



AMENITIES & LEISURE COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting for the members of the Amenities & Leisure Committee held remotely on Wednesday, 12th January 2022 which commenced at 7.45pm.

Present

Chair – Councillor A Newton

Councillors: A Bassett, G Bhangra, N Brock, M Eastwell, A Long, T Maher, 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) and 3 members of the public.

67. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D Ireland.

68. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

69. PUBLIC FORUM

A representative from MERA voiced concerns over the Borough’s proposal for a 3G pitch at Laurel Park and the potential impact on residents. Concerns raised included increased use leading to an increase in traffic noise, pollution, and parking issues; the loss of public amenity land arising from a field being turned into a car park; the potential for light pollution from floodlights impacting both residents and fauna on the nature reserve; the potential for increased water runoff from the astroturf in light of local flooding issues, as well as plastic pollution. He noted the potential for noise pollution from any PA system and with usage of the field extended into the evening. The MERA representative asked what the town council’s view would be. The Town Clerk confirmed that this was a Wokingham Borough Council site and a borough council project, and that ETC did not currently have access to any details about the plans. The town council was therefore unable to express a view but its Planning Committee would debate any planning application if one was submitted to WBC. The chair requested that MERA provide the town council with a copy of the points they had raised at this evening’s meeting.

The MERA representative went on to comment on agenda item 7 - ‘Lakeside Hedge’, noting that MERA condemned the unlawful cutting but suggesting that the action was indicative of the strength of feeling about the height of the hedge. The representative was keen that the hedge facing Lakeside housing should be kept neat and tidy whilst understanding that the site was a nature reserve.

A representative from ACER expressed concerns regarding Item 8 - ‘Trees at Milton Road’. He noted that three replacement trees had been planted by WBC, in new locations, and asked when would the remaining trees be maintained or replaced? Who was responsible for maintaining the trees and if there was a budget in place for this maintenance?

Councillors agreed to bring forward discussions on Item 7 - 'Lakeside Hedge' and Item 8 - 'Milton Road'.

70. LAKESIDE HEDGE

Members noted that reports had been received in December 2021 that an unknown person or persons had been cutting down the hedge located on Lakeside, this action was being undertaken at night. Councillors, and MERA, had been informed that the situation was being monitored by the Park Rangers and a report had been made to the Police as this activity was considered criminal damage. It was generally agreed that the person causing this destruction was most likely someone unhappy with the town council's decision to preserve but improve the hedge, for environmental reasons, rather than cut it down to improve the view for a minority of householders.

The Senior Park Ranger reported on the difficulties the damage was causing them in trying to maintain the hedge in the agreed way, councillors noted that the Rangers had cut a gully to cause separation in the hedge to allow access for maintenance but that this was being compromised. The Senior Park Ranger and councillors expressed disappointment that one or possibly two people felt their wishes should take precedence over the welfare of the nature reserve and the feelings of a large number of users of the reserve, especially when the existence of other trees and plants meant that views of the lake would always be somewhat obscured for these properties. He noted that the needs of the wildlife on the reserve should also be a concern for councillors.

71. TREES AT MILTON ROAD

It was noted that the three replacement trees, funded by Earley Town Council, had now been planted in Milton Road by Wokingham Borough Council. WBC's Senior Specialist for Trees had advised that they had been planted at different locations to the originals due to better soil quality and larger verge sizes. The ACER representative had been made aware that whilst ETC had funded the planting of trees on Milton Road, this was WBC land and therefore the borough would carry out any surveys. The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that WBC had agreed to plant and maintain the replacement trees in Milton Road after ETC had agreed to fund their purchase. It was noted that WBC was best equipped and resourced to maintain trees in the borough, especially given the restrictions around working on or near highways, and that it had officers who were tree specialists. It was agreed that if residents had concerns about the trees, it was best to use the dedicated WBC reporting tool.

Three members of the public left the meeting

72. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3rd November 2021 were approved as a true record and it was **RECOMMENDED** they be signed by the Chair (Minutes 50–66).

73. CORONAVIRUS - UPDATE

Members noted that no further restrictions had been introduced by Government in relation to the Omicron variant and that regular activities continued to take place at the Town Council's community centres and sports pavilions. Due to high infection rates, bookings for parties and large gatherings were currently not being taken and but this remained under regular review. The Town Clerk confirmed that booking levels remained steady.

74. CULVER LANE ALLOTMENTS

Councillors noted that notice had been given on several allotments by plot holders, these would be offered to people on the waiting list.

75. TREE REGISTER

The Committee received a verbal update from Councillor Maher, noting that, following a meeting of the working group in December 2021, Councillors Long and Matthews had drafted terms of reference and an action plan which were in the process of being finalised. Relevant local groups had been contacted including Reading University's community relations team and several individuals had also expressed an interest in helping the working group. WBC's Senior Specialist for Trees had indicated that they were setting up a database which ETC could have access to, the details of that access to be confirmed. The working group will share their documentation with the Council once completed.

76. WBC GARDEN FOREST SCHEME

Councillors noted that Wokingham Borough Council had published details of its Garden Forest Scheme, a project designed to encourage residents to plant a tree in their own gardens. The deadline for an expression of interest was 30th January 2022 and Members were pleased to note that ETC was promoting the scheme. Councillors were keen to promote take up of the scheme on their social media.

77. ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENT

Members discussed how the Town Council could encourage and support biodiversity on its land. Consideration was given to the planting of bee-friendly shrubs and the creation of insect-friendly habitats. The Senior Park Ranger noted that options were limited as ETC did not own a large amount of land and that officers already did a lot of eco-friendly work on sites they managed. He suggested that ETC may wish to focus on influencing other landowners in Earley to take such measures. The Town Clerk noted that the Climate Emergency working group were creating a green infrastructure plan and councillors should avoid duplicating that work.

78. WOOD CHIP BIN

Councillors discussed the possible installation of a second wood chip bin. The Town Clerk had previously discussed this with the Senior Park Ranger and noted that as the siting of the current wood chip bin was alongside an ETC site, it could be regularly monitored by staff and there was an informal agreement in place with a woodchip provider. Alternative sites were likely to prove more problematic as they would be on third-party land, ETC would have less regular oversight, more liability and would likely require commercial agreements. Councillors were keen that the possibility of a second bin be explored if at all possible.

79. SOLAR POWERED LIGHTING

Members discussed the Chair's suggestion that solar powered lighting be considered for the skatepark at Sol Joel Park, following the successful installation of solar powered lighting in the ETC offices car park. After discussion it was agreed that this could have a negative impact on residential neighbours of the park and therefore the suggestion would not be taken forward.

80. PUBLICATIONS

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

CCB	E-Bulletin November, December 2021
Earley Orchard Group	Minutes of Annual General Meeting 24 th October 2021
MERA	Minutes 11 th November, 9 th December 2021
Me2 Club	E-newsletter November, December 2021
Berkshire Youth	E-newsletter November 2021

81. PRESS RELEASES

No press releases were requested.

82. TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting was declared closed by the Chair at 8.56 pm.

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Chair, Amenities & Leisure Committee