

CONGLETON TOWN MEETING

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 9 May 2024

At The Town Hall, High Street, Congleton, CW12 1BN

Present: Mayor of Congleton, Councillor Rob Moreton (Chair)

Presenters: Cllr Amanda Martin, Jo and Mark (Urban Imprint), Mike Potts (Gazer Agency)
Cllr Robert Douglas, Cllr Suzy Firkin, Cllr Kay Wesley.

Panel – Chairs of Committees: Cllr Kay Wesley (Community), Cllr Suzy Firkin (Environment), Cllr Robert Douglas (Finance and Policy), Cllr David Brown (Personnel), Cllr Amanda Martin (Planning), Cllr Suzie Akers Smith (Town Hall and Assets) and David McGifford, Chief Officer.

One member of the Press
39 members of the public

INTRODUCTION

The meeting is convened under the provision of the Local Government Act 1972 SEC (1) and 13(1) and due notice has been given in the local press

1. The Chief Officer informed the room about the procedures for the evening before the Town Mayor, Cllr Rob Moreton started to chair the meeting. The Mayor highlighted a few key events within his Mayoral Year, which was due to finish on 16 May.
2. Noted that the Minutes of the 2023 Annual Town Meeting are on the Town Council website.

3. Update on Congleton's Neighbourhood Plan.

[Link to Presentation slides – Neighbourhood Plan](#)

Cllr Amanda Martin, Chair of Planning Committee explained the background to the draft Neighbourhood Plan and Jo and Mark from Urban Imprint explained the current process working through the realms of evidence and consultation that is informing the redrafting of the draft Congleton Neighbourhood Plan (NP) and the revisions ahead of Regulation 14. Planning that Reg 14 will be later this summer.

Questions were raised:

- about the influence that CEC can have over the NP (CEC will be legally responsible for the plan and it needs to conform with the Local and National Planning Policy)
- Confirm that Congleton Town Council will remain responsible for the consultation on regulation 14 of the plan.
- Confirm that a planning officer needs to refer to both the CEC Local Plan and the Town Council Neighbourhood Plan when considering a planning application.

4. Totally Locally Congleton

[Link to Presentation Slides – Totally Locally Congleton](#)

Mike Potts from the Gazer Agency explained about the inspiration and aspiration around the Totally Locally Congleton project. A project to help local independent businesses to market themselves and to encourage local people to support local shops and businesses.

There were no questions

5. Impact on Local Authority Finance

[Link to Presentation Slides – Impact of Local Authority Finance](#)

Cllr Robert Douglas spoke about Congleton Town Council's finances and the pressures on local government.

Questions were raised around:

- If CTC were to take on services from CEC would that be double taxation – could we see our share of CEC tax reduced?
- What services/ assets does CEC have in Congleton that the Town Council could take over - potentially green space at the back of the Town Hall or rearrange space in the library?
- A Question was raised about cost of running the Town Hall – especially heating and lighting
- Question raised about why couldn't all the various trusts in Congleton combine to make it easier for those seeking funding (all have their own constitutions and reasons for existing)
- Some people wanted to see a return to Cheshire County Council and Congleton Borough Council – it was left to them to raise a petition.

6. A Green Congleton

[Link to Presentation Slides - A Greener Congleton](#)

Cllr Suzy Firkin, Chair of the Environment Committee spoke about the work that the Town Council is doing to reduce its carbon footprint and increase biodiversity

- Concern raised about who will take care of all the trees being planted once they grown beyond the care of the Town Council. (When planted on CEC land they become the responsibility of CEC which is why they are included in the consultation.
- Concern raised about the funds that CTC will need to put towards the decarbonisation grant and questioning whether it was worth it. Confirmed that this year is an exploratory year to ensure that plans work and will be a good investment. Round of applause given for the work taken to secure a £4*** grant)

7. Equal Access for All in Congleton

[Link to Presentation Equal Access in Congleton](#)

Cllr Kay Wesley, Chair of the Community Committee spoke about the need to improve access in Congleton for all our society. People living with a disability should be able to access events, transport, shops, communications. It's a big issue and can't be solved overnight – but we need to work towards this goal with the new Equal Access group.

- Question raised about the lack of public toilets, both accessible and general in the Town Centre. CTC is aware and trying to resolve the issue with partners

8. Open Forum and Debate

- Question raised about trees planted on land behind a member of the audience's house who is concerned that no-one is taking responsibility for them.** Action: - Chief Officer will look into issue and get back to them
- The household waste bins have not been emptied in North Street for 7 weeks – Cheshire East not deploying smaller vehicles.** Action – CTC to speak with CEC Council. Also an article in the next newsletter.
- Why are builders not honouring infrastructure agreements? Answer** – these are legal agreements between the builders and Cheshire East. The Town Council has discussions with Cheshire East about S106 and we do another check on the list and see where we may be able to add pressure.
- Why are potholes filled but not sealed as they used to be – Answer** – more often than not the pot holes are filled as a quick fix to allow the road to be open – CEC programme more sustainable works when funding allows.
- Why is CMQ in Mill Street being faced with chipboard – it needs to be renovated.**
Answer: The reason for the boarding on Mill Street is to protect the current buildings and the adjacent land, primarily for health and safety reasons and security. The current development of the Market Quarter is phase one and they have now put in an application for phase 2 which regenerates the areas you have mentioned
- Please can you explain what is happening to Moody Hall? Answer:**
It is in private ownership and its condition is a concern. We have met with the owner and Cheshire East Council Conservation Officers to try and help move this development along – the main issues surround the retention of the heritage assets

or features within the building. Within the last 12 months Cheshire East Council have issued and enforced 2 urgent works notices against the owner to protect the building.

g) **Why doesn't Congleton Town Council purchase Bradshaw House and allow the museum to use it? Answer:** When Bradshaw House was put on the Market we worked in partnership with the museum to seek grants to support their relocation. We submitted a proposal to Cheshire East Council to acquire Bradshaw House with the museum becoming the tenant. Unfortunately, our bid was not accepted and Bradshaw House was ultimately sold to another bidder. We know that Bradshaw House is being transformed into an assisted living location and its heritage is protected during this process.

h) **What is happening with Capital Walk and when will it reopen? Answer**
We understand that Capital Walk was closed in September 2023 as it did not meet fire regulations, we believe that this is still the case. We have had a discussion with the owner with regards to this matter and about the public toilets which have been closed for over a year. With regards to the toilets, all I can say is there are issues with the lease which are still to be resolved.

i) **How can the Council and other organisations ensure that people with auditory problems are catered for?** The Town Council has hearing loops in both of its meeting rooms. We are working with the Equal Access Group to discover other ways to make all aspects of the Congleton community more accessible for those with hearing loss.

The meeting closed at 8.38pm