



AMENITIES & LEISURE COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Amenities & Leisure Committee held remotely on Wednesday, 4th November 2020 which commenced at 7.45pm.

Present

Chair – Councillor A Newton

Councillors: A Bassett, G Bhangra, N Brock, M Eastwell, D Hare, D Ireland, A Long, S Matthews and K Yabsley.

In attendance: J Friend (Town Clerk), E Carroll (Deputy Town Clerk), G Hawker (Senior Park Ranger), R Fryer (Democratic Services Officer), Councillor A Mickleburgh and a member of the public.

33. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor N Brock declared an interest in Item 10.2 Memorial Bench.

35. LOCAL WALKS PROJECT

35.1 Councillors **RESOLVED** to bring forward agenda item 11, discussions regarding the Local Walks Project

35.2 Councillor Long provided an update regarding the Town Council’s recent collaboration with the local Ramblers Group to produce a series of published walks around Earley. He praised Mary Bather and her colleagues who had produced a series of 12 walks. The intention was to make the details of the walks freely available. The Committee expressed unanimous support for the project. The Town Clerk agreed to investigate the creation of an additional web page on the Town Council website to house the walks, and consideration was given to publishing them as a booklet in the future and for them to be publicised on Town Council noticeboards and through Councillors’ social media accounts.

The member of the public left the meeting.

36. PUBLIC FORUM

There were no members of the public present.

37. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd September 2020 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

38. BUDGETS 2021/22

- 38.1 The Chair highlighted the financial impact of the Coronavirus on the Town Council's non-precept income and Members discussed projects they would like the Town Council to undertake in 2021/22. The Committee were minded to carry over projects which had been delayed this year, including the Cemetery extension and environmental projects. Councillors discussed their wish to involve residents in this decision making process, but agreed that the setting of the next budget was going to be extremely complex owing to the extraordinary events of 2020 and so it would not be an appropriate time to start such a process. Consideration was given to using the opportunity of the Annual Town Electors Meeting to launch this conversation with residents for the 2022/23 budget.
- 38.2 Members expressed a preference to focus on those projects which met urgent need and noted that this was a fluid situation which would continue to remain changeable for the immediate future. However, they agreed that priority should be given to the youth outreach project, the cemetery extension and environmental work. Councillors were reminded that there had been an intention to extend the overflow car park at Sol Joel park and that this work would provide benefits to users of the park as well as to local residents.
- 38.3 A Councillor suggested the Council consider installing a tennis court in the town.

39. ANNUAL FEES & CHARGES REVIEW

The Committee began preliminary discussions on amendments to the Town Council's fees and charges for 2021/22 for services provided, including hall hire and cemetery. Members were mindful of the need to try to ensure that the running costs of amenities were met, but also considered the benefit of freezing charges where possible. Councillors agreed that they would recommend that cemetery charges should increase in line with inflation, but that other charges, such as hall hire, should be frozen for the next financial year. These suggestions will be forwarded to Policy and Resources Committee for consideration and will form part of the discussions undertaken by the Budget Working Party.

40. DOG WASTE BAGS

Councillors considered whether to continue provision of free dog waste bags to residents in 2021/22. After lengthy discussion the Committee would recommend to the Policy and Resources Committee that the provision of free dog waste bags be withdrawn next year, on a trial basis, the situation to be reviewed at the end of 2021. In the event that Council decides to continue to provide dog bags to residents, officers will look into alternative suppliers and the implications of making a charge for the bags.

41. CULVER LANE ALLOTMENTS

Members noted that the annual Best Kept Allotment Competition will not take place this year, in fairness to those plot holders whose ability to tend their plot had been restricted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Council plan to resume the competition in 2021/22.

42. MAYS LANE CEMETERY

Councillors considered the request for a memorial bench to be erected at Mays Lane Cemetery. Members were mindful of the importance of siting benches appropriately in the amenity given the limitation on space, and it was suggested that a bench policy be drawn up. The administrating officer for Mays Lane Cemetery had recommended that a slightly different position for the bench to that requested by the applicant would be more appropriate.

It was **AGREED** that the officer would speak with the resident to explore agreement on the position of a memorial bench, and that if agreement could be reached then the memorial bench could be installed. If the applicant did not agree to the revised position then the officer would contact the Chair of this Committee.

43. MAIDEN ERLEGH LAKE & NATURE RESERVE

43.1 Flooding Issues

The Deputy Town Clerk reported that she had spoken with the Borough flooding team, following the meeting between the Deputy Town Clerk, Councillor Jones, Councillor Mickleburgh and senior Flooding and Drainage officers from Wokingham Borough Council to discuss the recent flooding affecting the Egremont Road area. The WBC officers confirmed that a works application had been submitted to remove one tree and short term remedial works would take place, before Christmas. Councillors noted that preliminary discussions were being held to explore longer term solutions.

43.2 Memorial Bench

Councillors considered the request for a memorial bench to be erected at the Nature Reserve. The Park Ranger noted that there were issues of space and noise that had to be taken into account when making decisions concerning the Nature Reserve and that he didn't feel there was an appropriate spot for a bench to be installed. Members understood the personal nature of this request and the significance of the location and suggested that maybe an alternative type of memorial could be proposed.

It was **AGREED** that the Town Clerk would arrange for a discussion to be had with the applicant to explore suitable alternative options.

44. TOWN COUNCIL YOUTH OUTREACH WORK

Councillor Long reported on the recent meeting of the Youth sub-committee and the progression of the outreach project. The sub-Committee were exploring the possibility of increasing the hours worked by the Town Council's Youth workers and the Outreach volunteers and will report back any further developments.

45. EARLEY IN BLOOM

Members considered a request by Councillor Mickleburgh that Earley Town Council consider running an annual Earley in Bloom competition. Councillors were mindful of the extra workload this could cause officers who were already under pressure owing to the impacts of the pandemic. It was agreed that Councillors Bassett, Brock, Matthews and Mickleburgh would form a Working Party and produce a report for the Town Clerk.

46. CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS

It was noted that, owing to the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, the Town Council would not be organising any Christmas celebrations this year.

47. PUBLICATIONS

The Committee noted that the following items had been received and were available for viewing from the Council Offices:

Involvement Community Services	October 2020 e-newsletter
Earley Volunteer Drivers Bureau	Virtual AGM notification and papers – 5 th November 2020
The Link Visiting Scheme	Autumn Newsletter

48. PRESS RELEASES

Councillors requested that, once the Local Walks project had been completed and the appropriate information had been published, a press release be made promoting the project.

49. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

There were no members of the public or press present. It was agreed that the remaining items on the Agenda be taken under Part II.

PART II

50. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

51. TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting was declared closed by the Chair at 9.36 pm.

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 Chair, Amenities & Leisure Committee