

**Minutes of the meeting of the OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE held in Rickards Hall at 8pm on Monday 5 September 2022**

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Present: Cllrs A Baker (Chairman), S McGregor (Vice-chairman), J Aldridge, V Jennings, A Layland, N Lloyd and A Read.

In attendance: Cllr M Gemmell Smith  
Deputy Clerk, Head Groundsman.

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

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received, noted, and accepted from Cllrs B Todd, A Damodaran, and S Taylor.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, OR PREDETERMINATIONS**

None.

*The Chairman adjourned the meeting*

**3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

None.

*The meeting was re-convened.*

**4. TO RECEIVE AND SIGN MINUTES OF THE OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE 25 JULY 2022**

**Resolved:** that the minutes (9761-9765) be signed by the committee Chairman as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

**5. TO RECEIVE ANALYSIS OF THE COMMITTEE'S RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS TO 31 July 2022**

Members noted the position with one third of the financial year completed; there were no questions.

**6. TO RATIFY OPERATIONAL DECISIONS FOR OPEN SPACES ACTIVITY**

Following report of a part-broken branch in a tree within the clump adjacent to the playground in Stangrove Park. The area was cordoned off overnight, and a tree surgeon attended first thing next morning to climb and remove the branch, at a cost of £200 plus VAT.

A large pane of glass was smashed in the bus shelter on Main Road opposite The Swan, mid month. The Clerk approved a replacement pane of clear toughened glass at a cost of £215 plus VAT.

A Cemetery visitor reported failure of one of the older water taps to turn off at the end of an afternoon. A local plumber was quickly arranged to attend, and fitted a replacement tap he had in stock, at no charge.

An older lantern on a lighting column in The Brownings required repair, but the contractor advised that there was a risk another part could likely fail and require more repair. He recommended fitting a new SL8 LED lantern, as on the other column in the street, and on lights being upgraded elsewhere, at a cost of £350 plus VAT. In consultation with the committee chairman, this replacement was approved.

**Resolved:** to ratify the above decisions for expenditure of £200 for the tree work, £215 for the bus shelter pane, and £350 for the replacement lantern, all prices ex-VAT.

**7. CORRESPONDENCE**

**7.1 Resident re: water level in Stangrove Pond**

Members noted a resident contacted the office last month with concerns regarding the low water-

level in Stangrove Pond. They were reassured that this was not unusual in drought years, as the pond was fed by groundwater and run-off from the Park. Past experience showed that as the rain returned into the autumn and winter the water level and wildlife usually recovered, but the situation was being monitored. The head groundsman advised that the previous night's storm had already improved the water level.

## **7.2 Resident re: Mill Leat water supply**

Members noted the new owner of the former Tanyard House (now called Tanyard Cottage) had contacted the office regarding payment for the water used to top-up the adjacent Mill Leat feature as necessary.

The Clerk had requested a site meeting to confirm whether there was a new sub-meter, and also a copy of the water bill showing supply charges, so that the Council could pay correctly what was owed. Members would be updated on the outcome, for inclusion in budget considerations.

## **8. HEAD GROUNDSMAN'S REPORT**

### **8.1 Routine and seasonal work**

Members noted the team's routine and seasonal work during July-August.

### **8.2 Groundstaff activity**

Members noted there were no current contact details registered for owners of graves noted in the summer headstone check, so contact request cards were being placed at the graves concerned. The summer visual tree survey was complete, and there was a list of minor works to be undertaken by the grounds team. Any items beyond their capabilities had been reported to the deputy clerk.

All the Councils' benches had been repainted, including those for which it had recently taken over maintenance at the front of Stangrove Park.

The team spent some time preparing and marking ten Ultimate Frisbee pitches at the Recreation Ground as requested by the rugby club for the event last month. All the Council's sports pitches had been marked for the coming season and all goal posts reinstated.

The two ladders approved by councillors at the last meeting had arrived and would be a great help going forward. The large scale weed spraying was completed as soon as weather permitted. Ground conditions had still not permitted the pitch decompaction work.

The team had started cutting back various summer shrubs and removing summer plants from the Councils' beds and planters. This would continue in the coming weeks with a view of planting the winter plants sometime in October.

### **8.3 Items for the future**

Members noted the proposal to change paint suppliers for line-marking the councils' sports pitches at the Recreation Ground, and the possible replacement of the spray line-marker in the coming weeks/months. A representative from a previous supplier would make a site visit to demonstrate the options. After that the committee would be provided with costings.

## **9. OPEN SPACES BUSINESS FOR DECISION**

### **9.1 To receive the Burial Report**

The burial report was noted as follows, updating the record of Cemetery activity:

July 2022	August
Two interments of ashes	Three interments of ashes
	One Grant of Right

### **9.2 To consider works scheduled for 2022/23 in the 10 and 30 year Open Spaces maintenance plans**

The small schedule of works recommended from the periodic **external tree inspection** report had been commissioned in line with the decision at the last meeting, with exception of one of the Churchyard yews in major decline, which had been advised for felling. The Church had confirmed that it wished its tree to be half-felled in company with the one adjacent, to give scope

for regeneration. The Churchwarden had advised in writing that the PCC would cover future cost of removal if necessary, if the tree ultimately failed.

The contractor which usually carried out the autumn hedge-cutting work at Blossoms Park, the Recreation Ground, Mowshurst, and Forge Croft allotments, had advised that the cost this year would be £1,895 plus VAT - the budget allowed for this work was £1,512. The difference reflected increased operation costs, and the fact that the hedgeline behind the new playground at the Recreation Ground will have to be cut manually as the machine previously used no longer fits behind the new playground fence. It was

**Resolved:** to seek two alternative costings from other companies for comparison.

It was noted the annual external playground inspection had taken place on 22 August, and reports received for Marsh Green, Blossoms Park skate ramps, Stangrove Park including the outdoor gym and ball games area as well as the playground, and Spitals Cross playground. All items were assessed either low or very low risk, and minor maintenance points would be addressed by the grounds team. The new facility at the Recreation Ground had recently received its post-installation inspection, so was not included this summer.

### **9.3 To receive update on projects awarded CIL funding**

#### **9.3.1 Recreation Ground playground refurbishment**

Members noted that two new litter bins, supplied through Sevenoaks District Council post-Covid funding, had been installed. The outstanding items of play equipment had been installed during the day of the committee meeting, and members were pleased that the zip wire in particular was immediately in use and well received, featuring on social media.

A number of the snagging items had been dealt with, including installation of signage, but there were several minor points still outstanding, including some identification labels to attach to items. The Clerk had visited site, and inspected and discussed with the supplier and contractor.

**9.3.2 Additional street lighting, Westways:** amended resolution for total cost of project, currently £6,568 (CIL approved £5,000) – to receive update and consider potential additional expenditure.

Further to the report at the previous meeting, the two new lighting columns were installed on 1<sup>st</sup> July, and it was expected UKPN would make the connections on 18 August. The office had been advised that one had been connected, but there had been an issue with the second, which could result in the need to relocate it. It was

**Resolved:** that the officers with the committee and Council chairman should continue to seek clarification, consult with residents as necessary if relocation was required, establish any additional costs for a bid for additional CIL funding, and report back to October Council.

#### **9.3.3 Bus shelter, Swan Lane**

The committee chairman reported that the County Councillor had still received no response from Highways regarding the shelter location, but was continuing to pursue the issue. It was

**Resolved:** that the item would be included on the next meeting agenda.

### **9.4 To receive the report on bulky waste collections**

Members noted the next free Bulky Waste Collection date was on Saturday 8 October, with the collection vehicle calling at four locations, beginning with Church Street, then moving to Skeynes Road, followed by Park View Close, and finally Fircroft Way. SDC had reported that there were no problems from fly-tipping of items in advance at the end of July. Publicity through posters, social media, and website, emphasised that service users must stay with their items to load into the freighter. There was one further booking in this financial year in January to be confirmed.

Members discussed whether to continue with this quarterly collection service next financial year.

**Resolved:** to continue the quarterly Bulky Waste collections and include the cost in budget funding considerations.

#### **9.5 To consider damage to playground gates**

Members at last meeting approved repair to the damaged access gate at the Ball Games area in Stangrove Park, at a cost of £295 plus VAT (which has been carried out). The same design of safety gate was included at the Recreation Ground playground, and one of these had been similarly damaged within weeks of installation. It was noted that the damage to the gates was the result of user abuse. One member voiced disappointment, saying the gates were not robust enough. The Deputy Clerk advised that they were standard industry approved gates used widely in other playgrounds.

More robust gates would need to be considered. A suitable alternative safety gate had been identified, at a cost of £1,100 plus VAT.

#### **9.6 To note security at Mowshurst Barn**

In line with the decision at last meeting, the Head Groundsman had fitted a covered hasp style of lock to Mowshurst Barn, following the break-in over a weekend in May. The locksmith who was asked to inspect the doors, and recommend a more robust lock arrangement compatible with the size of the large doors, had suggested fitting two heavy duty hasp and staple locks, to the top and the bottom of the door, and fitted with two heavy duty padlocks. The cost quoted would be £637.56 plus VAT. As no items of value remained in the Barn, it was

**Resolved:** to monitor the situation and reconsider if there was any further security issue.

#### **9.7 To receive update on anti-social behaviour at Lingfield Road Recreation ground**

During the summer holiday period there had been a couple of reports of evening/night behaviour involving vehicles at the Recreation Ground, which were referred to the Community Safety Unit at Sevenoaks.

Following last meeting, Cllrs Baker and Aldridge with the Deputy Clerk met on site with representatives of the company which deals with CCTV for Sevenoaks District. They had subsequently contacted BT to obtain costings for transmission services, which had been circulated to members. There were two options for positioning the service transmission, and the prices quoted at £10,500 or £22,500 did not include the cost of the camera equipment itself.

Having considered the cost indications, with incomplete information at this stage, it was

**Resolved:** to investigate alternative options with other providers, to achieve the relevant level of observation to meet the Council's requirements.

#### **9.8 To consider the survey report of the Retention Dam**

Members had received a copy of the comments and costings for works to the dam bridge from the company which originally provided a ball-park figure for a new timber bridge earlier in the year. It was noted that they were not able to undertake any repairs to the abutments on the river bank. This would be an additional cost.

The bridge did not carry a Public Right of Way footpath, as SR612 crossed the river over to Church Street nearer to the High Street, and that "cradle bridge" is maintained by Kent County Council. The distance between them was roughly 100m along the riverbank. Members

**Resolved:** to consult residents on the future of the bridge over the Retention Dam, giving the context, and providing costings for repairs/replacements compared with the potential cost of removal.

#### **9.9 To receive an update on projects for the Queen's Jubilee**

The remaining project was replacement tree-planting this autumn/winter and, as Members requested, a brief tour of potential planting sites had been arranged with the District Council's countryside manager. This was on Thursday 8 September starting at 10am at Marsh Green.

**9.10 To receive update on Ready-Steady-Grow gardening competition**

Members noted the guest-talk evening with Tom Hart Dyke on 10 August was very well received by a capacity audience in Rickards Hall. The competition presentation evening was arranged for 6.30pm on 14 September, and all competition entrants had been invited. The special guest from the horticultural world was Jim Buttress, whose life in gardening had ranged over 75 years, from maintaining the Royal Parks to becoming a renowned Royal Horticultural Society judge, particularly for Britain In Bloom, and allotments. He would talk about his wide experience after handing out the prizes and certificates for Ready-Steady-Grow.

A limited number of additional free seats were being advertised to the wider community, on a first-come-first-served basis, to extend the audience for the evening.

**10. NEWS RELEASE**

The consultation on the Retention Dam bridge should be the subject of a News Release.

Meeting closed at 9.15pm