



EAST
CAMBRIDGESHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance & Assets Committee held at 4:30pm on Thursday 24 November 2022 in the Council Chamber at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE

PRESENT

Councillor David Brown (Chairman)
Councillor Ian Bovingdon (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor David Ambrose-Smith (Substitute for Councillor Bill Hunt)
Councillor Sue Austen
Councillor Anna Bailey
Councillor Lorna Dupré
Councillor Mark Goldsack
Councillor Simon Harries
Councillor Julia Huffer
Councillor John Trapp
Councillor Gareth Wilson (Substitute for Councillor Alison Whelan)

OFFICERS

Emma Grima – Director Commercial
Sally Bonnett – Director Community
Maggie Camp – Director Legal & Monitoring Officer
Spencer Clark – Open Spaces & Facilities Manager
Tracy Couper – Democratic Services Manager
Richard Kay – Strategic Planning Manager
Ian Smith – Director Finance
Angela Tyrrell – Senior Legal Assistant
Hannah Walker – Trainee Democratic Services Officer

IN ATTENDANCE

John Hill – Managing Director ECTC
Nigel Ankers – ECTC Finance Manager

53. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

A statement was made by Graham James, a Trustee of Little Thetford Village Hall, in connection with the Growth and Infrastructure Fund grant application for the Village Hall as follows:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon with regard to the Growth and Infrastructure Fund grant application from Little Thetford Village Hall. I am here with my wife who is also a Trustee and was involved in preparing the application. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, we would like to publicly thank the Officer and Councillors of East Cambs DC for their efforts in obtaining and making this grant funding available.

The opportunity to apply for funding such as this does not come about very often and, should we be successful, it will make a significant difference for our village and surrounding communities. As I said in our application, we have full support from our community as well as Lucy Fraser MP, our District and Parish Councillors, alongside our other village institutions including the pre-school, church, sports and social club and our FEAST committee.

Our project for moving the village hall to reliance on renewable energy has been something we were working towards, but it became more urgent when subsidence was discovered in the storage area that houses our oil supply. With every threat comes an opportunity, and ours was to bring the work to electrify the hall. Our approach secures the future of the building in the medium term as well as supporting the desire of our community of all ages and the priorities of East Cambs DC in combatting climate change. In short, the project will deliver measurable benefits in a short timescale.

I would also like to raise one specific matter for consideration by the officers and committee on future funding opportunities. It is a given that public bodies have to deliver value for money and invariably part of this is a consideration of the number of people who will be impacted by projects and grant funding. Unfortunately, this can work against smaller communities like Little Thetford with a relatively small population but where infrastructure costs such as a village hall still has the same operating costs with little access to internal funding streams. To put it into perspective, our grant application today is nearly four times the value of the annual Parish Council precept. We accept that officers and councillors will never satisfy everyone in their decision making, but perhaps a mechanism could be found so that smaller communities are not disproportionately disadvantaged.

In conclusion, the Trustees of Little Thetford Village Hall hope that the Committee will support the proposal from the officers to make additional funding available and thereby support our project.

Councillor Doug Stewart from Stretham Parish Council asked the following questions in connection with the Growth and Infrastructure Fund grant application and CIL funding request in respect of Stretham Community Hub:

1. The County Council removed their grant due to lack of consultation of residents, has there been any further consultation carried out since losing this?
2. The only quantity surveyor reports completed for SPC to date show costs to be 50% higher than stated in the funding application, how can you be sure the 2.35 million is correct?
3. Have SPC shown proof of the 750k funding they claim to currently have?
4. Is there a business plan or a feasibility plan?
 - a. Can you be sure the Council can complete this project using public money and continue to run the centre without drastically raising the precept to cover the currently unknown running costs?
5. Has the amount of spending on designs and plans on behalf of the SWCLT been calculated yet and will the SWCLT reimburse the public money

Stretham Parish Council has spent on their behalf for the designs and plans of their business units?

6. Are you aware Stretham Parish Council plan to pay, with public money, for all the building and legal fees, drainage and external works on behalf of the SWCLT for their business units?
7. ECDC granted Planning permission at Manor Farm for the SWCLT on the basis of providing a Doctors' surgery to the residents. Is it right that it is now paid for with public money from Stretham Parish Council instead?

The Chairman stated that these statements/questions referred to Items 7 & 8 on the Agenda and should be taken into consideration by Members of the Committee as part of their discussions/deliberations on these items.

54. APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bill Hunt and Councillor David Ambrose-Smith was acting as Substitute Member; and Councillor Alison Whelan with Councillor Gareth Wilson acting as Substitute Member.

55. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bailey declared an interest in Agenda Item 12 on ECTC half yearly update, as a Trustee of East Cambs Community Land Trust.

Councillor Goldsack declared a Prejudicial Interest in the Growth and Infrastructure Fund grant applications for Soham Town Rangers Football & Social Club and Isleham Community Association, as a Director/Trustee of both bodies, and stated that he would leave the meeting for the duration of this item.

56. MINUTES

It was resolved:

That the Minutes of the Finance and Assets Committee meeting held on 4 October 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

57. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Hannah Walker, Trainee Democratic Services Officer, to her first meeting of the Committee.

The Chairman informed Members that, in order to aid discussions, he had invited John Hill and Nigel Ankers from East Cambs Trading Company to attend the meeting to speak on the item relating to ECTC half yearly update and had agreed change the order of the Agenda to move this to the next item of business.

58. ECTC HALF YEARLY UPDATE

The Committee considered a report (X112 previously circulated) giving the half yearly progress update on the ECTC Business Plan 2022/23. The ECTC Managing Director, Director Property & Commercial, and Finance Manager highlighted the key aspects of the update.

Questions/comments were raised in relation to the update and responses given as follows:

On House Sales, a Member queried the properties put back onto the market at a lower price. The Member also commented that the statement in the Risk Register that the Housing Market remained strong now was not borne out. The Member questioned how these two issues would impact on the ECTC loan repayment. The ECTC Director Property & Commercial explained that the re-marketing of the properties had been the result of the normal factor of collapsing chains and the lower prices still were within the Business Plan threshold. The Trading Company remained confident regarding loan repayment.

Another Member referred to the projected reduction in house prices by 10% by this time next year and the fact that tracking of mortgage rates was not an identified risk in the Risk Register. Therefore, he suggested that there should be scrutiny of these two factors and this reported on to the Committee. The ECTC Director Property & Commercial gave an assurance that both factors were regularly reviewed and that interest levels in ECTC properties remained high. The Member commented that, as the Shareholder Committee, Members of this Committee should receive timely reporting on such issues.

In response to a question by a Member, the ECTC Finance Manager explained the latest position on property completions/sales at West End Gardens, Haddenham.

It was resolved:

That the half yearly progress update on the ECTC Business Plan 2022/23 attached at Appendix 1 to the submitted report be noted.

59. BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN AND NATURE RECOVERY IN EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE

The Committee considered a report (X106, previously circulated) containing proposals for putting in place a framework to progress Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and nature recovery across East Cambridgeshire. In order to achieve this, the report contained the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire final report - *Interim Nature Recovery Network for East Cambridgeshire* (August 2022) and the draft *Biodiversity Net Gain: East Cambridgeshire* (November 2022) document.

The Strategic Planning Manager emphasised the importance of these documents, highlighting the dramatic loss in biodiversity globally in recent

decades. The documents would provide a framework for specific action in specific geographic areas where local nature recovery efforts could be focussed, whilst not limiting activity to just those areas. In time, the documents would help create a biodiverse-rich, working and productive landscape in East Cambridgeshire, for the benefit of everyone – people and nature. The Strategic Planning Manager thanked the Wildlife Trust for their commitment and co-operation and Officers for their assistance in providing quality photographs for the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) document.

Members commended the Strategic Planning Manager on the quality of the two documents and for his passion and commitment to the issue.

Members raised questions/comments and responses were given by the Strategic Planning Manager as follows:

A member queried when the mandatory system that an applicant for planning permission must commit to ensuring that the overall level of biodiversity would be at least 10% greater than is the case before development takes place would take effect from, and whether there were any plans for the Council to aim to achieve above this threshold. The Strategic Planning Manager reported that the '10% rule' would, subject to final Government approval, be effective from Autumn 2023 and that a higher East Cambridgeshire threshold could only realistically be mandated via a Local Plan update.

Reference was made to the Soham Grasslands Biodiversity Priority Area, and how this was affected by the intensity of housing development in the Soham area. The Strategic Planning Manager acknowledged the potential conflict, but that officers were alive to these issues. For example, the need for more effective management of the Soham Commons area had become part of the role of the newly appointed Climate Change and Natural Environment Officer. This Officer also currently was working with Natural Cambridgeshire to produce templates for Parishes to use for Local Recovery Plans. This also could be progressed via the Neighbourhood Planning process.

A Member queried how the 10% figure would be enforced and commented that this should be part of a Local Plan review. Other Members queried the impact of the large-scale solar farm developments in the District on the documents. The Strategic Planning Manager stated that all development would be subject to the BNG policy framework. In that connection, some Members commented on the need to protect land for food production. A Member also highlighted the example of the former Mepal Outdoor Centre as a biodiversity recovery site, because it had been left untended for a number of years.

In concluding, Members thanked the Strategic Planning Manager and other bodies/officers involved, for their work on these outstanding documents which gave due focus to such an important issue. It was hoped that partnership working would develop further following national implementation of the mandatory framework.

It was resolved (unanimously):

That the Committee:

- (A) Acknowledges the global biodiversity emergency and the local impact this could have on the communities and businesses we serve.
- (B) Adopts the *Interim Nature Recovery Network for East Cambridgeshire* (August 2022) attached at Appendix A to the submitted report, and asks the Corporate Management Team to ensure all future plans and strategies of this Council play their part, where appropriate, in helping to deliver the aims and recommendations within it.
- (C) Endorses the *Biodiversity Net Gain: East Cambridgeshire* (November 2022), document attached at Appendix B to the submitted report, for the purpose of an interim working document prior to the implementation of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain expected in late 2023.

60. GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE FUND SCORING PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Councillor Goldsack left the meeting for the duration of this item

The Committee considered a report (X107, previously circulated) detailing the recommendations from the Growth and Infrastructure Fund Scoring Panel.

A copy of the following statement from the Chairman of Stretham Parish Council had been circulated to Members of the Committee:

'I am writing to update you on the latest position from Stretham Parish Council on the Stretham Community Hub.

I would like to clarify and assure the District Council that the GIF and CIL funding applied for is for Phase 1 and Phase 3 of the scheme, i.e the Hub and the GP rooms. The grant will not be used for Phase 2 of the scheme which is the CLT proposals.

£650,000 Public Works Loan Board

There has been much chatter about this in the village. I would like to reassure the District Council that Stretham Parish Council has had discussions with the Public Works Loan Board who have confirmed that the project meets the requisite criteria and in principle would support an application after planning permission is secured.

I would expect, if the District Council were prepared to approve our grant applications, that there would be a condition requiring Stretham Parish Council to provide written evidence of secured funding and that no monies would be passed to Stretham Parish Council without this written evidence.

Parish Poll

A Parish Poll was conducted on 10 November 2022. The question was:

'Do you agree that all further activity and spending on the Village Community Centre should be paused until after the Parish Council elections in May 2023? Yes or No'.

The turnout was 474 (29.49%) and a majority (317) voted yes.

Prior to the Parish Poll Stretham Parish Council took the decision to progress with plans for the Community Hub. Stretham Parish Council are minded to continue with the plans to progress the Community Hub without delay. The reasons for doing so are simple:

1. Delay will only result in increased scheme costs;
2. Concern that grants may not be available if there is further delay; and
3. We may lose the opportunity to bring the GP premises into the Community Hub

I trust this information clarifies where we are with the project.'

The recommendations in the submitted report were moved and seconded by Councillors Bailey and Bovingdon.

With regard to the public questions submitted earlier in the meeting on the Stretham Community Hub, the Director Community responded as follows:

1. The County Council removed their grant due to lack of consultation of residents, has there been any further consultation carried out since losing this? **The Council is not aware of whether further consultation has taken place or not.**
2. The only quantity surveyor reports completed for SPC to date show costs to be 50% higher than stated in the funding application, how can you be sure the 2.35 million is correct? **The Council cannot comment on this matter.**
3. Have SPC shown proof of the 750k funding they claim to currently have? **This is addressed in the response from the Chairman of the Parish Council above.**
4. Is there a business plan or a feasibility plan?
 - (a) Can you be sure the Council can complete this project using public money and continue to run the centre without drastically raising the precept to cover the currently unknown running costs? **These are matters to be raised with the Parish Council.**
5. Has the amount of spending on designs and plans on behalf of the SWCLT been calculated yet and will the SWCLT reimburse the public money Stretham Parish Council has spent on their behalf for the designs and

plans of their business units? **These are matters to be raised with the Parish Council.**

6. Are you aware Stretham Parish Council plan to pay, with public money, for all the building and legal fees, drainage and external works on behalf of the SWCLT for their business units? **These are matters to be raised with the Parish Council.**
7. ECDC granted Planning permission at Manor Farm for the SWCLT on the basis of providing a Doctors' surgery to the residents. Is it right that it is now paid for with public money from Stretham Parish Council instead? ***The S106 Agreement for the development does not stipulate on funding issues, but it was always envisaged that there would be an element of public funding for the project.***

In response to a question by a Member as to where the additional £307,216 to fund all of the recommended grants would come from, the Director Commercial explained that it could be accommodated from the total of £2.8M funding received from Cambridgeshire Horizons.

An amendment then was moved by Councillor Dupré and seconded by Councillor Harries as follows:

Members are requested to:

- i Increase the Growth and Infrastructure Fund from the allocated £2,000,000 to up to £2,307,216.
- ii Approve the funding of the following projects:
 - a) £250,000 to National Trust- Wicken Fen Burwell Lode Crossing
 - b) £124,056.00 to Viva Arts and Community Group- Apprenticeship, Traineeship & Learning Hub with Solar
 - c) £800,000 to Soham Town Council- Soham to Wicken Cycleway
 - d) £700,000 to Stretham Parish Council- Stretham Community Hub
 - e) £191,535 to Witchford Playing Fields Association- Village Hall Expansion Project
 - f) £105,000 to Bottisham Parish Council- Bottisham New Cemetery
 - g) £51,360 to Soham Town Rangers Football and Social Club- Community Club Refurbishment
 - h) £22,265 to Isleham Community Association- Commercial Kitchen
 - i) £63,000 to Little Thetford Village Hall- Moving to an all-electric village hall using renewable energy
- iii **In view of the result of the Parish Poll held in Stretham calling for the delay of all further activity and spending until after the Parish Council elections in May 2023, no funding for the Stretham Hub should be paid over prior to those elections and subsequent review by the Parish Council of the proposals.**

- iv Delegate authority to the Director Community, in consultation with the Chairman of Finance & Assets Committee, to complete funding agreements for the funding and projects identified.

Speaking in support of the amendment, Councillor Dupré stated that it would be wrong to disregard public opinion expressed in the Parish Poll and the amendment would give this reassurance. Councillor Dupré expressed the belief that it would be a betrayal of the duty that this Council had in terms of good stewardship of funds to allocate a grant to Stretham PC before the issue of the Parish Poll outcome had been resolved.

During lengthy debate on the amendment, strongly differing views were expressed in favour and against the allocation of funding for the Stretham Community Hub project, with some Members concurring with the view of Councillor Dupré that no funding should be allocated at this time, whilst others referred to the fact that the project met the grant funding criteria, had been supported by the Panel, that strict conditions had been set for the actual payment of the grant funding, and all of the projects recommended for approval represented valuable community facilities needed by local towns/villages. A Member also highlighted that the outcome of a Parish Poll was not binding. In contrast, another Member referred to the apparent lack of consultation and trust relating to the project in the village of Stretham. Speaking on the amendment as the mover of the original Motion, Councillor Bailey emphasised that all normal processes had been followed and protections were in place for the recommended funding allocations for this and all of the other grant applications, which was why she could not support the amendment.

Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was lost by 4 votes in favour to 6 votes against.

Speaking on the Motion, Councillor Bailey thanked the Director Commercial for her work in securing the Cambridgeshire Horizons funding which had enabled the establishment of this grant scheme. She commented on the high standard of the applications and the cross-party nature of the Panel that had considered and scored them. This had concluded that all of the projects had merit and should receive funding. Nevertheless, all would be subject to the same conditions before any monies were released. The Vice-Chairman of the Committee, as seconder of the Motion, echoed these comments. Councillor Dupré, as mover of the amendment, acknowledged the worthiness of the projects, but still had concerns that there were too many unanswered questions relating to the Stretham Hub project, particularly on such issues as the actual securing of match-funding, Quantity Surveyors figures and the GP facilities. However, in response, Councillor Bailey stated that the conditions meant that safeguards were in place before the release of any monies to any organisation.

A recorded vote was requested on the Motion and voting was as follows:

FOR (6): Councillors D Ambrose-Smith, Austen, Bailey, Bovingdon, Brown, Huffer.

AGAINST (4): Councillors Dupré, Harries, Trapp, Wilson.

ABSTENTIONS (0):

The Motion was declared to be carried.

It was resolved:

- i) That the Growth and Infrastructure Fund be increased from the allocated £2,000,000 to up to £2,307,216.
- ii) That approval be given to the funding of the following projects:
 - a) £250,000 to National Trust- Wicken Fen Burwell Lode Crossing
 - b) £124,056.00 to Viva Arts and Community Group- Apprenticeship, Traineeship & Learning Hub with Solar
 - c) £800,000 to Soham Town Council- Soham to Wicken Cycleway
 - d) £700,000 to Stretham Parish Council- Stretham Community Hub
 - e) £191,535 to Witchford Playing Fields Association- Village Hall Expansion Project
 - f) £105,000 to Bottisham Parish Council- Bottisham New Cemetery
 - g) £51,360 to Soham Town Rangers Football and Social Club- Community Club Refurbishment
 - h) £22,265 to Isleham Community Association- Commercial Kitchen
 - i) £63,000 to Little Thetford Village Hall- Moving to an all-electric village hall using renewable energy
- iii) That delegated authority be given to the Director Community, in consultation with the Chairman of Finance & Assets Committee, to complete funding agreements for the funding and projects identified in (ii) a-i which will contain the conditions set out in paragraph 4.4 of the submitted report.

Councillor Goldsack returned to the meeting

61. COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL) FUNDING REQUEST STRETHAM

The Committee considered a report (X108, previously circulated) containing a request for a CIL Funding allocation of up to £766,666 to the Stretham Community Hub project.

The recommendations in the submitted report were moved and seconded by Councillors Bailey and Bovingdon.

In response to a question by a Member, it was confirmed that Planning permission had not yet been granted for the project.

The following amendment was proposed by Councillor Dupré and seconded by Councillor Harries:

Members are requested to approve the expenditure of up to £766,666 to the Stretham Community Hub project. **In view of the result of the Parish Poll held in Stretham calling for the delay of all further activity and spending until after the Parish Council elections in May 2023, no funding for the Stretham Hub should be paid over prior to those elections and subsequent review by the Parish Council of the proposals.**

Some Members reiterated the concerns that they had expressed under the previous item in relation to the project. Members were reminded that this was merely an allocation of CIL funding which still would be subject to conditions.

The amendment, upon being put to the vote, was declared to be lost by 4 votes in favour to 7 votes against. The Motion, upon being put to the vote, was declared to be carried by 7 votes in favour to 4 votes against.

It was resolved:

That a CIL Funding allocation of up to £766,666 be approved for the Stretham Community Hub project.

62. APPOINTMENT TO LITTLEPORT & DOWNHAM INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD (IDB)

The Committee received a report (X109, previously circulated) requesting appointment of a representative to a vacancy on the Littleport & Downham Internal Drainage Board. Members were advised that two nominations had been received from Councillor Howard Palmer (Witchford Parish Council) and Councillor Andrew Butcher (Little Downham Parish Council).

Following voting on the two nominations,

It was resolved:

1. That Councillor Howard Palmer (Witchford Parish Council) be appointed to the vacancy on Littleport & Downham Internal Drainage Board.
2. That both nominees be thanked for their submissions and Councillor Butcher approached to ascertain if he would be interested in one of the other Council vacancies on IDBs.

63. TREASURY OPERATIONS MID-YEAR REVIEW

The Committee received a report (X110, previously circulated) giving an update on the Council's Treasury operations during the 2022/23 financial year. A Member commented that the figures relating to the UK economy on page 3 of the update report were outdated. The Director Finance advised that the report related to the position at the end of September 2022 and acknowledged that the economic climate had changed since then and would be updated in the next report.

It was resolved TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL:

That the contents of the mid-year review report on the Council's Treasury operations during 2022/23, as set out in Appendix 1 to the submitted report, be noted.

64. SERVICE DELIVERY PLANS 2022/23 – 6 MONTH UPDATE

The Committee received a report (X111, previously circulated) containing the six month update on the Service Delivery Plans for service areas within the remit of this Committee.

It was resolved:

That the update report be noted.

65. PUBLIC CONVENIENCES ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT

The Committee received a report (X113, previously circulated) containing an update and independent audit findings on accessible Public Conveniences provision in East Cambridgeshire owned/managed by the Council.

Members commended the report and findings of the audit of Council provision. A Member suggested that the height of toilet pans be considered in relation to ambulant facilities.

It was resolved:

That the report be noted.

66. ANNUAL INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING STATEMENT

The Committee received a report (X114, previously circulated) containing the Annual Infrastructure Funding Statement relating to CIL and S106 income and expenditure for 2021/22.

It was resolved:

That the Annual Infrastructure Funding Statement 2021/22 as detailed in Appendix 1 to the submitted report, which will be published in December 2022, be noted.

67. FINANCE REPORT

The Committee received a report (X115, previously circulated) detailing Budget monitoring information for services within the remit of this Committee and for the Council as a whole.

It was resolved:

That it be noted that:

- This Committee has a projected overspend of £44,400 when compared to its approved revenue budget of £5,607,728.
- Overall the Council has a projected year-end underspend of £97,300 when compared to its approved revenue budget of £14,937,774.
- The overall position for the Council on Capital is a projected outturn of £8,933,870, which is an underspend of £1,901,131 compared to the revised budget.

68. ASSETS UPDATE

The Committee received a report (X116, previously circulated) containing an update on Council-owned assets.

The Open Spaces & Facilities Manager reported that the gullies at Barton Road, Ely, had been replaced and the doors/windows at 72-74 Market Street refurbished following vacating of the offices by the Mayor of the Combined Authority and the offices were due to be marketed to find a new tenant.

In response to a question by a Member, the Open Spaces & Facilities Manager agreed to provide more detail in future reporting on the status of the Assets Programme items.

It was resolved:

That the update on Council-owned assets and Expenditure Tracking Sheet at Appendix 1 to the submitted report be noted.

69. BUS, CYCLE, WALK WORKING PARTY

It was resolved:

That the Notes of the East Cambridgeshire Bus, Cycle, Walk Working Party meeting held on 6 July 2022 be noted.

70. FORWARD AGENDA PLAN

The Committee received the revised Forward Agenda Plan.

It was resolved:

That the Forward Agenda Plan be noted.

71. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PRESS

It was resolved:

That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the remaining items because it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information of Categories 1, 2 & 3 of Part I Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

72. ECTC MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

The Committee considered a report, previously circulated, containing the ECTC Management Accounts for the first half of 2022/23. The ECTC Finance Manager introduced the report and gave an overview of its contents.

It was resolved:

That the contents of the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 6:53pm.

Chairman:.....

Date: