

LEISURE AND RECREATION COMMITTEE OF THE WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

**Held on Monday 9th September 2013
at 6.10pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall**

Present

Councillor: C K Woodward (Chairman)

Councillors:	Mrs J C Baker	R F N Curry
	A K Beames	P J Dorward
	Mrs B J Churchill	J S King
	Ms C Curry	B J Woodruff
Non- Committee Members :		H B Eaglestone
		D S Enright
Officers:	Town Clerk	Deputy Town Clerk
	Facilities Manager	Democratic Services Officer

Also present: 6 members of the public, 1 member of the press

L392 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

L393 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

L394 The Chairman congratulated the Town Council's officers on the recently held Play Day at the QEII Burwell Field. He said that it had been a fantastic success.

L395 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED: The minutes of the meeting held on 8th July 2013 and 29th July 2013 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman with the following amendment:

Meeting of 8th July 2013: Minute L301 - Mrs B J Churchill to be added to the apologies received.

L396 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

i) Meeting of 8th July 2013: Minute L306 – Tower Hill Cemetery Access

Cllr King asked that it be made clear that the review of the new system in Tower Hill Cemetery was to be three months from the system's introduction and not from the date of the meeting on 8th July 2013.

ii) Meeting of 8th July 2013: Minute L309 – Witney Vikings Football Club

Cllr Beames asked if any free pitch space could be advertised on the Council's website and also if an on line booking system could be set up.

RECOMMENDATION:

That this be referred to the next available meeting.

L397 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Mr Alan Scholan – Witney Town Bowls Club

The Chair welcomed Mr Scholan from Witney Town Bowls Club, who has come to address the committee in relation to item 12 on the agenda – Witney Town Bowls Club New Pavilion – Request for a Loan.

Mr Scholan explained that 24 bowlers from the club had recently played against the team from Abingdon in a replica of a match that had taken place 100 years ago to celebrate the opening of the Abingdon Bowls Club. Witney Town Bowls Club was now 103 years old and it was one of the oldest in West Oxfordshire and they believed that it was the oldest sporting club in the district operating from its original site.

Mr Scholan said that there was a good landlord and tenant relationship with the Town Council, and that many generations had enjoyed the healthy activity of outdoor bowls.

From time to time upgrades were necessary. The present building had moved from North Leigh to its present site at the Leys in 1984. The Town Council had given £10, 000.00 towards this building, which was now coming towards the end of its life. Mr Scholan explained that the bowls club had agreed to replace it, and had been fundraising for three years. They had initially struggled with Sport England Funding but had recently been successfully awarded £50, 000.00. West Oxfordshire District Council had also given funding of £37, 000.00. The bowls club had applied for £50, 000.00 from the District Council and if they had been successful in this they could have accepted the building tender. However, they now faced a shortfall in funding.

The bowls club felt that the new building would fit in with the planned upgrade of the Leys. Mr Scholan pointed out that the club had paid back a loan of £10, 000.00 to the Town Council in the 1980's in full and on time. On behalf of the club, he asked the Committee to approve the loan of £12, 650.00.

The Chair asked the Committee if it was happy to discuss agenda item 12 at this point, and members confirmed that they were happy to do so.

Cllr R Curry asked what term for the loan was proposed by the bowls club and what would happen if they defaulted on payments? Mr Scholan said that he would propose an interest free loan over eight years, which were the same terms as a loan they had accepted from the National Bowls Association. Mr Scholan said that the club had little to offer in terms of security for the loan.

Cllr Dorward asked what the current membership of the club was. Mr Scholan replied that they had 80 bowlers and 20 social members.

Cllr C Curry said that she remembered that club's centennial celebrations and said that they were wonderful and had been well attended.

Cllr Dorward asked if there was a timescale for receipt of the loan. Mr Scholan explained that the tender the club had originally accepted was now being re costed by the builder, and that the club wanted to go ahead as soon as planning permission (which had lapsed) was given.

Cllr King asked if the club would come back to the Town Council for further money if the building costs had gone up. Mr Scholan said that the club would not do so.

The Town Clerk asked how much the Club had applied for from Bowls England. Mr Scholan said that it was £20, 000.00 and that this money was needed in addition to the loan from the Town Council.

RECOMMENDATION:

To recommend to the Finance and General Purposes Committee that they support granting this loan subject to terms being agreed with Witney Town Bowls Club.

L398 **PRESENTATION FROM THE WEST WITNEY USER GROUP ON THEIR FUTURE ASPIRATIONS FOR THE WEST WITNEY SPORTS GROUND SITE**

The Chair welcomed Mr Liam Walsh on behalf of the West Witney User Group.

Mr Walsh explained that the group had made a presentation to the Town Council in September 2012. Various sports used the West Witney sporting facilities and also the separate social club. Further to the formal sports the ground was also used for Aunt Sally, darts, and crib and the club provided meeting rooms.

Cllr King asked how many members of the social club were members of sports teams. Mr Walsh said this was about half. Not all members of the sports clubs were members of the social club.

Mr Walsh said that there were over 1, 000 regular users of the site including families, supporters and opponents. The themes identified at the last presentation were still relevant. The Clubs' existences were highly dependent on volunteers of which there were 100.

Mr Walsh stated that there were various issues with the site. The social facilities were 50 years old and were coming to the end of their natural life. DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) compliance was also an issue. The access road was no longer fit for purpose and there was not sufficient parking. The changing facilities were poor and the playing surfaces were in need of work, especially the tennis court and the football pitches which flooded and were often unplayable in the winter.

Mr Walsh continued by saying that previous blocks to development had been a lack of security of tenure and Witney Town Council's strategy to sell the site.

Cllr C Curry stated that she thought this comment was disingenuous, as the Town Council had wanted to sell the site and move all the sports to another facility which would have had enhanced facilities for all.

Cllr King said that one reason that the user group had opposed moving to an alternate site was that people would not be able to walk to it as they did to West Witney. He therefore did not understand why further car parking was needed if people did in fact walk there.

Mr Walsh responded that the proposed replacement site was smaller than the current one. Cllr C Curry said that this was incorrect. Mr Walsh said that he believed that more car parking was needed; people did walk and cycle to the site, but opposing teams could not always do this.

Cllr Eaglestone said that he had been a member of the Witney Mills bowls club in the past, and that the subs covered membership of the social club. He wondered if that was the case with current clubs.

A representative from the tennis club said that tennis club members had to pay extra to be members of the social club. Cllr Eaglestone thought that if all sports users were members of the social club the additional income could help cover the costs of improvements.

Mr Walsh continued that when the Town Council decided against the sale of the site on 8th April, this gave the users security of tenure.

The West Witney User Group was set up with a Chair, Vice Chair and a Secretary and all user groups were involved. The group had had active support from Cllrs Beames and Woodruff. They would ask Witney Town Council for a 40 years lease for the site.

Cllr C Curry asked how the Town Council could improve facilities if it was constrained by a 40 year lease. Mr Walsh said that the group had looked at other land that might be available. Cllr Beames explained that one site was the old McLeans yard which was not for sale, and the other site, land to the south of the current site, and was not for sale either. Cllr C Curry commented that no other land was immediately available and that the West Witney site had been purchased in the 1970's with an assurance that the land on the other side of the Burford Road would be available for future use/expansion. It seemed that the

Council had been misled as this land was in fact classed as part of the Windrush Valley, meaning it could not be built on.

Mr West explained that without security of tenure, funding applications were not possible. The group had started looking at potential funding opportunities from the Football Association and the Football Foundation and had begun to understand what would be required for these. The group had made an application to Sport England during the summer but this had failed due to lack of security of tenure. However, it had been a useful exercise and they had gained valuable feedback for future funding applications.

Mr West explained that although there was currently a user group, in future members needed to form a more formal group- probably in the form of a charity. This was a complex area that they needed to get right in order to effectively manage the site on behalf of the Town Council. Currently some clubs were integrated into the user group and some were not and they needed to be brought together into a coherent group. He confirmed that they had engaged with both SSGB and West Oxfordshire District Council.

Mr West believed there was a case for redevelopment and the group was looking at a three year plan. He understood that they needed to ensure that whatever they took on was achievable and sustainable. They hoped to maximise the use of the site for the community and turn some profit.

Mr West felt that a new build was key to generating and increasing revenue. The current building was not a welcoming venue. The District Council had indicated that any building should be towards the south west of the site. The priorities for a new building were a social area and changing facilities.

Mr West displayed some design ideas for the Committee. Cllr Churchill asked if these designs had been costed and Mr West said they had not.

Mr West felt that a significant issue over the summer had been the group's relationship with Town Council Officers. They wanted to have a good relationship in future. The Town Clerk stated that she did not think that this point was appropriate or relevant to the current presentation.

Cllr R Curry stated that he felt the crucial issue in the discussion was that of a 40 year lease. The Town Council would be required to terminate the individual leases held with each club and to give one new lease to the West Witney User Group. He wondered if the clubs would be prepared to end their leases voluntarily in order to enter into a joint 40 year lease. Cllr Churchill pointed out that the group were asking for a lease on the sports and social club and the land – currently the land was not leased.

Cllr C Curry said that she agreed with the Town Clerk's previous comment and that any issues with Council Officers should be discussed with the Clerk. She added that she did not think that the Council could grant a lease without a business plan or a financial background.

Cllr Churchill stated that she believed that the groups did not realise the extent to which the Town Council subsidised the pitches, and she asked where the money to fund the new plans would come from.

Cllr King said that in principle he liked the idea of a sports association but wondered if all the individual sports groups would be happy with this.

The Chair agreed with other members' comments and shared their concerns. He agreed that there needed to be some concrete base underneath the proposals. Mr West said that it would not be in the group's interest to take on anything without the correct legal and financial processes.

The Chair recognised that a lot of work had been done since the last presentation but thought that more needed to be done.

Cllr Woodruff thanked Mr West for all of his work so far.

Mr West stated that the next steps were:

- To clarify the Town Council's intent on the land
- Agree security of tenure
- Formalise set up of the West Witney Sports Ground Association
- Develop funding opportunities.

Cllr Enright explained that although he was not a member of the Committee, he was very interested in the work that had been done. He felt that a time frame would be useful, to set out at what point an in principle decision would be made and then at what point more detailed work would be carried out.

The Chair proposed that nothing could be taken further until the Council had received the final SSBG report.

Cllr Churchill thought that a feasibility study would be needed along with a business plan. This would go hand in hand with the SSBG report. She added that more feedback was needed from the West Witney Sports and Social Club Working Party.

Cllr King asked if the members could have a copy of Mr West's presentation and Mr West confirmed that they could.

Cllr Baker had found the presentation interesting and she could see the hard work that had gone into the project but she agreed that a feasibility study would be required. She was wary of the Town Council committing to legal costs without having a plan that could move forward.

Cllr R Curry thought that the Town Council should be clear about its' relationship with the User Group. SSBG was a consultant for the Town Council. He felt that if the user group wanted to progress they needed to form a proper group and then formally approach the Town Council for a lease with proper information to back this up. He felt that the Town Council needed to have confidence if it was to grant a 40 year lease.

The Chair asked if Cllrs Beames and Woodruff could write a short report on the matter for the next meeting.

Cllr C Curry wanted to make a final point that the Town Council shared the aspiration to improve sporting facilities and that this was something that it had been striving towards for a long time.

The Chair thanked Mr West for his presentation.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Chair work with the Town Clerk and the Democratic Services Officer to set a date for the next West Witney Sports and Social Group Working Party.

L399 **LEYS MASTERPLAN**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Facilities Officer on the Leys Masterplan. The Facilities Officer asked if members had any questions.

Cllr Baker said that the plan looked brilliant. She had met the Facilities Manager by chance at the site and had been very impressed.

Cllrs C Curry and Eaglestone agreed.

Cllr Enright agreed too and thought that it was good to see a plan coming together. The recent play day at Burwell had been a good opportunity for consultation. He asked if the carnival and Witney Feast Fair

would be affected by the plans. He had noted the additional changing facility in the north east corner. The Facilities Manager confirmed that a small area that the fair used would be lost but it was minimal and would not affect what the fair could offer the town. The main road access would need to be improved for the articulated lorries.

Cllr Churchill asked if there could be radar access disabled toilets. The Facilities Manager emphasised that at this stage the items included were just a wish list. Cllr Churchill also asked about the path along the top of the site as the surface was very bad. The Town Clerk said that she was in dialogue with the Highways Department concerning this.

Cllr Dorward asked how the areas would be fenced off. The Facilities Manager explained that both the wet and dry play areas were under consultation. The parents involved in the Splash Park project had requested a small fence around that area. The footpath would also be fenced off so that dog walkers and other visitors did not have to walk through the play areas.

Cllr Enright left the meeting at 7.25pm

Cllr Doward asked what had dictated the siting of the splash park and the Facilities Manger explained that considerations such as shade from trees, and falling leaves had been taken into account. The parents involved had also wanted more space and in fact companies consulted for a design had all identified the same area for siting.

Cllr Churchill expressed concerns about members of the public photographing children in the wet play area. Cllr Woodruff had seen signs asking people not to take photographs of children in Dorset. Cllr Churchill said that there was a type of fencing that could not be photographed through.

Cllr Curry had concerns about vandalism and was concerned that all the equipment should be vandal proof. The Facilities Manager said that the only part of the project that was underway was the splash park and this was as vandal proof as possible. She hoped that with the introduction of facilities such as a community cafe there would be increased use of the area by families for longer hours which would hopefully discourage anti-social behaviour.

Cllr Beames asked if there was provision for CCTV in the area. The Town Clerk would be meeting with the CCTV group in the next week and there would be discussion about this. Cllr C Curry said that she recalled previous discussions with Henry Box School who at one time had been happy for their cameras to be used for The Leys.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the Facilities Manager's report be noted
2. That the final draft masterplan be drawn up and presented to Full Council on 7th October
3. That the phased works should be decided by the Council at 7th October meeting to allow the works to be assessed for budget setting in November
4. That consideration to the sporting facilities, changing rooms and pavilion is made in combination with the SSGB report to ensure no cross over or identify possible savings or alternative options in providing sports facilities.

L400 PLAY AREA UPDATE

The Committee received and considered the report of the Facilities Manager.

Cllr Dorward asked about the financial implications of the Splash Park as the figures given were within a range. The Facilities Manager did not want to be specific as the contract would be going out for tender.

Cllr C Curry asked how long the project was to take and the Facilities Manager explained that there was a Splash Park Group of parents who were trying to raise funds and the timescale of the project was largely dependent upon how this went.

Cllr King asked for a timeline for the play area updates and the Facilities Manager explained that she was currently only working directly on the splash park. It was hoped that it would open next summer but this was dependent on fundraising.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the report of the Facilities Manager be noted.
2. That the funding for the ground works and new fencing at Raleigh Crescent play area be agreed with the money to be taken from the rolling fund.

L401 UPDATE ON BURIAL/CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION

The Committee received and considered the report of the Democratic Services Officer. Cllr King asked if the memorial safety policy and the method statement for the inspection of memorials were in line with the correct guidance. The Facilities Manger confirmed that they had been in line with ICCM guidance and that she and the Democratic Services Officer had also corresponded with the CCMLG.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the report of the Democratic Services Officer be noted and the Memorial Safety Policy and Method statement be approved
2. That the consideration of additional staffing hours for the input of historical burial data be referred to the personnel sub-committee.

L402 CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES

The Committee received and considered the report of the Events and Communications Officer on the forthcoming Christmas Festivities.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

L403 FINANCIAL REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the RFO/Deputy Town Clerk.

Cllr Curry noted that from the information provided it seemed that the Council had spent less than was forecast. He asked if this was an actual saving or if the money would be spent later in the year. The RFO/Deputy Town Clerk explained that this was not a saving as the money would be spent later in the year as the Council worked to an annual budget.

Cllr Dorward queried the figures under cost centre 1054 – Easements/Wayleaves and the RFO/Deputy Town Clerk agreed to check these in time for the next meeting.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report of the RFO/Deputy Town Clerk be noted.

L404 HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE

The Committee received and considered the report of the Facilities Manager. She explained that an area of particular concern was the lake at the country park. The signs for the area had been highlighted as a requirement in the Health and Safety Audit. The cemetery signs that she proposed were as a result of issues at Tower Hill cemetery.

The Chair queried the cost of the proposed litter pick and queried why this was needed. The Facilities Manager explained that she had been trying to discern exactly what was included in the contract for grounds maintenance and it appeared that litter picking at the lake was not included.

Cllr Churchill said that the National Trust had removed litter bins from some of their properties and asked people to take their rubbish home with them.

Cllr Dorward said that he walked around the lake regularly and had been distressed to read of the anti-social behaviour detailed in the report. He asked if the signs were vandal proof and the Facilities Manager confirmed that they were as far as possible. Cllr Woodruff had some experience in this area and said that an anti-graffiti finish could be specified. Cllr Dorward supported the introduction of a Park Ranger.

Cllr R Curry was surprised that Town Council staff could not carry out a litter pick at the country park. He also reiterated that any items of vandalism should be regularly reported to members. The Facilities Manager confirmed that further to his previous request she was writing a report for the forthcoming Finance and General Purposes Committee.

Cllr Baker said that she had been down to the country park and had seen a lot of young men swimming in the lake. She said that she was unsure about the cost of additional litter picking.

Cllr King had great concerns over the anti-social behaviour occurring over the summer at the country park.

The Chair thought that the area was well managed by the Town Council but emphasised that it was still a dangerous place, as had been exemplified by the tragic death of a young man over the summer.

Cllr C Curry had received e-mails from a regular visitor to the country park concerning the anti-social behaviour and thought that this should be front page news.

The Facilities Manager explained that she had been working closely with the PCSOs over the summer and that the Events and Communications Officer had been updating the Town Council's Facebook page daily. It had been very distressing for officers to learn of the death at the lake earlier in the summer. The PCSOs had stepped up their patrols but they could not be permanently in the area. She also emphasised that staff would struggle to carry out litter picking in the time available.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To approve the signage at a cost of £687.00
2. To approve four litter bins at a cost of £450.00
3. To obtain a comparative quote for litter picking to ensure that the Town Council was getting value for money.
4. To approach a charitable/voluntary organisation e.g. Base 33 to see if they could carry out litter picking for a donation from the Town Council.

L405 PARK RANGER

The Committee had been asked to consider the appointment of a Park Ranger by the Personnel Committee of 5th August (minute no. S365). Cllr C Curry thought that a Park Ranger would be a good idea for the country park, play areas, and cemeteries.

Cllr Beames asked if volunteer ranger could be a possibility. The Facilities Manager thought that the responsibilities would be heavy for a volunteer to take on.

Cllr R Curry asked what level of pay would be proposed for the role. The Facilities Manager said that the role may require anti-social hours and weekend working and this would have to be taken into account. She thought that two part-time staff could be an option. Cllr King added that he thought that the anti-social behaviour at the country park would mean that a significant salary would be required for the role.

The Chair reminded members that the Council had undertaken a major staffing review the previous year and he felt that if a Park Ranger had been needed, this would have been identified at that point. He thought that any role should not be considered lightly and any appointed person should be SIA trained.

Cllr R Curry asked for a report on the role and what money could be offset against a salary by deterring vandalism. Any role needed justification.

RECOMMENDED:

That a report on the role be presented to the next Leisure and Recreation Committee meeting.

The meeting closed at 8.07pm

Chairman.