

Recreation and Amenities Committee 2014-15 Report for the Annual Town Meeting – 09.04.15

As ever, we began the Civic year with an election for Chair and vice-chair of the Committee; Cllr Wood was elected Chair for the Municipal year. Cllr David Clenshaw was elected Vice Chair.

We then went through the Terms and condition for each sub-committee and group which reports to R_A – they are Mill Meadows and River, Christmas Decorations and Events, Britain in Bloom and Civic Pride and the Makins Wheeled Sports Facility (Skate park) Working Group .

The R+A Committee is responsible for matters concerning the following: Mill Meadows, Marsh Meadows, Mill Meadows Car Park, Outside Contracts, Jubilee Park, Leichlingen Pavilion, Allotments, Cemetery, Henley-in-Bloom, Moorings, River and Rowing Museum, Sports Clubs AND any other matter of a non-strategic nature relating to the Recreation and amenities of the Town.

We were concerned to hear in June from the chair of the MWSFWG that due to having to wait for a Noise Impact Assessment the application for Planning had been held up which in turn meant that an application for a CCG Grant from SODC could not be made in the 2014 round and would have to be made in 2015.

We were pleased to hear that the eagerly awaited opening of the new and magical Toddler's Playground was due to take place @ 19th July and the opening of the newly refurbished lavatories with a specially adapted changing room for disabled people of all ages, were due to re-open @23rd of June.

We noted the proposed dedication of a public footpath around 40 acre field, by HTC (with the approval of the Tenant) and adjoining Landowners Mr and Mrs Emanuel. Such a dedication is rare; the footpath will be a considerable asset to the Town. (The footpath was dedicated and opened to the public on November 8th2014)

The Committee voted £750 towards the cost of a Bat Survey recommended by the Henley Wildlife Group who would raise the £250 balance of the cost. In July we noted the allotment rents were not due to be raised until 2016. That herbicides used by the Parks staff were applied only twice per year, were in line with EC regulations and should not have any adverse effect on the bee population. Talks were ongoing with SOHA regarding the Makins recreation Ground Pram Walk and future use of the former garage site.

We were advised by the Town Clerk that due to the flooding; Riverbank repairs had been re-scheduled to start imminently along with sheet-piling works at both Mill and Marsh Meadows.

We recommended that Henley Town Football Club be given permission to cone-off parking spaces in the Marsh Meadow Car Park 1pm-5pm on match day from August 2014-April2015. The Club were to held responsible for the removal f the cones on each separate occasion.

After receiving a report regarding the purchase of Outdoor Gym Equipment; members discussed the idea, where the equipment should be placed etc; a Working Group was formed to work on the project and report back to the Committee.

Permission was granted to Nomad to hold a Family Fun Day at Freemans Meadow which would have attractions supplied by a professional company, face painting etc, there would be a football tournament and a barbecue, Officers from SOHA would be in attendance to join in and to answer queries from their tenants. A similar Fun Day was organised by SOHA at Makins Recreation Ground; the Committee agreed these were very positive Community Events and gladly gave permission for use of both Recreation Grounds.

In September were asked to take part in a Limited Trial Approach to help OCC categorise public footpaths; Members decided to decline the invitation at that point but if assurance was forthcoming on the way high AND low priority paths would be managed, at that point they may re-consider the invitation.

We were asked to consider a request from the organisers of a Multi- sports weekend using Mill Meadows as the HQ for a 3 day event in August. Naturally, after the negative experience of the Triathlon held for 2 years running which had caused severe Road Closures, affected businesses in+ around the area members were very cautious and questioned the Organisers very closely about the whole event. We were advised the idea was that participants would be challenging themselves rather than competing against one another in swimming, running and cycling – one event each day; would it be a commercial event etc. The organiser Jeremy Laming, a Henley resident assured us he would not want the event to inhibit trade in the Town, rather to enhance it, bringing extra visitors to the town – the competitors and their families/ supporters etc . With so much to be discussed, a Working Group was formed to further discuss all aspects of the weekend, especially the proposed dates.

The budget was noted and discussions took place on items which the Committee might want to include in the R+A budget for 2015/16 which included costs for Dredging on the Slipway area at New Street, Replacement of Floodlights at Jubilee Park, Rainwater capture at Leichlingen Pavilion, Bath site Parking Area repairs, new fencing at Makins recreation ground and the cost of including additional information on Public Footpath signs. Obviously all of the above would not be possible but we appealed to the HTC Accountant for help with prioritising our 'wish list'.

We heard with disbelief that OCC were going to reduce the amount paid to HTC to cut grass around the town on their behalf by 50%! In 2015-16 to help balance THEIR books. Members had to consider whether we should maintain the amount of cuts per year to keep the town looking tidy with HTC funding the shortfall BUT the Parks Manager should assess the situation each year.

Dog Fouling has become an even worse nuisance in the town, especially at Makins recreation ground. Extra signage was thought to be ineffectual, banning dogs from certain areas needs a byelaw therefore it was decided that PCSOs should monitor the situation of dog fouling at Makins as they have powers under SODC's byelaws.

HENLEY in BLOOM won a GOLD award in the Thames and Chilterns in Bloom competition and a SILVER GILT in the national Britain in Bloom Competition. Henley is one of only 71 bloom groups out of 3600 nationally to be nominated to take part in the Britain in Bloom Campaign next year.

The Multi-sports weekend was re-named the Henley Highwayman and members were told how very helpful the organisers were being, it was decided that future notes of meetings with the Henley Highwayman Organisers be taken to Town and Community Committee as the races were now likely to be started in the Square, however should the use of Mill Meadows be required all such requests would come back to the R+A committee for consideration.

Fierce discussion took place over the decision to increase the charges for car parking and mooring fees at Mill Meadows.

The Chair and a couple of members voted to increase the charges only at weekends when it was thought the Carpark was used by visitors mainly whereas Local residents used it in the week. Unfortunately when Committees recommendations were brought to full Council; the majority voted to increase **all** charges and fees from 2015.

More Budget discussions took place.

At the meeting in October 2014 some of the old equipment at the Skate Park was deemed to be no longer fit for purpose and was disposed of.

The Environment Agency were informed of the works required to dredge the river at the Marsh Lock end of Mill Meadows whilst the Town and Community Committee would investigate the possibility of dredging at the New St. Slipway.

The Gainsborough Residents Group carried out a survey on what improvements Residents would like to see at Makins Recreation Ground and presented the Feedback; one thing they would like to see is an outdoor Table Tennis facility for which the Association would be willing to pay part as they felt the installation of such a facility would help prevent anti-social behaviour.

The Committee considered a report from the Berkshire College of Agriculture regarding how the College and the HTC Parks Dept. could work together for their mutual benefit. Members embraced the idea and congratulated the Council staff on their enthusiasm and vision in finding new ways to work with other Organisations.

Members were asked to consider Fairmile Cemetery Charges which were due to be increased from January 2015. There are different charges for Residents and non-Residents and where in the cemetery the body will be interred, etc. etc. the rise in charges was between £5 and £10 per fee.

January: During Public Participation; a Resident congratulated the Henley in Bloom Committee on investigating ways to reduce air pollution in the town by planting Silver Birch trees in and around the worst affected areas. He confirmed Trials using \Silver \birch trees had taken place in other towns and had proven to be successful.

The Outdoor Gym Working Group recommended, after visiting many such gyms in the area, that the location for a gym at Henley should be the located at the Putting Green in Mill Meadows; the proposal was thoroughly discussed at Mill Meadows Committee , at R+A and at Full Council. Members were, in the main, against the Putting Green as a location and grouping the equipment together rather than along a trail was not greeted positively either. The working Group were asked to re-consider their options.

After a very long debate, HTC recommended allocating £1900.00 from the Recreational Improvements budget towards installing a concrete table tennis table at Makins Recreation Ground, the remaining third of the cost, £900 to be funded by the Gainsborough Residents Group. However it was felt that a holistic view of the leisure facilities at all the recreational areas owned by the Town Council rather than a piecemeal approach. All Councillors will be asked to offer their views on improvements at all the recreational areas. The wooden play equipment at Makins has been removed by the Parks Manager who felt it was no longer fit for purpose.

A Plaque to honour Humphrey Gainsborough has been researched and designed by Mrs Vivienne Greenwood - a clever local artist- and will act as an information board about the great man which will be placed at the entrance to the Gainsborough Estate . The cost of the plaque was covered by donations from different sources but HTC will take on the ownership.

Moorings - Members considered a report regarding the principle of altering the manner in which the moorings are currently administered and charged. Members insisted that 3 of the moorings (2 at White Hart and 1 at River Terrace) were left in public use and felt an FOC 3 hour maximum stay was appropriate. A very long debate ensued on the idea of introducing an annual charge to boat owners which would include lifting and storing over winter their boat, local companies would be asked to tender for the contract to carry out the work and for letting the moorings. It would save HTC the worry of letting every mooring. Many of us were reluctant to outsource the moorings and worried that our loyal Moorers would be unhappy with the idea, we wanted to debate further but unfortunately a decision had to be taken in haste as a contract would have to be in place at the start of the season – April 1st. Reluctantly we agreed but only on the proviso that the contract had a break clause after 3 years, thus if our Moorers were not happy with the way the moorings were being organised then we would use the break clause in 2018 to end the contract. So far all is going well with the contract having been won by Hobbs of Henley who began work April 1st 2015.

During all the above meetings the R+A committee discussed and noted reports from all the sub groups and sub committees named at the beginning of this report which I hope has illustrated some of the interesting and varied items discussed and acted upon by the Recreation and Amenities Committee at Henley Town Council for the current Municipal year – we still have one more meeting which will be the very last meeting in the Civic cycle before the final Full Council on May 5th 2015.

Cllr Jeni Wood

Chair- Recreation and Amenities Committee. Henley-on-Thames Town Council