

DISS TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting of the **Town Council** held in the **Council Chamber** at **Diss Corn Hall** on **Wednesday 14th June 2023** at **7.15pm.**

Present: Councillors S. Browne
D. Collins
M. Gingell
S. Kiddie
A. Kitchen
K. Murphy
S. Olander (ex-officio)
J. Robertson
E. Taylor (ex-officio / Chair)
G. Waterman
J. Welch
J. Wooddissee

In attendance: S. Villafuerte-Richards (Town Clerk)
A. Jamieson (Responsible Finance Officer)
County / District Councillor Kiddie
District Councillor Minshull
10 members of the public

FC0623/01 APOLOGIES

Apologies received from Cllrs Peaty (Holiday) & Sinfield (ill health).

FC0623/02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

Minute No.	Councillors Name	Personal/Other Interest	Pecuniary Interest	Reason
FC0623/11	D. Collins	X		This councillor is a member of the Diss Community Team and of the working group reviewing a feasibility study on former Beales building.
FC0623/11	S. Kiddie	X		Member of the working group reviewing a feasibility study on former Beales building.
FC0623/11	J. Welch	X		Member of the working group reviewing a feasibility study on former Beales building.

FC0623/03 MINUTES

Members considered the minutes of the May meeting. It was noted that there was a query reference FC0523/01 regarding whether the presiding Chairman has the casting vote during the election of Chairman. It was agreed this would be added and the Clerk confirmed that this was the correct legal procedure.

Post meeting note – legal reference is LGA 1972, 15 (3). It was

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 17th May 2023 as a true record subject to the amendment to be signed by the Town Mayor post meeting.

(Action: Clerk; immediately)

FC0623/04 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Councillors considered a resolution under Standing Orders 3d to 3h to suspend the meeting to receive reports from the County and District Councillors, and to hear comments from members of the public on items to be discussed on the agenda. There were 9 members of the public in attendance regarding item 11 on the agenda, which would be brought up the agenda.

County / District Councillor Kiddie spoke of the great success of Diss Carnival, which did not cost the Diss taxpayer anything with expenditure offset by income.

The highways works to Denmark Street have been scheduled for two Sundays later in the season. Due to several recent incidents on the S-bend on the A1066 at Freezen Hill (Roydon) a pre-warning sign will be installed and resurfacing undertaken. Norfolk County Council will do as much white lining during the summer as possible including the cycle path along Victoria Road. The utilities emergency works at Sunnyside and Walcot Green were completed late due to the follow up resurfacing works.

Cllr Kiddie has just met the District Council's new 'Ditchwalker' Officer who deals with surface drainage schemes, riparian rights, and flooding. They looked at flooding issues at Frenze Beck and Sawmills Road and the contact details will be passed on to the Clerk. Cllr Kiddie requested confirmation of the cycle trail signage positioning.

A flag will be raised at County Hall and District Council Offices on Monday to mark the start of Armed Forces week and a Go For It Grant should be available to the Diss Litterpicking group. It was agreed that the Town Council's flag would also be raised at the same time.

(Action: Clerk; immediately)

There was a question regarding the Animal Rescue (Pride) shop. It was noted that the owner was convicted, has served time and is now out. It is not a registered charity; anyone can set up a business and that any law infringement would be a matter for Norfolk Police.

There were further questions regarding 4 & 5G broadband provision for Diss and Cllr Waterman volunteered to review the cycle route signage with cllr Kiddie.

(Action: GW / KK; by 06.07.23)

District Councillor Minshull reported on District Council matters. It was noted that cllr Kiddie has been appointed to waste and environment and cllr Minshull to people & communities, which includes council tax, housing benefits and Early Help. They both have £1k each to spend in grants for Diss & Roydon.

He reported that Diss has fewer empty shops when compared with the rest of the District. Cllr Minshull agreed to follow up with the Planning department to determine whether the Orchard Croft estate off Frenze Hall Lane had been signed off as planning consent required that the roadways would be brought back to previous standard.

(Action: GM; by 06.07.23)

FC0623/05 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business which the Town Mayor or Town Clerk had previously been informed at least 24 hours before the meeting.

FC0623/06 FINANCE

Councillors noted:

- a) the bank outgoings for May 2023.
- b) the summary of Income & Expenditure for May 2023.
- c) the Earmarked Reserves for May 2023. It was noted that General Reserves are just within the six months minimum stated in the Council's Financial Reserves policy.

FC0623/07 **ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2022/23**

Members considered report reference 04/2324 regarding the annual accounts for the financial year to the 31st March 2023. It was

RESOLVED: to approve the annual accounts for the financial year to the 31st March 2023.

FC0623/08 **ANNUAL AUDIT 2022/23**

Members considered the following documents and cllr Kitchen thanked the RFO for managing the Council's accounts. It was

RESOLVED: To approve:

- a) The Annual Internal Audit report of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return.
- b) Section 1 of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return (Annual Governance Statement) for the Financial Year ending 31st March 2023.
- c) Section 2 of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return.
- d) The dates for the notice of public rights and publication of unaudited Annual Governance & Accountability Return.

(Action: RFO; immediately)

The RFO left the meeting.

This item was brought forward to allow the members of the public to speak.

FC0623/11 **MARKET**

Councillors considered a business plan from representatives of the Diss Community Team (DCT) regarding the feasibility of supporting the use of the former Beales building for an indoor market. The Chair of the DCT spoke regarding the opportunity to increase the footfall to the Friday market, one of the Council's strategic objectives. He believes there is a lot of support for the proposal partly evidenced by those present in the public gallery in support of the proposal.

Another member of the public spoke about the loss of empty shops in the town centre and the opportunity to have a community market in an existing building. He spoke of the Council's support for Diss Corn Hall / Heritage Triangle Project, the successes of the Octagon, 35E Mere Street and DesignerMakers21 on St Nicholas St, all innovative projects to try and revive the town centre.

A former art teacher from Diss High School spoke about Diss' potential and the opportunity to have space central to Diss for small enterprises. A member of DM21 spoke about the positive feedback received from tourists regarding the town's arts and craft offering and met someone who is excited about the possibility of Diss having a vintage / antique style market and would be willing to help with marketing it for free.

It was reiterated that the decision at this meeting was solely about taking the empty space in the former Beales building to trial an indoor market for three months, which should help to support the town and 40 or so local independent traders.

A long-term resident of the town spoke of his experience working alongside the Council on many imaginative initiatives, supportive of the community.

A trader with 40+ years of experience in the town spoke on behalf of a number of traders explaining their concerns over shop closures, appreciation for the work of the DCT and likened the longer-term proposal to the Forum in Norwich. Her concern was around the careful consideration of market stallholders to ensure they do not compete directly with existing traders in the town.

It was considered that the forecasted electricity bills have been underestimated along with other bills associated with such a building. It was confirmed that these costs would be underwritten by the DCT removing the financial risk from the Council.

Councillors discussed a Norfolk Market Town Centre report published in 2022 by Norfolk County Council, which provides data regarding shop vacancies, both in Diss and Norfolk. It was noted that there were more shop vacancies between 2011-2014 compared with 2022 with a vacancy rate of 6.4%, below the Norfolk average. It was noted that the data was collated a year ago, that the situation on the ground has changed and it would be useful to compare the current vacancy rate across the other 20 towns submitted in report.

There was discussion regarding the impact of this project on the Council's staffing team. Following a recent staff restructure, the Council is reviewing disparity of work within the operational team with workloads already at capacity. Supporting this project will require consideration for which non-statutory projects (e.g. Carnival) the Council can put on hold, additional staffing hours and / or significant external volunteer support (members and community).

Councillors also discussed the proposed stall cost of £35, which was reported to be based on the Council's existing square metre rate plus 10% for the indoor space. It was felt this may be unrealistic, but the price would reduce for a smaller space so is flexible.

It was noted that previous projects such as the HTP project also had the support of both the District and County Councils, and that the Town Council's commitment is to residents and not to businesses as the latter falls within the remit of the District Council. The former Beales building is privately owned whereas the Corn Hall is owned by the Town Council.

One councillor spoke of his experience of a successful indoor and outdoor market operating 6 days and 2 days per week in another town which drew shoppers into town.

It was noted that the landlord would not hold the offer beyond this meeting and that a decision was needed immediately. There was discussion regarding the importance of Council determining the decision without undue pressure from members of the public and that Council can provide justification for the decision it takes.

The Chair had to request a member of the public to moderate their conduct (as per Standing Orders 2a).

Cllr Waterman said he'd be willing to support DCT to identify the hours required to support the initial stage of the project.

There was a motion put forward to support the principle of the proposal with reservations around the staffing impact. With five abstentions from councillors Browne, Gingell, Murphy, Olander and Waterman, it was

RESOLVED: to trial the indoor market for three months subject to minimum staffing impact and further discussions with higher tier authorities.

(Action: Clerk; immediately)

FC0623/9

CODE OF CONDUCT

The model Code of Conduct for Diss Town Councillors adopted in March 2022 was reviewed following the re-election of members. It was

RESOLVED: to adopt the revised model Code of Conduct for the electoral term subject to including reference to the Nolan principles on Appendix A.

(Action: Clerk; immediately)

FC0623/10 **DISPENSATION POLICY**

Members reviewed the Council's revised Dispensation policy. It was

RESOLVED: To adopt the revised dispensation policy as presented.

(Action: Clerk; immediately)

FC0623/12 **STRATEGIC PLAN**

Members considered report reference 05/2324 regarding the review of the Council's strategic plan. It was noted that the timeline would not allow for the full budgetary impact to be known across all projects but that some of them would have medium – long term budgetary implications.

There were several projects that were not listed in the feedback form to residents requesting their views on the Council's next strategic plan for example the proposal to purchase a site on Denmark Lane, clear the rubbish and rogue vegetation to excavate the Blacker Bombard and place an information board by it so that it becomes a community green space and / or supporting a project to repair St Mary's church's clock. It was noted that these projects can be considered again as part of the Infrastructure committee's deliberations and consulted on as per the proposed timeline. It was

RESOLVED: To approve the timeline for committee / Full Council review of the strategic plan and staff and community consultation phases.

(Action: Clerk / DepTC; as per timeline)

FC0623/13 **PROGRESS REPORT**

Councillors noted the progress on decisions made at the last meeting of Council.

FC0623/14 **MEMBER FORUM**

Councillors considered information or issues relevant to Council from members for brief discussion, action, or inclusion on future agendas.

Cllr Waterman confirmed availability of members for the first Park Enhancement working group meeting on 20th July at his workplace and advised all of the date for the BBQ social of Friday 14th July.

There was further discussion regarding empty shops. It was noted that the proposal to install large-scale artwork on buildings in Diss should be ready to start in September and the graphics can be applied to specifications for empty shops. The District Council Officers for Economic Development are being re-engaged since the restructure and move and that members could lobby the District Council and central government to engage with landlords particularly those who are owned by pension funds.

It was also noted that Diss Town Council now sits in the low 60s of top precepts in the country and has moved out of the top 50.

FC0623/15 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Councillors noted that the next meeting of Town Council is scheduled for Wednesday 12th July 2023 at 7.15pm.

FC0623/16 **PUBLIC BODIES (ADMISSIONS TO MEETINGS)**

Members considered a resolution under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 and Standing Orders 3d to exclude members of the public and press in order to discuss the following item which is properly considered to be of a confidential nature.

FC0623/17 TELEPHONE AND BROADBAND CONTRACT

Members considered further information from contractors regarding the Council's telephone & broadband provision (confidential report 06/2324 referred). There was discussion regarding landline phones moving to digital technology and it was agreed that this would be followed up by the Clerk. It was

RESOLVED:

(Action: Clerk; by 30.06.23 / 01.09.24)

Meeting Closed 9.09pm.

Councillor Murphy
TOWN MAYOR