

CABINET



MONDAY, 23 MARCH 2026 - 4.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor C Boden (Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman), Councillor S Count, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor S Imafidon, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor S Tierney and Councillor S Wallwork

APOLOGIES: Councillor G Christy

CAB62/25 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held 23 February 2026 were approved and signed.

CAB63/25 INVESTMENT BOARD UPDATE AND REVIEW OF THE COMMERCIAL AND INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Members considered the Investment Board Update and Review of the Commercial and Investment Strategy report presented by Councillor Boden.

Proposed by Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED to note the report and that the ongoing review of the current Commercial and Investment Strategy as determined by the Constitution and delegated to the S151 Officer is still currently deferred.

CAB64/25 AIR QUALITY REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT STATUTORY REPORTING

Members considered the Air Quality Review and Assessment Statutory Reporting report presented by Councillor Imafidon.

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

- Councillor Hoy said the need for additional monitors was mentioned at the County Council's planning meeting about Saxon Pit. There was also some discussion about costs, presumably to Fenland, so it would be useful to know how monitoring was funded and how additional monitors could be obtained. Also, although she understands why air quality areas are revoked if they do not meet specific criteria, when it was done in Wisbech the process was not communicated in the best way. People thought monitoring was being removed just when an incinerator was coming. Members knew that was not the case and it was a statutory process, but she thought it could have been explained better.
- Councillor Boden said in respect of Saxon Pit, the air quality management area was based on a particular polluting source that no longer exists so should have been revoked. However, there is now another potential source of pollution at the same site which public health are treating seriously. They have set up a new committee which will meet next month to look at sources of pollution particularly, but not exclusively, from Saxon Pit, with representation from himself, Councillor Nawaz and Councillor Branton. Furthermore, the Environment Agency have agreed to move a top-notch monitoring station to the near edge of Saxon Pit to record in more detail what is coming from there. When they produce their report in the summer, he will be keen to see that due attention is paid to what they uncover before firm decisions are made as to how matters proceed, particularly in respect of particulates. Councillor Boden also stated there had been frequent exceedances, especially of sulphur dioxide, at Whittlesey but not frequently

enough to be reportable. So, whilst individual days or hours had seen exceedance take place, they did not pass the threshold for action needing to be taken. He wanted it placed on record that there were no exceedances for which action could be taken, which is an important distinction to make.

- Councillor Imafidon responded to Councillor Hoy's funding question, stating monitors were funded by the contractors and there was no cost to the Council.
- Councillor Count said he was surprised by the levels in Broad Street, March showing an increase, considering the success of the High Street redevelopment and less traffic. However, he believed the reason for this was that the measurements compared 2023, when works were ongoing and there was hardly anything going through, to the reopening in 2024 when there was an uplift in traffic. However, when compared to 20/21, the figures are much lower which shows the project to be a great success in its aims which included air quality improvements in the town centre and congestion reduction.

Proposed by Councillor Imafidon, seconded by Councillor Hoy and AGREED to note the report, monitoring locations, plans and proposed actions to ensure the Council's statutory obligations under the Environment Act 1995 continue to be met and actions are implemented to further improve air quality.

CAB65/25 FENLAND INSPIRE! PLAY AREAS

Members considered the Fenland Inspire! Play Areas report presented by Councillor Imafidon.

Councillor Boden said a small amendment was needed because the Whittlesey total was £285,000 rather than £250,000. This was due to a lack of time to examine all opportunities and make recommendations. He proposed removing the roundabout from Teal Road saving £15,000, removing the roundabout from Church Street saving £15,000, and reducing the country park work required by £5,000, reducing Whittlesey by £35,000 to £250,000.

Members accepted the amendment.

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

- Councillor Seaton suggested a further amendment. Instead of the installation of a safety fence at Tydd St Giles for £30,000, a much lower fence could be installed for £15,000. He asked who would be responsible for implementation of the work as some parish councils were concerned that it would fall to them.
- Councillor Boden asked members if they agreed to the amendment. Members responded that they agreed.
- Councillor Hoy said as this reduced the villages spend, she wondered whether Tydd St Giles should receive an extra piece of equipment instead. Councillor Seaton responded that decisions on what was included or excluded were for Cabinet and the portfolio holder.
- Councillor Boden said Councillor Hoy's point was that £500,000 had been allocated to the parishes as a whole and she was concerned this may take them under that figure, but this would be covered under the delegations in the recommendations and members would ensure no area goes short.
- Councillor Imafidon responded to Councillor Seaton's question about responsibility for the works and said they would be carried out by contractors, not parish councils and it would not necessarily be the same contractor across the whole district as they would be allocated from a pool.
- Councillor Mrs Laws said she supported open tenders as she felt many contractors tend to increase their prices when they see the council as a guaranteed payer. She asked for reassurance that tendering would go to a variety of contractors.
- Councillor Imafidon said he was also in favour of open tenders. In Wimblington, a contractor has already been identified for two projects, but they have a proven track record, and he does not see this as a problem. Councillor Boden advised that the Monitoring Officer had reminded

him that the FDC procurement policy will be followed in all cases.

- Councillor Mrs French said she noticed an underspend for March of £21,000 and requested a second climbing rock at a cost of £17,000 as there several suitable locations for it. Councillor Boden said that this can also be dealt with under delegation powers with the Portfolio Holder and officer concerned.
- Councillor Count welcomed the funding as a good news story. He asked for clarification on the March narrative at paragraphs 3.1 and 3.2, stating 3.1 named Peas Hill Road open space as the primary area, 3.2 then listed other areas, and it then referred to work after the initial two open spaces had been done, but he could only see one listed and asked which the two were. He also queried the statement that the West End play area could not be extended due to underground services such as gas and water. West End is heavily used and if it could not be extended perhaps a secondary play area is needed. Councillor Boden said decisions were not final and public consultation could lead to further amendments. He asked officers to find the answers to Councillor Count's queries and respond in writing to Councillor Count and the other Cabinet members.
- Councillor Hoy said she was glad the item would come back to Cabinet for further comments, as she had many points. She did not understand why the paper was unclear given members were supposed to be working to discuss town proposals. She did not understand the Tydd St Giles position or where an arbitrary £50,000 per village figure came from and noted Doddington was around three times that. She preferred a ballpark figure per area rather than lists that looked like items picked from a catalogue, and questioned whether children would want the items, noting consultation would inform this. She cautioned that listing many villages raised expectations and that £30,000 in a village would buy very little, referencing a previous experience where £25,000 funding achieved only a swing and a rocker at Burcroft Road which she found embarrassing.
- Councillor Boden responded that the report might not necessarily return to Cabinet and delegations allowed the portfolio holder and officer to make adjustments, with Cabinet only needing to see it again if significant changes arose from public consultation.
- Councillor Seaton clarified the Tydd St Giles position, saying it was not being cut by £15,000 they were only going to have a lower fence. The figure put in came from an audit by FDC, but it was always going to be £15,000.
- Councillor Boden said the need to spend by 31st March 2027 required FDC to move with speed, which could be done by making discussions private and avoid raising expectations but that would go against the spirit of the funding, which is meant to consider the views of the public and MP.
- Councillor Hoy returned to the Tydd St Giles point, stating that if the fence cost was £15,000 cheaper, then £15,000 remained in the overall budget and asked why they could not receive an additional piece of play equipment. Councillor Boden replied none of the numbers were likely to be final and the point could be taken into account under delegated powers.
- Councillor Mrs French said the figures were estimates and she hoped they would come under budget, allowing a further look. She expressed her disappointment that a new housing estate off Wisbech Road, Hazelnut Drive, with 118 affordable homes had offered only £20,000 and would not install its own play equipment, which she described as disgraceful given the number of children. This was why she and the mayor had looked at Peas Hill, which was near the site. There was £20,000 in the kitty from Sage Housing which she hoped would be passed over so additional provision could be made.
- Councillor Boden said in addition to the £1.5 million, Government had just announced an additional £270,000 playground fund but with different rules, which must be spent by 31st March 2028. It needs to relate to three projects and reflect levels of deprivation and need. It would be sensible to consider this alongside the £1.5 million work to avoid duplication, and that no area would lose out because any project moved to the £270,000 fund would free an equivalent amount from the £1.5 million. Referring to the Index of Multiple Deprivation he anticipated most of the £270,000 would go to Wisbech.
- Councillor Mrs Laws said she would not object if it had to be three projects in Wisbech. Consultation in Whittlesey for play areas had achieved strong engagement, with feedback on

age group, equipment and safety, and correct consultation should yield good responses.

- Councillor Hoy said it would be useful to have maps of the lower super output areas to identify land in those areas and know what was possible and what can be achieved and suggested including a consultation question asking what else people would like to see. Councillor Boden said it was premature until government guidance was received, but agreed maps would be important.
- Councillor Count asked how the new £270,000 grant would be handled alongside the existing plan, to avoid duplication. He would prefer delivery by March 2027 if possible and asked for a steer on whether Cabinet wanted involvement or whether speed was essential. Councillor Boden said that utilising the work already done it may be possible to fast-track one or more of the three projects and if they can be delivered by March 2027 then all the better. However, that the funding has only just been announced so not covered by the delegations in the current report so it will need to come back to Cabinet.
- Councillor Hoy said she did not want officer time or consultation costs charged to the £270,000 unless legally required. She added that although it is a good thing to be given the money, she finds it sad that areas are in the bottom of the league tables for reasons such as lower life expectancy and people living in reduced circumstances and in poorer areas. Councillor Boden said there was no intention to use any of the money on consultants or officer time unless required by Government.
- Councillor Tierney responded that comparisons of life expectancy were complex and often related to personal choices, and it was not the Council's place to control choices but to advise and guide.
- Councillor Wallwork stated that freedom of choice required equal ability to make choices and access to healthcare, education and safer environments, which Fenland was low on, and then added this could link to access to play areas.

Proposed by Councillor Imafidon, seconded by Councillor Mrs Laws and AGREED:

- 1. The projects for each of the towns and rural areas as set out within the report.**
- 2. To delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder responsible for the Fenland Inspire! Open Spaces and Play Areas Project to consult with local Elected Members with regard to any necessary adjustments to current expected spend against the budget and adjust the notional budget allocations as necessary and matches these revised budgets with Elected Members' priorities.**
- 3. To instruct officers to inform the local MP of what plans have been approved, pending the necessary community engagement to further shape proposals, as is required by the Government Prospectus for the Pride in Place Impact Fund.**
- 4. To note that community feedback regarding any proposals is a requirement of the Government Grant and that feedback may alter proposals accordingly. Community engagement will take place throughout April based on decisions made by Members in paragraph 3.1.**
- 5. To note that the deadline for committing the Pride in Place Impact Fund which is funding open space and play area improvements is no later than 31 March 2027.**
- 6. To authorise officers, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder responsible for the Fenland Inspire! Open Spaces and Play Area Project and the Portfolio Holder for Open Spaces to deliver the improvements approved by Cabinet in paragraph 3.1. Those improvements will be subject to the MP's feedback and feedback as part of a community engagement process, ensuring compliance with MHCLG's prospectus for this grant funding.**
- 7. To delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder for the Fenland Inspire! Open Spaces and Play Area Project to consult with local elected members regarding alternative projects where, from the options approved by Cabinet, permission to use a third party's land is denied, or including where MHCLG rejects a project as unsuitable for the funding.**
- 8. To authorise the Monitoring Officer to execute and complete all requisite legal documentation in relation to the matters above related to play area and open spaces improvements, procurement and their delivery.**

CAB66/25 DRAFT 6 MONTH CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The draft Cabinet Forward Plan was noted for information.

CAB67/25 SALE OF 2 BROAD STREET, MARCH

Members considered the Sale of 2 Broad Street, March report presented by Councillor Boden.

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

- Councillor Count said that this is a hugely successful project, being a combination of the Broad Street project, chaired very well by Councillor Seaton, and March Area Transport Strategy delivery, chaired very well by Councillor Mrs French. Despite initial public scepticism, his experience from living in March is that the vast majority have found this a success. He commented on improved air quality and the enhanced streetscape being used for outside eating. When the area overlooking the river is completed that will be a great boon for March. Due to the good financial management of officers, the town has ended up with a better project than originally envisaged as the area outside Iceland in Station Road was also improved.
- Councillor Mrs French added that the underspend had also enabled additional car parking spaces at City Road.
- Councillor Tierney said sadly there will always be people that do not like the plans members bring forward but down the line when it has all been delivered, it is quite inspiring to see things work out positively and he finds March much improved.

Given the nature of the discussion Members resolved to move to exempt session at this point for discussion involving Appendix 2.

Proposed by Councillor Seaton, seconded by Councillor Count and AGREED to accept bid 2 based on the responses detailed in the exempt Appendix 2 of the report and approve the disposal of the freehold interest in the property upon the terms reported herein and give delegated authority to the Leader of the Council, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Assets and the S151 Officer, to approve the contractual terms securing the disposal of the property and to enter into all legal documentation required.

(Members resolved to exclude the public from part of the meeting for this item of business on the grounds that Appendix 2 involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972).

5.44 pm

Chairman