



MINUTES

Meeting: ENVIRONMENTAL &
OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE

Date: 18th March 2024

Time: 7.00pm

Venue: PARISH HALL, THORNWOOD COMMON

PRESENT:

Councillors (5) A Buckley (Chairman), R Spearman, Mrs S Hawkins, Mrs S Jackman MBE,
A Tyler

Also in Attendance (2)

Susan De Luca, Clerk to the Council

Joanna Tyler, Senior Administrative Officer

Members of the Press (1)

Members of the Public (0)

E23.25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (1)

Apologies for absence received from Cllr Mrs Etherington

E23.26 OTHER ABSENCES (3)

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

E23.27 MINUTES

Members **APPROVED** as a correct record the Minutes of the Meeting held on 24th January 2024.

E23.28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

E23.29 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC - None present.

The Chairman advised Councillors that a member of the public was expected to attend the meeting to ask a question relating to Item 7. The Chairman asked if Councillors would agree to delay this item for discussion until later in the meeting in case the member of the public should turn up. All Councillors **AGREED**.

E23.30 CEMETERY

The Clerk advised Councillors that had received an enquiry from a cemetery plot holder who had asked if the Parish Council would consider installing a Letters to Heaven Post Box at the cemetery. Councillors noted that these special post boxes enable people to write messages to loved ones who have passed away. The post boxes have been installed in many cemeteries and crematoriums throughout the country. The idea had originally been inspired by a 9 year old girl who wanted to write to her grandparents. The initiative has received the support of King Charles, the Prime Minister and Bereavement Charities. The Clerk advised that both herself and the Senior Admin Officer had researched what should be done with the letters when the post box is emptied. One

suggestion is that the letters are shredded with the contents unopened and then turned into mulch which can be distributed in the cemetery grounds, wildflower seeds can be mixed in with the mulch. Councillors noted that the post box would be available for anyone to write to their loved ones, not just for those who have purchased a plot in the cemetery. The Chairman asked where the post box would be installed. The Clerk suggested the inside wall of the entrance to the cemetery. The Clerk confirmed that the cost to purchase a post box starts at £120.00. Following discussion, Cllr Tyler **PROPOSED** that a post box should be purchased and installed. Cllr Mrs Jackman MBE **SECONDED** the proposal, all Members **AGREED**. The Clerk confirmed that a policy would be drafted to confirm how often the post box would be emptied and the procedure which would be followed regarding the disposal of the contents.

E23.31 EPPING FOREST COUNTRYCARE

Councillors **NOTED** that the Clerk had received notification from Epping Forest Countrycare advising that they will be increasing the charge for volunteer days at Thornwood Common Nature Area from £420.00 (+VAT) TO £450.00 (+VAT) with effect from 1st April. It was noted that Epping Forest Countrycare have been managing the site for a number of years.

E23.32 WEALD COMMON SENSORY GARDEN

The Clerk reported that work on the new Sensory Garden had been delayed by at least a month due to the weather. Councillors noted that the timescale for completion had been extended and the grant funding was still in place. The Clerk confirmed that the seats and planters were being stored by the Parish Council's contractor. It was noted that an additional bench is to be purchased, along with a birdbath for the central area. The signage is expected to be delivered this week. The Clerk advised that a specimen crab apple tree had been planted. The Chairman asked how many of the trees in Eldridge Wood needed to be removed to accommodate the seats and planters. The Clerk stated that it was only a few and confirmed that they would be re-planted elsewhere.

Councillors noted that the new gardener who was tending the garden at the parade of shops would be planting up and looking after the new planters. The Clerk commented that the garden by the parade shops was looking really good. The Chairman agreed that the gardener had done a very good job. The Chairman mentioned that he had been offered some primroses by a resident and these are to be planted in the planter on the Village Green and in the central area near to the information boards at North Weald Woodland.

E23.33 ALLOTMENTS

a) BEEKEEPING

Councillors **RECALLED** the decision made at the Committee Meeting held on 24th January 2024, regarding a request from a Wheelers Farm Gardens allotment tenant to keep bees on their plot. Attached to the agenda was an extract from the Minutes of that Meeting, together with information from the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardens. It was noted that the allotment tenant had asked to speak directly to the committee regarding their decision and that the tenant had been sent a copy of the

meeting agenda for information. Councillors agreed to discuss the matter again in the absence of the allotment tenant.

The Clerk reminded Councillors that the original decision was made out of concern for the adjacent footpath and neighbouring tenants (the current hives are located at the Orchard on the Queens Road site, which is away from plots). The Clerk advised that the Principal Financial Officer had researched documentation and liaised with other allotment sites specifically in relation to beekeeping. To assist Councillors with their decision, the Clerk read out a list of recommendations which the tenant would be asked to adhere to:

- Must be a Member of the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) (NSALG Guidance)
- Must have undertaken a course as to how to manage and own bees (NSALG Guidance)
- Mentoring by resident Beekeeper (if he agrees) (NSALG Guidance)
- Review after 12 months
- Consultation with tenants of Neighbouring Plots
- Erection of Notice on plot with contact details and notifying of bees on plots
- Once a week inspection of hive to check for swarming preparations (April to July) (BBKA Guidance)
- Specific beekeepers' insurance

The Clerk stated that if Councillors were to agree to a beehive on the tenant's plot, a formal beekeeping policy would need to be introduced. The Clerk listed the following recommendations for all allotment sites in the parish:

1. Introduction of a formal beekeeping Policy and guidance that all beekeeping tenants are required to adhere to and sign.
2. Any beekeeping tenants will be required to have beekeepers insurance and provide a copy to the Parish Council once per year.
3. Notification to plot holders of bees on plots and their locations
4. Information on Notice Boards about action to take if stung, or swarming.
5. Put an upper limit on the number of Hives (BBKA Guidance)

Following lengthy discussion, Councillors **AGREED** that they would have no objection to a beehive being sited on the tenant's plot, provided all of the criteria is adhered to. The Clerk stated it was her understanding the tenant rented two plots and she would need to clarify which one the hive would be sited on. Councillors also **AGREED** to the introduction of a formal beekeeping policy and confirmed that the current beekeeper would be asked to adhere to this. The Clerk confirmed that she would contact the current beekeeper to ascertain if he has been mentoring the tenant and, if so, whether he would be happy to continue to do so.

b) Boundary Hedge – Hastingwood B Allotment Site

Councillors noted that the Clerk had received a complaint from a resident regarding a cyclist who hit their eye on the hedge fronting on to the road at the disused

Hastingwood B Allotment site. The resident contacted the Clerk after observing the cyclist ride past the hedge and being hit in the face by overgrown vegetation. The Clerk immediately arranged for the Parish Council's contractor to cut back the vegetation encroaching on to the road. It was noted that the resident again contacted the Clerk and asked if the height of the hedge could be cut back for aesthetic reasons. The Clerk reminded Councillors that the height of the hedge had last been cut in November 2019. Following discussion, Councillors **AGREED** that the Clerk should write to the resident advising that as the site is unoccupied, a decision had been made to leave the hedge uncut at the current time for privacy and to keep the site safe from illegal encampments. Councillors **AGREED** that the exception to this would be if vegetation was encroaching on to the roadside.

E23.34 OTHER MATTERS

- a) The Chairman reported that a resident had remarked on the planters in Epping, High Road, praising the quality of the plants. The Chairman asked the Clerk if she knew if Epping grew their own plants or where they got them from. Cllr Mrs Hawkins said that EFDC used to have their own nursery and said that she would try and find out.
- b) The Chairman reported that the former members of the North Weald Preservation Society who tended the planter by the flagpole on the Village Green had advised that they have enough money to replace the flowers at the moment, however, they are finding watering the plants difficult. The Chairman said that they may want to pass the planting over in due course. The Clerk suggested that it may be a possible job for the new gardener. All Councillors **AGREED**.
- c) The Clerk advised that the Christmas Tree on the Village Green had to be removed. The Chairman stated that the tree had not been in the best of health when it was originally planted. All Members **AGREED** that a replacement should be sourced.
- d) The Chairman mentioned the central part of North Weald Woodland (where the information boards are sited) and suggested a meeting to discuss low maintenance plants for the area. The Clerk suggested that the Chairman approach the new gardener and ask if he would like to design a low maintenance planting scheme and present the plan to this committee in May or June.
- e) The Chairman mentioned the weed spraying at North Weald Woodland and asked the Clerk when this was scheduled to commence. The Clerk advised that the Principal Finance Officer had agreed a planned maintenance programme with the Parish Council's contractor. The Chairman asked if he could have a copy of the programme.
- f) The Chairman reported that he had been trying to get in touch with the owner of the car park at the parade of shops in North Weald. He reported that the wall had been hit in several places and was waiting for repair and the car park in general was suffering from an increase in litter. The Chairman also mentioned his concern at the general state of the parade of shops, in particular the soffits that are falling down above the drycleaners. The Chairman asked if there was anything that the Parish Council could do. The Clerk suggested that she could write to Cllr Nigel Bedford and ask for a meeting to see if he can put pressure on the leaseholders to tidy the area. Councillors **AGREED** that the Clerk and Senior Admin Officer would visit the area to take photographs and the Clerk would then write to Cllr Bedford accordingly.
- g) The Clerk reported that she had written to North Weald Veterinary Surgery to

MINUTES

ask that they discourage their staff and visitors from parking in the Parish Council's parking spaces in the Village Hall car park. The manager had responded saying that she will put up a notice, however, she could not promise that visitors will not carry on parking there.

Meeting closed: 8.05pm

Signed

Date