot see the mention of rabbits or terrier packs in it as Councillor Christy said. He feels the motion does not actually seem to reflect what is in the Government's strategy so he is concerned that a vote is being taken on things that are not being proposed by the Government and he wants clarification of where this information has come from because reading the document it does not say it is going to ban the hunting of rabbits whereas it does mention some of the other things, although he does agree that rabbits can be a pest and do need to be controlled. Councillor Booth agreed with Councillors Hoy and Nawaz regarding the point about why two members of Parliament have been singled out, acknowledging that they are both leaders of small parties, but to be even handed it should be sent to leaders of all opposition parties to try and get as much support across the political spectrum as possible. Councillor Booth expressed the opinion that there are too many rules being made by Central Government on the rural way of life.

Councillor Booth proposed that an amendment be made that where it says leader of the opposition it refers to leaders of all opposition parties and the names, Nigel Farage MP and Rupert Lowe MP, are removed from the motion, which was seconded by Councillor Patrick.

Members made comments on the amendment as follows:

- Councillor Miscandlon referred to Councillor Booth recommending it be sent to the leaders of all opposition parties, there are 650 MPs, everyone has an individual opinion, and he thinks it should be sent to all MPs throughout the whole Government so they all understand as they may not agree with this. The Chairman made the point that only one amendment can be made at a time.
- Councillor Count asked if officers are aware that there is a single drop box for all members

of Parliament because if there was a single address for all MPs, rather than producing 650 copies, he would far rather hear a second amendment and go with that. It was indicated that there was not, and Councillor Count stated that he thinks that would be too much work for officers considering the fact that most people probably will not read it and it is only hoped that it gets some of the leaders thinking about this.

- Councillor Tierney stated that he would support the amendment as long as Councillor Taylor is happy with it as he thinks it makes perfect sense.
- Councillor Taylor stated he was happy to accept the amendment.

Members agreed the amendment to the motion.

Councillor Carney stated that he has undertaken some background reading and it seems as though the reason why the Government wanted to bring some of this in appears to be a bit of an own goal from when the 2004 Hunting Act came into force as part of those provisions said that rat packs or terrier packs prevent damage to livestock and crops on farms and they are now deciding 21 years later that this should not be happening. He referred to the birds of prey and the British or UK Hawk Board have said can hawks realistically flush out and kill foxes and no they cannot single-handedly. Councillor Carney referred to trail hunting, prior to 2005 it never happened and came about as a result of all these different hunts up and down the country wanting to exercise their dogs or horses and for enjoyment and there is an alternative called drag hunting, which uses non animal scent and the reason why the Government are trying to bring this in is because trail hunting facilitates illegal hunting under a smoke screen of trail hunting. He feels it is subjective because whatever is regulated there is always going to be an undercurrent and not every instance of illegal hunting can be eliminated. Councillor Carney referred to farrowing crates, which is something they have stated that they will not be looking to change immediately overnight and they will be consulting with the pig industry to look at alternative options. He advised that the farrowing crate system is where the sow is kept in a crate for about 5 days and as soon as the piglets are weaned then they are released into more open space and it is just to stop the sow from rolling over and crushing the piglets, however, 50% of the UKs sows, which is information on the Government's website, are giving birth outdoors and 8% of indoor pig breeders are moving over to a non-crate system so it looks to be an on-going issue but this will probably accelerate it and it seems encouraging that the Government is going to work with the industry rather than just outright ban it.

Councillor Taylor referred to the birds of prey and stated that there is a horrendous amount of birds of prey that are used at airports, which clear the runways before planes can take off, and there are several buildings and councils around the country that use birds of prey to deal with feral pigeons, which will all cease. He made the point that hunting with dogs refers to a wide spectrum, but he does know a lot of things are not listed yet because they cannot keep the website updated. Councillor Taylor reiterated that members should put their personal ideas to one side and listen to the wording of what the motion is about and what is trying to be achieved, asking members to support the motion as all members represent a rural area.

The Motion was approved, with inclusion of the amendment.

(Councillor Patrick left the meeting following this item and for the remaining agenda items)

C54/25 BUSINESS PLAN 2026/27

Members considered the Final Business Plan 2026/27 report, presented by Councillor Tierney.

Proposed by Councillor Tierney, seconded by Councillor Imafidon and AGREED to approve the Business Plan 2026/27.

(Councillor Hicks left the meeting following this item and remainder of the agenda items)

C55/25 CORPORATE BUDGET 2026/27

Members considered the Corporate Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy report, presented by Councillor Boden.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Mrs French stated that she would like her congratulations and thanks noted to both the officers and to Councillor Boden for all of their hard work in the preparation of the budget.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Hoy and AGREED that

- (i) the revised estimates for 2025/26 as set out in Section 6 and Appendix A showing an estimated surplus of £107k which will be transferred to the Budget Equalisation Reserve be approved;**
- (ii) the General Fund revenue budget for 2026/27 as set out in Section 7 and Appendix A be approved;**
- (iii) the Medium Term Financial Strategy as outlined in this report and Appendix B be adopted;**
- (iv) the Capital Programme and funding statement as set out in Appendix D be approved;**
- (v) the adoption of the additional Business Rates Relief measures as detailed in Section 5 using Discretionary Relief Powers be approved;**
- (vi) the expenses detailed in Section 10 be approved to be treated as general expenses for 2026/27;**
- (vii) the Port Health levy for 2026/27 be set as shown in Section 11;**
- (viii) the current working age Council Tax Support Scheme be adopted with effect from 1 April 2026 as set out in Section 13, with appropriate changes to the prescribed pensioner scheme as determined by regulations;**
- (ix) the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement (including amending the MRP calculation to be based on the 'Annuity method' from 2025/26 onwards), Treasury Investment Strategy, Prudential and Treasury Indicators for 2026/27 and Capital Strategy 2026/27 as set out in Section 14 and Appendix E be approved; and**
- (x) the Band D Council Tax level for Fenland District Council Services for 2026/27 be set at £253.35, a reduction on the current year.**

The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 impose an obligation on Local Authorities (after 25 February 2014) to record all votes on decisions on budget and council tax, with this in mind Members voted on this item as follows:

In favour of the proposal: Councillors Barber, Benney, Boden, Booth, Carney, Christy, J Clark, S Clark, Count, Cutler, Mrs Davis, Foice-Beard, Mrs J French, K French, Harris, Hay, Hoy, Humphrey, Imafidon, Mrs Laws, Marks, Miscandlon, Mockett, Murphy, Nawaz, Purser, Rackley, Roy, Seaton, Summers, Taylor, Tierney, Wallwork and Woollard.

Against the proposal: None.

Abstentions: None.

(Councillor Woollard declared that he is in receipt of Council Tax benefit, but will remain open minded when considering the item)

(Councillors Boden, Christy and Seaton declared that they are Trustees of FACT)

(Councillor Miss Kim French left the meeting following this item and for the remaining of the agenda items)

C56/25 COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTION 2026/27

Members considered the Council Tax Resolution 2026/27 report, presented by Councillor Boden.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Tierney stated that the Council has frozen Council Tax for nine years and this has not been as a result of making lots of cuts to services, it has been made possible by working better, working harder and working more intelligently. He expressed the view that there are not many councils in the country who are doing what Fenland is doing and, in his view, that is special and everyone should be proud of that.
- Councillor Nawaz expressed the view that he finds it unbelievable that one of the very few councils in the country can maintain its Council Tax despite the previous high inflation in the previous 3 or 4 years. He stated that he cannot think of any other political party who has managed to sustain the same amount of Council Tax for nine years running and he will fully support the proposal.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Booth and AGREED the resolution set out in the report for the Council Tax requirement be approved.

The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 impose an obligation on Local Authorities (after 25 February 2014) to record all votes on decisions on budget and council tax, with this in mind Members voted on this item as follows:

In favour of the proposal: Councillors Barber, Benney, Boden, Booth, Carney, Christy, J Clark, S Clark, Count Cutler, Mrs Davis, Foice-Beard, Mrs J French, Harris, Hay, Hoy, Humphrey, Imafidon, Mrs Laws, Marks, , Miscandlon, Mockett, Murphy, Nawaz, Patrick, Purser, Roy, Seaton, Summers, Taylor, Tierney, Wallwork and Woollard.

Against the proposal: None.

Abstentions: None.

(Councillor Woollard declared that he is in receipt of Council Tax benefit, but will remain open minded when considering the item)

C57/25 RECAP WASTE STRATEGY

Members considered the RECAP Waste Strategy report, presented by Councillor Tierney.

Proposed by Councillor Tierney, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED that:

- **the revised Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Joint Waste Strategy be approved, subject to any final drafting amendments to be made by the Director responsible for Environmental Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Recycling and Refuse Collection;**
- **the updated Fenland Recycling Plan be approved; and**

- **that the development and approval of a shared waste strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough which fulfils a Business Plan objective for 2025/26 be noted.**

C58/25 LICENSING SERVICE - S113 AGREEMENT

Members considered entering into a Section 113 agreement with Huntingdonshire District Council for the provision of an interim Licensing Manager, presented by Councillor Hoy.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Mrs Laws stated that she will happily supports the proposal as the officer's knowledge is extremely useful and valuable to the Council.
- Councillor Hoy expressed the view that she believes that this proposal is unfortunately before the Council as a result of Local Government Reorganisation, and she does not believe that this will be the only scenario where this takes place. She expressed the view that this situation may arise in other services if officers choose to move on to other roles, and then it will need to be decided as to whether they are replaced for potentially a year. Councillor Hoy added that she has had a number of people contact her with regards to expanding the licensing service in order to be more proactive rather than reactive, however, consideration needs to be given as to whether the authority invests money on a service which may not exist in 18 months' time. She asked for it to be placed on record that the Government do not appear to be considering just how difficult the suggested changes are going to impact statutory services, making the point that the impact of services failing operated by County Council could have dire consequences. Councillor Hoy expressed the view that the situation could get far worse as matters progress and there needs to be decision made by Central Government as soon as possible as the uncertainty is having a significant impact.

Proposed by Councillor Hoy, seconded by Councillor Christy and AGREED to enter into a Section 113 agreement with Huntingdonshire District Council for the provision of interim support to the Licensing Service and delegate to the Monitoring Officer to finalise and enter into any legal agreement in consultation with the Portfolio Holders.

C59/25 LOCAL PLAN - S113 AGREEMENT

Members considered entering into a Section 113 agreement with Uttlesford District Council for provision of services to progress the development of a new Local Plan for Fenland, presented by Councillor Mrs Laws.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Booth stated that he has deep reservations concerning the proposal as it took the Council 7 years previously in which to prepare a Local Plan using the assistance from Peterborough City Council. He added that now the Council finds itself in a situation where they are trying to deliver a new Local Plan within 2 years but are still having to go to another Local Authority as that is where the resources are. Councillor Booth stated that he has concerns that there will not be the commitment and the time needed from officers to be able to deliver a Local Plan in the timeframe but there appears to be no other option.
- Councillor Boden stated that he agrees with Councillor Booth that all authorities facing abolition are going to find it increasingly difficult to recruit officers that are being dissolved but the proposal and the Section 113 Agreement is the best option available and he provided assurance that he attends monthly meetings with Councillor Mrs Laws to monitor the progress that is being made on the Local Plan with the available staff. He made the point that the whole process is being overseen and both himself and Councillor Mrs Laws are very keen to ensure that the whole process is completed in time so that the Council makes the final decision as to what the new Local Plan will be for Fenland over the course of the next 6 to 8 years.

- Councillor Mrs Laws stated that she does understand the concerns of Councillor Booth, but she explained that other options have been explored, including consideration being given to whether agency staff are used but with that brings a considerable cost and then there is the risk that agency staff dictate their working hours. She stated that by entering into an agreement then there is the certainty of the manpower which the Council will have, making the point that by going to an agency there is also the possibility of introducing an individual who is not familiar with Fenland. Councillor Mrs Laws explained that the proposed officer has been completely involved to date and is familiar with planning policies and it will only mean that some of the work already undertaken will need to be adapted rather than totally undertaking work from scratch. She expressed the view that she believes that it is a good option and not just the only option available as it is an officer that knows the work, knows Fenland and will deliver for the authority.

Proposed by Councillor Mrs Laws, seconded by Councillor Boden and AGREED to enter into a Section 113 agreement with Uttlesford District Council for the provision of services to deliver a new Local Plan and planning policy work and for the drafting and final approval of the Section 113 agreement to be delegated to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Finance and Planning.

C60/25 SENIOR MANAGER PAY POLICY

Members considered the Senior Manager Pay Policy report, presented by Councillor Boden.

Members made comments as follows:

- Councillor Nawaz expressed the view that society and the community as a whole may function better and more efficiently if there was not the perpetual interference from Central Government. He stated that he would like to praise the officers for the excellent work that they undertake as, in his opinion, they deserve their pay award and he urged everyone to support the resolution.
- Councillor Boden stated that once legislation is introduced it proves very difficult for it to be abolished. He added that when the new Unitary Authorities are introduced there will be the opportunity to both effect the new constitution of the new authority and to impact on the way that it is set up.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED to adopt the Senior Managers Pay Policy Statement for 2025/26.

6.20 pm

Chairman