



Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment and Leisure Committee** held on
Monday 8th July 2024 at 7.00pm
Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield

PRESENT:

Cllr. Angie Smith (Chair)	Cllr. Bernadette Reed (Vice-Chair)
Cllr. Karen Bedwell	Cllr. Donna French
Cllr. Val Frost	Cllr. Michael McClafferty
Cllr. Chris Macve	Cllr. Spike Mayhew

IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Peter Selby

James Hollingdale – Estates and Facilities Manager
Rachel Newton – Senior Administrative Officer
Thomas Woollard – Countryside Ranger
Minutes taken by Rachel Newton

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. No declarations of interest were provided at this stage in the meeting.

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

None.

3.0. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology was received prior to the meeting from Councillor D. Bennett due to family commitments and also, from Councillor K. Bedwell who had informed the clerk that she may potentially arrive late due to a personal commitment.

4.0. MINUTES

4.1. Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee held on the 15 April 2024

EL.03.07.24 It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee held on the 15 April 2024 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4.2. Action list

Members noted the report and agreed to remove the action on:
EL.54.04.24 – To consider an application for Wealden District Council's Community Orchards Grant Funding Members agreed to the areas proposed by the Town Council: Ridgewood MUGA an Victoria basketball court, an orchard already planned at West Park and maybe the bottom of Hempstead Field. The Countryside Ranger had submitted an application under this scheme and had been successful.

4.3. Project Monitoring List – for information only

Members noted the report and agreed to remove the actions on:

FC.86.01.23 – A new gazebo was purchased plus two folding white trestle tables, utilising these funds and existing revenue budgets.

FC.91.01.24 – The D-Day Anniversary activities event were a great success with the support of local suppliers, performers, staff and councillors.

5.0. **FINANCE**

5.1. To note bills paid

Members noted the report. Councillor M. McClafferty raised a query in relation to a submission on the suppliers invoices for the sum of £545.71, referenced under the heading 'Safety boots'. Although this was the only item showing under this heading, the invoice itself provided a summary of the safety equipment purchased totalling this amount and the receipts for those purchases had also been verified by councillors.

5.2. Income & Expenditure report

No finance report was produced at this time due to year end.

6.0. **ADMINISTRATION**

6.1. To appoint members to Outside Bodies - Local Nature Reserve Supporter Group

EL.04.07.24 Members **RESOLVED** to appoint Councillor D. French and Councillor V. Frost as Town Council representatives of the Local Nature Reserve Supporters Group.

6.2. To consider memorial tablets for new ashes area within Snatts Road Cemetery

There was provision for a pre-planned area of ashes interments adjacent to the north west border of the 'X' section, as well as a more recent suggestion for a suitable memorial tablet to be laid along this area. This was an alternative design and format for a new desktop tablet, with integrated vase that could create a well ordered, tidier line of ashes interments next to the pathway, enabling loved ones to visit and pay their respects.

Members agreed that this would be in keeping and a lovely idea for this particular area. One member asked if the overall appearance of the row of tablets would be affected with various colours of inscriptions. However, there were only standard colours available and they would had a similar theme to the tablets in the Garden of Remembrance.

This proposal was agreed and members were also asked to accept the slight amendments outlined at item 51. (xii) within the Snatts Road Cemetery Rules and Regulations.

The Garden of Remembrance in the south side of the cemetery would also be reaching capacity in the near future and the Town Council had been looking at other suitable areas for ashes interments nearby. Councillor D. French had also been kindly assisting with her knowledge and expertise of mapping systems which had been really helpful so far.

EL.05.07.24 Members **RESOLVED** to:

(i) accept this proposal for a new 'desktop tablet' with integrated vase, for the new areas allocated for ashes interments, and;

(ii) accept the amendments proposed (in red) at item 51. (xii) within the Cemetery Rules and Regulations.

6.3. To consider a request from a resident to purchase land at the rear of their property

A local resident had requested to purchase a piece of land at the back of their garden at 10 Calvert Road, Uckfield.

The Chair reminded members that previously, the Town Council had received a number of requests to buy land but that committee members had consistently turned them down as they did not wish to make a precedent.

The Chair also stated that any decision regarding the potential purchase of council land would not be taken lightly, and that members needed to consider each request individually on their own merit.

The Ranger was present at the meeting to provide further information about this area of land. This was a natural piece of heathland and was already a community orchard that was planted by the Town Council, which was under the grand scheme to be extended areas.

Members asked about one of the images provided by the resident, as a stretch of grassway had been cut directly around the back of the property. This was not a natural pathway and it was agreed that this might cause a problem if people were not using the correct access routes. It was suggested leaving this area as part of the heathland.

Members objected to this request as the Town Council could end up losing that strip of land (Path 'UM') and it was one of a few green space left and was also going to be used for an orchard and natural heathland for residents to enjoy.

One member also pointed out that the areas requested would extend down past the rear of another garden, which would not be fair to other residents.

EL.06.07.24 Members **RESOLVED** unanimously to object to the request submitted by a local resident to purchase land at the back of 10 Calvert Road, Uckfield (land known as Path 'UM').

- 6.4 To consider a proposal to limit the number of benches at Snatts Road Cemetery
A proposal was put forward to limit the number of benches installed in the cemetery, primarily put forward by the Head Groundsman as the Grounds team had been responsible for their upkeep and maintenance.

Members agreed to a limit of twenty benches, and to decide on a process for how to allocate spaces for benches in the future. They also wished to be mindful to be fair to everybody, so the current benches would not be removed unless they were a health and safety concern to the public.

One member suggested maybe having a bench like the ones the Lions installed on Luxford Field, as this sort of bench comes in a variety of designs. This would more appealing than the current timber benches, durable and maintenance free, and would not suffer from deterioration or vandalism. Maybe families could pay for a plaque to be installed on a chosen bench or two. The plaques could be in the shape of an oak leaf or something equally as nice.

As we had a lot of open spaces, Councillor Reed also suggested perhaps having a program of benches and practical areas to place them.

The Ranger was asked if he might have some wood to re-purpose for more basic benches too within our open spaces, maybe as a memory bench.

The Estates and Facilities Manager mentioned that the problem had been the maintenance and repair costs, so if we did not know who owned a bench that could be a problem. There was no licence so inspections of benches could be time consuming, so he liked the idea of a plaque on a bench instead.

A suggestion was also made to offer to plant a tree instead, as an alternative memorial to a bench.

EL.07.07.24 Members **RESOLVED** to request staff to:

- (i) investigate how many spaces there were left in the cemetery and around the town, and allocate a wish list of them for communal memorial benches (town owned);
- (ii) look into a suitable plaque;
- (iii) set a 10-year licence for the benches (so that we could take them away if they were damaged or deteriorating, replacing old for new);
- (iv) offer to plant a tree instead on Town Council land in the town (no plaques on trees);
- (v) potentially, look into any alternatives such as having a an engraved brick structure, and;
- (vi) take those findings to the next Environment and Leisure Committee.

6.5 To confirm membership of the Committee's working groups

Councillors K. Bedwell, S. Mayhew, M. McClafferty and A. Smith were happy to remain on the Combined Fees and Charges Working Group (for the provision of all our open spaces), since they had all been involved on the joint working group committee last year. Councillor B. Cox was no longer on this committee.

Councillors K. Bedwell and A. Smith also volunteered to remain on the Climate Change Steering Group. Councillors B. Reed, M. McClafferty and D. French also volunteered.

EL.08.07.24 Members **RESOLVED** to confirm to continue with the existing councillors K. Bedwell, S. Mayhew, M. McClafferty and A. Smith for the Combined Fees and Charges Working Group.

EL.09.07.24 Members **RESOLVED** to confirm the members for the Climate Change Steering Group – Councillors K. Bedwell, A. Smith, B. Reed, M. McClafferty and F. French.

7.0 ENVIRONMENT

7.1 To note an update from the Countryside Ranger

The Countryside Ranger, Tom, was introduced and welcomed to the committee meeting.

Trees were one of the biggest issues for the grounds team during the spring to summer seasons and the way professional tree inspections were carried out had involved bringing in a specialist arboriculturalist, brought in as a retainer for three days a month, at a slightly reduced day rate.

The plan was for all surveys to be carried out periodically during the summer and works to start in September. That way, the grounds team were less busy over the period.

Just to highlight, there were 226 trees that currently required work within the next twelve-months. This would probably cover half a day per tree minimum, by the time everything was set up, so there was quite a bit of work to do. This did not include the large scale ash die back works in the main woodlands and excluded anything that was not a boundary tree however.

The view was that doing this in-house would save that amount of allocated funds and any leftover materials could be re-purposed in a sustainable way.

With the Community Grant Funding for the Orchards, this had paved a way for re-planting in new areas and extending the West Park Community Orchard.

The Ranger also planned to introduce a bird watching station in the wet meadow with some of the materials.

Councillor Reed would meet up with the Ranger separately to go over some items she knew were on the agenda prior to making any changes to the noticeboards, which were outdated.

Improvements were included in the management plan to undertake wildlife surveys and improve water quality at Harlands Pond, which was winter work. The idea was to remove the silt with a special product rather than dredge at this point, which would be more environmentally friendly too.

Councillor Smith thanked the Ranger for the impressive report which was a really valuable addition to the agenda and asked if he could return twice yearly to update the committee.

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

[Councillor K. Bedwell arrived at the meeting at 19:51pm]

Councillor Bedwell asked the Estates and Facilities Manager if it was possible to have a bulb planting day for local residents to bring along and plant themselves around Harlands pond. This could be something that staff could look into.

Further large scale ash die back works were programmed for Boothland Wood this winter. Councillor Mayhew asked if some of the wood chip could still be delivered to allotments. The Estates and Facilities Manager said that we would need to be careful not to set a precedent as it could be a health and safety concern when it mulched and rodents or fly tipping were involved. However, if the tenants could manage this themselves, that would be ideal. This would be raised at the next allotment meeting.

The fence around the perimeter of Elizabeth Gardens was broken and would be replaced by chestnut fencing this week.

Councillor Bedwell wished to thank Grounds staff for the work they were doing, especially since meeting with the Estates and Facilities Manager and Head Groundsman recently and beginning to understand the pressures that the grounds team were often under during trying to manage the workload.

7.3 To consider establishing a working group for Uckfield Heritage Plaques

EL.10.07.24 Historic England had released a blue plaque scheme recently, and members agreed that it would be better to take this to the next Full Council meeting to ask for any volunteers in the broader sense, to see if there was more interest from wider councillors.

Also, members asked for the existing Historic England Blue Plaque Scheme to be investigated to see if this would be an alternative to launching our own scheme, as it was currently open for recommendation.

8.0 **LEISURE**

8.1 Update on the Our Parks Initiative

These sessions were available four times a week at Harlands Playing Fields, and were fun and free to local residents of Uckfield. To join, view Our Parks website for further details. The attendance rate was increasing, and was being advertised so it would be great to see more people join in.

9.0 REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

- 9.1 To note an update from the Joint Allotment Working Group
Members noted the report.

Councillor D. French was given huge thanks for creating the amazing Rex and Ursula scarecrows who had taken up residence at the Civic Centre this week in anticipation of the Allotment Competition on 11 July.

- 9.2 Climate Change Working Group Update

A request was made by the working group for the Town Council's solicitors to be re-instructed to contact the owner of the land adjacent to the River Uck and abutting the lane leading to the Sussex Horse Rescue site.

The committee approved and proposed that we pursue this because if we could extend from where the footpath terminates it would be a huge benefit to the local community.

Grant funding would need to be looked into to purchase the land.

- EL.11.07.24** Members **RESOLVED** to agree to request staff to instruct the Town Council's solicitors in relation to the potential purchase of land adjacent to the River Uck and abutting the lane leading to the Sussex Horse Rescue site.

10.0 REPORTS FROM COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

- 10.1 All Weather Pitch Operations Group
Nothing to report at this time.

- 10.2 Conservators of Ashdown Forest
Nothing to report at this time.

- 10.3 Local Nature Reserve Supporters Group
(see item 6.1)

- 10.5 Luxford Centre Management Committee
Members thanked Councillor C. Macve and noted this report. The flooring was well received by the Town Council grant scheme and proposed extension.

- 10.6 Uckfield Railway Line Parishes Committee
Members thanked Councillor C. Macve and noted this report. Councillor B. Reed wished to mention that she was upset to see Wealden District Cllr Everitt's comments as this was a dual track and not a single track with a cycle way alongside.

- 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 Wealden Food Partnership Advisory Group
Nothing to report at this time.

- 10.10 Uckfield and District Twinning Association (AGM and events only)
Members thanked the Marketing and Community Engagement Officer for this update and for publicising photographs from the trip to France on social media.

11.0 CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS

Nothing to report.

12.0 CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

EL.12.07.24 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 and thanked the Marketing and Community Engagement Officer for the excellent content once again, and to try to get more subscribers wherever possible.
- 12.2 To select a suitable lease agreement for two new Grounds vehicles
Members discussed this item in detail and provided some recommendations to take back to members of staff to explore in further detail.

The meeting finished at 21:00pm.