

LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF PARISH MEETING

MONDAY, 20 MARCH 2023 AT 7.30 PM

Present: Councillors C Palmer
 R Berry
 D Bowater
 A Dodwell
 M Freeman
 S Jones
 F Kharawala (Town Mayor and Chair)
 T Morris
 R Goodchild
 V Harvey
 S Hemmings
 S Owen

Also in attendance: M Saccoccio, Town Clerk
 I Haynes, Head of Grounds and Environmental
 Services
 S Sandiford, Deputy Town Clerk
 L Salmon, Head of Cultural and Economic
 Services
 N Carnell Greensand Country Landscape
 Partnership
 D Bowles, Greensand Country Landscape
 Partnership
 M Jahn, Committee Officer

Members of the public: 27

1 WELCOME

The Town Mayor, Councillor F Kharawala, explained the format of the meeting and welcomed all those present and thanked everyone for attending.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Councillors Gray and Spurr.

3 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 21 March 2022 were approved as a correct record and were signed accordingly.

AGREED that the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 21 March 2022 be approved as a correct record of the meeting.

4 **GREENSAND COUNTRY LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP**

Two representatives of the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership gave a short presentation about the 40-mile stretch of land across Bedfordshire, from Leighton-Linslade in the west to Gamlingay in the east, including a short film taken by drone footage showing the various habitats of woodland, heathland and grassland along the route. The access to this route had increased and included walking, cycling and horse-riding paths with a new Gateway feature being added at the bottom of the High Street in Leighton Buzzard. This feature was the final project in the lottery funded programme and would officially be launched on the 1st May to coincide with the May Day Fair being held in the town and the beginning of the Greensand Country Festival which would run until 10th June 2023. The festival would be a celebration of the distinct, beautiful and loved Greensand Country and would help to encourage those living within the area to get out and explore the outstanding countryside on their doorstep.

A question was raised whether the Partnership could use their attraction sites to remind visitors of the effects of climate change and what could be done to reduce this. It was suggested that posters or boards be used to do this and it was confirmed that a working group had been set up on Climate Change and that volunteers to join this group would be welcomed.

Thanks were given to the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership representatives for their interesting and informative presentation and film and for the work they carry out to ensure the habitats are preserved and enhanced and available for public use.

5 **QUESTIONS**

The Chair invited attendees to ask questions (Q) or make statements (S).

(Q) A member of the public asked if it would be possible for an island to be created in the Astral Park lake for wildlife.

(A) This lake was not the responsibility of the Town Council but the question would be raised directly with Arnold White Estates for their attention.

(Q) On reflection what do Councillors feel has gone well or not well in the past year and what are plans going forward.

(A) The Council is proud of how the community pulled together during and after the COVID pandemic; the success of the Market winning a national award; the work of TACTIC youth service; the new all-inclusive play area at Parson's Close Recreation Ground; the excellent events programme including the Christmas Festival, The Big Lunch and the Canal Festival; the support given to local organisations and charities through the Grants and

Awards schemes; the ambitions for net zero carbon emissions; the provision of funding to support warm spaces during the cost of living crisis; the celebration of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee; the period of community mourning following the death of Queen Elizabeth as well as the proclamation of the new King; the work done with older people to enable them to access technology to increase independence and alleviate loneliness; lobbying for improvements in

services and infrastructure; and the combined efforts of officers, councillors and volunteers to enable all the above to happen.

Going forward there were many issues to be addressed including the climate emergency, the potential development of the Land South of the High Street, the housing development outside the Leighton-Linslade Parish, the need for additional Health facilities in the town, improved collaborative working with Central Bedfordshire Council and the need to include more community groups in decision making in the town.

(Q) A member of the public spoke of his concerns with the increasing visible drug problems as well as litter in the town and could the Town Council or Central Bedfordshire Council be seen to actively discourage this.

(A) TACTIC staff routinely went into schools to address issues such as this, as well as undertaking themed work in the Centre and undertaking outreach work and holiday projects. The council had also supported other projects for young people through funding and partnership working with other bodies. CBC now had a new community safety officer and concerns could also be taken up with Bedfordshire Police via the Community Safety Sub Committee.

(Q) Could the Riverside Centre on Bridge Street be used as a community building, as when it was previously the adult education centre.

(A) Potential uses of this building, owned by Central Bedfordshire Council, had previously been investigated at length, but there were significant issues regarding the building condition, access and safety, which had resulted in it being used for storage. Costs to return it to a practical use were likely to be prohibitive but any practical proposals to bring it back into use could be put forward to CBC.

(Q) What are the council's individual and collective views on the possible options put forward by Central Bedfordshire Council for public consultation regarding the Land South of the High Street.

(A) Individual views were varied but could not be discussed in this forum as it would take up the rest of the meeting. The town council had yet to make a formal response to the CBC consultation but had been keen for some time to see the land brought forward for community uses.

A South Side Working Party had been set up by the Town Council and all meeting dates and minutes were on the Town Council Website for

information.

(Q) Are the public allowed to know what reserves the Town Council has available and whether the public could influence spending of reserves.

(A) The council is required as best practice to keep between 4-6 months of operating costs in reserves. Current figures are closer to the 4-month mark. All financial information was published on the town council website including annual budget and reserves, along with details of all proposed and approved expenditure.

(Q) Could any dual-hatted councillors comment on why are there difficulties between the Town Council and Central Bedfordshire Council and how could these be addressed.

(A) The Town Council works well with Community Groups in the town and the Councillors who represent both the Town Council and Central Bedfordshire Council work hard to do their best for the residents. It was understood there were similar communication issues with other parish councils in the district. It was hoped that this could improve after May 2023.

6 **FINAL REMARKS - MEETING CLOSES BY 2100 HOURS**

The Mayor ended the meeting by thanking all present for their attendance and for participating. Attendees were wished a safe journey home and reminded of the need to bring photo ID to the elections on 4 May. Any further questions could be raised by contacting the Town Council by phone or email at any time.

The meeting closed at 8.49 pm.

I HEREBY CONFIRM THAT THE FOREGOING IS A CORRECT AND ACCURATE RECORD OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 20 MARCH 2023.

Chair

18 MARCH 2024