



Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment and Leisure Committee** held on
Monday 9th October 2023 at 7.00pm
Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield

PRESENT:

Cllr. D. French
Cllr. D. Ward
Cllr. B. Reed

Cllr. D. Bennett
Cllr. V. Frost

IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Peter Selby

Holly Goring – Town Clerk
Rachel Newton – Senior Administrative Officer
Minutes taken by Rachel Newton

In the absence of both the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Environment and Leisure Committee, members voted unanimously for Councillor D. French to take on the role of Chair for this meeting.

1.0. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members and officers were reminded to make any declarations of personal and/or prejudicial interests that they may have in relation to items on the agenda.

Councillor D. Bennett declared a prejudicial interest in agenda items 5.5, as a result of his position as a committee member on the AFC Uckfield Town football club and item 5.6, as he was a current allotment holder.

2.0. STATEMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON MATTERS ON THE AGENDA AT THE CHAIRMAN'S DISCRETION

None.

3.0. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received in advance of the meeting from Councillor S. Mayhew, Councillor A. Smith, Councillor K. Bedwell and Councillor M. McClafferty due to health reasons and work commitments.

4.0. MINUTES

4.1. Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee held on the 29 August 2023

EL.21.10.23 It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee held on the 29 August 2023 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4.2. Action list

Members discussed items on the action list.
It was agreed to remove the actions on:

72.05.22 – To consider illegal tree works to Town Council trees
08.06.22 – To consider proposal for a Queen’s Platinum Jubilee Sign at Victoria
Pleasure Ground
09.06.23 – To nominate two members to work with the Estates team, to review the
open space grass cutting schedule and future support towards ‘no mow May’.

- 4.3. Project Monitoring List – for information only
Members noted the report and ongoing actions.

5.0. **FINANCE**

- 5.1. To note bills paid

Members noted the report.

- 5.2. To note the Income & Expenditure report ending 31 August 2023

Members noted the report – no comments.

- 5.3. To consider applying for funding through the Wealden Community Spaces Grants Programme

Members were asked to determine which projects to apply for and to look at the list of items to decide which of them to include.

The first four items on the list included footway improvements within Boothland Wood, West Park and Hempstead Meadows Local Nature Reserves and Bridge Farm Wood. Although we were still waiting on a quotation for the lower steps needing replacement at Bridge Farm Wood, members considered it to be favourable to apply for those items above all, as being the best way to spread the cost across the town.

This proposal was seconded as it would improve accessibility into public spaces.

EL22.10.23 Members **RESOLVED** to agree to apply for funding through the Wealden Community Spaces Grants Programme, to include footway improvements to Boothland Wood, West Park Local Nature Reserve, Hempstead Meadows Local Nature Reserve and Bridge Farm Wood.

- 5.4. To undertake an initial review of the budget areas for 2024-25

Members recognised that some items were more in need of repair than others, such as upgrades to the Victoria Pleasure Ground play area and the zipwire at Hempstead Recreation Ground and that they did not want to put fees up to include more items due to the recent cost of living. The allotments were the only statutory provision required of the council and those costs were also being kept to a minimum for similar reasons.

One consideration was to maybe look into the cost of having a wild meadow type garden area on the western side near the trees by the park in Luxford Field, perhaps with sleeper benches.

Members agreed that was an excellent idea but to also stick to the list of items in the report due to the budget being tight and to hold back on any further new initiatives for the time being.

EL23.10.23 Members **RESOLVED** to support those suggestions for the draft budget 2024/25 and to look into the provision of a wild meadow garden area on the western side of Luxford Field.

- 5.5. To undertake an initial review of fees and charges for sports facilities

Members all supported one proposal to initially look at increasing the fees and charges by five percent due to reflect the increasing costs of materials and grounds maintenance.

EL24.10.23 Members **RESOLVED** to initially consider placing an increase on the fees and charges for sports facilities by 5% in 2024/25, and for this to be confirmed during the budget setting process.

5.6 To undertake an initial review of fees and charges for allotments

The Town Clerk reminded members that the admin fee was brand new as of 1 April 2023 and the water charge was determined by the water board.

Members agreed that it would be prudent for tenants to settle into the changes established this year and that this could be reviewed more substantially next year.

Members were keen not to allow more than the proposed percentage increase of 1.5% next year.

The deposit would not be increased as this was considered reasonable and refundable.

EL25.10.23 Members **RESOLVED** to initially consider increasing the fees and charges for allotments by 1.5% in 2024/25. This would not include the deposit or the admin fee.

5.7 To undertake an initial review of fees and charges for Snatts Road Cemetery

A proposal was made to continue with the same percentage increase unless the service was experiencing hardship. Members agreed.

EL26.10.23 Members **RESOLVED** to initially consider increasing the fees and charges for Snatts Road Cemetery by 1.5% in 2024/25.

6.0. ADMINISTRATION

6.1 To note the draft minutes from the Allotment Conference on 20 September 2023

Members noted the draft minutes.

7.0 ENVIRONMENT

7.1 To note the current position of the Town Council's Estates

Members noted the report.

7.2 To consider a suggestion by the Manor Park & Hempstead Fields Residents' Association in relation to the Dene

(Cllr B. Reed arrived at 7.28pm)

A Powerpoint presentation was provided by the Town Clerk including feedback from the Head Groundsman.

Although the land registry title register was yet to be received, The Dene was now the property of the Town Council.

An enquiry had been submitted to ask if it would be beneficial to plant a line of four or five carbon catching trees, such as horse chestnuts beside the path that runs beside the tunnel that runs up to Nevill Road.

The Head Groundsman was a little uncertain about this. They had just taken on the cutting of the grounds this season and were concerned about roots growing too closely to the path and the roots pushing up, as they would become very large trees. Also, they had noticed that horse chestnuts were becoming more prone to disease recently.

There was also concern about the anti-social behaviour and mowing around this area.

If members were keen to plant on this site, a suggestion was made to perhaps plant one native tree within the bowl of the green at the bottom.

One member suggested that planting trees could damage the open plan garden design of the Manor Park estate. The Dene was an important vista towards the Buxted Park estate. A specimen Oak might be lovely there and more appropriate. Another member agreed but suggested maybe having a Sycamore tree in thought of the lost Sycamore Gap tree near Hadrians' Wall. Either way, members agreed that consideration would need to be given towards its maintenance, as well as the grass cutting, the potential damage to pathways and safety for those sledging in the winter months.

Furthermore with the garden design of Manor Park estate, a design code dissuaded the planting of native hedgerows, so this also needed to be reflected in any decision made.

Members asked to defer this decision to have a proper look at the area and rethink considering the very recent purchase of the site.

Also, a proposal was made for Manor Park and Hempstead Fields Residents' Association to look at a tree in Larnach Close, as there was epicormic growth which needed attention.

EL.27.10.23 Members RESOLVED:

- (i) to thank the Manor Park and Hempstead Fields Residents' Association and welcome their suggestion for trees to be planted at The Dene, and;
- (ii) agree that at this precise time the Council needed time to assess the area for future use and defer any decision until the next financial year, with the potential of maybe planting one native tree only.

7.3 To consider the installation of a gate to restrict access to the Grounds work area next to Victoria Pavilion

A powerpoint presentation was provided by the Town Clerk and ideas provided for discussion.

The grounds staff had made a good job of fencing off this area in the last year with a gate installed from the path up from New Barn.

However, with a lot of machinery in this area and moving Grounds vehicles going in and out every day, it was becoming a health and safety concern, especially with bikes and scooters going down the tarmac area at speed whilst at the same time, vehicles were travelling in and out.

One suggestion would be to create a path around the edge of the fencing on the field towards the car park, although this could be costly. However, it was agreed that the issue of safety would prevail over costs.

To hire external contractors to install a path was estimated at around £5K, although this would be halved if the grounds team were to do this instead. This would also include materials and machinery, although labour costs would need to be factored in too. Members were keen on this idea going forward.

A more recent and cost-effective suggestion was for a gate to be installed on the other side of the drive (next to the garages) with a pedestrian gate and closer to

allow an access point. Access to the two rented garages would still need to be provided for the Anderida Cricket club and Uckfield Performance Ensemble.

Members were in favour of this idea too, leaving the area as a work site only and taking out any risk from the equation.

One member suggested the inclusion of some sort of demarcation on the grounds to indicate that this was not a footpath or area for bikes and scooters.

It was also requested that any footway installed would need to meet disabled access requirements.

Although we could ask the Ridgewood Farm developers if they could help with this idea as part of their development, we would need to get this work done sooner rather than later, due to the safety aspect. The developers were also at various phases of purchasing land so it would be unlikely to happen any time soon. There were improvements to the footway around Victoria Pleasure Ground and New Barn planned as part of the S106 agreement for the Ridgewood Farm site, but that would not be for a while yet and was more focused on improving accessibility from the town centre through to the Ridgewood Farm estate via the sports pitches and Boothland Wood.

Also, the responsibility would be down to us to make our grounds area safer. There was some money available from earmarked reserved which could be used for this purpose, which would need to be explored further.

EL.28.10.23 Members **RESOLVED** to agree to:

- (i) install a gate on the main drive (with a pedestrian gate and closer) estimated at £300 to 400, and;
- (ii) defer the decision to bring the path around the edge of the fencing up to the car park to the next E&L Committee in November 2023, after seeking further details on accessibility and funding options.

7.4 To consider a relaunch of the Drone Code

Members were aware that this was purely to publicise the key principles of the drone code, including consideration for neighbouring households and where drones would be allowed.

EL.29.10.23 Members **RESOLVED** to agree to the relaunch of the Drone Code.

8.0 LEISURE

8.1 To note an update on the Our Parks Initiative – Wealden funding

Members noted the report and were keen on the provision of further funding for this initiative which was as no extra cost and beneficial for all our residents to have access to join.

The Wellbeing Project Officer at Wealden District Council had confirmed that they now had an agreement in place and had officially appointed Our Parks to deliver sessions in Wealden. Our Parks had been working on recruiting coaches for the sessions in other areas and Wealden DC were hoping that they would be able to give them an indication of a likely start date for those this week. The Wellbeing Officer would touch base with Our Parks to discuss their plan for continuing the sessions in Uckfield, which the Town Council had been assured would be included in the programme costs that they had agreed to fund.

As soon as they had any further details they will let us know.

9.0 REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

Nothing to report.

10.0 REPORTS FROM COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

10.1 Active Uckfield

Nothing to report at this time.

10.2 All Weather Pitch Operational Group

Nothing to report at this time.

10.3 Conservators of Ashdown Forest

Members noted the report – with thanks to Councillor Reed.

10.4 West Park LNR and Hempstead Meadows LNR – Supporters Group

Nothing to report at this time.

10.5 Luxford Centre Management Committee

Members noted the report – with thanks to Councillor Macve.

10.6 Uckfield Railway Line Parishes Committee

Members noted the report – with thanks to Councillor Macve.

10.7 Uckfield Youth Club Board

Nothing to report at this time.

10.8 Wealden Bus Alliance/Weald Link

Nothing to report at this time.

10.9 Uckfield and District Twinning Association (AGM and events only)

Nothing to report at this time.

11.0 CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

12.0 CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

EL.30.10.23

It was **RESOLVED** that pursuant to Section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted it was advisable in the public interest that the public be temporarily excluded and they were instructed to withdraw.

12.1 To consider a report on the Marketing programme

Members noted the report.

The meeting finished at 20:13pm.