

Present: The Chairman, Councillor Mrs J Wood, Deputy Mayor
Councillor M Akehurst, Mayor
Councillor Mrs J Bland
Councillor D Clenshaw
Councillor S Gawrysiak
Councillor Miss K Hinton
Councillor D Nimmo Smith
Councillor I Reissmann

In attendance: Mr M Kennedy – Town Clerk
Mrs B Walker – Committee Administrator/Minute Taker

Also Present: 1 member of the press
2 member of the public

23. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the Councillor Miss S Evans (Councillor D Nimmo Smith substituting) and Councillor D Silvester.

24. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

None received.

25. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION

Mr David Parry, Greys Road – Minute 26 – Public Rights of Way.

Mr Parry, speaking on behalf of the Open Spaces Society and Chiltern Society asked what the Highway Authority (Oxfordshire County Council - OCC) intend to do, over and above, their statutory obligation in terms of managing public footpaths. He commented that a large number of people in Henley would, for instance, not know how to walk to Greys Court by footpath and more should be done to help people to use the countryside. Mr Parry acknowledged OCC and the Chiltern Society waymark footpaths.

The Chairman advised Henley Town Council could not answer for Oxfordshire County Council on this matter and further discussion would take place under this item on the agenda.

26. VARIATION TO ORDER OF BUSINESS

In accordance with the Standing Orders 5 (a) (viii), it was **RESOLVED**

that in view of the member of the public present the Order of Business on the agenda is altered to allow Item 9 – Public Rights of Way – Limited Trial Approach to Categorising paths to be considered next

27. PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY – LIMITED TRIAL APPROACH TO CATEGORISING PATHS

Members received and considered a letter from OCC – Country Access department and were asked to consider taking part in a limited trial approach to categorising paths. Local communities are asked to identify key routes that locals and visitors use, in order to focus efforts on higher priority issues, and to meet community needs.

A letter from the Open Spaces Society (OSS) with their views on the request was tabled as additional information along with a reply from OCC. The OSS expressed concern that what may seem like a simple request to prioritise paths may lead to less expenditure on less well used paths and, in time, all paths. OCC responded and made the assurance that this project is not to do with reducing statutory protection of some public rights of way but a way of identifying whether what OCC think are the more well used paths are the same as the communities think. It was also reiterated that this project is over a limited number of map extracts and not the whole county.

During discussion both points of view were acknowledged eg that to categorise paths could lead to better management of limited resources however this could also lead to less well used paths getting a lower priority. Members agreed to undertake the categorising of paths would be a major undertaking, it would take a considerable amount of time and noted a response was requested in September, which would make the task unworkable.

Councillor Nimmo Smith, as a County (and Town) Councillor offered, to feedback the comments made by the Committee to the officer concerned at OCC.

After further discussion it was **RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND**

that the Town Council does not participate in the trial categorisation of paths at this stage, however if reassurance could be given on the way low and high priority paths would be managed and a longer timescale to process the request, then the Town Council would welcome a further approach in the future

28. MULTI-SPORTS WEEKEND – HENLEY HIGHWAYMAN

Members received and considered a request from the organisers of the Multi-Sports Weekend (the Henley Highwayman) to use Mill Meadows as a headquarters for a 3 day sporting event in August 2015 and also for the start/finish of the swimming event. The Chairman invited Mr Jeremy Laming, one of the organisers, to the table.

Mr Laming, a Henley resident, introduced himself and explained he is a keep-fit enthusiast who already has experience of running sporting events in Henley as a co-founder of the Henley Swim which organises open water swimming events such as Pub to Club swim, the Bridge to Bridge Swim and the Classic Swim along the Regatta course.

Mr Laming gave an overview of the proposed event, in addition to his written report, and made the following comments regarding the event:-

- it contains the 3 elements of a triathlon (swimming, cycling and running) however participants can choose the distance they undertake.
- It is based on the sportif system whereby each individual is timed therefore participants are encouraged to personally challenge themselves

- rather than competing against one another. Participants will be encouraged to compete each year and to improve their personal best
- each sporting event is being held on a different day (swimming on Friday, cycling on Saturday and running on Sunday). This will allow people of varying fitness to take part.
- families will be encouraged to take part with children and family events also forming part of the weekend.
- the event is an event for Henley in Henley and the organisers would want to work with the Town Council, surrounding Parish Councils, District and County Councils, residents and businesses to ensure a smooth running event with minimal disruption
- having learnt from feedback from the Challenge Henley Triathlon there would be no major road closures. The cycling would be based on a time trial system and cyclists would start in small groups eg 5 rather than in large groups so there would be no “bunching” of cyclists. The route, although not confirmed, would be of a “clover leaf” structure meaning participants are always within a certain distance of safety and help stations. There maybe some short term, rolling road closures.

Members were invited to ask questions and the following points were made:-

- although the date for the event has not been confirmed, the August Bank Holiday is being considered. It was felt this was a very busy time for Henley in general, retailers and particularly Mill Meadows and therefore may not be a suitable time for this event.

Mr Laming assured members one of the goals of this event is not to inhibit or prevent trade but to enhance it and members comments would be taken into account

- the increase in trade for shops, hotels, restaurants and cafes was questioned particularly when people bring their own refreshments and create increased litter problems etc.

Mr Laming hoped to be able to prove the increased trade for hotels and restaurants which the event would bring in by offering “point of sale” deals eg by negotiating with local hotels and restaurants and making special offers available for participants which could be booked through the Event’s website

- what other areas of the town would be used?

Mr Laming would seek advice from the Town Council regarding locations however it would be beneficial to have a “Tour de France” style start for the cycling in the centre of town. It was noted businesses in the Market Place have licences to use this area therefore this may not be possible.

- would Mr Laming be asking for free use of Mill Meadows?

Mr Laming explained, although this event is a commercial event, it is unlikely to make any money in the first 2 or 3 years, therefore free use of Mill Meadows would be sought.

The Chairman thanked Mr Laming for his participation and he left the table.

Members discussed the proposal and acknowledged one year is not very long to organise such an event and a lot of details need to be clarified before permission could be given, therefore a Working Group should be set up to investigate further. Members noted this event would straddle two Committees – Recreation and Amenities for the use of Mill Meadows and Town and Community for the town centre elements.

After further discussion it was **RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND**

that a Working Group be set up to have further discussions with the organisers of the Multi Sports Weekend in order to clarify the details of the proposed event to enable the Town Council to decide whether to support the event and allow use of its land. The Working Group to report back to the Recreation and Amenities Committee although it was acknowledge certain aspects would need to be referred to the Town and Community Committee.

that the membership of the Working Group consist of the Chairman of the Recreation and Amenities Committee, Mrs J Wood, the Chairman of the Town and Community Committee, Councillor Mrs E Hodgkin, Councillor S Gawrysiak, Councillor Miss K Hinton and Councillor Mrs J Bland. All councillors be asked at Full Council if they would like to join the Working Group.

Councillor Mrs E Hodgkin and Mr J Laming left the meeting at 8.40 pm

29. MINUTES

- i. The minutes of the Recreation and Amenities Committee held on 15 July 2014 were approved and then signed by the Chairman, Councillor Mrs J Wood as a true record.
- ii. The Committee received and considered the minutes of the Christmas Decorations and Events Sub Committee held on 25 July 2014.

The Committee **RESOLVED**

that the minutes of the Christmas Decorations and Events Sub Committee held on 25 July 2014, be received, approved and adopted.

30. BUDGET

- i. The Committee received, considered and noted the management accounts to July 2014.
- ii. The Committee received and considered the report on preliminary 2015 – 16 budget considerations and made the following comments:-
 - **Dredging the River at Marsh Lock end of Mill Meadows** - it was suggested the Slipway at New Street be added as the water is very shallow here which restricts its use and it is the only public slipway in Henley. A member queried whether the dredging of the river is a matter for the Town Council. It was noted the Town and Community Committee are investigating this matter.
 - **Replacement of the floodlights at Jubilee Park** the Town Clerk confirmed in response to a question that the floodlights had been

installed at the same time as the original astro pitch (c. 1996) and their replacement was the landlord's (Town Council) responsibility.

Although the lights have been upgraded over the years they do have a limited life and budget consideration should be given regarding options for their replacement. Better/GLL are investigating possible funding opportunities eg from England Hockey and Sport England.

- **Rain Water Capture at Mill Meadows** – it was suggested a system of rain water capture from the Pavilion roof be budgeted for – the water could be used by the Parks Service for watering, etc. This could be combined with the proposed green/living wall on the Pavilion
- **Baths Site parking area repairs** – the need to repair this area was queried. The Town Clerk responded that the islanders on Rod Eyot, who lease parking spaces on the site, have made representation to the Town Council asking for repairs and improvements eg potholes and installation of movement sensor lighting particularly for winter time.
- **Makins Recreation Ground** – a member suggested the Town Council plan in the context of the Skatepark being built in 2015/16 and therefore related elements included on the Makins Progress Report eg new fencing etc should be considered for inclusion in the 2015 – 16 budgets and costs should be sought for the next cycle of meetings.
- **Adding additional information on the waymarking signs/finger signs for public rights of way** – it was suggested consideration should be given to include the ordnance survey reference, footpath number, where the path leads to and/or the distance to signage on signage of finger posts for public rights of way around Henley.

The prioritisation of the projects was considered and it was agreed members should give consideration to the ranking/importance of each project, including those included on the Makins Progress Report. It was suggested the Accountant be asked to advise a suitable method to enable this for the next cycle of meetings.

After further discussion the Committee **RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND**

that the report on preliminary budget considerations for 2015 – 16 be approved and the following items be added for further consideration; system for rain water capture on the Pavilion for use by the Parks Service; dredging of the Slipway area at New Street; items included on the Makins Progress Report eg new fencing etc and the cost of including additional information on footpath signage

that the accountant be asked to suggest a method of prioritising the projects for consideration in the 2015 – 16 budget for the next cycle of meetings to include safety aspects, support for the projects, costs etc

31. GRASSCUTTING – REDUCTION IN GRANT 2015 – 16

The Committee received a report outlining the intention by Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) to reduce the grass cutting grant paid to Henley Town Council by 50% in 2015 – 16.

Members noted under the current agreement (signed in 2007) the Town Council undertakes at least 5 cuts of OCC land (5 hectares of verges etc) between April and October on behalf of the County Council and 3 months' notice is required by either party to cancel the agreement. Since 2012, when the grass cutting was bought in-house, the Town Council agreed the grass should be cut at least 6 times a year and certain areas eg the Fairmile to be cut more often if deemed necessary with the Town Council funding the additional cuts.

The Park Services Manager has estimated it takes 2 staff 6 days to complete a full cut of all OCC designated areas. The accountant has estimated a total cost of at least £10,000 pa to cut OCC land including staff costs, petrol, maintenance and replacement of equipment etc. In 2014 – 15 the Town Council received £8,831 from OCC for the 5 cuts. A reduction in the grant by 50% will reduce the Town Council's income by £4,415 pa. To maintain the current level of grass cutting would therefore result in a short fall of around £5,600 (this represents £1 in Council Tax for a band D property).

Members were asked to either consider the following; to continue with the same number of cuts (at least 6) and fund the shortfall and if so to consider where the compensating income/saving would come from (eg increase the precept or cover the net cost); to continue the contract with OCC and cut the grass less often eg 2 – 3 times a year or to hand the contract back to OCC and the Town Council no longer cut the grass on their behalf.

Members discussed the options and made the following comments:-

- great disappointment was expressed at OCC cutting the grant
- Councillor Nimmo Smith spoke on behalf of OCC and explained that the central government grant to County Councils has been reduced each year and there is a cap on how much OCC can increase the precept by and therefore spending for core services has to be prioritised
- to reduce the grass cutting will not only leave the town looking unkempt and result in complaints from residents, it could also, in some areas, be unsafe eg on road junctions.
- reducing grass cutting is a false economy as it can lead to damage of infrastructure eg breaking up pavements, moving kerbstones etc
- reducing grass cutting would encourage wildlife
- certain areas could possibly be cut less often and could promote wildlife however there is the view by some that there is a thin line between conservation and neglect
- plants and trees help reduce pollution levels

After further discussion the Committee **RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND**

that the Town Council continue the contract with OCC and accept a reduced grant, but maintain the present number of cuts per year (6) and the Town Council fund the additional cuts.

that the Parks Manager assess the situation each year and identify which areas can be cut less frequently and which areas need to be cut more frequently in order to be aesthetically pleasing, ensure safety of motorists and pedestrians and to encourage wildlife

Councillor D Nimmo Smith left the meeting at 9.30 pm.

32. PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received and considered the progress report including items concerning Makins Recreation Ground. A member asked if dogs could be banned from Makins Recreation Ground as dog fouling is a problem. The Town Clerk advised banning dogs would require a byelaw. Members considered additional signage however it was felt it would be ineffectual. It was suggested the PCSOs be informed of the dog fouling issues at Makins and be asked to monitor the situation as they do have powers under SODC's byelaws.

The Committee **RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND**

that the progress report be noted.

33. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

It was moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED**

that the public and the press be excluded from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 as matters which were about to be discussed would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

MINUTES OF THE CONFIDENTIAL SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE RECREATION AND AMENITIES COMMITTEE HELD ON 9 SEPTEMBER 2014.

34. CONFIDENTIAL

MILL MEADOWS TOILETS – FINAL ACCOUNT

The Committee received and considered a report by the Accountant, Mrs L Jones, which advised members of a potential overspend of £13.4 k against budget on the refurbishment of the public toilets at the Leichlingen Pavilion. A report was also tabled which was prepared by appointed architects (Robert Rigby Architects - RRA) based on the final account received from the appointed building contractors (Wells Builders - WB) and following meetings held with WB and the Toilet Refurbishment Working Group (TRWG).

The two reports identified reasons for the project coming in over budget and broke down the costs into the following categories; unforeseen contingency items, architects design variations, client variations and extension of time due to variations.

Members were concerned at the overspend and were assured that the negotiations are continuing between the TRWG, RRA and WB in the hope that the final figure is reduced and the final amount is fully justified.

The Committee acknowledged, under the terms of the contract, the payment is now due and therefore, in order to enable the amount to be paid, once the final amount is agreed, the amount of £13.4k should be recommended for approval by this Committee in order that the expenditure can be ratified at Full Council on 23 September 2014.

After discussion the Committee **RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND**

that the overspend of £13.4k on the refurbishment of the toilets at the Leichlingen Pavilion be approved in principle to allow completion of this project at the earliest opportunity on the understanding that negotiations continue with the appointed architects and building contractors to try and reduce the overspend and justify the amounts. The £13.4k to be vired from the General Fund balance.

The meeting ended at 10.02 pm

Chairman

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