

WEST MERSEA TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 7 NOVEMBER 2024

In attendance:

Cllr S Weaver, Mayor	Cllr D Baker	Cllr D Boylan
Cllr N Hinderwell	Cllr R Jenkins	Cllr T Webster
Petra Palfreyman, Locum Clerk	Cllr John Jowers (ECC)	Cllr Dr Martin Parsons (CCC)
19 members of the public		

24/240 RECORDING OF MEETING

Chairman requested anyone present to identify their intention to record the meeting.

Cllr Hinderwell, Cllr Webster, the Locum Town Clerk and one member of the public confirmed they would be recording the meeting. The office recording device was also used.

24/241 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Greenleaf & Cllr Powling, City Cllr Davidson. A vote of acceptance was taken with all in favour.

24/242 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Hinderwell declared a non-pecuniary interest as he is a member of the West Mersea Tennis Club.

24/243 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

MOP 1 – was pleased the Council will consider VG 241 South as the statutory authority.

MOP 2 – is representing Mersea Island Environmental Alliance, working for green justice to protect the Blackwater Estuary and Mersea’s environment when actions threaten public health and our local eco system, such as the impact of new housing developments on the sewage infrastructure. Colchester City planners have not considered the environmental impact of more human waste on the estuary from the Sanderling Reach and Dawes Lane developments. Concerns raised in May 2023 were not addressed by WMTC and in March 2024, the Food Safety agency issued a formal warning based on 2021 Sanitary Survey and the findings stated that more development would lead to higher bacterial loads in our coastal waters and threatens public health and the local economy. This was not addressed later in the year by WMTC or Colchester City Council and the resident now urges the Council to act and represent the rules and concerns of the residents. A meeting will be arranged with the Council to discuss this.

MOP 3 – Quoted from Colchester City Council senior planners that West Mersea has high level opportunities at settlement level. West Mersea has a high level and a good range of services and facilities. The built-up area is one of the largest in the district and has potential opportunities for growth to provide in infrastructure. The debate is the same as the last Local Plan when the Council took the view that the only way it would improve infrastructure would be to accept the development of 350 dwellings. Also, there are issues with climate changes and rising sea levels and surges and the consequences. The resident requested a written report at the next meeting with the Councils response to the Colchester City Council emerging Local Plan and climate change issues.

MOP4 - mentioned inappropriate conduct at Council meetings, poor behaviour at Council meetings, Freedom of Information request and S106 monies.

MOP 5 – expressed concerns about the large amount of earth on the Dawes Lane site, with Stable Close residents becoming concerned it will be a new site for a skate park. Also offered to send a list of the planting and asked who will landscape the site, and will it be what is needed in that location.

To receive reports from County and City Councillors

Cllr John Jowers

- ECC Cabinet member Tom Cunningham is investing another £24M as well as the current £15M on road maintenance. Also, a request for curbing of St Peters Rd and Mersea Avenue. The East Mersea Road is almost completed.
- The Local Plan is under review, so WMTC needs to review the Neighbourhood Plan.
- Sewage works were upgraded many years ago at a cost of approx. £3M, with a consequence of more houses.
- Mersea Waterside plan was created in 1986. We got permission to treble the size of the car park in Coast Road, which is unlikely if it was a village green.
- Devolution is coming. Effectively control goes to the Mayor of Essex as there will not be a city council.

Cllr Dr Martin Parsons

- The new recycling scheme has been approved but will not start until 2026.
- Winter fuel allowance will only be paid if you have pension credit. ECC will provide support to help people apply for this.
- £1000 Locality budget towards speeding available.
- The water cycle study will determine whether there is enough water in the area for the end-to-end process. This is carried out for the Local Plan.
- Sea level rises are under the remit of the Environment Agency, along with ECC Flood management agency and CCC for shoreline management plan.

24/244 To confirm minutes of the Council Meeting of 9 September 2024 – Matters arising

This item was deferred as the incorrect version of the minutes have been published.

24/245 To confirm minutes of the Council Meeting of 10 October 2024 – Matters arising

It was resolved unanimously to accept the minutes of 10 October 2024.

Proposed: Cllr Webster, Seconded: Cllr Jenkins. All in favour.

24/246 To consider Planning Applications received and to receive notifications of Planning Decisions

Planning applications

(a) 242066

Removal of existing conservatory with proposed single storey rear extension.

70 St Peters Road, West Mersea

It was resolved that consent be granted in respect of this application. Please refer to West Mersea Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan.

(b) 242074

Part change of use from shop store to Pizza takeaway area.

Island Supermarket, 46 High Street, West Mersea

This Council has no comment to make.

(c) 242146

Infill extension to existing property, 2 storey extension with extended balcony and single storey rear extension replacing existing conservatory. 21 Shears Crescent, West Mersea

It was resolved that consent be granted in respect of this application. Please refer to West Mersea Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan.

(d) 242147

Proposed 2 storey rear extension and single storey rear extension with renovation works to existing outbuildings. 25 Windsor Rod, West Mersea

It was resolved that consent be granted in respect of this application. Please refer to West Mersea Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan.

Planning decisions

Applications passed

(a) 241675

Application for variation of condition 2 (drawings) following grant of planning permission 240513. 15 Firs Chase, West Mersea

(b) 241658

Demolition of existing garage and construction of two storey side extension.
6 New Captains Road, West Mersea

(c) 241705

Application for variation of condition 4 (hours of opening/operation) and 5 (amplified music) following grant of planning permission (240596).
West Mersea Yacht Club, 116 Coast Road, West Mersea

(d) 241808

Single storey front extension with fenestration and new windows.
7 Blackwater Drive, West Mersea

(e) 241794

2no. shipping containers for storage of sports equipment for Mersea Island Rugby Football Club. Temporary approved under application 230977.
Glebe Recreation Ground, Colchester Road, West Mersea

24/247 To receive a finance update

Finance Report provided by Cllr Jenkins, Chairman of Finance & Strategy Committee.

Bank balances	Amount £	Statement date
NS & I	173,411	11 th July
Barclays current account	256,791	5 th November
Unity current account	23,051	5 th November
Prepaid burials savings acct	50,310	
VAT contingency savings acct	100,793	
Total	604,356	

Income Projection and Shortfall

Income after 6 months is £132,345 under the annual target. Most budgeted income is likely to come in around where predicted, although we have a few debtors to chase up; the exception is NEPP where the prediction of nett funds after the VAT and costs is likely to be around £100,000 in total – a shortfall of £30,000. Burial income is some £8,000 short owing to this figure having been included in error in last year's income. Add to this the VAT bill for previous years (£88,466) and we have some £127,000 to fund from reserves, or savings in planned expenditure, or a combination of the two.

Expenditure

Expenditure by cost centre (see Running Budget) is roughly in line with expectations with 5 months of the year to go. However, to help alleviate the impact of the income shortfall and VAT bill we could look at the budgeted spend and agree to defer some of the projects/spend into next year.

Examples were given in last month's report, they are:

Play equipment	£17,000
French drains	£6,000
Bike ramps	£3,000
Feldy tear drop	£9,000
Sinking Fund cemetery	£5,000
Cemetery entrance	£10,000
Christmas lighting	£9,000
White lining	£6,000
Footpath clearance	£4,000
Water bailiff	£25,000
Total	£94,000

This is not an exact science as there are so many variables. However, we are now beginning to see the end of most of the long running issues; this plus the Edge management system is now up to date so we can more clearly understand where we are against budget. When the RFO is appointed, we can start to utilise Edge to its full potential.

We need to ensure that all our debtors pay within the financial year and if we see any shortfalls in income stream we need to take further measures to control our expenditure.

November is the time to start to draft our 2025/6 budget – could all Councillors please consider –

1. What new items, if any, they would like to consider for next year.
2. What price increases, if any, they would like to see e.g. allotments.
3. Which of the current projects could be dropped or deferred.

The Chancellor's budget putting up Employers' NI contributions will add some £6,000 to our costs and there will be general inflation to consider on most of our costs.

24/248 To consider adding additional signatories to the bank accounts

It was agreed unanimously to add all of the Finance Committee members to the bank accounts
Proposed: Cllr Webster, Seconded: Cllr Weaver. All in favour.

24/249 To discuss and agree to a suggested donation of £50 to the Royal British Legion for Remembrance Day Poppy wreath

It was agreed unanimously to donate £50 to the Royal British Legion for the Remembrance Day Poppy wreath. Proposed: Cllr Jenkins, Seconded: Cllr Hinderwell. All in favour.

22/250 To agree the legal fees for the Tennis Club lease of between £750 and £1,000 plus VAT and disbursements

It was agreed by a majority to agree the Tennis Club legal fees within the parameters given.
Proposed: Cllr Jenkins, Seconded: Cllr Boylan. Abstained: Cllr Hinderwell.

22/251 To discuss a quote for £360 including VAT, from the Tennis Club for repairs to the wire fence

Following discussion, **it was agreed** by a majority that the Council would agree to pay for this work but require 3 quotes to ensure value for money is sought. Proposed: Cllr Webster, Seconded: Cllr Baker. Abstained: Cllr Hinderwell. Against: Cllr Jenkins.

24/252 To discuss and agree a quote for PAT testing at the Council Office and Council Depot

Following discussion, the quote for £140 from CJW Pat Testing **was agreed** by a majority.
Proposed: Cllr Weaver, Seconded: Cllr Boylan. Abstain: Cllr Webster.

24/253 To discuss and agree the format for adding audio recordings to the website

Cllr Hinderwell provided an update about the costs and consequences of uploading recordings of meetings to the website. **It was agreed** that further costs would be obtained.

24/254 To discuss and agree the quotation for roof repairs on High Street toilets

It was agreed by a majority to go ahead with the repairs for the roof at the High Street toilets.
Proposed: Cllr Jenkins, Seconded: Cllr Boylan. Abstain: Cllr Webster.

24/255 To discuss and agree the quotations for deep cleans in High Street, Coast Road and Willoughby toilets

The quotation of £1190 to deep clean the toilets in High Street, Coast Road and Willoughby **was agreed** unanimously. Proposed: Cllr Webster, Seconded: Cllr Baker. All in favour.

24/256 To discuss and consider writing a list of current projects and outstanding actions, set Terms of Reference and agree a priority list

The Council **agreed** unanimously the need to arrange a meeting to review the current projects, outstanding actions, set a priority list and agree Terms of Reference. Proposed: Cllr Hinderwell, Seconded: Cllr Baker. All in favour.

24/257 To consider a letter received from a resident – VG241 South and agree next actions

Following discussion, **it was agreed** by a majority to go ahead with the registered plan for Village Green 241 South. Proposed: Cllr Webster, Seconded: Cllr Hinderwell. Abstain: Cllr Jenkins.

24/258 To discuss and agree a format for answering Freedom of Information requests

The Council discussed the number of requests received and currently in hand and **it was agreed** that a log of requests should be held, the ICO should be contacted for any matters outstanding and a timeline agreed. The Clerk and councillors will liaise to arrange this.

The Council agreed to extend the Council meeting to 9.30pm

24/259 To consider setting dates for committee meetings to reduce the impact on full council meetings and allow the committees to focus on their projects and issues

Cllr Webster requested that chairmen of committees consider arranging committee meetings for the New Year so that Council meetings are shorter and can focus on generic local matters. Cllr Jenkins requested that all committees meet before 12 December 2024 to discuss their committee budgets.

24/260 To receive an update about the Dawes Lane Open Space

Mersea Homes advised the current position as confirmed by Colchester City Council (CCC), is that the open space will all go to a management company, unless CCC agree to amend the current s106 as offered back in April. Mersea Homes have asked their solicitors to consider whether it is possible to delay the decision to give WMTC additional time and await their response.

Colchester planners confirmed they have now heard back from their solicitor who has looked through the whole open space schedule in the legal agreement. The solicitor has confirmed that there is no opportunity to compel the developers to pass the POS to CCC or it's nominee via the existing Section 106 agreement. CCC asked if WMTC are interested in taking the land via the Deed of Variation as that offer is still available. If WMTC do want the POS, CCC will proceed on that basis, and that will give WMTC the ability to negotiate the terms of the DOV as we would be party to it. If WMTC do not want the land on that basis, CCC will proceed with the Deed of Variation to deal with the matter of 'First Homes' only.

Following discussion, the Council **agreed** unanimously that the position is to wait and see if Mersea Homes are prepared to extend their time frame and make a decision based on that outcome. The clerk was advised to write to Colchester planners and make them aware of the current position, proposing that CCC suggests that Mersea Homes prepare a Deed of variation in relation to the affordable homes, as this is a CCC matter and not a WMTC matter.

Proposed: Cllr Webster, Seconded: Cllr Weaver. All in favour.

24/261 VE Day 80

(a) To receive an update from the Working Group

Cllr Weaver gave a report with the current plans for the VE Day 80 celebrations on 8 May 2025. A flag will be raised at the Council office in the morning and St Peters & St Pauls church bells will ring at 6.30pm. On Victoria Esplanade car park, it is proposed there will be a party atmosphere with music, entertainment, stalls, activities and food, similar to the D-Day celebrations this year. The beacon will be lit at 9.30pm.

(b) To agree Terms of Reference for the Working Group

The Terms of Reference, as previously circulated, were **agreed** unanimously.

Proposed: Cllr Webster, Seconded: Cllr Baker. All in favour.

24/262 To note the government consultation paper about remote council meetings and recommend councillors respond

The clerk advised councillors of a government consultation regarding remote council meetings and where to find the consultation to respond with individual views.

Meeting closed at 9.20pm.