

Harrietsham Parish Council
Environmental Committee
Minutes of meeting held on Monday 26th September 2022

1. **Present:** Cllrs Dean (chairman), Dayes, Luck, and M Cuerden [MC] (RFO/Amenity Manager)
2. **Apologies:** Cllr Stanley and Mrs S Amos **Members of the public:** None
3. **Minutes of the last meeting** (21st July 2022) were signed (without amendment) at the July Council meeting, another copy was signed for our records.
4. **Disclosures:** None.

5. **Amenity Contracts (Update):** MC reported that he had very recently walked round all the contracted areas, and that they were all looking well maintained and litter-free. He particularly noted that :
 - the footpath between the New Burial Ground and the Garden of Remembrance and then on down past the churchyard and war memorial was clear and easy going, with the hedge to the Garden having been recently cut back.
 - The A20 verges had (mostly) been cut that day, and were looking good. He thought the contractors may well be back the next day to finish off.
 - It was pleasing to see that the community orchard in the Saxon Place Amenity Land had survived the unusually long, hot summer. Whilst it was true that some trees had fared better than others, the majority had either some, or a lot, of fruit on them. It seemed that those which had suffered most were those nearest the stream, and he thought that may be when it rained, the water drained more quickly due to the slope to the stream. In any event, all were alive, and hopefully will benefit from another year of life in getting established. The plot is getting a little overgrown with weeds, so MC was asked to arrange a trim – hopefully the last one of the year.
 - Woodlands Walk had been walked round and looked ok, although he had noticed that two of the three duckhouses were sloping into the water, with part of the platform submerged. He assumed that the one floating correctly was the one recently refixed by the contractors, but Cllr Dean wasn't so sure. She also noted that the houses themselves weren't actually used by the ducks; this led to a conversation as to whether we should spend money on renovating/refloating them, remove them or let them just gracefully decline. It was generally agreed that we should keep them in good order, and MC will ask the contractors to remove the two sloping ones, renovate and re-fix them, as per the existing contract.

Cllr Dean also reported that there had been a number of dead fish found in the lake recently, (three or four). The cause was unknown, but various theories had been advanced, ranging from old age to disease to lack of oxygen in the water. MC noted that it had been some years since we had last had the lake looked at, so it wouldn't hurt to get someone to check the environment. Cllr Dean said that she had tried to contact the Environment Agency, without success. It was agreed to **Recommend to Council** that we should get the lake professionally checked for water quality/health, paying any reasonable fees that may accrue.

Cllr Dean also reported that there are a significant number of saplings – mostly poplar – starting to grow by the path and in the hedge by the path down to the Walk. She felt that, if left, they could cause significant problems. (It was also noted that some are near where we believe there to be underground drainage pipes, which could get damaged if the trees are allowed to establish.) MC added that the grass area had several saplings starting to grow through – it was almost as if the contractors are actually mowing round them! It was agreed that MC will contact the contractors and ask them to be a bit more rigorous in cutting these back, and especially to remove all the young poplars by the path and round the hedge towards the bench.
6. **Teers Meadow:** MC reported that he had walked the field and all looked ok. He had been met by nine cows, which seemed very happy, eating the vegetation. He had walked close by two of them, as they were on the path, and although they didn't move, they didn't seem perturbed by his close proximity. (They also aren't very big, standing about waist high.)

7. **Woodlands Walk:** MC reported that, following the tree survey recently carried out within the Walk and the Shaws, we had approached the same contractor that did the work following the previous survey. The reason for approaching just the single contractor was because they would be familiar with the site, and the work required is, in many ways, just a continuation. The quote received was to the value of £780 + VAT; it was agreed to **Recommend to Council** that the quotation be accepted.

Although not part of Woodlands Walk, we also asked for a quote concerning the tree on the corner of Harrisons Drive. The tree is leaning slightly, and the council has had several calls from concerned parishioners, both in case it topples, and also because the lower branches are intruding on to the footpath. KCC have said it isn't their responsibility, and it is outside the Village Hall boundary, so that leaves us. We've have had two separate tree experts look at it, to be told that it is of no immediate danger, but nevertheless we continue to get calls about it! The quote is to raise the crown from the bottom, and to reduce the height – all, strictly speaking, probably un-necessary, but firstly it should quieten the calls, and secondly it should reduce any risk, just in case. It was therefore agreed to **Recommend to Council** that we accept the quote for £720 to reduce the tree as advised.

8. **Glebe Field information board:** As part of the Teers Meadow discovery trail, we had been supplied with the draft of an information board to be installed on the Glebe Field. This had been previously circulated to all councillors for comment, as there is a relatively tight timescale involved in securing the prices. No amendments had been received, so the committee confirmed that the draft is acceptable and should proceed. MC noted that the website address mentioned on the board was our current one (.org.uk), but the clerk is in the process of dealing with someone to try and get our .gov.uk domain back - if this is successful, we will have to retain the .org and redirect traffic to our new address.
9. **West Street Green cherry trees:** MC reported that a problem had been identified with the two large, mature and attractive cherry trees on the Green. Both had been identified as suffering from a fungal infection common to mature cherry trees, with one being badly affected, and in the process of dying. Advice originally received was to remove the dying tree, and monitor the other (after removing the worst infected parts), but in the expectation that it would follow within a year or two. We subsequently received a quotation for the removal of both trees, at a cost of £280 for the smaller, more infected, one and £360 for the other. This then generated a discussion, revolving around such topics as should we remove both, what – if anything – should we replace them with, and where, and if we want to replant in the same area, would we need to remove the roots (the quotation being to leave stumps cut as low as possible), and would the ground be infected by this fungus, making it un-useable? In the end, it was agreed that the committee would **Recommend to Council** that the most infected tree be removed, as per the quote, and the other be monitored – all the other questions could wait until we have to remove the second one.
10. **Allotments:** At this time of year we usually review the level of rent charged for our allotments. It was noted that we currently charge £20 per year per plot (regardless of size). After some discussion, it was agreed to **Recommend to Council** that we should increase the annual rent by the rate of inflation, making it £22 per year.
11. **Poppy Cascade:** There had been a suggestion from a parishioner that they be allowed to install a “poppy cascade” of home and school crafted poppies on West Street Green, which had then been followed by the suggestion that similarly crafted poppies-on-sticks be added. This had been passed round the council by email, and all seemed in favour, subject to certain restrictions, such as the installation(s) should only be in place for a week (or two) before Remembrance Sunday, and that the council takes no responsibility for them (in the case, for example, of vandalism). From the same parishioner came a suggestion that we acquire another “Tommy” to be placed on the Green, again for a week or two leading up to Remembrance Sunday, being removed each year for storage, (the question of where being left open). After a general discussion, Cllr Dean proposed that we purchase said “Tommy”, with the wording “Lest we Forget” at the base, for about £175, with all in favour. It was therefore agreed, having no objection to the other proposals, that the committee **Recommend to Council** that the two poppy installations be approved (confirming the email vote), and that we purchase a “Tommy” from the Royal British Legion.

12. **Items for Discussion:** None.

13. **Date of next meeting** – Monday 21st November at 7:30pm in the parish office.

Meeting closed at 8:45 pm.