

MINUTES OF THE OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD AT BANSONS ON 13 JUNE 2013

PRESENT: A. Kaye (vice chair) S. Jackman C. Knights R. Prosser
D. Roberts J. Rushton

Officer: J. Cook (Deputy Clerk)

Public: None

01/13 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs A. Wingfield, B. Surtees and F. Knights. In the absence of Cllr A. Wingfield Cllr A. Kaye chaired the meeting.

02/13 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

03/13 Public participation

There were no members of the public present.

04/13 To agree the minutes of the Environment and Open Spaces committee meeting held on 18 April 2013

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 April were reviewed and agreed as a true record and signed by the chairman.

05/13 Clerk's Report

Allotments

The Council had been awarded £1440.20 from the Edible Essex Project of Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE). The funding would be used to pay for the following work at Castle St allotments –

- Tree survey
- Clear, rotovate and create 2 new allotment plots
- Clear and define paths
- Numbers for plots markers

At the Environment and Open Spaces committee meeting on 18 April 2013 Councillors asked that the length of notice for an increase in rent be confirmed. The Allotments Act 1950 stated that 12 months notice was required and therefore the agreed rent increase could not be implemented until November 2014. This would be forwarded to the Finance committee for approval.

The draft Allotments Risk Assessment approved by the Environment and Open Spaces committee on 18 April 2013 was included on the agenda for the Human Resources committee on 13 June 2013 for its approval.

Cemetery

A relative had complained to the Council regarding items that were missing from a grave. The resident was very upset that items of sentimental value had been removed from the grave without consultation. No instruction was given to outside spaces staff to remove these items and a search by Council staff of the Cemetery was unable to locate the missing items. .

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High St planters

The planters were replanted by Ongar Allotment and Gardening Society (OAGS) on Sunday 19th May.

Highways

The Deputy Clerk had confirmed with EFDC's parks manager that the grass near the footpath between Woodland Way and Kilnfield was regularly cut by EFDC. The broken handrail had been reported to Cllr Paul Keska.

Litter picking day

The litter picking event held on Saturday 25th May was attended by Cllrs D. Roberts, A. Kaye, J. Rushton and A. Wingfield, one member of the public and two members of staff. Litter pickers, high viz jackets and gloves were borrowed from EFDC. Mr Alan Brett kindly agreed to remove the bags of rubbish in his vehicle. It was a very disappointing turn out and this may have been due in part to the day chosen being a Bank Holiday weekend at the beginning of half term.

A further litter picking day would be held on Saturday 12th October.

Play areas

The refurbishment of the Jubilee Field (Love Lane) play area was completed and officially opened by the Rt. Hon Eric Pickles MP on 10th May. A celebration Play in the Park was held in conjunction with Ongar Mums Group on 30th May and held in the Scout hut due to the poor weather. The event raised approximately £400 for further play area improvements.

The possible insurance claim for an accident at Shelley Park had been dismissed by the Council's insurers.

St Martin's church yard

On the advice of the EFDC Arborologist some essential tree work was carried out on trees in the church yard.

Ash trees

Advice from Essex County Council stated that the Ash Dieback was unlikely to be eradicated from this country. ECC recommends that Town and parish Councils inspect their ash trees twice per year, once in the growing season (now) and once in autumn.

It was suggested that a tree warden be asked to assist the Council with these inspections.

Countrycare

It was reported that the Council had received a copy of Countrycare's Annual Report for 2012 - 13 and this was available in the office should Councillors wish to view it.

It was reported that Countrycare had started to advertise the Town Council's Nature Reserve Open Day on 14th September.

06/13 Terms of reference

The Terms of Reference for the committee were reviewed and two amendments requested.

AGREED

- to recommend the amended Terms of Reference to Full Council

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07/13 St Martin's Church

Cllr D. Roberts and the Deputy Clerk met with representatives of St Martin's PCC. A report was provided for Councillors information. Several actions were provisionally agreed and an update on these items was provided at the meeting. The next meeting would be held on 2nd July.

It was reported that the recommended tree works in the churchyard had been completed. The PCC and the Council had completed a joint faculty application for the removal of a self seeded lime tree and repairs to the boundary wall.

The draft Risk Assessment for St Martin's church yard was reviewed by Rev Cooper and would be included on the agenda for the next Open Spaces committee meeting.

08/13 Additional CCTV coverage on play areas and skate park

i) To receive a recommendation from Community Affairs committee regarding additional CCTV coverage on Cerizay play area

At the Community Affairs committee meeting held on 6th June Councillors considered providing additional CCTV coverage on the Cerizay play area.

Community Affairs committee recommended that Open Spaces committee approve the installation of additional cameras to overlook the play area and to release funds from either play area maintenance or the play area improvement budget.

The committee agreed that further CCTV was required at this location and that the cost should be taken from the play area maintenance budget.

AGREED

- to install an additional CCTV camera overlooking Cerizay play area
- that the cost be taken from the play area maintenance budget

ii) To receive a recommendation from Community Affairs committee regarding additional CCTV coverage on Love Lane play area

At the Community Affairs committee meeting held on 6th June Councillors considered providing additional CCTV coverage on the Love Lane play area.

Community Affairs committee recommended that Open Spaces committee approve the installation of additional cameras to overlook the play area and to release funds from either play area maintenance or play area improvement budgets.

The committee agreed that further CCTV was required at this location and that the cost should be taken from the play area maintenance budget.

AGREED

- to install an additional CCTV camera overlooking the Love Lane play area
- that the cost be taken from the play area maintenance budget

iii) To receive a recommendation from Community Affairs committee regarding relocating CCTV recording equipment at St Peter's Ave

At the Community Affairs committee meeting held on 6th June Councillors considered relocating the recording equipment from its present location to a new location to ensure access to the equipment as necessary. Community Affairs committee recommended that Open Spaces committee release the funds from play area maintenance, play area improvement budgets or Shelley Park maintenance budget.

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The committee agreed that the relocation of the CCTV was essential and that the cost should be taken from the play area maintenance budget.

AGREED

- to relocate the recording equipment to a new location
- that the cost be taken from the play area maintenance budget

iv) To receive a recommendation from Community Affairs committee regarding additional CCTV coverage on the skate park

At the Community Affairs committee held on 6th June Councillors considered providing additional CCTV coverage on the skate park.

Community Affairs committee recommended that Open Spaces committee approve the installation of additional cameras to overlook the skate park and to release funds from the amount originally set aside for the removal of the skate park. However, Councillors agreed that the order for the CCTV was only to be placed after the Council had signed the new lease for the skate park.

The committee agreed that further CCTV was required at this location and that the cost should be taken from the play area maintenance budget. However, as the lease had not yet been agreed this project would not commence until after the lease has been signed.

AGREED

- to install an additional CCTV camera overlooking the skate board park
- that the cost be taken from the skate park maintenance budget
- the project not to commence until after the lease had been signed

09/13 Ongar Allotments and Gardening Society

To receive a report on the meeting with Ongar Allotments and Gardening Society (OAGS) held on 6th June 2013

The Deputy Clerk and Cllr A. Kaye met with representatives of OAGS on Thursday 6th June. Notes of the meeting were considered by Councillors. Cllr R. Prosser asked to be informed of the date of the first risk assessment inspection.

AGREED

- the first risk assessment inspection to be carried out as soon as possible
- written records kept of each inspection
- letters to be sent to tenants where issues have arisen following the inspection

10/13 Cemetery

To agree on a course of action regarding mementos on some graves

The Council had received complaints from residents regarding inappropriate mementos on some graves. This included planting of spring flowers and the placement of unsuitable items on graves. The cemetery had been designated as a lawn cemetery and Councillors were advised that this situation had built up over a number of years and some action may cause upset or offence to relatives.

Councillors were concerned that this practice would continue and expand unless action was taken.

AGREED

- the Clerk to write to relatives reminding them of the Rules and Regulations
- that the items be removed after a period of time and kept at Council offices for collection
- to inform local Funeral Directors of this action and request their assistance

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11/13 Nature Reserve

i) To receive confirmation that the Council has been awarded the Living Landscapes Award from Essex Wildlife Trust (EWT)

The Deputy Clerk nominated the Jubilee Nature Reserve for the Living Landscapes Award from Essex Wildlife Trust. This had been awarded and the Council had been invited to send a representative to receive a framed certificate at the EWT AGM to be held on Saturday 22 June. The Council was also entitled to use the Living Landscapes logo on any literature.

AGREED

- no Councillor or staff were able to attend the AGM
- to inform Cllr R. Prosser of the date of the AGM

ii) To consider access arrangement for the rear entrances of properties 14 – 17 Turners Close
It had been brought to the Council's attention that residents of 14 – 17 Turners Close were experiencing difficulty accessing their properties via the rear entrance to their properties across land granted as easement to the Town Council by EFDC. Terms of the easement stated that there was no public access to the Nature Reserve at this point but that the Town Council must continue to ensure that rear access to the properties continued to be used.

The main gate, while allowing pedestrian access, did not allow enough space for a pushchair or wheelbarrow. Residents had requested that the main gate be repositioned and a pedestrian gate provided.

Councillors felt that there was insufficient information to allow a decision and requested that this item be deferred until the next meeting. Cllrs D. Roberts, R. Prosser and A. Kaye offered to visit the location with the Deputy Clerk.

AGREED

- to add this item to the next agenda
- Cllrs and the Deputy Clerk to visit the site and explore options for access

12/13 Open Spaces Society

To consider and decide whether to donate funds to the Open Spaces Society

The Council had been contacted by the Open Spaces Society to request funds to assist with their "Greens: what next?" campaign. A copy of the letter was provided for Councillors' information.

Cllr D. Roberts supported this request in principal but proposed that there were no funds available.

AGREED

- not to provide a donation to the Open Spaces Society

13/13 Independent annual inspection of play areas and skate park

The annual independent inspection was completed in May 2013. This highlighted some areas for consideration.

Greensted Rd play area

No gate to restrict entry by dogs

Rust on the underside of the slide would need attention

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The equipment was dated and nearing the end of its life – the Council would need to plan to change these items, possibly one each year unless the lease could be renegotiated with Essex County Council. The Clerk was working with the Council's solicitor on securing a new lease.

Councillors noted this information.

Skate park

Chain link fence to rear of site in urgent need of repair (this belongs to Castle Farm Trustees who had been contacted regarding this)

Both bins had suffered fire damage (but were still usable)

Insufficient safety zone to the rear of each ramp – a minimum of 2 metres was recommended

Councillors were concerned that the lack of safety zone had not been raised before.

AGREED

The Clerk was instructed to -

- ascertain the cost to provide a guard rail to both ramps
- to check with the Council's Insurance company that the Council is responsible despite the lack of current lease
- to close the skate park until such time as a solution is agreed
- to check the wording of the closure notices with the Insurance company
- to issue a press release on the temporary closure

Cerizay play area

No remedial work to be done

Councillors noted this information.

Jubilee Park (Love Lane)

Timber fence decayed

Minor items such as missing dust covers would be replaced as part of the ongoing maintenance tasks

Councillors noted this information.

Shelley Park

No remedial work to be done

Minor items such as missing dust covers would be replaced as part of the ongoing maintenance tasks

Councillors noted this information.

14/13 Shelley Park

A fence installed within the perimeter hedge had been broken allegedly to allow youngsters to retrieve footballs that had accidentally gone into the garden. The fence was installed by Ongar Landscapes on behalf of the Council to prevent unauthorised access to the garden. The resident had installed barbed wire to try to prevent unwanted access. A photograph was provided for Councillors information.

Councillors agreed that the Council was responsible for the repairs to the fence.

AGREED

- to arrange for the repair to the fence

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15/13 Skate park

It was reported by the Open Spaces Supervisor on 30th May that one of the pedestrian gates to the skate park had been stolen. This had been reported to Essex Police and a crime number obtained. A replacement gate was estimated to cost approx £300 with this cost to be taken from the skate park maintenance budget.

Councillors noted this information.

AGREED

- to defer a decision on replacing the gate while the park was temporarily closed

16/13 Working Parties

The committee was asked to decide what working parties were required and the membership.

AGREED

- a working party for St Martin's Church
- membership to be Cllrs D. Roberts, A. Kaye and J. Rushton

17/13 Open Spaces committee budget 2013/14

To receive information on the committee budget

Councillors requested a breakdown of the costs of the grounds maintenance budget. Cllr C. Knights felt that the ear marked fund for the lorry park seed funding was no longer required and the amount transferred to general reserves.

AGREED

- the Clerk to email committee members with a breakdown of grounds maintenance costs
- to add the ear marked fund for lorry park seed funding to the next agenda

18/13 Unlisted items

Unlisted items could be raised by Councillors or members of the public for the Council's consideration.

Cllr S. Jackman suggested that the Council consider obtaining insurance for discipline procedures against either the Clerk or Councillors. The Clerk was asked to check whether Councillors were insured against personal indemnity. If so, the Clerk would write to all Councillors to inform them of the existing cover.

Cllr D. Roberts thanked the Clerk for liaison with ECC Highways to remove a sign illegally attached to a highways sign on Ongar High Street.

It was suggested that contact numbers for staff be given to all Councillors for use in emergencies only. Councillors felt that the Council should consider business continuity procedures in case of emergencies.

The meeting closed at 9.54 pm.

Signed

Chair

Date