

MINUTES OF THE RECREATION AND AMENITIES COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD ON 13 JULY 2021

PRESENT

- The Mayor – Councillor Rushton
- Deputy Mayor – Councillor Garvey
- Councillor Brady
- Councillor Davies
- Councillor Hall
- Councillor Hart
- Councillor Hawley
- Councillor Jackson
- Councillor Jones
- Councillor McLoughlin
- Councillor Rogers
- Councillor Salt
- Councillor Sheldon
- Councillor Smith
- Councillor Yates

1. ELECTION OF A CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR

Councillor Hall nominated Councillor Hart as Chair; seconded by Councillor Jones. There were no other nominations. All voted in favour.

Councillor Garvey nominated Councillor Jones as Deputy Chair; seconded by Councillor Sheldon. There were no other nominations. All voted in favour.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Harper, Councillor Redfern and Councillor Perkin.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

- a) **Disclosable pecuniary interests and dispensations:** Councillor Sheldon declared an interest in any matter relating to Biddulph in Bloom.
- b) **Other interests:** None declared.

4. MINUTES

- a) The minutes of Recreation and Amenities Committee meeting 13 April 2021 were approved and signed.
- b) The notes of the Transport Working Group held on 25 May 2021 were received.

5. TO RECEIVE A VERBAL UPDATE FOLLOWING THE TRANSPORT WORKING GROUP MEETING ON TUESDAY 13 JULY

Councillor Jones summarised that the discussion at the meeting that day had revolved around the license to access the Aldi site and the proposed minor changes to the 93 bus route. Councillor Jones said that the figures of 93 bus usage showed that this was increasing after a significant decrease in usage during the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Councillor Jackson said he was really pleased about the intervals at Aldi being changed to 30 minutes, but he was concerned about Aldi's response to this. It was confirmed that this will not result in a change in the number of buses stopping at Aldi.

Councillor McLoughlin said he was concerned that there is no scope within the license to increase the numbers of buses to Aldi.

6. LENGTHSMAN

Councillor Sheldon said that some small grass verges could be added to the Lengthsman's job list. Councillor Sheldon said she would show the Chief Officer the areas concerned.

Councillor Salt said she would like a greater discussion around grass cutting as uncut verges create natural habitats. Councillor Salt said she felt taking a similar approach to Stoke where only a small width immediately next to the pavement to stop weed encroachment could be beneficial and also supports action on Climate Change issues.

Councillor Hart said he is aware that there are increasing numbers of councils taking a similar approach.

Councillor Smith asked if there was any update regarding the alleyways on the Biddulph East estate, as Staffordshire Moorlands District Council have not responded to requests. Councillor Smith will send a list to the Chief Officer who will refer to the Lengthsman.

Councillor Yates said Your Housing have agreed to provide a definitive map of their owned/maintained areas. Councillor Yates said he agrees with the idea of mowing a mower's width to minimise encroachment on the pavement and tidy the area, to support biodiversity. He also suggested preparation in terms of seeding appropriately on the verges and that a community consultation and informed plan about the Council's approach is important.

Councillor Yates asked if the Lyndhurst Drive and Washington Close footpaths could be cut. He said he was weary that Biddulph Town Council is taking on the maintenance duties of other councils or organisations.

The Chief Officer confirmed she reviews who is responsible for maintaining areas before referring to the Lengthsman.

It was agreed to put grass cutting as an agenda item for a future meeting and to add it to the Environment Working Group agenda.

Councillor Sheldon said that sometimes grass needs to be cut due to blocking visibility, but she is only requesting grass cutting on specific areas.

Councillor Hall said that resources are needed for all the items discussed, and if additional work is taken on, he expects some additional funding from relevant authorities.

The Chief Officer said she had continued to raise the issue of the Town Council taking responsibility for grass cutting from the County Council, and while they have an enthusiasm for the concept, they have been unable to progress the matter.

Councillor Smith said she had observed in Cheshire East the rewilding of verges where signposting had been helpful in getting people on board.

Councillor Salt asked if a County Council Officer and District Council Officer could be invited to meet to discuss the issue.

Councillor Sheldon said that the middle bars for the barriers at St John's Road have been removed and wondered if anyone has any idea why or how this is happening.

Councillor Smith said she had raised this issue above previously. It was noted that there is little that can be done other than to continually reporting to Staffordshire County Council and maintaining vigilance.

7. TO APPROVE REVISED RULES AND REGULATIONS SIGNAGE FOR THE BURIAL GROUNDS

The Chief Officer said that the catalyst for review was the change in contact details, but an update was required. The poster portrays only a limited number of rules which are part of a larger document, but covers the main points that visitors may need to be aware of.

Moved by Councillor Hall, seconded by Councillor Jones; all voted in favour of the attached poster.

8. TO CONSIDER QUOTATIONS FOR THE INSTALLATION OF TWO NOTICEBOARDS AND THE REVISED SIGNAGE (ITEM 7) AT THE TOWN BURIAL GROUND AND WOODHOUSE BURIAL GROUND

Councillors reviewed the report regarding the above item. Councillor Garvey asked if there was a cost for fitting for comparison, as only one quote included fitting costs. It was noted that the fitting costs were reasonable compared to the cost of carrying out fitting independently, though specific quotes hadn't been obtained.

Councillor Salt proposed, Councillor Brady seconded for PR Graphics to be appointed for providing both signs and noticeboards.

9. TO CONSIDER SOLUTIONS REGARDING THE MANAGEMENT OF SOIL AT BOTH THE WOODHOUSE AND TOWN BURIAL GROUND SITES

The Chief Officer requested that this item be postponed to consider a wider range of solutions. All agreed.

Councillor Yates suggested that silos for storing hardcore were used for Biddulph Valley Way and suggested this be considered as part of the deferred discussion.

10. TO CONSIDER QUOTATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN SECTION L OF THE TOWN BURIAL GROUND

The Chief Officer said that this had been the first opportunity to feedback possible solutions for dealing with some of the landscape and drainage issues at Section L of the Town Burial Ground and outlined the following proposals:

- i) Willow whips along the border of Biddulph Grange Gardens under the oak tree*

The Chief Officer outlined that these grow well in wet soil, but there will be ongoing maintenance required. They would provide a border, but also soak some water up in the area.

Councillor Salt and Councillor Jones expressed support for this idea. Councillor Salt proposed and Councillor Smith seconded; all in favour.

- ii) New turf identified as hard-wearing and appropriate for shady areas (please note grave managers will receive correspondence about the installation of new turf, advising them to remove kerbing, additional vases etc)*

A particular turf had been recommended that may do well in damp or shady areas. However, this would require that all grave managers in the area would be contacted and asked to remove kerbing and grave dressings.

Councillor Yates suggested that grass mats may be beneficial in maintaining grass that gets walked on in Section L. The Chief Officer outlined that the area is so densely used there is little opportunity for pathways to be made in the area.

Councillor Salt wondered if someone who has expertise had reviewed the area. The Chief Officer said this hadn't been considered as of yet as she wished to seek support for the idea from Councillors. If local firms are able to provide this service, this would be an option.

Councillor Yates also suggested consulting the National Trust to see how they manage their grass areas in similar conditions on their neighbouring site.

Councillor Salt proposed that the Chief Officer gets some specialist advice on turf, seconded by Councillor Jones.

Councillor Smith said that a local resident has specialism in the area and will pass her contact details on to the Chief Officer.

iii) New drainage and tarmac along the paths at the Town Burial Ground (map attached which pink lines identifying paths to be considered).

The Chief Officer shared a map with three key areas to be considered for drainage and retarmacking. She also alerted the Committee to the fact that there are limited local tarmac providers.

Councillor Hart and Councillor Salt expressed a preference for getting quotes for all the pathways in the Town Burial Ground.

Councillor Jones suggested a two phase approach - getting two quotes from providers – one for the key areas and a second for the whole Burial Ground.

Councillor Garvey asked whether alternatives to Tarmac had been considered, to path covering that drains more freely.

Councillor Jones said that the funeral directors use a wheeled trolley which requires a smooth surface.

Councillor Jones proposed and Councillor Salt seconded to obtain quotes for path and drainage replacement in both key areas and the entire site. All voted in favour.

iv) To consider the removal of the Yew Tree in section L, which has now become very large

Councillor Jones said that he would be reluctant to see the Yew Tree cut down given its slow growing properties, though he would be happy for pruning work or crown raising to take place.

Councillor Garvey said that as Yews are often used as topiaries they can be cut back quite heavily.

Councillor Jones proposed that a tree surgeon be consulted to significantly prune the tree; Councillor Yates seconded. All voted in favour.

11. TO CONSIDER THE TOWN COUNCIL'S POSITION ON THE FOLLOWING ISSUES AT THE BURIAL GROUNDS

i) Returfing of graves

The Town Council has previously paid for returfing, occasionally due to badger activity or sunken graves; the cost is usually a reasonable amount. The Chief Officer queried whether Councillors were happy with this practice.

Councillor Rogers noted that some people want to take responsibility for their graves, while others are unable.

Councillor Salt said that the Town Council should take the responsibility to maintain the turf and this can help manage the standard of the lawned areas.

Councillor Yates said it was difficult to apply consistently and if the Town Council take responsibility, this should be reflected in future charges and service agreements.

Councillor Jones wanted to ensure that people know they are able to turf graves themselves if they wish, but the Town Council should take on responsibility where it was felt to be appropriate. All voted in favour.

ii) Solar lights on graves

It was noted that there are a lot of solar lights on graves, though these are not permitted within the rules and regulations.

Councillor Yates said that the burial grounds are a place of quiet contemplation and this should be reflected in the grave dressing, but noted this is particularly hard to enforce where children are buried or interred. He suggested that solar lights may be permitted for the first 12 months after interment.

Councillor Jackson asked what problems the solar lights are causing the Town Council and wondered if action was necessary.

The Chief Officer noted that often solar lights are accompanied by lots of ornaments or other grave dressings. She also noted that some do rust over time, but others are well maintained.

Councillor Rushton said that at Carmountside posters state that solar lights cannot be placed on graves and the memorials are inspected for 'tastefulness'.

Councillor Jones proposed stipulating that anything placed on the grave is limited to the base of the headstone, to prevent the spread of items and solar lights should be permitted; Councillor Salt seconded. All voted in favour.

iii) Plastic Wrapping

Councillors Hall proposed and Councillor Jones seconded to request that plastic wrapping is not left at the Burial Grounds. All voted in favour.

iv) Benches falling in to disrepair

The Chief Officer explained that a number of benches are due to be removed as per the Bench Policy; these have started to rot and are a health and safety risk.

Councillor Yates asked if the bench can be renewed; it was confirmed this is not routinely offered as an option.

Councillor Jones moved to approve the removal of benches in question, Councillor Garvey seconded. All in favour.

12. TO CONSIDER FURTHER REMOVAL OF ASBESTOS FROM ALLOTMENT SITES, INCLUDING ON SHEDS.

The Chief Officer updated the Committee that it had become apparent that there was still some asbestos at the Park Lane allotment site. The Chief Officer would like to progress with this activity over the summer.

Councillor Rogers asked where it would be removed to. It was confirmed that a certified asbestos contractor would remove the items to an appropriate asbestos waste disposal site.

Cllr Jones moved to approve the removal of asbestos, Councillor Yates seconded. All voted in favour.

Confidential items

In accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, s1, the Council is to determine which items, if any, should be taken with the public excluded.

- 13. It was agreed to ascertain the suitability of certain burial plots for future use.
- 14. It was agreed to contact Morris Homes with regard to tree planting.
- 15. A site visit was agreed in relation to a potential future allotment site.

The meeting closed at 8.44pm.

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