

MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE RECREATION GROUNDS, PUBLIC LANDS & LIGHTING COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 11TH NOVEMBER 2020, AT 7PM

Committee Members present:

Mrs A Clarey, B Collier A Cooper, Mrs M Cooper (Chairman), S Hayes, C Phelps, G Russell, J Talbot.

Also present:

Town Clerk – Mrs K Elliott-Turner, Assistant Clerk – Ms C Jenkins, Councillor H Pickering and Mrs L Anderson – Central Beds Council Ecologist

81/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence received from Councillors Mrs S Bundock and Mrs J Hyde.

82/20 DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS INTERESTS ON MATTERS CONTAINED IN THE AGENDA

Councillor Talbot declared an interest in item 7 relating to allotments, as his wife has an allotment plot at the Common Road site. Members were reminded that if at any time during the meeting they feel they have an interest in an item being discussed, they should declare it at that point.

83/20 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – QUESTIONS, COMMENTS & RESPONSES

None present.

84/20 CLERK'S REPORT, CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED & MATTERS ARISING FOR INFORMATION

Matters arising

Minute 80/20 – quotes are being sought for works to fill the ruts in the drained pitch area at Arlesey Road, for consideration at the next meeting.

85/20 REVIEW OPEN SPACE MAINTENANCE

Members considered reviewing our policy of open space maintenance, following a request from Central Beds Council's Ecologist. Suggestions from the Ecologist are to create more wildlife friendly areas, not to cut all areas of grass and to leave some to grow wild, encouraging pollinators and not to trim around trees. Her particular direction was towards maintenance of Arlesey Road, being the largest open space area within the council's remit. Discussions were held about the possibility of allowing wildflowers to grow in the swale area of Arlesey Road.

Last Wednesday, Councillor Collier, the Assistant Clerk and Richard Lawrence of BRCC met at Arlesey Road to consider planting under BRCC's funding for trees and hedging. They looked at the top right-hand corner, near the swale, and near the bund at the back of Vaughan Road. Work may need to be phased because there is potential for lots of hedging/trees to be planted, and so Richard will come back to us with a proposed plan. In terms of the bunding, Richard suggests hedging and trees in various positions, to have a different mowing regime for the banking, and setting of wildflowers along the top of the bund, in between the new tree/hedging planting. In the top right hand corner of the site, it is suggested that a triangular section cutting across from the bunding, across

the edge of the swale, to the hedge line on the north side, could be developed with more trees and planting. Also, along the edge of Pix Brook Academy boundary.

Another area suggested by the Ecologist for tree planting is along the access road to Pix Brook Academy, known as the Stone Road. This is on Central Beds Council Land and would be use a different funding pot; this is being pursued by the Ecologist.

Members also discussed a former wish of the Etonbury Green Wheel group to create a wildlife area at Riverside Playing Field. Liz Anderson explained that it was the group's intention to use the wet area at Riverside Playing Field to create a defined pond area, but this needs a visit by Richard Lawrence, following some initial research.

Councillor Collier advised that in terms of planting at Arlesey Road, Richard Lawrence of BRCC advises against planting behind the post and rail fence between the open space and the rear of the houses, because the eventual tree routes could interfere with the gas main that goes along that route. Therefore, any planted trees should be on the open space side of the fence. Liz Anderson cautioned planting on bunding due to drought issues and advised that any tree planting on bunding must be well-watered.

The Clerk advised that in her discussions with the two S106 play officers at Central Beds Council recently regarding the second phase at Arlesey Road to project a MUGA, a proposal has been suggested that excess soil scrapings in creating the MUGA and any equipped play area could be used to form bunding in that area. It would help to soften the open space, and tree or shrub planting could be included, together with wildflower seeding.

Councillor Mrs Clarey will include an item on the Etonbury Green Wheel agenda for their meeting in the new year, to discuss the pond again at Riverside Playing Field, as this has been a long-standing item.

Councillor Collier advised that the plans for the Stone Road leading to Pix Brook Academy shows tree planting on the western side of the road, and also we are waiting to hear from Central Beds Council as to the replacement plan for the London Planes which were felled due to highway works on the Arlesey Road/Stone Road junction.

RESOLVED that our Landscape/Grass Cutting Contractor will be advised of discussions held at this meeting, to see what sort of reduced but workable mowing regime could be introduced at Arlesey Road, which would benefit wildlife and pollinators.

Members thanked Liz Anderson for her input, and she left the meeting.

Councillor Russell joined the meeting during this item.

86/20 ETONBURY GREEN WHEEL – TREE PLANTING

Following a request from Cliff Andrews, BRCC, members considered further areas in the town for tree planting, relating to the Green Wheel route.

There were no further suggestions as additions to those already put forward and as discussed in the previous agenda item. However, it was suggested that the new Stone Road and footpath beyond leading to Common Road, could be put forward as a new spoke for the Etonbury Green Wheel. This will help with a case for future planting along that route.

A further suggested new spoke to the Green Wheel could be the path running from Hitchin Road, opposite Brook Street, through open fields to Etonbury Green Wheel.

These two suggested new Green Wheel spokes, together with planting, will be put to Cliff Andrews.

87/20 NORTON ROAD ALLOTMENT – SKIP REQUEST

Members considered a request from an allotment tenant for a skip to be provided for use by all allotment tenants. Many tenants take over plots which have been neglected and work to clear them to cultivatable standard. The requesting tenant advises that as they work during the day, they have been unable to get to the tip, and now have concerns about availability of the tips due to the second lockdown. Prices for skip hire were provided for members.

A member asked for a skip to also be provided at the Common Road Allotments, although as site is in the ownership of Eleemosynary Charity of William Field, a separate request would have to be made to them.

Members expressed concern about the potential of incorrect use of a skip at the allotments, with household rubbish, rather than waste from the allotments being disposed of. We have experienced such abuse of a waste disposal area in the past. It was also felt that to meet the requirement of the large number of tenants on the allotment site, we would have to constantly replace the largest size of skip.

RESOLVED that due to the reasons given above, a skip is not provided at the Norton Road Allotments.

88/20 NORTON ROAD ALLOTMENTS – TAP BOXES

Members considered a quote from the Handyman Contractor to build x4 tap boxes (as at the cemetery) for Norton Road Allotments £140 per box (labour & materials). This figure does not include any additional pipework, should it be needed.

RESOLVED that the quote from Neal Saggars, Handyman Contractor, to build x4 tap boxes for Norton Road Allotments, at £140 per box, is accepted. Funds from Allotments – Maintenance & Repairs budget, or EMR – Allotment Hedging should there be insufficient budget.

89/20 MEMORIAL BENCH & TREE POLICY

Members considered the Clerk's draft Memorial bench and tree policy for adoption and suggested some amendments.

RESOLVED that Memorial Bench and Tree Policy is adopted.

90/20 LITTER BIN SURVEY

Members were previously provided with a copy of the Handyman's litter bin survey of all Town Council owned bins in our open spaces and in locations around the town. All bins are serviceable, new liners will be sourced for two, if available. This litter bin survey will be carried out annually.

RESOLVED that the contents of the 2020 litter bin survey are noted, and should any bins or liners require replacing, they are permitted to do so without putting to committee.

91/20 ARLESEY ROAD – MUGA FACILITY

Project to date

Following production of a list of preferred items the council wishes to provide at Arlesey Road, consisting of a MUGA facility and fitness equipment, and a subsequent meeting with a supplier, who produced a design, concerns were expressed by the Central Beds Council S106 and play officers that aspects of the initial proposed MUGA and play facility would not meet the requirements of S106. There were also concerns about play and safety aspects, such as conflict of play space.

The project was temporarily put on hold. Discussions have resumed between the Clerk, Councillors Brian Collier, Alan Cooper, Steve Hayes and Brian Saunders, the S106 and play officers (Lisa White and Naomi Henry), and more recently the Assistant Building Surveyor (Aaron Obee) at Central Beds Council about how to move this project forward.

Going forward – procedural matters

To enable the project to continue, for the release of S106 funds to be authorised, the S106 and play officers are now on board, and will work with the council to ensure that our proposed facility at Arlesey Road meets safety requirements and S106 descriptions.

It is proposed that Central Beds Council Assets (via Aaron Obee) will lead the project, which will consist of three parts – MUGA facility, play area, and separate space for outdoor fitness equipment, and S106 funding has been identified for these three aspects of the project.

A revised proposed layout would see a 12m x 24m play MUGA, with supporting paths and lighting. A play area primarily aimed at 10+ years will 'wrap around' the MUGA facility, with bunding (using excess soil from MUGA and play area excavations) and planting separating the play area and an area for outdoor fitness equipment (has to be 25m away from play equipment). It is proposed that the bunding area will include seating and planting and is suggested that Cliff Andrews of BRCC is involved in planning and planting of these areas. S106 funds will not support soft landscaping, and so additional funding from the Town Council will be required if no other funding source can be identified.

Naomi Henry will work with the Clerk on determining the shape of a tender brief for the play element of the project, with Aaron Obee producing a brief for the MUGA, footpaths and lighting. The draft tender documents will be provided to council to agree before being issued. The tender will be split into 'lots', enabling companies to bid for one or more 'lots'. This can sometimes produce a better bid and bring better value for money. It is envisaged that 'lots' will be: MUGA (open, play type, with fencing at goal ends), fitness equipment area, interactive ball wall, an interactive arch, play area to include swinging, multi-unit, rotating and dynamic equipment). All items being tendered are to be innovative and modern, to meet our previously identified aims. A small group of councillors, plus Naomi Henry will score the tenders and award the successful contracts on behalf of the Town Council. Importance is placed on the quality of play equipment and their play value, together with best value. Weighting for scoring of received tenders will be 30% finance, 60% quality and 10% presentation – applicable to top three from evaluation of quality and finance.

As the project is being led by Central Beds Council, the tender process and procurement will go via their online procurement portal.

RESOLVED

- i) that the Clerk is authorised to continue discussions with the S106 play and assets teams at Central Beds Council to progress the project to draft tender brief stage.
- ii) that Councillors Cooper, Collier, Hayes and Saunders will form a Task and Finish Group with delegated decision-making power to respond to specification details in the production of the tender document, to respond to queries and make decisions on finer detail during tender process, and to join the S106 Play Officer in the tender scoring stage.

92/20 PUBLIC TOILETS

As per request at the last meeting, members considered re-opening the public toilets in the town – Brook Street/High Street and Arlesey Road car park. With the current second lockdown now in place, consideration is to be given to risk in re-opening and mitigating measures to be taken.

Identified people at risk and mitigating measures for consideration:

Those at risk: general public, contractors

Mitigating measures: notices regarding social distancing and hand washing to be displayed. Hot water and soap available for hand washing. Toilets to be cleaned by Handyman Contractor daily, first thing in the morning, and again at mid-day. Notices to be displayed to advise twice a day cleaning only. Should the toilets be abused, they will be locked, and re-opening will be reassessed. Notices to be displayed to this effect. Surfaces to be cleaned using an approved disinfectant. Handyman Contractor to provide own PPE.

There may be an additional cost in terms of the Handyman Contractor's hours to increase cleaning from once a day to twice daily. The Handyman's contract currently requires him to clean both toilet facilities once a day, Monday to Friday.

Discussions were held over access to the toilets – the High Street toilets are on a timed locking system, so are not open 24/7, however the toilets in the Arlesey Road car park are locked by key and so require opening times and manpower to be identified.

RESOLVED that

- i) the public toilets on the High Street are re-opened, with the mitigation measures identified above.
- ii) the public toilets in the Arlesey Road car park are not re-opened during the pandemic period, as they are isolated with few visits to the area, particularly whilst the football club is closed, and manpower will need to be provided. Once the Junior Football Club returns to playing on the Arlesey Road recreation ground, they will be advised that the public toilets are closed for the pandemic period, and suggest that they open the community use changing rooms for toilet use only.

In terms of future use of the Arlesey Road car park toilets once the pandemic period is over, it was:

FURTHER RESOLVED that investigations are made into adding timed locks on the Arlesey Road toilet facility for use after the pandemic period.

93/20 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES, RELEVANT TO THIS COMMITTEE ONLY

A resident has written to thank the council for the removal of the bus stop and sign post at The Green, and has asked for overgrown shrubs to be cut back on the footpath around the corner of the Green in that area as they currently restrict access. This will be forwarded to the Landscape Contractor to action.

In Fen End, a Willow tree located close to the footway is very overgrown and means pedestrians have to walk out into the road. It is not clear who the tree belongs to; investigations will be made, and a letter sent to the householder if appropriate.

A query was raised about why a recent planning application for pollarding work on a Walnut tree in Brayes Manor was refused. The Clerk will find out the reason for the refusal and will circulate to members.

Thanks were given to the street lighting contractor for fixing the light outside no. 16 Coppice Mead, as it had been flickering for some time.

Central Beds Highways will be asked to switch on the newly replaced streetlight at the High Street end of Grange Drive, and to return the Christmas lights fixing bracket which was removed with the damaged column.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 8.20pm

MINUTES APPROVED (date):

SIGNED BY CHAIRMAN: