

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 at Prestwood Community Centre at 10am
on Thursday 27 May 2021

Present: - Councillor K. Pither (Chair)

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

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

- 1) **Apologies:** Were received from Councillor Marshall
- 2) **Declarations of Interest:** There were none
- 3) **Public Forum:** No members of the public attended.
- 4) **Minutes:** - of the meeting of 5 February 2021 were agreed by all and it was agreed that they would be printed and submitted to the chair to sign in due course.

5) Matters arising: -

a) Update on Young Offenders Team Management from the deputy clerk was that there were further changes to the young offender's team management and that due to Covid 19 the opportunity to work with them on projects was limited at present and would have to be kept under review. Councillor Lovegrove advised that he had contact with the Deputy head at the Chilterns Academy who were looking for projects to undertake, and he agreed along with Councillor Pither to take that forward. Councillor Bunting indicated that other groups were looking for project work for things such as Duke of Edinburgh award scheme.

b) It was confirmed that the signs for Prestwood Common had been installed save for the 2 to go on buildings. The deputy clerk indicated that Prestwood Colts had a provisional location for their sign on their pavilion and asked the committee where the sign for the PCC building should go. Councillor Humphreys said he did not want the sign put on the building as it would not stand out because of the colour. He also said that the sign near the PCC building faced inwards and not outwards. The deputy clerk indicated that this had not been the case originally and that instructions would be given to turn it so that it faced those entering the Common.

c) Update on the issue of land at Potter Row. The deputy clerk indicated that following the last meeting when Councillor Humphreys had claimed that there was land at Potter Row that he specifically stated was not part of the allotments and was "further down the road", he had checked the records both on the computer and paper files and could find no evidence that any such land had been part of the land registration process undertaken by Ken Williams as clerk and Councillor Lee. Not only that but no such land appeared on the asset register at present and had not appeared on the asset register since before the present clerk and deputy clerk had been in post. He had also raised the issue with Councillors Lee and Johnstone, and no-one else was aware of any such land. Councillor Humphreys now suggested that there was a sign saying allotments on this piece of land and that anyone could see the piece of land, and indeed that there were 2. Councillors Lovegrove

and Pither agreed to visit to see if there was any evidence of any other land in the ownership of the Parish Council. There was a further discussion about the possibility of registering such a piece of land. The deputy clerk advised that in order to register the land there would need to be evidence as to use, or ownership, which in view of the comments from councillors seemed unlikely to be available.

6) Allotments: -

Councillor Pither asked if any of the committee had any questions regarding the allotments paper that had been circulated.

There were none. The committee expressed itself happy with the level of occupation and the deputy clerk indicated an intent to try to get some further viewings undertaken before his departure. He explained that notice to quit was to be issued in a couple of cases to formally end the tenancies for non-payment.

The notice boards were in use and appeared welcome by the allotment holders.

No allotment liaison meeting had taken place as the majority of the allotment liaison officers were elderly and not able to attend meetings face to face and not familiar with zoom. It was agreed that now with the relaxation of Covid 19 restrictions meetings should be set up between the ALOs and Councillors Pither, Baxter, Bunting and Lovegrove.

The deputy clerk indicated that the water supply was in fact only turned off at Nairdwood Lane as there were issues identifying the stopcocks at other sites.

Councillor Lovegrove expressed concern at the amount of the running costs that is attributable to the provision of water and asked if the rents should be increased to cover more of this cost.

Councillor Ormesher made the point that most allotment holders tried to use water butts and to limit the amount of water that they use from the taps. The committee determined not to increase the rents on the allotment for the following year.

The committee noted that a quote was awaited both for the removal of rubbish from Ballinger Plot 1, and for a new wooden post at Nairdwood lane to support a tap. Quotes would be sought for a new lock and repair to the fence at Chequers Lane (High Street end) and the grounds contractor would be asked if he could locate the stopcocks at Ballinger, Chequers Lane Greenlands Lane and Spurlands End Road

It was agreed that now that a majority of councillors had approved the use of Enterprise Skips, the deputy clerk would try to arrange a skip for Greenlands Lane as soon as possible.

The use of weedkiller was discussed and Councillor Pither confirmed that she had been in the process of arranging a meeting with a resident in the vicinity of Greenlands Lane who was concerned about the use of weed killer. It was explained that on this site the grounds contractor had strimmed around the hedge area rather than using weed killer. It was suggested by Councillor Bunting that on the allotment sites allotment holders might be asked if they wanted to opt out of use of weedkiller. It was agreed that this would be discussed with the allotment liaison officers in their meeting. There was further discussion about the use of weed killer elsewhere on verges and boundaries. It was agreed that it was a balancing act between sustaining growth of produce on the allotment's and promoting wildlife and nature. Councillor Lovegrove queried whether bees should be permitted on allotment sites and it was confirmed that the risk was considered too great to permit them.

It was suggested that perhaps a charter for allotment holders might be considered but not agreed. The deputy clerk indicated that the quote for removal of the tree on the Chequers Lane site had unfortunately not been forthcoming as the tree surgeons had not been asked to quote for this. The point was made by various councillors that clearing the overgrown plots and common areas might be carried out by young offenders or other interested parties such as those undertaking Duke of Edinburgh schemes.

The committee noted that unfortunately the website was incorrect in showing only 5 sets of allotments and agreed that this should be amended and that in addition the website should reflect

the tenancy agreement, namely it should state that allotments are restricted to those resident within the parish.

The deputy clerk updated the committee to the position with regard to the cockerel at Ballinger. The tenancy agreement makes no reference to permitting cockerels. A further complaint had been received and an indication that the complainant had spoken with the allotment holder. The allotment holder had only recently paid for the plot, and a letter had been sent to her advising of the need to remove the cockerels as a matter of urgency failing which a notice to quit might be served. The committee noted the issues with regard to the Chequers Lane pond and that enquires were in hand with Bucks Council as to their apparent mixed messages to local residents as to the pond either being the cause of flooding on Chequers Lane as it was overflowing (when inspection revealed no pond) or that the absence of the pond was the cause of the flooding as it was used for drainage from the highway. Council would be updated in due course when highways responded, and it was pointed out that permission was required for Bucks Council to drain on to parish council land.

The terms for Prestwood Nature to take on the Greenlands Lane Pond had been set out for them to agree and then start work on the pond.

With regard to the issue at Nairdwood Lane and plot 10b the deputy clerk reported that he had met with the tenant and expressed concern at the size of the poly tunnel and the shed. The allotment holder had agreed to reduce the size of the shed and tidy it up, and then on the next inspection it would be decided by the councillors whether the poly tunnel might be permitted to remain. The point as made in answer to a question, that the size of the poly tunnel was controversial as it far exceeded the size of those normally permitted and other allotment holders had been prevented from having poly tunnels of this size. There was also an issue as to whether as yet payment had been made for this plot which the Deputy Clerk would take forward. After inspection if required a letter would be sent to the allotment holder advising him of the outcome and what steps were required of him. It was agreed that councillors Pither, Baxter, Bunting and Lovegrove would inspect this site.

Allotments competition for 2021

It was agreed after input from Councillors Ormersher and Stevenson as to weather and growing conditions, that the inspection would take place in the week commencing 21 June and the councillors to inspect the allotment for the competition would be Councillors Pither, Baxter, Bunting, Lovegrove and Ormersher. The same judging criteria would be used as last year unless any changes were proposed and agreed by all of the committee, no such changes having been suggested as yet. It was then intended to hold a presentation for the allotment holders in October. The committee were urged to consider what might be appropriate for that presentation, depending on Covid 19 restrictions of course, and to submit ideas to Councillor Pither.

A further issue was raised as to the question of hedge cutting as an issue had been raised last year in respect of Ballinger Allotments and similar issue had been raised this year in respect of open land on the Lovel estate, namely that under the grounds maintenance contract our contractor is required to cut the hedges throughout the year, and yet this means cutting them during the course of the bird nesting season, when in theory hedges and trees should only be cut if there was an urgent need to do so. The committee discussed this and suggested that subject to council agreeing the hedges should be cut lower at the beginning of the year and at the end of the birds nesting season so as to reduce the number of cuts required and reduce the risk to birds and wildlife. Then hedge cutting should no longer be required during the bird nesting season. It was agreed that when the grounds maintenance contract was renegotiated next year this should be specifically factored into the tender process.

It was noted that the prize winners of the 2020 Allotment competition had all been delighted to receive their awards and that a competition had taken place despite the problems and challenges arising as a result of Covid 19.

Finally, the committee confirmed that arrangements for the refund of deposits to allotment holders could be made by the clerk and or deputy clerk without reference to council or the committee unless there was an issue as to the state of a plot and potential withholding of the deposit monies.

7. Play Areas: -

The committee noted the paper on play facilities within the parish and had no specific questions on the paper.

Councillor Stevenson raised the issue of the SPICA and indicated that he had contacted Kompan the company who provided the SPICA. He had concerns as to the bearings but it appeared – as indicated in Councillor Stevenson’s paper to council that the issue was more related to water ingress to the base where the bearings were located. Councillor Stevenson thought that the second SPICA – not the one that had recently had the top section replaced- should be taken out and the bearings checked. In any event it needed work done on it as it was wobbling and needed tightening. The bottom line is that there may be design issues which make the product vulnerable to fail and put pressure on the mechanism. The deputy clerk was unable to advise when the item was installed, originally but pointed out that Grymsdyke had been installed in 2007. The committee was reminded that the guarantee for the item was 10 years and for the bearings was 5 years.

As Playground Facilities are due to attend this site (Grymsdyke) to carry out some resurfacing, the suggestion was that perhaps they be asked to remove and check this SPICA whilst there.

Councillor Humphreys updated the committee on the repair scheduled for the Shelter on the Common and confirmed that he had the part that had been removed from the Shelter and was waiting for a call from Playground Facilities as to when they would attend as he intended to meet with them to supervise the repair. He stated that it was urgent as a health and safety issue. It was pointed out that when at Councillor Humphrey’s instigation he and Councillor Pither had met with Playground Facilities on site to discuss the possible repair, they had advised that there was no health and safety issue. The deputy clerk indicated that therefore any issues arising from the delay in repair should not cause any problem for the parish council.

With regard to the incident at Buryfield on the slide in the main playground, it was agreed by the committee that in light of the nature of the hazard, and the advice from the ground’s contractor that the use of turf would not work unless it was regularly watered and might in fact enhance the trip risk. It was agreed that a small amount of soil should be spread around the bottom of the slide as a temporary measure, and that as the Annual playground inspection was due to take place in June/July they inspection company should be asked to focus on this item of play equipment and perhaps recommend the best type of surface. It was pointed out that even the use of wet pour would not be a guarantee of removing trip hazards and avoiding repairs- the fact that Grymsdyke surface is wet pour and requires repair demonstrates this.

The committee were asked to consider what budget spend should be programmed in for the present year.

The committee were advised that the new springer for Buryfield was due to be installed in June, and that if it was salvageable the existing Springer would be removed and put into store in the Memorial Hall storage area and considered for installation at another location.

The deputy clerk referred to the potential new sign for putting up at the playgrounds warning of the risks of Covid 19 and it was agreed that this would be circulated to council as a whole to consider. Technically the council’s decision to have a “Soft” closure of the playgrounds is still in place, but the reality is that all the signs at all the playgrounds have been removed or have become detached. And need to be replaced.

8. Open Spaces

a) Tree reports

In the absence of Councillor Marshall, it was agreed that Councillor Pither, Councillor Baxter, and Councillor Bunting would carry out an inspection of the trees on parish land. It was explained to the committee that there are around 90 to a hundred trees owned by the parish council and for which the parish has responsibility for maintenance. Councillor Marshall will be asked to join the inspection party. It was made clear that the responsibility for the inspection is solely in respect of trees on parish council land and that responsibility for other trees in public places rests with Buckinghamshire Council. It was observed by several councillors that there appeared to be a number of issues with trees being cut back or felled across the area and particularly in Prestwood. The deputy clerk will make enquiries to see if a list of trees with TPOS may be made available to the Parish Council to assist in monitoring any unlawful work on such trees.

Councillor Lovegrove pointed out that trees within a conservation area are automatically considered to be covered by the equivalent of a Tree Preservation Order.

Further information will be sought from Councillor Marshall with regard to the young trees to be planted in order to make arrangements to progress this.

b) Biodiversity

In the absence of Councillor Marshall, it was agreed that this would be held over until the next meeting or until such time as a further update paper is provided to full council. It was noted though, that at least the planning committee were taking into account in making representations on planning matters biodiversity issues.

c) Prestwood Community Centre.

Councillor Baxter gave a brief update for information purposes as to the work of the Community Centre working party that had already met under her chairmanship.

d) Ramp/step Link Road to Buryfield

Councillor Pither and Brooke gave an update. In effect before any work can be carried out permission is required as a result of the proximity of the step that already exists to an inspection chamber. Unfortunately, the utility company had refused to assist with an inspection due to the Covid 19 restrictions. However now that these restrictions have been relaxed, the utility company will be contacted again with a view to arranging a meeting as soon as possible so that this project can get going. Councillor Humphreys continued to express reservations as to the impact that a step from the Link Road into Buryfield might have on the parking available. However, council had previously decided to progress this to improve access to Buryfield.

e): - Recognition of Parish Cup Winners.

Councillor Lovegrove had proposed that some form of honours board for previous winners of the Parish Cup should be provided but had subsequently investigated this and decided that it seemed prohibitively expensive. However, as an alternative the proposed TV package that was being commissioned would allow a much easier and cost-effective way of reflecting recognition of parish cup winners and others for example the allotment holder competition winners.

9. Cemetery Management: -

The committee noted the paper from the deputy clerk outlining the ongoing work in managing the cemetery and the limited impact of the change of ownership to Buckinghamshire Council. The plans for the extension

had not yet been shared with the public or interested parties and the planning application had not yet been submitted by Buckinghamshire Council.

The committee noted the change in the paper in terms of providing an annual figure for volume of work and the significant increase in work for the last year. There was then a discussion as to the fees received by Buckinghamshire Council and the relatively low proportion paid from those fees for the administration and management of the cemetery. The current fees received are £1056 plus vat for the year. It was decided after discussion to suggest that the fee level that the parish council would seek should be set as a percentage of the fees recovered from Buckinghamshire Council and should be 10%. This would result- assuming business levels were consistent with last year, in an increase in payment to the parish council of around 50%.

10) Street Lighting: -

The committee noted the street lighting report provided and had no questions. The deputy clerk pointed out that the policy of replacing streetlight bulbs as they needed replacement with LED had worked well and that almost a third of the stock owned by the parish council had been replaced without and major expense from the reserves allocated for this transfer. The stocktake report had been received and although the contractors had no major concerns, they did want to discuss their findings with the deputy clerk. Councillor Pither indicated a wish to participate in any meeting on this subject.

11) Bollards for Buryfield and Prestwood Common: -

The committee noted that the bollards were all in place at Prestwood including the additional collapsible bollard. A padlock was still to be installed in this post as the original padlocks were no longer available with the same key,

At Buryfield the old bollards had been removed but remained on site, the replacement for the bollards was the hedge, which it was noted exceeded the anticipated and intended height. There was a discussion as to maintenance- and when it could be cut back, not until after the bird nesting season had ended and it had chance to establish itself, and as to who would be responsible for this. It is not at yet part of the Open Spaces Contract. Concerns were expressed by Councillor Lovegrove, and other committee members about the health and safety issues as a result of the fact that at least one entrance gap in the hedge- that opposite the office, was concealed from sight from motorists and for children leaving Buryfield via that exit. Councillor Lovegrove had witnessed 2 near misses. In addition, the deputy clerk indicated that Philip Green had expressed some similar concerns as he was setting up the fair. Possible solutions would be blocking up the gap, cutting back the hedge around that exit, or simply putting in speed warning, visibility and warning of children being present signs along the access road. Councillor Humphreys expressed some cynicism as to there being any risk but did say that if traffic were restricted to those using the memorial hall the risk would be less. He went on to say that following the refurbishment and the relaxation of Covid 19 restrictions use of the car park by users was likely to increase. He suggested a barrier across the car park entrance to replace the existing chain, something that Councillor Pither had suggested some time ago. It was agreed that Councillor Pither would form a working party to explore this.

12) Phase 2 of the Prestwood Common Regeneration

The draft "flyer" for residents had not been attached and the deputy clerk apologised and indicated that he would circulate this to the committee for their input and feedback.

In addition to the new benches installed by the Parish Council, there are also offers of benches from the Revite Group and from the WI in Prestwood. It was agreed that installation of any further benches should be put on hold on the Common but that the preferred location for them would be on the recreation ground, subject to either permission from Buckinghamshire Council or the recreation

ground being transferred to the parish council. Revite Group benches are to be included in phase 2. This was particularly the case in view of the issues that had arisen regarding one of the benches recently installed. Councillors Pither and Humphreys had met with the resident who had complained and Councillor Pither had agreed a way forward with the resident to monitor any impact of the bench.

Councillor Lovegrove suggested that as an alternative could a bench be installed on the Lovel estate open land?

It was noted that the PVA were happy to allow the use of their website to consult people. Councillor Pither indicated that she would arrange a meeting in due course and that representatives from those using the Common and other interest groups including the PVA and MAY would be invited to attend and make their representations to Councillors Pither, Baxter, Lovegrove and Marshall.

13) Dog bin request South Heath

The committee noted the request and the cost that would follow in terms of both buying a bin and then paying for it to be emptied. Councillor Brooke indicated that along with Councillor Johnstone she was monitoring the situation and was aware that the resident who had made the request was seeking support from a resident's association in South Heath. It was agreed that at present no action was required and it would be a situation of waiting and seeing what the overall view was from South Heath residents.

Any Other Business:

All present were asked if they had anything else to add or suggest.

A question was asked as to why the proposed playground notice referred to no eating or drinking. The deputy clerk explained that this came directly from the government guidance on playgrounds being open.

There being no other questions or issues raised, the meeting closed at 12.30 with the proposed next meeting to be set for a date in the second week of July.

Christopher Thompson
Deputy Clerk