

PETERSFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Grounds Committee held at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Petersfield, on Thursday 13 October 2011 at 6.30 p.m.

PRESENT: Cllr R Ayer (Chairman), Cllr Ms J Dickinson, Cllr Mrs L Farrow and Cllr W Organ

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs S McMorran (Deputy Town Clerk), Mr P Jones (Maintenance Contracts Officer) and Mr D Petche (Sheet and Tilmore Allotment Association).

G 0310 CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

The Chairman had no comments.

G 0311 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Marshall and Budden.

G 0312 APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Grounds Committee held on 15 September 2011 be approved.

G 0313 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

G 0314 PUBLIC REPRESENTATION

Mr David Petche from the Allotment Association addressed the meeting. He reminded those present that the Allotment Association had written to the Town Council in June 2011 with the aim of saving the Town Council staff effort by carrying out the inspections and also saving £2,000 and also to get better value on the maintenance of the allotments. Mr Petche had spoken to three organisations that could carry out the work in the current contract (£3750) at half the price. He also advised that tree surgery could be carried out more cheaply than at present. The impression of the Allotment Association was that value for money was not being achieved. The Allotment Association would like to be involved in choosing contractors and also to prioritise where the money was spent. A list of proposed projects, as discussed with Officers, had been submitted for inclusion into the budget for 2012/2013.

Mr Petche went on to say that it had never been said that the Allotment Association was not interested in full devolution and that it had been suggested to start with Tilmore but the Association were happy to do both. He also outlined a plan for the grass cutting to be done by Allotment holders that bordered the tracks without payment but that their allotment rent could be waived. He did not agree that the maintenance could not be taken out of the current contract.

G 0315

MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS OFFICER'S REPORT

Members received and noted the Maintenance Contracts Officer's report, a copy of which is attached to these minutes at Appendix A.

Members noted that the Heath Pond Association intended to introduce predatory fish to the Pond and asked if this would be discussed at committee, as had previously been agreed. The Maintenance Contracts Officer confirmed that plans would be presented to committee prior to the introduction of these fish to Heath Pond.

The Maintenance Contracts Officer confirmed that the Taro Fair had passed without incident. A report had been received that human waste (possibly from a chemical WC) had been left on The Heath, but no evidence had been found.

G 0316

PLAY EQUIPMENT PROJECT

Members received a report from the Deputy Town Clerk on the progress being made with the equipment installation on The Heath and Bell Hill recreation ground, a copy of which is attached to these minutes at Appendix B.

G 0317

OAK TREE - QUEENS DIAMOND JUBILEE

Members were asked to give consideration to a location for an Oak Tree which will be donated by the Hampshire Gardens Trust to every town and parish council in Hampshire to celebrate the Queens Diamond Jubilee. Following consideration it was

RECOMMENDED that the following sites be considered as a location for the Queens Diamond Jubilee Memorial Oak Tree:

- Avenue Playing Fields
- Love Lane Sports Ground
- High Meadow

G 0318

THE AVENUE PAVILION PAVING

Members received a quotation in the sum of £1772 plus VAT for work to the paving at The Avenue Pavilion to rectify trip hazards.

Members asked how these works would be funded. Officers advised that it was hoped that virement could be identified. Members expressed concern that only one quotation had been obtained. They were advised that this was because the matter was urgent but that a further quotation could be sought if required.

RECOMMENDED that work to the paving at The Avenue Pavilion to rectify trip hazards in the sum not exceeding £1772 plus VAT be approved with Officers identifying suitable virement and obtaining an additional quotation

G 0319

ALLOTMENT DEVOLUTION

Members received a report and recommendations from the Town Clerk, following the working party meeting and subsequent meeting regarding Allotment devolution to Sheet and Tilmore Allotment Association, copy attached at Appendix C.

Cllr Mrs Dickinson, who was a member of the working party, reported that she had learnt a lot by accompanying Officers on the allotment inspections. She advised that she was not in favour of the Allotment Association carrying out inspections without Officers but felt that their involvement was useful. She felt that if the Allotment Association carried out the inspections that the potential for bullying was quite strong. The letters would still be written by Officers and she did not feel that a lot of savings of Officer time would be achieved. The inspections should be done by an objective body. She felt that the contract regarding grass cutting needed further exploration as savings may be able to be made.

The Chairman stated that he could not imagine that Officers would write to terminate a tenancy unless they had inspected the plot. He reported that the Town Clerk had advised him that the inspections took two Officers less than a morning a month (March - October) and that the inspections were now taking longer as the Allotment Association were accompanying the Officers.

RESOLVED to suspend standing orders to allow Mr Petche to address the meeting

Mr Petche stated that there was validity to the comments made by Cllr Mrs Dickinson and suggested that one Officer plus one member of the Allotment Association carry out the inspections. He also agreed that more investigation on the grounds maintenance contract was needed.

Mr Petche went on to advise that the committee of the Allotment Association (9 members) met monthly. The Association had 115 members and there were approximately 170 plot holders (total for both sites).

The meeting was reconvened.

Following further consideration it was

RECOMMENDED that:

1. Any plans for the full devolution of management of allotments, now or in the future, required consultation by the Town Council of all tenants.
2. Relationships with the Town Council and Allotment Association should remain constructive with the Association continuing to have a positive input into the management of unsatisfactory plots as at present.

3. If it was decided to devolve management functions with financial implications it should commence at the start of the financial year.

4.
 - a. If full devolvement of management is intended then a formal agreement is required covering roles and responsibilities
 - b. Partial devolution may not require a formal agreement
 - c. Monthly inspections, March - October, should continue to involve the Allotment Association
5. Any decision on full devolution should await the outcome of the application for independent parish status for Sheet
6. The Grounds committee shall review the maintenance of the allotments within the Grounds Maintenance Contract
7. Full devolution cannot take place without more detailed research and consideration
8. It is preferred to work with the Allotment Association in the management of the two sites. For this to work effectively there needs to continue to be co-operation from both parties and communication needs to be clear and concise.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 7.50 pm

Maintenance & Contracts Officer's Report
to PTC Grounds Committee.
October 2011

This report seeks to inform councillors of matters of interest affecting any of the public open space land which we own or manage. Members are reminded that its contents are not available for debate, but questions can always be asked and we will seek to answer them, however it should be borne in mind that if they involve the need for investigation or would be complex or lengthy, answers will need to be given outside of the meeting. If councillors consider that any matter on the report is in need of debate, the subject can be added to a future meeting's agenda for this purpose. ~ Town Clerk.

General:

- I am pleased to report that grounds maintenance contract works are back on course and up to schedule. Our maintenance contractor has responded well and worked hard to bring about a marked improvement in quality and performance and I am very happy with the current standard.
- Hedge cutting at all sites is now completed. In future, hedge cutting will be scheduled to take place twice a year; as soon as possible after 31st August and again late as possible but prior to 1st March. These dates to be further reviewed and amended if and when necessary.

Love Lane Recreation Ground:

- Skate Park: The small gaps between the sleepers on the boardwalk have, from time to time, been an attraction to vandals. In an effort to deter would-be offenders we have filled these gaps with sand.

Bell Hill Recreation Ground:

- The Ditch has been cleaned and cleared.

Woods Meadow:

- The Ditch has been cleaned and cleared.
- Work needs to be carried out on the east boundary where trees and woody overgrowth has become a problem and is encroaching onto the field as well as adjacent properties.

Bell Hill Common:

- The Ditch has been cleaned and cleared.
- The grass has been cut and the wild area strimmed.

The Avenue:

- The existing pathway and disabled access ramp has a number of trip hazards which have developed over time. In places the paving slabs have sunk or shifted or been displaced by tree roots. Urgent remedial work is required to prevent further H&S incidents occurring.

The Heath:

- Taro Fun Fair (J.Wall & Sons) arrived and set up with no apparent problems.
- Heath Pond Association: The HPA have reported no problems as far as fish and fishing activities are concerned. Water level in the pond is very low. There are currently no reports of blue-green algae. Oxygen levels are low but not critical. The HPA are planning to introduce predator fish species to the pond (e.g. Perch, Pike etc) and reduce the number of Bream in order to control overall fish numbers, improve water quality and increase the biodiversity of the pond.
- A large willow tree has come down and was hanging dangerously across the path adjacent to the pond sluice gate. The tree has been safely removed. Other trees in the vicinity have been identified as being potentially dangerous and will be dealt with in due course.
- The drainage ditch which runs from behind the sluice to Rival Moor has been cleaned, cleared and the bank vegetation thinned.
- Playground contractor Greenspan Ltd, started work on the 26th September and are progressing well with the new playground installation. The work is well on schedule and so far there have been no complications or major problems.

THE HEATH AND BELL HILL RECREATION GROUND - PLAY EQUIPMENT

Appendix B

Bell Hill Recreation Ground

A contract for the agreed works, with the additional item (climbing frame), is being prepared and will be issued shortly.

The Heath

Work is progressing well on the new toddler play ground and is on schedule. Many positive comments are being received by the installers from the general public.

Sue McMorran
7 October 2011



GROUNDS COMMITTEE

Allotment Association Proposal for Devolved Management

Background

Members will be aware of the proposal for devolved management of the allotments received from the Sheet and Tilmore Allotment Association that was considered at the Grounds Committee meeting of 14th July 2011.

The changes included within this proposal can be summarised as follows:

- 1 Allotments Association to carry out plot inspections
- 2 Allotments Association to determine how budgets for the allotments are spent
- 3 Pilot the proposed changes at Tilmore only
- 4 Review efficiency of the revised structure after 1 year

The matter was debated at the July meeting and the following resolution was made:

that a working party comprising of Cllr Mrs Dickinson, Cllr Budden, The Deputy Town Clerk and two members of the Allotment Association be formed to explore the possibility of the devolution of the management of the allotments to the Allotment Association and report to the September meeting of the Grounds committee.

The Working Party met on 18th August 2011 and from that meeting the Allotment Association wanted further information on the budgetary matters relating to the two sites that those present did not have. Due to a combination of officer leave and other work commitments, this further meeting attended by myself and the Maintenance Contracts Officer with Mr Petché was delayed until 3rd October 2011.

Members need to be aware that if devolved management of the allotments is approved, the Town Council will remain the 'Allotment Authority' and still need to invest time in checking the efficiency of the devolved process.

First Meeting – 18th August

This meeting was attended by all members of the Working Party except Cllr Budden. The contents can be summarised as follows:

- The Allotment Association were advised that the officer time currently taken up by inspecting allotments was substantially less than the 20 days per annum quoted by them. In reality it was no more than 5 days per annum.
- The Allotment Association indicated they did not have the resources to do more than the inspections. They were unable to issue the letters to plotholders whose plots were not being maintained in a suitable condition.
- The Allotment Association wished to help in the best way they could.
- Inspections undertaken by officers were impartial.
- All agreed that the maintenance of both allotment sites had improved since the introduction of the new Tenancy Agreements.
- Concern was expressed by the Allotment Association over the grass cutting at the allotments in relation to its regularity and standard this summer. The Association were reminded that it was part of the overall Grounds Maintenance Contract.
- The Allotment Association considered the cost of the grounds contract to the allotment sites was high but were reminded that there may be penalties incurred if the Council removed them from the overall contract at this juncture.
- The Allotment Association considered that the contractors used by the Council did not always offer good value. Their solution was that the Association approach contractors they thought would be suitable arranging for the contractor to quote direct to the Town Council. They were unwilling to share their proposed contractors list.
- The Association remained unhappy that the conifers at Tilmore had not been removed although they had asked for this to be done approximately 3 years ago. Officers reminded the Association that the Council didn't tend to remove healthy trees and certainly wouldn't consider it unless a budget for the work had been allocated.
- The Allotment Association wanted a bigger say in how the allotment budget's were spent.

It was agreed that:

1. Allotment Association members would accompany officers on future inspections
2. The opinion of the Association would continue to be sought where necessary in dealing with difficult or troublesome plots.
3. A copy of the Grounds Maintenance Contract specification for the allotment sites be provided to the Allotment Association.
4. The Association were asked to submit spending requests for the allotments for the next financial year by the end of September.

Second Meeting – 3rd October

In part, some of the same ground covered within the first meeting was re-iterated with the following points being raised:

- The Allotment Association still wanted to have the inspections devolved to them with the Council sending all letters to troublesome plotholders.
- A quotation was produced for the removal of the conifers at Tilmore and given to the Maintenance Contracts Officer.
- The Association were asked to submit their requests for projects to be included in the budget for the next financial year by the end of the week.

- The Allotment Association expressed their dissatisfaction with the cost of maintaining the allotment sites within the Grounds Maintenance Contract and the quality of work experienced in recent months. This was used as a prime example of the Council not getting value for the allotments.
- A copy of the Grounds Maintenance Contract in full has been requested by the Allotment Association.

Conclusions and Issues for Consideration

- 1 It must be questionable whether inspections done by one organisation and correspondence by another is either effective or efficient use of resources. Plotters unhappy at receiving a letter do telephone to discuss or complain about its content and managing these situations can often become time-consuming. The credibility factor in this situation is critical and probably cannot be achieved successfully by splitting responsibilities in this way. It is also quite conceivable that rather than saving time as is intended, the proposals as they stand may take more officer time and have the opposite effect.
- 2 Those allotmenters who are not members of the Allotment Association may be unwilling to submit to an inspection regime undertaken by the Association.
- 3 Mr Petcher in his address to members in June suggested that full devolved management of the allotment sites was not desired by the Association.
- 4 For devolution to be successful it has to be carefully managed and implemented at an appropriate time. Members need to consider whether partial devolution is appropriate and make a judgment on the likelihood of its success. The current situation regarding the status of Sheet and the future responsibility for the allotment site in the community needs careful consideration.
- 5 With the Allotment Association remaining unhappy with the current grounds maintenance contract as it relates to the 2 sites, should this be reviewed by the Council?

Recommendations

- 1 **Before commencing with any plans for the devolution of management for the allotments, either now or in the future, all plotters must be consulted on the detailed proposals.**
- 2 **It is important that relationships between the Town Council and the Allotments Association remain constructive and that the Association continues to have a positive input into the ongoing management of unsatisfactory plots as at present.**
- 3 **If it is desired to devolve the management function of the allotments to the Allotment Association it should be commenced at the start of a financial year.**
- 4 **If devolvement of management is desirable, for it to be effective and to achieve its stated aims, both allotment sites would need to be included and a formal agreement entered into covering roles and responsibilities.**

- 5 It would be sensible to delay any decision on the proposals until the outcome of the application for independent parish status in Sheet is known along with the future responsibility for the allotment site within the community.
- 6 The current proposals are likely to involve more officer time to implement and manage rather than create a saving as is desired.
- 7 Consideration be given to reviewing the maintenance of the allotment sites within the current Grounds Maintenance Contract.
- 8 For devolved management of the allotments to be successful, full devolution needs to be explored but this will take time and may or may not be the route that councillors wish to take at this time.
- 9 It is preferred to work with the Allotment Association in the management of the two sites rather than go through a devolvement process. For this process to work effectively, there needs to be co-operation from both parties and communication needs to be clear and concise.

Neil Hitch
Town Clerk
7th October 2011