

**CHATTERIS TOWN COUNCIL
LEISURE AND GENERAL PURPOSES WORKING GROUP**

Minutes of a meeting held at the King Edward Centre, King Edwards Road, Chatteris, on Tuesday 13th February 2024

Present: Cllr A Hay (Mayor), Cllr L Ashley (Vice Chairman of group), A Gowler, V Joyce, P Murphy, S Selman, M Siggee and S Unwin.

L46 23/24 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllrs J Carney, A Charrier and I Benney.

L47 23/24 Speakers: Fire Chiefs Jon Anderson and Stuart Smith

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Mr Jon Anderson, Area Commander Mr Stuart Smith and fire officer Mr Nev Burgess were welcomed to the meeting to talk about the proposed closures of Manea and Sutton Fire stations and the impact such closures would have on Chatteris.

Mr Anderson began by talking about the on-call fire service, which involved fire engines not being continually crewed. He said the system was designed after the war but times had changed and there were now problems with the availability of retained fire fighters. The fire service could provide the engines but the problem was finding enough fire fighters on call to man them. Chatteris had good availability and a good crew but Manea was struggling to get enough people. Manea only had six retained fire fighters so most day times there were insufficient people available to man the appliance.

Mr Anderson stressed that attracting enough retained fire fighters was a national problem. He admitted there had been a recruitment freeze in Manea, as the force did not want to take on and train more fire fighters for the village if the station was to close, but that freeze had now been lifted. The Mayor asked if there had been a publicity campaign to attract more fire fighters in Manea. Mr Smith said there had been various campaigns and Cllr Gowler requested one more recruitment drive.

Cllr Murphy, a former retained fire fighter, said most people who lived in villages left the village to work during the week. Mr Smith said it had been hoped that with more people working from home there might be people willing to be on call but bigger businesses did not want to release people to ride fire engines.

The proposal was to close three fire stations (including Kimbolton) and invest in two more appliances which would be on call across the county at weekends as there were currently 8 appliances available at weekends compared to 10 in the week. The two additional appliances would be based at Ely and St Neots but would move to where they were needed to plug gaps.

Mr Anderson said Manea, which had few fire calls, would be covered by Chatteris. Cllr Murphy asked how many calls the Manea crew attended a year in their own territory.

Mr Smith gave the following figures.

2019	19 incidents	Crew didn't attend 7
2020	34 incidents	Crew didn't attend 16
2021	21 incidents	Crew didn't attend 4
2022	34 incidents	Crew didn't attend 27
2023	25 incidents	Crew didn't attend 15

Mr Smith said 85% of incidents in the Manea area were covered by Chatteris when Manea fire engine was not available. He stressed availability in Chatteris was at 90%, to make 100% there would need to be 16 retained firemen in the town.

Cllr Murphy asked how many times Chatteris and March covered Sutton and was told Ely primarily covered Sutton with Chatteris attending as a second appliance. Cllr Murphy was concerned by the length of time it would take a fire appliance from Chatteris to reach Manea.

Cllr Selman was concerned that there were plans to close two stations close to Chatteris as Chatteris had to cover both. She asked for the figures for Sutton. Mr Smith said Sutton availability was very poor and the crew had not turned out since August 2023.

The figures for Sutton were:

2019	75 incidents	Crew didn't attend 74
2020	89 incidents	Crew didn't attend 62
2021	75 incidents	Crew didn't attend 60
2022	92 incidents	Crew didn't attend 89
2023	86 incidents	Crew didn't attend 82

Mr Anderson stressed that during the busiest periods, weekday daytimes, both Manea and Sutton crews were not available.

Cllr Unwin was concerned that Chatteris would be left vulnerable during the summer months when there were frequent field fires. Mr Anderson said most of the fires were in the daytime when Manea and Sutton crews were not available but contingency plans would be in place during long dry periods, such as using water tankers which only needed two crew.

Cllr Gowler said he had raised the subject of the proposed reservoir when he attended a Manea Parish Council meeting, which was also attended by Mr Anderson. He had pointed out it would be a 10 to 15 year construction project and would result in a massive piece of infrastructure right in the middle of the area covered by Chatteris and Manea. Mr Smith admitted the reservoir had not been on their radar but they had now started conversations with Anglian Water.

Mr Anderson assured members that the fire service would not be rushing into a decision on the closures. If Manea were able to recruit enough people that would be taken into consideration and if the stations were closed those who were currently retained fire fighters would be offered posts elsewhere (possibly helping to crew an engine at weekends).

Cllr Selman suggested having a stall at the Chatteris Midsummer Festival as part of the recruitment campaign and Mr Anderson said there were plans to hold surgeries with the public at the three fire stations threatened with closure.

He also said the force was looking to put out an email every month giving details of when fire crews turned out, were unavailable, etc.

Mr Anderson, Mr Smith and Mr Burgess were thanked for attending the meeting.

After they had left the meeting Cllr Gowler reminded members that the Manea crew not only attended fires in their own area, they also backed up crews elsewhere and one member had informed Cllr Gowler that they were called out 59 times in 2023.

Cllrs Gowler and Murphy left the meeting and Cllr Ashley took over as Chairman for the remainder of the meeting.

L48 23/24 Any Matters Arising from the Last Meeting of the Group

L44) Mayor's Cadet: March Town Council Clerk had forwarded a copy of their policy and guidelines for the Mayor's Cadet who was appointed annually and was nominated by the cadet force's commanding officer. Duties included attending civic engagements, such as the Mayor making, the civic service and the Remembrance commemorations, and charity events such as St George's Fair and the Christmas Lights Switch On. The Mayor did not feel there was sufficient need to appoint a Mayor's Cadet in Chatteris at the present time but it was agreed it was an idea which could be considered in the future.

L40 Overgrown: The Clerk had been contacted by the FDC parks and open spaces officer who informed her that the overgrown bushes, shrubs and self-set trees were to be removed from the planting beds in Furrowfields car park by FDC's contractors. Initially bark would be installed and in future new planting would be undertaken. The Clerk had asked if, as the area was being tidied up, the public toilets could be smartened up/repainted.

L49 23/24 Little Acre Fen Pocket Park & Old Railway Line Updates

The Clerk had received two complaints that off road motorcycles had churned up the Pocket Park and damaged trees. She had been to investigate and had found significant damage to the surface of the park but the trees appeared to be intact. The Clerk had reported the damage to Sgt Arnold and asked if the area could be patrolled, especially between 1pm and 3pm at the weekend when it was reported the motorbikes were tearing around the park (she had pointed

out this was dangerous for other park users). She had also reported the criminal damage on line.

Cllr Siggee suggested one solution might be gates with holding pens at each entrance to the park as this would allow wheelchairs and buggies to get in but would stop motorbikes. The Clerk agreed to look into the idea but was worried about the cost. Cllr Joyce said he had tried calling the police when he heard the motorbikes but was told they did not have any availability. It was suggested the story should go to the newspapers and the Clerk said the chairman of FLAPP was considering putting out a Facebook post.

L50 23/24 Defibrillators Update

After the Town Council's support for the idea of buying two defibrillators from Section 106 funds, the Clerk had written to FDC asking them to release the money.

Cllr Selman said she and Cllr Unwin were working on a map to show the location of all defibrillators in the town which would be included in the new Town Guide. They had asked the Community Defibrillators for Chatteris organiser for a list of all the defibrillators she was aware of but believed there could be more in buildings such as schools, dental surgeries, etc.

L51 23/24 Youth Skatepark Project

The Clerk had been in contact with the graffiti artist who had originally tagged the Wenny Road skatepark and he was very interested in helping with the new graffiti project. The Clerk was now trying to put him in touch with the youth leader who had also expressed an interest in the project.

L52 23/24 Community Hub

An email had been received from the Fenland Village Agent for ACRE whose role was to set up community hubs. There was a need to set up three more community hubs in Fenland and Chatteris had been suggested so she was now looking for a suitable venue and volunteers to help set up the hub and run it. In addition to refreshments the hub would offer mini courses.

Members were concerned that this would be another venture when a group would be set up by an outside body and then left to its own devices. They also expressed concerns that the hub would duplicate clubs/activities already set up in the town and it would struggle with the lack of volunteers.

The Clerk said she and the Financial Officer had that day met with the Social Prescriber and the Community Navigator Co-ordinator for Chatteris to discuss provision for elderly and vulnerable people in the town. The Navigator said she would be meeting with the Fenland Village Agent to discuss the hub idea and would report back.

L53 23/24 Proposal to Switch to Teams from Zoom

The Clerk said the monthly £15.59 fee paid to Zoom could no longer be justified. Members debated if an on-line meeting service was required. The Clerk had a quote for a basic Microsoft Teams package which appeared to meet the Council's requirements for £3.30 a month. It was agreed to look into switching to Teams and stopping the Zoom subscription and to trial the new service for 6 months to see if it was necessary.

L 54 23/24 D-Day Commemorations

The Clerk informed members that the commemorations to mark the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings would take place on the 6th June 2024. Towns and villages were being asked to mark the anniversary by lighting beacons at 9.15pm. Cllrs Joyce and Siggee said they would help to light the Chatteris beacon and Cllr Unwin said she would ask if the In Bloom/Christmas Lights float with the water container on board could be present to help if there were any fires.

The official national website for the commemorations also noted that Mr Matthew Sinclair, of Chatteris, would join town criers worldwide in reading the D-Day 80 Proclamation.

L55 23/24 Any Other Business

Weed Management: The Clerk had received a letter from the County Council with an update into the review of the Highways Operational Standards in relation to weed management in Cambridgeshire. The review identified the need for revisions to the HOS and recommended the revisions were approved after consultation with local stakeholders. The letter said the use of chemical weed control across the county was reinstated as it was deemed to be the most effective method of weed control and the most financially viable. In addition, the letter proposed a one off non-chemical weed removal programme to cleanse all areas affected by weeds before the start of the twice yearly chemical weed treatment programme which would begin in May. The Council was asked to complete a questionnaire and state if the area preferred not to have chemicals used (in which case funding would be offered towards the cost of alternative weed control). The Clerk said she was happy to complete the questionnaire and asked if Councillors wished her to opt for the chemical weed control option. A majority of councillors agreed to the chemical solution.

Empress Swimming Pool: The Clerk had been copied in to correspondence between the head coach of Chatteris Swimming Club and MP Mr Steve Barclay about the current closure of the Empress Swimming Pool. Mr Barclay was seeking clarification from FDC on the buildings Community Asset listing.

Backfiring cars: Cllr Siggee asked if there had been any updates on the noise from back-firing cars. The Mayor had raised the issue at the police meeting with Sgt Arnold and he had responded by saying that the problem was under reported but he had asked Pc Chad Hall to contact the person who had complained to the council and promised they would do what they could on enforcement. Cllr Siggee gave registration details of the car he believed was

responsible and Cllr Ashley said the police had posted on line that they had been monitoring exhaust noise levels in Chatteris but those surveyed had not exceeded the limit.

L56 23/24 Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 19th March 2024.