

**Minutes of the Recreation & Amenities Committee meeting held on
Thursday 29th January 2015
in the Mechanics Institute, Percy Street, Alnwick at 7.00pm**

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

In attendance: W Batey, Chief Officer and Town Clerk, J Pibworth, Administration Assistant.

RA 14/34 Apologies

Councillors M Harrington and A Shilton.

RA 14/35 Declarations of Interest

Councillors Farrar, Roberts and Swinbank declared a non pecuniary interest in Item 7c.

RA 14/36 Budget Update 2014/15

The Town Clerk circulated a copy of the Recreation & Amenities Committee Income and Expenditure as at 29th January 2015. This showed expenditure of £10,340.29 on events, £16,720.02 on projects and £21,380.26 on assets & services. Income was £3,902.50 at this point, most of which is from Allotments rents for St James's and Ratten Row. The Town Clerk took councillors through each section noting the following:

EVENTS:

Remembrance Sunday - Slightly over budget due to a room booking fee.

Town Twining - Video conference has taken place but final figures are not yet in.

Alnwick in Bloom - Currently £1,495 but will be at budget figure by the end of the year as one bill still outstanding.

PROJECTS:

Town Promotion - Councillor G Mavin asked why the new leaflets had not yet been produced. The Town Clerk advised that this was due to the cost of the new leaflets (£3,500) and so far only NCC and Aln Valley Railway had offered money towards this.

Councillor Symmonds advised that the Music Festival programme had only cost £600 for 3,000 as they did the copy themselves in house and sent directly to the printers.

Councillor Patience suggested this be taken to the Communications working group.

Councillor Roberts felt it was important that the leaflet was accurate and up to date before being used.

Dog Bins / Litter Bins - Currently there is some budget left over for new bins.

War Memorial - There will be a grant to offset some of the cost of the work to the memorial. There is an additional cost for a column survey including modelling test. It was originally thought that the displacement was not significant for a structure of its age but the tests will determine whether any additional work is needed.

ASSETS & SERVICES:

Wages - The January pay award may take the final figure slightly over budget.

Playground equipment - costs will be higher than budgeted as additional equipment has been purchased during the year.

Robertson's Fountain - costs are much higher than budgeted as additional work was identified during an electrical inspection. This was electrical work and replacing the light.

Seats - budget will be used on new seats at Cawledge, The Tanners, Greenwell Lane (2) and Clayport Bank.

Planting Floral displays - bills are now in from NCC.

Play Area replacements - bill is in for the removal of the brick walls and slabs at the Play Area at Glovers Green.

RESOLVED: To note the current budget position.

RA 14/37 Additional Grass Cutting Policy for 2015/16

Councillor Farrar gave an update on his suggestion to have later grass cuts in some areas of the town. This would enable bulbs to be planted at the town gateways which would come up early. He advised that there would be a small costs involved but that this could be covered by the reduction in grass cutting charges. He gave a suggested list of bulbs which would cost around £500 for 5,000 bulbs which would be planted at Denwick Lane, South Road, Alnmouth Road and Clayport Bank. It would take around 30 hours to plant the bulbs and that the Town Council could ask for volunteers including Alnwick in Bloom. The bulbs would be planted in September 2015 and the first grass cut left until April 2016.

Councillor Patience advised that youngsters doing Citizenship could be asked to volunteer. She also thought that it may be possible to attract sponsorship for the bulbs.

Councillor G Mavin said he was not in favour of bulb planting as the additional grass cuts were put in place because the long grass looked unsightly.

Councillor Symmonds advised that, as the land where it was being suggested bulbs be planted belonged to NCC they needed to be contacted. He also advised that in the past they had not been keen on this sort of thing. He felt it was a question on preference as there can be a real mishmash of grass and bulbs.

Councillor S Mavin said she was in favour of bulb planting and she liked to see the mixture of grass and bulbs.

Councillor Edge handed out examples from Harrogate and York to show how there can be a really lovely mix of bulbs and grass and how this can be a real asset to the town and attract visitors.

Councillor Swinbank advised that there were already daffodils on Clayport Bank and that they looked fine although there could be issues with smaller bulbs.

Councillor Roberts felt there was already a precedent for having bulbs planted as there were also daffodils on the A1 roundabout and on Alnmouth Road.

Councillor Patience advised that as the committee had some time to decide about this it was put on the agenda for the next meeting.

Councillor Edge advised the committee that it was worth looking outside Barter Books at their new planting area to see what bulb planting looks like.

Councillor Roberts thought it would be useful to take photographs, over the next 3-5 months, of areas in the town that had bulb planting to give councillors a better idea of what the different types of bulbs would look like.

Councillor Broom said he was in favour of bulb planting but not necessarily in the grass areas. He thought the area near to Sainsbury's on the bank opposite Hardy's would benefit from bulb planting.

Councillor Holt asked if the Town Council would need to seek permission from NCC

every time they wanted to plant bulbs. The Town Clerk advised that they would.

Councillor G Mavin asked that if the Town Council did not have a March grass cut, would they still have to pay for the April cut. The Town Clerk advised that NCC cut in April anyway so there would be no extra charge.

RESOLVED: i) To contact NCC about bulb planting; ii) To review the item at March's committee meeting; iii) To get the views of Alnwick in Bloom about bulb planting.

RA 14/38 Working Group Updates (Events & Communications)

The Town Clerk gave an update from each working group:

Communication - update on actions from this meeting are covered under Item 7e) Notice Board and Website.

Events - actions from the meeting included identifying how the Town Council could support the local Living Leader bid which is Item 6. on the agenda. Another action was to organise a volunteer fair - the Town Clerk and Chair of Recreation & Amenities have a meeting with Wansbeck CVS to discuss this.

Councillor Broom thought the idea of a volunteer fair was a good one.

Councillor Patience informed the committee that CVS were holding an event at Bailiffgate Museum for potential volunteers in February as they are funded by NCC to do events like this.

Councillor Roberts advised that she had been to a similar event held by CVS.

Councillor Patience advised that the event discussed at the Events working group was about showcasing the work of different organisations to possible volunteers and it was envisaged that it would be held in the Market Place during the summer.

Councillor Swinbank commented that the Communications working group focused on external communications and that its remit could include internal communications. The Town Clerk advised that this be could be discussed at the meeting on February 5th.

RESOLVED: To note the updates.

RA 14/39 Consideration of Financial Contribution towards the Animating the Market Place Project

The Town Clerk reminded the committee that his item was following on from the presentation Philip Angier from Local Living had given at the last Full Council meeting.

Councillor Farrar asked if the funding would be conditional on them getting Leader funding. The Town Clerk confirmed it would be. Councillor Farrar said he was unsure that he understood what the actual bid was for and if there was a document that the council could look at. The Town Clerk confirmed he would ask for more details.

Councillor G Mavin informed the committee that Local Living had been piloting some new activities such as busking. He was keen for the Town Council to offer funding to help with their bid to Leader.

Councillor Symmonds supported Councillor G Mavin's comments but would like to ensure that this was a reasonable amount.

Councillor Patience commented that the Town Council might offer financial help in year one then other forms of support in subsequent years.

Councillor G Mavin suggested a figure of £2,000 in 2015/16 which Councillor Symmonds supported.

Councillor Holt commented that she felt that the Town Council should provide support for one year only.

Councillor Edge commented that having read the summary document issued by Philip Angier the project costs were £80,000 with £48,000 from Leader and £32,000 from matched funding and would be scaled down in years 2 and 3.

The Town Clerk advised that it was not easy to find match funding. Councillor Swinbank confirmed that match finding was a real difficulty with bids.

Councillor Symmonds said that whilst he shared the committee's reservations he felt it important that the Town Council see how Local Living engage other parties before making their decision. He confirmed that the principal of the project was something the Town Council had supported in the past and that they needed to see the bid in order to take a more informed decision. There also needed to be equity in sharing the funding.

Councillor Patience advised that the match funding might need to be spread across three years so the proposed £2,000 could be split.

Councillor G Mavin was not clear why the money needed to split over three years and felt that the Town Council should just offer £2,000 for Local Living to decide how to use it. The Town Clerk advised that Local Living would need letters of support from each match funder setting out exactly what match funding they are offering.

Councillor Holt felt it was important that the project application needed to be monitored to ensure that it gave Alnwick what it needs.

Councillor Roberts advised that she would like to be able to offer more funding to the project if possible.

RESOLVED: To offer Local Living £2,000 as match funding for their 2015/16 Leader bid then review the project before committing further funding in 2016/17 and 2017/18. The £2,000 could be split into three contributions over the three years.

RA 14/40 Updates:

a) Allotments - The Town Clerk gave an update:

St James - reported that the rents had now all been paid. There had been four new allotments let and there are three people on the waiting list, the longest of which had been on the list since July 2014.

Ratten Row - Most rents have been paid with only about £350 outstanding. He also reported that four people had given up established plots. There are three people on the waiting list. A press release has been written and will contain information about the other allotment sites and waiting times.

St Georges - One allotment has been let since last meeting. Three people on the waiting list who are the same people as on the St James's waiting list.

Councillor Broom commented that there are still a few plots at Ratten Row that needed developing. The Town Clerk confirmed that there are two plots to let and an area to develop. Councillor Broom asked if they could be cleared to look tidier. He advised that pigs were a good way to clear sites. Councillor Patience said plots could be offered to allotment holders who have chickens.

Councillor Holt asked why people didn't seem to like the allotments at Ratten Row. The Town Clerk advised that there was some excellent allotment but was isolated, there had been fly tipping and had been some isolated issues with petty theft.

Councillor Farrar said he liked the idea of pigs and felt that an electric fence could be

used to keep them in place. The Town Clerk said he would check the lease to see what the Town Council are able to do on the site with regard to animals.

b) Public Conveniences

The Town Clerk had issued a breakdown of costs he had received from NCC. He advised that he had been back to NCC with queries about the cost of some of the items which seemed very high. He had also informed them that the Town Council did not think they were good value for money. NCC have confirmed they have asked for a Best Value audit to be done on the figures and would come back to him in due course.

Councillor Symmonds commented that the first thing that struck him was that several figures seemed unrealistic as they were identical.

Councillor Broom felt it was important that the figures were put right as the Town Council need to be seen to be getting value for money for their residents. He was concerned that cleaning had not been done properly but that charges had been made.

The Town Clerk advised that he knew they did not clean the tiles as part of their daily cleaning schedule.

Councillor Farrar asked if there was any further information about the wider issue of toilet facilities. The Town Clerk advised there was no further information as meetings were still taking place between Town and Parish Councils and Paul Jones (NCC).

c) Play Areas

Glovers Green - The Town Clerk informed councillors that the hard landscaping had been removed and that new play equipment would be installed, which had already been chosen by pupils of Swansfield Park school. He confirmed he had received several comments and suggestions from residents about the site of the new equipment. Some did not want the play equipment moved from its original site as they felt this would encourage more football. He also advised that were a couple of other pieces of play equipment that needed replacing. One was a single swing in a small area in the middle of the houses and the other had a see saw that had been removed due to corrosion.

Councillor Swinbank asked if the play equipment was sited further into the orchard would it be better received by residents. The Town Clerk advised that it might.

Councillor Holt said she took on board the comments of residents about football. She was not keen to put it into the community orchard so supported keeping it where it was.

The Town Clerk confirmed that the piece of equipment already selected, could be placed on the existing site and another couple of pieces of equipment be sited close by.

Councillor Roberts advised that any equipment put into the community orchard would have an impact on their insurance. The Town Clerk recommended that the selected piece of equipment was put back on the original site but moved away from the tree. Councillor Farrar asked if this was just because the original site was shady. The Town Clerk said that that the swing that was there got covered in tree sap and bird droppings.

Councillor Swinbank asked if the other two pieces of equipment it was suggested replacing were old. The Town Clerk advised they were probably around 30 years old but residents would like to replace them. Councillor Farrar felt they should be replaced.

Barrasdale - The Town Clerk advised that the insurance company had denied liability for an injury to the child as they felt that the Town Council had done everything they could have done. No further action had been taken by the claimant.

RESOLVED: i) To replace the play equipment in Glovers Green at the location of the newly removed excavated area; ii) To site a seat and bin at the same location.

d) Memorial Schemes

The Administration Assistant advised that councillors had approved the choice of benches previously distributed at the last meeting. The next stage was for herself and the Town Clerk to review the list for benches currently in place around the town, with a view to recommending locations for memorial benches.

e) Notice Board and Website

Notice Board - The Town Clerk advised that he had received confirmation that the NCC parking sign in front of the arch where the notice board was planned, would be moved but as yet had not been done.

Councillor Roberts advised the Town Council that she had spoken to the students about the Community Electronic Notice board Project and was awaiting a response.

Website - The Administration Assistant issued the website stats (at Jan 28th 2015). There had been 790 visits and 1,812 page views in the period, the average number of pages viewed was 2.29 and the average duration of stay 1 minute 52 seconds. The number of new visitors remained high and the bounce rate had reduced.

The Search word analysis was issued and will be reviewed at the next Communication working group.

RESOLVED: To recommend locations for memorial benches and type of benches to be offered at each location.

RA 14/41 Wildlife surveys in Thomas Percy Woodland and Cawledge Burn

Councillor Farrar advised the committee that the Alnwick & Denwick Neighbourhood Plan contains a policy regarding woodlands. He advised councillors that two sites had been identified - Thomas Percy and Cawledge Burn, which belong to NCC and Northumberland Estates respectively, and that visits had been undertaken with Alnwick Wildlife Trust and Alnwick Natural History Group.

RESOLVED: i) To obtain permission from NCC to carry out a wildlife survey in Thomas Percy wood and Cawledge Burn; ii) To undertake risk assessments on the proposed locations of the survey; iii) To carry out the surveys through volunteers including Alnwick Natural History Group.

RA 14/42 Any Other Urgent Business

Councillor Broom asked about a date for the next Town clean up and suggested Sunday March 30th. The Town Clerk advised that he will add this item and the suggested date to the next Full Council meeting in February.

Councillor Patience advised councillors that the roof of the former Corn Exchange had been made safe and that the public right of way had been reopened.

Meeting closed at 9.05pm