



DRAFT MINUTES

Meeting: ENVIRONMENTAL
COMMITTEE

Date: 26th October 2022

Time: 7.00pm

Venue: PARISH HALL AT THORNWOOD COMMON

PRESENT:

Councillors (5) A Buckley (Chairman), R Spearman, Mrs S Hawkins, Ms D Wood, A Tyler

Also in Attendance (2)

Susan De Luca, Clerk to the Council

Joanna Tyler, Senior Administrative Officer

Members of the Press (0)

Members of the Public (0)

E22.01 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Cllr Mrs Hawkins **PROPOSED** Cllr Buckley as Chairman. The proposal was **SECONDED** by Cllr Tyler. All Members **AGREED**.

E22.02 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

Cllr Mrs Hawkins **PROPOSED** Cllr Spearman as Vice Chairman. The proposal was **SECONDED** by Cllr Tyler. All Members **AGREED**.

E22.03 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (3)

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs A Grigg, Mrs S Jackman MBE, G Mulliner

E22.04 OTHER ABSENCES (6)

No apologies for absence had been received from Cllrs Bedford, Blanks, Clegg, Mrs Etherington, Irvine and Stroud. However, although this committee is open to all Councillors, not all do attend.

E22.05 MINUTES

Members **APPROVED** as a correct record the Minutes of the Meeting held on 28th February 2022.

E22.06 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Ms Wood declared a non pecuniary interest with regard to Agenda Item 8(b) School Green Lane Play Area.

E22.07 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC - None present.

E22.08 PLAY AREAS

a) Inspections

Councillors **NOTED** that weekly and monthly inspections of the Play Areas are completed by Thornwood Grounds Maintenance, who are trained and hold the relevant certificates of competence to complete such inspections. At the start of 2022, the Parish

Council signed up to using specific software for this purpose – PSS Live. This software enables access by both the Parish Council staff and Thornwood Grounds Maintenance, who are able to report and record any issues or findings via a mobile app which is then directly transferred online. These are regularly reviewed, and action taken to resolve, note or monitor any issues, the decision for this being taken by both the PFO and Clerk. Annual inspections continue to take place once per year. Councillors **NOTED** that the latest inspections were completed on Friday, 21st October, the reports for which were still awaited.

Councillors **NOTED** that this Council is currently trialling the self-repair of shrinking Wetpour edges. The Clerk reported that Thornwood Grounds Maintenance had trialled the self-repair kit at Thornwood Play Area. It was noted that whilst it does not give a perfect finish and is not as neat as the professional's, the kit has resolved a number of identified Wetpour issues where gaps and trip hazards had appeared. Thornwood Grounds Maintenance have advised that they will try mixing it up slightly wetter to see if that gives more control on the end product / appearance.

With regard to Weald Common and School Green Lane Play Areas, Thornwood Grounds Maintenance do not think that it is possible to use the self-repair kit in these locations, unless the safety surface is cut and is made bigger. There is still shrinkage, however, now that the weather has changed it is nowhere near as bad as it was in the Summer. Councillors **AGREED** to keep monitoring the issue.

b) School Green Lane Play Area

Councillors **NOTED** that the Clerk had received a complaint from a resident regarding School Green Lane Play Area. The resident had suggested that the play area equipment should be updated and the play area itself extended so that older children can use it too. Cllr Ms Wood referred to the Countryside development plans and commented that within a couple of years a new play area will be built and suggested that any plans to update the existing one should be put on hold until further details are received. All Members **AGREED**.

Councillors **NOTED** that the same resident had complained about the basketball court being neglected. The resident had reported that there were shards of glass all over the surface and weeds growing through the broken concrete. The Clerk had advised the resident that the Queens Hall Charity are responsible for the basketball court and it was noted that details of the resident's complaint had been forwarded on to the Trustees. Cllr Ms Wood confirmed that the court had since been cleaned and swept.

Councillors **NOTED** that a new set of flat swings had been installed at School Green Lane Play Area, as agreed within the budget for this financial year. The Clerk reported that, following a recent inspection by Thornwood Grounds Maintenance, it was noted that an area under the newly laid Wetpour seems to have a void or is less solid than other areas. The PFO has contacted the company who installed the swing and asked them to visit the site to inspect the issue.

c) Thornwood Common Play Area

Councillors **NOTED** that the Clerk had also received complaints regarding the Thornwood Common Play Area. The Clerk reported that the complaints were also to

do with the suitability of the play equipment. It was noted that there would also be a sum of money from developers for the play area, therefore no further action should be taken at the present time. In light of this, the Clerk said that no money would be put aside for updating play area equipment in the precept this year.

E22.09 ALLOTMENTS

a) General Update

Councillors **NOTED** that the PFO had been in contact with the wardens for Thornwood and North Weald sites to ask for updates. There are a number of plots that are perhaps a little underworked and a couple of minor matters that need addressing, however, generally both sites are going well with active involvement and management by the Allotment Wardens. It was noted that the PFO is currently in the middle of attending 3 training sessions on allotments and that it is expected there will be a number of actions needed as a direct result of these sessions. The Clerk stated that there would have to be new Rules & Regulations and advised that further information would be given at a future Parish Council Meeting.

b) Hastingwood Allotment Site

The Clerk read out the following update from the PFO regarding the on-going treatment of Marestail:

UPDATE: Councillors will recall this has been an ongoing issue at Hastingwood for many years. Over the past two years, there have been 3 treatments, with the 3rd one being next to useless as the site was so overgrown identifying and treating the plant (weed) was very difficult. The Office staff have looked at an alternative solution by way of placing a membrane over the unused plots which suffer the most with Marestail, however Kevin has spoken to one of the top consultants in the southeast on invasive weeds who has advised that there is really no use to a barrier as that is only a benefit if there is drift, which we are not sure there is. In addition, it was pointed out that the chemical used on the Marestail is so strong no one unqualified and or not deemed competent should even consider spraying in windy conditions. As such, the membrane was not thought to be a solution. They originally suggested a site survey of the surrounding areas to establish if the Marestail is growing in the fields, as if so, there is almost no point in treating the allotments as we will have no chance ridding the allotment of it.

Furthermore, at the first Allotment training session Adriana attended she made contact with the Clerk of Hullbridge PC who had first-hand knowledge of Marestail, and also discovered that Loughton Town Council had the same problem. The PFO has been in contact with both Councils', and the overriding guidance and advice received was that unless you pull the marestail out by its root (which is often 2 meters deep and 2 meters wide) you would be wasting your money. Hullbridge PC has a 10 year plan to manage the weed, and even after this 10 year period it will not be destroyed. It is suggested at this stage that a guidance document be created to be placed on the new notice board at Hastingwood about the best way to try and manage this (which includes NOT pulling the weed out with your hands).

Councillors **NOTED** the contents of the update and following discussion **AGREED**

with the suggestion of a guidance document being created and placed on the noticeboard to let people know how the council is managing the issue.

Councillors **NOTED** that a new noticeboard had been purchased for the Hastingwood site. This is to be erected inside the site as the old one on the gate is disintegrating.

c) Request for fairness and reduction of fees

Councillors **NOTED** that the Parish Office had been approached by a tenant of Wheelers Farm Gardens Allotment asking for justification as to why he is paying the total cost of two small plots (£26.00 each) when if he had one large plot, equal in size to the two small plots he currently leases, it would be £31.00. The tenant had advised that this did not seem fair especially as no large plots were available at the time he got his plots. There are now large plots available, which had been offered to the tenant, however he had declined.

Councillors were reminded that the system of rental fees is based on the size of the specific size of the plots as follows:

- Under 50sqm = Extra Small £24.00
- Between 51sqm & 100sqm = Small £26.00
- Between 101sqm & 150sqm = Average £27.00
- Between 151sqm & 200sqm = Large £31.00
- Over 201sqm = Extra Large £33.00

This sizing scheme was agreed by Council to ensure appropriate administration of the allotments, as allotments are not charged per meter squared.

The Clerk read out the following report from the PFO:

Councillors originally agreed to have fixed sizes of plot in order to ensure the administration of allotments could be adequately managed. Whilst it is unfortunate that this person has to have two small plots, this is simply a case of what was available at the time. The PFO would not recommend making a change as suggested by the tenant, as this would effect numerous plot holders who are in a similar position, plus also result in a loss of revenue for the Council for the allotments, which already do not break even.

The Clerk stated that comparisons of rental fees had been made with other sites in Chigwell, Loughton and Ongar and it was felt that this Council's plots were very good value for money. Cllr Spearman mentioned tenants that vacate their plots and leave rubbish behind and suggested that a charge should be made for clearance. Cllr Tyler agreed with this and recommended that an extra clause be added to the Rules & Regulations. Following further discussion, all members of this Committee **AGREED** that the cost of the allotment plots represented good value for money and considering the present economic climate, no changes would be made at the present time.

E22.10 CEMETERY

a) Complaint regarding Cemetery Fees

Councillors **NOTED** that the Clerk had received a complaint from the owner of two plots in the Cremated Remains Section regarding the costs associated with interment of ashes, the purchase of a plaque and boulder and transfer fee costs. The Clerk

had advised the owner that the fees were considered each year and that the Parish Council had to consider the on-going maintenance of the cemetery, which is factored into the fees. Councillors discussed the matter at length. Cllr Ms Wood commented that the fees were very reasonable compared to other cemeteries in the area. All members of this Committee **AGREED** that the current fees represented good value for money and were in line with fees charged by other local Town and Parish Councils in the area.

b) Request for Memorial Bench – Spring CR Section

Councillors **NOTED** that the Clerk had received a request for a Memorial Bench to be placed near to Spring CR17 and CR18. A report was attached to the agenda, which included photos depicting the requested location and a suggested alternative location. Following discussion, Councillors **AGREED** that there was not sufficient space to place a memorial bench directly near to plots Spring CR17 and CR18 and it was suggested that the Clerk contact the owner to arrange to meet in person at the Cemetery to look at alternative locations should the owner still wish to go ahead with the purchase of a bench.

c) Cemetery Bin

Councillors **NOTED** that there had been incidents of fly-tipping of building rubble being found in the cemetery bin and the bin had now been padlocked. Councillors **AGREED** that a notice should be put on the bin advising people as to why it had been locked.

d) Cemetery Audit

Councillors **NOTED** that the Clerk and Senior Admin Officer had recently attended a Cemetery Compliance Course, following which an Audit was undertaken, with cemetery maps checked against Cemetery Registers. All was found to be in order. The Clerk advised that the Hedges Section was now full, with each grave being either used or purchased in reserve. It was noted that the Cremated Remains Spring Section is full and Summer Section is almost full. The Clerk confirmed that plots in Meadowbrook Section are purchased as next in line, purchasers are not allowed to choose a specific plot in this section.

E22.11 REPAIRS TO BRIDGE AT HIGHAM VIEW

Councillors were reminded that the Parish Council is responsible for the maintenance of the bridge which links Higham View to Weald Common. It was noted that repairs to the bridge had been undertaken on a number of occasions over the past few years and that the handrails had now broken away from the main structure. Following a recent inspection, Thornwood Grounds Maintenance had recommended that the bridge is replaced as soon as possible. The Clerk has made enquiries and Epping Forest District Council have said that the Highway Rangers would be willing to replace the bridge provided the Parish Council pays for the materials. Councillors noted that the Clerk is still awaiting an update and would be contacting EFDC Countrycare with regard to this.

E22.12 WEALD COMMON PLAY AREA PATH

Councillors noted that the play area at Weald Common is inspected by Thornwood

Grounds Maintenance on a weekly basis. These inspections also include the access pathway. It was noted that the maintenance of the path has always presented a challenge and as a short-term solution the contractor has been asked to fill any gaps / holes on a weekly basis to ensure that it remains safe for use. The contractor is using a different mix of materials and, so far, these materials are holding firm. The contractor will continue to use this mix to fill any holes and it will be monitored over the winter months. If this solution fails, Councillors noted that they will be asked to consider a better more permanent solution.

The Chairman mentioned the new swale and said that it is being monitored and may reduce the situation. The Clerk said that the Parish Council may need to put aside some money in the precept. Following discussion, Councillors **AGREED** that the issue should be monitored and to also to set aside a sum of money in the precept for ongoing maintenance.

E22.13 ANNUAL ASSET CHECKS

Councillors **NOTED** that the Annual Asset Checks are in the process of being completed by the Principal Financial Officer.

E22.14 ANNUAL TREE RISK ASSESSMENT

Councillors **NOTED** that the Annual Tree Risk Assessment is scheduled to be carried out during October. Councillors were asked if there were any specific trees or matters they would like to be included in the inspections. Cllr Ms Wood mentioned a Horse Chestnut tree on the green near to the Pavillions. The Clerk said that she would check with the PFO to see if the tree is on Parish Council land and said if it is not, that it would be reported to EFDC.

E22.15 REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Councillors **AGREED** to a statement being added to the Parish Council's Environmental Policy relating to the proposed Weald Common Tree Planting Project. The statement will relate to the recycling of the plastic tube guards which are required to protect the whips. It was noted that the guards will be removed and recycled 5 years after the trees have been planted. Councillors were reminded that the Parish Council is working closely with ECC's Senior Forestry and Woodland Officer who has sourced a supplier that will take back the guards and recycle at the end of their use.

E22.16 DOG WASTE BIN COLLECTION

The Clerk reported that there had been a problem with the dog waste being collected from the Parish Council's bin. The waste company have said that they will continue to take it, provided the bin is emptied every week. Cllr Ms Wood offered use of the bin at the Queen's Hall. The Clerk thanked Cllr Ms Wood and said that she would advise the Parish Council's contractor, if necessary.

E22.17 WEALD COMMON TREE PLANTING AND SWALE PROJECT

The Chairman reported that the swale is being monitored. The swale runs diagonally across the field where the play area is, from the football pitch across to EFDC's flood alleviation field. Councillors noted that a temporary fence is to be erected

to deter walkers from crossing the swale to get to the football pitch. It was noted that a new pathway had been cut across from the footpath adjacent to EFDC's field. Notices have been put up explaining what the swale is for. The Chairman said that the swale appeared to be working ok after the recent rain, however it had not rained long enough to see if it had alleviated the problem.

The Chairman gave an update on the Weald Common Tree Planting Project and reported that a potential start date of 28th November had been agreed at the project meeting on 12th October. Thornwood Grounds Maintenance will be planting the trees and liaising with ECC's Senior Forestry and Woodland Officer with regard to the planting plan. It was noted that the mulch is to be ordered and delivered to site prior to planting as it was more beneficial to the whips to have mulch put around them as soon as they are planted. Councillors noted that a meeting had been organised between the Chairman, Clerk and the Deputy Headteacher of St Andrew's Primary School to talk about involving the school with the project.

The Chairman briefly mentioned the possibility of having a Dementia Friendly Area, however, it was noted that the requirements for this were still being looked into. The Clerk said that to have a Dementia Friendly space there needs to be adequate signage, seating, etc. An update will be given at a future Parish Council Meeting.

The Chairman mentioned the inaugural tree (the Copper Beech which was planted earlier in the year) and said that it is doing well. The Chairman mentioned that there are plans to put a couple of benches and some signage near to the Copper Beech which is at the crossroads in the main planting area. The Chairman referred to the concrete anchors that were used in WWII and said that there are plans to have an information board with historical details included. Cllr Tyler suggested that it may be a nice idea to have a memory tree as well. The Chairman advised that the council is just waiting for the final written confirmation to proceed from EWCO.

E22.18 CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

- a) Councillors **CONFIRMED** the following arrangements for this year's Christmas Lights:
- Christmas lights to be displayed on Norwegian Spruce – Village Green, North Weald.
 - Christmas lights to be displayed on the front of the Parish Hall, Thornwood.
 - Purchase of two Christmas Trees with lights, to be displayed in the garden at the parade of shops in North Weald, as per Christmas 2021.
- b) Councillors **AGREED** that a contribution of £50.00 would be made to Hastingwood Village Hall to be used towards the purchase of a Christmas Tree.

Meeting closed: 8.24pm

Signed

Date