

## March Town Council

Minutes of the Annual Assembly of March Town Council that took place at 7.15pm in  
The Skoulding Suite at March Town Hall on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2022.

<b>Present</b>	Councillor	K French	Town Mayor
	Councillors	DW Connor AR Donnelly J French MW Purser RF Skoulding	SR Court CK Elkin R Johnson G Tustin RW White
	Town Clerk		C Lemmon
	Town Clerk Elect		SL Lemmon
	Asst Town Clerk		SA Taylor
	Public		None

### 10 Introduction

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the Annual Assembly.

### 11 Apologies for Absence

No apologies were received.

### 12 Presentation from Fenland District Council re Broad Street and Market Place Proposals

Matt Wright (FDC High Streets Project Officer) and Phil Hughes (FDC Acting Director) were welcomed to the meeting to detail the full proposals for the redevelopment of Broad Street and the Market Place.

Following their presentation, which highlighted the fact that final plans will not be available before July 2022, a “question and answer” session ensued whereby the following points and concerns were raised:

- a) Full consultation has not taken place with March Town Council. Discussions in 2018 and 2020 highlighted that March Town Council would like to see improvements to March town centre. However, this cannot be viewed as a commitment to the scheme until final plans are available.
- b) Having one MTC member on the Broad Street Steering Group does not constitute regular consultation with March Town Council.
- c) It was agreed that funding would be paid to MTC to compensate for the Xmas lights and catenary support wire that would become redundant when the Broad Street scheme was implemented. In addition, the funding should cover the full replacement costs of new made-to-measure set-pieces.

- d) The height of replacement street lights had not yet been determined and, as such, it was not yet known how suitable such lighting would be in supporting the Xmas lights. It must be ensured that this lighting is equipped with suitable time-switches and sockets.
- e) Christmas lighting in Broad Street would be lost for at least one season whilst construction works were underway.
- f) Full consultation has not taken place with the shops. It would appear that the only conversations that FDC has had with the shops is to enquire whether their premises had rear delivery entrances or cellars.
- g) The scheme has not taken into account the 3,000+ houses that are likely to be built in March in the next 20 years. This is likely to equate to 6,000+ extra vehicles within the town.
- h) The scheme actually provides less car parking spaces in the immediate area than are currently available and Fenland does not have a viable public transport system or alternative routes around the town to compensate for this.
- i) The FDC Officers could not provide details as to when the traffic study to support the scheme was undertaken, at what time of day it was undertaken or whether it was within or outside of school term time. It was felt that this information should have been readily available.
- j) Because of escalating building costs, the extent of the works contained within the scheme could not be guaranteed and may have to be scaled back to fit the budget available.
- k) Discussions between the Middle Level Commissioners and FDC have only just commenced in spite of the various permissions required from this authority.
- l) FDC Officers suggested that “pop-up” cafes could be introduced in the pedestrianised area. It was felt that this idea completely conflicted with the premise of supporting local businesses when we already have an abundance of cafes/eateries within the town centre.
- m) March Town Councillors did not accept the premise that it was too late to undertake further consultation and would not accept an Officer led fait accompli.
- n) In particular, it was stressed that consultation and communication with the general public was essential because extremely negative feedback was emanating therefrom.
- o) It was agreed that FDC should create an exhibition at the library or within a town centre vacant shop to publicise the scheme since consultation to date had been sadly lacking. However, Officers were criticised for suggesting that there would be no staff available to man such exhibition. Phil Hughes was requested to email the Town Clerk with full details of his proposals for such exhibition(s).
- p) Public consultation as an online exercise only was not deemed satisfactory by MTC. Furthermore, failing to advertise such online consultation further reduced its effectiveness.
- q) There was a general consensus between March Town Councillors that no scheme and the loss of funding was preferable to a poorly managed scheme that was not in the best interests of March.

At the conclusion of the “question and answer” session, the FDC Officers were thanked by the Mayor and left the meeting at 8.55pm.

### **13 Minutes of the Annual Assembly held 26<sup>th</sup> April 2021**

The minutes of the 2021 Annual Assembly, as previously circulated, were accepted by the meeting.

### **14 Matters Arising from the above Minutes**

There were no matters arising.

### **15 Report of the Town Mayor for 2021 / 2022 and the Mayor's Charity Donations**

The Mayor's report was accepted by the meeting and is attached to these minutes as Appendix A (1 page).

It was also noted that the Mayor had distributed four cheques from the Mayors Charity Account during the year totalling £1,050.00p to causes of her choice.

Unfortunately, the year has again been blighted by the Coronavirus epidemic and the Mayor has been unable to attend many events or hold any fund-raising activities.

The Mayor's Charity Account is attached (Appendix B – 1 page).

### **16 Written Report of the Town Clerk for 2020 / 2021**

The written report of the Town Clerk, as previously circulated, was accepted by the meeting (see Appendix C – 3 pages).

### **17 Affirmation re Mayor's Allowances**

The Mayor, Councillor Kim French, affirmed that the Mayoral expenses received during this and her previous year of office and totalling £3,150.00p per annum had been fully expended in the execution of her Mayoral duties.

### **18 Resolution to Approve the Annual Governance Statement**

It was noted that the Personnel and Administrative Sub-Committee had undertaken a full review of the effectiveness of our systems of internal control on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022. It had also fully reviewed all general risks likely to be faced by March Town Council and all procedures included within the MTC risk assessment document. All the findings were ratified by Full Council on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2022.

Members re-affirmed their approval of the procedures adopted to satisfy themselves of the effectiveness of the systems of internal control currently in place.

The Annual Governance Statement was then discussed as follows:

- a) Its contents were reviewed and completed as appropriate.
- b) It was proposed by Councillor Skoulding and seconded by Councillor J French, with all in favour, that its contents were approved.
- c) The resolution to accept the Annual Governance Statement was, therefore, unanimously approved.
- d) The Clerk and Chairman duly signed and dated such Statement.

**19 Resolution to Approve the Accounting Statements for 2021 / 2022**

The Annual Accounting Statements for the financial year 2021 / 2022, as previously circulated, were presented to the meeting by the Responsible Financial Officer to allow full discussion by Councillors.

After such discussions, the following decisions were reached:

- a) It was proposed by Councillor Skoulding and seconded by Councillor Purser, with all in favour, that such Accounting Statements be approved.
- b) The resolution to accept the Accounting Statements for 2021 / 2022 was, therefore, unanimously approved.
- c) The Mayor, Councillor Kim French, and the Responsible Financial Officer duly agreed to sign and date such document as necessary.

**20 Open Forum**

There were no members of the public present so no questions or concerns were raised.

Thereafter, the Mayor declared the meeting closed at 9.15pm. However, anyone who so wished, was invited to remain for the Planning Meeting which was due to follow.

Councillor K French.....  
Mayor of March

9<sup>th</sup> May 2022.