

G R E A T M I S S E N D E N P A R I S H C O U N C I L
Minutes of a Meeting of the Open Spaces & Lighting Committee
held by zoom at 10am
on Friday 5 February 2021

Present: - Councillor K. Pither (Chair)

Councillors: C. Baxter, J. Brooke, S. Humphreys, I. Lovegrove, V Marshall, C. Ormesher and T. Stevenson.

Councillor Pither thanked everyone for attending and welcomed Councillor Ormesher to her first Open Spaces Committee Meeting.

Public Forum:

No members of the public attended

1) Apologies: None

2) Declarations of Interest: There were none

3) Minutes: - of the meeting of 11 June 2020 were agreed by all and it was agreed that they would be printed and submitted to the chair to sign in due course.

4) Matters arising:-

a) The committee were advised that the tree at Greenside was in a good state and it was agreed that whilst councillors would continue to monitor its development the item could be removed from the agenda.

b) It was agreed that the Young Offenders Team would be kept in mind for suitable projects as and when the Covid situation has changed and they are able to undertake works.

c) It was confirmed that the alterations to the signs for Prestwood Common had been made to incorporate reference to Prestwood Colts and that subject to Prestwood Colts confirming their agreement to a sign being placed on the pavilion and to the reference to them on the signs the order would be placed. The order would now be for 6 signs the 6th to be on the Community Centre Councillor Baxter raised concerns as to the condition of Prestwood Common, brought about as a result of the exceptional wet weather, it was agreed that the condition of the Common would be monitored, but it was noted that as a result of Covid it was not being used by Prestwood Colts. Before they recommence training and games it would be important to see that the Common was in a fit state for such use. The point was made that Buryfield too was in a poor condition with standing water and being very muddy despite the drainage work undertaken recently.

5) The proposal to set up standing working parties for topics such as playgrounds, trees, allotments and other matters such as the cemetery and street lighting was set out by Councillor Pither. The idea would be to allow the working parties to report back to the committee or to council and to spread the work of the committee and reduce the length of Open Spaces Meetings. Councillor Humphreys opposed the idea saying that this was role for the parish warden. It was explained that this was not about the working parties carrying out work it was about them looking at particular topics such as trees and the need for any tree work to be carried out, or going through playground inspection reports and reporting back to the committee and or council. Councillor Baxter thought the proposal sound, Councillor Brooke agreed with Councillor Humphreys and Councillor Stevenson suggested

that working parties should be set up as and when required. Councillor Ormesher suggested working parties for the allotments and playgrounds might be a good idea and that as an allotment holder she would like to be on any allotment working party. Councillor Humphreys then stated that the parish warden was to be a clerical role. The question was asked as to when a parish warden might start work and the deputy clerk advised that by the time a job specification had been prepared, an advert placed and interviews had taken place it was likely to be at least 3-4 months. After further discussion it was agreed by a majority that for the next 4 months working parties would be set up on an ad hoc basis as and when required.

6) Allotments:-

Councillor Pither asked if any of the committee had any questions regarding the allotments paper. There were none.

The committee agreed to the proposal that the vacant plots at Ballinger be strimmed in order to help let them, and also that the grounds contractor be asked to quote for the removal of the rubbish deposited on plot 1.

The committee discussed the surplus in the strimming budget brought about in part by higher occupancy rates and in part by the weather, but agreed that the strimming budget should remain separate from the general allotments upkeep budget as this had been a request from the finance committee.

The committee did agree that as there was surplus in this budget it should be spent on providing skips on allotment sites. This would be expressed as being a one off good will gesture in light of the fact that bonfires had been prohibited due to Covid 19. There was a discussion as to when they should be provided and how they should be managed to ensure that only non-compostable rubbish from the sites be put in the skips. Councillor Humphreys suggested asking the grounds contractor to supervise loading, or alternatively placing the skip in The Memorial Hall or Prestwood Common car park for use by allotment holders. The committee felt that this would not work and that allotment holders would if driving to a skip with rubbish instead drive to a tip and that what was needed was something on site. Councillor Ormesher having recently taken on an allotment plot indicated that there was a lot of non-compostable rubbish on plots to dispose of.

There was a discussion as to the price of skips and the committee agreed that a trial should be undertaken at Greenlands Lane selected because there was hardstanding and the skip could be hidden from the road with a skip being provided for the allotment holders to dispose of non-compostable rubbish and advised of this in advance by email.

It was also agreed to ascertain whether the grounds contractor had a shredder and if so what it would cost for him to attend allotment sites by arrangement to shred rubbish.

The committee agreed that showing vacant allotments was not essential work and that it would be left to the clerks discretion as to whether it was safe and appropriate to show vacant plots.

Councillor Lovegrove did suggest consideration of showing plots electronically and the deputy clerk agreed to investigate if this would be feasible.

It was agreed that allotment liaison meetings with the allotment liaison officers would be resumed once Covid restrictions allow as the feasibility of holding those meetings as zoom meetings was limited. In any event the ALOs were happy that they are able to speak to the clerks whenever there are issues.

Councillor Stevenson suggested that if the opportunity arose it would a good idea to produce and circulate an allotment newsletter to all allotment holders.

The committee agreed that the anomalies that existed at Spurlands End Road should be rectified as the renewal stage, so that those with 2 half plots which are in effect 1 plot will be charged as a full plot rather than 2 halves, on the basis that no credit will be given for what might then appear to be past overpayments.

The committee looked again at the issue of use of weed killer but had decided at the last meeting that it should continue as it is necessary. Councillor Stevenson suggested that this should be aired in

any newsletter to the allotment holders. There was a discussion about strimming as an alternative, but it was agreed this was not a viable alternative. It was agreed that weed killing at Greenlands Lane should not take place alongside the net fence immediately adjacent to the allotment plots. The committee confirmed that if not already done, the website should be amended to show that to be eligible for allotments the applicant should be resident within the parish.

With regard to the issue raised by a neighbour of Ballinger allotments as to the cockerel's noise after discussion it was agreed that the complainant should be contacted and asked if they had spoken with the allotment holder, and the allotment holder should be contacted advising them of the complaint and asking them to speak to the complainant to resolve the issue.

On a wider basis the committee took the view that in due course the tenancy agreement should be re-written and possibly make it clear that cockerels should not be kept. There was a discussion as to what animals are permitted. It was agreed that the drafting of the tenancy agreement was a major exercise that would require consultation and possibly external legal advice.

With regard to Chequers Lane it was agreed that a quote should be obtained to remove or reduce the Hawthorn tree as there are now people actively seeking plots. The committee was advised that the gate at the High Street end of the site had been repaired. It was agreed that it should be fitted with a new lock which might necessitate a new panel alongside the gate post. A quote is to be obtained.

The issue of flooding on Chequers Lane was discussed and the deputy clerk reported that there was a clear sign of a hole having been cut in the hedge from Chequers Lane in order to drain onto the allotment land. It was agreed that Buckinghamshire Council should be contacted to enquire as to what they thought was causing the flooding on the road and on what basis they believed it was appropriate to drain the road into the allotments.

As regards Nairdwood Lane the committee were concerned as to the polytunnel and shed extension that had been erected on Plot 10b and it was agreed that the tenant should be written to and advised to remove the extensions to the shed and the polytunnel. In addition to the fact that permission had not been sought before the work was carried out, and had only been sought after a conversation with another allotment holder, the construction clearly breached the tenancy agreement rules and may also require planning permission. It was agreed that he should be given 28 days to remove the structure. However before sending such a letter a round robin needs to go to all councillors asking for their agreement as the committee did not represent a majority of council. The committee noted the issue that had arisen with local residents cutting back the hedge around the allotments and the issues that this had caused for at least 1 plot holder and agreed that this situation would be monitored during this year.

In terms of the allotment competition Councillor Humphreys expressed some concern as he had delivered the prize vouchers to the office. The deputy clerk explained that he had not been made aware of this either by email or phone call. Councillor Humphreys also suggested that more recognition needed to be given to Hildreths for providing the vouchers and that thanks should be expressed in a letter and on the notice boards at the allotment sites. This should also feature in the newsletter and in The Source. Councillor Humphreys said that this should have been done yesterday and not tomorrow, but as the deputy clerk pointed out if he was not aware that the vouchers had been delivered he could not do anything about it.

At this point Councillor Brooke had to leave the meeting.

With regard to this year's allotment competition and inspection it was agreed that the judging should take place between 1 and 4 June. Councillors Lovegrove, Ormesher, Stevenson, Baxter, Pither and Marshal all expressed an interest in joining the judging group. The guidelines that had been used for 2020 appeared to have helped with the judging and would be sent to the committee to look at and see if they had any ideas as to how to improve them. It was agreed that it was too early to

consider how to award the prizes for the current year, and that this should be discussed as and when there were further developments with regard to the relaxation of Covid 19 restrictions.

The committee agreed to the refund of deposit by the deputy clerk and clerk as long as they were satisfied that it was appropriate to return the deposit, and council or the committee need only to be consulted in the event of there being issues.

Councillor Humphreys then wanted to know what was happening with the other allotment land in Potter Row. The deputy clerk indicated that he had no knowledge of any other allotment land in Potter Row, and having checked the Land Registry papers they only showed the allotment site that is known about and occupied. The deputy clerk indicated that he would make some further enquiries.

7. Play Areas:-

a) It was noted that the Buryfield Pocket Park Renovation was complete with the last of the signs in place following the completion of the car park extension.

b) There were no specific budget proposals for play equipment. It was noted that the budget is £6,000.00 for repairs for the current year and that to date £3300.95 has been spent leaving £2,669.05 available for repairs. There is also an earmarked reserve of £75,000.00.

c) The committee agreed that on being advised that there were no works categorised in the annual inspection report as either very high, high or moderate risk, all other items of equipment being assessed as either low or very low risk, that the repair budget should be allocated as follows:-

i) authorising the Grounds Contractor to carry out the repair of the bench at the Ballinger Playground.

ii) A quote to be obtained from Playground Facilities to carry out the 3 repairs that were currently flagged up on the weekly inspection reports, namely:

repairing the area of surfacing at Buryfield Pocket Park around the roundabout that has been cut out.

repairing the areas of wet pour at Grymsdyke that have been damaged and

Either repairing and reinstating the Spinner Pole from Grymsdyke that had been removed and was in the Prestwood Community Centre for safe keeping, or replacing it. This was likely to spend a significant proportion of the repairs budget leaving some for any emergency repairs that may be required before the end of the year.

d) The committee agreed to proceed with the installation of the new Springer at Buryfield, but also agreed that the installers be asked if the existing Springer which had passed the annual safety inspection could be saved and relocated elsewhere to avoid it simply being scrapped.

e) The deputy clerk indicated that he would inspect the matting at Ballinger around the swings and report back if further work was required, but it was not an issue being raised on the weekly inspection reports.

f) The committee were pleased to have feedback as to the use of the rescued multiplay that had been installed at Prestwood Common, and noted that the bill had been reduced of their own volition by Playground Facilities as they had not needed as many mats as they had anticipated. It was agreed that the issue of cleaning all the playground equipment should be explored, with suggestions that perhaps the Walled Garden might be asked to participate, but that a contractor might be required to clear some graffiti including that on the inside of the multiplay at Prestwood Common.

It was pointed out that the gate to the entrance to the playground at Buryfield is sticking again.

The committee went on to discuss the position with regard to the playgrounds being “closed”. It was suggested that further advice might be sought from the new insurers. Overall the committee was of the opinion that no further formal steps should be taken to close the sites, and that instead the notices should just be reapplied advising that the playgrounds were closed and that anyone using them did so at their own risk along with advice as to precautions to take. Councillors Marshall, Humphreys, and Baxter were in support of this as was Councillor Pither. Councillor Lovegrove did question whether they ought to be properly closed. The deputy clerk advised that although there was government guidance as to playgrounds being open, there had been a risk assessment carried out, and Council had determined that they should be the subject of a “Soft closure” with the use of notices advising that the playgrounds were closed as the other

requirements for them to be open namely restrictions on use of pieces of equipment, queuing systems, regular cleaning of equipment and the provision of sanitiser on each site were unrealistic for the parish council to achieve.

In addition to the existing signage the deputy clerk had designed a poster which had been seen by a few councillors and would now be circulated to the committee and or council for consideration as an additional sign more suitable for children than the written sign

8. Open Spaces

a and c) Tree Reports and surveys

Councillor Marshall reported that she had 15 young trees from Woodlands Trust that were due to be planted around Prestwood Common and Recreation Ground at some point, but the final locations had yet to be determined, and that as and when it was possible to meet the working party would do so to determine the location. It was agreed that Prestwood Colts should also be asked to comment on the proposed planting. The remaining 16 trees are to be planted at Buryfield and the working party is awaiting Councillor Hewett's determination as to where they are to go.

With regard to the tree report it was agreed that Councillors Baxter, Lovegrove, Marshall and Pither would arrange to meet as soon as possible in order to go through the report and assess what if any work needed to be carried out. There are potential issues at Westrick Walk, Nairdwood Lane, and Buryfield/Abbey Walk

b) Biodiversity:-

Councillor Marshall indicated that the parish council needs to do more. The loss of trees is a real concern both because of the prevalence of Ash dieback but also because of developments which seem to involve the loss of mature trees.

One suggestion made was that when looking to renew the council's electricity accounts for the office, Memorial Hall, Community Centre and for street lighting that quotes are sought from green suppliers of electricity. The planning committee are making observations on planning matters discussed as to biodiversity. Thanks were given to Councillor Marshall for her continued vigilance on this issue.

d) Prestwood Community Centre:-

This matter was on the agenda simply to record the fact that this will now no longer be under the auspices of The Open Spaces Committee.

e) Ramp/step from Link Road:-

Councillors Pither, Baxter and Brooke were the working party on this and had not been able to make any significant progress due to Covid 19. A meeting had taken place with a contractor as a result of which Councillor Brooke had made contact with the water company and the environment agency as the "step" is within close proximity to the watercourse- The Misbourne- and permission is need for any works. Unfortunately the Environment Agency will not attend meetings to discuss possible developments or carry out site inspections due to the Covid 19 restrictions. Councillor Humphreys did express reservations as to why a step from the Link Road into Buryfield was required and suggested just putting poles across but the meeting was reminded that it had been a council decision to progress this and improve access on to Buryfield.

f) Ballinger Car Park:-

See above. Other than that it was simply noted that provision need to be made for the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the car park in order to avoid it falling into a state of disrepair again.

g):- Recognition of Parish Cup Winners. Councillor Lovegrove proposed that some form of honours board for previous winners of the Parish Cup should be provided. The committee agreed that Councillor Lovegrove should explore this and begin by researching and obtain quotes for an honours board so that consideration could be given as to location at a future meeting. Councillor Lovegrove also suggested that the award of the Parish Cup should feature in The Source and be on the agenda for the Parish Council meeting in March. It is a good news story that needs to get more publicity to recognise the good work of the community and the Parish Council

9. Cemetery Management: -

The committee noted the paper from the deputy clerk outlining the ongoing work in managing the cemetery and the impact of the change of ownership which continued to be very limited. Plans for the extension of the cemetery were still in the process of preparation by Buckinghamshire Council and had not yet been seen for consultation. The Parish Council would be a consultee in due course. There were then various processes to be gone through by Buckinghamshire Council including obtaining planning permission, getting the land consecrated and building the supporting infrastructure for the new plots.

The issue of the fee for managing the cemetery was discussed and it was proposed that for the year 2022-23 an increase in management fees would be justified bearing in mind the increase in activity at the cemetery, it being too late to secure an increase in the management fee for the coming financial year.

10) Street Lighting:-

The committee noted the street lighting report provided and that the electricity supply for the lights was currently provided by EON on a 12 month contract through until June 2021.

It was noted that the budget for electricity for the lights was £4,000.00 and that spend to date was £3475.19 leaving £524.81 to cover electricity until the end of March 2021;

That the budget for repairs which is largely the replacement of bulbs that have failed with LED units is £500.00 with spend to date being £630.00;

There is however a sum of £5,000.00 in reserves for repairs and maintenance if required. The average cost of replacement and conversion of a light to LED is around £315.00.

At present the policy is simply to replace failed units with LED, but it was agreed that in due course it may be sensible to expand the use of LED units. For example if in a particular road there are 2 lights with traditional fittings and one fails it may be costs effective to replace both units in the road at the same time.

Finally there is a budget fee of £500.00 for a stocktake and audit as to condition. One quote for such an inspection has been obtained and is for £795.00. It was agreed that 2 further quotes should be obtained for consideration so that stocktake could be carried out as it was now due and would also demonstrate to the insurers that steps are being taken to monitor street light condition which would mitigate any risk from any failure and or accident.

11) Bollards for Buryfield and Prestwood Common:-

The committee noted that the issue of bollards for Buryfields was to be removed from the agenda on the basis of the decision to plant a hedge around the open space as an alternative. The issue of a budget for maintenance costs in other words water supply and hedge cutting was raised and it was noted by the committee that provision has been made in the budget for the next year for this maintenance which is not covered under the existing Open Spaces Contract.

As for Prestwood Common it was agreed that 1 additional collapsible bollard should be installed. The location was to be close to the Community Centre, and not close to the entrance to The Common, largely for security reasons. The fixed bollard that would be removed could be reused elsewhere.

It was noted by the committee that despite some – not local -support for opening up the car park, feedback from local residents was that this would encourage more anti-social behaviour on The Common and risk damage to the football pitches and buildings.

12) Phase 2 of the Prestwood Common Regeneration

There was a general discussion as to how this should proceed with the idea from Councillor Stevenson that ideally there would be some form of public meeting but an acceptance that this was not currently a viable option. Accordingly it was suggested that a document be drafted for Council to consider to be sent to occupiers of property within the vicinity of The Common who would be most affected by any further development. In addition the consultation could be on the GMPC website and also Prestwood Village Association had offered to host the consultation too. It was agreed that it was important in the first instance that the consultation was organised by the Parish Council and not by any wider group. As and when ideas have

materialised from the initial consultation that may be the right time to bring in interest groups for further discussion.

Councillors Pither, Baxter, Marshall, and Lovegrove volunteered to work on the project, and Councillor Humphreys offered to assist with a leaflet drop.

Any Other Business:

All present were asked if they had anything else to add or suggest. It was suggested that more regular meetings might be of benefit as clearly meetings do go on for some time in view of the length of the agenda.

The question was asked as to whether it was intended to hold a Prestwood Community Centre meeting in the near future, particularly bearing in mind the imminent proposed external refurbishment.

The meeting closed at 12.45

Christopher Thompson
Deputy Clerk