

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE VEM COMMITTEE HELD IN THE CARNEGIE,
CAGE LANE, THETFORD ON WEDNESDAY 19th MAY 2021, AT 1.00 pm

Present:

The Mayor Councillor M S Robinson

Councillors:

B J Canham, D Crawford, T J Jermy, K H Parker, S N H Wright

Officers in attendance:

David Brooks VEM Officer, Tom Scott Venues Coordinator

Chris Crimmen Committee Secretary

MINUTES

1036/20	<u>DECLARATIONS OF ANY DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS</u> None.
1037/20	<u>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</u> Apologies were received from Councillors C Barreto and C Harvey.
1038/20	<u>MINUTES</u> RESOLVED: The minutes of the Committee's meeting held on 14th April 2021 received by Full Council on 27th April 2021 be confirmed as a true record and signed/initialled by the Committee Chairman.
1039/20	<u>GUILDHALL HERITAGE HUB</u> The VEM Officer reported that there had been issues with the contractor who was responsible for completing the external improvements to the Guildhall and after taking legal advice the Council had terminated the contract. The VEM Officer indicated the new contractor will finish the project by the end of June/early July. The VEM Officer reported a new Heritage and Events Officer has been appointed to start on 1 st June 2021. The new Officer has over 15 years' experience in a number of similar high-profile environments.
1040/20	<u>MARKETING REPORT</u> The Venues Coordinator provided an update for April 2021 with his Marketing report (see Appendix A) attached. He reported on the following and answered questions on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video Projects • Media Suite Completion • Rotunda Posters • Thetford Talent Show • Then & Now • Thetford Trim Trail • Monthly Observations • Guildhall Website Launch • Venues Bookings & Events • Social Data The committee agreed to extending "Talking Up Thetford" to the towns open spaces, Castle Hill, Barnham Cross and King's Gardens and the other tourist attractions that will be opening next month.
1041/20	<u>MARKET PLACE IMPROVEMENTS</u> The VEM Manager reported that the working group will be arranged to meet in next weeks as physical meetings have now resumed to what can be achieved and outline a plan for the way ahead. The Group should realise indicative costs have been above our tender threshold limits therefore depending on the final plan this will need to be the process we will initiate and/or out funding, investment, and sponsorship. Whilst

there is no funding immediately available the committee as when setting the budget, it was to achieve a 0% precept rise and therefore expenditure budgets are limited. It is hoped that from 21st June 2021 Covid 19 restrictions will ease, things could pick up quickly and income above our budget levels could be reinvested into special projects. It was agreed the officers would work with the Chairs of ALP, Finance and VEM to progress the item.

At this point Councillors D Crawford and K Parker joined the meeting.

1042/20 TTC OPEN SPACE COMMERCIALISATION REPORT

The VEM Officer asked councillors to receive a report on the possible developments of some of the urban open spaces. There followed a discussion:

- Fees and Application policy.
- Terms and Conditions.
- Current Hire Charges.
- The proposed changes to the Market Place to create a safe pedestrian space.
- King's House Gardens.

The report was noted and agreed by the committee that this report should form the basis of a specific planning process to next stage to develop areas of commercial potential. It was agreed officers would work with Chairs of ALP, Finance and VEM to progress the item.

1043/20 END OF YEAR FINANCIAL REPORT

The VEM Officer had circulated the financial report which had a positive outlook that been hit hard by the lockdown from March 20. On a positive note, he reported that most of the bookings that had been cancelled have been rebooked for date after the final lockdown has been lifted on 21st June 2021.

The VEM Officer reported on the new staff that were joining the council. It was agreed to have an agenda item where the new staff would join the first Venues and Communication meeting in June to present what they bring to the Council and outline the opportunities to improve income and opportunity. An action point was agreed for the committee to receive refresher training from Finance Officer regarding its Budget.

1044/20 VEM AGENDA FORWARD PLAN

The VEM Officer reported that the new committee meets for the first time on the 9th June 2021 and needs to identify the vision and strategic priorities going forward. The Terms of Reference states the committee should review:

- Annual Venue Hire Fees in July.
- Annual Market tolls in July.
- Budget setting 2022/23 in September/October/November
- Which ones are falling short of target?
- Set strategic Direction and operational objectives.
- Periodically review and reset the strategic plan.

The VEM Officer will start working on the strategic direction for the meeting on 9th June 2021

Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	
10 th	14 th	19 th	16 th	14 th	

	Website review (stage 3) To agree final layout & launch	Guildhall Operational and marketing plan (stage 2) Market Place Improvements and use. (Stage 2)	TTC Open space commercialisation report Market Place Improvements Development Plan (stage 3) Mobile catering and bar services.	<i>Market Place Improvements (stage 3)</i>	<i>Mobile Catering & bar services</i>	
1045/20	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT					
	The new staff should be the subject of a press release outlining the job they have been recruited to achieve for the Council. This would be an opportunity to showcase the venues that the Council have to offer.					
1046/20	COMMITTEE OFFICERS UPDATE					
	None.					

Chairman.

APPENDIX B
THETFORD TOWN COUNCIL
OPEN SPACES COMMERCIALISATION

Purpose & Current status:

Thetford Town Council own and manage several open spaces across the town.

There is an approved Open Spaces policy, part of which sets the hire charges and terms and conditions for Public hire.

The purpose of this report is to explore how we commercially promote our open spaces for events etc., what the charges are and are these realistic, how much do we currently generate from our Open Spaces hire and what possible additional options might be open the Town Council.

Aims:

To maximise the income potential of the TTC Open Spaces.

The Current Open Spaces Policy states:

The Purpose of the Open Space Policy:

- To encourage residents and visitors to use and enjoy Thetford's open spaces.
- Encourage activities that enhance the quality of life for visitors and encourage healthy living.
- To promote Thetford's strong historical, environmental heritage complemented by a vibrant contemporary culture.

Activities that will be considered.

- a) Events organised by registered charities for the purpose of raising money for local and national charities.
- b) Events organised by voluntary groups or organisations for the purpose of benefiting the local community and/or raising money for local and national charities.
- c) Commercial events of local, national, and international importance or significance that promote the Town to a wider audience and encourage visitors to Thetford.
- d) Events and activities that aim to enhance the environment of the park or open space, educate users, encourage participation, and promote the leisure activities or opportunities available.
- e) Civic events.

Prohibited Events

The Council will not give approval for events on its land of the following nature:

- a) Any event likely to provoke public disorder.
- b) Any event that includes the use of performing animals, except those which are normally regarded as domesticated in the United Kingdom (i.e., horses, dogs, cats, birds used in falconry demonstrations, caged birds, and rabbits), which may be used as an ancillary part of a performance. No live animals are to be used as prizes.
- c) Any event that would cast doubt on the integrity of the Council.
- d) Any event the Council believes may be of questionable public morality.
- e) Balloon and Chinese lantern releases are not permitted for environmental reasons.

Fees & Application Process

The Amenities Committee will have the discretion and ultimate decision on determining whether a proposed event falls within the programme exclusions.

Applications for small community events should be submitted where possible 6 weeks before the event. Large events should be submitted 12 weeks before the event. Events submitted outside the dates will be considered at the discretion of the Council.

Hire fees and service charges will be levied for the use of parks and open spaces and these fees will be reviewed and approved annually by the Amenities Committee. See Appendix A for list of charges.

Registered charities, non-profit making, and local community groups may be offered the hire of parks and open spaces for raising money for local and national charities at no charge following the approval of the Amenities Committee. Charges may be made for the use of staff, materials and equipment supplied by the Council during the event.

Income/donations derived from event hire fees will be re-invested into the provision, development and maintenance of parks and open spaces in Thetford.

Terms and Conditions

The hirer and will keep Thetford Town Council indemnified against all losses, claims, demands, actions, proceedings, damage, costs or expenses or other liability arising in any way from this licence.

The hirer must observe any directions that Thetford Town Council may make from time to time, governing their land.

The hirer at the hirers expense must immediately make good any damage to any part of the Council's land or any part of it.

Police must be made aware of your car parking arrangements and cones must be placed on the roads, around the Common in order that residents' drives are not blocked. Please note that there is no vehicle access to King's Street.

Council requires that event organisers comply with all relevant legislation relating to the control of noise and the protection of the immediate and local environment.

Organisers will be encouraged to work with local residents and the relevant authorities to minimise the impact of events on the local community. Any residents within the vicinity should have a letter posted through their door advising of the event, and a contact number to call for queries.

The protection of the park environment, wildlife and features will take precedence and will be considered when planning events. Where necessary the Council will secure a ground deposit from the organiser in advance for refuse removal and/or reinstatements and repairs following events.

In the case of severe weather creating very wet ground conditions, the Council reserves the right to cancel the event or require the event organiser to introduce ground protection measures to avoid excessive damage to the fabric of the park or open space. In the circumstances that it is necessary to cancel an event due to severe weather this will be done in consultation with the hirer, and the Council will not be liable for any costs. The decision to cancel an event due to severe weather will be taken by the Town Clerk in Consultation with the Mayor, whose decision will be final.

In the case of severe winds creating dangerous conditions associated with trees on site, the Council reserves the right to cancel the event or require the event organiser to cordon off areas where the public may be at risk.

Promoters and organisers of events remain responsible for the marketing and promotion of their event and shall be required to make adequate provision for it comply with the relevant licensing and planning legislation. Flyposting for events will not be permitted and the necessary permissions must be obtained for any promotional banners or posters erected.

Operating hours for events will be between 9am to 11pm (excluding set-up and set down).

Applications for events in parks and open spaces will be dealt with on a first come first served basis, excepting that recurring annual events will be given priority if they are staged on regular dates.

The Council will consider events on the basis of those permitted events and prohibited events as referred to above. References may be required and taken up where the content of an event needs further confirmation. The Council accepts no responsibility for the impact of refusing an event.

Event organisers cannot hold an event in the Council's parks and open spaces without the Council's written permission. This permission will be granted at the discretion of the Council and only following satisfactory completion of the Open Space application documents.

Evidence of adequate insurance and risk assessment will also be required. Organisers will be required to obtain and provide evidence to the Council of Public and Employers Liability Insurance to a minimum value of £10 million. For organisations that do not have this level of cover the Amenities officer has discretion to accept lower public liability coverage if this is approved by the Town Council's insurers.

Hirers must comply with all relevant Health and Safety Legislation and provide a site-specific risk assessment for any activities.

Hirers will be required to supply a copy of the child safeguarding policy or vulnerable adult's policy if relevant to the activities on site.

If collecting money, a Street Collection Permit must be obtained from Breckland District Council and a copy submitted to Thetford Town Council.

Current Hire Charges:

Open Spaces	Charity, schools, voluntary Groups & local non-profit organisations	Commercial Events
Sites	Donation	Charge (£)
Commons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Melford Common Barnham Common (Playing Field) 	Suggested Donation £20 small activities £50 larger activities	£275 + VAT £300 Deposit
King's Square <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small performance area 	Suggested Donation £20 small activities £50 larger activities	£150 + VAT £200 Deposit
King's Square	Suggested Donation	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large performance area 	£20 small activities £50 larger activities	£150+ VAT £200 Deposit
Market Place	Suggested Donation £20 small activities £50 larger activities	£150 + VAT £200 Deposit
Castle Park	Suggested Donation £20 small activities £50 larger activities	£150+ VAT £300 Deposit

Next steps & Future Options:

The VEM committee (to be the Venues & Communications committee from our next meeting) must understand and accept that it is the Amenities committee that has the responsibility for the hire of the designated open spaces within The Open spaces Policy, however, under the latest review of the TTC committee structure the Market Place was agreed by ALP and approved by Full Council to transfer the responsibility of the operational management of the space which should include the hire of the ‘open space’.

Therefore, the initial proposal is to omit the Market Place as part of the Open Spaces Policy.

It is my understanding in consultation with the Finance Dept. that there was only £500 generated from the hire of Open Spaces, this is undoubtedly due to the Covid 19 restrictions, however the annual budget set was only £1635.

Market Place:

The consensus of the public survey conducted in autumn of 2019 prior to the commencement of the Guildhall works, provided 82% support to the question – ‘**should we close the Market Place as a public car park to create a safe pedestrianised space for events and enjoyment**’.

There was also an overwhelming majority by VEM councillors to pursue this direction once the Guildhall external works have been completed, ideas to install additional lighting, more appropriate seating areas around the perimeter of the Market Place and within designated areas that may serve the Guildhall and, under additional licence, to the Red Lion.

The successful NHLF grant application submitted to fund the improvements to the Guildhall and parts of the Market Place (namely reinstatement of the Water Trough) we are committed to delivering a number of annual events in addition to the current weekly Markets on Tuesday & Saturday; this will be part of the responsibilities of the Heritage & Events Officer role who commences their 2-year funded employment as from 1st June 2021.

The ARC in Bury St. Edmunds is a space that regularly has events such as Arts & Craft stalls, additional food vendors, family activities, seasonal stalls, and car launches, all of which we will consider for the Market Place going forward in addition to arts, music, and outdoor theatre productions.

We are already scheduling events on the Market Place in the forthcoming months, such as a VJ Day event in conjunction with the Chairman of Breckland District Council on Sunday 15th August,

activities as part of Heritage Open Day on Sundays 12th & 19th September as well as a Christmas Market on Sunday 12th December.

We are currently exploring further summer events with the Heritage & Events Officer prior to her starting the role with the Town Council, enabling us to 'hit the ground running.' It is hoped that we can deliver at least two additional events during August weekends as well as family-based activities during the school holidays.

We will be open to commercial hires as this report is based on furthering those opportunities and will initiate a marketing campaign to advertise those opportunities.

The Market Place is one of two urban spaces within the town centre and therefore should command higher footfall so we should propose a review of the current Open Spaces Policy charges for this area as I feel there is a lot more flexibility within the space than that of other green open spaces.

Current charges:

- ***Charity, schools, voluntary Groups & local non-profit organisations = Suggested Donation - £20 small activities / £50 larger activities.***
- ***Commercial Events = £150 + VAT (£200 Deposit)***

We need to designate the space that equates a small activity and large activity. To hire the Market Place for fees such as £20 or £50 if even for a not-for-profit type of status the fee agreed by ALP is far too low.

We should also equate in terms of Commercial hire of the Market Place to that of the Carnegie hire fees, therefore a day rate for activities such as product launches running from 8am-4pm = £200. + VAT (£200 deposit).

Additional ideas & opportunities:

On a recent tour of the TTC open spaces, the VEM Chair & VEM Officer as well as the Mayor elect for part of the review, noted a number of possible opportunities that TTC could look to develop as commercially operated in-house or external leased options.

Castle Park:

Castle Park has a high footfall as a well-used area for families to gather and enjoy.

There is a children's play park and a recently installed adult trim trail, whilst the steps to the top of Castle Mound met with initial negative responses, it has enabled a great many people to climb to the viewing area at the top, and enabled much positive public opinion in recent months, this in itself is a real attraction.

There is a public toilet located at the Park (cleaning outsourced to external contractor).

With the many numbers of families that regularly use the park, it does lack one feature, that is a refreshment kiosk. There have been over the years a number of public enquiries as to whether they could set up a small kiosk and on very hot days Castle Park is certainly en-route for the Ice Cream vendor. But there are more often than not no real facilities to service families.

There is a number of quick and easy installation options on the market, namely refurbished shipping containers, which have been the basis of many larger retail and hospitality formats springing up across the country, in urban environments such as Shoreditch, Wembley, York etc.

As the examples below show, these can be very tastefully modified and at reasonable costs.

Cost of installation with utilities already on site in terms of water, waste and electricity could be in the region of £9,000 incl. delivery (left-hand image) and the £15,000 incl. delivery (right-hand image).



Obviously, the left-hand image has been shown as a garden office but can easily be created as an open fronted trading kiosk.

There would be some additional installation costs to the purchase price need for the cross linking of the current utilities, but this does not include the reduction on the servicing and consumables costs associated with the Castle Park toilets if the lease of the unit also includes the cleaning and servicing of the Castle Park toilet.

Lower Market

We have talked about this space a number of times, however if you located 3 x the left-hand image container above it would be more conducive to the independent retailers, the initial layout would be £27k.

If the retail monthly rental £500 p/month = £6,000. per annum x 3 = £18k total for 3 units this means by month 18 we have made the return on the container purchase value and by month 20 the units would be providing a return on investment and creating an investment back into the ongoing development/upkeep of the surrounding area and building.

Market Place:

The Market Place is a much more valuable space if it is not used as a general Car Park.

The use of the Market Place in more innovative and creative ways is vital to the success of the Guildhall Heritage Hub.

The Guildhall refurbishments and improvements allow the space to be accessed by a much wider audience, the reconfiguration of the internal rooms provides an opportunity to generate higher income from a wider breadth of hire opportunities, the tea-room has been remodelled and is

serviced from an adjoining kitchenette allowing an improved menu, whilst the use of the largest space for intimate and quirky events can really enhance to attraction of the Guildhall.

However, as said the Market Place also plays an integral part in the Guildhall success as it cannot be isolated in the location by a car park outside the front entrance. It creates a barrier to the entrance, and also precludes the opportunity to creating an outside space for the Tea Room operation and increasing the overall footfall attraction by additional events on the main Market Place space.

The Market Place itself can also generate actual income by providing a marketable space for product launches, specialist Markets, family entertainment (kiddies fairground rides) street food vendors, etc.

If we commissioned events or delivered part of our Town event programme incorporating the Market Place this would also allow use to utilize the opportunity for sales of food and beverages.

Examples:

- Street Food Fayre (July/August)
- Night Market / Music (July / August)
- Family Fun Days (Whitsun, July/August, Oct ½ term)
- Heritage Festival (September)
- Christmas Lights switch on (November)
- Christmas Market (December)

Kings House Gardens Coach House:

Kings House Gardens is not one of TTC designated open spaces, however the Coach House within the gardens is a space that is currently rented to Thetford Town Council by G W Staniforth Trust. It is used as a storage space since the move out of the Works Yard at Telford Way, generally considered a stop gap solution while the new Works Yard was developed at the Cemetery.

The Cemetery works yard has undergone a number of improvements namely the installation of several containers used for storage of equipment and we are about to undertake the installation of a tarmac surface and improvements to the Staff welfare facilities namely upgrades to toilets and rest area.

This means that we will have to decide to relinquish our rental agreement with GW Staniforth Trust as we will not need the space for storage of equipment or look to formalise the rental agreement and undertake some improvement works to the internal areas to enable a more commercial use within the Gardens.

There are a number of opportunities such as.

Creating a refreshment outlet, the gardens are being used more and more in terms of events, further leased spaces within the Gardens that are attracting greater footfall and subsequent activities, this in turn creates a public awareness of the Gardens and therefore use is increasing.

The refreshment space could also offer the opportunity to facilitate additional activity such as –

- i. Beverage and simple food outlet – confectionary and ice creams.
- ii. Hire of activity equipment.

- iii. Wedding Photographic package – guest drinks and canapes.

Thetford Netball Club, the leaseholder of the former Tennis Pavilion, has 100 playing members in the club, many of them are junior members. This means that there are also a similar or larger numbers of parents/ supporters that attend matches so a ready-made opportunity to service these visitors with refreshments.

We are developing an outdoor Theatre performance programme with local group Magic Floor Productions with 4 key productions per year – this year will be.

- I. Oliver (29 & 30 May)
- II. Alice in Wonderland (2 dates in August)
- III. Out of the Shadows (Halloween)
- IV. A Christmas Carol (11 & 12 December)

We will also work with other activity providers and touring theatre companies to enable a real variety of options for people to attend and enjoy. Therefore, we will generate a footfall that can be commercially served with the proposed operation.

The costs of building refurbishment have got to be explored but would require at least an expression of interest to develop by the Committee before valuable Officer time could be attributed to this project.

Conclusion:

Although the committee is not being asked to decide on any one idea that has been identified, however the committee should be asked as to whether this is an area that the new Venues & Communications committee should be asked to pursue in terms of further development and costing a formal proposal in the future.