

Marlborough Town Council



Amenities and Open Spaces Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Amenities and Open Spaces Committee held Monday,
14 October 2024 in the Council Chamber, Marlborough Town Hall at 7pm

PRESENT	Councillor Mark Cooper	Chair
	Councillor Andrew Ross	
	Councillor James Sheppard	
	Councillor Mark Luson	
	Councillor Emily Trow	
	Richard Spencer-Williams	Town Clerk
	Dawn Whitehall	Corporate Services Officer
ALSO		
PRESENT	Neil Goodwin	Marlborough.News
	Plus 6 members of the public	

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Sandra Rogers (College Fields & Barton Park Residents Association) – referred to agenda item 7 and asked whether there was any further information that she could supply to help Councillors with their deliberations.

The Chair thanked her for her question, and for supplying additional information which had been emailed to Members prior to the meeting. He would suspend Standing Orders at the agenda item in order that members of the public could address Councillors.

199/24 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from **Councillors Farrell, O'Brien, Shantry, the Town Mayor Councillor Cleasby** and the **Grounds Manager**.

200/24 DECLARATIONS

Councillor Cooper – agenda items 16 (Allotments) and 18 (Memorial Bench Requests) – non-pecuniary. **Councillor Luson** – agenda item 16.

201/24 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

202/24 MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meetings held 17 June and 15 July 2024 were approved as true records, and signed by the Chair

203/24 ACTION LOG

Members noted the updated action log. There were no questions arising.

204/24 STONEBRIDGE MEADOW

Members noted the Town Clerk's report and considered proposals to form a Stonebridge Meadow User Group and a proposed budget for 2025-26. Discussion points included:

The Town Clerk clarified that the section of the report entitled 'View of the River' referring to a section of hedgerow should read that a section of *riverbank herbs* such as rosebay willow herb would be cut back and maintained by volunteers in Spring 2025.

The **Chair** highlighted progress made since the last Committee meeting, where the Stonebridge Meadow Management Committee (SMMC) had agreed that three picnic pods (*mown circular areas with a picnic table*) could be created and trialed in the amenity area, and he thanked **Councillors Shantry and O'Brien, Mrs Forbes (Action for the River Kennet (ARK)), the Town Clerk and Grounds Manager** for the progress that had been made.

Councillor Ross noted that Members had not received minutes of the 25 July meeting of SMMC. Although pleased with the compromise that had been achieved and mindful that he would support the outcome, he questioned whether the proposals should have been brought back to this Committee for agreement; and whether two Councillors could make decisions on behalf of the Committee. The **Chair** accepted his point, noting that this Committee had tasked its representatives (*Councillors Shantry and O'Brien*) to discuss its questions with ARK at SMMC, and felt all should be commended on reaching this compromise. The **Town Clerk** explained that both Councillors, who were the Committee's nominated representatives at the SMMC had been keen to feed this outcome back to Members in person, and it was a shame that neither was able to attend this meeting. **Councillor Ross** had raised the question knowing that the topic was a controversial one: it appeared from the report that the decision had been made and once again asked whether it should more properly have been proposed to the Committee to agree – which he was sure it would. The **Chair** confirmed that the outcome of the trial would be brought back for Members to consider.

The **Town Clerk** explained that while the overall budget for managing Stonebridge Meadow had not changed, he had met with Councillors Shantry, O'Brien, Mrs Forbes and the Grounds Manager to agree a clarified budget document, breaking down the specific costs that would be borne by each organisation (Appendix 1 in the agenda).

User Group

The **Chair** invited Members to comment on the proposal to consider the creation of a Stonebridge Meadow user group, highlighting the questions in the Town Clerk's report asking Members to consider the purpose, mandate, composition, organisation and management of such a group. Comments included:

- Whilst the idea was appealing in principle, in practice it was hard to see how it could be managed
- It was difficult to see any purpose to such a group that was not already fulfilled by existing bodies
- That ARK and the Town Council were more than capable guardians for Stonebridge Meadow
- General satisfaction with the current arrangements
- Whether it would be capable of doing anything that wasn't already covered by ARK, volunteers, the Town Council or the SMMC
- To be wary of creating additional structures or layers of involvement without any clearly defined benefit
- Whether there was a risk of creating a silo
- That interested parties were always able to engage via questions at this Committee, with the Town Council's representatives able to take those questions into the SMMC

RESOLVED: (i) not to form a user group for Stonebridge Meadow

Budget

RESOLVED: (ii) to adopt the Stonebridge Meadow budget as provisionally agreed with SMMC with a view to informing the Committee's budget request for 2025-26

205/24

COLLEGE FIELDS AND BARTON PARK BENCH REQUEST

Members noted the Town Clerk's report and considered the College Fields and Barton Park Residents Association (CF&BPRA) request to plant trees at agreed locations.

During a suspension of Standing Orders, **Sandra Rogers** expanded on information already supplied by email and emphasised the high level of support for adding one tree to each of four locations already agreed for benches in College Fields and Barton Park. She also answered Councillors' questions. Points included:

- Climate emergency: benefits of trees included carbon capture, improved air quality, wildlife habitat and providing shade for people using the benches
- To select appropriate types and sizes of trees to suit the locations
- Appointing a resident or CF&BPRA 'tree minder' to keep an eye on the trees and involve the community
- Residents had put their names forward to fund the cost of the tree purchases

The **Town Clerk** confirmed that Wiltshire Council (WC) will issue licences for the benches. Since the original request in 2022, WC had changed its policy on trees. Now if someone wants to plant a tree, they have to apply, via the Town or Parish Council, to Wiltshire Council and the former has to be prepared to take on the land asset under WC's devolution policy i.e. all the surrounding land parcels for the trees would become Marlborough Town Council's maintenance responsibility and liability (and not just the immediate area around the tree, as was the case previously). However, the wording of the policy included that this was WC's *preferred* route, implying there may be exceptions. Members discussed the implications on Town Council resource and costs if it was required to take on the management of additional

land parcels in order to support the request to plant the trees. **Councillor Sheppard** agreed to follow this up with Wiltshire Council to clarify whether an exception could be made.

RESOLVED: that the Town Council supports the planting of four trees next to benches in Barton Park and College Fields in principle, subject to seeking clarification from Wiltshire Council that they can be planted without the Town Council taking on land management responsibilities

ACTION: **Councillor Sheppard** to seek clarification about land management responsibilities should the tree planting be progressed

Two people left the meeting

206/24 **GROUNDS MANAGER'S REPORT**

Members noted the Grounds Manager's report and considered a proposal to replace the roses at the 7th Battalion Wiltshire Regiment Memorial with poppies.

The **Chair** asked that the Committee's thanks be passed back to the team for all they do. Discussion points included:

- **Councillor Ross** asked for a progress update on the request to site a litter bin next to a bench at The Recreation Ground (*Min. No. 391/23, A&OS Meeting 15 January 2024*)
- **The Chair** asked for a progress update on providing watering cans at Marlborough Cemetery (*Min. No. 65/24, A&OS Meeting 17 June 2024*). The **Town Clerk** had discussed the construction of a small storage area to keep these neat, and would follow this up with the Grounds Manager
- The **Town Clerk** confirmed that the 3-year management plan to control and eradicate Japanese Knotweed at Marlborough Common was reportedly working. **Councillor Sheppard** hoped that the **Grounds Manager** could attend the next meeting to provide more detail
- A request to include the three allotment sites in future reports

The red roses planted at the 7th Battalion Wiltshire Regiment Memorial were failing. The proposal to replace these with poppies was considered:

- Some members supported the proposal, some did not
- Poppies would add to pockets of biodiversity around the town
- Once established, poppies would self-seed and would be likely to thrive in this location
- Poppy flowers would be gone by November, when annual Remembrance events were held at the location: how would the area appear at that time if only planted with poppies?
- Whether to seek advice from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission on recommended plants at War Memorials

RESOLVED: prior to making changes to planting at the 7th Battalion Wiltshire Regiment Memorial, to seek advice from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission on alternatives to roses, and consider those recommendations at the next meeting

207/24 TREE REPORT

Members noted the report of works to the Council's trees.

208/24 WORKSHOP EXTENSION

The **Town Clerk** provided a verbal update on the project to extend the workshop at Salisbury Road Recreation Ground:

- Preparations were in hand for phase 2, which would include levelling the ground, creating access points and working on internal spaces and staff quarters
- The Town Clerk, Councillor Hall (Chair, Property Committee) and the Town Council's agent had met to select a preferred supplier following a tendering process. The contractor had been asked to provide additional details and costs
- More detailed plans had been commissioned to satisfy building regulations
- Although taking a little longer than was originally estimated, it was hoped that work would start within 2-3 weeks

One person left the meeting

209/24 CEMETERY EXTENSION

Members noted the Town Clerk's report on the status of the consultation plan for the cemetery extension. It was frustrating that the land handover to the Town Council, originally expected in April or May 2024 had still not taken place. Discussion points included:

- The consultation was the start of a very long process. Although it could start without the land handover, ideally the consultation would present the proposed new Common land to people in its best form to be able to explain the full benefits to electors
- Work had finally begun to install the play equipment – whether there was a risk that the length of time since its delivery might mean the Town Council would inherit a playground to maintain with a shortened warranty period and that would be hard to hold to account with the company installing the equipment

Members agreed to the **Town Clerk's** recommendation not to begin the consultation until the land parcel had been handed over. If this had not been achieved by February or March 2025 a different approach should be considered.

210/24 BIODIVERSITY REPORT AND PLAN

Members noted the biodiversity plan for the Town Council's estate, and the **Chair** thanked all involved in creating it. Members considered proposals to create wildflower beds and add wildlife boxes. Comments included:

- The Recreation Ground had not been included in the plan: **Councillor Ross** asked whether this could be reviewed as he believed there was scope to include the area along the hedge on the southern boundary to create a wildlife corridor
- The estimated cost of £5,000 had been included in the report for budgeting purposes only
- Members commended the report and its proposals

RESOLVED: the plan is commended, and proposals to create wildflower beds and install wildlife boxes are agreed; and to include £5,000 for this project in the A&OS projects budget line for consideration for 2025-26

211/24 VICTORIAN CEMETERY PROJECT

Members noted the Town Clerk's report and considered the project plan for the Victorian Cemetery and arboretum.

Councillor Ross noted that the plan did not make any mention of checking and/or maintaining the sarsen stone perimeter wall built by Thomas Free and asked whether this should be included.

Members were invited to put their names forward to join a project group, which would meet approximately every four weeks for one hour: no-one present was able to commit to this.

ACTION: Town Clerk to email all Councillors to seek a volunteer Councillor to join the Victorian Cemetery project group

212/24 FINANCE REPORT

Members noted the Amenities & Open Spaces finance report for month 5 with no questions arising.

213/24 BUDGET 2025-26

Members considered the Committee's priorities and budget requirements for 2025-26. Proposed priorities were:

1. Complete phase 2 of the workshop extension and construct a greenhouse
2. Grounds Team vehicle replacement subject to agreement with lease company
3. Cemetery extension
4. Biodiversity management
5. Management plan for land at Tin Pit and Rabley Wood View
6. Parking arrangements at Marlborough Common
7. Salisbury Road Recreation Ground subject to s106 CIL funds
8. Victorian Cemetery and Arboretum

RESOLVED: that the proposed priorities and budget requirements were agreed as presented for 2025-26

ALLOTMENTS

Councillors Cooper and Luson had declared interests in this agenda item: Councillor Cooper holds an allotment at St John's Close, Councillor Luson at Stonebridge Lane

Members considered the Town Clerk's report on the Stonebridge Lane allotment site and received a verbal update from Councillor Luson, the Town Council's representative to the Allotment Association.

- Some works to be undertaken by allotmenters to improve the site's resilience against flooding were dependent upon actions for the Town Council (agreed at a site meeting in June) but these had not yet been carried out:
 - Strim the external boundary to prevent weeds and seeds encroaching into ARK land
 - Strim the edges of drainage ditches and vacant plots to suppress weeds and enable the community to conduct remedial action to the ditches
 - Deposit surplus soil or compost to the site to assist with raising growing bed levels and mitigate high water levels
- As well as risk of flooding from the river, there were also natural springs across the site
- Allotmenters had worked to improve drainage ditches; ARK were due to dig out the settling ponds on 16 October
- Allotmenters who had raised the level of their plots had not suffered so badly from the flooding in January
- Whether the site would remain viable in the short or long term; if there was no or little income from the site, it would not offset the cost to the Town Council to rent the site
- That adding boundaries or ditches at plots would prevent those with raised soil levels having soil washed away in times of flood
- Whether there was a requirement on the Town Council to provide a set number of allotment sites related to the size of the population
- Whether, if the site was not viable in the future, the Town Council would be able to meet its obligation to provide allotments to residents
- Whether clarification could be provided about why people applying for plots at Stonebridge Lane had been told that this site was on hold for the time being
- September had been the wettest on record since the early 1900's: wet weather had hampered the Grounds Team's ability to conduct certain tasks
- The Staffing Committee was in active discussion to address capacity issues in the Grounds Team
- Whether an overall view of the total number of plots across the three sites vs required quota could be clarified
- **Councillor Luson** offered to provide a more detailed, costed proposal for the site

ACTION: to expedite the delivery of soil to Stonebridge Lane allotment site

ACTION: Councillor Luson to provide more detail about what was required of the Town Council to support the Stonebridge Lane allotment site, and an overview on the total number of sites across the town and statutory requirements

215/24 CEMETERY REPORT

- i) Members noted grants of Exclusive Rights of Burial (ERB) that had been issued
- ii) Members noted recently approved memorials and inscriptions

216/24 MEMORIAL BENCHES

Members considered three requests for memorial benches or plaques:

RESOLVED: (i) that a request for a memorial bench in Cooper's Meadow for Mr Taylor was approved

RESOLVED: (ii) that a request for a memorial bench in Cooper's Meadow for Mrs Cooper was approved

RESOLVED: (iii) that a request for a memorial plaque on an existing seat in the High Street for Mrs Hancock was approved

The meeting closed at 8.32 pm

Signed:
Chair

Date: