

COOKHAM PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of a Meeting of the GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
Held in the Community Room on Tuesday 15th October 2024 at 7.30pm

PRESENT: Cllr. H. Pleming (Chairman) Cllrs. C. Aisladie, L. Austin, M. Brar, J. Edwards, L. Tull, T. Caen, E. Bune and C. Aisladie (from 7.45pm)

Also Present: Mrs. H. Holder (Locum Clerk)

Two members of the public but no members of the press were present.

OPEN FORUM:

Caroline Collins and Mike Copland from the WildCookham Society attended and reported on the summer bio-diversity survey they had undertaken – at the request of the Council - at the Alleyn's Lane allotment field. Highlights were that key species of bat, barn owl and glow worm had been found amongst the 100 or so species identified but this was lower than hoped for and ideally at least 150 – 200 species should have been found. This was possibly due to the bad weather but it was felt more could be done. Key recommendations were to increase hedging, have longer grass around the margins and, if feasible, to create a ditch, which needn't be very big, for a natural water source. The priority was the hedging. The Woodland Trust would provide funding for this and it was hoped volunteers would install. Natural species would be used which were horse friendly. Cllr. Edwards noted that the RBWM Conservation Officer had recommended that the field should not be grazed continuously. Following discussion, it was noted that the needs of increasing bio-diversity and the grazing of the field could clash and that given the current licensee's family had grazed the field for 40 years a negotiation coming to a balanced approach was necessary. Wild Cookham said they would arrange a visit for councillors, themselves and the licensee in the next two weeks, submit to the Council any agreed proposals regarding the hedging and submit a grant application to the Woodland Trust by the end of the month. Timing was crucial and the hedge would need to be installed by March 2025.

1. Apologies

Cllrs. B. Perry, M. Howard, A-L. Regan and M-L. Kellaway.

2. Declarations of Interest

Cllr. Edwards noted that she had been involved in the glow worm aspect of the survey referred to by WildCookham in open forum.

3. To approve the minutes of the meeting of 20th August 2024

These were unanimously agreed.

4. To review the draft budget for 2025/26 in so far as it relates to the items of income and expenditure within this committee's remit

The Locum Clerk explained that this was the stage at which the Committee could put forward its strategic plans for the open spaces and suggest items for the budget. In particular, thought should be given to what areas of improvement were necessary or desired at the Alfred Major recreation ground, the allotments and the cemetery and a budget requested for such projects and a timescale agreed over the next 3 years to achieve them. The following ideas were put forward, namely, improving the access between Hillcrest Avenue and the School, improving signage, replacing damaged bins and revisiting ideas for a new path. The Chairman would be required to represent the Committee's views to the Finance Committee meeting next week. Cllrs. Tull and Brar offered to re- survey the bins and signage and identify which needed replacing.

Action: Cllrs. Tull and Brar

Action: Cllr. Pleming

5. **To review and agree the letting terms for Cemetery Lodge**
The letting agents had recommended £2,200pcm (currently £1800pcm) for the rent renewal due in December. Following negotiations the tenants had agreed to offer £2,000pcm. This was unanimously **agreed**. Cllr. Caen requested the letting agents be asked to make their recommendations earlier in the year (ideally around June) to allow time for negotiations given the restrictions that Councils have of meeting monthly.
Action: Locum Clerk
6. **To review the letting agents for Cemetery Lodge**
The Locum Clerk had been asked to find out the termination terms of the current letting agents. This was proving difficult as the original contract seemed to have been entered into in 2012. The Locum Clerk was still pursuing.
Action: Locum Clerk
7. **To agree costs of improvements to the Alleyns Lane Grazing field**
An approximate quote had been received for the cutting back of brambles, fixing of fence posts and installing a water pipe. **It was agreed** to defer a decision on the fencing and brambles but that the laying of a water pipe was more urgent. The Council was awaiting another quote for this. It was noted that a tap existed at the top of the allotments about 30 metres from the field. Contractors would be asked whether the polypipe could be run from this and amended quotes sought. **It was further agreed** that the decision to appoint a contractor to lay the polypipe could be delegated to the Chairman and Cllr. Edwards provided costs did not exceed £500 plus VAT.
Action: Locum Clerk
Action: Cllrs. Fleming and Edwards
8. **To agree the contractor to install the Sutton Road allotment Orchard**
It was noted that three quotes had been received but that a fourth was being sought. Cllrs. Fleming and Cllr. Edwards had previously been delegated authority to make spending decisions on behalf of the Council provided the same were in the grant budget. Members present were satisfied that the quotes received so far were reasonable.
Action: Cllrs. Fleming and Edwards
9. **To consider litter picking arrangements**
Cllr. Aisladie reported that, via the Keep Cookham Tidy group, a number of litter picks took place regularly throughout the village and other volunteers were very active. The Locum Clerk made the point that if an insurance claim was ever made, say about broken glass in the Alfred Major recreation ground and especially in the play areas, then the Council would need to be able to say that it had a regular regime of checking and litter picking. Ideally once every week. She recommended a litter picker be engaged in a self-employed capacity or at least that a Councillor organised a weekly rota of other Councillors and volunteers who sent into the office an email to say they had checked and whether anything needed doing. Cllr. Aisladie would liaise with the Clerk about this.
Action: Cllr. Aisladie and the Locum Clerk
10. **To consider and agree work necessary on Trees T11, T12 and T13 on the edge of the Alfred Major allotments**
It was agreed that the lower branches needed lifting. Perhaps some higher branches needed removing too. R Watts and Steve Taylor would be asked to advise and to quote for this.
Action: Locum Clerk

11. **To consider installation of the security hedge at Sutton Road allotments (cost of materials approved at 2nd June 2024 meeting)**
It was agreed that this needed installing by a contractor rather than volunteers. Steve Taylor to be asked to quote for this. **Action: Locum Clerk**
12. **To approve the cost of returning grave furniture to its rightful grave**
The Locum Clerk explained that some grave furniture had been improperly moved onto another grave around 10 years ago. A quote of £228 had been received from a memorial company to return the grave furniture to its rightful grave. **This was agreed.**
Action: Locum Clerk
13. **To ratify the decision to fix the bolt on an item of play equipment by HAGS for £173**
This was ratified. **Action: Locum Clerk**
14. **To review the latest quarterly HAGS play area report and agree any action arising**
This was reviewed and it was noted that all items were identified as low risk. Accordingly, **it was agreed** no action was necessary.
15. **To agree to renew the contract with Hags for the regular inspection of the play area**
It was agreed to renew the contract on the revised terms offered by HAGS. It was noted that the Council had unnecessarily been paying for two annual Rospa inspections each year. **It was further agreed** not to have any further annual inspections undertaken by Playsafety Ltd. **Action: Locum Clerk**
16. **To approve the removal of a rotten bench in the cemetery and to agree a policy on offers of donation of new cemetery furniture**
It was agreed:-
16.1 to remove the rotten bench at a cost of £75.
16.2 that a new bench was needed to replace the rotten bench but that the bench being offered by a parishioner was not robust enough for public use.
16.3 that a recycled plastic bench should be ordered from Glasdon who were the major suppliers of such benches and used by RBWM.
16.4 that if the parishioner offering their bench wished to put a plaque on the new bench they would need to supply an approved plaque and pay for the Council's contractors to install the plaque and make a donation of £65.
Action: Locum Clerk
17. **To agree to appoint David Hancock to undertake the installation of signage ordered by the Council and to clean the plastic on the noticeboards**
It was noted that Mr. Hancock had experience of working for Councils and his prices seemed very competitive and in the opinion of members present seemed to represent best value. **It was agreed** that he be engaged to undertake the works referred to above. He was to be asked to quote for graffiti removal. **Action: Locum Clerk**

18. **To consider items for discussion at the 29th October Allotment Association Meeting**

It was agreed to wait and see what transpired at the meeting.

19. **Any other business for which no decisions may be made at this meeting**

19.1 Cllr. Bune felt it was important to send all relevant information with the agenda rather than receiving some information as late as the day of the meeting.

19.2 Cllr. Aisladie proposed clearing the weeds around the High Street War Memorial and requested assistance. Cllr. Brar agreed to help on Saturday 2nd November at 11.30am. Cllr Edwards recommended pictures be taken of the Memorial before it was cleaned and that they be sent to the National Trust who should be maintaining it.

19.3 Cllr Aisladie reported a disturbing story of evidence of deer poaching on Cookham Dean Common. She was trying to contact the National Trust about it and was also encouraged to report it to the police.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm.