

**BARNARD CASTLE TOWN COUNCIL
SERVICES COMMITTEE**

14 DECEMBER 2015

PRESENT: Councillors Peat (in the Chair); Harrison, Yarker, Hinchcliffe, Mrs Thompson and Mrs Grady (from Minute 42).

Also in attendance: Councillor Sutherland; one member of the public and; one member of the press.

Officers: Mr King (Town Clerk) and Mrs Woodward (Deputy Clerk).

39. ACCEPTANCE, OR OTHERWISE, OF APOLOGIES:

None.

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with this Council's adopted Code of Conduct (Minute 72(a)/Sep/12 refers), Members will be asked whether they have any personal or prejudicial interests in any matter on the agenda and, if so, to declare those interests at this point of the meeting. Members are reminded that a declaration can be given later in the meeting if a need arises during discussion. Councillor Harrison declared an interest in respect of Item 42.

41. SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING – 19 OCTOBER 2015 – MINUTES

Resolved – That the Minutes be accepted as a correct record.

42. ALLOTMENTS

(i) General update

It was reported that there were two vacancies on the allotment sites. It was anticipated that both plots would be re-tenanted towards the end of December. One vacancy had resulted from a Notice to Quit issued in November due to non-payment of allotment rental. It was thought unlikely that the income would be recouped. There had been no new applications received on the waiting list, which currently stood at 25.

Councillor Yarker expressed concern about the ongoing surface water on the Crook Lane allotment site. It was thought that drainage through the fence would alleviate some of the surface water.

Resolved – (a) That the information be noted and;

(b) That drainage channels be trialled by Cllr Yarker in a small section of the fence at Crook Lane allotment site.

(ii) Allotments Improvement Action Plan

Following the allocation of monies into the Allotment Improvement Holding Account, costings were now to be sought for the identified improvement projects, to be reported to Services Committee in February 2016 and implemented from April 2016.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

43. PLAY AREAS

(i) Marwood Drive Flooding

It was reported that a letter of concern had been received from a resident regarding the condition of play area safety matting; there were gaps between the safety surfacing and edging surround and between the joints in the surfacing. The safety surfaces were lifting at the edges causing risks of trips and falls. This issue was highlighted during the annual play area inspections in May 2015 and identified as a low risk. Suggested action was to repair the perimeter of the safety surfacing to remove tripping points. It was noted that the safety surfacing was deteriorating at all the play areas, but Marwood Drive appeared to be deteriorating faster, possibly due to flooding at the site. Members recalled that it was resolved to increase the 2015/16 Play Areas expenditure budget by £2,500 and each year thereafter, to set up a 'Play Areas Repairs and Future Provision Reserve Fund', in order to repair or replace play area safety surfacing within the next few years (Minute 27(iii)/Oct/14 refers).

Members were asked to consider whether it would be prudent to repair the safety surfacing at Marwood Drive Play Area now from this fund and set up an ongoing rolling programme of safety surfacing repair and replacement at all the town council's play areas.

It was reported that pursuant to Minute 31(ii)/Oct/15, Councillor Peat had rodded a section of the existing drains in the play area. Given the recent high rainfall, the significant wet area in the play area by the goal posts had reduced. The resident of 9 Marwood Drive was exploring the possibility of installing a drain from the rear garden to link in with the drains in the play area. Members were asked to consider giving permission.

Resolved – (a) That estimates be sought to repair the Marwood Drive play area perimeter safety surfacing in the first instance, to determine cost-effectiveness, presented to next Services Committee on 22 February 2016;

(b) That a rolling programme of play area safety surface repair be set up;

(c) That permission in principle be given to the residents of 9 Marwood Drive to install a drain from the garden to link in with the drains under the Marwood Drive Play Area and;

(d) That the existing drains in the Marwood Drive Play Area be rodded annually by a drainage engineer as part of ongoing maintenance.

(ii) Tree (Green Lane)

It was reported that a resident whose property backed onto Green Lane Play Area, had contacted the council regarding pruning of a large tree. The tree was taking a lot of light from the property and was sited within the boundary of the play area and was therefore the responsibility of this council. Durham County Council's tree officer had been contacted and it was confirmed that there were no restrictions on the tree concerned and pruning by a competent tree surgeon was recommended. It was proposed to strive to obtain three estimates for professional pruning of the tree with the work carried out before the end of March 2016. This work would be funded through the Play Areas Budgetary allocation for 2015/16. An update would be given at the 22 February 2016 meeting.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

44. MINI GOLF – REVIEW OF 2015 SEASON

Submitted – a report providing members with a review of the 2015 mini golf season. It was noted that between 28 March until 1 November, the total number of rounds played was 6,755 (54 visitors per day on average). There were 126 operating days over a period of 32 weeks, however, the course had to close early on 17 occasions due to heavy rain and winds.

There remained a problem with falling twigs/leaves and bird guano on the course. Two school visits had taken place, as well as one Brownie Group and one private birthday party.

The final income and expenditure figures were as follows:

- Total income - £11,359 against a budget of £10,000
- Expenditure to date - £6,650 against a budget of £9,000

It was noted that there would be further expenditure from the 2015/16 budget in respect of grounds maintenance, repairs following the winter period, recruitment costs and an extensive pre-season clean of the course prior to start of the 2016 season.

It was anticipated that investment would need to be made to the felting prior to 2017 season.

Members were informed that from April 2016, the national living wage would be £7.20 an hour for workers aged 25 and older and it was likely that there would be a further increase in the National Minimum Wage from 1 October 2016.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

45. WAR MEMORIALS 2016/17 BUDGETARY BID

Following the annual inspection of the war memorials under this council's responsibility and pursuant to Committee Minute 20/Jul/15, the two cracks to the plinth of the Town Memorial within The Bowes Museum grounds had been inspected by Coverdale Masonry. This company successfully carried out the major restoration work to the three town memorials in 2009 and subsequent professional cleaning during 2013, providing an excellent professional local service and value for money.

It was confirmed that the cracks were not of a structural nature and could be superficially repaired in situ at a cost of £250 plus VAT. Repairs to missing or damaged black lead lettering to the memorial (approx. 12 in number) would also be carried out at the same time.

Resolved – That Coverdale Masonry be instructed to carry out the repairs in the sum of £250 plus VAT with the work to be carried out, weather permitting, before end of March 2016.

46. MARKET CROSS FLOODLIGHTING UPDATE

The floodlights around the market cross were installed by Durham County Council's Street Lighting team on Sunday 22 November and focussed on Thursday 26 November. The lights were now in daily operation from dusk to midnight. Funding for this scheme was secured through private donation and from TAP. Monitoring reports would be provided to TAP as a funding condition.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

47. PUBLIC SEATS

It was reported that donations continued to be received into the memorial bench scheme. Work had been carried out to a bench in the Remembrance Gardens and a recent donation had been received for work to a bench sited on the top Demesnes.

Due to the success of the project, there remained only a few benches in need of refurbishment. However, ongoing maintenance and repairs were still necessary to keep the benches in good condition.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

48. DELIVERING DIFFERENTLY

Received – a report providing the Committee with an update on progress made with the scheme and outlining next steps in its implementation in Barnard Castle. The Town Council had been awarded £10,000 as a one-off grant to allow transfer of assets from Durham County Council (DCC). The Department for Communities and Local Government would be delivering cost-benefit analysis training and the Town Clerk was to attend.

Full Council resolved to pursue asset transfers and make provision in its budget bid for 2016/17 on 16 November (Minute 84(5)/Nov/15 refers). DCC had indicated a preferred implementation date of 1 April 2016 for the proposed lease period of 30 years, to include selected open space, two additional play areas and toilets (with a potential TUPE transfer).

Plans of the areas to be transferred, prepared by DCC, were circulated. Condition reports regarding the toilets in the Market Place and off Galgate were made available to view in the office. It was noted that the rose bed on Bridgegate appeared to be missing from the plans and that it was unclear what constituted the small parcels of land on the plan of the Demesnes.

Councillor Mrs Grady proposed that the town car parks also be transferred as assets to the Town Council.

It was noted that with regards to the Demesnes, it was likely that the lease to Barnard Castle Rugby Club and dog agility would remain with DCC.

With regards to the Galgate Greens, DCC would seek adverse possession and give freehold transfer to the Town Council.

It was noted that up to £20,000 funding had been earmarked for independent assessment linked to this initiative and the on-going partnership work between local councils.

Resolved – (a) That the progress being made in advancing the town council's project linked to this initiative be noted;

(b) That the principle of DCC commissioning Durham University to undertake an assessment of existing partnerships, and the benefits of the initiative, be noted;

(c) That investigations be made into the feasible transfer of the town's car parks (Newgate and the car park next to Morrisons) from DCC to the Town Council.

49. FLORAL AND OPEN SPACES

(i) Floral Displays – winter planting

It was reported that Elm Ridge Gardens Ltd carried out winter planting on 27 October. The Gateway beds had also been included for the first time.

Councillor Peat informed members that 8 members of the public, 'Galgate Workers', had come forward to be part of the Floral Development Volunteer Group.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

(ii) Upper Demesnes Hay Meadow – Natural Environment Award

It was reported that the Upper Demesnes Hay Meadow had received a commendation at the County Durham Environment Awards 2015 on 24 November. The commendation was awarded to The Friends of the Demesnes, Town Council and Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership, for the valuable contribution to the improvement of the natural environment and the understanding of traditional management techniques.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

(iii) Heart of Teesdale (HoT) grant funding

Grant funding had been received from Heart of Landscape Partnership for two projects:

- £170 to purchase a scything kit for volunteers to maintain the Demesnes hay meadow and;
- £800 to plant a further 5000 daffodil bulbs around the castle walls.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

(iv) Interpretation Board – Sculpture Garden

Pursuant to Minute 37(iv)/Oct/15, estimates were being sought to replace the Sculpture Garden interpretation board with HoT funding, at no cost to the town council.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

(v) Woodland Trust Tree Packs

It was reported that the Woodland Trust had free tree packs, available for planting on one publicly accessible site per application. The closing date was noted as 6 January 2016. Members considered a suitable site for planting.

Resolved – That approval be given to apply for a Woodland Trust Tree Pack of orchard or ornamental tree species, for planting in the Crook Lane/Kalafat area.

50. DOG FOULING

Pursuant to Minute 74/Apr/15, 'smoke and dog free' play areas signs had been designed and were circulated. Members selected two examples to send to primary schools to vote for their favourite design, which would then be reproduced at all the town council's play areas. It was suggested that this could perhaps be combined with education sessions on dog fouling delivered via Durham County Council's Civic Pride Officer and Neighbourhood Warden.

Resolved – That approval be given to circulate two chosen designs to primary schools in Barnard Castle, to choose their favourite design, combined with education sessions.

51. PARKING FOR BIKES

As part of the Local Transport Plan, 'Park that Bike', was giving away free parking stands for bikes under the community cycle parking scheme. Members considered potential locations and types of stands available.

Resolved – That approval be given to apply for 4 Sheffield stands, to be located in the leased area of Woodleigh.

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