

Harrietsham Parish Council
Environmental Committee
Minutes of meeting held on Monday 9th October 2023

1. **Present:** Cllrs Brown (Chair), Luck, Stanley, Mrs S Amos and M Cuerden (RFO/Amenity Manager)
2. **Apologies:** Cllr Dayes **Members of the public:** None
3. **Minutes of the last meeting** (17th July 2023) were signed (without amendment) at the September Council meeting, another copy was signed for our records.
4. **Disclosures:** None.

MC raised an urgent item for consideration, being the need for a Biodiversity Policy. This will be considered later.

5. **Amenity Contracts (Update):** MC noted that all contracts appear to be operating smoothly, with no known problems. He then proceeded to review each of the various contracts in turn.
 - Burial Ground / Garden of Remembrance: We have been asked by a parishioner if they could plant a couple of memorial trees somewhere. MC had identified a couple of spots in the GofR which appeared suitable, and this had been confirmed by the contractor. The contractor had also provided a price for these trees, which, if councillors were happy with the proposal, MC would pass back to the enquirer. Councillors confirmed that, so long as it was at no cost to the council, they were happy for the proposal to proceed.
 - Glebe Field: MC reported that he had been passed a risk assessment by the clerk which indicated a couple of Medium Risk items (the High Risk ones having already been dealt with). SB, looking at the list, thought that they had already been done by the contractor on his last visit. He took the list, and will check and let us know. MC also reported that he had been asked by another councillor about disabled facilities on the play area. It was generally felt that swapping one or more items out of the Glebe play area would have quite an impact on the facility as it stood. SB suggested waiting until we had control of the Saxon Place play area, (whenever that might be!), and look to provide disabled facilities there. FS raised the question of signage on the Glebe play area – was the disclaimer of sufficient size to mean it couldn't be missed, and was there one on every entrance? MC promised to have a look.
 - The Medical Centre and Church Road Verges: Also looking good.
 - Woodlands Walk: MC noted that the outstanding tree work should commence soon. This will include removing the saplings which had grown up along the bank of the lake, which are too small to be classed as trees, as suggested in the water quality report.
 - Benches: All ok.
 - War Memorial: All ok.
 - A20 Roadside Verges: All ok.
 - Saxon Place Amenity Land: MC reported that the Clerk currently had 5 vacant allotments, with 2 more possibly becoming so. This was a combination of tenants voluntarily giving up, and some being given notice due to a failure to maintain their plot. There was then some discussion about the Community Orchard. SA and MC had both noticed that it had been strimmed. SA commented that it had obviously been done by someone not exercising an adequate level of care, as some of the trees' bark had been damaged. It was also a shame that some of the teasels and wild flowers had been cut down, although it was agreed that there were quite a lot of invasive and aggressive brambles that did need clearing. No-one knew who had done the clearance, so there wasn't much we could do about it. MC agreed to contact Brogdale to arrange the usual annual visit, and would ask if they could supply some more robust tree guards at the same time.
6. **Teers Meadow:** MC ran through the list of activities and costs that had been run during the lottery project. It was agreed that we should look to run some more of the same to see what the up-take by the community was like during the late Spring and early Summer next year. This would be discussed at the January meeting. SA had sent MC Mike Phillips' management plan, and it was noted that the cattle could be there from September to October (as they are), but also March and April, so we could ask Tracey if that was possible.
7. **Woodlands Walk – Access and control:** This had been referred to the Committee by Council, and MC ran through some of the background. SL stated that she felt that the gate should be locked at dusk, as present, as it would help discourage intruders. SB supported this view, adding that there was a safety aspect to this as well – by locking the gate, it was clear that the council were taking no responsibility for any out-of-hours activities. It was emphasised that Mr Chandler, who currently does this, was only to lock/unlock the gate – he was not to engage in

any other control of the lake, including stopping illegal fishing. SB suggested that we could fix a “No Entry” sign to the gate, to show when it is shut, just to emphasise the point. Proposed by Cllr Brown, seconded Cllr Luck, with all in favour. As to the fishing, we would have to accept that we couldn’t enforce the ban, but anyone seeing illegal fishing (or, indeed, any other illegal activity) should contact the police.

8. **Glebe Field access control & matting:** MC had obtained three quotes for a barrier in the style previously discussed, and one detailed quote for matting with two other guide prices. It had become apparent, that, together, we could be looking at spending some £5-£6,000. The general feeling was that this was a lot of money, so it was agreed to defer the matter to the January meeting, and in the meantime, SB and FS would look at any possible alternative solutions to the problem. MC agreed to check with the Clerk to see if there was any limit on the size (depth) of the hole we could dig for the concrete base of the posts.
9. **Percy’s Information Board:** SL had obtained a quote for a replacement board using the same artwork as the original. MC had provided the initial measurements, but stated that he would check them before ordering. The quote was for £150+VAT for a board with a 7-year guarantee. It was felt that this was a reasonable price and it was agreed to **Recommend to Council** that it be accepted. Proposed Cllr Stanly seconded Cllr Luck, all in favour.
10. **Open Spaces Policy:** This was also referred to the Committee by Council, especially with regard to parking on the Glebe Field. Councillors went through the existing document (2017 version) and agreed that it was generally ok, but the following modifications should be made. (a) The Glebe Field should provide free parking for any recognised charitable event, (b) Any other user should be apply for to council, which would consider each application on its merits, (c) there should be an explicit ban on barbeques and camping, (d) on clause 3, we reserve the right to charge for use, whether or not there is a cost to the council and (e) it should explicitly state that a user should repair any damage to the field, or agree that we would do so and charge them.
11. **Biodiversity Policy:** MC reported that we – ie the Clerk and he – had recently become aware that the council is supposed to have a policy in place by January 2024, even though the council has never been informed of this. The committee had a quick look at the relevant government website. MC also reported that it seemed that some parishes were well on the way to having theirs’ in place, and it appeared that some had gone down the single A4 sheet, generic, broad-brush policy route, some had gone the whole hog and hired environmental consultants, and others were somewhere in the middle. Bearing in mind that we effectively discussed this at the last committee meeting, under re-wilding, MC suggested three possible approaches. (a) we could possibly take our existing open spaces contracts and see if, with some re-working, they could be turned into a suitable policy (b) we establish a working party of interested councillors to prepare a policy or (c) we pay a consultant to write a policy for us. Councillors unanimously agreed that we should pursue option (a), with a view to having a draft presented to January’s committee meeting.
12. **Date of next meeting** – To be on Monday 15th January 2024, in the Parish Office, at 7:30pm.

Meeting closed at 9:45 pm.