



Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment and Leisure Committee** held on
Monday 25th November 2024 at 7.00pm
Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield

PRESENT:

Cllr. Angie Smith (Chair)
Cllr. Michael McClafferty
Cllr. Spike Mayhew

Cllr. Karen Bedwell
Cllr. Chris Macve

IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Peter Selby
Ranger – Tom Woollard
Three members of the public

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

Standing orders were suspended in order to enable two local residents who lived in Saunders Close, to speak for two minutes each in relation to item 6.2, raising their views and objections to this request for two parcels of land adjacent to 9 Saunders Close.

EL.26.11.24 Members RESOLVED to suspend standing orders.

Resident 1:

The request to purchase land to the front of the property had been refused previously and the vendor was asked not to park on Town Council land because the low chestnut fence was deteriorating, but cars were still being parked in this area. The vendor was also asked not to use this space for bin storage.

In reference to land to the rear of the property, Mr Comber did not believe that this request was justifiable, given that when the property was sold to the current vendor, an extension had been built soon afterwards which reduced the size of the rear garden to about a third of its original capacity. The vendor maintained that brambles and nettles had encroached and invaded his garden, although this would be worse if the vendor was offered additional land. The vendor had also been refused permission in the past to plant trees around his property, as this was a nature reserve.

There was also mention of an oak tree which had a tree preservation order (TPO), and there were other blanket TPOs in this region up towards Downlands Copse so we needed to be cautious.

Resident 2:

She expressed that she also objected to this request and was passionate about the nature reserve and that we all had a duty of care as this land must be protected, especially for wildlife preservation. If people were allowed to purchase land on nature reserves, this could also set a precedent and supermarkets could apply to build on similar land.

EL.27.11.24 Members resolved to reinstate standing orders.

3.0. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Three apologies were received in advance of the meeting from Cllr D. Bennett, Cllr D. French and Cllr V. Frost, all owing to personal reasons.

4.0. MINUTES

4.1. Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee held on the 14 October 2024

EL.28.11.24 It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee held on the 14 October 2024 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

A small typo was corrected to include the Ranger as an attendee at the last meeting.

4.2. Action list

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

EL.42.01.24 – To consider proposals to improve safety at the lower end of Luxford Field. Those works were now due to receive reinforcement and a much sturdier solution following vandalism after they had been installed. The posts had been cemented in properly, although the tack welds had been broken apart.

EL.43.03.24 – To consider the 'We Grow' Initiative – a Sussex based gardening co-operative. This scheme has since been established on private land near Uckfield College and Uckfield Leisure Centre, which was working well.

EL.07.07.24 – To consider a proposal to limit the number of benches at Snatts Road Cemetery – Procedures were now in place for the purchase of benches and associated licence agreement.

EL.14.10.24 – To consider the quotations received for upgrading two Grounds team vehicles and to select a suitable lease agreement (see item 4.3 below).

4.3. Project Monitoring List – for information only

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

FC.64.01.21 – Green Projects plus £5,000 in earmarked reserves. These funds had been utilised to cover deposit payments for the installation of an air source heating system at Foresters Hall.

FC.86.01.23 – Vehicle replacement. All vehicles had now been ordered with two vehicles due to arrive before Christmas. The diesel pick-up would be ready in Spring 2025.

5.0. FINANCE

5.1. To note bills paid

Members noted the report – no comments.

5.2. To note the Income & Expenditure report up to 30 September 2024

One member praised staff for this report, as the income and outgoing figures were aligned which showed that the Town Council are meeting its targets.

6.0. ADMINISTRATION

6.1. To note an update on the Law Commission's consultation on burial and cremation

Members noted the report and were asked to provide any comments on or before 5 December.

6.2 To consider a request to purchase or rent two parcels of town council land adjacent to 9 Saunders Close, Uckfield

Members objected to this request for various reasons:

A nature reserve should be protected, especially wildlife.

The extension to the rear of the property had reduced the size of the garden space at the rear. The property had been sold to the current vendor with the garden space that was suitable for the size of the property at the time.

The vendor was previously asked not to park on council land. With the increasing number of cars on this property there were likely to be issues with parking. With no law enforcement for those parking on verges, this was always going to be a challenge.

One member asked about the prospect of having a policy set to deter any future requests for the sale of any Town Council owned land, although the Chair reminded the committee that each request should be considered on its own merit. If a policy was ever agreed, this could include a caveat stating that if the Town Council wished to sell any assets, local residents would need to be consulted.

To provide some background information, when the properties were built, the outer fence between the north-side property gardens and nature reserve were brought in by about a fence panel's width (about 8 feet) for the last two properties on the cul-de-sac. The fence itself may have been tapered because water either flowed from the nature reserve westwards through that point, or a gas mains pipe ran through that area. This being the case, the land could not be extended.

Historically, the grounds staff were very limited on manpower to replace the fencing, although it appeared that the fencing was still in reasonable working order.

EL.29.11.24 Members noted the report and **RESOLVED** to unanimously object to the sale or rent of two parcels of council owned land adjacent to 9 Saunders Close, Uckfield.

6.3 To review the 2025/26 proposal from East Sussex County Council on their Urban Grass Verge Cutting Contract

Members preferred option was to downsize to two basic cuts per year, with the aim of putting aside those savings for future needs. If there were any issues raised, East Sussex County Council would still be responsible for this.

One concern was raised that some areas may need cutting at peak season and that some areas could look unkempt and untidy. A few areas did do their own cuts, although this was not possible in all local towns.

Overall, members agreed that there was always a risk with every decision made and saving money was the better option for this return. If an additional cut was required, this could be subcontracted out with the money saved, and may still be more cost effective in the long run.

EL.30.11.24 Members noted the report and **RESOLVED** to agree to Option 1 - 2 cuts per year and seeing what effect this had on local verges.

6.4 To consider a letter drafted by the Chair of Westmeston PC to their MP proposing a speed limit on rural roads

Members felt that this kind of approach would make a mockery of the law if it were

brought into force, especially as there were no designated rural roads, so effectively this would be unenforceable. Also, since rural roads were being used alongside the new highways during road works, traffic was naturally self calming.

EL.31.11.24 Members noted the report and **RESOLVED** to agree not to take any action with regard to their proposal for a speed limit on rural roads.

7.0 ENVIRONMENT

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

Members noted the report. The Ranger confirmed that repairs to the slide and fencing panel at Hempstead Playing Field were on the planned works list and materials were being sourced and custom made by a local blacksmith to make it sturdier, to prevent it being damaged again from any anti-social behaviour.

A proposal was made for staff to arrange a bulb planting day in January, to raise this on social media and ask local residents if they wished to join forces alongside the grounds team, to make Harlands pond prettier for next springtime.

7.2 To note an update from the Countryside Ranger

The Ranger provided a powerpoint presentation and verbal update on the new digital platform provided by a company called OTISS. This system was being used to offer town council staff the opportunity of a more streamlined approach to overseeing surveys and maps, trees and street furniture around the town, with the aid of GPS handheld tablets.

Members thanked the Ranger for his comprehensive report and site notes regarding remedial tree works and planting, nature reserves and woodland holdings. The conversion process to OTISS was working

The Ranger and the Head Groundsman had recently qualified as professional tree inspectors and all the allotments would be surveyed after recent issues with an oak tree.

All works on the grounds sheet had been actioned to make time to continue with tree works. A veteran tree in Boothland Wood had been ring-fenced and a path re-directed in order to preserve this valuable asset. With the community orchard scheme, there had been a slight delay on planting the saplings.

8.0 LEISURE

8.1 Nothing to report

9.0 REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

9.1 To note an update from the Allotment Working Group, with proposed amendments to the Allotment Rules and Regulations

Members acknowledged the report and agreed to accept the proposed amendments at item 3.1 (in red) in the Allotment Rules and Regulations and to be sent to all allotment tenants. An additional clause would be included that trees must be assessed by the Ranger or Head Groundsman prior to any works being carried out to British Standards. Tenants must cut the branches of trees themselves.

EL.32.11.24 Members noted the report and **RESOLVED** to agree to the small amendments made within the Allotment Rules and Regulations at item 3.1 in relation to cutting back trees.

9.2 To receive an update from the Climate Emergency Steering Group

Members noted the report. A date was now set for the ECO Expo Upcycled fashion show and art exhibition taking place on 27 February 2025. The Marketing and

Community Engagement Officer would be using social media platforms to attract interest and sort out the tickets.

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.

10.5 Uckfield Railway Line Parishes Committee
Nothing to report at this time.

10.6 Uckfield Youth Club Board
Nothing to report at this time.

10.7 Wealden Bus Alliance/Weald Link
Nothing to report at this time.

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

11.0 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Clerk had issued a statement on social media about the vandalism of the Luxford Field lighting and local residents also provided some comments. The Town Clerk would monitor CCTV to find out if they had any leads.

12.0 CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

EL.33.11.24 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 thanked the Marketing and Community Engagement Officer for this report.

12.2 To consider the provision of temporary toilet facilities at Harlands Playing Fields
An urgent consultation panel would follow with costings and potential options available.

The meeting finished at 20:20pm.