

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HALL, MARKET PLACE, NEWBURY
ON MONDAY 11 DECEMBER 2023 AT 7.30PM**

PRESENT

Councillors: Vera Barnett, Alistair Bounds, Jayne French-Drayton (Deputy Chairperson), Nigel Foot, Roger Hunneman, Ian Jee, Vaughan Miller (Chairperson), Sarah Slack and Martha Vickers.

In Attendance

Martin Kavanagh, Services Delivery Manager
Caroline Edmunds, Community Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Cllr David Marsh.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS

The Services Delivery Manager declared that Councillors Nigel Foot and Martha Vickers are also Members of West Berkshire Council, which is declared as a general interest on their behalf and a dispensation is in place to allow them to partake in discussions relating to West Berkshire Council business.

3. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

PROPOSED: Councillor Vaughan Miller

SECONDED: Councillor Martha Vickers

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Community Services Committee held on 18 September 2023 are approved and signed by the Chairperson.

Cllr Alistair Bounds joined the meeting at 7.32pm

4. QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Question from Mr Simon Kirby

I'm pleased that your officers are recommending to freeze allotment rents at their present rate of 45p/m² which is £112.50 for a full plot for the 2024/25 growing season pending what your chair has said will be a full review of the benchmark analysis of rents by spring next year.

You are recommending a 6.7% increase to 48p/m² which is £120 for a full plot for the

2025/26 season, but I am confident when you see how rents in Newbury are between two and three times the going rate that you will want to cancel that increase too and halve the cost of an allotment in Newbury to something more comparable with the full-plot cost of £44 charged by a typical parish council such as Pangbourne or the £60 charged by a typical town council such as Fylde.

I note that you report in the minutes of the recent stewards meeting how "It was agreed that our rates are reasonable and much lower than some other Parishes", and it is important to note that this assertion is not supported by the evidence. In point of fact all of the 49 parish councils sampled at random in the comprehensive benchmark analysis charge less than Newbury. It would have been helpful if you had invited me to present the benchmark analysis to the stewards meeting as I had sent it to your chair a fortnight previously, but as you will now be considering the evidence of that analysis after setting the 2025/26 rate this evening I trust that you will accept the recommendation of your officers to forgo the planned 10% increase for the coming growing season and then review the rate for the 2025/26 growing season and onwards in light of that benchmark analysis.

Chairperson responded:

Thank you for presenting this and bringing to our attention. There has been a misunderstanding with the published numbers on the Agenda tonight. The numbers were incorrect and did not take into account the meeting in December 2022. We will be covering the Allotment Charges later in the Agenda.

All allotment tenants would have already been informed of the previously agreed charges for 2024/25 which is 49.5pence per square metre.

Supplementary Question:

Mr Kirby: "You were all under the impression that the rate for next year was going to be 45p per square metre. Can I suggest that you consider cancelling the 10% increase for next year?"

Chairperson: We will get back to you on your benchmarking response that you provided, and we will be discussing the allotment rents later in the Agenda.

5. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

Question from Councillor Andy Moore

Ref: Anti -Social Behaviour at City Recreation Ground.

Table / Benches in City Recreation Ground

Councillors for West Fields Ward, which includes City Recreation Ground, have received representations and complaints from residents of Rectory Close about anti-social behaviour (ASB). On fine nights in particular, groups have gathered around the table/benches near the playground and have brought music players along. Loud voices and music until the early hours has disturbed the sleep of residents whose properties back on to the Recreation Ground. Last summer was at least the third time that this has happened; the residents associate it with the placement of the table/benches during the refurbishment in early 2021.

The issue has been regularly discussed at the Newbury SW Community Forum. Warning notices about ASB have been posted, and police / PCSOs have promised to look into it; phone numbers have been shared so that residents can alert the police when the ASB is happening. The police, who accept their responsibility, comment that it is almost impossible to take action given the unpredictability of occurrence, due to their resources and the open nature of the Recreation Ground.

Very reluctantly, since they are such a benefit to those monitoring children on the playground and more generally, I have concluded that we should ask for the table/benches to be removed for the forthcoming "summer" season to test whether it discourages the ASB.

Question(s)

Will the Community Services Committee:

- a. Recognise the situation described above and empathise with the residents?
- b. Agree to the removal of the three table/benches in City Recreation Ground between 1 April and 30 September 2024 (or near convenient dates)?
- c. Agree to the placement of a prominent sign explaining the reason for the removal and appealing to the community to discourage anti-social behaviour?
- d. Ask the affected residents of Rectory Close to report the outcome of the temporary removal?
- e. Consider the outcome at its meeting in a year's time to determine a way forward?

Answer from the Chairperson:

Thank you, Andy, for bringing this question to the committee.

It is the case that we have had multiple vandalism incidents in the park and we fully empathise with the residents if they are getting occasional disturbance from some of the park users.

NPT have regular patrols of the area and residents have been advised to report every instance of disturbance to the police. This way we can build up a trend which can be used to inform future actions. There was only one report in the summer months this year, and a couple more subsequently.

Whilst having homes that back onto a park has many benefits, residents are inevitably subject to occasional disturbance by park users.

On the subject of the benches, they are very popular with parents while they monitor their children in the play area. They are also popular for other users for picnics, etc. and even for dog walkers who need to rest occasionally whilst walking their dogs. We have received some feedback from other residents of the close which would be very much against removal of the benches.

Our consideration is that removing the benches would significantly reduce the overall enjoyment of the park by most users and could actually result in the park losing its Green Flag status. Removing benches may only shift congregation to another part of the park, e.g. near the changing room building. We do not believe therefore that this is a viable solution.

Given all that, we can do the following:

- Initiate a multi-partner meeting to discuss the situation and produce recommendations to help improve the lived experience of residents as well as other users of the park.
- Encourage residents to report every instance of anti-social behaviour to the police using 101 or report via the TVP website if there are problems and keep a note of the crime reference number.
- NTC will also report all instances of vandalism we find during our weekly inspections and keep the crime reference number.
- Report back in our summer Community Services meeting in July on progress, inc. on the crime report numbers. We would request that residents submit their numbers to the council before this date.
- Finally, there is a consultation taking place on extending the PSPO in Newbury town centre. We would recommend that residents submit their responses requesting that the PSPO is extended to include City Park.

Question from Councillor Meg Thomas

“I have a couple of questions to be exact; both were raised by the same resident at the Wash Common Community Festival and judged by Vaughan to be valid.

1. There is a need for a bench on Elizabeth Ave about halfway up. This would allow those wishing to walk to town (good for health and climate, of course) to have a little rest and thus be more likely to ditch the car keys. Likewise for cyclists. There are plenty of grass verges.
2. The community orchard on Barn Crescent is under-utilized, or so it is felt. This is leading to apples rotting on the ground. Please could signage be improved?

I'm wondering if CIL money could be used here?”

Answer from Services Delivery Manager:

Elizabeth Avenue Bench

Costings for a bench at Elizabeth Avenue would be £1100 - £1300 including installation.

This is something we could consider for our budget for next year, but we need clarification as to whose responsibility this is. The land would be West Berkshire Council's.

Barn Crescent Signage

This question will be referred onto Growing Newbury Green as the Barn Crescent orchard is their project.

In the meantime, the Community Services team can prepare temporary signage.

6. SERVICES DELIVERY MANAGER'S REPORT

The contents of the Services Delivery Manager's Report were noted.

Victoria Park gym equipment – the Services Delivery Manager stated that it would currently cost around £20k to replace the gym equipment. If further legislation is passed with regard to new surfacing, this could be an additional £20k.

It was confirmed that the gym equipment is very well used by residents.

7. COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE 23/24 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Forwards Works Programme for 2023/24 was noted and Members were invited to raise any additional items for consideration for the next meeting.

PROPOSED: Cllr Vaughan Miller

SECONDED: Cllr Nigel Foot

RESOLVED: To change the meeting date for the next CS Meeting from 11 March to 8 April 2024.

8. REVIEW OF COMMUNITY SERVICES 2024/25 BUDGET

Energy Conservation Projects:

To agree to include the Shaw Cemetery Chapel project, to replace the gas bottle heaters for electric panel heaters and install roof solar panels. Estimated budget £9,000.

Football pitch improvements and open spaces /GM Contract:

Agree to put forward £35k increase to the GM Contract budget which will include football pitch improvements and more frequent mowing (two weekly) of parks as well as football pitches at City Rec, Wash Common and Victoria Park.

Playgrounds Upgrading:

Agree to put forward to allocate to reserves of £50k per annum from the precept to manage the costs of upgrading our playgrounds on a regular basis.

Boules in Victoria Park:

Not going to consider as part of the budget for next year but we do have a possible donation which we will consider when appropriate.

Victoria & Her Lions:

Agree Defer to consider for 2025/26 budget.

It was suggested that a WBC Members BID could be applied for, and also placed on The Good Exchange to raise funds, similar to the Bandstand project.

Floral Displays:

Defer to consider for 2025/26 budget.

Newbury in Bloom:

Agree to continue with Newbury in Bloom but defer any proposed entry into Britain in Bloom.

Allotments:

Agree to continue ongoing investigations into the drainage at Wash Common. The Community Services Team will come back to this Committee with further information and proposals.

Wharf Toilets:

Agree to introduce contactless payment for the Wharf Toilets, budget estimated of £2,600 for this to go ahead.

Canal Corridor:

Defer to the Green Spaces Working Group when they next meet and come back to this Committee with detailed proposals.

PROPOSED: Cllr Vaughan Miller

SECONDED: Cllr Ian Gee

RESOLVED: To present the Budget provision for 2024/25 including recommendations detailed above to the Policy & Resources Committee on 15 January 2024.

9. SERVICES REVENUES FOR 2024/25 FINANCIAL YEAR

PROPOSED: Cllr Vaughan Miller

SECONDED: Cllr Nigel Foot

AGAINST: Cllr Roger Hunneman

RESOLVED: To approve the Football pitches to be charged as listed below from 2024/25:

£75 for adult games

£25 for full pitch or two 5 a side pitch

£15 for single small pitch 7 a side pitch

PROPOSED: Cllr Vaughan Miller

SECONDED: Cllr Martha Vickers

RESOLVED: To present to the P & R Committee on 15 January 2024 and the proposal for the 2025/26 Allotments charges to increase from 49.5p per sq. metre to 52p (rounded) per sq. metre (6.3% increase in line with other Services increases).

It was requested that the benchmark analysis response is distributed to the committee before the P & R Committee on 15th January.

PROPOSED: Cllr Vaughan Miller

SECONDED: Cllr Martha Vickers

RESOLVED: To approve the 6.3% increase for Cemetery and Market Charges as detailed in the Appendix.

All resolutions need to be brought to the P & R Committee Meeting for approval on 15 January 2024.

10. VICTORIA PARK CAFÉ PROJECT

To note: The Services Delivery Manager gave an update on the Tender process for the project, currently at Feasibility and Design Stage.

11. ALLOTMENT STEWARDS MEETING

The minutes of the Allotment Stewards meeting of 26 October 2023 were noted.

PROPOSED: Cllr Roger Hunneman

SECONDED: Cllr Jayne French-Drayton

RESOLVED: To amend the Allotment Rules to state:

2 (s) Not plant any trees without written consent from the Council (which will not be unreasonably withheld) to ensure that only miniature fruit trees and bushes are planted;

and keep all trees to a maximum height of 8ft (1.53m) ensuring that the canopy of the tree is kept within the boundary of the tenant's allotment plot.

12. MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR VAUGHAN MILLER – ALLOTMENT SURVEY FEEDBACK

The allotment consultation feedback was discussed.

PROPOSED: Cllr Vaughan Miller

SECONDED: Cllr Martha Vickers

RESOLVED: To amend the Allotment Rules to state:

To set up a task group to analyse the Allotment Tenants Survey.

Members of the task group agreed as Roger Hunneman, Jayne French-Drayton and Sarah Slack.

Parameters will be agreed at this task group meeting with Vaughan Miller.

13. MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR VAUGHAN MILLER – PLAYPARKS STRATEGY

PROPOSED: Cllr Vaughan Miller

SECONDED: Cllr Sarah Slack

RESOLVED: to undertake a strategic review of NTC playpark provision, in light of new proposed regulation and provide a schedule of condition report and assessment of expected timeline for replacement/renewal of the assets. In addition, produce a summary of the financial impact of the outcomes over the next 6 and 12 years.

14. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

PROPOSED: Cllr Vaughan Miller

SECONDED: Cllr Nigel Foot

RESOLVED: That under Section 1, Paragraph 2 of The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business because publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

15. PROVISION OF SMALL VAN FOR THE GROUNDS & OPEN SPACES TEAM

PROPOSED: Cllr Roger Hunneman

SECONDED: Cllr Martha Vickers

RESOLVED: To approve the provision of a small electric van for the use of the Town Council's grounds team.

THERE BEING NO OTHER BUSINESS, THE CHAIRPERSON THANKED ALL THOSE IN ATTENDANCE AND DECLARED THE MEETING CLOSED AT 9:52 PM.

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