

Minutes of the Meeting of the OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE held in Rickards Hall at 7.30pm on Monday 20 November 2017

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

In attendance: Cllr C Pearman
K Staff – Deputy Clerk
J Skinner – Head Groundsman

There were no members of the press or public present.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllrs M McArthur – family illness, R Davison – away, and M Robson – unwell.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, OR PREDETERMINATIONS

Cllr Layland – acquainted with the correspondent item 6.1

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 18 September 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 31 October 2017

Members noted the position for the first seven months of the year. In consultation with the committee vice-chairman, a water pipe burst at Swan Allotments had been fixed, and members

Resolved: to endorse the urgent expenditure of £220 plus VAT to dig out the damaged section, replace it, re-connect, and back-fill.

6. CORRESPONDENCE

6.1 Resident re: bus stop request

Members considered a request for installation of two bus shelters with seats at the bus stops on Swan Lane beside and opposite Swan Ridge. It was noted the cost could be c. £7,500 and

Resolved: to investigate with Kent Highways during their imminent visit to Edenbridge the feasibility of installing bus shelters at these locations, given the limited space and possible sightline issues, and to confirm the exact location of the town-bound stop where there was no bus stop sign.

6.2 Tom Tugendhat MP re: impact of traveller incursions

Members noted the reply received in response to the committee chairman's letter, and

Resolved: to update Marsh Green residents, and raise the issue with the Police and Crime Commissioner at the forthcoming KALC meeting at which he would be present.

6.3 ERFC re: Ultimate Frisbee dates 2018

Following the success of the two Frisbee events at the Rec in the summer, members considered a request for two events next year with more marking out work for the groundstaff – 23/24 June (7-8 pitches), and 7/8 July (8-10 pitches). It was

Resolved: that the pitch-marking request be approved, provided the groundstaff can accommodate this work within their busy summer period.

6.4 NWKCP re: support for CIL and other projects

Members discussed the letter from North West Kent Countryside Partnership regarding the kind of projects with which they can provide assistance. It was suggested that the Footpaths Forum might benefit from assistance regarding path clearance, and work around Stangrove Pond might be another project. It was

Resolved: to make particular focus on Stangrove Pond reviewing the management policy during the forthcoming "winter" quarterly sites monitoring tour.

6.5 Resident re: Cemetery thanks

Members noted the letter received complimenting the groundstaff, maintenance, and administration, and

Resolved: to formally note their appreciation of the staff's Cemetery work

7. HEAD GROUNDSMAN'S REPORT

7.1 Routine and seasonal work

Members noted the first report from Jim Skinner following his appointment as head groundsman.

7.2 Groundstaff activity

The head groundsman had attended and passed a 3-day first aid course commencing 13/11/17, and would attend a trailer course this December to obtain the required licence to pull the loaded trailer.

The visit to SALTEX show at the NEC in Birmingham, by Cllr James Barnett and the head groundsman, was enlightening, and they were able to make some new contacts.

The annual Tasks Risk Assessments review was under way, and would be completed by end of month. The salt bins were full and there was about 2 tons in stock, with approximately 150 sandbags ready. The quarterly Health & Safety monitoring had been carried out.

Members noted report on three equipment items, including damage to the ride-on mower from a utilities cover at the Rec. which, after consultation with the committee chairman, was repaired urgently by a local contractor at a cost of £593.61. It was

Resolved: to endorse this expenditure

The tractor had brushed a front garden wall while turning at Stangrove Park - no damage to the vehicle, but this matter was in the hands of Council's insurance company for wall repair. Also the gang mower was slightly damaged when caught on the gate exiting from the Rec. Minor repairs were quickly completed and the machine back in operation.

Members were pleased to note two members of staff helped the Great Stone Bridge Trust on the Watermeadows project, including chainsaw works to clear broken branches from paths. Also lifting the canopies of younger trees, and stacking the brush in piles to help create wildlife habitats.

7.3 Future activity

The head groundsman put forward some ideas to help with maintaining sites. This included powerful backpack leaf-blowers to not only aid leaf removal to reduce grass damage, but also maintenance of areas on-going throughout the year. Having considered costings, it was

Resolved: to purchase a Stihl Backpack blower BR600 from the current year equipment budget at £370 plus VAT from Kidmans, and a second blower from next year's funding.

The idea of adding flower swathes along roadsides was attractive, with information collected from different companies at SALTEX which plant and maintain. One had close links to Hever, and it was

Resolved: to invite a representative to visit Edenbridge and assess possible locations to bring more colour to the town

Members considered the suggestion that providing either a lap top or a tablet for the Head Groundsman would also be useful in removing the need to go into the office each time there was need to use a computer. A tablet could enable its use “in the field” for recording data onto report documents for inclusion in Council files, and reduce the amount of paper recording currently carried out. It was

Resolved: to consult the Council’s technology advisers and purchase a suitable model of tablet capable of working in the field and at the Depot, and of linking to the Council’s network, to include an attachable keyboard, at approx. £800 plus VAT, funding to be taken from the equipment budget

8. OPEN SPACES BUSINESS FOR DECISION

8.1 To receive the Burial Report

Members noted the burial report as follows, updating the record of cemetery activity:

September 2017	October 2017
None	Two ashes interments
	One burial

8.2 To receive the report on the Annual review of Activities Risk Assessments

The Head Groundsman had begun the review of Activities Risk Assessments.

8.3 To consider the annual review of groundstaff activities and staff training requirements

Members noted the small group of councillors considering groundstaff structure would meet in early December, and training requirements would emerge through the Annual Appraisal process due in the next few weeks.

It was noted the groundstaff had kept a detailed record of the man hours spent grass-cutting at the Council’s various sites over eight months, to help inform the review of groundstaff structure. In addition to this record, the Cemetery had basic mowing and strimming by contractor every two weeks August/September/October with two people taking two and a half to three days. Also in September additional gang-mowing work was added temporarily to deal with larger areas the depleted team was unable to cover. This had been a particularly long grass-growing season.

The new head groundsman believed the current team composition would not be able to take on any more activities than at present, with usually four staff April-October, and three during November-March.

8.4 To receive the updated report on quarterly monitoring and review the Action Plan

No monitoring visit was arranged for the end of October, with the head groundsman newly in post. It was

Resolved: to arrange the next dates for the fourth quarterly visit towards the end of January

8.5 To consider feedback from SALTEX and committee budget recommendations for 2017/18

Following earlier discussion, it was

Resolved: to submit the following items for Budget consideration:

Backpack leaf-blower	£ 400
Hanging baskets display	£2,500
Churchyard mowing	£3,120
Autumn hedge cutting	£1,485
Back-data entry – Cemetery registers	£2,000

8.6 To consider works in the Open Spaces 10 year Maintenance Plan

8.6.1 Update current Year 2

Hard Landscape

Members noted the Building Manager finally found a heritage building company willing to inspect and report on the wall dividing the Churchyard and the Market Yard, at no cost to date. They considered the report and the recommended work, totalling £9,619.36, against available budget of £16,947.30

The company noted they were not structural engineers, and advised an independent structural engineer should survey it. It was

Resolved: to seek an independent survey as originally recommended in the 10-year Plan,

As the wall is in the Conservation Area and adjoins a Listed Building, it will be necessary to check the mortar requirement, and it may be repointing in NHL lime will be required, at around 25% higher cost. Subject to the above investigations, it was

Resolved: to engage Valley Builders to carry out the work on the Market Yard wall

Members considered costing investigated for replacing the four gates and posts at Swan Lane allotments (these were not in the plan this year, nor next) following the decision last meeting. It was

Resolved: to carry out this small project in the early spring if there was sufficient funding in the Open Spaces contingencies at c. £500 plus VAT

Annual pumps service

It was noted the works agreed last meeting to restore the Mill Leat to operation had been carried out at a total cost of £1,125 plus VAT. The pump installation company reported that it would not be cost effective to attempt to refurbish the old pump, nor would it provide much in the way of useful spares. It was

Resolved: to dispose of the old pump

Sports pitch decompaction

It was noted the company engaged to carry out this work at Mowshurst and at the Recreation Ground was on site w/c 13th November.

8.6.2 Schedule for next Year 3

Members noted that the resurfacing works at the Recreation Ground eastern car park would be the largest location expenditure in the next financial year, and other works were smaller projects.

8.7 To consider action to protect open spaces from unauthorised access

Members considered amended quotes following October Council's decision on the nature of works proposed for Marsh Green and Stangrove Park, and its commitment of up to £5,500 for the works from Council's unallocated reserves. It was

Resolved: to commission Hever Countryside Services to carry out works at Marsh Green at £4,534 plus VAT (extend wood posts eastward, and bank up where necessary, extend wood posts westwards, and install gateway) and to commission S R Mercer to carry out works at Stangrove Park at £1,052.25 plus VAT (three drop-down bollards at the front, with two drop-down bollards and row of wood posts by Norman Court) – a total of £5,586.25

8.8 To consider costings for additional playground repairs

Members had referred one outstanding item to October Council for consideration and £400 was approved for repair to the butterfly see-saw at Stangrove Park. It was noted the confirmed cost was £625 for the parts plus labour to fit. After consultation with the committee chairman,

the cost was accepted in order to progress the programme of works resulting from the annual playground inspection. It was

Resolved: to endorse this expenditure

Members considered quotations for repair to the edge of the safety surface around the slide at Marsh Green playground and

Resolved: to accept the quote from specialist sports and play company SSP at £1,500 plus VAT to cut 100mm band round the edge, clean out grass and weeds, and install 23LM of new 50mm thick brown rubber mulch bonded to the current edging.

8.9 To consider the report from the biennial street light review

Members had carried out a biennial review of the quality and condition of street lighting maintained by the Town Council, and noted that the few items on the report had been passed to Council's lighting maintenance contractors for action.

8.10 To consider progress on the Watermeadows project

A report from the Great Stone Bridge Trust had been circulated to all councillors the previous month. Cllr Pearman gave a verbal update at the meeting, including appreciation of the help provided by two members of the Council's grounds team. Members considered a request on behalf of Great Stone Bridge Trust for similar assistance next year, and

Resolved: to make two members of the team available to help, on the likely date 4th October 2018

9. TO NOTE THE GENERAL REPORT OF OPEN SPACES ACTIVITY

Tree works agreed by this committee during the summer had been carried out, with the exception of the Turkey Oak in the Cemetery which had been commissioned. The SDC tree officer advised further work might be permitted on the Copper Beech in the corner of the Churchyard, depending on what was requested. The resident making the inquiry had been advised of this, and of members' decision at last meeting.

10. PRESS RELEASE

No items were suggested for a Press Release

The meeting closed at 9.07pm