

Minutes of the meeting of the OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE held in Rickards Hall at 7.30pm on Monday 17 April 2023

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

In attendance: Cllrs M Gemmell Smith and S Compton
Town Clerk, Deputy Clerk, and Head Groundsman

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received, noted, and accepted from Cllr N Lloyd; Cllrs A Damodaran and S Taylor were absent.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, OR PREDETERMINATIONS

None.

The Chairman adjourned the meeting.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A member of the public stated his support for the Council's action regarding unauthorised gates access onto the Recreation Ground from neighbouring properties. But he questioned Council priorities as he was frustrated with the anti-social behaviour and public safety in the western car park.

The meeting was re-convened.

4. TO RECEIVE AND SIGN MINUTES OF THE OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE 13 February 2023

Resolved: that the minutes (9864-9873) be signed by the committee Chairman as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

The Chairman, Cllr Baker, proposed to bring forward agenda item 9.11

Resolved: to bring forward agenda item 9.11 before proceeding with other items on the agenda.

Minuted under 9.11

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

Members noted the position to 31 March as the financial year was ending. Some projects budgeted for had not been delivered and the allocated funds would be transferred to Earmarked reserves so that the money remained for when delivered; this included the underspend on streetlights which was previously approved to be directed to LED upgrades alongside the next tranche of the streetlighting upgrade programme.

6. TO RATIFY OPERATIONAL DECISIONS FOR OPEN SPACES ACTIVITY

6.1 Branch reduction to oak at Forge Croft allotments

One item from the visual winter tree inspection that could not be completed in-house was reported for investigation, and the advice was to remove the branch over the access track back to source – at a cost of £195 plus VAT. After consultation with the committee chairman the work was approved, to be scheduled as soon as possible. It was

Resolved: to ratify the above expenditure of £195 plus VAT for work to the oak at Forge Croft allotments

7. CORRESPONDENCE

7.1 Kent Men of the Trees re: Kent Plan Tree

Information regarding the KCC project Plan Tree had been received. Members were reminded the Town Council planted the Millennium Wood as a new wood at Mowshurst, which 20+ years later was maturing well. More recently a dozen trees were installed across four sites as part of the Queen's Green Canopy project for the Platinum Jubilee, replacing some lost to age or disease.

The Council had no appropriate locations itself across its open spaces, but sites could be farmland or other private property within the parish. It was

Resolved: to publicise this call to identify potential sites for planting

7.2 Resident re: re-positioning of benches from outside Stangrove Park

From the Annual Town Meeting, a question was submitted asking whether the Council had thought about moving some of the "unused" benches on Station Road outside Stangrove Park. The suggestion was to place them outside playgrounds – at the Recreation Ground, and in Stangrove Park – to enable those with dogs to sit with them and still keep a watch on children inside the fenced play area.

Since the committee's decision last year to take over maintenance of these benches, their use unsurprisingly had increased, and were used by people glad of a seat *en route* to and from town. Rather than relocate some of the benches, it was

Resolved: to leave the benches *in situ*, and as per the meeting report to approve budget of £635 to add another picnic bench outside the playground fence at Stangrove Park; also at the Recreation Ground playground to install a spare bench already in store.

7.3 Marsh Green Community re: Big Lunch on the Green 7th May

At March Council meeting members agreed to permit the event, to include use of the TN8 Licence and subject to meeting the standard conditions of the Open Spaces Hiring Agreement. It was noted the details of the event plan had been completed and submitted with the finalised Hiring Agreement, risk assessment, and proof of insurance. Mindful of the timing of sunset that day, the activity would occupy part of the green from 10am until 8pm on the day.

7.4 Kent FA re: grass pitch improvement funding

Members noted the officers had been looking at an opportunity with Kent FA which had opened up funding to town and parish councils for improving grass pitches used by grassroots football clubs. The Football Foundation had for some time offered revenue funding for this purpose, but generally for leagues and clubs to apply. Towns and parishes could apply directly, first-come-first-served.

Maintenance activity such as decompaction, slitting, re-seeding and fertilising, would be covered, and an application was being prepared. Funding would be tapered over six years, and would require two Pitch Power Inspection reports per year for each pitch to be recorded. The drainage issues at Mowshurst would only be considered after two years of this programme.

Cllr Compton joined the meeting 7.52pm

7.5 Request from Fair to locate in Stangrove Park

A fairground company had requested to operate in Stangrove Park for two weeks in the summer. Members noted the Family Fun Days activities would be in the Park on Thursday afternoons from July 27th to August 24th so those weeks would not be available. The company proposed to fence round the space occupied to enclose the fairground. They would need access arrangements altered at the gates from the car park, removing gate and post, which could affect the defence of the open space against unauthorised vehicles and encampment. They had not indicated how they would maintain general security of the Park during the fair's visit. It was

Resolved: to offer the company a one week visit, requesting a substantial deposit against potential

security breach, and to meet the costs of gates removal and reinstatement.

7.6 CPRE: spring-summer edition of Countryside Voice

It was noted the latest seasonal editions of the above magazines had arrived at the office for members to peruse – topics included housing development in rural areas, wildlife friendly areas, and the future of water supplies.

8. TO RECEIVE THE HEAD GROUNDSMAN'S REPORT

8.1 Routine and seasonal activity

Members noted the routine and seasonal work carried out by the groundstaff. This included installing the new notice board at Blossoms Park, and clearing a tree that had fallen from the hospital grounds adjacent to the skate ramps. A new sign had also been installed.

The winter pitch decompaction took place in February during a short dry spell. At the Rec all football plus rugby 1 were treated, as well as both pitches at Mowshurst. Inspecting of all the Council's football pitches had begun in hope of applying for funding for pitch improvements (see item 7.4 above).

Periodically the team had been bringing in benches from the Cemetery for renovations and painting.

Water levels in the Mill Leat were being monitored, but only two bowserfuls of water had been added so far this year, but more recently had been aided by regular rainfall.

The Spring pond checks had been made and reported to the deputy clerk. Also the annual driving licence checks had been carried out.

8.2 Items for the future

Two items of equipment due for replacement on the Asset Register as approved last meeting had been purchased - a back-pack blower and a dimple pitch marker. Team members were booked for arc welding training, and for first aid training.

9. OPEN SPACES BUSINESS AND UPDATES

9.1 To receive the Burial Report, and note the Churchyard wall works

Members noted the record of Cemetery activity February/March: two interments of ashes.

The 2022 Diocesan Quinquennial (five-yearly) report on the condition of the parish church and the Churchyard identified the need for repair to a short section of the stone wall between Cemetery 1 and the Churchyard, damaged by weathering. This work had been completed in line with the decision at February committee meeting.

Churchyard/Market Yard car park wall

The Diocesan report also noted the north (Market Yard) brick boundary wall required patch pointing near the top, and had open joints to parts of the brick coping. These items have also been completed in line with the February decision.

9.2 To receive a report on allotment activity

Edenbridge Allotment Garden Association (EAGA) at Forge Croft site had reported difficulties with a few tenants resigning their Tenancies and failing to clear old vegetation and assorted materials from their plots. Members

Resolved: to take action under the site rules agreed last June to charge for removal and disposal of the materials

9.3 To receive the report on bulky waste collections

It was noted the next free Bulky Waste Collection date was scheduled for Saturday 29th April, 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. Other dates booked this year are 29th July and 7th October. A further date for the fourth quarterly collection was to be booked for January 2024. Abuse of the collection points with fly-tipping was being monitored, and a reminder would be included in publicity that no business waste was allowed.

9.4 To consider works to the Retention Dam

Following the decision last meeting, the contractor had confirmed his costing for only removing the existing bridge over the Retention Dam on the River Eden, pending future repairs, at £5,950 plus VAT. Members had received a copy of the quote, and noted the need to obtain permission from the District Council for access across Town Field and for the site compound, for the three day duration. This latter had been given in principle. It was

Resolved: to accept the costing for the bridge removal, as there was another (Public Right of Way) bridge a little further along Church Street, at £5,950 plus VAT.

9.5 To consider replacing a further broken tree at the Recreation Ground

Following disappointing damage to a further Jubilee Tree at the Lingfield Road Recreation Ground, members

Resolved: to replace the Tulip Tree, at a cost of £50 from the vandalism budget.

9.6 To consider parking management

9.6.1 Update on parking issues at Blossoms Park

Members were advised that parking by residents had continued, and on a several occasions taking up all spaces. On one occasion a nearby resident parked among daytime Pavilion users in the Cricket Club extension area, and later in the day returned to find themselves shut in behind the gate. Fortunately, the groundstaff had not left for the day, and were able to attend and open the gate.

The Town Clerk authorised a further sign for the field side of the access drive, opposite the spaces, to reiterate “no residential parking”. This was in place before Easter and the situation was being monitored with the new sign *in situ* while external parking management solutions were investigated. Information was awaited, but the Clerk had had a positive conversation about different options. It was

Resolved: to meet with a parking management company to explore options available, and to raise awareness using social media that Open Spaces parking areas were for site users, not residential parking.

9.6.2 Market day - inconsiderate drivers in Market Yard

Councillors had been circulated with information regarding issues with inconsiderate parking on Market days, despite signage clearly advising that the area should be kept clear. This will continue to be monitored.

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

The 10-year plan budget included funding for **replacement water tank valves** as necessary at Forge Croft allotments site. A report of two tanks leaking was received at the end of February, and the supply was temporarily stopped, so the Clerk approved the order of two replacement tanks at £314.02 plus VAT, to be ready for the new growing season – taken from remaining Small Projects budget. It was

Resolved: to ratify the expenditure of £314.02 plus VAT for two replacement water tanks.

It was noted the **notice board at the front of Blossoms Park** had been replaced, in line with the decision at last meeting. The local Youth Workers were delighted to have the opportunity to display in half of the board information which was relevant to many of the users of the skate ramps.

9.8 To consider works scheduled for 2023/24 in the 10 and 30 year Open Spaces maintenance plans

Members had received the 10-year plan schedule, with the annual works items (marked “ann”) now budgeted within a separate new heading of annual and inspection costs.

Quotes had been received for the annual weed control Spring spraying of sports pitches with selective herbicide at Blossoms Park, the Recreation Ground, and Mowshurst. Members noted the comments on the increase in product costs this year, and after some discussion, it was

Resolved: to commission Peter Duke to carry out the weed control at the three sites, at a cost of £1,610 plus VAT

9.9 Review of the Byelaws

It was noted the draft Byelaws approved at the November meeting had been sent to the Byelaws Team at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities at the beginning of December for comments/approval. The response received apologised for the delay in reply. No “blocking issues” were identified which might lead to the Secretary of State declining the application, as the proposed byelaws were closely based on the Department’s model set with minor alteration. The next step of the process would be to consult on the proposed Byelaws, which would take place after the May elections.

9.9.1 To receive an update regarding the risk Assessment for a request to fly electric powered model aircraft

Members noted Communication between a resident and the Clerk had been circulated to members, including information sent to the Council’s health and safety consultants regarding risk assessment. It was noted a response was still awaited, also from Council’s insurance company regarding the Public Liability element of cover.

9.9.2 To receive an update regarding boundary issues at the Recreation Ground

Council resolved at its 6 March meeting (Item 10.8) to approve legal fees to address the issue of unauthorised access. A letter had been sent to a resident, and to all other properties bordering the Recreation Ground, where there also appeared to be some other potential access. Works to reinstate the boundary fence and hedge where necessary had been commissioned. Members considered the way forward regarding redress for the costs of legal action, and

Resolved: to seek a share of the costs, and to apply for a Charge to be put on the property if payment was not forthcoming.

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

The gardening competition was launched on Council’s social media, in May/June newsletter, and by poster on its notice boards in the week before Easter. Six local schools and one youth group wished to participate, and KCC approval was given to provide seven “starter packs” funded from the unspent grant remaining from last year for this element of the project. The “packs” including growing medium, and a range of children’s equipment and a bug box, would be delivered to these young gardening groups that week.

Closing date for entries was 30th June and forms were available on-line and at the office front desk. Judging would take place during July, with photographs again as the first stage. The Presentation Evening was booked for 5th September. All allotment plot-holders were being encouraged to enter their plot or their garden, and the young gardener category included a

“tallest sunflower” sub-group to be judged later in August. The June committee meeting will nominate judges.

9.11 To receive an update on the Coronation Big Lunch – Stangrove Park 7th May

The required documentation had been received in line with the original proposal submitted. The deputy clerk had a site meeting with the events management company on 3rd April, discussing practicalities such as ground conditions, timings, access, site layout, waste management, and staffing. The detail of site plan layout had also been provided. The Big Lunch organiser, Heart of Sevenoaks, updated committee members on preparations for the community event, and provided a copy of the publicity poster/banner design. Members noted the Bonfire Society stage would be used, and had no other questions at this stage.

9.12 To note the response to an increase in anti-social behaviour in the vicinity of Stangrove Park and the Leisure Centre

Public and councillor concerns regarding an increase in anti-social behaviour around the area of Stangrove Park and the Leisure Centre had been reported to the Sevenoaks Community Safety Unit Daily Tasking meeting. The Police had tasked more patrols to Edenbridge over the next few days because of the increase in reports. The SDC CCTV cameras had been useful to the Police in identifying young people causing problems in the past, and this resource would always be utilised if required.

Local people were urged to report incidents of anti-social activity so that a body of information could be gathered to help the police, regarding timings, days and dates, and descriptions of those involved.

10 . CIL BOARD: To receive and ratify a CIL Award amendment to the Friends of Hever Primary School for its ‘outdoor play improvements longevity project’ (award was for £24,659.72)

Members considered a proposed change to the play equipment to be included for the project – rather than a few smaller structures, the structure would be one long piece combining the challenge and strengthening opportunities. It was designed with both KS1 and KS2 in mind and would allow the play to be undirected, even better creating opportunities for children to use their imaginations, and providing for shared experiences and building social skills.

The surface change would be to either wood chip or shredded rubber rather than grass tiles, to ensure all weather use.

Whilst there was no change to the principle of the bid and award, the original application included an outdoor gym and a range of smaller items of equipment, and now looks like one multi play frame. As the School was keen to proceed and the brief was for ‘improving the ground and installing new play equipment’, and the next CIL Board was not scheduled until November, members unanimously

Resolved: as the project aims and details remained valid, to ratify the award with the equipment amendment (value £24,659.72).

11. NEWS RELEASE

Items from the meeting identified for publicity included the call for Kent Plan Tree sites, the Coronation Big Lunch event, and the Ready-Steady-Grow competition.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 12 June 2023

Meeting closed at 8.34pm