

Minutes of the Meeting of the OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE held in Rickards Hall at 8.03pm on Monday 24 July 2017

Present: Cllrs T Bryant (Chairman), J Barnett (Vice-chairman), R Davison, A Layland, M McArthur, S McGregor, M Robson and B Todd

In attendance: C Lane - Clerk

There were no members of the public and no press present.

Prior to the formal business of the meeting, an extra ordinary planning meeting had been held.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr J Woollorton was absent.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, OR PREDETERMINATIONS

None.

The Chairman closed the meeting

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None.

The Chairman re-opened the meeting

4. TO RECEIVE AND SIGN MINUTES OF THE OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE 5 June 2017

Resolved: that the minutes be signed by the committee Chairman as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

5. TO RECEIVE ANALYSIS OF THE OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE'S RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS TO 30 June 2017

Members noted the position for the financial year.

6. CORRESPONDENCE

6.1 Resident re: tree works request, Cemetery

Members considered the request from a resident requesting that the height of the Turkey Oak adjacent to the Wall of Remembrance be reduced, and advising that the English Oak next to it (1653a) contains a lot of dead wood and growth on the lower trunk.

Resolved: following advice from the Council's tree surgeon, to accept his quotation for an aerial inspection, crown clean and removal of dead wood, removal of epicormal base growth up to and including primary branches to the height of 5m. on the English oak and reporting on condition of the tree at a cost of £450+VAT

Resolved: to advise the resident that as works to the Turkey Oak are ascetic rather than necessary should he wish to arrange for an experienced tree surgeon to carry out works to reduce, not remove, the Turkey Oak he could do so, providing the proposed works, appropriate insurances and Risk Assessments were provided to, and approved by, the Council in advance.

7. HEAD GROUNDSMAN'S REPORT

7.1 Routine and seasonal work

Members noted the groundstaff work during June/July.

7.2 Groundstaff activity

Members noted that the selective weed killing has been completed at the recreation ground and Mowshurst football pitches. The new bin has been put in at the REC play area and the one at the top of Stangrove Park had been rescued from the pond and reinstated.

Six pitches had been marked on the Recreation Ground for an Ultimate Frisbee which had proved extremely popular. They are returning later in the month for further competitions. The marking out and putting goals up for football will begin at the end of July. The summer headstone check has been completed with two head stones laid down with notices attached. The quarterly Health & Safety report has been completed and Cllr Alan Layland will oversee this until a replacement Head Groundsman is in place.

The Committee wished to formally thank Lance Thompsett for his hard work and excellent leadership of the team over the last 10 years. He was an excellent Head Groundsman and an asset to the Council.

8. OPEN SPACES BUSINESS FOR DECISION

8.1 To receive the Burial Report

Members noted the burial report below and that the electronic version of the Cemetery records had been completed.

June 2017

July 2017

One interment of ashes

Two interments of ashes

8.2 To consider Year 2 works within the 10 year Maintenance Plan Churchyard Walls

Members noted that, the sudden death of the surveyor carrying out the survey of the Churchyard/Market Yard boundary meant that the Council will not be receiving a report and recommendations. Another surveyor had been approached and is meeting with the Building Managers, in the absence of the Deputy Clerk, to undertake the work. Until this is done, the details of the work to be costed will not be known.

Advice is being sought on other issues identified with the Churchyard walls, during a recent Quinquennial Church inspection, which include a section of the eastern wall which has "blown" at the base, and approx 7m in need of rebuilding. There is some spot re-pointing necessary, and some of the rough coping stones to re-set, on the south wall as well.

It is hoped that the new surveyor will be able to provide separate reports on these issues alongside those required in the 10-year plan for Year 2, so that costings can be obtained.

Hard Landscape

Works had commenced early on the scheduled hard landscape works. The Building Manager is monitoring them in the absence of the Deputy Clerk. The removal and installation of chestnut fencing at Forge Green allotments has been put on hold as there is confusion over the ownership of the fence, and the practicalities of working around the shrubbery.

Playground repairs

Play maintenance companies were asked to quote for the work, planned for this year. One declined to undertake the work, with two providing costings which members considered. Some works are planned for Spittals Cross as it is unlikely there will be changes there within the next couple of years.

Resolved: to commission Safe Play to carry out the proposed works with the exception of the wooden fence at the Recreation Ground where further quotes will be sought.

8.3 To arrange July annual monitoring visit and update the Action Plan

Cllr Trevor Bryant went round before the Head Groundsman left and the updated action plan which was circulated. In the absence of the Deputy Clerk and Head Groundsman it has not been possible to confirm what works have been completed.

8.4 To review the Open Spaces risk assessment

The current assessment was circulated, no future actions have been identified and members did not have any proposals for any additional measures, actions required or future actions to add.

8.5 To review the Open Spaces asset register to identify items due for replacement 2018

The items identified as due, or past their replacement date, on the council's asset register were listed they will generally be replaced when they become unreliable or need major repair. A Stihl strimmer and a small petrol mower have been ordered and delivery is awaited.

Resolved: that the new Head Groundsman and Chairman or Vice Chairman of Open Spaces should be asked to attend SALTEX, at the NEC in Birmingham 1/2 November, to review the latest products and developments and to inform the November committee meeting and the budget-setting process.

8.6 To consider Groundstaff team structure review

With the unexpected resignation of the Head Groundsman, and without knowing who will be taking on this role, this item is somewhat in limbo. Once the interviews have taken place it will be vital for the review of the team to be swiftly carried out. This summer it was not possible to find agency staff willing to take on a short term, part time role and ultimately this was resolved by directly employing a third temporary part time groundsman. All three contracts expire at the end of October.

Resolved: that Cllrs M McArthur, A Layland and B Todd should assist the Clerk with this task.

It was noted that as the unskilled groundsman has injured his hand in a fall at the weekend and dislocated his thumb, he is likely to off work for some weeks.

8.7 To receive an update on Great Stone Bridge Water Meadows

Members noted that no work has been carried out in the GSBT Water Meadows during the spring and summer so as to allow the flora and fauna breeding and growing cycles to continue unhindered and that Management work will re-commence in October, beginning with the Radnor House School visit to the meadows on the 4 October when the pupils will undertake restoration of the damaged / stolen bird nesting boxes, and the removal and stacking of damaged trees and branches. The ETC Ground Staff and members of the North West Kent Countryside Partnership would also be in attendance to assist with chainsaws and other expertise. Town Councillors were asked to advise Cllr Pearman if they wished to join the session

The Clerk was asked to advised Cllr Pearman that if the staffing position had not improved the groundstaff might not be available.

8.8 To consider tree work

A small branch fell from one of the trees in Stangrove Park and caused minor damage to the fence between the park and Riverdale Court.

Resolved: to commission works to ensure that further branches do not fall onto parked vehicles. The works appear to be of a minor nature but the tree surgeon will assess the condition of the tree when he has climbed it. The cost of the works are £300 +Vat.

A second resident contacted the MP Tom Tugendhat requesting the removal of an established tree on Forge Green, that was cutting out light and overhanging their property. The owners have expressed concerns that the roots will get into the foundations of their property and/or damage the drains, which they expect the Council to be liable for if it is not felled. Tom Tugendhat MP has requested this Council to arrange for the tree concerned to be removed.

Resolved: to advise the owners that the Council would only allow trees to be felled in exceptional circumstances. The tree had been checked and rated as in a fair condition. As works would be ascetic rather than necessary, should he wish, at his own cost, to arrange for an experienced tree surgeon to carry out works to reduce, not remove, the Ash tree he could do so, providing the proposed works, appropriate insurances and Risk Assessments were provided to, and approved by, the Council in advance.

8.9 To approve expenditure on vandalised items

Resolved: Members retrospectively approved expenditure to replace one of the large timber posts at the entrance to Stangrove Park path to the Leisure Centre which was broken at its base, at a cost of £327.75 plus VAT, and a rescue line was stolen from the pond at Stangrove Park, £39 including delivery and VAT.

Members noted that the new litter bin installed by the seat at the top of Stangrove Park which was uprooted, and disappeared, came to light as the water level dropped in the pond. It was retrieved, cleaned, and reinstated.

A memorial bench by the children's playground at the Recreation Ground has been vandalized and needs replacement. The Deputy Clerk will address this issue on her return.

8.10 Annual Playground Inspection Report

The annual independent inspection of playgrounds took place on 4 July. A copy of the full report is available at Doggetts Barn. Costs for works required will be obtained. The only urgent issues are the fence repair at Spittals Cross, and Pod Swing plastic inserts which need replacement at Stangrove Park within six months.

8.11 To receive an update on street lights maintenance – nothing to report

8.12 To consider footpaths maps encapsulation

Resolved: that three more large scale footpath maps should be encapsulated by the print room at SDC, providing the costings are reasonable and within the footpath element of the open spaces budget.

9. TO NOTE THE GENERAL REPORT OF OPEN SPACES ACTIVITY

Members noted that the press release on the new wooden noticeboard installed at Marsh Green, in the front garden of the church St John URC, had been published, and the ballcock mechanisms on two of the diptanks at Swan Lane allotments had been replaced.

10. PRESS RELEASE

There were no issues on which the Committee wished to publish a press release.

The meeting closed at 8.57pm