

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

Minutes of the meeting of the Amenities and Recreation Committee held in Magistrates Court, Guildhall on Wednesday 26th November 2019 at 7.00pm.

Present:

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| Councillor Jim Halliday | Chair |
| Councillor Charlie Birks | |
| Councillor Samantha Bowring | |
| Councillor Grace Clifton | |
| Councillor Eric de la Harpe | |
| Councillor Jeanette Halliday | |

In Attendance:

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| Councillor Margaret Crick | |
| Mr Tim Badcock | Cemetery and Works Supervisor |
| Mr Chris Ford | Wick Farm Nurseries |
| Mr Stephen Rich | Assistant Town Clerk & Head of Services (Clerk to the meeting) |
| Mrs Susan Whipp | Treasurer / Responsible Finance Officer |

A35. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andrew Coveney and Robert Maddison.

A36. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Grace Clifton, Jeanette Halliday and Jim Halliday declared non pecuniary interests in any matters concerning allotments (item 5 of the agenda) as they had relatives or friends who rented allotment plots.

A37. Urgent Matter

Members were informed by the Assistant Town Clerk / Head of Services of a serious incident that happened in the Boxhill and Chilton Close play areas, resulting in a member of the Works Team injuring himself which required hospital treatment. The Thames Valley Police had been informed and they were treating the matter as an assault and would be making the case public through the media in order that others will be aware and take necessary precautions.

The Committee were shocked at receiving this news and wished the member of staff well.

A38. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

It was **resolved** the Minutes of the previous meeting on 4th September 2019 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

A39. **Matters Arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda**

Minute A9 – Street Furniture – Members were informed that the two new bus shelters at the northern end of the Oxford Road had now been installed.

Minute A12 - Cremated Remains – the meeting was informed that the creation of a garden area to accept the scattering of cremated remains was in the programme of works for the Council.

Minutes 15 – Roundabouts in Abingdon – Members were informed that Councillor Emily Smith of the District Council had offered to contact her officers with a view to finding a way forward with this matter. It was **resolved** that Members who were also Members of the District Council would speak with Councillor Smith about the importance of this matter.

Minute A23 – West End Allotment Site – Members were informed that the removal of materials from the West End Allotment site had been completed and all allotment associations informed that certain materials should not be brought on to allotment sites.

Minute A26 – Notice Boards – It was reported that the Stratton Lodge and Roysse Court noticeboards had been ordered and were awaiting delivery and the officers were trying to locate a manufacturer of a circular noticeboard to be sited in the Market Place..

Minute A27 – Bench outside Abbey Cinema, Guildhall – Members were informed that a bench had been installed around the tree outside the Abbey Cinema, Guildhall. Members commented that it was already well used.

Minute A28–Planting of New Trees – Officers had received no suggestions regarding where new trees should be planted but would be willing to offer advice to Members if contacted. It was suggested that a Community Wood could be set up on the Abingdon Common west of the Tesco site where a diverse range of trees could be planted. Members were enthusiastic regarding this suggestion and asked the Cemetery and Works Supervisor to prepare a report for the next Committee meeting.

A Member expressed concern about the maturing trees along Copenhagen Drive and Dunmore Road that could be put at risk when the new development was underway. It was suggested that the Member contact the arboricultural officer at the District Council regarding TPO's (Tree Preservation Orders) to ensure the trees' longevity.

Minute A29 – Happy to Chat Benches – Members were informed that signage had been installed on a bench in the Market Place and at St. Helen’s Wharf, but they had now been removed by persons unknown. The Cemetery and Works Supervisor said he could arrange something sturdier and more permanent to display the notices and the Committee **resolved** that the notices be replaced as suggested. Members asked that publicity be made about the “Happy to Chat” benches and it was reported that Dr. Peta Foster, who had spoken to the Committee previously on this matter, would like to be involved in that regard.

A40. **Financial Report**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Treasurer / Responsible Financial Officer as circulated with the agenda.

Management accounts

Resolved: that the Committee approve the management accounts for the period 1st April 2019 to 30th September 2019.

Projected year end income and expenditure

It was noted that the projected net expenditure for the year was £486,936. This was significantly lower than the original budget of £517,103 (potential saving £30,167 (5.8%)).

Resolved: to note the projected outturn for 2019-2.

Estimates 2020-21

The Committee received the report of the Treasurer / Responsible Finance Officer and made the following **recommendations** to the Finance and General Purposes Committee concerning the 2020 / 2021 budget estimates:

- Increase fees for the cemetery by 5%, rounding to the nearest £5. For burials taking place from outside the parish charges would increase from double to treble the normal fees for residents of Abingdon.
- Allotment rents to increase by the rate of inflation, 1.7%.
- Fishing fees to increase by the rate of inflation rounded to the nearest 50p if under £20 and the nearest £1 if over.
- That funding for immediate tree work, as stated in the Tree Survey 2019 be sourced from this year’s budget and earmarked reserves. An additional £24,500 be requested in the budget estimates on top of the existing 2019/20 budget to make a total of £50,000 for 2020 / 2021.
- Members agreed to the £21,000 budget for horticultural supplies as suggested in the report.

- Play areas and equipment – request release of funding from the earmarked reserves (£37,353) for 2020 /2021 expenditure and further estimate for 2020/21 spend.
- Cemeteries improvements budget for 2020 / 2021 to be £17,000 (2019/20 - £27,000).
- New Cemetery Fund: to continue to increase the saving in the earmarked reserve by £75,000, as in previous years.
- To continue to upgrade/ replace the Christmas lights with a budget of £8,000 and any underspend in 2019 / 2020 transferred to the earmarked reserve.
- In relation to the Fairs, to maintain the same budget for 2020 / 2021 as the current year. However, Members were concerned that a new agreement with the Fair organiser had not been forthcoming and suggested the Council employ a person to look into arrangements for other local fairs, in conjunction with other Council's, with a view to Abingdon Michaelmas Fair paying a more realistic rental charge so that all appropriate expenditure was recovered from the fair operator.
- That taking in to account the above, that the net expenditure budget for the Committee for 2020/21 be set at £389,563 (2019/20 - £412,360, a reduction of £22,797).

The Chair, Cllr Jim Halliday, commented that the Committee's budget proposal for 2020/21 represented a saving of 5.5% against the 2019 / 2020 estimates. However, this should not be construed as a year-on-year saving as the Committee was recommending some use of earmarked reserves.

Resolved: that the report of the Treasurer/ Responsible Financial Officer, be approved.

A41. Cemetery and Works Supervisor's Report

The Committee received and considered the report of the Cemetery and Works Supervisor as circulated with the agenda. It was **resolved** to accept the report.

The Committee liked the new winter hanging baskets in Roysse Court and decided that this should continue in future years.

The Committee wished to record their thanks to the Works Team for their work undertaken during the recent months on the Fairs and Remembrance Day.

Resolved: that the report of the Cemetery and Works Supervisor, be approved.

A42. Abingdon In Bloom

The Committee received and considered the report of the Assistant Town Clerk/ Head of Services, as circulated with the agenda.

The Chair, Cllr Jim Halliday, thanked Mr Chris Ford, of Wick Farm Nurseries, for attending the meeting and offering advice to the Committee.

The Committee **resolved** to have the Roysse Court garden planted at the beginning of May 2020 in time for the VE Day commemoration using red, white and blue colours for the displays. The Market Place, County Hall and War Memorial would also have this colour scheme. The rest of the Town would be planted up towards the end of the month using vibrant colours.

It was proposed by Councillor Charlie Birks, seconded by Councillor Eric de la Harpe and **resolved** to purchase 12 new Airlie Planters and Basket Trees at a cost of approximately £19,113 and new hanging baskets at £1,920. The new planters would replace those as detailed in the report and three of the plastic planters to be replaced would be transferred to Reynolds Way shopping area for a trial period.

It was **recommended to the Finance and General Purposes Committee** that the cost of these items should come from the earmarked reserve for street furniture.

Resolved: that the report of the Assistant Town Clerk/ Head of Services, be approved.

A43. Tree Survey

The Committee received and considered the report of the Assistant Town Clerk/ Head of Services, as circulated with the agenda.

Members were informed by the Assistant Town Clerk that the latest Tree Survey had recently been received by the Town Council and officers had yet to study its findings in detail. However the result of the survey had suggested that £40,000 worth of work was required in the next three months with a further £44,000 within six months and another £5,000 within 12 months. Officers were looking in to see how much of this work could be carried out by Council staff and how much should be undertaken by external contractors. Officers were confident there could be a reduction in costs against the report.

Members **resolved** to use the remainder of this year's budget and recommended **to the Finance and General Purposes Committee** that the earmarked reserve (£20,000) also be released for works. It was further recommended **to the Finance and General Purposes Committee** that the 2020/21 budget for arboriculture be set at £50,000 (2019/20 - £24,500) to allow for the rest of the tree work to be undertaken as recommended in the Tree Survey.

Resolved: that the report of the Assistant Town Clerk/ Head of Services, be approved.

A44. New Bus Shelter

The Committee received and considered the report of the Assistant Town Clerk/ Head of Services, as circulated with the agenda.

Requests had been received for seating at the south bound bus stop near to the Boundary House and a new shelter in the Vineyard. Members discussed both requests and **resolved** to ask their officers to come back with designs for new stops at both locations. Officers were asked to email Members with proposals and it was **recommended to the**

Finance and General Purposes Committee the funding for this work should be allocated from the earmarked reserve in relation to street furniture.

Resolved: that the report of the Assistant Town Clerk/ Head of Services, be approved.

A45 **Land in Stratton Way**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Assistant Town Clerk/ Head of Services, as circulated with the agenda.

The Assistant Town Clerk reported to the Committee that a parcel of Council owned land to the north of the pedestrian subway in Stratton Way was causing some concern because it has become a site of anti-social behaviour, was difficult to maintain and had little amenity value. It was therefore suggested to members that the Council may wish to consider disposing of the land. It was **recommended** to the Finance and General Purposes Committee that this request be considered.

Resolved: that the report of the Assistant Town Clerk/ Head of Services, be approved.

A46. **New Cemetery**

The Committee received and **resolved** to approve the notes of the New Cemetery Working Group which took place on 11th November 2019.

A47. **Spring Road Cemetery Grazing**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Assistant Town Clerk/ Head of Services, as circulated with the agenda.

The Committee **resolved** allow the grazing of sheep within the meadow area of the Spring Road Cemetery on a trial basis. Members also **resolved** to permit bee hives in the area with the appropriate warning notices for those who visit the area.

Resolved: that the report of the Assistant Town Clerk/ Head of Services, be approved.

A48. **Spring Garden Cemetery Lodge Shower**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Assistant Town Clerk/ Head of Services, as circulated with the agenda.

It was **resolved** that a replacement shower unit be installed in the bathroom of the Spring Garden Cemetery Lodge replacing the one removed during the refurbishment of the building.

Resolved: that the report of the Assistant Town Clerk/ Head of Services, be approved.

A49. **Benches in St. Helen's Wharf**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Assistant Town Clerk/ Head of Services, as circulated with the agenda.

It was **resolved** to replace three benches on St. Helen's Wharf with recycled plastic benches to match those already replaced. It was **recommended to the Finance and General Purposes Committee** the funding for this work should be allocated from the earmarked reserve in relation to street furniture.

Resolved: that the report of the Assistant Town Clerk/ Head of Services, be approved.

A50. **Margaret Brown Garden**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Assistant Town Clerk/ Head of Services, as circulated with the agenda.

Following a request from a local resident concerning Margaret Brown Garden, Town Council officers made enquiries with the Thames Valley Police and other members of the public concerning the issues that had been raised.

The incident referred to as having taken place in the Margaret Brown Garden, was known to the police who had informed officers that the people involved were known to each other. Town Council Members therefore considered that this was likely to be a one-off incident.

Regarding the feeling of safety, members of the public, who walked through the garden at 9.00pm. had been asked their opinion. People felt they were safe and that the lighting was adequate because the surrounding areas was lit.

With regard to reducing the shrubs, hedges and trees, officers had been to the site and found there was no need for any reductions at this moment in time without spoiling the nature of the area and its shielding from the road.

Members **resolved** not to undertake any extra work in the Margaret Brown garden at this time. However they requested officers to ask Thames Valley Police to let the Council know if there are any further incidents there.

The Member who received the request from the local resident would respond with the above comments.

Resolved: that the report of the Assistant Town Clerk/ Head of Services, be approved.

A51. **Environmental Implications**

The Committee considered environmental implications in relation to matters on the agenda having regard to the Council's resolution on the Climate Change Emergency. Members felt that environmental matters had been covered during discussions on agenda items where necessary.

A52. **Publicity**

The Committee **resolved** that the following could benefit from publicity:

- “Happy to Chat Benches”

A53. **Items for Next Meeting**

Members were informed that they could email officers with items, with an appropriate narrative, for inclusion in future agendas of the committee. There were two items which members requested to be on the agenda at this stage:

1. Paper on proposal for Community Wood.
2. Butterfly / Bee friendly areas.

A54. **Dates of future meetings**

Members were informed that the Amenities and Recreation Committee would next meet on the following dates:

- Tuesday 25th February 2020
- Tuesday 9th June 2020.

A55 **Exclusion of the public, including the press**

The Chair moved:

That in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 (as extended by Section 100 of the Local Government Act 1972), the public (including the press) be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

Items discussed:

1. Matters Arising from the Confidential notes of the previous meeting held on 4th September 2019.
2. Cemetery Matters – see confidential appendix.

The meeting rose at 10.00pm.

Signed Date

Chair