



**MINUTES**

**Meeting:** ENVIRONMENTAL &  
OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE

**Date:** 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024

**Time:** 10am

**Venue:** PARISH OFFICE, QUEENS HALL, NORTH WEALD

**PRESENT:**

**Councillors (4)** A Buckley (Chairman), R Spearman, Mrs S Hawkins, Mrs S Jackman MBE

**Also in Attendance (3)**

Susan De Luca, Clerk to the Council  
Adriana Jones, Principal Finance Officer (PFO)  
Joanna Tyler, Senior Administrative Officer

**Members of the Press (1)**

**Members of the Public (0)**

**E23.15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (2)**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Clegg and Tyler

**E23.16 OTHER ABSENCES (2)**

No apologies for absence had been received from Cllrs Irvine and Born who are Members of this committee

**E23.17 MINUTES**

The Chairman asked for one correction to be made to Minute No. E23.07, all Members **AGREED**.

The Chairman highlighted the following items and asked if any update had been received from the Parish Council's contractor:

1. Play Areas – lifting of edges of wet pour. TGM are trialling a self-repair kit. The Principal Finance Officer advised that this was part of the contractor's Winter work which is carried out until March.
2. Weald Common Woodland Area. The Chairman state that following meetings with the Parish Council's contractor, it was his understanding that weed spraying would be taking place from February. Cllr Spearman suggested that March onwards would be better. Following discussion, the Clerk confirmed that she would contact the contractor and request that spraying commences at the start of the growing season.

The Chairman asked Members if they agreed with the contents of the Minutes, following which Members **APPROVED** as a correct record the Minutes of the Meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2023.

**E23.18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**E23.19 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC - None present.**

## E23.20 ALLOTMENTS

### a) Review of Allotment Fees

Councillors recalled from the previous meeting; they had postponed making a decision on whether to increase Allotment fees for 2025/26. The Chairman of this Committee had asked that if there were any requests for improvements from the allotment sites, a list should be provided, together with costs, for Members to take into consideration when making their decision. Councillors **NOTED** that no requests for improvements or equipment had been received prior to the preparation of the agenda.

Councillors were reminded that notice of any increase must be given a year in advance. The Chairman referred to the previous meeting and the discussion regarding requests for improvements. He asked if all allotment holders had been written to or if it was just the wardens. The PFO advised that herself and the Clerk have an open dialogue with the wardens and the last major purchase was the cage in Wheelers Farm Gardens garage, however, since that time there have been no further requests for big expenditure items. The PFO confirmed that this was the same across all the allotment sites. The Clerk commented that consideration will need to be given to replacing the main gate to the Hastingwood site this year as it is looking shabby and the wood is splintering. Cllr Spearman reported that there is, what he believed may have once been old compost bin, which needs to be removed from the Hastingwood site. Cllr Mrs Hawkins agreed with this and said that the frame was broken.

The PFO gave the following financial report:

- Income for last year was £2650 from rents and the current year it is £2904
- Expenditure for last year was £4503, however the council did receive a grant to offset that figure. The current expenditure for this year is £4377, which includes £1130 for the cage at Wheelers Farm Gardens allotment site.

It was noted that the increase in income for the current year, when compared to last year, may have been due to people leasing an allotment plot and then leaving (refunds are not given and plots may have been leased again) or it may have been due to an increase in fees.

Councillor Mrs Jackman MBE commented that the current fees were quite low. The Clerk advised that the provision of allotments in the parish is a statutory requirement and the income received from rentals would never match the amount that it costs to maintain the allotment sites.

Cllr Mrs Hawkins reported that it was her understanding that some plots on the Thornwood site may be given up this year. The PFO advised that there is currently a waiting list for the Thornwood site and confirmed that she was not aware of any vacant plots. Both Cllr Mrs Hawkins and Cllr Spearman commented that they thought there were several plots not being used. The matter was discussed at length, following which, Councillors **AGREED** that the PFO would arrange a site visit with the Warden and report back to the Allotment Sub Committee. Cllr Mrs Hawkins and Cllr Spearman confirmed that they would be resuming Sub Committee site visits in March.

The Chairman referred to the allotment fees and whether these should be raised.  
The current fees being:

**ALLOTMENT RENT FOR YEAR 2023/2024 and 2024/2025**

**Under 50 sqm = Extra small £26.00**  
**Between 51sqm & 100sqm = Small £28.00**  
**Between 101sqm & 150sqm = Average £29.00**  
**Between 151sqm & 200sqm = Large £33.00**  
**Over 201sqm = Extra Large £35.00**

Following discussion, Cllr Spearman suggested increasing the fees by 10%, rounded up to the higher figure. All Councillors **AGREED** and confirmed that the Allotment Rent for Year 2025/26 will be:

**Under 50 sqm = Extra small £29.00**  
**Between 51sqm & 100sqm = Small £31.00**  
**Between 101sqm & 150sqm = Average £32.00**  
**Between 151sqm & 200sqm = Large £37.00**  
**Over 201sqm = Extra Large £39.00**

**b) Bee Keeping**

Councillors **NOTED** that the Principal Finance Officer had received a request from an allotment tenant on Wheelers Farm Gardens site to house bees on their individual plot. The PFO reminded Councillors that the Queens Road orchard site houses a number of beehives which are managed by a tenant of Wheelers Farm Gardens allotments (with permission granted by the Council) who is very knowledgeable in the keeping of bees. The location of the orchard site is away from other allotment plots. An extract from the current Rules and Regulations regarding the keeping of bees was tabled at the meeting, along with guidance from the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners:

***EXTRACT FROM CURRENT ALLOTMENT RULES & REGULATIONS:***

***7. Livestock***

***7.1. Except with the prior written consent of the Council the Tenant shall not keep any animals or livestock on the Allotment Garden save rabbits, hens (no Cockerels) and bees, to the extent permitted by section 12 Allotments Act 1950. (Such animals not to be kept for trade or business purposes and accordingly to be limited in number as the Council may provide in writing.)***

***7.2. Any Tenant wishing to keep bees on their Allotment Garden are asked to contact the Council for prior written consent. Should permission be granted, it will be for one beehive per plot, and the management of that hive will remain the responsibility of the plot holder. In the case of termination of tenancy, any bee hives need to be completely removed at the cost to the plot holder. Failure to do so may result in any costs borne by the Council concerning a beehive being reclaimed from the tenant / previous tenant. Bee Hives are not permitted on any communal areas at the allotments, without the express permission of the Parish Council.***

**8. Buildings and Structures**

***8.1. The Tenant shall not without the written consent of the Council erect any building or pond on the Allotment Garden, provided that consent shall not be refused under this clause for the erection of any building reasonably necessary for the purpose of keeping rabbits, bees or hens or be unreasonably withheld for the erection of a garden shed, greenhouse or poly tunnel the maximum size and positioning of which shall be determined by the Council.***

The Chairman asked if there had been any complaints from other allotment holders. The PFO stated that when taking account of the guidance from NSALG, the council needs to establish if anyone close to that particular plot has an allergy to bees, has an issue with it and what actually does it mean for the wider population of the allotments. Councillors were reminded that the reason permission was given for the orchard was because it is an open space and there are no other allotment plots nearby. The PFO advised that there are trees alongside the plot and there is a public footpath which runs adjacent to those trees. The plot is also near to the community garden. The Chairman asked if there was a suitable site where an additional beehive could be located within the orchard. The PFO advised that if a beehive was put over the other side of the site, it would be adjacent to the 2 houses which are on the corner. The Councillors discussed their concerns at length and **AGREED** that a response should be sent to the tenant stating that, at the current time, the Council is unable to facilitate the request, however would be happy to reconsider in the future.

**c) Bonfires**

Councillors **NOTED** that the Principal Financial Officer had received a request from tenants on the Hastingwood Allotment site asking if the Committee would reconsider allowing bonfires on allotments from 1<sup>st</sup> April through to 31<sup>st</sup> October. The PFO advised that the reason for the request is because tenants often find that they cannot have a bonfire following the end of the growing season as the material is too damp or it is wet to burn. It was noted that there is no legal reason behind stopping bonfires during these months, the timings were introduced to stop any nuisance to neighbouring properties. Following discussion, Councillors **AGREED** that they would permit an extra 4 weeks, allowing tenants to have bonfires from 1<sup>st</sup> October and asked that the PFO amend the Rules and Regulations accordingly.

**d) Annual Allotment Meeting**

Councillors **NOTED** that the date of the Annual Allotment Meeting has been scheduled for Sunday, 24<sup>th</sup> March at 9.30am in the Parish Hall, Thornwood Common. All Members are welcome to attend.

**e) Allotment Sub Committee**

Cllr Mrs Hawkins and Cllr Spearman confirmed that this had been covered under item 7(a).

**E23.21 CEMETERY**

**a) Review of Cemetery Fees**

Councillors **NOTED** that the Clerk had received notification from the Grave Digging contractor that fees for interments are to be increased. Members recalled that the

Committee last agreed to increase the fees from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023. It was noted that the Clerk had not received notification of increases from either the supplier of boulders, plaques and spikes, or from the grounds maintenance contractor, however she fully expected to receive these prior to 1<sup>st</sup> April. It was noted that a comparison of fees charged by other local authorities had found that their fees had not been reviewed since the last comparison in June 2023. The Clerk said that it would be her recommendation not to increase the fees at the current time and to review again in six months. The Clerk also suggested that Councillors may wish to add a codicil that if notification of any increase is received, the increase could automatically be applied to the fees without having to revert to the Committee. The Chairman asked if the cemetery made a loss, the Clerk confirmed that it did not. Following discussion, all Councillors **AGREED** that fees would not be increased at the current time, however a codicil would be put in place as per the Clerk's recommendation.

**b) Drainage Complaint**

Councillors **NOTED** that on the evening of Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> January, the Clerk received an anonymous complaint, via email, regarding lack of drainage at the Cemetery. The complainant had expressed concern that there were several graves underwater, pathways flooded and a general lack of run-offs to disperse surface water. Several photos had been supplied. In reaction to this complaint, the Clerk visited the Cemetery the following morning (Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> January). The Clerk observed that any excess water had dispersed, took photographic evidence and responded accordingly to the complainant, giving a brief outline of the history of the Cemetery and the surrounding area regarding flooding. Copies of the photographs taken by the complainant, together with those taken by the Clerk, were tabled at the meeting. The Clerk informed Councillors that the Cemetery had been laid out in accordance with specific planning regulations. Councillors **NOTED** that there had been no acknowledgement from the complainant and that the Clerk had been unable to establish the identity of the complainant. All Councillors **AGREED** that no further action would be taken.

**E23.22 GARDEN BY PARADE OF SHOPS**

Councillors **NOTED** that the Chairman was still looking for someone to carry out the maintenance of the garden by the parade of shops. The Clerk confirmed that an advertisement had been placed on parish noticeboards, shared on Facebook, Everything Epping Forest and North Weald Village Life. The Clerk advised that a message had been received from a company who may be interested, however, the company would require a contract. It was noted that one of the Allotment Wardens had expressed an interest however, he would like to meet with the Chairman on site to see exactly what is required before giving a price for the work. The Clerk advised that when she had spoken to the Allotment Warden he did say that as the garden is the flagship he thinks that we may need a bit more time and money spent on it. The Clerk suggested that we might be able to incorporate the maintenance with the planters which are going to be sited in the Sensory Garden at Weald Common. The Chairman stated that the garden is well-established and just needs to be kept weed free, so he said he was surprised at the comments and he did not think it would take a great deal of time to complete.

The Chairman reported that the wall at the parade of shops had been hit again and he had sent a photograph to the owner. It was noted that one of the sleepers had moved slightly so he may need to get the Parish Council's contractor to look.

**E23.23 UPDATE ON SENSORY GARDEN, WEALD COMMON**

The Clerk reminded Councillors that the Parish Council had received £15,000 in grant funding for the creation of a Sensory Garden at Weald Common. Councillors noted that the contents for the signage had been approved by EFDC the previous day and a lectern had been sourced. Two benches had been ordered: one being an audio bench with 6 different sounds and the other being a "talking point" bench which is metal with RAF aircraft depicted. The Clerk advised that 4 planters had been commissioned specifically for the new garden. The Chairman asked if all the grant monies had to be spent on the Sensory Garden, the Clerk confirmed that it did and said that it also had to be spent by the end of March.

The Clerk reported that she had sent a request to the North Weald Village Hall Management Committee to ask if the Parish Council could reinstate the eggshell type pathway between the Parish Council's parking spaces and the Weald Common sign. The request had also asked if the Parish Council could put up signage for the defibrillator. The Clerk advised that she had not received a response, therefore she called the Chairman of the North Weald Village Hall Committee and was advised that the request had been received too late to be considered at their most recent meeting. However, the Chairman did advise that the signage could be put up, however, said that it would be a no to the pathway request. Councillors noted that the Clerk could not understand how a decision had been made without going to the Committee, therefore, she had written an email requesting to see a copy of the minutes. The Chairman commented that he had raised concerns about the path with the Clerk previously and said that it could prove difficult for people walking from the car park to the Common. The Chairman stated that North Weald Village Hall had benefitted from the installation of the swale and he was disappointed with their attitude.

**E23.24 OTHER MATTERS**

- a) The Chairman requested a supply of Dog Bin Notices – PFO to action.
- b) The Chairman reported that he had received a complaint about overgrown ivy on the bridge that crosses the stream adjacent to Elm Gardens in North Weald. The PFO reported the issue to the Highway Rangers.

Meeting closed: 11.10am

Signed .....

Date .....