

COUNCIL



MONDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER 2025 - 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 Mrs J French, Councillor K French, Councillor G S Gill, Councillor R Gerstner, Councillor A Gowler, Councillor S Harris, Councillor A Hay, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor S Imafidon, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor C Marks, Councillor N Meekins, Councillor A Miscandlon, Councillor J Mockett, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor Dr H Nawaz, Councillor D Oliver, 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 D Connor, Councillor L Foice-Beard, Councillor P Hicks and Councillor M Humphrey

C25/25 **PREVIOUS MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of 21 July 2025 were confirmed and signed.

C26/25 **CIVIC ENGAGEMENTS UPDATE**

The Chairman drew members' attention to the civic activities undertaken by herself and the Vice-Chairman in the weeks preceding Full Council.

C27/25 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AND/OR THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE**

Councillor Barber announced with sadness the passing of Barry Howlett who had been a Fenland District Councillor for March East from June 2001 until May 2007. During that time, he sat on the Planning Committee and was also a member of the Twinning Association.

The Council offered their sincere condolences to Barry's friends and loved ones and a minute's silence was held to commemorate his life.

Councillor Barber reminded members of her Civic Reception taking place at Gorefield Community Hall and Sports Centre from 6.30pm on Friday 19 September 2025.

Councillor Barber stated that her coffee morning in aid of Damsons will take place in the Council Chamber from 10am on 23 October 2025.

C28/25 **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 question under Procedure Rule 8.4:

- with the recent resignation of Councillor Sennitt Clough, who was Chair of the Culture, Arts and Heritage Advisory Review Committee, and the fact that she was the main component

for the Fenland flag competition, what is going to happen with regards to this? Councillor Boden responded that he does not know but consideration will be given to that and members will be advised as soon as possible. Councillor Booth suggested that the idea of a competition be removed and possibly the existing flag be adopted that is used by so many businesses and residents, which would be his preference. Councillor Boden responded that he does not make these decisions, he will consult with his group and others in order to come to a decision.

C29/25 **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 Booth referred to the update on the Local Plan, making the point that there is not much of an update, but it does now confirm that there is a Gypsy Traveller Needs Housing Assessment in place, which has been needed for some time. He asked if this is going to be publicised more widely, particularly with the Parish and Town Councils, and also is there any idea when the Local Plan is going to be delivered, there are no timescales which he did ask for at the last meeting he was present at, several months have passed and it is getting on for a year since the Government published its revised NPPF and guidance and this Council is going forward at a snails pace, questioning whether a Local Plan will be in place by the time of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). Councillor Mrs Laws responded that unlike many councils, Fenland District Council has a 6.6 year housing and land supply, well in excess of the Government's 5-year target and has consistently overperformed on housing delivery in recent years, which, in her view, demonstrates that Fenland has planning policies and is a very pro-growth council. She stated that the LGR process proposed by Central Government, which if implemented will see Fenland merge with a number of other local councils, has necessitated how future planning policy should be best progressed including the new Local Plan and it will be kept under review as the LGR, scheduled to be implemented in full by April 2028, progresses to ensure the best and most cost efficient outcome for Fenland residents. Councillor Mrs Laws added that there will be, one way or another, a new Local Plan covering the Fenland area, with the method and times of this depending upon whether or not LGR goes ahead and she will make an announcement at Full Council in December explaining how and when a new call for sites will be initiated. She stated that in regard to the new policy this is going to be circulated to all Parish and Town Councils so they will have an up-to-date policy for travellers.

C30/25 **MOTION SUBMITTED BY TIM TAYLOR REGARDING SOLAR FARMS AND FOOD SECURITY**

Councillor Taylor presented a motion on solar farms and food security, seconded by Councillor Tierney. Councillor Taylor stated since 1 January to 1 June 2025 this Government has spent £649 million by having wind turbines switched off as the National Grid is at capacity and the volume of turbines switched off asks the question why is solar needed. He feels that if the turbines are turning constantly and cannot keep up then alternatives should be looked at but when turbines have been switched off and extra money is being paid to have them switched off then why is another energy supply required, which is all being undertaken in the name of Net Zero.

Councillor Taylor continued that Labour in its original manifesto stated that energy bills would be £200-£300 cheaper, however, the price cap will increase by another 2% from next month and the National Grid have stated that this is to afford to pay to have turbines switched off. He added that it has also been stated that a lot of these solar farms, wind farms, etc., are built in the wrong place to get power to where it is needed, with it being known that if you use extension leads the power is less at the end of the plug, which works the same with wind and solar.

Members made the following comments:

- Councillor Summers thanked Councillor Taylor for agreeing to the amendments and stated that he supports the protection of BMV land.
- Councillor Booth referred to Councillor Taylor mentioning some add-ons to media outlets and asked for these to be pointed out as part of the motion. Councillor Taylor stated that the additional outlets are Farmers to Action, The F in Farmer, Pro-Farmers United, Catherine Blaiklock and Rupert Lowe MP. Councillor Booth stated that it is important that members know exactly what they are voting on. He added that in principle he will be supporting this motion and one thing that is worth noting about food security is that this country has not been self-sufficient since the mid 18th century and currently only about 60% of its food is produced in this country, it is obviously an aim to have food security but feels it will be a long time coming.
- Councillor Christy expressed the opinion that it is a very important matter for Fenland but the only concern he has is that he does not feel the motion is strong enough, which relates to an all-party joint letter that was sent to the Prime Minister earlier this year and thinks this motion should be calling for the same sorts of things, an unequivocal ban on large area solar installations on best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land, which as Councillor Taylor has described is Grades 1, 2 and 3A. He continued that they are also calling for the likely reduction of BMV land as a result of climate change, inclusion of ALC grade 3B in the BMV category and finally a policy promoting a rooftop first and brownfield first approach to siting solar installations at local, regional and national levels. Councillor Christy expressed the view that this would be much more stronger as words and in terms of who that letter should be taken to it should also include the Prime Minister, and supporting cross party MPs which includes the local MPs which are calling for that motion, which puts Fenland on the same playing field and the same level as what is being called for.
- Councillor Count stated that he had not intended to speak on this motion as he felt it was straightforward and sensible being a big supporter of green energy but recognising that agricultural land should be protected. He stated that he was shocked at what Councillor Taylor said in relation to up to £900 million being spent to turn wind turbines off, which he could not believe and he has Googled it and is shocked to find this is correct, a billion pound of taxpayers money was spent last year turning wind turbines off. Councillor Count continued the wording behind this was because of capacity grid constraints so he looked a bit further as to when will it get to the point where the grid can handle this and it will not as it is not just the capacity it is the wind speed when it goes from 25 to 35 mph it is turned off because there is too much fluctuation. He made the point that this is a permanent, ingrained problem with wind turbines that residents will be paying for forever more. Councillor Count stated that for his entire life since wind turbines have arrived he has looked out of his window and seen them all over the Fens and felt a real sense of warmth at thinking that they sit there and generate electricity and to learn something like this today really hurt his feelings. He added that he is not too concerned because he knows what is built and there might be places where it is more suitable, where they are closer to delivering without going through a substation that might not cope but this is about prime land and he had the privilege of leading the County Council for a while and was proud of what happened there with building solar farms, which delivered great savings to the taxpayer but when the policy was written he was insistent that they never be built on Grade 1 agricultural land but he is not sure if that is still policy there today. Councillor Count expressed the view that he believes in taking a measured approach and one of the measured approaches to talk about is food security, which is an issue and he takes on board what Councillor Booth said in that there has not been 100% food security since the 18th century but when you have a problem, even if it has gone on for 200 years, it should not be allowed to get worse but recognise there is a problem and not make it get any worse and all security issues should be been thought about and it is vital that matters are addressed such as this. He referred to an old farmers saying you can't grow any more land and that is true, Grade 1 land cannot be reinvented elsewhere and Fenland has the perfect soil for growing, which should be

protected. Councillor Count stated that he appreciated the widening of the brief to say that planning should be used appropriately to protect the land from inappropriate development because it is not just energy, what happens when somebody makes a great case for 100,000 square metre distribution plant on Grade 1 agricultural land and there has to be that widening of the clause so somebody does not skirt around the edges and land is lost that way. He referred to the continued belief that rewetting of the wild Fens will bring it down to net zero, with some people promoting flooding the area losing all the Grade 1 agricultural land because it will somehow help the planet with net zero and, in his view, that is unrealistic. Councillor Count stated that he knows that members need to work within the NPPF and one of the most useful clauses added by Councillor Summers was 'within our means' so that the Council can do what is within its power as well as writing to other people so he does support this motion.

- Councillor Hoy referred to energy security as she feels often a number of people and herself have been scared to say what they have been thinking for a long time and she thinks now is the time to say that net zero is a complete scam as the future that is being left for people is everyone is going to get colder and poorer because people cannot afford to pay the prices of energy bills and whilst everyone blames Russia and Ukraine the truth is that this country has subsidized for years things that do not work, such as turbines that do not turn. She feels that the world is getting worse due to decisions that have been made in the past and it cannot carry on, with the next thing that will be said is that food will not be grown in this country anymore as it is cheaper to import it, on a plane which uses fossil fuels, with everything being said by politicians at a national level not adding up. Councillor Hoy expressed the opinion that something is not right to be told on the one hand that the world is going to end in a few years' time unless carbon emissions are reduced and then paying to import food from other countries on aeroplanes that give out carbon emissions, which does not seem right to her. She stated that she supports the motion and wishes that the Council goes further.
- Councillor Carney stated that he supports the motion and the important thing to remember is that at this point in time the power does lie within the hands of the local planning authorities. He referred to South Kesteven District Council refusing a solar farm citing the exact same reasons as are being talked about today and this was backed up by Lincolnshire County Council, whether this got through on appeal he is not aware but the point remains that the local planning committee should take a measured approach on each application as they are submitted. Councillor Carney expressed the view that generally from a planning point of view is whether it is so necessary to have solar panels and solar farms, Councillor Christy mentioned brownfield sites and he would suggest either nationally or locally on any sort of large scale building scheme, such as warehouses, supermarkets, etc., which has a large roof space either by encouragement or making it compulsory, although he would suggest encouragement, that they have them fitted with solar panels and have them feed into the local generating network. He referred again to South Kesteven which is not on Grade 1 land but they cited it was Grade 2/Grade 3 farmland and they said it was rare, being productive land and as has been mentioned before you cannot make any more of it.
- Councillor Tierney stated that he is a free marketeer and believes if markets are free to run and not controlled they deliver good results and his problem with turbines and solar panels is that if all the subsidies were removed and they compete fair and square nobody would ever invest and ever build turbines or solar panels, except in a very few specialist circumstances. He continued that they only exist because Governments have made, in his view, this terrible, stupid blind policy of net zero, which he feels is the second most dangerous policy after the challenge to freedom of speech and the previous Government and this Government are all following the same stupid path. Councillor Tierney stated he agrees with everything that Councillor Hoy said, this is so damaging to remove Fenland's fantastic growing land and the ability to produce the food needed and the farmers that produce it and replace it with energy generation which would never be built without the fudges that are put in by the Government. He stated that whether all members agree with him that net zero is damaging he feels that it can be agreed that the farmland is needed to

produce the way it should.

- Councillor Taylor, in summing up, stated that, in relation to solar farms and panels, the steel is imported from Turkey and the panels themselves are imported from China on ships that use approximately 20,000 litres of diesel per hour and that is called net zero, which does not add up to him. He expressed the view that if the whole of the EU was 100% net zero from 2020, by 2050 the climate would be 0.02 degrees warmer, almost an unmeasurable amount, and by the turn of the century it would be 1 degree warmer at the cost of trillions of pounds for something which cannot be achieved. Councillor Taylor thanked members for their comments and hopefully the support of the motion.

The motion was approved.

(Councillor J Clark declared that he is a landowner in March)

(Councillors Benney, S Clark, Mrs French, Gerstner, Imafidon, Marks, Meekins, Murphy, Patrick, Purser and Rackley declared that they were either substantive or substitute members of the Planning Committee and took no part in the discussions and voting thereon)

(Councillor Mrs Laws declared that she is Portfolio Holder for Planning and took no part in the discussion or voting thereon)

(Councillor Wallwork was not present in the room when the voting took place)

C31/25 AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

Members considered the Audit and Risk Management Committee Annual Report presented by Councillor Kim French as Chairman of the Audit and Risk Management Committee.

Proposed by Councillor Miss French, seconded by Councillor Booth and AGREED the Audit and Risk Management Committee Annual Report for 2024/25.

C32/25 REFUSE, RECYCLING AND CLEANSING HGV FLEET REPLACEMENT

Members considered Cabinet's recommendation to approve the procurement of the required HGV vehicles as part of the ongoing Fleet Replacement Plan, presented by Councillor Tierney.

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

- Councillor Gerstner stated it was an excellent report but asked are these vehicles being procured in the UK, are they UK sourced and built? Councillor Tierney responded that officers will be given the right to decide how the vehicles are purchased in consultation with him as Portfolio Holder so he would be pre-empting to say exactly what officers were going to do. He added that if what Councillor Gerstner is saying is that he would like a steer to try and procure in the UK he would be happy to pass this to officers but the most important thing is to ensure the vehicles are purchased in a timely fashion and at the best cost. Councillor Gerstner stated that he fully understands and appreciates this but given the fact that members have just heard that 99% of solar panels are built in China and 99% of wind turbines are built in Europe it would be a good thing for this Council to be seen to, providing the costing are competitive, look at UK suppliers. Councillor Tierney responded that he broadly agrees with this and would like to source from home, officers have heard Councillor Gerstner's comments and will take that as a steer to do what they can to make this possible but taking into account the delivery and price to the taxpayer.
- Councillor Woollard stated that he supports 100% the acquisition and keeping the fleet up-to-date but he does not see any mention of, which he hopes is deliberate, electric vehicles being looked at, which, in his view, is not appropriate. Councillor Tierney responded that as Portfolio Holder if he had been brought information on electric vehicles he would have

looked at them with a very askance view but he doubts this will be possible because the costs are quite different, although it cannot be pre-judged and an open mind needs to be kept but feels it would be very unlikely.

- Councillor Booth referred to the report stating that these are replacement costs but he recalls when he first joined the Council that these vehicles were leased and asked why has this approach been moved away from and has any consideration been given to setting up leasehold agreements? Councillor Tierney responded that is before his time as Portfolio Holder so the question could be addressed later on to the original Portfolio Holder who would have a lot of knowledge around this but his guess would be that it was probably more cost effective to purchase the vehicles. He stated that personally he likes the Council owning its own stock rather than hiring it, which is a positive, but if that worked out cheaper for the new vehicles then he is sure officers will investigate it and make the suggestions that are best for the Council.
- Councillor Mrs French stated that she fully supports this proposal and she remembers many years ago the Council had broken down vehicles and did not have a collection over a Christmas period and a decision was made years ago that the vehicles would not be left to get into such an appalling state.
- Councillor Booth stated that when he asked the question why vehicles were leased in the past he was told that it was most financially prudent way of doing it so, in his view, an open mind is needed to achieve the most cost effective way of ensuring the Council has the fleet of vehicles it needs. Councillor Tierney agreed and is sure that officers have heard his comments and they are welcome to suggest whatever they think the most appropriate and cost effective delivery method is.
- Councillor Summers asked what happens with the old vehicles? Councillor Tierney responded that he not sure of the answer but he would suspect that they are sold as they are still working and would have some value.
- Councillor Gowler asked how does this proposal fit in with the proposed new food waste collection and is this being taken into account when purchasing these vehicles? Councillor Tierney responded that this is a different policy which the Council has different income to deliver so whilst the whole service is tied together this proposal is for the 20 vehicles that the Council has currently that are looking to be replaced and not what might be needed for the new food waste collection service, with further information on this being available in the next 2-3 months.
- Councillor Murphy referred to the question about leasing of the refuse vehicles and stated that the Council stopped leasing the vehicles years ago because it is more cost effective to purchase them and when they are owned by the Council it has its own workshop for repairs, which is a quicker service to get the vehicle back on the road whereas leased vehicles were taken away for weeks on end to repair.
- Councillor Miscandlon stated that he agrees with everything that has been said and on the point that Councillor Gerstner made about obtaining a UK manufacturer he made the point that UK manufacturers are few and far between so the chassis, cab and engine will probably come from abroad but the manufacturing of the actual body is undertaken in this country and he hopes it continues to do so. He added that Councillor Tierney is correct that the Council needs to look at what is available but hopefully it is British manufactured, at least for the bodywork, protecting UK jobs.
- Councillor Tierney thanked members for their comments and he is sure that officers will have heard those members that have made suggestions.

Proposed by Councillor Tierney, seconded by Councillor Miscandlon and AGREED to

- **approve the procurement of the 4 HGV vehicles for delivery April 2026 as part of the ongoing Fleet Replacement Plan;**
- **approve the vehicle and capital requirement for 2027/28 and 2028/29 and for these requirements to be added to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy;**
- **approve the delegation of the procurement of these vehicles to the Corporate Director with responsibility for Environmental Services, through existing**

procurement frameworks or mini tender as required, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder responsible for street sweeping, recycling and refuse collection; and

- note that the total value of required vehicles that will need to be ordered within the next 24 months is expected to be in the region of £2,560,000, with the Chief Finance Officer determining the best value means of financing these necessary vehicles.**

C33/25 CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS: PLANNING SCHEME OF DELEGATION

Members considered revisions to the Planning Scheme of Delegation within the Council's Constitution to allow the delegation of authority to initiate prosecutions for non-compliance with enforcement notices to officers, rather than requiring a resolution of the Planning Committee, presented by Councillor Mrs Laws.

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

- Councillor Mrs French stated that she fully supports this, it was a Planning Committee request as officers spend hours writing these reports and action is delayed by several weeks, especially on the Section 215 and 216s.
- Councillor Hoy expressed reservations about this proposal as it goes against what they have moved towards in Licensing, which is members having a say rather than officers. She stated that she understands that the Planning Committee want this change but she is unsure whether it is the committee that is the cause of the lack of 215s. Councillor Hoy made the point that there are buildings all over Wisbech that could do with being served notices and she does not think that is due to the lack of Planning Committee action. She asked how is consistency in approach going to be ensured because if there is an officer deciding the enforcement process how is it known in which way they are enforcing as some people may be being enforced against more than others and how is it going to be monitored? Councillor Mrs Laws responded that the reason that this has been put forward is because the appropriate planning actions have been looked at and it has been consistent with the officer's recommendation. She does agree that consistency needs to be monitored, there is a Planning Enforcement team and they report into the Head of Planning so these things will be monitored by the Head of Planning and herself.
- Councillor Booth expressed the view that the approach to enforcement in the District is not great, certain people know this and take advantage of the situation. He is frustrated as a Parish Councillor that enforcement action is not taken when it should be and he hopes that it leads to improvement in the services provided and enforcement action increases. Councillor Booth stated that he was told several years ago that only 5% of enforcement enquiries ever resulted in enforcement action, which seemed to him low at the time.
- Councillor Tierney expressed reservations as it goes in the wrong direction in what he believes for local councillors but he has belief in the Portfolio Holder and Planning Committee and if they say this is what they want to do he will support the proposal. He hopes that it can be looked at to see if this is working and if it is not changes can be made accordingly.
- Councillor Boden stated that the comments made by Councillors Hoy and Tierney are correct as the direction with policies is that they are more member controlled justifiably so as elected councillors responsible to the electorate and this goes against that policy but, made the point, that it is very limited in its scope as it is talking about circumstances where enforcement notices have already been served and he feels that practicality comes to the fore, with the need for speed and the lack of bureaucracy. He expressed the opinion that it will be monitored carefully and if it turns out that it does not work as expected it can be revisited and he has faith in officers that they will act appropriate and swiftly in making sure that prosecution is undertaken as appropriate.
- Councillor Nawaz stated that he prefers there to be democratic oversight over decisions as much as possible, especially where there are implications for local communities so he does have reservations, however, he will be supporting this proposal, with the caveat of a review at a later stage.

- Councillor Carney referred to the delegation being revisited and asked if it could be operated for a 12-month trial period? Councillor Mrs Laws responded that she can understand the reservations, the delegation is limited but she will be happy to look at it and bring it back in 12 months' time.
- Councillor Booth expressed the view that the recommendation should be amended so that an annual report be provided to Planning Committee. Councillor Mrs Laws stated that she would be happy with that suggestion.
- Councillor Tierney agreed but rather than an annual report that, which commits to a report every year, that it be a report in 12 months' time as by then it will be known whether it is working or not. Councillor Mrs Laws confirmed she was happy with this.
- Councillor Mrs French made the point that Planning Committee is not in habit of delegating its power, but this is to speed up the Section 215 and 216 process not the actual enforcement, which would in turn save the planning team resource.

Proposed by Councillors Mrs Laws, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED that the Planning Scheme of Delegation within the Council's Constitution be revised as set out at Appendix 1 and that a report be submitted to Planning Committee in 12 months.

(Councillor Hoy requested it be recorded that she abstained from voting on this item)

(Councillor Harris left the meeting during this item and was not present for the remainder of the items on the agenda)

C34/25 MEMBERS ALLOWANCES - COMBINED AUTHORITY SRA FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY AND AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEES

Members considered a proposal to cease payment to Fenland District Council members of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) Overview and Scrutiny and Audit and Governance Committees, presented by Councillor Boden.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED to

- **act on the feedback of the Independent Remuneration Panel and remove the SRA from the Members' Allowances Scheme for members appointed to the CPCA Overview and Scrutiny and Audit and Governance Committees; and**
- **delegate to the Monitoring Officer to update the Members' Allowances Scheme within the Constitution in line with the decision taken by Council as set out at Appendix 1.**

(Councillors Christy, Mrs Davis and Hay declared that they are members of Fenland District Council appointed to these Combined Authority committees and, therefore, affected by this SRA and the decision to be made, and left the room for the duration of the discussion and voting thereon)

5.19 pm

Chairman