



DRAFT

MINUTES

Meeting: ENVIRONMENTAL
COMMITTEE

Date: 3rd February 2016

Time: 10.30 am

Venue: NORTH WEALD LIBRARY, HIGH ROAD, NORTH WEALD

PRESENT:

Councillors (7) G Mulliner (Chairman), C Hawkins, B Bartram, A Buckley, B Clegg,
B Eldridge, Mrs E Godwin-Brown*

Also in Attendance (3)

Susan De Luca, Clerk*

Adriana Jones, Principal Finance Officer*

Joanna Tyler, Senior Administrative Officer*

*For part of meeting

Members of the Public (0)

E15.26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – None recorded.

E15.27 OTHER ABSENCES – None recorded.

E15.28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

NOTED there were no declarations of interest.

E15.29 MINUTES

Members **APPROVED** the minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2015, as previously circulated with the Parish Council Meeting Agenda for 2 November 2015.

E15.30 ALLOTMENTS

Members **NOTED** that weekly Allotment Sub-Committee meetings continue to take place subject to there being issues to be discussed, and that there were no pressing issues to be brought to the Environmental Committee. Copies of the minutes of these Sub-Committee meetings are available in the Parish Council office.

a) Allotment Fees

Members **NOTED** that for the past 3 years, this Committee has increased the allotment fees by 10% year on year. The Parish Council are required to give 12 months notice of any increase to allotment holders. Members considered a possible increase in the fees for 2017/2018. Cllr Hawkins stated that the Parish Council had agreed a **NIL** increase in the precept for 2017/2018, and as such felt it would be wrong to then ask Allotment tenants to accept an increase in their rent. Cllr Clegg stated that he understood what Cllr Hawkins was stating, however the precept and any income generated by the Parish Council are different matters altogether, and a nil increase does not mean certain fees shouldn't be increased. Cllr Clegg reminded members that a 10% increase would only be £1.90 per annum for a small allotment.

Councillors were reminded that the reason for increasing the allotment fees over recent years was to close the substantial gap between the income received from rental and the cost to run the allotments. The Chairman asked if the allotments break even, to which the Financial Officer stated that she didn't have exact figures to hand, but that the allotments still run at a loss, however the extent to which this depends on the expenditure for that particular year.

Cllr Bartram stated that there has been no correlation in the past between the agreed precept and any decision to increase the allotment fees, and feels that the fee should be increased thereby continuing to close this gap. Cllr Godwin-Brown stated that the allotments are mostly used by elderly residents or individuals without a large garden, and that having an allotment improves your health, and as such feels that an increase in the rent should be discouraged. Cllr Clegg stated that there were two different arguments - one moral and one financial, however at this stage there was a need to close the gap and as such he would support an increase of 10%.

The Chairman asked for a vote **FOR** a 10% increase in the fees for 2017/2018, the result of which was as follows:

5 - For 2 - Against

It was therefore **AGREED** to increase the allotment fees by 10% (rounded up or down to the nearest 50p) for 2017/2018. The **AGREED** allotment fees for 2017/2018 are therefore:

- Under 50sqm = Extra Small £21.00
- Between 51sqm & 100sqm = Small £23.00
- Between 101sqm & 150sqm = Average £24.00
- Between 151sqm & 200sqm = Large £27.50
- Over 201sqm = Extra Large £29.50

b) Annual Allotment Meeting

Members **NOTED** that the Annual Meeting of Allotment Holders is scheduled to take place on Sunday, 20 March 2016, 9.30am for 10am start, and will be held at the Parish Hall Thornwood Common. Refreshments will be available. All Councillors are invited to attend. The Chairman stated that he was unavailable for the meeting, and requested that another Councillor Chair the meeting. Cllr Hawkins confirmed he would do so as Chairman of the Parish Council.

c) Allotment Warden – Hastingwood A

The Allotment Sub-Committee currently carry out the role of allotment warden at Hastingwood A, visiting the site on a monthly basis. Members considered if the Sub-Committee should retain this role for the forthcoming year or whether nominations should be asked for at the Annual Allotment Meeting. After discussion, it was **AGREED** that the Allotment Sub-Committee were happy to continue as Warden for the 2016/2017 year.

E15.31 PLAY AREAS

Members **NOTED** that weekly play area checks continue to be completed by the Finance Officer, and monthly checks completed by Thornwood Grounds Maintenance. Any High or Medium issues are looked into urgently, and rectified if deemed necessary. The Finance Officer stated that on the latest Monthly check completed by Thornwood Grounds Maintenance, there were a number of Medium risk issues which she would need to investigate further as her opinion differed. This would be completed during this week's weekly inspections. Full copies of all inspections were available to review in the Parish Office.

The Finance Officer showed members pictures following her latest inspection of the Weald Common Play Area which showed the extent to which the wet ground conditions were affecting the entrance. It was noted that at the Parish Council meeting on 1st February, Councillors had agreed to consider providing wetpour at the entrance to this play area, however this would form part of a grant funding application later in the year, and that in the meantime if the access was too wet, the play area would be closed to members of the public. Councillors were also shown a picture of the damage to the newly laid path at Weald Common which had been caused by some form of motorised vehicle. The Chairman confirmed that the Bridleway (PROW 201_87) accessed via the Weald Common entrance by the stone, runs adjacent to the hedge but on Parish Council owned land, and that this was the reason why installing a kissing gate at this location would not be appropriate. The Finance Officer thanked the Chairman for clarifying this point.

The Finance Officer stated that Cllr Hawkins and herself had spoken recently regarding the paving slabs on Thornwood Common adjacent to the Play Area, stating that whilst they are ok at present, they are regularly lifting and needing relaying. The Finance Officer stated that there is no legal requirement to have two entrances/exits to a play area, and that Cllr Hawkins had informed her this entrance was not widely used. Cllr Hawkins also stated that weeds grow between the paving slabs which can contribute to their movement, and there are a couple that are cracked. After discussion, it was **AGREED** to monitor over the Spring/Summer, and that if the path got to the point where any remedial action was needed, the path should be removed and laid to turf, with the gate locked. Cllr Hawkins had stated there was no need to lock the gate, and that it could continue to be used, however concern was raised that it could end up being similar to the surface under the gate at Weald Common.

E15.32 WEALD COMMON – CCTV CAMERA

This item was not discussed in light of the decision made at the Parish Council Meeting held on the 1st February 2016.

E15.33 CEMETERY

a) Available Plots – Burial Section One

Members **NOTED** that the Parish Office staff had met with the Grave Digger on Thursday, 21 January 2016 to mark out the remaining available plots in Burial Section One. Several new plots were created and the Cemetery Map and Burial

Books have been updated accordingly. The Clerk stated that by creating the new plots, Burial Section One should be able to be used for a further two years. Members **NOTED** that the new plots have been marked out by the Grave Digger.

Councillor Eldridge asked the Clerk about the new area and whether any progress had been made. The Clerk advised that an alternative centre piece would need to be investigated as a tree cannot be planted there. Cllr Eldridge asked about the area adjacent to St Andrew's Churchyard which requires a bridge for access. The Clerk stated this area was best to be kept in reserve for now, adding that Section Two would need to be opened at sometime in the future. The Clerk reminded Members that Section Two would not need to be consecrated as the whole of the cemetery was consecrated by the Bishop in 1988.

b) Increase in Cemetery Fees

Members were asked to **CONSIDER** a possible increase in cemetery fees for 2016/17. Fees have previously been increased on a yearly basis by 10% (rounded up to the nearest £1). Cllr Clegg referred to the current Cemetery Fees list attached to the agenda and asked if the prices quoted for North Weald Residents applied to all parish residents. The Clerk confirmed that the prices did and stated that the column title would be amended to read "Parish Residents". The Clerk stated that extras could be included in the definition of parish residents, for example, if a person had moved away from the area for the purposes of obtaining care, or for other relevant reasons and there was evidence of a connection to the parish, the Chairman or Vice Chairman, can look at agreeing fees on an individual basis.

Councillor Eldridge queried why there was a digging surcharge for an American Style Casket. The Clerk explained that because of the size of the casket there is an increase in the amount of soil that has to be removed. Cllr Bartram asked if the fees were similar to those charged by neighbouring local authorities, the Clerk confirmed that they were, with the exception of Ongar which are slightly cheaper. The Chairman asked if the digging fees would be increased, the Clerk stated that the grave digger normally increases his fees on a yearly basis. Cllr Bartram asked if the ditch would need to be cleared again, bearing in mind that new plots have been created close by. The Clerk stated that the grave digger had recommended that the plots at the end of Burial Section One are used first, if possible. The grave digger had confirmed that there is plenty of room for him to gain access with the digger and said the same with the hedge cutter. The grave digger has not reported any concerns with regard to drainage.

The Chairman asked Members if the fees should be increased. Councillor Hawkins stated that, in his opinion, there should be no increase in fees, adding that, at the precept meeting, Members agreed that there was no need to ask for an increase in the precept, therefore we should not be putting up the cemetery fees. The Chairman asked the Clerk if the cemetery would lose a lot of money if there was no increase this year. The Clerk advised that whilst the cemetery should be self funding, it should also be seen as a community facility. Cllr Clegg **PROPOSED** a nil increase for 2016/17. All Members **AGREED** unanimously.

E15.34 GREEN OUTSIDE PARADE OF SHOPS, NORTH WEALD

Councillor Buckley advised Members that two quotes had been received, both amounting to around £8,000. At the precept meeting, an estimated figure of £6,000 for the overall project had been put forward. Cllr Buckley reminded Members that there will be additional costs involved with regard to the purchase of plants/flowers.

Councillor Buckley advised that he had been in contact with the owner of the wall, who had confirmed that he would have no objection to it being used to retain the garden, provided a membrane is put in place. Cllr Buckley stated that this would result in a reduction in the cost by around £1,700. He distributed a map of the project area for Members perusal. Cllr Buckley stated that the owner of the wall had also given his agreement to the section at the end of the wall (which is constantly damaged) being cut away.

Councillor Buckley mentioned enlisting the help of the lady who chairs Epping in Bloom and who is also a member of the Parish Hall Management Committee, to assist with ideas for planting. Cllr Buckley stated that if the project could be started by the Spring, completion could possibly coincide with celebrating 100 years of the Airfield, adding that there may be a possibility of getting some sponsors.

Member discussed the two quotes in more detail. Cllr Bartram asked if written confirmation could be obtained from the wall owner. The Clerk suggested that a letter be sent regarding the agreement, requesting that the wall owner sign and date it. With regard to sponsorship, the Chairman suggested that plaques could be sold (mentioning the pier at Southwold as an example).

Councillor Hawkins asked if the price of the CCTV had now been included in the cost of the garden, adding that the overall cost of the project would now amount to around £11,000. The Clerk reminded Members that that the CCTV would cost £5,000 (plus additional costs) and is to cover the whole of the area by the shops, not just the garden project. Discussion ensued regarding how the budget could be allocated.

Councillor Eldridge referred to the site map and expressed concern that the strip of grass remaining in front of the garden could be a problem. Cllr Buckley advised that Essex County Council are going to be putting railings along there. Cllr Clegg asked what is the height of the railings. Cllr Buckley stated that the height had not been advised. The Clerk stated that Essex County Council are installing them under the Local Highways Panel.

Councillor Clegg asked if the phone box needed to stay and if it was still working. Cllr Buckley confirmed that it would need to remain and that it was operational.

The Clerk asked Members how they would like her to present how the monies will be allocated. A brief discussion ensued and Members agreed that the Clerk should put together some examples and present at the next meeting. Cllr Buckley suggested that any extra monies could be used to smarten up the end section of wall, opposite

the Cinnamon Restaurant, by securing planters on to it. He added that the manager of the restaurant is very pleased with the proposed project. Cllr Hawkins stated that the flowers/plants would need to be watered every day and that maintenance of the garden is going to cost a lot of money, adding that no plants are low maintenance. The Clerk suggested that perhaps the shops could be asked to provide assistance with watering. Cllr Hawkins stated that regardless of low maintenance plants, the garden will get weeds and the maintenance will cost a lot more than has been envisaged.

E15.35 BULB PLANTING

Members **NOTED** that EFDC operatives have planted bulbs in the green areas both sides of the Talbot Roundabout. The Chairman informed Members that the bulbs planted by the Committee in October are starting to come up. The Clerk asked if a note of where the bulbs had been planted had been made. Cllr Buckley stated that he has the map that was used and will take photos of the bulbs when they flower and log their locations.

The Chairman asked Members if they had any other issues relating to this Committee which they wished to discuss:-

- a) Councillor Eldridge mentioned that he had managed to contact a responsible person, Faith Watson, Community Safety Officer, Harlow Town Council, regarding the situation with the horses on Harlow Common, of which she was fully aware.
- b) Councillor Buckley mentioned that, with regard to the bulb planting, some flowers may only appear a couple of times then disappear, however they should come up again and there is no need to remove them, adding that this is also the case with “blind” bulbs, they can flower again in time.

Meeting closed: 11.20am

Signed

Date