



**CITY OF ELY COUNCIL
TOURISM AND TOWN CENTRE COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF MEETING HELD AT 6.45PM ON
TUESDAY 18th JUNE 2019 AT SESSIONS HOUSE, LYNN ROAD, ELY**

PRESENT:

Cllr Dian Warman Cllr Rebecca Denness
Cllr Arnie Arnold Cllr Kevin Wilkins
Cllr Christine Whelan Cllr M Rouse
Cllr Ian Lindsey
Tracey Harding (Tourism, Town Centre and Events Manager)

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Every.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Public Question Time

A local independent retailer expressed her concerns that the City of Ely Council/Visit Ely were not doing enough to help city centre retailers. If they were not supported then there was a real fear that businesses would close. Since the opening of the new Leisure Village on the outskirts, city centre footfall had dropped by 20% and this is a real concern. Local independents felt that Visit Ely put too much emphasis on tourism and not enough on town centres. They would like improved communications and were very willing to work with us to achieve this.

Cllr Lindsay suggested that the Town Centre Manager summarise the history of the town centre service in order to provide some background.

Mrs Harding detailed the journey that Town Centres had come on since its time under East Cambs DC and its recent move to the City Council. She said that retailers and other key city centre stakeholders had been brought together on numerous occasions over the years and that great schemes and initiatives had been achieved but these were mainly when large amounts of funding had been available. Up until this financial year, town centres had never received any dedicated budget. Cllr Every, in particular, had been working with some of the independents to try and support them on wider issues that were affecting many High Streets nationally. We are currently waiting to hear the results of the first round of funding applications from the Government's new High Street Fund and there is also the possibility of funding from the Combined Authority. However, these would be big budgets for big plans. In the interim the

proposals under Item 8 would hopefully have some immediate impact and demonstrate the support and commitment Visit Ely/City of Ely Council now has.

Cllr Lindsay mentioned that there was some further money ear marked for town centres within the Council's budget and Mrs Harding said that this had been originally earmarked for signage and this could be looked at again as an overview of all city centre signage was overdue.

4. Appointment of Vice Chair

Cllr Denness proposed herself and Cllr C Whelan seconded this motion. Therefore, Cllr Denness is now the new Vice Chair. This was unanimously agreed by members.

5. Minutes of last Tourism and Town Centre Committee Meeting

Picking up on the Action/Recommendations, Mrs Harding confirmed that there was sufficient budget to commission the third phase of the Oliver Cromwell's House refurbishment (TTC15). Mrs Harding also provided an update on the Coach Parking position in that improved signage had been erected although the actual entrance to the coach parking site still needed some attention. Mrs Harding had been advised that Cllr Every would be taking this matter up with the East Cambs DC (TTC16).

The minutes of the last meeting held on the 9th April 2019 were agreed and signed as a true record.

6. To Review and Approve the Terms of Reference

In light of recent concerns from town centre businesses, it was suggested that the Terms of Reference should emphasis the role this committee had in town centre management more.

Action/Recommendation by Committee:

Mrs Harding to revise terms accordingly.

7. Budget Update

Mrs Harding explained that the grant for the refurbishment of Oliver Cromwell's House had yet to be received but was expected very shortly.

Action/Recommendation by Committee:

None.

8. Town Centre Initiatives

Mrs Harding recapped that there is now a specific budget for town centre initiatives. Already committed from this budget was the employment of a 15 hour per week City Centre Ranger, Kerry Edmundson-Brown who had started this week. A summary of her role is below:

- To be a visible presence in Ely's city centre
- To assist with the policing of the city centre thereby ensuring visitors and shoppers feel safe and secure
- To identify, report and follow up on any cleansing issues
- To facilitate the city's Shopmobility scheme
- To develop relationships with businesses in the city centre and feedback any complaints or concerns
- To assist in the delivery of events and/or projects and town centre initiatives.
- To welcome and nurture visitors and shoppers to the city centre
- To distribute information and literature and re-stock various Information Points

In addition, as of 1st May, we have signed up to a footfall counter so that we can now begin to obtain some statistical information on how our town centre is used as follows:

- To measure and benchmark the performance of our streets, retailers and leisure businesses using location behaviour insight.
- This can be benchmarked against national indices and local competitors (i.e. other towns)
- Measure each month how visitors use our town centre, how long they stay, where they travel from and where they go.
- Identify preferred brands of your audience that may be missing.
- Measure how our marketing campaigns and events impact on visitors' behaviours.

Mrs Harding also proposed that we ran a series of information and awareness events around environmental issues in order to highlight and increase the greenness of our city as well as increase vibrancy and vitality to the city over the summer:

- Themed event days in August within the town centre around environmental issues eg. Food, Water, Plastics, Transport etc
- Mixture of displays, information, freebies and activities from local businesses and organisations
- Promote the schemes that we already have
- Encourage ideas from public (Pledges/Wish Tree) to see what more we can do eg. Water Refill Scheme
- Links and sign posting to local businesses around specific themes

In line with a lot of other towns, Mrs Harding suggested that Ely could benefit greatly by the introduction of a Gift Card scheme. Gift Cards encourages advocacy, increases participation and promotes everything a place has to offer. This particular scheme does not require any additional work for the participating business as the Gift Card is treated in the same way as any Master card payment. We would need a minimum of 50 business in order to make it viable and is not limited to

retail business alone. Other city centre businesses such as restaurants, attractions, beauty parlours etc could be included.

Cllr Rouse, with the agreement of the Chair then lifted standard orders for a few minutes in order to receive direct feedback from the member of the public who has a city centre business. In principle it was felt that it was a good idea if it did not include any national brands and was solely for independents or smaller franchise businesses. They also had concerns around the expiry date.

Mrs Harding said that these were matters that could be addressed and probably had been by the other towns that have successfully implemented this scheme

Action/Recommendation by Committee:

To run the summer promotions around environmental issues.

To begin discussions with businesses to assess the appetite for introducing an Ely Gift Card.

9. Visit Ely Membership

In response to a comment raised at Full Council and for the benefit of the new councillors, Mrs Harding detailed the Visit Ely membership scheme.

- Entry in Visitor Guide (from £140)
- Entry on website (from £125)
- Engagement on Social Media as well as including dedicated posts/tweets
- Participation in any relevant competition/promotion
- Display of any marketing or event material at Tourist Information Centre and at Travel Shows that the Visit Ely team attend
- Ability to put your events on our What's On section which then feeds into our weekly e-newsletters
- Invitation to our Tourism Forums
- Opportunity to be involved in media and journalist visits/articles where appropriate

Unlike many other towns and cities, Visit Ely does not run a membership scheme whereby a membership fee was payable which then entitled the business/organisation to participate in a number of advertising and promotional activities at a discounted rate.

Traditionally, the scheme had been termed Tourism Partners and was a mix of accommodation providers, attractions and eats. During the last few years we have increased our partnership to those offering experiences, meeting spaces, leisure and retail. Thus, widening the appeal of Ely and the local area.

In essence, businesses had the choice to pay for Visit Ely's marketing services in much the same way as they would pay for an advert in the paper, entry onto a website or indeed a sponsored advert on Facebook.

Businesses who do not choose to pay for our advertising services are still supported via regular e-newsletters and invitations to participate in initiatives such as Eel Festival Weekend and

Christmas vouchers to support the Cathedral's Gift Fair. In addition, Mrs Harding hoped that the activities highlighted in her presentation under Item 8 further demonstrated the support provided to all city centre businesses.

Action/Recommendation by Committee:

None.

10. Health and Safety

Mrs Harding reported that there had been two incidents of visitors to Oliver Cromwell's House tripping on a particular step. A warning sign has since been put in place and no further incidents have occurred.

Action/Recommendation by Committee:

None.

11. Any Other Business

Cllr Rouse thanked the members of the public for attending and hoped that communications would now improve and offered to meet with them at any time, along with Mrs Harding and Cllr Warman, should they have any further issues.

Cllr Denness expressed concern about the works being carried out the back of Steeple Row as it was an eye sore. Cllr Rouse updated the group on the plans of the Ely Perspective group who had imminent improvement plans for this area as it was a key are for connecting the cathedral with the town centre.

Cllr Lindsey requested that Ely in Bloom be taken over by this committee. This suggestion was agreed by all members.

Action/Recommendation by Committee:

Mrs Harding to speak to the previous Working Party members of Ely in Bloom to seek advice as to what the scheme entails and how Visit Ely can take the initiative forward.

11. Date of Next Meetings

The next meeting was confirmed as Tuesday, 13th August 2019 at 6.45 pm.