

COUNCIL



MONDAY, 16 DECEMBER 2024 - 4.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor N Meekins (Chairman), Councillor B Barber (Vice-Chairman), Councillor C Boden, Councillor J Carney, Councillor G Christy, Councillor J Clark, Councillor S Clark, Councillor S Count, Councillor D Cutler, Councillor L Foice-Beard, Councillor Mrs J French, Councillor K French, Councillor R Gerstner, Councillor A Gowler, 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 Oliver, Councillor D Patrick, Councillor B Rackley, Councillor D Roy, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor E Sennitt Clough, Councillor M Summers, Councillor T Taylor, Councillor S Tierney, Councillor S Wallwork and Councillor A Woollard.

APOLOGIES: Councillor I Benney, Councillor G Booth, Councillor D Connor, Councillor Mrs M Davis, Councillor G S Gill and Councillor M Purser.

C30/24 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 30 September 2024 were confirmed and signed.

C31/24 CIVIC ENGAGEMENTS UPDATE.

Councillor Meekins drew members attention to the civic activities undertaken by himself and the Vice-Chairman in the weeks preceding full Council. He advised that Councillor Barber was unable to attend the Whittlesey Town Council Civic Service as listed in the activities.

C32/24 TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AND/OR THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE.

Councillor Meekins paid his respects to former District Councillor Avis Gilliatt, who was a member of Fenland District Council from May 1999 to May 2007 as a Labour councillor for Wisbech (North) which became Waterlees (Wisbech). She served on the Economic Regeneration Committee, Housing Committee, Overview and Scrutiny Panel and Standards Committee.

Members joined Councillor Meekins in observing a minute's silence for Avis Gilliatt.

Councillor Meekins thanked everyone who attend his Carol Service on 6 December, which was an enjoyable event in the historic St Peter and St Paul's Church, Wisbech where a wonderful festive atmosphere was created to mark the start of the season. He extended his thanks to Member Services for their assistance in organising the event as well as Reverend Paul Kite, Keith Aplin, the Clarkson Singers and James Trundle, James Mooney Dutton, the organist and Hannah Teasdale, the Fenland Poet Laureate.

C33/24 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 Clark, in the absence of Councillor Booth as Leader of the Opposition, asked the following questions under Procedure Rule 8.4:

- Councillor Clark congratulated Whittlesey on its wonderful tribute to Remembrance Day in the Whittlesey Garden of Rest, the crochet knitted figures represented many of the forces that gave so much for the country in the two world wars and he feels that Whittlesey members should be very proud of its residents who put on such an impressive show. He stated that after finding a parking place he walked along the main street, did some shopping and had something to eat and drink and enjoyed his visit to Whittlesey but on speaking to residents, parking seems to have been taken up by people parking in Whittlesey and travelling through to Peterborough to work, etc., avoiding parking charges in Peterborough and asked if the Leader was aware of this problem and if so what is he doing to address it? Councillor Boden responded that he was pleased that Councillor Clark enjoyed his visit to Whittlesey and the knitted works that have been found in the Garden of Rest and elsewhere in Whittlesey are the work of volunteers, nothing to do with the Town or District Councils and he is pleased that Councillor Clark agrees that it has had a massive impact on anyone who comes to Whittlesey and sees it for themselves. He stated that there are parking issues in Whittlesey and there is an element, which has been in existence for many years, of individuals who park in Whittlesey and then get the bus into Peterborough but it is really difficult to do much about it because if restrictions are introduced then it is going to potentially harm individuals who are working in the Town Centre so the available options are being investigated but he wants to do this as part of a comprehensive parking review, both on-street and off-street. Councillor Boden expressed the opinion that this issue has been stymied by the County Council for several years now and he is hoping that things will move forward after the elections but he is loathed to start things on a piecemeal basis just looking at the off-street parking issues when it needs to be undertaken holistically.
- Councillor Clark asked for an update on the Saxon Pit creating dust, noise and smell and did the Council go ahead and purchase the monitoring equipment? Councillor Boden confirmed that the Council did purchase some additional monitoring equipment, which is not at Saxon Pit it is some distance away by the Park Lane school and it is operating and the information is being published as to what it is showing. He stated that it is really valuable to have that in conjunction with knowledge of what the wind direction is at any particular time as it can assist the Council significantly in trying to identify when people report a problem with odour allegedly from the pit or even a problem with dust so the objective data can be looked at and see what it says and if it does confirm what it is that people suspect is happening.
- Councillor Clark referred to the White Paper on Local Government reorganisation published today and the area has many tiers of councils, with many expected to increase their share of the Council Tax meaning a possible big increase when the Council Tax bills are sent to residents. He referred to the comments of a former leader of the Council, Alan Melton, on Look East regarding the salaries paid to 10 Chief Executives in Cambridgeshire, there being too many councillors and too many support staff. Councillor Clark stated that Michael Hesseltine, a former housing secretary, once said there are many councillors and officials sending around papers and achieving very little and he would suspect that with the plethora of directives, policies and standards now sent by e-mail is the justification for these officers and multi-layered Local Government in Cambridgeshire and beyond prompting the Government to look into Local Government structures, efficiency and value for money and service delivery. He asked if the Leader supports Local Government reorganisation? Councillor Boden responded that nothing is perfect in this world so he would very much welcome Local Government reorganisation, although not necessarily what is being proposed by the Government at the moment. He stated that the numbers quoted from Alan Melton are probably correct and he does not dispute the principle of them but there is an issue in that democracy comes with a price, you do not get democracy for free and there needs to be a structure to support democracy and it is a matter of what level of democracy should there be. Councillor Boden made the point that Cambridge could save a significant amount of money in a whole host of different ways and by the local council just being run

from Cambridge but do residents really want decisions made about their bin services, grass being cut or their Electoral Services controlled from Cambridge, questioning when does Local Government stop being local. He stated that this is a very legitimate debate to have and if taken to extreme Local Government would be best controlled from the centre as the more that is controlled from the centre the less worry there is about all of the costs that Councillor Clark was referring to but that removes the locality and localism from Local Government, with there being one significant step in the removal of Local Government back in the 1972 Local Government Act where Fenland was created. Councillor Boden made the point that there are still people, even in the Chamber, who hark back to the greater amount of democratic accountability which there was with smaller local authority bodies than exist now but things have to move forward and cost efficiencies have to be recognised, however, it is much too early in the process to start talking about specifics but there is a trade-off do people want to save every single penny by making Local Government more remote or do they want to keep a considerable amount of control in the hands of local people. He feels this is a legitimate debate that will be needed in the future.

C34/24 **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 Gerstner stated that he has been extensively lobbied and communicated with about the Ralph Butcher Causeway, with a letter having been circulated by Alex Beckett, Chair of Highways and Transport at the County Council to say that there is a contractual dispute between the County Council and the contractor. He asked will this hold up even more the non-information or very little information that is coming through at the moment and does this start to look a little bit like the guided bus way affair that the County Council had issue with the contractor many years ago and asked for any update. Councillor Boden responded that it has been remarkable how little public information has become available in the last three weeks about what has been happening in Whittlesey and those that do not live in Whittlesey will not be aware of the sheer chaos that there has been for the around 6 months, particularly in the last few weeks because of restrictions on the Ralph Butcher Causeway. He referred to Alex Beckett's letter, which he was not going to comment on until at least between Christmas and New Year as it is important that the current situation is sorted, but he was surprised to read the letter which tried to bring party politics into the subject and made reference to something which he understood was not supposed to be mentioned but given that Alex Beckett is the Chairman of the Transportation and Highways Committee at the County Council and he has made reference to it he now also feels able to make reference to it. Councillor Boden stated that after the current administration came into power at County Council there was a catastrophic failure of the bridge supports, this was before any bridge had been put on top of the supports, and action was taken at that time to change the design of the bridge and supports so that if the whole of Fenland were to be devastated by a Comet hitting it the one thing that would stay up would be those bridge supports. He continued that this is not what should really have happened at that time, which was a better questioning of why did that catastrophic failure happen and it is possible that if that had been looked at by the County Council administration at that time thoroughly they may have found there was an underlying problem which may be the same as the underlying problem that there is now with the support of the embankment right next to those bridge supports. Councillor Boden expressed the view that it may be when all of this finally comes out and what has caused the problems that currently exist there may have been a missed opportunity in 2021 because there was a real warning sign that perhaps ground conditions were such that it was inadvisable to continue the way it went. He is saying perhaps as he honestly does not know what the position is and no one does but what has happened is that given the issues that have been found, the cracks which have been found in the

carriageway which are not explained and which are not immediately a safety matter but could be so the County Council has acted correctly with being cautious in blocking off one of the two carriageways and instituting temporary traffic lights. Councillor Boden stated that given that this is the case what has happened is that the contractor, with whom there is a contractual dispute, has brought in a boring machine to bore 6 holes 20-25 cm in diameter and to a depth of 12 metres into the embankment and has taken 12 separate 1 metre samples from each of those 6 holes, which are now the subject of analysis but it is not known how long this will take, how long it will take to get any answers and whether the answers will be released in the short term. He stated that given the horrendous lack of information that has been received over the last few weeks, he spoke to the Chief Executive of Cambridgeshire County Council to say that it was not acceptable for people in Whittlesey to be kept in the dark about what is happening and he agreed that he should speak to the Director of Highways at the County Council and he has a meeting tomorrow afternoon to go through what the current situation is, what can be revealed to the local people and what the prognosis is. Councillor Boden added that the one thing he fears he cannot say is how long this is going to carry on as it is not a reasonable question for him to expect an answer to at this time but there are a whole host of things, including the way in which the traffic lights are being operated at the moment, what is happening with the B1040 and what alternatives there may be if it is necessary to have major works undertaken on the bridge. He agreed with Councillor Gerstner that the amount of official information which has been coming out from day one of this issue has been poor and in the last 3-4 weeks it has been virtually non-existent, which is not acceptable as people are at their wits end at the delays which they suffer and if action can be taken by the County Council to reduce those delays it needs to be taken. Councillor Gerstner thanked Councillor Boden for his comprehensive response, which has hopefully informed residents a little more and that further answers will come from the meeting he has tomorrow.

- Councillor Clark made that point that 5-6 years ago it was announced that Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) would be introduced in Fenland and there was the backing from the entire Council as he does not think there is any councillor who does not receive complaints about inconsiderate parking. He stated that a good start was made but it seems to have stalled, with the Combined Authority coming up with its £150,000 towards the scheme which the Council must be in danger of losing if it is not drawn down and Fenland's share of £500,000 could easily have been met by considerable windfalls of the Horizon money and the 2-year unexpected grants towards the IDB payments. Councillor Clark stated that March Broad Street is now going to be cluttered up with 42 bollards to try and stop inconsiderate parking, which, in his view, is unlikely to work. He asked if the Council had given up trying to introduce CEP in Fenland and if not, when is it going to happen? Councillor Mrs French agreed that CPE was started in 2019, all was going well until there was a change of administration at the County Council, with the original costs being £325,000 which meant that Fenland would have to pay for all the new lines, signs, etc., and over the years these costs have risen to around £1 million, which is not sustainable. She stated that she has argued repeatedly with County Council that it is not up to the District Council to maintain lines and this Council was also told that the County Council wanted it to maintain them in perpetuity but finally it was agreed that this is not this Council's job. Councillor Mrs French stated that there are over a thousand lines and signs that are incorrect and apart from the financial side, the County Council officers are putting unrealistic conditions on local service agreements. She made the point that CEP has not been discounted, the money will be found somewhere but it is just a case of not just the money but the conditions which this Council does not want to be burdened with forever. Councillor Mrs French agreed that the parking in March is appalling, arrangements were made through MATS that 42 bollards are going to have to be erected to stop people parking, with there being enough car parking for taxis and disabled people. Councillor Clark asked if there was any indication when this was going to happen? Councillor Mrs French responded that it will be after the election as it is stalemate with the current Rainbow Alliance County Councillors and hopefully with a change of administration dialogue can be reopened.

- Councillor Roy referred to the new Planning Policy Framework being published and asked for an indication of how long it will take for the new Local Plan to be introduced? Councillor Mrs Laws responded that the Framework has only just been published, she has had a meeting with officers this afternoon and she has been reading through it but it is a little early to give a confident answer. She stated that the Council is very focused on bringing the emerging Local Plan forward but this has thrown 'a spanner in the works' so there will be a need to revisit a couple of areas, conversations are also being held with neighbouring councils regarding policy and there are a couple of lines in the Framework that require clarification.
- Councillor Clark stated that when he was a County Councillor he attended meetings on the Whittlesey bridge with Ralph Butcher on several occasions and at such time Kier Construction were a preferred builder for this scheme but they saw many difficulties with it and withdrew and then the County Council went with a cheaper operator to deliver the scheme. He feels it may be worth asking at Councillor Boden's meeting why did they not go with Keir or why did they not take any notice of the expected problems they could see? Councillor Boden responded there is, as the Chairman of the Highways Committee at the County Council has now revealed, a contractual dispute between the County Council and Jonas Brothers, with the dispute being about who is responsible for the catastrophic column slippage in July 2021, what caused it and who pays for all the additional costs which were involved with it. He stated that he does not know the answer but it could be to do with ground conditions, the design, materials or the build and these are the four options he can see but there may be others and each of those four will point in a different direction as to who will be responsible in terms of the additional costs for that failure in July 2021. Councillor Boden expressed the opinion that if it turns out that the same cause is also responsible for the embankment problem that exists now then the numbers involved in that dispute will be many more times bigger than they are currently but he does not know which of the parties is responsible as that is a technical question with a technical answer and he does not have that expertise. He expressed the view that he does not think it will be constructive in his meeting tomorrow to start going into the past about who was responsible for what at what time partly because that is part of what this legal dispute is all about and tomorrow his concern is about what residents in Whittlesey are facing on a daily basis and how it can be managed in the short term to ameliorate some of the problems being faced at the moment and to give some answers about what might be happening in the medium term rather than the short term so practical questions to get some practical answers on how to improve the position that people in Whittlesey are facing, especially whilst the B1040 is closed. Councillor Boden stated that the questions raised by Councillor Clark are ones that will have to be answered eventually but he would be wasting the opportunity of trying to improve the day-to-day position of residents in Whittlesey if he was to delve into those questions tomorrow.
- Councillor Gerstner referred to some months ago members were given the indication that Cabinet would be given a presentation on the plans for the future of the three leisure centres in Fenland and asked if there was an update? Councillor Miscandlon responded that he has spoken to officers and it is not envisaged there will be a meeting between Cabinet and the projected programme until around March 2025 due to the complexity of the reports that have been received from the consultants and also getting Freedom Leisure on board with what is going to happen as they are the partners and have to agree. He added that officers have a meeting with Freedom this week to show them the latest report.

C35/24 MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR DAL ROY

Councillor Roy presented his motion concerning The Flag of the Fens.

Councillor Summers seconded the motion and members made the following comments:

- Councillor Mrs Laws stated that she does not hear of anyone in Whittlesey accepting this flag from Whittlesey Town Council's point of view and she cannot support it as she

considers it to be a poor copy and design of the rampant of Scotland and the Royal Banner of the Royal Arms of Scotland. She drew members attention to the centre of the Chamber, where there is a carpet which has the Fenland registered insignia and also on entering Fenland Hall there was a flag flying which is the same insignia as in the Chamber. Councillor Mrs Laws made the point that The Flag of the Fens has been talked about for several years and she does not consider it represents Fenland. She feels if members have the time and inclination to look at this she would suggest it goes out to consultation and goes through the proper process but she cannot see anything wrong with the Fenland emblem that exists now.

- Councillor Tierney expressed the view that normally when a motion is presented to Council he would expect to see a problem being raised, suggestions to clarify the depth of the problem and then a solution and he does not feel this motion does this as it is a bit vague and seems to require him to do some research before he can look at supporting it. He referred to the first paragraph where it says Fenland is growing, the East of England is growing, which is fine but the second paragraph then says Fenland needs an identity but he feels that Fenland already has an identity, Fenland itself as well as all the individual villages and towns all have culture and identity already and he feels it a little rude to suggest otherwise, which this motion does in several places. Councillor Tierney expressed the opinion that it is for the people of Fenland to decide if they need a flag to represent them not one individual and it may be that lots of work has been undertaken but the motion does not mention this, it gives no background. He stated that the third paragraph goes on to do what is called a logical fallacy, it is an appeal to authority by saying these other people support it, the MP supports it so this Council should support it, these people are all entitled to their views but members have their own decision to make looking at the evidence presented to them. Councillor Tierney referred to it finally stating that all these people need to be brought together under one identity as if suggesting a flag developed or thought about by one person will somehow solve every issue that cultures, religions and races have with one another and he does not believe a flag will change that. He feels the motion is a failed motion, it does not do what it is supposed to do and what he would expect to see in a motion. Councillor Tierney stated in terms of the flag itself he does not like the design personally but if everyone in Fenland liked the design then it could be brought forward but he would like to see evidence of a wide consultation, schools involved and some talk about what Fenland really means so it could be introduced into the flag.
- Councillor Gowler echoed some of the comments made by Councillor Tierney and stated personally he likes the idea of a flag and agrees with some of the things in the motion about giving Fenland an identity. He stated that he does have a problem with this flag and it being one person's idea and he would prefer there to be some kind of consultation, with schools being involved may be having some kind of competition with the best ones being selected and then subject to a public vote. Councillor Gowler referred to the motion being concentrated on Fenland but he knows the individual proposing the flag comes from Ely which suggests it represents more than Fenland itself and more likely represents The Fens so he does not think this Council should be the only authority that should make this decision.
- Councillor Carney stated that background reading revealed to him from The Flag of the Fens Facebook group that it is not just about Fenland itself, it is trying to encompass the geographical area of the Fens which goes from Lincolnshire to Suffolk and includes West Norfolk. He feels it is more of a trademark for businesses and individuals who wish to stamp their product as being a product from the Fens and reading what the British Flag Institute says about registration of flags is that any flag that is registered with them has to be one that can be used freely and without any repercussions. Councillor Carney stated that should this Council be minded to support it or not, if The Flag of the Fens became officially registered there would be no obligation for this Council to use that flag simply because there is already a Fenland District Council flag.
- Councillor Christy stated that he agrees with the spirit of the flag but he echoes the sentiment of Councillor Tierney and thinks it is the wrong place to bring it to the Council as

a motion as it not right for members to be making that decision, it should be consulted on and the people should decide. He stated that he cannot support it.

- Councillor Sennitt Clough stated that with all due respect to Councillor Roy, she is from the Fens and as Chair of the Culture, Arts and Heritage Committee it would be remiss of her not to talk about the history of the Fens. She made the point that the Fens has not always had a homogenous identity and she feels it is important to preserve the identity of the Fens as a group, a collection of islands which is reflected in their names with the suffixes e, ey or ea. Councillor Sennitt Clough feels that to airbrush that history and individual spirit of the Fens is not acceptable to her and she is unable to support it with her Culture, Arts and Heritage hat on.
- Councillor Hoy stated that she is not bothered either way about this flag but from a personal level she is not keen on how it looks as it looks more like a dragon than a tiger but she does like the idea of people having an identity because of the amount of times she has said she is from Fenland and people do not know where it is. She expressed her disappointment that there are not many motions submitted to Council from the opposition and there are so many issues in Fenland at the moment, such as dualling the A47, the dire problems in Whittlesey, etc., but where are the motions on these important issues.
- Councillor Summers stated that he is no expert on flags and he cannot dispute any of the facts that other people have raised but what he feels is that there is some logic behind what is being proposed, some justification for it and the sentiment behind it is a positive one of bringing communities together and a lot of the responses today have focussed on the negatives as the motion could fail but there could be a more positive conversation. He stated that personally he is ambivalent about the design, he is not from the Fens originally but he likes the idea. Councillor Summers referred to Councillor Hoy's point, yes there are a lot of important issues going on but not many of the ones discussed are in the Council's control whereas supporting something or not that a member of the community is trying to achieve is within this Council's control.

Councillor Roy in summing up thanked all the councillors that had commented and made the point that every day is a learning day, especially to the councillors that put forward the proposal to have a consultation, which is an element he had overlooked. He requested that the motion be withdrawn.

The motion was withdrawn.

(Councillor Sennitt Clough declared that she had been lobbied extensively on this item but would remain open minded)

C36/24 MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR TIM TAYLOR

Councillor Taylor presented his motion regarding the sustainability of farming and horticulture in Fenland.

Councillor Foice-Beard seconded the motion and members made the following comments:

- Councillor Tierney stated that he supports this, he does not normally like motions that begin with writing to the Secretary of State because he does not think they care what members say, regardless of which party is in power, but he likes anything that supports farmers. He feels it is important that the Council is clear it supports agriculture and farmers in every respect because they need to hear that people support them at the moment.
- Councillor Summers referred to vagueness of motions already being mentioned today and for him this motion is too vague, it fails to clarify what the perceived obstacles to it are in any material sense and it fails to provide the solutions to those obstacles. He added that he loves a farm shop and supports them but, in his view, there needs to be regulation around how they appear and that is why he does not support this motion.
- Councillor Mrs Laws stated that she will support this motion without question, she made the

point that there is a huge amount of regulation around farm shops and they have to go through proper planning procedure as with any development and there is no fast tracking of farm shops because if it was fast tracked then a residential development should be fast tracked. She made the point that farm shops are also regulated by Environmental Health and there has to be consideration given to highways, the location of the property, easy access and traffic movement, which is really no different to how a planning application for housing development or other structures would be handled. Councillor Mrs Laws stated that as the emerging Local Plan is being developed the Council wants to support business coming into Fenland and look to enhance and improve the agricultural system.

- Councillor Nawaz expressed surprise that farmers are not already able to have their own shops as you can open up a corner shop with 5 minutes notice and sell alcohol and unhealthy food and why are farm shops with healthy foodstuff not allowed, especially when the farmers are hard squeezed by big retailers and now with the inheritance tax on top. He feels the Council should try to facilitate the farmers and not put any obstructions in their way, although he acknowledges there are rules and regulations that govern the setting up of farm shops. Councillor Nawaz stated that he fully supports the motion and in this area which is predominantly rural with lots of farms members are supposed to be representing everybody's interests.
- Councillor Barber stated that she fully supports this motion and wonders how there are little stalls on the side of the road selling strawberries in Summer for example and she is sure they do not have planning permission. She feels that members should support the farmers in whatever they do, as will be seen in the next motion also, because they are suffering at the moment and Fenland is a farming community.
- Councillor Clark expressed the opinion that he not sure if this motion is over promising and under delivering and takes note of the Planning Portfolio Holder who is informing members that this is all going to come under the National Planning Policy Framework and a planning application will have to go through the normal process and this Council cannot make any decisions to circumnavigate this. He stated that he can support the motion but the Council cannot over promise and under deliver.
- Councillor Hicks agreed with the comments of Councillor Clark, whatever members do on this motion it is not going to make a difference to decision making because of the National Planning Policy Framework so, in his view, it is a bit of a pointless motion.
- Councillor Hoy referred to the comments of Councillor Nawaz on corner shops and thinks he was speaking figuratively as to open a corner shop is really easy, however, if you are a farmer and you want to open a farm shop and sell your goods it is difficult and you do have to go through these barriers, with their being more of a focus on healthy eating and people living longer, with easy mechanisms not being in place. She further referred to the point about it being a pointless motion and agreed that the letter writing is annoying and she does not think this letter will 'change the world', it will probably go on the Minister's desk and be ignored or maybe a stock written response will be provided, however, members have to try and make an effort sometimes as nothing will change.
- Councillor Patrick questioned how many farm shop applications there has been within Fenland and how many have been accepted or rejected.
- Councillor Imafidon expressed the view that farmers have been squeezed enough and are facing enough restrictions. He does agree that planning rules have to be followed but particularly in the current climate, with the protests across the country, farmers are struggling and being forced to sell their land to solar panel farms so anything that can be undertaken to support farmers he is in favour of.

Councillor Taylor in summing up thanked members for supporting the motion, he agreed that the industry is in dire trouble at the moment but it will survive, farmers are going to fight, there is a lot of fight in them and they will not be backing down for anything, with the industry here to stay. He stated that the new app is up and live as from last night where people can find out their local suppliers or local farms prepared to sell direct to the public so the planning applications for farm shops is just another step.

The motion was approved.

C37/24 MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR BRENDA BARBER

Councillor Barber presented her motion regarding preserving the Fenland landscape and recognising the area of Fenland as a critical food producing area.

Councillor Taylor seconded the motion and members made the following comments:

- Councillor Tierney expressed the opinion that Governments have gone completely mad because the only thing that seems to matter to them in controlling the weather and the threat of climate change. He expressed the view that food security is absolutely vital and there are lots of forms of energy but solar and wind, which are the top sources currently, are not counted on what they cost the area, the concrete that needs to be laid, the turbines, the areas of land eaten up by solar panels, the difficulty of undertaking battery storage in the long term and the costs of subsidies which are so well hidden to make these forms of energy seem inexpensive and affordable when they are not. Councillor Tierney expressed the opinion that the best form of energy that can be used is the old-fashioned forms but there is concern about the consequences of using them but he feels that the area should not starve itself or future generations by making stupid decisions now. He made the point that Fenland is a fantastic farming agricultural area, with some of the best land in the country providing a lot of food and why would this be destroyed to build some, in his view, useless solar panels.
- Councillor Carney agreed with the comments of Councillor Tierney, solar farms and wind turbines are foisted on the area whether they are wanted or not. He takes on board Councillor Barber's point about having the local population consulted on it and being listened to but members all know that they are not, referring to the solar farm near Fordham with local people protesting in that area and the County Council making a legal challenge against the Government, but local people and local councils no matter what they say are having them imposed by higher authorities whether it is wanted or not. Councillor Carney stated that he wholeheartedly supports this motion because if it is only a tiny mechanism to get the message driven home the nation needs to be fed and needs food. He made the point that why cannot large industrial buildings have solar panels fitted to them rather than the use of Grade 1 or 2 fertile land.
- Councillor Gerstner stated that he fully supports this motion, he thinks it is a very good motion but unfortunately the Council has its "arms tied behind its back" in planning terms as for many years in this area building has been allowed on Grade 1 agricultural land because of planning rules and regulations. He feels it is a travesty that building is taking place on good quality farmland, it is known that farmers suffer and he has a farmer near to him where his farm was flooded and whose yield was only 50% of what he normally gets and he is looking to sell the land to build on because he will make more money from it. Councillor Gerstner made the point that the country should be feeding itself long before building more wind turbines and more solar farms, with there being a hidden cost to this and not being what all Governments have stated being cheap energy, with the days of cheap energy having gone.
- Councillor Summers stated that he is not sure what the old ways are that Councillor Tierney referred to but thinks nuclear is the only real answer. He feels the motion is about preserving Grade 1 agricultural land for food security and that is of utmost importance, he is not sure if anyone is listening but the Council has to try so he fully supports the motion.
- Councillor Miscandlon referred to an application for wind turbines when he was Chairman of Planning Committee and he did a quick calculation of how much land it was actually using and with them growing wheat on the land in one year they would produce enough wheat to make over a million loaves of bread so security of Fenland's farming land is paramount and it should be protected at all costs. He feels that the Government, whichever party it is, should be made aware that the farmland in Fenland is paramount in feeding this country

without importing it as every piece of food that comes in from abroad has a cost attached to it and this country's standards are also strict so he will support this motion.

- Councillor Gowler echoed the comments of the other councillors that had spoken, successive Governments since the 1980s have completely failed to solve the energy crisis and nuclear power stations should have been built everywhere but unfortunately this has not happened. He stated that he supports the motion but made the point that the reservoir is a national infrastructure project and as a Council this has been supported so questioned whether there might be an amendment to mention this.
- Councillor Hicks stated that he supports the motion being very pro-farming but does not know whether any members saw a programme a couple of days ago on solar panels where they were growing crops underneath the solar panels and in the rows between and they were getting better results and tastier produce so it is possible to farm and it has been undertaken on various sites already.
- Councillor Patrick stated that he will support the motion as he does agree that Fenland's farmland needs to be protected but he is also concerned about the rise of temperatures within the world and if nothing happens on the energy front and fossil fuel and oil is continued to be burnt the temperatures will eventually be pushed up so high that the land will become infertile.
- Councillor Mrs Laws stated that she supports the motion, the new emerging Local Plan is looking at building, design and trying to persuade developers to look at putting solar panels on new developments and any buildings that come forward. She referred to the comments of Councillor Hicks and made the point that this has taken place, to her knowledge, for over 35 years in Germany not only food production but animals, mainly sheep.
- Councillor Taylor made the point that it is obvious that he supports this motion and referred to Councillor Mrs Laws comments regarding developers, which is something he has been pursuing for the last five years and there has been a lot of negativity come back because the power companies do not want solar panels on a lot of house roofs as they are not getting money out of it so this is something that needs to be investigated. He stated that in regard to solar farms, there is footage from last weekend from the country's largest solar farm and the land has been obliterated, with the company who own the farm stating that they are not designed for those sort of weather conditions. Councillor Taylor referred to a wind turbine where a whole fan came off in one go and went across the ground like a boomerang but when you talk to a proper meteorologist this country's weather circles are running on 20 year patterns so there is another 15-17 years to go within the weather situation that there is at the moment and the wind turbines and solar panels are not fit for this weather. He expressed the view that a 2 megawatt turbine, which is a small one, requires 260 tonnes of steel and that requires 300 tonnes of iron ore and 170 tonnes of coking coal which is mined to produce the steel for the footings, which is not including the concrete and this is then transported to the manufacturers then to site and if a turbine turned every second of its life it would never produce as much power as it took to manufacture it and questioned how is that green. Councillor Taylor made the point that the country is an island and surrounded by sea and power could be simply produced from sea water at very minimal costs to what there is now and the farmland would be safe.

Councillor Barber in summing up thanked members who appreciated and agreed with the motion. She stated that it is suggested that a billion solar panels will be fitted across Britain to hit Net Zero targets and apparently the wind turbine blades are not recyclable and have to go into landfill. Councillor Barber expressed the opinion that it is important that the Council does something but she is not sure what it is.

The motion was approved.

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

C38/24 **TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT & ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY MID-YEAR REVIEW 2024/25**

Members considered that Council's Treasury Management activity for the first six months of 2024/25, together with an update on matters pertinent to future updates to the Council's Treasury Management Strategy presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Nawaz stated that this report is not easy to compile as there is so much uncertainty, thanking the officers concerned and elected members for bringing together this complex report and he agrees that, putting the uncertainties aside, there have been two successive months of shrinking economy and it is likely that the fourth quarter of this year will show a contraction in GDP and that injects even more uncertainty, with the Government being required to reduce the interest rates and then increase them again, which may affect figures. He added that the £40 billion tax grab by the Government means a range of companies will not be investing much money or employing any more staff, particularly in view of the increases in National Insurance contributions so he feels it is a good report in difficult circumstances.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Nawaz and AGREED that the report be noted.

C39/24 **ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGIC REFRESH 2025-28**

Members considered the Economic Growth Strategic Refresh document created to continue the delivery of the Council's Economic Development Strategy 2012-2031 presented by Councillor Boden in the absence of Councillor Benney.

Members made comments as follows:

- Councillor Count thanked the officers and members that have helped put this document together, it has been produced in partnership with the Combined Authority to enable an overall growth strategy and it is very important that Fenland manages to put its marker down and that it is open for business. He feels it is a good piece of work and the examples used show how much the Council can help a business whereas in some areas of Government it gets in the way of local businesses. Councillor Count drew attention to the section that talks about available serviced land and infrastructure, with there being some great potential things happening locally, with one of the major projects which people either like or do not like being the Fenland Reservoir but he wants to concentrate on the area around the Chatteris Stainless Metalcraft and the possibility of the Peterborough Science and Technology Park at Whittlesey as what separates them for him is landing high productivity businesses in the area and he is looking for more of that and it is the productivity that is achieved in an area that changes the social and economic outcomes for the area, with there being too many years when the residents of the area have attended universities elsewhere and attained better jobs elsewhere, which means the economic material that is left in the Fens is behind other areas which has had social outcomes. He expressed the view that if the most can be made out of areas such as these and high value jobs can be drawn into the area with high productivity then the area would start keeping some of the people that are local to Fenland, which will make a real difference. Councillor Count would like the Council to go further as when a business is expanding they cannot afford to wait for a planning system and it is about how quickly it can be delivered and he has seen examples of where enterprise parks have said they will do all the necessary background work and pay associated costs which can be recouped and he would like to see a package put in front of the CPCA to say this is what is needed to change the area to bring some high productivity growth into Fenland, which could reduce inequalities in the area.
- Councillor Miscandlon agreed with the comments of Councillor Count, the two major projects in the Fens at the moment are the reservoir and the technical and science park, with it being unfortunate that it is referred to as Peterborough, but it is many millions of

pounds that is going to be spent on this project which is not prime agricultural land, it is a waste area, but it will be, if it comes to fruition, a very exciting project which will put Fenland on the map for being a science and technology centre.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Miscandlon and AGREED that the Economic Growth Strategic Refresh 2025-28 be approved.

C40/24 GAMBLING ACT 2005 - STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES 2024

Members considered the Gambling Act 2005 Statement of Principles 2024 following a period of public consultation and approval by the Licensing Committee presented by Councillor Oliver.

Proposed by Councillor Oliver, seconded by Councillor Humphrey and AGREED that the Gambling Act – Statement of Principles Policy 2025-2028 be approved.

5.50 pm

Chairman