

**Minutes of the Meeting of Open Spaces held in Rickards Hall on 6 November 2023 at 7:30 pm**

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Present: Cllrs. Jon Aldridge, Angela Baker (*Chairwoman*), Michael Gemmell Smith (*Vice-Chairman*), Alan Layland, Angela Read, Jeff Streets, Stephen Sumner

In attendance: Town Clerk, Head Groundsman, Community Warden, Minutes Clerk, Planning and Admin Officer, and Cllr Bob Todd. There were no members of the public and no Press.

19:34 Meeting opened.

**1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received, noted, and accepted, from Cllrs Compton, Martindale, and McGregor.

**2 Declarations of Interests, or Predeterminations**

None.

**3 Public Questions**

19:34 *The Chair closed the meeting.*

The Community Warden advised members of his successful contact with the Great Stone Bridge Trust (GSBT), gaining permission for additional bulb planting in the vicinity of the old stone bridge.

19:35 *The Chair re-opened the meeting.*

**4 To Receive and Sign Minutes of The Open Spaces Committee 18 September 2023-018/1-xx**

Members noted the minutes from the last meeting had not been completed, and would be presented to the next meeting.

**5 To Receive the Financial Budget Comparison for Open Spaces (codes 300s/3000s) up to 31 October 2023**

Members noted the budget comparison as reported with the meeting papers, and that some headings were only up to the end September, but noted on the report. It was also noted 30-year Maintenance Plan allocation of £31,500 included £25k streetlighting replacement programme; playground repairs/replacement contingency £5k; Mowshurst Pitches £1,500 contingency.

Streetlighting expenditure included £7,050 from 2022/23 replacement programme of works which had not been paid last year, but £5,661.60 refund had since been received against 2022-23 for traffic light management not used. Committee had agreed at its September meeting to continue with the 30 LED replacements previously supported, £350 each total cost £10,500, and supported a budget overspend, noting that £2,832 had been moved to the earmarked reserves last year towards these costs.

**6 To receive a report and ratify recent Operational Decisions for Open Spaces Activity  
Operational decisions for ratification**

None.

**7 To receive the Head Groundsman's Report**

Members noted the Head Groundsman report on routine and seasonal maintenance, including an issue around mis-use of the open waste bins provided for cemetery waste such as old flowers and wrappings. Despite signage, people were depositing in items such as unwanted food rubbish, and dog waste, which attracted wildlife to spread the waste round the Cemetery - creating additional clear-up work for the groundstaff. The bin just inside the old Cemetery 1 section in particular, was used for offloading rubbish from vehicles in Church Street - although there was a District Council street bin for general waste just across the road. Having discussed

possible solutions, in hope of reducing the spread of rubbish, Members unanimously,

**Resolved:** to initially, trial removing the Cemetery 1 bin, plus one other from the main Cemetery area (2&3), leaving others which were nearer to the main access.

**7.1 To consider improvement to the existing soil storage area in the cemetery creating a concrete base area, expenditure to achieve this of up to £1,000**

Members noted that the top-soil storage space had over recent years expanded and been abused by people dumping their own unwanted earth. It was proposed to remove existing earth for use elsewhere using a hired digger to create footings and install a 5m x 3m concrete base, this should prevent weeds growing up through the soil pile, and to formally highlight that it was not for public use. Members unanimously,

**Resolved:** to approve the proposal to install a concrete base for storage of top-soil used in the Cemetery and for sports pitch maintenance, at an approximate cost of £1,000 for hire of machinery and ready mix concrete lorry to pour the new base. This would be funded through contingencies budget (3080).

**7.2 To approve the expenditure for a new brush cutter machine up to £600**

Members noted that the purchase of an additional attachment for an existing strimmer had removed the need for a brush cutter machine.

**8 Open Spaces Business**

**8.1 To receive the Burial Report**

Members noted the Burial Report:

September: six interments of ashes; six burials. October: one burial.

**8.2 To receive an update on Memorials in cemeteries which are not compliant with the Cemetery Regulations and Rules**

Members noted an audit of the memorials in Cemetery sections three and four had revealed 17 burial plots which had not maintained compliance with the Cemetery regulations. They had expanded the space permitted for memorials, as well as placing their own additional memorials and memorabilia. Each of these have been (or are being) contacted to rectify and reinstate to what is permitted. Some have already done so, or were in the process of doing this.

Over the years, the regulations have been upheld with requests outside of the regulations declined. September Open Spaces Committee refused a retrospective request to permit an additional memorial at a grave plot, Committee agreed to uphold the regulations for memorials and **not** amend its policy, and maintained that the additional memorial needed to be removed.

**8.2.1 To receive a resident's request to permit the extended memorial area to allow for kerb stone area with decorative stone shingle at a grave plot**

Members were asked to consider an extended memorial area at the burial plot currently 88 cm high, 90 cm wide and 80 cm depth. Members considered the request at length. It was noted that permitted width was 76 centimetres, and depth/thickness was 30 centimetres, and that kerb stones were **not** permitted in cemeteries 3 and 4. Members noted other people were to comply with the rule book, and decided there were no extenuating circumstances to allow the extended area, and unanimously.

**Resolved:** to ask the family to reinstate the memorial to the original authorisation in line with the Cemetery regulations, and to insert an informative in the rules stating that no subsequent unauthorised additions are permitted.

**8.3 To confirm wording amendments to the Cemetery Regulations & Rule Book Memorials section (21) to provide clarity to the current rules**

In view of the current issues with a few of the memorials in the Cemetery, members considered changes proposed for added clarity to section 21 of the Cemetery Rules and regulations booklet, including emphasis that only one of the memorial options is permitted on burial plots in the lawn cemetery sections Three and Four.

**Resolved:** to confirm the proposed clarified wording in section 21 of the Cemetery Rules and regulations booklet, added the wording 'plinth depth' replacing the word 'thickness'; and for clarity to add the words 'Memorials at burial plots in cemetery three and four are permitted only one memorial as per a or b above'.

**8.4 Allotment matters**

It was noted that the Town Clerk and a member of the groundstaff team had met the Edenbridge Allotment Gardens Association (EAGA) volunteer Plot Officer to view some of the overgrown, unattended plots, and other issues at Forge Croft site. Some plot holders were making efforts towards clearing the plots, but there were some where past tenants had not been able to clear their plots sufficiently. As the groundstaff would be attending to other works on site, it was agreed that help would be given to clear some of the plots and rubbish left around the site.

**8.5 To receive an update on the Annual Works programme and other approved works**

Members noted works carried out, including:

Tree work at Stangrove Park and pond; Mowshurst

Stangrove Park replacement swing

Recreation Ground zipwire cable seat and chain replaced; swing safety chain repaired; sensory spinner wheel replacement

Pump replacement - Pavilion waste water pump; and Mill Leat water pump - work booked for w/c 6 November.

Outstanding works included:

- Doggets Courtyard - Repointing courtyard slabs £890 (10 year maintenance plan), repair work on 5sqm of the paving in the vicinity of the flower cart
- Stangrove Park: Replacement seesaw and new litter bin
- Annual hedge cutting for Blossoms Park, Recreation Ground, Mowshurst
- Mowshurst car park resurfacing - agreed with Head Groundsman to review after Christmas
- Market Yard car park - repainting bollards - groundstaff to carry out this work

Scheduled work

- Line marking Rec East & West car park, £1,652 - to review early 2024
- Replace hanging baskets Doggets courtyard, £777 - to review early 2024
- Stangrove Playground - surface repair budget, £240 - to monitor and remove to reserves if not needed

**8.6 Kent FA Grass Pitch Maintenance Fund - To receive an update on funding application**

Members were pleased to note confirmation had been received of funding over a six-year period, the grant total value being £14,080; this must be used towards the following improvement works:

Slitting – contractor works

Scarification – contractor works

Decompaction – contractor works

Selective herbicide (weed treatment) – contractor works

Fertiliser – contractor works and/or purchase of materials (fertiliser)

Overseeding – contractor works and/or purchase of materials (seed)

Top dressing – contractor works and/or purchase of materials (topsoil)

Soil Sampler – purchase of a soil sampler

The hiring of maintenance machinery for works that have been recommended in the PitchPower report - those operating the machinery must have completed their GMA Level 1 course.

**8.6.1 Training: To approve the expenditure of £230 for the groundstaff members to complete the online Level 1 Football Grounds Maintenance qualification**

As part of the FA Grass Pitches grant, Council must have two employees holding GMA Level 1 qualification or equivalent. The Grounds Management Association (GMA) has a range of training courses suitable for both the professional and grass roots volunteer. The new online Level 1 modules cover a range of sports and gives participants an awareness and general understanding of the tasks involved in maintaining playing surfaces. The cost is £46 per person and it was proposed all five members of the groundstaff team take the training.

**Resolved:** to allow all five members of the team to take the online Level 1 Football Grounds Maintenance qualification at the expenditure of £230.

**8.7 Winter Maintenance plan**

Members noted Kent Highways had confirmed it would provide the usual one-tonne salt grit supply. Edenbridge delivery is still awaited, but there is currently some supply surplus from previous year. Council office had supplies of flood sacks for sale to residents, £25 for 5 sacks.

**8.8 To review annual subscriptions to Open Spaces organisations**

**8.8.1 Open Spaces Society Membership renewal £45**

Members considered the update from the Open Spaces Society on its activities over the past year, including preventing activities closing and diverting public paths, and the re-registration of "lost" commons. Members,

**Resolved:** to continue Council's membership of the Open Spaces Society at £45 annual subscription.

**8.8.2 Kent County Playing Fields Association £40**

Members considered Council's membership of Kent County Playing Fields Association (KCPFA), and were advised that the subscription for 2022/3 was outstanding, and the current renewal was due. After some discussion on the purpose of the Association in supporting the provision of playing field facilities, and voting six in favour and one against it was,

**Resolved:** to continue Council's membership of Kent County Playing Fields Association at £20 annual subscription, also paying £20 overdue.

**8.9 For information only: To receive an update on other open spaces matters**

Members noted that following the public tender process, full Council meeting the previous week (30 October) had agreed a contractor selected from the three tenders submitted, and details on the offer, contract, and works schedule, were currently being confirmed.

**9 Byelaws update: To note the revised and updated byelaws for the Council's open spaces and car parks are to be submitted to the DLUHC for confirmation and approval**

Members noted that following completion of the required Notice procedure, the next step was to make an application to the DLUHC for confirmation and approval. This had been presented to full Council for Council approval on 30 October, and councillors agreed to make an application to the DLUHC for confirmation and approval, and to adopt the updated Byelaws subject to DLUHC approval.

**10 Dogs on leads consultation: To receive feedback from the recent consultation and consider how Committee wants to proceed**

*20:15 District Councillor Margot McArthur joined the meeting for this item.*

Members discussed at length the results of the community consultation during October, which had produced 256 survey responses revealing that opinions were divided for and against the possibility of introducing dog-walking restrictions on Council's open spaces. Though there was a clear majority who agreed there was a problem with dog fouling at Town Council open spaces, there was no evidence that a dogs-on-leads policy was supported or would solve the problem. Other options were considered, including possibly running further consultation, but eventually Members concluded and,

**Resolved:** to publicise a summary of the responses from the survey; also to continue the publicity campaign to urge people to bag their dog's waste and that it could be put in any waste bin as all Council litter bins are now dual-use.

Members asked to thank the Communications Officer for all her hard work with this consultation, and analysis of the results.

**11 To confirm the proposed replacement columns for 2024-25 and to advise the budget for 2024-25**

Members noted that costings for the next phase of the rolling programme of lighting column replacements had still not been received, despite repeated requests from the office - now expected early December. The budget for 2024-25 had £45k allocated, it was proposed to replace five of the oldest steel columns, seven of the more modern metal columns, and the last three remaining pole-mounted boxes. It was unknown if the 15 lights would be covered by the budget, Members,

**Resolved:** to support the proposed replacement programme for the next financial year 2024-25 and estimated expenditure of £45k.

**12 To confirm budget recommendations for 2024-25**

Members reviewed an initial draft budget for Open Spaces for 2024-25, and

**Resolved:** to recommend the initial Open Spaces draft budget, requesting £427,310 to the Finance Committee for its draft Council budget preparations.

NB: Following the meeting, it was noted a calculation error, and the requested expenditure should have been £436,084.

**13 Date of next meeting - 12 February 2024 (EOY review)**

Noted.

20:27 Meeting closed.