

Minutes of a meeting of the **SPALDING TOWN FORUM** held via Zoom, on Wednesday, 8 June 2022 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT

R Gambba-Jones (Chairman)

A C Cronin

R A Gibson (Vice-Chairman)

M Hasan

C J Lawton

J D McLean

A M Newton

G P Scalse

E J Sneath

G J Taylor

Apologies for absence were received from or on behalf of Councillor G A Porter

In Attendance: G Scott (Spalding Transport Forum), R Perkins (Castle Sports Complex Bowls Club), J Bland (Civic Society), the Assistant Director – Strategic Growth and Development, the Strategic Operational and Property Manager, the Democratic Services Manager and the Democratic Services Assistant.

1. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2022.

AGREED:

That the minutes be signed as a correct record.

2. ACTIONS

The Chairman introduced the new 'Actions' standing item which contained officer responses to Forum Members' questions raised at the previous meeting.

The Actions item was welcomed by the Forum and would come forward as a regular item.

AGREED:

That the Actions update be noted.

3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS.

There were none.

4. ASSETS UPDATE

The Strategic Operational and Property Manager attended the meeting to provide an update on the following Spalding Special

Action By

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Expenses funded assets:

- Ayscoughfee Gardens – A significant range of jobs, both large and small, had been completed:
 - New toilets were being installed and improvements were being made to the Café which was expected to re-open fully at the start of July.
 - Benches had been repainted, new LED security lights installed, the community wall rebuilt, and the war memorials had been cleaned.
 - The pond had been refurbished and had received positive feedback from the public
- Water Fountain
 - A proposed planning application was to be submitted, to place the fountain in Ayscoughfee Gardens. Railings would be added around the fountain to help prevent anti-social behaviour and historical feature boards would also be added to create a visual feature.
- Spalding Cemetery:
 - A new one-way system had been installed and roadways resurfaced
 - The old toilet block had been demolished to create new parking bays.
 - Notice boards had been placed around the site to display the history of the cemetery – one noticeboard gave information on the hidden footstones that had been found next to a tree in the cemetery.
 - The cemetery improvements had received very positive feedback from the public.
- Daffodil Walk
 - Work had been completed at the end of March 2022 to install 850 metres of new cycle lane and walkway.
 - It was hoped that in the future, work could be undertaken to enhance the entrance to the walk to make it more noticeable.

Members raised the following points:

- Was there any logical route for visitors to the Cemetery to follow in relation to the historical noticeboards?
 - Officers responded that preliminary diagrams for the four noticeboards around the Cemetery were being drawn up, but there was no particular order for them to be followed.
- Some members raised concern that showing an image of the proposed siting of the fountain was unnecessary, given that a planning application had not yet been submitted.

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- It would be helpful to have a noticeboard at the entrance of the Cemetery to show visitors what could be seen inside.
- It was clear to see that major investment had taken place at Ayscoughfee Gardens, and the Cemetery improvements had received many positive comments from the Public.
- It was noted that the work of the Friends of Spalding Cemetery group should be highlighted - they were very dedicated in assisting with the upkeep of the site and worked hard all year round.
- The Daffodil Walk had taken some time to get to the stage it was at, and lots of positive feedback had been received. It was noted that Pedals had done a tremendous amount of work in consulting with the Assets team in advising what works should be undertaken at Daffodil Walk, and in campaigning to ensure that monies available from a Section 106 agreement were utilised on completing the route.
- It was noted that it was important to keep the notice boards up to date and to listen to resident's feedback.
- Residents had raised some concern with members about the Daffodil Walk surface being uneven and that more bins could be placed along the route.
- Members offered to assist in the production of a leaflet for the Cemetery by including some statistics from the 1851 religious census.
- Councillor Sneath, who was the County Councillor for the area between Spalding and Pinchbeck said she would raise the completion of the Daffodil Route with a County Council officer.
- It was noted that Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) had recently announced another tranche of funding for South Holland to promote cycling - it should be stressed that the rest of the cycleway should be completed to the same standard.
- Had any more surfacing been undertaken since the completion of the Daffodil Walk project at the end of March? Members had received some feedback from residents that certain areas of the route were uneven.

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- Officers confirmed that the current surfacing would be left to settle for the rest of 2022 and then a decision would be made as to whether further surfacing was needed.
- If there were areas of concern raised by members of the public, could signage be put up to advise that the surfacing had to settle?
 - Officers noted this suggestion and confirmed they would look into this suggestion.
- The Civic Society explained that they had been engaging with the Council about the placement of the water fountain and had provided additional information. It was an ongoing conversation where no final decision had been made as far as the Society was concerned.

5. PUBLIC SPACE USE OF SPALDING TOWN CENTRE

The Assistant Director – Strategic Growth and Development introduced the item and explained that there were several individual aspects and long-standing town centre issues that had to be progressed such as the Traffic Restriction Order, pedestrian access along with the presence of cars and the desire to improve the connection between the high street and the river.

They were complex issues intrinsically connected to Lincolnshire County Council highways who owned most of the roads in the town centre. The officer was investigating how SHDC could work on a common plan with LCC to address these issues.

It was proposed that a representative group be set up to explore a strategy for the town centre and access as a whole with engagement sought from residents and businesses. The idea of the group was supported by senior officers at LCC Highways. It was hoped that the group's proposals would be presented to the Transport Board at LCC. This work would sit alongside the improvement plan works which focused on more short-term issues, as the above-mentioned issues were wider ranging and required a more focussed approach with a wider group of partners.

Members raised the following points:

- It was noted that there were similar issues in other town centres across the country and there were many different opinions across Spalding relating to what needed to be done in terms of access to the town centre. The group

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needed to ask the community what they wanted and needed from the town centre.

- The group was a good idea, but the parameters of the town centre needed to be defined. It was a challenge that LCC owned the bulk of the accessible land within the town centre. A town bus that went directly through the town centre would be a real benefit for both residents and businesses and this idea needed to be promoted.
- Market traders were important users of the town centre, and their views in terms of access should be sought.
- It would be a fundamental part of the group's work to consider the experiences of everyone in the town centre, especially those with mobility issues. There were some relatively minor issues within the town centre, such as uneven paving blocks, that needed to be dealt with as a matter of urgency - process and delivery should be quicker.
- It was suggested that anyone active in the community in respect of the issue of accessibility within the town centre needed to be involved in the group's work.
- It was vital to collaborate with the steering group on ideas and engage with the public to gain their views.
 - The Chairman confirmed that it was the ambition of the group to have an initial discussion and then to consult with the public to gather their views.
- If the public response was that parking was wanted within the centre, would that be possible?
 - The Chairman suggested that it was not a straightforward answer and the discussion needed to be that broad as no options or ideas should be left off the table. Questions should be asked and then the landscape examined to see how appropriate and suitable the idea was and what would be needed to make it work.
- It could be a good idea to enable the three car parks in town to have 2 hours of free parking.
 - The Chairman noted that there were issues surrounding the management of free car parking hours.
- What was the timescale for the first meeting of the group to be held?
 - The idea would be taken to a future meeting of

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Cabinet for approval with the first meeting being set up very soon after that with regular meetings to be held thereafter.

6. TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

The Assistant Director – Strategic Growth and Development gave a brief update on the Town Centre Improvement Plan where the following key points were raised:

- Environment, Public Realm & Heritage
 - Worked on developing plans for seating improvements in the town centre
 - Developed a National Lottery Heritage Fund Bid
 - Commissioned Transported to utilise three areas for public art opportunities.
 - Targeted poor-quality properties through enforcement powers.
- Business, Markets and Economy
 - Conducted a feasibility study for a Business Improvement District (BID)
 - Commissioned a High Street Business advisor to provide 1 to 1 support to high street businesses across the district
 - Ran a social media campaign to promote independent retailers
 - The Economic Development team were working to secure investment and occupiers into empty town centre units.
 - Recruitment of a Markets Manager and Markets Officer
 - £1.2m of Recovery and Growth Grants had been delivered to 147 businesses across the district.
 - Installed a footfall monitor to support funding applications
 - Looked at options for better utilising vacant space above shops.
- Events, Culture, Promotion and Awareness Raising
 - An expression of interest to the Arts Council had been submitted to establish Ayscoughfee Hall as a National Portfolio Organisation.
 - Worked with Visit Lincolnshire to improve representation of the district on their website.
 - 'Love Your Local Market Roadshow' and 'Spring Into Spalding' events had been hugely successful.
 - Plans had been finalised for the Pumpkin Festival in October and the Christmas Celebration in November.
- Travel, Transport and Accessibility

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- Worked with LCC to secure £1.8m in government funding to improve cycle access into the town through a new dedicated cycleway on Pinchbeck Road.
- Made a case for investment in bus services in and around the town centre.
- Improvement works had been completed to signalling systems when entering the town centre.

Members raised the following points:

- There had been difficulties for some businesses in accessing the recovery and growth grants as they had to be match funded - was there anything in place to help businesses who were unable to match fund?
 - Officers responded to say that the Recovery and Growth scheme had finished but the match funding expected depended on how much funding had been requested. There was now a UK Shared Investment Fund which was focussed on how the Council could develop support for businesses. A flexible approach would be used for the running of the next programme of funding.
- There had been a government announcement stating that Councils could intervene if a shop had remained vacant for more than six months.
 - Officers responded that they were aware of the scheme but did not have any details on how the scheme would work.
- Could above shop accommodation be turned into homes?
 - Officers noted that there was an increasing number of local authorities looking at this option and to encourage owners to bring forward their space for alternative use. Grantham had, for example, received significant government funding to assist with improving their high street and how more varied use of the spaces within their town centre could be achieved.
 - Officers were currently trying to understand what other authorities were doing and what model would work best for our towns and villages.
- The biggest hurdle with above shop accommodation was the practicality of access and it could be difficult to split the upstairs area from the shop below.
- It appeared that the pest control company had had little

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success in addressing the pigeon problem.

- Officers confirmed that some positive feedback had been received but they would seek a further update.
- There were issues with members of the Public still feeding the pigeons and it was suggested that a presence may be needed within the town centre to make sure people were behaving correctly.
 - The Chairman responded that other towns often included a funded post within any bids they submitted.

7. COMMUNITY GROUP REPRESENTATIVES

The Chairman asked members to advise Democratic Services of any community group representatives who they thought would make a positive contribution to the Forum and they would send an invite out for the next meeting.

The following points were raised:

- It was understandable that some Community representatives had stopped coming along to the meetings as they may have thought that their view did not carry the same weight as elected members.
 - The Chairman felt that this was not the case as the Forum was not a decision-making body and therefore no-one's opinion held greater weight than anybody else's.
- It was noted that that the George Furniss Memorial had been vandalised, but the plaque had been retrieved and put into safe storage at West Marsh Road Depot.
- The Forum needed to find a way to explain to community group representatives what was involved in the Forum's work and how they could have their input.
- It may be useful to have a Swimming Club representative attend to discuss recent issues at the Swimming Pool.
- The Forum needed to be as relevant as possible for the people of Spalding, as the town did not have democratic representation at the present time.
- Could members of the public come to just one meeting and raise an issue?
 - The Chairman advised that he would seek advice from Democratic Services as to whether this was

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- possible.
- Members of the Public could contact elected members to ask for a particular issue to be raised or discussed at the next meeting of the Forum.
- Following the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, the question of whether Spalding should have a Town Council had been raised. Was now the time to have that conversation?
 - The Chairman responded that he had been raising the question of a Town Council for many years without much response. He explained that the public needed to express their wish to have a Spalding Town Council to the District Council – this question had been put to the public before, but there had been very little enthusiasm for it.

8. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT

There were none.

(The meeting ended at 8.21 pm)

(End of minutes)