



DRAFT MINUTES

Meeting: ENVIRONMENTAL
COMMITTEE

Date: 22nd June 2023

Time: 7.00pm

Venue: PARISH HALL AT THORNWOOD COMMON

PRESENT:

Councillors (5) A Buckley (Chairman), R Spearman, Mrs S Hawkins, A Tyler, N Born

Also in Attendance (2)

Susan De Luca, Clerk to the Council

Joanna Tyler, Senior Administrative Officer

Members of the Press (0)

Members of the Public (0)

E23.01 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Cllr Mrs Hawkins **PROPOSED** Cllr Buckley as Chairman. The proposal was **SECONDED** by Cllr Tyler. All Members **AGREED**.

Following which, the Chairman signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

E23.02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (1)

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs S Jackman MBE

E23.03 OTHER ABSENCES (2)

No apologies for absence had been received from Cllrs Clegg and Irvine

E23.04 MINUTES

Members **APPROVED** as a correct record the Minutes of the Meeting held on 22nd October 2022.

E23.05 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

E23.06 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC - None present.

E23.07 PLAY AREAS

Councillors **NOTED** that the Annual Play Area Risk Assessments were completed in October 2022, with all Parish Council owned items being classified as either Low, or Very Low Risk. The only moderate risk was the Basketball court at the Memorial Playing Fields which is the responsibility of the Queens Hall Charity. Weekly Play Area Risk Assessments continue to take place at all three play areas, with any urgent matters addressed.

Councillors **NOTED** the contents of the following report from the Principal Finance Officer, which was read out by the Clerk:

Weekly, Monthly, and Annual play inspections continue to take place:

Weekly and Monthly

Completed by Thornwood Grounds Maintenance. Fully trained, and using PSS Live software, which allows report to get generated in real time, with pictures, during the inspection, and then this is uploaded so that the PFO can access the report and review the findings. There are a couple of outstanding matters as follows:

Picnic Bench at Thornwood Play Area	It was agreed to replace this in the budget with £1,00 earmarked for from the HMRC funds, however, subject to the bench remaining a low risk on play area inspection reports, any replacement should be postponed until later in 2023, when at which time it was hoped that more information would be available on S106 funding. On 13 th March 2023, inspection found some splintering, albeit the risk remains low, however a recommendation was made that this be replaced within 3 months.	RECOMMENDATION: REPLACE BENCH USING HMRC MONEYS AS BUDGETED
Pathway to Weald Common Play Area	Inspection on 15 th May 2023 identified this as medium risk as some ruts have occurred. This is a continuous problem for the site, due to the wet ground, with some form of remediation works needing to be carried out each Year.	TGM ASKED TO MAKE GOOD / REPAIR
Moss and Algae	Issues at all sites with moss and Algae – this is more of a problem in the winter months when the ground is wet.	TGM ASKED TO SPRAY
Lifting of Edges of Wetpour	This is an issue at all three sites. As the cost to repair this is so expensive, late 2022 TGM trialed a self repair kit.	TGM TO ALTER MIX AND TRIAL AGAIN

Annual

Completed by The Play Inspection Company. Only item that were deemed Medium Risk was the Basket Ball post and court at the Memorial Playing Field, and these are not the responsibility of the Parish Council, but the Queens Hall. The Queens Hall have been made aware of this. All other items were either low or very low risk. A quote is awaited for some of the items, however these are not deemed urgent, and any deterioration is monitored at the weekly inspections.

E23.08 ALLOTMENTS

a) Review of Allotment Fees

Members of this Committee were asked to **CONSIDER** if there was a need to increase allotment fees for 2025/26. Councillors were reminded that the Parish Council is required to give 12 months' notice of any increase in fees:

ALLOTMENT RENT FOR YEAR 2023/2024 and 2024/2025

Under 50 sqm = Extra small £26.00

Between 51sqm & 100sqm = Small £28.00

Between 101sqm & 150sqm = Average £29.00

Between 151sqm & 200sqm = Large £33.00

Over 201sqm = Extra Large £35.00

Cllr Mrs Hawkins mentioned the monthly Allotment Sub Committee site visits carried out by herself and Cllr Spearman and reported that there are a number of plots on both the Wheelers Farm Gardens and Thornwood sites that are in need of attention. Cllr Spearman suggested that instead of allowing new plot holders to have a year's rent free (when they take on a plot which requires a lot of work to get it to a reasonable state for planting), ask the plot holders to pay the rent for the first year and then consider offering the plot rent free for the second year, which could then perhaps be an incentive for them to maintain their plot to a good standard.

The Clerk said that she had not received any reports from the Allotment Wardens. Cllr Mrs Hawkins said that a plot holder on the Queens Road site had complained on the last site visit. Cllr Tyler said that he could recall from previous discussions the suggestion of requesting a deposit of between £50 and £75 from new plot holders, which would only be refunded if the plot is left in good condition when it is relinquished. The Clerk advised that there were very few allotment plots available for rent and that there is currently a waiting list for plots in North Weald. Following lengthy discussion, it was agreed that the Clerk would arrange for Cllr Mrs Hawkins and Cllr Spearman to meet with the Allotment Wardens for the North Weald sites. Cllr Spearman suggested that it would be a good idea if the Principal Finance Officer could also be in attendance. Cllr Mrs Hawkins confirmed that she had a note of all of the allotment plots.

Cllr Mrs Hawkins reported that she had also received complaints from plot holders on the Thornwood site regarding overgrown plots. The Clerk said that she was not aware of any complaints and advised that she would contact the Allotment Warden.

Cllr Born commented that there was a rumour going around that the Parish Council wanted to get rid of the allotment sites and asked if they had been included in the North Weald Masterplan. Both the Clerk and the Chairman confirmed that the allotment sites were unaffected by any development. The Clerk briefly explained the process that had to be followed before a site could be considered for de-allotmentisation, with an application having to be submitted to the Government. The Clerk gave the old Queen's Road site (where Cyril Hawkins Close has since been built) as an example, and advised that it took nearly 12 years before EFDC were finally granted permission to develop the site.

Following lengthy discussion, Councillors **DECIDED** that they would be very strict in ensuring that the allotments would be utilised to the standard necessary. Councillors **AGREED** that a decision as to whether or not to increase fees for 2025/26 would be deferred until the next Committee Meeting, when they would look at the possibility of increasing fees to cover the costs of improvements

b) ALLOTMENT SUB COMMITTEE REPORT

Councillors **NOTED** the contents of a report from the Principal Financial Officer, which was read out by the Clerk, details of which were as follows:

Thornwood Allotments

- 13th August at 2pm – Allotment Community Picnic, to be managed and organised by the Allotment Warden.
- Request received from Allotment Warden to apply for some funds to purchase a replacement petrol strimmer for the allotments for tenants to use. The item will be stored in the locked shed on the allotments (just to the rear of the Allotment Warden's house) which is where the communal mower is stored. The approximate cost is £200. The previous strimmer was purchased in March 2014. All Councillors **AGREED** to the request.

North Weald Allotments

On the 14th June the Clerk and PFO met with a representative from the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners to discuss the following:

- Removing all the water butts and replacing with stand pipes (not recommended) – Councillors **AGREED** not to replace.
- Changing all the water butts to new 'duel' systems, with a water butt and stand pipe (the representative is to going to find out particular item that he was referring to). All taps should have non return valves (1999 regs).
- The benefits of being an allotment society (access to grants, discounted seeds, discounted membership for individual allotment holders including insurance). Clerk and PFO to look into). **Suggested that this should be an item on the Agenda for the Annual Allotment Meeting.**
- The use of hosepipes and how this should be managed (should not be left on the ground, trip hazards, hot water hazard, friction between tenants, biggest concern is contaminated water backing up into the water system (1999 Regs) site could be closed down because of this.
- How to get rid of Marestalk (place cuttings into bag, let it naturally mulch down, can then be used as compost after 6 months, or alternatively place in a bucket of water and after 6 months the liquid can be used as feed). The representative suggested contacting Hullbridge PC, however, the PFO did this in October 2022 and guidance was if it is more than 2ft in the ground, it cannot be eradicated, it can only be managed by digging it out.
- Some organisations are now recommending 'No Dig Gardening'.
- Looking at changing the old pipe work underground and adding additional water points at end of WFG (this is also applicable to other sites). **Quote for work to be obtained from PC contractor.**
- PC contractor has been asked to repair the barrier on the pathway between Queens Road and Wheelers Farm Gardens allotment sites. In addition to cutting back hedges, cutting back all overgrowth along the ditch through WFG (all for Health & Safety reasons). Councillors **AGREED**.

Hastingwood Allotments

Councillors Mrs Hawkins and Spearman visit on the first Tuesday of every month

and report any issues back to the PFO.

Cllr Mrs Hawkins said that the Hastingwood Allotment is the most improved Allotment site and said that there were also a couple of plots at North Weald which deserved recognition.

Discussion reverted to whether the fees should be increased. Cllr Tyler suggested increasing the fees to provide the allotment holders with everything that they want. Cllr Mrs Hawkins suggested that the question is asked at the Annual Allotment Meeting. The Chairman said that Committee needs to have a full list of what everyone wants made available at the Annual Allotment Meeting. The Clerk reiterated that Members would have to make a decision before the Annual Allotment Meeting, as the Parish Council has to give a year's notice of any increase. Discussion ensued regarding costs. The Clerk confirmed that the operating income for last year was £4651.00 and the running costs were £4,503. As discussed earlier in the meeting, Councillors **AGREED** that they would look at increasing the fees for 2025/26. The Chairman reiterated that the costs for the improvements would be needed for the next meeting so that they can be taken into account when deciding on any increase.

Cllr Mrs Hawkins asked if plot holders were allowed to plant trees on their plots, the Clerk confirmed that they were able to plant fruit bearing trees.

E23.09 CEMETERY

a) Review of Cemetery Fees

Councillors were asked to consider if there was a need to increase cemetery fees for 2023/24. It was noted that the Clerk had received notification from the supplier of boulders, plaques and spikes that costs were increased from 1st April 2023. In addition, the grave digging contractor has increased fees by 15% for lawn cemetery interments and 46% for the interment of cremated remains. A comparison of cemetery fees charged by other local authorities was attached to the agenda, together with a copy of the council's current fees. Following discussion, Councillors **AGREED** to increase the cost of a plot purchase in Meadowbrook Section plot for residents by £75.00, then to take the percentage increase (which equated to 9.5%) and increase all other fees by this amount, rounded up to the nearest pound. Councillors **NOTED** that there are no available plots for sale in the Hedges Section. Councillors **AGREED** that the increases would take effect from 1st September 2023.

b) Unauthorised Memorial

Councillors **NOTED** the contents of a report attached to the agenda regarding an unauthorised memorial on a Cremated Remains plot in Summer Section. Cllr Born asked if there was signage on display at the Cemetery. The Clerk advised that all plot owners are provided with copies of the Cemetery Rules and Regulations. Councillors noted that the owner of the plot in question had been made aware, in writing, at the time of the purchase, that an option to purchase a boulder and plaque was available and that this had been declined. Following discussion, Councillors **AGREED** that the Clerk should write to the owner and advise that this Committee had decided that the memorial is inappropriate and ask that it be removed.

c) Lockable Bin

Councillors were reminded that the bin in the Cemetery is now locked, following incidents of fly-tipping. CCTV is now in place (from EFDC on a 3-month trial). The Clerk reported that visitors to the cemetery are complaining that they cannot put their rubbish in the locked bin. The Chairman asked for recommendations. It was **AGREED** that the Clerk would respond, advising the reason for locking the bin and that it would be reviewed following the end of the 3-month trial period. Following further discussion it was also agreed that the Clerk would contact the Parish Council's contractor and ask for the chain to be loosened slightly to allow people to lift the bin lid without it being unlocked.

E23.10 ASSET CHECKS

Councillors **NOTED** that the checks will be completed during June and July and will include a pictorial record of each items together with any recommendations for work. The Clerk advised that it is a work in progress and a full report will be provided on completion.

E23.11 TREE SURVEY

Councillors **NOTED** that the Annual Tree Risk Assessment took place in October 2022, with two recommendations for Coppicing to take place within 12 months. These were at Thornwood Allotments and Wheelers Farm Gardens Allotments. The Clerk read out a report from the Principal Financial Officer. Following discussion, it was agreed that Councillors Mrs Hawkins and Spearman would liaise with the Principal Financial Officer and look at the work required when undertaking their next Allotment Sub Committee Site Visits.

E23.12 NEW WOODLAND AREA, WEALD COMMON

The Chairman reported that work is currently taking place to finalise the content for the three information boards. It was noted that there will be two A1 size boards (one detailing the history of the location and one detailing the trees planted). A third board will be a smaller A3 size that will have information regarding the trees planted by St Andrew's Primary School Eco-Warrior Group. The Chairman advised that the location for 3 benches had been agreed, one of which has been donated by the North Weald Preservation Society. Councillors noted that arrangements are being made for an Official Opening for the first or second week of September, depending on the availability of the Eco-Warriors. The Chairman suggested that the area could be called the North Weald Woodland.

E23.13 WALKS IN AND AROUND THE PARISH

Councillor Born gave a brief report regarding the benefits of walking and mentioned that he had purchased (on behalf of the Parish Council) a booklet for each Councillor which detailed walks in and around North Weald village (the booklets cost £2.00 each from Epping Ongar Railway). Cllr Born commented that walking is tremendous from a wellbeing point of view and it doesn't cost anything. He said that he meets lots of people and uses the opportunity to share information about the village. Cllr Born suggested that Councillors may perhaps wish to join him on one of the walks. The Chairman thanked Cllr Born.

E23.14 OTHER MATTERS FOR NEXT MEETING AGENDA

- Decision on Increasing Allotment Fees for 2025/26

Meeting closed: 8.24pm

Signed

Date