

**AMENITIES COMMITTEE OF THE WITNEY COUNCIL**

**Held on Monday 12 May 2014  
at 6.00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall**

**Present**

Councillor: Cllr M J C Curry (Chairman)

Councillors:	Mrs J C Baker	C Holliday (non-member)
	H B Eaglestone	J S King
	D S Enright	
Officers:	Town Clerk	Democratic Services Officer
	Facilities Manager	Events and Communication Officer

A213 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for their absence was received from Cllr N Buckle, Mrs B J Churchill, and A D Harvey.

A214 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting.

A215 **ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

**RESOLVED:** that Councillor Mrs B J Churchill be appointed Vice Chairman of this Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

A216 **MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** that the minutes of the Leisure and Recreation Committee meeting held on 3 March 2014 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

A217 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

Cllr King queried what was happening with regard to St. Mary's Church as he had lost sight of it. The Town Clerk advised that the Facilities Manager would give a verbal update during the consideration of Committee Vision.

A218 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no members of the public present for this item.

A219 **COMMITTEE VISION**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk and the Facilities Manager as circulated with the agenda.

The Town Clerk invited members to consider the current position of the Committee and to set realistic objectives going forward. The Facilities Manager had provided a list of current and future projects.

The Facilities Manager explained that she had put together a list of projects already started or due to start in this cycle of meetings. She drew members' attention to the notes on the St. Mary's Churchyard meeting that had been circulated prior to the start of the meeting.

The Facilities Manager said she had circulated these notes in the interests of transparency and also as an update to members. She had prepared a verbal report but was happy to circulate this to members as a hard copy after the meeting.

The Facilities Manager proceeded to deliver the following report which she requested be recorded "verbatim" in the minutes:

**St Marys Churchyard - Maintenance**

*This was a very separate issue to that of stability project.*

*Town Council officers were awaiting confirmation from St Marys on establishing ownership of each section of the boundary wall before a maintenance schedule could be drawn up. This included a recent request regarding the front wall, so the Council would be able to commission the stone mason's repair works.*

*Officers had established that the footpath through the church yard (excluding the section of path leading directly into the church) was listed as private. However following a conversation with Rights of Way, it was listed as a right of way and therefore it had been confirmed that this fell under the maintenance responsibility of the Countryside service, which in turn had an agreement on all tarmacked ROW surfaces which were maintained by the County Council Highways department. Town Council officers on behalf of St Marys had requested a meeting with a senior surveyor to discuss the pathway conditions and report back to the church regarding the action required by Countryside services. The Town Council had again requested that the drainage from a sink outflow which ran directly onto the path and was causing damage was repaired as soon as practicable. These responsibilities might also cover drains to the pathway.*

*In summary, the Town Council had started to create a picture of who was responsible for certain areas and tasks but had not yet received any updates from St Marys.*

Cllr Enright asked if this meant that the Town Council was now responsible for cutting the grass and maintaining the fence in the churchyard. The Facilities Manager replied that it meant that the Town Council had started to create a picture of who was responsible for certain areas and tasks, as per verbal her report.

Cllr Enright asked if any of this applied to St. Mary's Church, Cogges. The Town Clerk replied that when the closure order was presented to the Town Council, the Church had requested that it retained ownership of the churchyard and its subsequent maintenance.

Cllr King referred to the ownership of the wall and thought that economies of scale made it ridiculous to partition the ownership up into small portions.

The Chairman commented that the Town Council had agreed to contact the District Council to see if they had any archived records of the transfer of the Churchyard, as the Urban Council to which the transfer was originally made had been split into the District and Town Councils in 1974. She could not see that there would not be some paperwork. The Facilities Manager would follow this up and would ask the District Council to search their archives for documentation.

The Facilities Manager continued to deliver her verbal report:

**Stability project**

*It was important to highlight that this project covered all cemeteries and not just St. Mary's.*

*Cllrs would recall a zoning assessment that was carried out early last year covering all Town Council cemeteries, in order to progress applications for faculties. A faculty for Holy Trinity and Tower Hill were in place in order for testing to go ahead. Work on memorial testing had started at Tower Hill in the un-consecrated sections as reported through Council (minutes L496/ii/13 and L542/13 refer).*

*Town Council officers had the huge task of trying to contact owners of graves where work was required regarding the cost of repairs. However members would recall that Cllrs agreed that the Town Council would pay for repairs up to current annual budget limits (minutes L 524/13 and L006/14 refer).*

*St Marys was a more complicated issue due to the large number of listed memorials and the scope of the project. English Heritage was contacted last year about the project, as were other stakeholders. The zoning assessment and subsequent actions taken should clarify any concerns regarding meeting the Town Council's health and safety requirements. The Town Council had a clear audit trail identifying its responsibilities, and outlining required actions and those taken. Therefore The Town Council could provide evidence of due diligence as well as with some certainty its efforts in fulfilling health and safety requirements, documented through Council (minute L542/13 refers).*

*Following a very productive meeting between all Stakeholders regarding the memorial stability works, and in order for the Town Council to gain the faculty needed to carry out the required risk assessment an interlocutory faculty will be applied for in the coming weeks. This document is a faculty of sorts, which will allow us to carry out the initial risk assessments for the stability project to go ahead. In order for the Town Council to satisfy the Diocese in order to gain such an interlocutory faculty, contractors had provided a detailed method statement as well as an agreement on immediate action, should any memorial tested be deemed to be dangerous. The agreement allowed a temporary structure to be built around the memorial until the process can be continued in order to ensure public safety.*

*Once a risk assessment has been carried out under the interlocutory faculty, the Town Council could apply for the full faculty. This would enable the process of testing and repair of memorials to commence. This process was likely to take a considerable amount of time, and*

*would include site visits with conservation officers and English Heritage, contractors and officers the first of which would happen very soon.*

*Members should also consider that at present there is no annual or earmarked budget allocation to fund any such works.*

*Conservation of memorials was not part of this project. It had been agreed with all stakeholders this should be a separate issue as covered in the meeting notes.*

The Facilities Manager added that the Diocese had mentioned there could be funding that the Church could apply for towards conservation. The Chairman was pleased to hear this as previously a church representative had said no funding would be available.

The Chairman thanked the Facilities Manager for her report and thought that things had moved on hugely. The Facilities Manager said that she had wanted to demonstrate that good practice was being followed in regard to health and safety and also in regard to transparency.

The Town Clerk informed the Committee that on a related item, she had received a letter from the church's solicitor, as the church was concerned about the Town Council's insurance cover in the event that a passer-by had an accident in the churchyard. She had contacted the Council's insurers, Zurich, who had confirmed that the appropriate public liability insurance of £15 million was in place. She thought that the church may have been confused at an earlier point that it only extended to the Council's staff and contractors. They were particularly concerned for the public given the amount of public events planned - the beer festival and food festival for example.

The Chairman asked what the situation would be if someone under the influence of alcohol had an accident. The Facilities Manager said that there would not be a problem as she could demonstrate due diligence regarding health and safety. She added that the Diocesan Secretary had said that the Town Council would be within its rights to lock the gates to the churchyard if that was what was most appropriate in regard to safeguarding public safety.

The Facilities Manager moved on to other areas covered by the Amenities Committee. She said that she would bring reports about the lake and country park to the Committee and highlighted that there were a lot of play area projects. She was pleased to be able to announce that the grant application to WREN had been successful and that the Splash Park Project had been awarded £75,000. Members congratulated her on a successful application.

She had also included grounds maintenance and a list of smaller items such as dog waste bins in her list. There were also buildings that required a condition survey to update the asset register – a good example of this was the chapel at Tower Hill.

The Facilities Manager highlighted that there were lots of events happening now which demanded a lot of officer time. Cllr Eaglestone commented that on Sunday there had obviously been an event at West Witney Sports Ground as the area was packed and cars were parked all along Burford Road, and Deer Park estate. It seemed clear to him that the ground was not large enough. The Town Clerk said that this was a matter for the Recreation

Committee. Cllr Eaglestone had raised the issue as he was not a member of that committee, but wanted it raised.

Cllr Enright thanked the Facilities Manager for her compilation of projects. He would like to see them listed on a spread sheet with red, amber and green to indicate progress. The Facilities manager replied that the list was currently just a “vision”. Members needed to decide what they wanted to do and what was important to them and to set timelines as such. Cllr Enright thought it was difficult to set exact timeframes, for example with the memorial garden – it would happen but not this year, although planning would continue.

The Facilities Manager asked what Cllr Enright felt was important. He replied that this would be the access to the Windrush cemetery, the land near the Ducklington end of the flood meadow for allotments and play areas. The Town Clerk explained that the land in question for potential allotments was in the hands of the agents at the moment and she understood that he was in discussions with the landowners. Cllr Enright thought it would be good to have a 5 year plan for the play areas. The Facilities Manager replied this had been done and this was why the areas listed were now under review. At Park Road, the residents had made representation to the Council to keep the play area, but they had not come back to the Council with any requests or plans despite being written to several times. The area was now locked as there had been antisocial behaviour taking place. The Chairman felt that something else should be done with the area such as creating more allotments. Cllr Baker was concerned that some of the plots already there were not worked. The Democratic Services Officer said that some of the plots had recently been given up and were in the process of being re let which should improve the situation.

Cllr Enright asked who owned the land and he was informed that it was owned by Cottsway who leased it to the Town Council. He wondered why Cottsway couldn't let it directly to the allotment association and the Town Clerk said this could be something to look into when the lease was up for renewal.

The Chairman recalled that there had been a lot of plans for the Park Road area to be an inclusive community project but the public had not got on board. Cllr King asked why the play area was locked. The Facilities Manager explained the complaints which had been received when it was a play area.

Cllr Baker thought it was a lovely corner but recognised that it was in an area where residents did not have much money to spare. She asked how much it would cost to turn the play area into allotments. The Facilities Manager said that she had initially suggested this because one of the Council's priorities at the time was to find more land for allotments. Cllr Eaglestone reported that there were quite a few unkempt allotments at Lakeside and Cllr Holliday had taken photos of these. The Chairman asked officers to investigate to ensure that the plots were properly used.

Cllr Baker said this did not answer the question of Park Road. She wanted to know what would cost less – allotments or a new play area. The Town Clerk advised that there was funding for allotments from the sale of the land at Madley Park some years ago. She also reminded Members that allotments were being provided as part of the Curbridge

development; however she was unsure to what extent the provision extended – whether the Council would have to fund the layout of the allotments – roadways, sheds etc.

The Chairman asked what members' views were. Cllr Enright asked if District Councillors had been contacted for their support for a play area. The Facilities Manager said she had not but she had contacted relevant Town Councillors. The Chairman asked members to think about what they wanted to see at Park Road and bring them back to committee. The Facilities Manager offered to draw up feasibility studies on the options of a play area and allotments. All agreed this would be a good idea.

**RECOMMENDED:**

1. that the report be noted;
2. that the Facilities Manager approaches the District Council to see if they have any paperwork pertaining to the transfer of St Mary's Churchyard upon Local Government reorganisation in 1974;
3. that the Facilities Manager brings a feasibility report on providing allotments or play equipment at the Park Road site to the next meeting;
4. that Members consider the Committees vision, objectives and priorities further at the next meeting.

**A220 MINUTES OF IN BLOOM WORKING PARTY**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the In Bloom Working Party held on 5 February and 12 March 2014 as circulated with the agenda.

The Communications and Events Officer confirmed the date of judging to be 21 July which was a little later than usual. She wanted to get West Oxfordshire District Council on board with litter picking and grass cutting, but was struggling to get the business community engaged.

This year "In Bloom" had a new logo to distance it from the Town Council. There were 6 community gardens that already looked amazing. Cllr King asked if Henry Box and West Witney schools were on board. The Communications and Events Officer said that they were not but the Kings School and Wood Green were.

In response to Cllr Enright's question the Communications and Events Officer advised that there would be a community lunch as part of the judging day which it was hoped would be at Cogges Manor Farm. She also informed the Committee that on 1 June there was the "Cogges Big Lunch" and it was hoped that "In Bloom" would have a presence there, showcasing the community gardens.

The next meeting was scheduled for 4 June 2014.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the minutes be noted.

A221 **WORLD WAR ONE WORKING PARTY MINUTES**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the working parties held on 4 March and 26 March 2014 as circulated with the agenda.

The Chairman said that the plans were coming on well. There would be a remembrance service on Church Green with a more secular church service afterwards. Horses, dogs and pigeons were to be involved and she wanted to encourage people to bring their pets to the services as pets had been sent to war.

The Chairman explained that it was hoped that the Town Council would plant an oak tree on The Leys and Churches Together would be planting 8 trees. There were also plans to plant a remembrance garden and erect a small plinth at The Leys.

The Communications and Events Officer added that boxes of poppies would be sent to Witney's twinned towns in Germany and France with messages of peace and hope.

The Chairman said that all were welcome to attend the next meeting on 27 May.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the minutes be noted.

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The meeting closed at 6.55pm

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Chairman.