

Harrietsham Parish Council
Environmental Committee
Minutes of meeting held on Monday 17th July 2023

Present: Cllrs Brown, Lay, Luck, Stanley, Mrs S Amos and M Cuerden (RFO/Amenity Manager)

1. **Apologies:** None **Members of the public:** None

Councillors elected Cllr Brown as Chair for this and subsequent meetings (prop Cllr Stanley, seconded Cllr Lay, all in favour).

2. **Minutes of the last meeting** (31st May 2023) were signed (without amendment) at the following Council meeting, another copy was signed for our records.

3. **Disclosures:** None.

4. **Amenity Contracts (Update):** MC proceeded to review each of the various contracts in turn.

- **Burial Ground / Garden of Remembrance:** He noted that these areas were looking neat, tidy and well-tended. We have had no further instances of inappropriate behaviour (notably open fires), although on one walk-round he had noted a small amount of litter – however, Cllr T Sams had then reported the same to him, saying that he would clear it up. On a subsequent visit, the litter was gone, presumably thanks to Cllr Sams. At the top of the north-running footpath, just before it turns NE to run between the two plots, there is a fallen tree, which does require ducking under to pass. It appears to be stable, and therefore no immediate risk, but he will ask the contractor to have a look and give a price for its removal.
- **Glebe Field:** This, too, is looking neat and tidy. Cllr Sams had commented on some cut branches that had been left on the field, but when MC went to have a look, he couldn't find anything that would be a problem – it turned out he had misunderstood their location, looking along the tree line with the rectory, when he should have been looking along the St Welcume's Way boundary. Cllr Stanley had noticed them as well, and MC agreed to ask the incumbent contractor clear them away. MC also informed the meeting that the new bin was now on order, and would appear in due course.
- **The Medical Centre and Church Road Verges:** Also looking good.
- **Woodlands Walk:** MC reported that we had been informed of some Giant Hogweed, so we had closed the Walk whilst our contractors attended and removed it. We then received a report of more being present, although it wasn't clear if that report pre or post-dated our action. MC therefore asked the contractor to check the site again, and they stated that they had been unable to find any further occurrences, although there is a very similar – but harmless – plant growing. MC noted that he had reminded the contractor to check on each visit, and that we had therefore done everything we could to ensure public safety. MC also reported that he understood that the usual tree survey had been conducted. The clerk had been away when it was done, so he presumed that the report would be awaiting her return, and that we would see it in due course. There remains some work from last year's contract to be done, and it would be interesting to see how these two compare.
- **Benches:** These had been done over the past couple of months, and were looking good. There had been no reports from the contractor of any problems with them. The bench upon which Percy sits has also been done, but Percy himself hasn't, as he requires special treatment. Cllr T Sams has said that he will source the appropriate treatment oil, and apply it shortly. As an aside – and nothing to do with benches – Cllr Sams had commented on the sorry state of the information board by Percy. MC said that he had been aware of this for some time, and had actually started to address it before COVID stopped anyone from doing anything, having obtained the artwork so that we could get another copy printed. Cllr Luck stated that she knew someone who might be able to print this on plastic, making it much more durable – MC said he'd find the artwork and send it over to her for assessment and pricing, together with the relevant dimensions.
- **War Memorial:** Also looking good, and following a request to do so all the old wreaths and wooden crosses had now been removed. The front hedge had been trimmed, and that the bushes along the footpath round the site had, following a request to the contractor, also been cut back to allow easy access. He also reported that, as you turn north on the footpath, there is a fallen tree across the footpath. It appears to be firmly in position, showing no sign of being unstable, and can easily be walked underneath. He felt that we didn't need to do anything about it other than making sure that there were no small branches hanging down that might catch people. He had, just in case, sought a price to have it removed, and been quoted £945 (plus VAT). Councillors concurred, and agreed to leave it for now.

- A20 Roadside Verges: These were generally looking tidy and well cut. We had been asked for some clarification on the contract requirements by HIB, which MC will supply. It was also noted that the West Street Green stream was becoming quite overgrown, but that the annual clearance is not due until November. MC had therefore asked the contractor for a price to do a 50% clearance – and that if it was in the tens of pounds, (rather than the hundreds), then they should just do it. He has also asked them to trim back the hedge that is beginning to overhang the footbridge over the stream in West Street.
 - Saxon Place Amenity Land: MC reported that this too was looking good, and being maintained to the standard required.
5. **Teers Meadow:** The meadow itself is looking good, with significant regrowth, lots of orchids etc. The only current issue is a fallen tree branch in the top NW corner which is blocking the entrance gate. MC was going to ask our three contractors for a price to clear it, but Cllr Stanley noted that it had come from a tree by the bridleway – and it might, therefore, be the responsibility of KCC, which would relieve us of the responsibility to organise the work (and pay for it!). MC said he'd discuss this with the clerk. Cllr T Sams had also commented that he felt the benches could do with a trim around them, as they are starting to get a bit overgrown; Mrs Amos and/or Cllr Stanley would have a look, but the general feeling was that unless the growth is brambles, then people who wished to use the benches could just trample it down.

Attention then turned to the on-going maintenance and use of the Meadow. It was agreed that we should seek to get the cows back again. Cllr Luck thought she might have the contact details for "Tracey", and to call her to arrange them – but if she doesn't then MC will contact Mike Phillips to get her name and number. MC also reported that the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership had asked if we would like another couple of their maintenance days, (suggesting 5th and 7th March), which the committee agreed to **Recommend to Council** should be accepted; Prop Cllr Luck, sec Cllr Stanley, all in favour). The expected cost would be around £500 per day. Mrs Amos was also asked about (a) the existing Management Plan and (b) whether we should try and get the Friends going. On the former, she stated that she does have the plan, and that although it is quite an old document, (pre lottery grant?), it was written by Mike Phillips, so would probably still be a useful tool – she would dig it out and circulate it for our consideration. (If she can't find it, MC would ask Mike for another copy.) On the latter, she still has the contact details gleaned from various past events, and she could get in touch and see if they were still willing to assist in the Meadow's maintenance.

As to the use of the Meadow, it was agreed that we should look at continuing the sort of events seen during the lottery grant work – so reptile walks hosted by Mike, activities by Anna Outdoors, Wild Flower walks etc. MC said he would find the invoices to see what sort of costs would be involved.

6. **Re-wilding (referred by Cllr T Sams):** The committee considered a series of emails from Cllr Sams, containing his observations and suggestions following a walk round by him. We noted that Teers Meadow, the Garden of Remembrance and major parts of both Woodlands Walk and Saxon Place Amenity Land were all already wildlife habitats. The New Burial Ground has limited scope for rewilding, primarily because – with luck – it won't be ours for much longer, as we are seeking to hand it over to the church. It was agreed that we should therefore avoid doing anything with it until its future is determined. The Glebe Field is intended as a recreation ground, which is why it is mowed short – there was a suggestion that we could try growing wild flowers on the mounds round the field, but Mrs Amos pointed out that this was tried when they were first put in, without success. (It was felt that either the ground wasn't suitable, or, more likely, they just didn't get the chance to take because people walked over them.)

The most obvious rewilding opportunity was to simply cease the A20 verges contract, let them grow, and rely on the KCC bi-annual 90cm strip mow. A variation on this would be to contract just a single cut in September, like the GofR wildflower area, and hope that nature would do the rest. After some discussion, it was agreed by all that we would prefer to keep cutting the verges, as it makes the village look cared for, and clearly demarks the village's extent.

Cllr Stanley then mentioned the Access Road from Marley Road up to the gate into Teers Meadow. Currently, this is mowed short, but it doesn't need to be. The area is used by dog walkers seeking an enclosed space where they can do training, but its primary purpose of providing access to the New Burial Ground for hearses etc is not yet required. It was agreed that this should be suggested in any further discussions on Climate Change / Green actions that the council might have. (Cllr Stanley also noted that the relatively new gate into this land has dropped, making it hard to open or close it – MC would raise it with the supplier.)

As an aside, we have had a request from a parishioner who wishes to plant a couple of trees in memory of relatives. It is understood that they don't wish to put plaques on them. It was felt that the best location was likely to be in the Gof R, and MC undertook to have a look to see if we could get another one or two in there.

- 7. Glebe Field access control & matting:** MC had done some research on both items, and showed the committee some websites that offered these solutions. On the matting, he suggested that we should consider an area of some 2.5 or 3 metres wide, by 5 metres into the field. He showed two possible alternatives. The first was a set of interlocking 50cmx50cm mats and the other was a roll of matting 2mx10m. Both would require some ground work in preparation, as they would need a flat surface to lay them on to. Both appeared to have an expected cost of just under £1000, plus ground prep work. Councillors expressed a preference for the roll as being probably easier to lay and less likely to move in use. MC said that given that guidance, he would seek two or three quotes and come back to Council with them.

Moving on to barriers, MC showed various possibilities. One consisted of huge concrete blocks to which the barrier was fixed, and which then swung open to provide access – councillors agreed that this was a particularly ugly solution, and open to every graffitti artist in the area. It was generally agreed that all we needed was a two-post and single barrier arrangement, where the barrier either swung open in a horizontal plain or lifted vertically. Initially, the feeling was for a single metal bar lifting vertically, but then councillors noticed a more substantial arrangement, being more of a metal gate opening horizontally, which they preferred. MC agreed to get quotes for that or similar from three suppliers (the expected cost being over £1000), for Council consideration.

- 8. Date of next meeting** – It was noted that the agenda had the wrong date on it, not having been updated from the previous one! It was agreed that the next meeting would be on Monday 18th September, in the Parish Office, at 7:30pm.

Meeting closed at 9:15 pm.