

**Minutes of the Recreation & Amenities Committee meeting held on  
Thursday 23rd July 2015  
in the Mechanics Institute, Percy Street, Alnwick at 7.00pm**

**Present:** Councillors P Broom (Chair), P Edge, D Farrar, M Harrington, G Mavin, S Mavin, S Patience, R Roberts, M Swinbank and A Symmonds.

**In attendance:** W Batey, Chief Officer and Town Clerk, J Pibworth, Assistant to the Town Clerk and Ben Bridgens (Alnwick resident).

**RA 15/15 Apologies**

Councillors P Holt and A Shilton.

**RA 15/16 Declarations of Interest**

None.

**RA 15/17 Use of Weedkiller in public places (Ben Bridgens)**

Ben Bridgens, a resident from Meadow Riggs in Alnwick, took councillors through his report that had been circulated to them regarding the use of weedkiller in public spaces in Alnwick. This highlighted that weedkiller was being used by NCC in Swansfield Park but that no warning signs were being put up.

He advised that the Government were suggesting lessening the use of Glyphosate. He also said that he would prefer to see strimming rather than weedkiller and suggested that woodchip could be put around the play equipment.

Trees - Ben also highlighted that 15 mountain ashes in Meadow Riggs had died in the past few years. He commented that whilst Glyphosate kills weeds around trees it is also sold to kill trees if the bark is cut first. As the trees in Meadow Rigg are on a slope they regularly get hit by the cutting equipment.

He had been to see Terry Garnick from NCC who had liked the idea of offering town and parish council alternatives to Glyphosate.

Swansfield Park play area - The Town Clerk advised that in 2014, Swansfield Park was strimmed, not having been done for some time but in 2015 NCC had used weedkiller instead. The Town Council own the play area in Swansfield Park but NCC cut the grass. He also advised that the area where Glyphosate had been used had now turned to mud. He said that a decision needed to be made as whether an alternative weedkiller should be used or if strimming should be requested.

Meadow Rigg Trees - The Town Clerk advised that this area was owned by NCC. He also advised that the Town Council could request additional cuts which have been done for the past three years.

Councillor questions:

Councillor Farrar asked if one option might be for the Town Handyman to do additional strimming in Swansfield Park.

Councillor Swinbank asked what the Town Council did in the other play areas? The Town Clerk advised that Glyphosate was generally not used but when it was the staff know to wait until the area is dry. He also advised that there was a Glyphosate free trial area in the cemetery (300 graves) which has so far this year been strimmed 11 times.

Councillor Swinbank confirmed that he agreed with Ben's report that the play area

should not have Glyphosate used. He also felt that if trees were very battered by cutting equipment then weedkiller should also not be used there.

Councillor Edge confirmed that he knew and had used Glyphosate and that it can be useful for treating weeds around young trees. He said that Glyphosate was more useful and less detrimental to the soil than lot of other weedkillers. He also confirmed that it was bad practice to hit trees with mowing equipment. He felt that bark could be used in play areas and that long grass should not be seen as a problem.

Councillor Roberts suggested that Meadow Rigg was used as a Wild Flower trial area. This would enable the Town Council to see what grew well and could be used in other area if the town. She also had concerns about the use of weedkiller in other areas of the town including the public herb beds. She felt that the issue of mowers hitting trees could be raised again with NCC.

Councillor Broom suggested that the town council request that NCC do more staff training with regard to operating cutting equipment.

Councillor Patience agreed with the previous comments but felt that Glyphosate had a wider environmental issues. Councillor Edge said he understood that Glyphosate did not go into the food chain.

Councillor Harrington said it was interesting and felt that there needed to be better management of how and where weedkiller was used but felt it certainly needed to be used on pavements around the town.

Councillor S Mavin agreed about Glyphosate and felt that the Town Council needed to publicise what it did and why.

**RESOLVED: i) To stop the use of Glyphosate in Swansfield Park play area and recommend that NCC do not used Glyphosate in other play areas; ii) To highlight the tree damage caused by cutting equipment in Meadow Rigg to NCC; iii) To suggest a greater distance left around all trees and that a no mow area be designated around a group of trees at Meadow Rigg letting the grass grow for the rest of this year then have end of year strim; iv) Offer the possibility of a site visit to NCC.**

#### **RA 15/18 Budget Update 2015/16**

The Town Clerk circulated a copy of the Recreation & Amenities Committee Income and Expenditure as at 23rd Sept 2015. This showed expenditure of £7,539.72 on events, £4,817.24 on projects and £20,050.56 on assets & services. Income was £490 at this point, all of which is from Allotments rents. The Town Clerk took councillors through each section noting the following:

#### **EVENTS:**

Grants - some grants had been paid since the last meeting.

Remembrance Day - work just started.

Tour of Britain - expenditure so far £284 + £50 for photography competition + cost of erection of stage in lieu of charge from Christmas lights team for putting up bunting.

#### **PROJECTS:**

Communication Project - budget of £4,000 remaining for additional notice boards or Newcastle University communication project.

Dog bins - may go over budget slightly.

WWI Memorial Garden - location needs to be finalised then planted.

Magna Carta - budget £740 + £40 for additional oak tree. Outstanding items include book for library and oak trees. There is also income of £91 to come from Bailiffgate Museum for merchandising items. Location for the trees needs to be agreed.

Councillor G Mavin asked about the £1,000 for leaflets under Town Promotion and said that he would rather not give the money to the Town team. The Town Clerk advised that this was Town Council money to supplement the activities of the Town Team.

Councillor Farrar asked if the Town Team had asked for any money. The Town Clerk confirmed that they hadn't.

Councillor Farrar suggested that the Communications Working Group meet to discuss leaflets and notice boards.

#### **ASSETS & SERVICES:**

Wages/PAYE for assets - handyman salary transferred from Finance & Policy budget.

Playground expenses - a request had been received from a resident in Allerburn Lea for a self closing gate on the play area. The cost would be approximately £1,250.

Councillor Farrar felt the resident should be told the potential cost of the gate.

Councillor Symmonds felt that the play area in Allerburn Lea should have parity with the other play areas which do have gates.

Councillor Harrington asked if the Town Council would be liable if there was an accident due to there not being a gate. The Town Clerk advised that the play area was inspected by ROSPA annually and the lack of a gate has never been mentioned.

Councillor Roberts agreed with Councillor Symmonds that a gate was needed. She asked if it needed to be self closing. The Town Clerk advised of the request again suggested getting some more quotes.

Councillor Broom commented that there were speed bumps outside the play area. He also advised that the bridle path close by had chicanes in place to slow people down which could also be put in place at the play area.

Bus shelters - the budget will be spent as some painting of wooden frames is needed.

Seats / benches - no feedback as yet on suggested locations. Budget will be spent.

Additional grass cuts - need clarification of locations from Town Council for March cuts.

Councillor Edge suggested that bulbs be planted at the Willowburn roundabout and asked for a budget of £195 to be allocated for this. This would mean longer grass but this would not be as noticeable once the trees come in leaf.

Councillor Patience advised that NCC would need to agree to any planting.

Councillor Farrar asked if NCC had any plans to plant the roundabout. The Town Clerk confirmed that as far as he was aware NCC had no plans.

Councillor Edge suggested that bulbs be planted on the bank down from the Cemetery to at a cost of £212. He felt that they would help detract from the litter that gathers there. Councillor Patience advised that winter aconites were good for suppressing weeds.

**RESOLVED: i) To accept the budget update; ii) To set up a Communications Working Group meeting to discuss leaflets and additional notice boards; iii) Add oak trees to November agenda to discuss locations; iv) To enquire at NCC about the Town Council planting bulbs at the Willowburn roundabout and the bank below the Cemetery.**

## **RA 15/19 Volunteer Fair - Feedback**

Events: The Assistant Town Clerk gave an update on the feedback received from the organisations who attended the Volunteer Fair on June 27th. The feedback was based on the seven feedback forms which were received.

### **GENERAL COMMENTS:**

Five organisations suggested that the event be held annually, whilst one every two years.

All organisations felt Saturday was a good day.

Three organisations felt the event was the right length whilst two felt it should be slightly shorter (suggesting 10.00 to 13.00).

### **POSITIVES:**

Most people felt it was worth while attending, it was a interesting to hear about other voluntary bodies and was a useful networking tool.

The organisation who gave feedback about the pre-meeting felt it was useful.

The two organisations who set targets both achieved them.

The representatives of Alnwick Town Council at the event were very helpful and made sure things went smoothly and sorted out any problems, which were few and minor so thank you to them.

It was interesting to connect with other volunteer organisations throughout the town.

The Hall was attractively laid out and the event well organised.

It was good to have refreshments available.

Pleased with the event.

### **NEGATIVES:**

One organisation was disappointed with lack of interest.

One felt there was limited value for volunteer recruitment.

More choice of table size - felt the 1m x 1m was a bit too small.

**RESOLVED: To accept the update.**

## **RA 15/20 Options relating to Public Toilets in Alnwick**

The Town Clerk gave a summary of the NCC document 'Review of Public Conveniences' (previously circulated) on the toilet provision across Northumberland. This gives Town/Parish; Proposed review outcome; Priority for refurbishment and Additional Comments. He advised that both sets of toilets in Alnwick were to stay and to remain open year round. The Shambles - will be looked at when Northumberland Hall refurbishments are done. Greenwell Lane - will be reconsidered when Playhouse redevelopment takes place.

The Town Clerk also reviewed the document produced following a meeting with Paul Jones (Head of Neighbourhood Services at NCC) in January 2015 and the options it suggested. He advised that the current level of staffing was one hour to clean both sets of toilets in Alnwick plus a stock take visit at lunch time.

Councillor Harrington felt that positive action was needed as he felt it was not right that Alnwick got the same level of service as rural toilets which get little use.

Councillor G Mavin agreed and added that the toilets at the Shambles were flooded at 11am on Saturday and had still not been repaired at 5pm. He felt the Town Council should take charge of cleaning the toilets in Alnwick.

Councillor Swinbank asked if the time allocated to clean the toilets had been reduced. The Town Clerk advised that in January we were told that they were allocated 1½ hours and last week told 1 hour.

Councillor Swinbank then asked what money NCC put into the cost of cleaning the

toilets in Morpeth. The Town Clerk advised that they put in a small amount to cover such things as toilet rolls but that Morpeth Town Council pay for all the cleaning and other costs.

Councillor S Mavin felt that the Town Council needed to press ahead with the Your Welcome scheme. She suggested that a sign could then be put at the Shambles toilets advising that they were closed.

Councillor Roberts asked if more information could be requested from NCC about what they have done about the Your Welcome Scheme in Alnwick. She also thought that NCC could be asked why the time allocated to clean the toilets in Alnwick had been reduced. She also felt that the Town Council could take responsibility for Greenwell Lane toilets and for stocking both sets of toilets. She added that she was reluctant to close any facilities as some of the cafes relied on them.

Councillor Harrington said he appreciated Councillor Roberts points but that the Town Council were going round in circles and action needed to be taken.

The Town Clerk advised that a decision would be needed at the November meeting.

Councillor Harrington said if the toilets needed significant work the cost should be put onto the precept. Councillor Symmonds said he did not want to see that happen.

Councillor Farrar asked if Rothbury Parish Council were covering all the costs of the toilet they were having transferred back to them. The Town Clerk advised they were.

Councillor Swinbank said that as NCC make it clear that they will not invest anything on the toilets the Town Council would not just need to cover cleaning costs but refurbishment costs as well.

Councillor G Mavin said he was just suggesting the Town Council take on the cost of cleaning.

Councillor Patience advised that as the fabric of the toilets was poor cleaning would not make any difference.

The Town Clerk suggested getting updated cost figures for cleaning from NCC.

Councillor Broom felt that the Town Council should do some additional cleaning during the day.

Councillor Patience thought that a trial could be undertaken.

Councillor Roberts asked if the trial could be done without NCC knowing. The Town Clerk advised that it couldn't as NCC specify the type of products used.

**RESOLVED: i) To ask NCC about the minimum standards needed to join the Your Welcome Scheme; ii) To request better signage at all Your Welcome locations; iii) To ask NCC who they have contacted about Your Welcome scheme in Alnwick; iv) To obtain up to date cost figures from NCC.**

## **RA 15/21**

### **Street Cleaning and improving the standards**

The Town Clerk informed councillors that NCC were surprised at the comments about weeds in the town as they are using new road sweeping equipment. He suggested that the areas where weeds had been reported were outside the central town area covered regularly by NCC.

Councillor Symmonds felt that NCC should be pushed to clean all areas of the town.

Councillor Broom felt if the rubbish was collected weeds would not grow.

Councillor Patience said that the cuts from Central Government meant that not all

services could be maintained at the same level.

Councillor G Mavin agreed that it would cost too much to do all areas of the town.

Councillor Symmonds said a specification could be put together if needed.

Councillor Patience felt the Town Council needed to decide what they want to do and whether they were prepared to put the precept up to cover it.

Councillor Swinbank asked if there were Service Level Agreements in place with NCC. The Town Clerk advised that these were only in place for hanging baskets planting.

Councillor G Mavin asked if Alnwick District Council had them? The Town Clerk advised that they did but they also had more staff. He also advised that Choppington Parish Council allocate a higher budget to cleaning but their precept was higher.

Councillor Farrar thought the Town Council could ask its residents what they would like the precept spent on and what additional services they would want. This could then be used to inform decisions.

**RESOLVED: i) To ask NCC for costs for extra cleaning and specification of what the Town Council get for their money; ii) To look at all potential NCC cuts to review impact on Alnwick and its residents; iii) To test costs with residents through questions possibly using The Cryer (Alnwick), the Town Council website and the Gazette.**

**RA 15/22 Updates:**

**a) Allotments** - The Town Clerk gave an update:

Ratten Row – a few plots still to let.

St James - all plots let. Won Silver Gilt in Northumbria in Bloom awards.

St Georges – a few issues with overgrown plots.

**b) Play Areas** - The Town Clerk advised there was no further update.

**RESOLVED: To accept the update.**

**RA 15/23 Any Other Urgent Business**

None.

Meeting closed at 9.30pm