



MINUTES

Meeting: ENVIRONMENTAL &
OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE

Date: 31st March 2025

Time: 10.45am

Venue: PARISH HALL, THORNWOOD COMMON

PRESENT:

Councillors (4) A Buckley (Chairman), Mrs S Hawkins, R Spearman, B Clegg

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)

E24.14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (8)

Apologies for absence received from Cllrs Bedford, Tyler, Irvine, Mrs Jackman MBE, Mrs Etherington, Kinnear, Ms Wood and Stroud

E24.15 OTHER ABSENCES (2)

No apologies for absence had been received from Cllrs Born who is a member of this Committee and from Cllr Blanks, who is not a member of this committee.

E24.16 MINUTES

Members **APPROVED** as a correct record the Minutes of the Meeting held on 10th October 2024.

E24.17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

E24.18 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC - None present.

E24.19 ALLOTMENTS

a) Approval of Updated Rules and Regulations

Councillors **APPROVED** the changes to the Rules and Regulations of the allotments, as attached to the agenda. Cllr Spearman asked the Clerk if there had been any complaints from tenants regarding the changes. The Clerk advised that she had not received any complaints, however, said that matters may be raised at the Annual Allotment Meeting on the 6th April.

b) Notice of Rental for 2027

Councillors recalled that, as agreed at the October 2024 Committee meeting, the dates of tenancy agreements had now changed and from 1st January 2026 will run for the entire year (1st Jan to 31st Dec in each respective year). Councillors were reminded that the Parish Council is legally required to give 12 months' notice of rental increase for the allotments. The Committee formally **AGREED** the rental for the tenancy year starting 1st January 2027 as follows:

- Under 50 sqm = Extra small £33.00

- Between 51sqm & 100sqm = Small £35.00
- Between 101sqm & 150sqm = Average £36.00
- Between 151sqm & 200sqm = Large £41.00
- Over 201sqm = Extra Large £43.00

This is an increase of £4 per plot.

Cllr Clegg asked if the Clerk knew what the percentage increase was. The Clerk stated that the PFO had not provided her with the percentage. The Chairman responded that it was around 3%.

c) Stop cocks on allotment sites

Councillors were advised that the Parish Council had been made aware that after the water had been turned off for the winter season, somebody had turned the water back on at the North Weald allotment sites. It was noted that the emergency work to fix this had cost in excess of £200. The Clerk stated that the Parish Council's contractor had advised that the stop cocks are underground at the North Weald sites and there would be enough room to install a lockable attachment. The Chairman asked if the wardens inform any of the users that the water is being turned off. The Clerk advised that a notice is placed on the allotment noticeboards. Both Cllr Spearman and Cllr Clegg agreed that the issue needed to be brought to tenants attention. Cllr Clegg suggested that if this continues to happen in the future, the fees would need to be increased due to inappropriate use. The Chairman stated that the Committee may wish to consider putting the locks on stop cocks at all sites. Cllr Mrs Hawkins said that the tenants at Thornwood are predominantly new and would not know where the stop cocks are and said that there had not been an issue with the tenants at Hastingwood. Following further discussion, Councillors **AGREED** that all sites should be assessed by the Parish Council's contractor to see where the locks could be fitted.

d) Replacement of water butts with standpipes on allotment sites

Councillors **NOTED** that the PFO had been working with the Parish Council's Grounds Maintenance contractor to source a suitable alternative to the current water butts on allotment sites. Councillors were reminded that the Parish Council holds an EMR of £5,000 for these works. It was noted that the Parish Council has a responsibility under the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999 (details of which were attached to the agenda). Councillors were asked to consider the replacement of water butts with standpipes straight onto the mains (as they are at Thornwood allotment site) to ensure that the pipes and fittings used comply with the regulations. It was noted that this may necessitate further changes to the Rules and Regulations of Tenancy with regard to hosepipe use. Councillors noted that any works would take place in October / November 2025. Cllr Spearman mentioned the recent allotment visit and said that there had been a discussion about removing all the water tanks, however, he would suggest that these are retained for rainwater collection. Cllr Spearman explained that non return valves would need to be fitted and that this would be applicable for all sites. The Committee **AGREED** to these works being carried out.

E24.20 CEMETERY

Increase in Cemetery Fees

Councillors noted that the Clerk had received notification from all three cemetery contractors and from the Parish Council's preferred suppliers for memorial plaques and memorial benches, that their charges would be increasing with effect from 1st April 2025. Councillors were reminded that the cemetery fees had not been increased since 1st September 2023. Attached to the agenda were copies of the of the current fees charged, together with details of individual contractor / supplier charges and, for comparison, a fee sheet from a neighbouring burial authority. Following discussion, Councillors **AGREED** that the following fees would be increased with effect from 1st April 2025:

- Interment Fees (includes digging and re-opening of graves)
- Digging Surcharge for American Style Caskets and Willow Coffins
- Dedication of a Bench
- Memorial Plaques

Councillors **AGREED** that there would be no increases to other fees.

E24.21 UPDATE ON SENSORY GARDEN

Councillors **NOTED** that the container plants had failed to take. The Clerk advised that there are sufficient funds available to replace the plants and said that Cllr Tyler and the Senior Admin Officer would be replanting them towards the end of April / beginning of May when there would be no risk of frost. The Clerk advised that the Parish Council's contractor had been asked to replace the soil and had agreed to water the new plants during weekly visits to the play area. It was noted that the Senior Admin Officer will monitor the new plants and report back. EFDC's Grant Officer is aware that the plants had failed and was supportive of their replacement.

E24.22 WOODLAND TRUST WILD HARVEST TREE PACK

Councillors **NOTED** that the 105 free saplings received from the Woodland Trust have been planted at Weald Common. The trees that had not taken in Eldridge Coppice have been replaced with 49 of the saplings and the remaining 56 have been planted in the new woodland area. The Chairman asked if the Parish Council's contractor would be cutting the grass around the 49 saplings. The Senior Admin Officer advised that the contractor would be looking after this area.

E24.23 GARDEN BY THE PARADE OF SHOPS

The Chairman reported that the contractor who had been taking care of the garden by the parade of shops, the Sensory Garden and the new woodland at Weald Common had left to start a new job and a replacement gardener would be starting towards the end of April after meeting with the Clerk. It was noted that the new gardener would not be looking after the Sensory Garden.

Councillor Mrs Hawkins referred to the earlier agenda item regarding changes to the Allotment Rules and Regulations and asked if an amendment could be made to the number of fruit trees allowed to be planted. Cllr Mrs Hawkins stated that several plots, particularly in Thornwood, appear to have more than 2 trees and said that she was concerned that if the trees were not maintained they would cause an issue with future tenants not wanting to take on plots and this would result in extra costs to the council. The Clerk suggested that an amendment could be made to remind tenants that no more than 2 fruit trees could be planted per plot. All Councillors **AGREED**.

E24.24 NORWEGIAN STONE AT THE REVETMENT, NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD

Councillors **NOTED** that the Chairman had asked for this matter to be discussed by this Committee prior to being included as an item on the next Parish Council Meeting agenda. It was noted that the Chairman had been in communication with Darren Goodey (Service Manager Commercial / Accountable Manager North Weald Airfield) and has made a request for the Norwegian Stone at the Revetment to be moved next to the Gate Guardian. Councillors were reminded that this matter was previously raised by the Chairman and discussed at length by the Parish Council (Parish Council Minute extracts for October 2021 and for January, February and March 2023 were attached to a Supplementary Agenda for information, together with a photo of the memorial stone).

The Chairman reported that the Revetment had badly deteriorated, and he felt that it would be more appropriate to move the stone and have it placed by the side of the Hurricane. The Chairman referred to an event that he attended with the Late Mr Arthur Moreton in 2019 and how they had visited the site of the stone with the visiting Norwegians and it had been an embarrassment. The Clerk advised Councillors that she had received an email from Cllr Tyler and read out the contents. Cllr Tyler has stated that he is concerned that if the stone is moved, it will not have any historical significance. The Clerk said that she had spoken with Darren Goodey who had said that if the Parish Council supported the proposal to move the stone, he would need to speak to Norway for their approval. The Clerk stated that if this Committee agreed to the proposal it would need to go to full Council to ratify the decision.

Councillors discussed the matter at length. Cllr Spearman said that he agreed with the Chairman, commenting that the history had gone. Cllr Clegg said that although he understood what Cllr Tyler had said in his email; he felt that the stone could be sympathetically moved and put in a more prominent position so that everyone can see it. The Clerk said that there would need to be a second plaque explaining why the stone had been moved. The Committee **AGREED** that the Clerk should make further background enquiries.

E24.25 OTHER MATTERS

The Chairman asked the Clerk if it was appropriate to mention the VE Day Bench. The Clerk advised that this would be an item on the Parish Council agenda for April and gave a brief explanation.

Meeting closed: 11.48am

Signed

Date