

REPORT OF THE OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE
HELD ON 12TH JANUARY 2016

MEMBERSHIP & ATTENDANCE

Chairman: Barbara Green

Councillors

- * Jo Clark
- * Barbara Dickens
- * Tony Edwards (ex officio)
- * Raj Khuroya
- * Jill Leeming
- * Alison Preedy
- * Martin Trevett
- * Jane White (ex officio)

* Denotes members present

Officers present Yvonne Merritt – Clerk
Claire James – Deputy Clerk

There were four members of the public present.

15/66 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were apologies for absence from Cllr Barbara Green and in her absence Cllr Martin Trevett chaired the meeting.

15/67 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest

15/68 APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

The Committee

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10th November 2015 be approved as a true and correct record, subject to the changes agreed at Full Council on the 1st December 2015 relating to the incorrectly implied prioritisation of the Four Year vision items.

15/69 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

15/50 - 15/37 Travellers

Cllr Edwards asked for an update on the meeting that the Clerk had attended with other Clerks from the Hertfordshire area affected by Traveller incursions. The Clerk advised that a useful session had been held but debate had not yet concluded and she would update the council as soon as there was anything to report.

15/52 Allotments – the visit by a number of Councillors to the Copmans Wick allotment site was discussed. The visit had been organised to inspect the issue of the dumping of allotment arisings and garden waste at the edge of the site. A number of Councillors felt that the problem was not that bad and had identified two main issues:

- Some residents dumping garden waste over their fence into the site and
- Allotment holders not composting arisings on their plot or removing them from the site but dumping them instead at the edge of the allotment site in the wooded area.

Councillors were sympathetic with new allotment holders and had suggested that a spare plot be used for a 'communal' compost heap. The Clerk asked who would manage this as the Rangers did not have the time to do this. She also raised the issue of the fencing at the side of the site near the wooded area which allowed people to enter the allotment site from the public area of Warings Field. It was pointed out that both Copmans Wick and the Swillett were marketed as secure sites with key access, for which the tenants paid a key charge.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That:

- 1) Notices be put up advising that the dumping of rubbish and garden waste was not permitted in the allotments and Fly tippers would be prosecuted
- 2) A strongly worded letter be sent to residents backing on to the site advising the above and that if it was to continue the Council would be within their rights to block the access gates at the end of some of the properties bordering the allotments
- 3) A statement be added on the subject to the Allotment Holders tenancy renewal letter which would be going out in the next few months
- 4) Costings be obtained for suitable replacement fencing to secure the site and brought back to the next committee.

15/70 FINANCIAL COMPARISON STATEMENT 2015/16

The Clerk explained that the miscellaneous budget still contained the insurance money for the wall repairs at Christchurch which Councillors had been made aware had been unavoidably delayed and would not now take place until the Spring. The money would therefore be carried over to next year.

The Committee

RESOLVED

To note the report.

15/71 OFFICER'S REPORT

Standing orders were suspended to allow a member of the Public to speak on a number of items in the report and raise the issue of a possible Beating of the Bounds on Rogation Sunday, which this year was Sunday 1st May. Standing orders were then reconvened.

Recommendation 1 Dog Kennel Lane Traffic proposals – there was general agreement that the proposals were an improvement on previous ideas but from a Council perspective concern was raised over the resulting height of the hedge if taken down the level required by HCC and resulting Health and Safety issues for Dog Kennel lane allotment holders and walkers. Concern was also raised that the Cattle sign, that was required for the Parish Council insurance, was being removed.

The Clerk advised that she had already responded to HCC on both these issues and sought a compromise of the hedge only being reduced in the immediate vicinity of the signs and not along the whole length. It was also felt that a perhaps a compromise could be reached with the signs being placed a little higher on the post if the Council in turn agreed to step down the hedge at these points. The matter of whether the hedge was in the conservation area and would therefore require planning permission was also raised.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That the proposals be agreed in principle, but a visit with the relevant Highways Officers, the Clerk and some Councillors (to include Cllr Martin Trevett) be requested to discuss and agree the detail.

This was proposed from the Chair by Cllr Martin Trevett and agreed unanimously.

Recommendation 2 Pond Works – The Common Ranger explained the process that would be undertaken for Top Common pond, advising that the quotes in the report did not include the removal of the silt from site as it was not possible for this to be made until the volume of material to be removed was known. He further advised that this pond had not been touched for 30 years and was approaching 100% vegetation cover, the ideal being 20-25%, adding that the newts needed open water in which to hunt. The timing of the works had to be in the December/January period and the contractors had confirmed that only a week's notice was required for them to start. In order for the works to take place he would be undertaking three surveys. If Great Crested Newts were found during any of these surveys then the works would have to be postponed until next year. Natural England had been happy with the plan as outlined.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That the quote of £3,700 plus VAT from Company A be accepted and if no Great Crested newts were found in the surveys that the work go ahead within the required timeline.

This was proposed by Cllr Raj Khuroya, seconded by Cllr Tony Edwards and carried unanimously.

Recommendation 3 Trees adjacent to London Underground Tracks – The Common Ranger explained that three contractors had been approached but that only two had chosen to visit and quote for the work. Company A had recommended that a survey be undertaken that would then highlight any licences that would be required for the work to be undertaken which would add a further £400 - £1000 to the quote.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That as both contractors were from a recommended list provided by London Underground that the cheapest quote from Company A be chosen noting the additional money that would be required for the survey and possible licences.

This was proposed by Cllr Raj Khuroya, seconded by Cllr Tony Edwards and carried unanimously.

Recommendation 4 FLORA: Bee Orchids – The background was explained by the Common Ranger. Concern was expressed that drawing attention to the specific location of individual plants could have potential for harm. Views were also expressed that highlighting the presence of the bee orchids could bring more foot traffic to the area resulting in harm to the plants.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That signs with positive wording be placed at the three points of entry to the area containing the bee orchids. The numbers would then be reviewed next year to see if there had been a detrimental effect on the numbers by this course of action.

The Clerk took the opportunity at this point to advise Members that the Office had received an unannounced visit from a Natural England Inspector the previous week. The Inspector had expressed delight with the work being done on the Common and the intricate knowledge of the Common on the part of the Common Ranger. It had been stated that the Common was being maintained to a superb standard and was becoming a very important area in Hertfordshire. The Inspector had been impressed with the Council spending money on the Common to achieve the results. The Clerk advised Members that much of this was down to the Common Ranger and the Committee expressed their praise and appreciation of his work, care and attention. In response to a Member's question the Clerk advised that she had asked the Inspector for a report that could be put on the website which might help inform and educate members of the public of the work and reasons for the work being undertaken. It was also suggested that an article be written for the next edition of Chorleywood Matters.

Recommendation 5 Installation of new tee markers by the Golf Club - The Common Ranger confirmed that it was his understanding that the markers would be flush with the grass and should not therefore present a trip hazard. It was also preferable to the current system of temporary tees anchored with a large pin which were removed by youths and then presented a potential hazard to people and machinery.

The Committee

RESOLVED

To accept the proposal from the Golf Club for the additional tees as specified by the Golf Club in the report.

This was proposed by Cllr Raj Khuroya, seconded by Cllr Tony Edwards and carried unanimously.

The rest of the report was then reviewed.

Coppicing of Ditch at War Memorial Hall: Cllr Barbara Dickens expressed her appreciation of the coppicing of the ditch at War Memorial Hall Permissive parking area stating that it was a good job and had made a fantastic difference to the area. The Ranger pointed out that he had been assisted by the work placement student. The provision of the hurdle to replace the broken handrail was noted and it was agreed that if sufficient material could be found then this would be extended.

Butterflies: The Clerk advised that the butterfly presentation that had been made by the Ranger to the Friends of Chorleywood Common would be made available on the website.

Filming: The Clerk advised members of an approach that had been made that day by a filming company wanting to use some of the parking areas on the Common for vehicles whilst filming in Chorleywood in April.

Horse Track signs: It was agreed that some work needed to be undertaken to assess the condition of the signs following the recent fall of one of the signs, but that this needed to be managed with the appropriate publicity explaining the reasons for the work.

The Committee
RESOLVED
To note the report

ALLOTMENTS

15/72 OCCUPATION

The Committee
RESOLVED
To note the occupation

15/73 WAITING LISTS

The Committee
RESOLVED
To note the details on the waiting list.

LAWN CEMETERY

15/74 INTERMENTS

The Committee
RESOLVED
To note the number of interments that had taken place.

COMMON AND GROVEWOOD

15/75 FOUR YEAR VISION

The Clerk advised that the Auditor had suggested that all the individual Committee Four Year visions be put together to form a Strategic Plan for the Council. This would be put to the next Policy and Resources Committee in two weeks' time. Under signage it was agreed that the Clerk would do some research into suitable signage for the Horse track. It was noted that the wording needed to be positive on such signs. The Clerk advised that she could seek advice from the Country Land Association (CLA) of which the Council was now a member. Cllr Tony Edwards offered to assist with previous work that he had undertaken on signage and potential suppliers. Proposals would be brought back to the next meeting.

15/76 WEBSITE

The Clerk explained the reason for bringing the website to the committee's attention and advised that this was being done for all committees. The website content had been established a number of years ago and whilst specific content was updated as appropriate, the majority of it was as originally set up. It was agreed that there were items that needed to be added in a positive manner with more up to date information required. The idea of a Ranger's page or 'Blog' was raised which could provide details of what to look out for in the next couple of months on a rolling basis and links provided to other websites which explained the reasons for some of the actions being taken on the Common.

The addition of a 'Frequently asked Questions' page was suggested. All Members, and members of the public present, were invited to come up with questions to be answered on such a page. Cllr Jane White offered to produce a first cut of ideas for the Open Spaces elements of the Website for Members to consider.

The Committee

RESOLVED

To note the report and the offer of Cllr Jane White to produce a first cut of ideas for the Open Spaces elements of the website.

15/77 RESULTS OF THE 2015 BUTTERFLY SURVEY

Standing orders were suspended to allow a member of the public to address the committee in praise of the Common Ranger and standing orders were then reconvened.

The Ranger in turn credited the volunteers advising they were essential to the survey work and the Committee passed on their thanks to them. He further advised in response to a question from a Member that it had been a very on/off year for the butterflies and moths this year but most of the usual suspects were present. He singled out the 5 spot Burnett moth as missing this year.

15/78 ENTRANCE TO THE COMMON FROM OPPOSITE COLLEYLAND

Standing orders were suspended to allow a two members of the public to address the committee on the agenda item and reconvened following the addresses.

A number of Councillors advised that they had walked the route in question to assess the issues raised. It was noted that the rules applying to the management and maintenance of the Common prevented any materials being imported which had been pointed out to the complainant. The record breaking rainfall levels of the recent months were also noted and the current conditions were therefore felt to be of a temporary nature. It was felt that the type of sub soil now visible in this area might lead to the assumption that gravel had been imported to create a path in this area. This is not the case but is naturally occurring gravel and sand at sub soil level. After due consideration and debate of the issues the Committee agreed that it was unable to accede to the request made by the complainant as detailed in the report and correspondence made available to the Councillors prior to the meeting.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That the Clerk would draft a letter for Cllr Martin Trevett to agree and sign to send to the complainant explaining why the Council could not accede to his request.

15/79 PURCHASE OF TWO NEW ROUGH TERRAIN VEHICLES IN PART EXCHANGE

It was noted that the good trade in prices were down to the good maintenance of vehicles and equipment by the Rangers.

The Committee

RESOLVED

To approve the purchase of two new rough terrain vehicles (RTVs) in part exchange for the existing RTV and small tractor at the prices quoted in the report, subject to sight of a second quote being received by the Clerk and discussed with the Chairman of the Council.

This was proposed by Cllr Raj Khiroya, seconded by Cllr Jane White and carried unanimously.

GENERAL

15/80 HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Committee noted that the provision of the personal protective equipment had been covered under the Officers report.

15/81 CLOSURE

The meeting having commenced at 7.30 pm closed at 9.36pm.

Signed Agreed by email – Cllr Martin Trevett Date 14/01/16

These minutes were agreed as a true and correct record at the Open Spaces meeting and signed by the Chairman.

Signed..... Date.....