

WHITTLESEY TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 18th April 2024 at 6.30pm at Peel House, 8 Queen Street, Whittlesey, PE7 1AY

Present: Cllr Mayor, Boden, Dickinson, Dorling, Gerstner, Mockett, Nawaz, Sennitt-Clough, Wainwright, Wicks

Officer in Attendance: Sue Piergianni – Town Clerk & RFO

Recording: The recording is made as an aide memoir for the Clerk.

F43/2024. Apologies for Absence - Cllr Arman, Laws (both personal)

F44/2024. To receive members' declarations of disclosable pecuniary, non-disclosable pecuniary or non-pecuniary interests in relation to any agenda item.

There were no declarations of interest.

F45/2023. Street Scene Officer Report. - Members received the Street Scene Officer report.

F46/2024. To confirm and sign the Minutes from the Full Council Meeting held on Thursday 21st March 2024.

The Minutes from the Full Council on Thursday 21st March were approved and signed as a true record. Proposed Cllr Sennitt-Clough seconded Cllr Dorling, with a unanimous vote in favour. Cllr Wainwright did not vote as he was not present at the meeting.

F33/2024 Public Forum

21 Members of the public were present.

Peter Bibb

Thanked WTC for allowing him to address the meeting and raised the following issue which he felt was causing a great deal of concern to many residents. It pertains to the controversy over recent social media posts to Facebook on the Official Whittlesey Town Council Facebook page, which has since become the Unofficial Whittlesey Town Council page. He noted that "communications" is an agenda item for this meeting, and he would like to help to frame that debate in terms of how the Council is perceived.

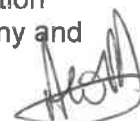
The use of the official council Facebook page to actively promote the candidacy of two conservative party members (with a video from our local MP and a Minister of State) not only breached electoral law but was the latest act of disdain for the electoral process and democracy shown by this council. He did not see the offending video first hand, because, despite being a resident of Whittlesey he was blocked from that page (for no good reason and despite assurances given to this council) furthermore he is still blocked from the new "unofficial" council page. Again, for no good reason.

Other residents alerted him to the content which is a clear breach of purdah and therefore electoral law. The fact that the videos have been removed does not absolve the culprit or culprits of blame for this breach.

It does in fact show that the voters of Whittlesey are being shown the utmost disrespect by some individuals and their actions are bringing this council into disrepute. Very sad to say this when he is aware that there are many hard working and conscientious members of the council who do not deserve to be seen in this light.

How to resolve this?

He would suggest that the councillors involved post a clear and prominent apology on the same Facebook page, explaining how electoral law was broken, why this is wrong and then indicating that the page will be closed until after the by elections and PCC elections are over and an undertaking that the words "Whittlesey Town Council" will in future only be used to describe social media communication channels which are run for and on behalf of the actual council and are therefore subject to scrutiny and editorial supervision by all members of the council.



A failure on the part of those councillors to comply, should lead to further censure and investigation.

He would invite the leaders of the council to show some leadership and deal with the errant members via a disciplinary procedure.

Mr Boddington – Eastrea – He attended February Full Council meeting where a councillor giving a presentation was interrupted several times by another councillor, he was disgusted at the way the member behaved and could not believe the acting chair did not bring order to the meeting. He asked when will meeting etiquette be resumed.

Alan Bessant – Whittlesey Target Sports Club, thanks to WTC for their support and advised they have nearly agreed short term lease with FDC. The Club is one hundred years old with close to two hundred members of all abilities and ages. All members would like to see the club retained.

Steve Tierney – Wisbech – Disappointing to see some of the shenanigans going on around election time. He knows quite a bit about election law having spent time working in Elections and he can assure that people often quote election law when they have no understanding, and abuse the term Purdah without any understanding as to what Purdah actually means, as far as he can see what happened in his opinion might have been ill judged but wasn't illegal and he thinks the police would confirm this, also WTC has no power to judge an individual councillor and would have to report them to FDC as the corporate body as a conduct complaint and he could not see there was anything to complain about. He thinks these are the sort of games that are played at election time, people get misled by ex journalists now bloggers who basically don't tell the truth and they stir things up in order to create controversy, which is detrimental to everyone and not just to one side but to all candidates. It creates in the eye of the public a view that things are not being done fairly which is not true and it creates a barrier between people, he would urge people to get on and get the election done.

F48/2024 Agenda items for Discussion.

Saxongate Group – Cllr Sennitt-Clough - Saxongate have pushed Fenland District Council to get the material certificates for the product used at Churchfield Farm. It appears Johnsons Aggregates were the source, and the material is Incinerator Bottom Ash Aggregate (IBAA), so government guidelines RPS247 apply. The EA has said that looking at the site, it appears not to conform to RPS247, and no permit is in place, but they continue to 'investigate'.

If one of the first major (and highly visible) uses of IBAA supplied from Johnson's Aggregates does not appear to follow the rules and needs residents to push the matter, how can residents have confidence in the process? There needs to be a strong duty of care chain with monitoring and enforcement. According to the Saxongate group, Cambridgeshire County Council are labelling this material as an aggregate product and their name features on one of the compliance certificates with reference to their construction specifications of sub-bases, and FDC officials are saying it is not a planning concern. This approach may lead to long-term pollution risks.

According to their website, Johnson's Aggregates can process significantly large quantities of IBAA. Saxongate and local residents worry that if significant quantities of IBAA are used in our area without proper controls, this could have far reached consequences for residents' long-term health and welfare. There are stronger rules in Scotland and Europe, and some countries do not allow its use. The science around the toxic health risks from forever chemical contamination is developing.

Whittlesey Town Council are obviously unable to comment from a scientific standpoint, but given that there is great concern from residents over IBAA (even its classification differs between agencies: IBA vs IBAA), the proposal from Cllr Sennitt-Clough is that there needs to be a viable duty-of-care chain to avoid contamination risks; as such, WTC will write to FDC, CCC and the EA on this matter.

Cllr Nawaz stated it is imperative that residents of Whittlesey adjacent to the pit are protected against noise, air, and toxic pollutants. Cllr Boden commented there are circumstances where IBAA can be used, however they clearly fail best practice as there is no membrane covering this, there is concern about leaching of the IBAA into the water course. In some parts of the regulatory system IBAA is identified as being a dangerous chemical Cllr Boden assured members this item will come up for debate at the next meeting of Fenland District Council. Cllr Gerstner – A lot of conditions were stipulated for this site, and

many have not been met, he has contacted head of planning enforcement at FDC, he did advise that some parts of the planning come under FDC, some under the EA and these issues need to be resolved.

The proposal as outlined above by Cllr Sennitt-Clough, seconded Cllr Mockett, Cllr Mayor took no part in the vote for personal reasons, it is not that she is against it, all other councillors voted in favour.

1. Planning Committee – Cllr Wainwright – Expressed concern about the lack of support for the Planning Committee, there are times when people do not turn up and no apologies are given. Cllr Wainwright advised at the last meeting the committee was not quorate so no business could be transacted. Instead, two of the Councillors had to discuss the applications and send individual responses. Cllr Boden was shocked with the numbers, but more so that there are only four elected members to the committee, the mayor is ex officio. In May 2023, there were only 7 appointed to it, the answer is when we meet in May and we have 14 Cllrs to choose from, we should pick an appropriate number of Cllrs to sit on the Committee, he suggested moving forward there should be eight on the Planning Committee. Cllr Wicks suggested one person from each ward should be on the committee, and the other on the ward should be the substitute. Cllr Gerstner received complaints that the last meeting had to be cancelled, there were members of the public present who could not speak as the meeting was not quorate. Cllr Boden stated that when council wards were co terminus it was easier to have one from each ward, but now we only have six town wards, this would not work. This item will be further discussed at the Annual Meeting of the Council.
2. Council Communications – Cllr Dorling – In agenda item F117/2023 (items for discussion) he expressed concerns about communications from WTC and asked who manages overall control over the content following the introduction of the Facebook 'official page of Whittlesey Town Council,' recently amended to an unofficial and private group.

Recently, the facility has posted party political messages contrary to the standards set in the House of Commons Research Briefing 8th April 2024 CBP 5265.

In the Full Council meeting referred to earlier, Cllr Boden advised that Cllrs Laws, Dickinson, and Arman would scrutinise WTC's social media, and he was concerned about blocked Facebook accounts. Cllr Arman confirmed that the administrators do not block anyone from the group. Cllr Dorling proposed a meeting to discuss communications, seconded by Cllr Wainwright. The Chairman suggested the item would pass on to Community Projects Committee and then onto the Finance and Policy Committee. Councillor Dorling questioned when will this occur?

The following two questions relate to:

Firstly, we need to know whether we have an official or an unofficial Whittlesey Town Council Facebook page.

Secondly – whatever we have – who will independently administer and challenge for compliant content?

Cllr Gerstner advised he had no communication with Mr Bibb so has not colluded in his comment, he proposed that if WTC wants an official Facebook page, the Clerk should be the moderator and only official town council information and community events should be on it.

Cllr Boden – thanked Cllr Dorling referred to the minute from last year, Cllr Boden did have concerns about individuals being blocked from a facebook page. The Clerk has made it clear on more than one occasion that no Facebook page or communication method can be official without it being done through the Clerk and by law the Clerk has to control this, this does not mean that the Clerk has to do everything, but the Clerk does have to control everything which is done through, for example, our website; we do have three councillors who oversee the website and have a good working relationship and ensure the website is used correctly and under the control of the Clerk. Facebook is a different beast from the website and has to be reactive and things acted on quickly. An official Facebook page would place too greater burden on the Clerk, and this is not fair. On the subject of legality if there were any issues of what has happened with the unofficial WTC Facebook page, this would be taken up by the SPOC (Single point of contact) to which the police officer who is responsible for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough for matters to do with electoral offices, he is unaware of any such problem, this does not come close to electoral law or a purdah situation as this is not official communications measure for the council. Consider the implications of having an official FB page, and this matter be discussed at F & P and report back to Full Council. Cllr

Gerstner felt that the confusion is whether it was official or unofficial. Cllr Wainwright confused as thought it was official FB page, he joined and was made a group expert, for it to be used for party political campaigning was a shock. He was blocked from it after that. Cllr Nawaz agreed an official page would have to be administered by the officer, eg the Clerk who is overburdened. Proposal by Cllr Boden the item of 'Official Whittlesey Town Council Facebook page be further discussed at Finance & Policy Committee, seconded by Cllr Mockett with a unanimous vote in favour. Cllr Dorling did ask what is going to happen to the unofficial one and was advised by Cllr Mockett that is being discussed with FDC.

F49/2024. To receive Councillor & outside body written reports.

- Climate Leaders Meeting 2nd April 2024 received from Cllr Dorling

F50/2024. To report the draft minutes from the Finance & Policy Meeting on Monday 15th April 2024 and receive the minutes from Monday 18th March 2024

Ratified: The minutes from the meeting on Monday 18th March 2024 were approved as a true record and the minutes from Monday 15th April 2024 were reported.

Donation for Christmas lights of £7500.00 proposed Cllr Boden, seconded Cllr Mockett, unanimous agreement

F51/2024 To report the financial documents.

- To report the bank reconciliation to 31st March 2024 – the year end bank reconciliation was reported.
- To report the list of payments & uncashed payments. To 31st March 2024 vouchers 294 – 339 to the value of £52105.48. net was proposed by Cllr Boden with a unanimous vote in favour. Cllr Wainwright asked if Cllr Boden has any thoughts of cost for the two by elections that we now have and was advised a proportion of the cost is being taken up by the PCC, the cost for WTC would possibly be around 5-6K. Cllr Nawaz – Thanked Cllr Boden and the Clerk for keeping a tight rein on the finances.
- To report the year-to-date figures – Cllr Boden advised the Clerk is going through these as they are end of year figures to ensure all expenditure is in the correct cost centre.

F52/2024. To receive the minutes from the Planning meeting on Monday 18th March 2024.

Ratified: The Minutes were approved and signed as a true record.

F53/2024. Consultations - There were no consultations.

F54/2024. Information.

Improvements to Tennis Courts - Report from Cllrs Laws

Helping Whittlesey Community Pantry – Project Summary from Anna Foster

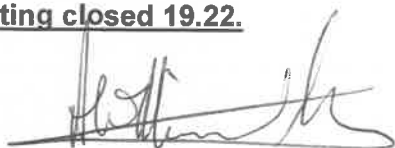
Musical Afternoon – Staring Paul Turner and The Whittlesey Singers – Sunday 4th May 2024.

War Memorials Bulletin - Available for members to read.

Members were reminded of the dedication ceremony at 10.45 on Friday 19th April at the Eastrea War Memorial for the Avro Lancaster that crashed in a field in Eastrea.

F56/2024. Date of next meeting: Thursday 23rd May 2024 – Parish Meeting 6.00pm, Annual Council Meeting 6.30pm.

Meeting closed 19.22.



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Cllr Kay Mayor
Chairman
Whittlesey Town Council

Whittlesey Town Council

RECEIPTS LIST

17 May 2024 (2024-2025)

Vouche Code	Date	Minute	Bank	Receipt No	Description	Supplier	VAT Type	Net	VAT	Total
1 Commercial Rent	15/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	Monthly Rent	Commercial Rent	Fenland Youth Radio	E	110.00		110.00
2 Residential Rent / Costs	09/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	Monthly Rent	Flat Rent	Peterborough city council	E	1,620.00		1,620.00
3 Commercial Rent	08/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	Monthly Rent	Commercial Rent	Fenland Electrical	E	220.00		220.00
4 Commercial Rent	08/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	Monthly Rent	Commercial Rent	ISA-Cam Rent	E	330.00		330.00
5 Precept	08/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	1st part precept	Precept	Fenland District Council	E	87,000.00		87,000.00
6 Allotments	08/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	See paperwork rec	Allotment Payments	Allotment Holders	E	1,493.10		1,493.10
Total								90,773.10		90,773.10

Whittlesey Town Council PAYMENTS LIST

17 May 2024 (2024-2025)

Vouche Code	Date	Minute	Bank	Cheque No	Description	Supplier	VAT Type	Net	VAT	Total
1	15/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	70252140	NNDR	Ferland District Council	E	120.00		120.00
2	13/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	13.4	Window Cleaning	H20 Pure - Mark Nicholas	E	30.00		30.00
3	25/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	2024/25	Scribe Accounts	Scribe	S	777.60	155.52	933.12
4	30/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	dd	Bank Charges / Interest	Barclays	E	8.50		8.50
5	30/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	dd	Telephone & Internet	EYAD	S	96.40	19.28	115.68
6	30/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	dd	Office Electric	British Gas Lite	L	118.05	5.90	123.95
7	30/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	online	Office Maintenance	T.P. Snitch	S	300.00	60.00	360.00
8	30/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	online	Payroll Admin	Hills Chartered Certified Ac	S	320.00	64.00	384.00
9	30/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	online	Salaries	Staff Salaries	E	2,331.55		2,331.55
10	30/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	allotment stamps	Postage	Kay Mayor	E	13.60		13.60
11	30/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	mileage & Avro Lai	Expenses	Sue Piergianni	E	57.99		57.99
11	30/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	mileage & Avro Lai	Expenses	Sue Piergianni	E	13.15		13.15
12	30/04/2024		Barclays Current Acc	online	Stationery	Sue Piergianni	S	90.66	18.13	108.79
Total								4,277.50	322.83	4,600.33