



Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment and Leisure Committee** held on
Monday 14th April 2025 at 7.00pm
Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield

PRESENT:

Cllr. Angie Smith (Chair)
Cllr. Karen Bedwell
Cllr. Donna French
Cllr. Chris Macve

Cllr. Bernadette Reed (Vice Chair)
Cllr. Duncan Bennett
Cllr. Michael McClafferty
Cllr. Spike Mayhew

IN ATTENDANCE:

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.

One declaration of interest was raised by Councillor D. Bennett in relation to item 5.3 as he was a committee member of a football club, and wished to declare that he would not be able to vote or take part.

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

None.

3.0. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

4.0. MINUTES

4.1. Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee held on the 3 March 2025

EL.45.04.25 It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee held on the 3 March 2025 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4.2. Action list

Members noted the report and asked for the following item to be removed from the action list:

EL37.01.25 – To consider the commemoration of the VE Day 80th Anniversary. An update report had been submitted to the meeting in relation to preparations for the important event.

4.3. Project Monitoring List – for information only

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

FC.91.01.24 – Tree for a tree planting programme. The Town Council had been successful with its bid for grant funding through Wealden District Council for Community Orchards and all trees associated with that project had been completed, including areas such as New Barn, Ridgewood Recreation Ground and West Park. An additional gift of black poplars had also been planted in Hempstead Meadows Nature Reserve.

FC.91.01.24 – Harlands Pond Management Plan Works were completed for 2024-5, with further works to continue in the hope of obtaining grant funding, to support biodiversity in this environment.

- 4.4 Forward plan – for information only
Members noted the report.

5.0. FINANCE

- 5.1. To note bills paid

Members noted the report.

- 5.2 To note the Income & Expenditure report ending 28 February 2025

The Chair noted that approximately £27k of the expenditure was already accounted for by the use of earmarked reserves. Members noted the report and made no comments about remaining items.

- 5.3 To confirm the Fees and Charges for our Sports Facilities in 2025-26

Members discussed the overall increases to the fees and charges and in particular previous proposals to uplift fees for seasonal pitch hire over a four-year period. It was these proposals that still needed to be agreed moving into this financial year.

Members were reminded that the current costs of sports hire did not cover the upkeep of pitches or maintenance equipment and this had already been reviewed, at least to balance the figures in the shorter term. The four year plan was devised to help to spread those costs and to manage the outgoings until further information was made available. Local football clubs had fully understood the reasons behind this decision and had been asked if there was anything that the Town Council could help or accommodate them with.

The Sports Working Group were praised for providing those calculations during the initial review period, which had not been easy but was necessary to ensure the future provision of pitches and sports facilities for the local community. The committee also needed to focus on:

- (i) reviewing usage and maintenance costs for adult and junior cricket for next season;
- (ii) sports facility improvements required on all sites including welfare facilities at Harlands;
- (iii) a more substantial licence for the use of West Park, by Uckfield Grasshoppers.

Discussions were also being held with Wealden District Council in relation to possible funding options and local sports clubs were aware that if they could bring funding in, including potential advertising sponsorships, then we could potentially reduce their costs.

A couple of queries were raised in relation to croquet games and if stoolball could be played at the Ridgewood Recreation Ground, since tournaments had not been played since the play area had been installed, although it was unsafe without proper boundaries. The tennis at Victoria Park was currently on a longer term lease by Urban Tennis although it was unsure how long the lease was for at this stage.

- EL.46.04.25** With seven votes in favour, and one vote abstaining due to a conflict of interest (Councillor D. Bennett) members **RESOLVED** to agree to approve both:
- (i) the Sports fees and charges for 2025-26 and to the same percentage increases as set out last year (*25% for football seasonal hire – over four years, and 4% for cricket seasonal hire, stoolball charges and the hire of community space or off pitch hire*), and;
 - (ii) the recommendation by the Internal Auditor to charge sports clubs (particularly football) their seasonal hire, in quarterly instalments, with an additional clause that 'along with paying in advance, clubs do not have a clear booking until payments are cleared'.

6.0. ADMINISTRATION

6.1 To note the tender process for Victoria Play Area and Public Consultation on Saturday 31 May 2025

Members noted the report and the Chair announced that it was lovely to see this moving forward and members were looking forward to seeing the end results.

7.0 ENVIRONMENT

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

Members noted the report. Councillor Reed asked if a bench could be sited near the new orchard at Ridgewood Recreation Ground for a local resident who carried out a survey for breeding birds. This would be referred to the Head Groundsman to see if there was a spare bench available for this purpose.

7.2 To further consider the consecration of a section of land in the new Y-section to accommodate all faiths within our community.

At the previous meeting, members had asked to look further into having both natural and consecrated land for burials and asked to consider how much space would be intended for non-consecrated burials and different faiths.

The report had provided some of the requirements for muslim burials from the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM), as well as some information at a later date in this regard from the local Imam.

Members were mindful of being inclusive and that there was a growing diversity within our community. However, further questions were raised with regard to how much land may need to be set aside for the specific faiths, bearing in mind that there may already be a designated burial ground available to accommodate their needs in the local area. A broad range of faiths and beliefs needed to be considered and to understand their customs surrounding death.

Before further research was undertaken, members agreed that 50% of the land could be consecrated and to invite representatives from the various faith and beliefs to a meeting, to find out their preferences and customs.

A query was still being raised in relation to the ecological aspects and root protection requirements of trees in ancient woodland. It was not clear if the buffer zones were in relation to planning rather than cemetery regulations.

Councillor B. Reed pointed out that there was a 'BS5837' British Standard Tree Survey required for root protection areas with a fifteen metre buffer zone around ancient woodlands, although she was also unsure whether this applied to cemeteries.

This would need to be further investigated with a view to looking into any legal requirements of burials and how this would affect the cemetery plan going forward.

Councillor Reed also provided some useful contacts, including 'Ancient Woodlands Standing Advice' which would provide guidance on direct or indirect harm. Also, 'Arbor Weald' for mapping for root protection areas and The Forestry Commission for specialist advice as they were dual custodians of ancient Woodlands.

Councillor D. Bennett also provided a useful contact, The Natural Burial Association where advice could be sought about the specific requirements needed for burials.

EL.47.04.25 Members **RESOLVED to note the report and,**

- (i) agree to the proposal from the Chair to consecrate fifty percent of the new Y-section (north side) with the view to adding further consecrated ground if and when required, and;
- (ii) to defer discussions for the provision of separate burial space for other faith groups until further clarity and understanding had been sought, and;
- (iii) to look into the legal requirements for burial space adjacent to ancient woodlands..

- 7.3 To receive an update on the litter campaign to address dog fouling in public spaces
Members noted the report. This campaign was ongoing with the schools and members of the public would be supported with any advice on how to report issues and help to try to eradicate this problem as a community.

8.0 LEISURE

- 8.1 To note plans for the VE Day 80th Anniversary
Members noted the report. Councillors were all expected to attend and volunteer at this event.

9.0 REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

- 9.1 To receive an update from the Climate Change Steering Group
Councillor Reed provided a verbal update and a visual link to a draft document supporting the town's natural assets (using a platform called Storymaps), which was an impressive portfolio, including an introduction and further information on the natural assets and green spaces within the town, setting the scene as to why nature was important to us all. Members of the Climate Change Steering Group were asked if they could assist with proof reading a portion at a time each, as there were fifty two sections in all.

The Chair commended Councillor Reed for all her hard work on this project so far, and Councillor Donna French for her help and support. This would certainly be something to look forward to seeing uploaded onto the Town Council website in the near future, once the final draft was approved.

- 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 and 'Weald to Waves'
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
Members noted the report and thanked Councillor C. Macve.

10.5 Uckfield Railway Line Parishes Committee
Members noted the report and thanked Councillor C. Macve.

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**
None.

12.0 **CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS**
EL.48.04.25 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 20:14pm.