



Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment and Leisure Committee** held on
Monday 14th October 2024 at 7.00pm
Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield

PRESENT:

Cllr. Angie Smith (Chair)
Cllr. Karen Bedwell
Cllr. Val Frost
Cllr. Chris Macve

Cllr. Bernadette Reed (Vice-Chair)
Cllr. Donna French
Cllr. Michael McClafferty
Cllr. Spike Mayhew

IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Jackie Love
Councillor Peter Selby

Rachel Newton – Senior Administrative Officer
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 CHAIR'S DISCRETION

None.

3.0. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

One apology was received from Cllr D. Bennett due to personal reasons.

4.0. MINUTES

4.1. Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee held on the 2 September 2024

EL.20.10.24 It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee held on the 2 September 2024 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4.2. Action list

Members noted the report - no items to remove.

4.3. Project Monitoring List – for information only

Members noted the report – no items to remove. Councillor Reed asked if there was an item in relation to the ecology report but this was not part of the action list.

5.0. FINANCE

5.1. To note bills paid

Members noted the report and a couple of areas were clarified:

With regards to the £900 payment made to a Tree Surgery company, the Ranger explained that it would normally cost around £350 per day for professional tree inspections and as a practicing Tree Surgeon, they were able to undertake more intricate climbing with specialist equipment. The tree climber worked alongside the Grounds team three days a month, so this was worthwhile and it helped the Grounds team to keep on top of the monthly expenditure by condensing their time at a reduced rate.

Clarification was sought on a payment made for a drum circle activity in August. It was explained that this formed part of the Weald on the Field entertainment and was led by a Ukrainian drummer. Councillors expressed how much fun this was and how much the activity was enjoyed by local residents.

5.2 Income & Expenditure report

One member recognised the need for the retainer for a tree surgeon having recently visited the local woodlands and seeing the amount of ash die back works being undertaken, but also found it quite revealing to see how the woodlands had been impacted by new pedestrian routes since developments had been built adjacent.

On account of the low income showing for burials and ashes interments during the first four months (April – July) of the financial year, one member asked if this was likely to be ongoing. It was budgeted at £12k (£3k per month), whilst the actual had recorded half of that budgeted. Members were advised that the income had caught up in recent months and that it had always been difficult to predict income for burials, with patterns changing year to year, particularly during the pandemic. Members asked to look at the costs involved in the upkeep and maintenance of the cemetery (including staffing) and replacement of vehicles and equipment.

Staff were asked to liaise with local funeral directors to find out if there were any recent changes in demand and families' preferred arrangements. They were also interested to understand if the Wealden Crematorium had affected business in the Wealden area. The Senior Administrative Officer stated that people were still requesting both burials and ashes interments so it was not comparable in that regard. It was suggested to investigate other areas, to see what they offered, since the Town Council only budgeted for what they had been doing traditionally (resolution at item 5.4).

5.3 To consider the quotations received for upgrading two Grounds team vehicles and to select a suitable lease agreement

The Ranger advised that ideally, the grounds team would like to focus on the replacement of two vehicles, although there was the option of a third electric 'pull' vehicle available that would be useful between Victoria and the Civic Centre. Local suppliers, Citroen and Toyota, had been recommended in the event of servicing requirements, although the Ranger had no preference.

Citroen did not offer pick-up trucks and were slightly cheaper, although one member strongly informed attendees that Toyota were considered to produce more robust works vehicles so could be potentially more cost effective in the long run. Toyota offered good discounts and it was suggested to avoid contract hire and to try making a deal for the purchase of three vehicles.

The Hilux was highly regarded for holding their value and included a tow bar.

The Ranger pointed out that for a 'pool' vehicle (one for all staff), an electric van would support the 'green' agenda, and that the initial costs would be cheaper, even with the additional cost of £1,080 for the charger to be installed, saving around £400 a year. The Toyota Proace box van came with electrics and also worked out slightly cheaper - SLM Group offered a £15k discount with this offer which was good

value. With mileage, this would provide a range of 160-248 miles per week, depending on which offer was accepted.

If a charger was installed for a small van, a suggestion was made to capitalise on this opportunity and purchase a bigger electric van too. Electric was fine as the vehicles would not be required for towing. If anything needed to be pulled out they would use a 4-wheel drive.

A minor point was also raised on the spreadsheet in the report - the contract period for the Toyota Proace was 48-months, not 36-months.

Whilst putting in an EV charger, it was also worth considering future proofing this to prepare for the installation of solar panels on the roof with a battery for economy 7, and to note this whilst setting the budgets.

The current Grounds vehicles were of low value but could be used for part exchange and it was recommended to buy seat covers for inside the vehicles.

EL.21.10.24 Members **RESOLVED** to agree to a finance lease deal for the three vehicles (if the budget allowed) with Toyota (two electric vans and one diesel pick-up).

- 5.4 To review fees and charges for Snatts Road Cemetery for 2025/26
Members had already provided their suggestions at item 5.2 to set up a working group to discuss maintenance fees and charges. Also, to round up the figures to the nearest £5 to make it simpler. It was felt that the budget was going to be extremely tight next year and this area had not increased over the last few years, so needed to be looked into.

EL.22.10.24 Members **RESOLVED** to agree to:
(i) a 2% increase to the cemetery fees and charges in 2025/26 - rounding up the figures to the nearest £5;
(ii) revisit the working group to discuss cemetery maintenance costs, and;
(iii) compare prices against Wealden Crematorium for ashes interments.

- 5.5 To review fees and charges for Allotments for 2025/26

EL.23.10.24 Members **RESOLVED** to agree that recent income was more or less equal and showed that we were now on target, so the proposed 2% increase was satisfactory, and the admin fee would remain at £15 per plot.

6.0. ADMINISTRATION

- 6.1 To note the draft minutes of the Allotment Conference on 11 September 2024
Members noted the draft minutes and that the Conference was a huge success.

- 6.2 To consider a draft licence agreement to manage the requests and number of memorial benches in Snatts Road Cemetery and on Town Council owned land
Members were not keen on the plastic benches being utilised within the cemetery, these would be more suited to the nature reserves. Staff were also asked to find out if they were made of recyclable materials. The timber slatted benches with metal ends were more attractive and better to sit on so would be more suited to the cemetery and open spaces where residents were likely to sit and reflect.

EL.24.10.24 Members noted the report and **RESOLVED** to agree to the proposed bench licence with a caveat that the nicer metal benches be placed in the cemetery and recreation areas and plastic/recycled material benches be restricted to the nature reserves.

7.0 ENVIRONMENT

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

Councillor Reed provided a verbal update about Harlands Pond and the recent liaison with the Newt Conservation Partnership. Unfortunately Harlands Pond did not meet the criteria, but there might be alternative areas suitable for consideration. If successful, this might support the cost of improving our biodiversity.

The slide at Hempstead Recreation Ground Play Area had been barriered off, although the tape kept being moved so the Ranger would investigate to find out if this was a safety issue and if so, the slide would have to be removed until repair works were done. Further to the annual inspection of the play equipment, any parts that had been removed or gone missing were being replaced or removed for safety purposes.

One of the streetlighting columns had been hit in the High Street by a vehicle. The Estates & Facilities Manager were asked to bear this in mind as it could affect the festive light installation.

8.0 LEISURE

8.1 Nothing to report

9.0 REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

9.1 To receive an update from the Sports Working Group

Members noted the report.

9.2 To receive an update from the Allotment Working Group

Members noted the report.

10.0 REPORTS FROM COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

10.1 All Weather Pitch Operational 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

Nothing to report at this time.

10.4 Luxford Centre Management Committee

Nothing to report at this time.

10.6 Uckfield Railway Line Parishes Committee

Members thanked Councillor C. Macve and noted this report.

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)

Nothing to report at this time.

11.0 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Nothing to report at this time. The Chair thanked the Ranger and Grounds staff for all of their hard work.

12.0 CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

EL.25.10.24 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 as this was very comprehensive. Tickets for the pantomime were due to be ready to order online later that week.

The meeting finished at 20:15pm.