

**Minutes of the meeting of the
PARKS, OPEN SPACES, CONSERVATION & FOOTPATHS COMMITTEE
held on Thursday 15th October 2020 at 1:30pm
using the online Zoom meeting platform**

Cllrs present: R Gardner, Ms A Rees-Jones, S May, R Patient, Mrs N Shaw, M Strubel & Mrs M Weir.

1. To elect a Chairman for the civic year 2020-21:

Cllr R Patient nominated Cllr S May as Chairman which was seconded by Cllr Ms A Rees-Jones. There were no further nominations and Cllr S May was unanimously elected Chairman.

2. To elect a Vice-Chairman for the civic year 2020-21:

Cllr R Patient nominated Cllr Ms M Weir as Vice Chairman which was seconded by Cllr S May. There were no further nominations and Cllr Ms M Weir was unanimously elected Vice Chairman.

3. Apologies for non-attendance at meeting:

Apologies were received from Cllr T Manyika.

4. Declarations of any:

- a) Disclosable Pecuniary Interest;
- b) Other Pecuniary Interest; or
- c) Non-Pecuniary Interest

on any matter on the agenda for 15th October 2020:

No declarations were made relating to a), b) and/or c). Members also made no declarations relating to any change in their Register of Members' Interests.

5. Public Forum:

No members of the public were present.

6. To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 9th March 2020 and to approve the destruction of the notes in respect of that meeting:

The Minutes of the meeting were **approved** as a correct record and Members approved the destruction of the notes in respect of that meeting.

7. Action List Update – October 2020:

- 7.1 Members noted there was a budget provision in the Earmarked Reserves (EMR) for the wall in Elizabeth Close but there had been no change in the condition of the wall.
- 7.2 There had been no updates regarding the approach from KeyMed. Stillwater Management undertook silt remediation works prior to lockdown and was due to carry out further treatment and clearance works in the coming weeks.
- 7.3 Rochford District Council (RDC) had been appointed to carry out the Tree Surveys; only a few low priority items remained, primarily in Glencroft Open Space.

- 7.4 RDC may apply for a Right of Easement over the land at the White Hart Lane entrance of Glencroft Open Space but it was not seen to be a priority unless issues would arise with the landowner. Members noted the item would be kept under review. The Clerk further updated Members that the 'den' which had appeared over the summer and had attracted some Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) had since disappeared and the area had been cleared. Members noted that the same landowner was responsible for the area where the den had been.
- 7.5 The new Rocking Horse had been installed in Magnolia Park Playground following the arson attack on an existing piece. The new safety surface around the swings had also been laid. Members agreed to close the item.
- 7.6 The Clerk had arranged for the boggy area by the pond in Magnolia Nature Reserve to be assessed by a contractor. The Clerk reported that the contractor had found the drainage pipe was blocked and had since cleared it. Chippings had also been laid and more would be laid if required.
- 7.7 The matter of resurrecting 'Friends of Magnolia' had been referred to the Community Engagement Working Group (CEWG). The group would now be looking at all parks and open spaces ('Friends of Hawkwell Parks'). It had been agreed an item be placed in the Newsletter to gauge interest from residents before further consideration from the CEWG. Cllr Mrs M Weir informed Members risk assessment had been set up historically and that she was aware of a lot of people who were keen to assist.
- 7.8 The Annual Playground Inspections for 2019-20 had been carried out in July 2019 and minor fire damage had been reported on a rope of the Multi-Play equipment in Elizabeth Close playground. On closer inspection the damage was minimal, and no action was required. The Annual Inspections for 2020-21 would be carried out in November 2020.

Members noted and **accepted** the Action Update List and **agreed** to the removal of the closed items.

8. Financial Report – September 2020:

The Clerk reported that at month six expenditure was at 41%. There had been some emergency works on a willow tree in Magnolia Nature Reserve which were due to be paid for, along with the pond treatment works which would soon be carried out and therefore the budget was on track.

There were no questions and Members **accepted** the Financial Report.

9. Summary of Park Works and Activities undertaken since lockdown at end of March 2020:

Members were pleased that works had been managed so well during lockdown. Cllr Mrs Mr Weir updated Members about her litter collecting work which had continued throughout lockdown. Particular attention had been paid to the bridlepath in Magnolia Nature Reserve where the badger had caused a high level of littering by digging out old bottles onto the path. Bottles now lay on top of the badger sett and it was difficult to access them. The Clerk pointed out that as the litter was on the actual sett it was advisable to leave it so not to disturb or cause any possible harm to the habitat and/or badger(s).

10. Report on Parks Equipment: Consideration of redundant items for disposal and new/replacement equipment required:

Cllr R Patient praised the work of the regular contractor and felt it was sensible to review the equipment. Chairman S May ran through the equipment proposed for disposal as laid out in a report prepared by the Clerk. Cllr Ms A Rees-Jones enquired if there were any ideas of costs for what the old equipment would be worth. The Clerk informed Members that a price of around £4.5k for the old chipper and flail arm had been suggested but that more conversations needed to take place. The Clerk explained that Council had previously traded in an old cutting deck with success. The Clerk also explained that there was several options with regard to the purchase of a new chipper, noting that a PTO (Power Take Off) option would be run via the tractor, be self-feeding but be considerably cheaper (approx. £3k starting price) than a motor powered, towable chipper (approx. £13k-£14k).

Members **agreed** by majority that the Clerk carry out further investigations on the costings of the proposed new equipment and that a decision would be made based on the information obtained.

11. Correspondence from residents:

a) Consideration of memorial bench for local resident in Magnolia Park (Crowd funding money available):

Members noted that the proposed bench was for a Hawkwell resident who had extensively visited Magnolia Park for 17 years.

Members gave their condolences for the loss of the resident and discussed the request. Members felt there was already enough benches in the Park grounds and noted that adding another bench would make the ground maintenance works more difficult. Concerns were raised about the potential vandalism issues if a bench were to be installed, noting the history of how benches had been targeted over the years and burned. Members also discussed historic decisions in relation to memorials; it was Council's policy not to permit any new memorials and have the open spaces and parks as memorial grounds.

Members agreed by majority that the request for a memorial bench to be sited in Magnolia Park be **declined**.

b) Consideration of resident request to plant Bluebells in Spencers Park:

Members felt that Bluebells would add colour to the Park and would look lovely but also raised concerns. Cllr R Gardner enquired if the Bluebells in question were native to the UK and noted that adding non-native Bluebell bulbs could be harmful. The Clerk noted that some Bluebells were poisonous to dogs and foxes. Furthermore, Members noted that the request was a memorial request and that Council's policy was to not permit memorial requests so not to turn its parks and open spaces into memorial grounds.

Members agreed to by majority that the request to plant Bluebells in Spencers Park be **declined**.

c) Consideration of a new litter bin near the BMX area of Magnolia Nature Reserve:

Members noted that a young resident had cleared the BMX area of litter and were very thankful. Cllr Mrs M Weir regularly carried out litter picks of the area and reported that littering was sporadic. She felt that an additional bin would likely not be used in the correct way. The Clerk reminded Members that an additional bin would also mean additional emptying costs to Council. Members discussed the possibility of a 'no littering' sign but felt it would not be very effective. Members noted that this had been the first complaint received and agreed it would be prudent to monitor the area before making a decision on whether to install a litter bin.

d) Consideration of an offer to plant two small Chestnut trees in HPC's parks:

Members discussed the offer of two small Chestnut trees and **agreed** to accept the offer of the trees. Members felt Glencroft Open Space was the best location for the trees. The Clerk would liaise with the regular contractor about the best place to plant the Chestnut trees.

12. Notification from RDC of a new Tree Preservation Order (TPO) at Land rear of 171-185 Rectory Avenue:

Members noted the information. The Clerk informed Members the office had taken calls from lots of upset residents who were aware of alleged illegal tree felling on the land.

13. Request by District Cllr J Gooding to consider supporting funding for a 'Talking Bench':

Members thought it was important to strike a balance between having a bench as a place where people may be able to speak to someone for their mental health and just having a bench to sit on without the need for contact; Members felt that it was not possible to strike that balance and also felt the parks and/or open spaces were not the right areas for such a bench. Concerns were also raised about the potential dangers of allowing such an initiative with people misusing its purpose. Members agreed unanimously that consideration to support funding for a 'Talking Bench' be **declined**.

14. Summary of Decisions:

- Cllr S May elected Chairman for 2020-21.
- Cllr Mrs M Weir elected Vice Chairman for 2020-21.
- Clerk to carry out further investigations on costings for new machinery.
- Request for a memorial bench in Magnolia Park declined.
- Request for Bluebells to be planted in Spencers Park declined.
- Clerk to monitor BMX area of Magnolia Nature Reserve regarding littering levels.
- Offer of two Chestnut trees accepted; to be planted in Glencroft Open Space.
- Request to support funding for a 'Talking Bench' declined.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 2:22pm.

Chairman