

**ILMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL
OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE MINUTES**

Minutes of a meeting of the **OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Ilminster on Tuesday 29th July 2014 at 19:30hrs

Present:

Chairman: Cllr C Goodall

Councillors: Cllr S Austin, Cllr P Burton, Cllr V Higgins, Cllr V Keitch, Cllr A Lawson, Cllr D Miller, Cllr J Pallister, Cllr A Shearman, Cllr S Shepherd, Cllr S Storey, Cllr R Swann, and Cllr E Taylor.

In Attendance

Officers: Mr A Jones (Senior Open Spaces Warden), Miss J Norris (Town Clerk)

7 members of the public attended this meeting and one member of the Press.

The Chairman welcomed the members of the public and explained the public participation scheme.

Items brought to the attention of the Committee included the following:

Speaker 1

- The Speaker was concerned about the people practising re-enactments and sword fighting on a Saturday afternoon as they are offputting to walkers. The Chairman responded that the group have practised on or near the tennis court for some years and are often watched by passersby. The concerns are noted and an attempt will be made to contact the group to let them know of the concerns.
- Speaker 1 then continued that in her opinion there have been no notable improvements to Rec, Britten's Field or anywhere else. The Chairman responded that Open Spaces Team have caught up with grass cutting and asked the speaker to be please be more specific about her complaint.

The speaker said that the Canal bank and path are overgrown and there are a lot of rats. The Chairman responded that areas of grass along the bank have been left to grow to encourage wildlife and meadow flowers will be encouraged to grow there next year.. It is known that there are some rats but the expert advice is that because water voles also live by the Canal poisoned should not be used. People feeding ducks and rubbish left along the Canal bank encourage the rats. The possibility of notices being erected to discourage duck feeding and encouraging people to take their rubbish home will be investigated. A letter will be sent to the Angling Club advising them of the concerns raised by the local residents.

119. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lawson and Sothern.

120. Declarations of Interest

At this point in the agenda there were no declarations of interest made by Councillors or Officers in respect of any item on the agenda.

121. Minutes.

RESOLVED

- a) that the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd June 2014 be confirmed as a correct record, subject to an additional bullet point being added to Minute 111 which reads " The total cost of the package will need to be established"
- b) to note the action list relating to the Open Spaces committee.

Items brought to the attention of the committee included the following:

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- total cost of providing MUGA has not yet been determined
- 336 from Greenfylde School children have visited Herne Hill as part of school activities
- The fitness activities / class on the Rec has started
- The Brownies should be asked if they have a date for burying time capsule

122. Warden's Report

The Committee received the report from the Senior Open Spaces Warden about recent open spaces activities in Ilminster and future planned work

Items raised during consideration of this item included the following:

- There is a mattress in a den at the top of Herne Hill; the Open Spaces Team will locate and remove it
- Councillors who have walked around Herne Hill recently have not seen any fly tipping

123. Police Report

PC Stuart was at Council and so did not attend this meeting

124. Financial Comparison and Virement

The Committee received information about the Open Spaces expenditure and commitments to date when compared with the 2014/15 budget.

Items discussed regarding this item included the following:

- An explanation of the expenditure on budget lines Miscellaneous (574) and Projects (595) is required
- The quality of the pointing on the cemetery wall along New Road needs to be checked
- The purpose of the timer on the Cemetery Lodge Septic tank was questioned

125. Feedback from Councillor Walkabouts

Councillors have recently had the opportunity to participate in walkabouts of the Cemetery, the Minster, the Recreation Ground, Britten's Field and Herne Hill. This agenda item provided the opportunity for Councillors to articulate their observations.

A) Cemetery maintenance

- Now back up to a good standard
- Council Volunteers tending plots would assist with the maintenance and the visual impact of the Cemetery.
- Where Volunteers were used to tend a plot taking before and after photos to send any relatives that could be traced may assist with future enquiries
- The sign about what can and can't be done is too small – bigger and more visible signage is required
- Unsafe headstones could be moved and placed in alternative locations – in Taunton some had been used to form a path within a churchyard
- The standards of grave digging that had been viewed were unacceptable.
- The Chairman explained, for the benefit of the public attendees, about the cemetery rules & regulations and grave digging requirements e.g. tamping
- Grass cutting around the cremation plots requires a small self-propelled lawn mower

B) Owl boxes

- Somerset Wildlife project supply free nest boxes; Their representative, Chris Sperring, visited Britten's Field and Herne Hill and thought there were suitable sites for nest boxes particularly as the old oak tree and long grassed area on the bank leading to the Ridge Path provides a natural habitat

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an owl needs e.g. insects, voles, suggest same a farmer - gets to certain height cut & take away

- The long grass should be cut before winter
- The possibility of introducing /rescuing an owl and releasing it in the Herne Hill / Britten's Field area may be attractive to a relevant organisation e.g. RSPB

C) Grass length on the land between Britten's Field and the Ridge Path

- It is not feasible / practical to create a wild flower meadow on the sloping ground - due to the size and nature of the area e.g. poppies and cornflowers grow in cracks in the earth where the land has previously been cultivated
- To create a wildflower area the seeds need to get into the soil and initially all grass has to be removed

D) Herne Hill access

- On walkabout Councillors looked at a possible new access route that could be made by going across bank where a cutting had previously been made; with the addition of a pipe traversing the width of the proposed path this would be a simple way to improve accessibility
- The removal of some dead elder to let more light in may promote growth of other natural / indigenous plants
- Emergency access by a vehicle such as a Land Rover would be able easier and quicker

E) Proposed Lookout point

- The resources need to create the lookout point – materials and labour
- Possible to use volunteers
- Movement of stone from its current location in Ilminster to the look out area

F) The Canal

- The current height of the pipe in the new angling club grill is affecting water level; this in turn will lead to the path flooding more frequently
- Badgers digging setts have affected the land alongside the Canal and especially at the top end between the Rec and Britten's Field
- Ideally volunteers will be used to clear thistles and other growth later in the year when things start to die back
- In fullness of time some of the original canal features could be revealed
- The pollarded crack willows are already starting to re grow

G) Multi Use Games Area

- 3 locations were looked at; the Councillor preference was for the location from the midpoint of the skatepark towards the toilet block
- SSDC Officer advice was for the location to be parallel with the skatepark or at 90degrees to the skatepark and parallel to The Mead
- The SSDC Sports and Play Officer was concerned that the Councillors preferred location severely compromised the plans put forward by Redbay Design particularly in regard to the childrens' play area and the path layout

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H) Other

- The ash tree by the toilet block on the Recreation ground is split and whilst not posing an immediate danger should be taken down before any high winds come with the autumn weather

126. Land at Court Barton

The Council considered a request from the Iminster Education Foundation (IEF) for the Council to take over maintenance of the grass area in the centre of Court Barton.

- Since the Grammar School closed in 1971 the land at Court Barton has been maintained by various people and methods
- There is a cost to the Town Council in taking on the grass cutting responsibility in terms of both time and money
Court Barton is an attractive part of the town and probably the oldest section still intact
- The tone of the letter from the IEF was disappointing and did not promote a partnership approach
- The Open Spaces Team could cut the grass at the same time as they cut the Minster grounds

RESOLVED

- (i) that the Town Council will maintain the grass at Court Barton free of charge for 1 year
- (ii) that a record be kept of the time taken to maintain the grass at Court Barton
- (iii) that after 1 year the Committee are given the costs that have been incurred maintaining the grass at Court Barton and will consider if a) they will continue to undertake the maintenance and b) whether or not there should be a charge for future maintenance

NB: At 20:50hrs Councillors Swann, Storey & Shepherd declared personal interests in this item as IEF Trustees

127. Church Railings

The appointment of a contractor to paint the church railings was considered. Issues discussed during consideration of this item included:

- the paint finish - gloss or smooth
- that the railings are in the heart of the Conservation Area
- Duration of work

RESOLVED

- (i) That Richard Crabb (Contractor B) be appointed to prepare, prime and paint the churchyard railings at a cost of £5460
- (ii) The work be funded £4,000 to be taken from the provision in the budget for the current year and £1,460 from the Reserves for Churchyard Railings and Gates

128. Temporary Vehicular Access Over Council Land

To consider a request to allow vehicular access over council land to enable a resident of The Incline to remove excavated soil from their garden.

- Possible Council use of the soil

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RESOLVED

- (i) that temporary access for the purpose of soil removal from the resident's garden is permitted subject to the costs for any repairs to damage caused being met by the resident making the request
- (ii) that the resident is requested to let the Council have the soil free of charge for use at the lookout point.

The Meeting closed at 21:10 hrs.

Chair's signature and date