



TOWN COUNCIL OFFICES
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MINUTES FROM THE OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 28TH JULY AT 7PM

This was a virtual meeting On Zoom

Attendance: B Height, E Hobbs (Chair), G Kennedy, and G Mayall.

Present: Councillor Faith and Harrison (non-committee members) C Starkie, Town Clerk, P Robertson, Assistant Town Clerk, T Jessop, Project Officer

Public: 2 representatives from Somerset Wildlife Trust: Head of Conservation and Head of Engagement

There were no public questions.

OS4.1 Apologies for Absence.

Councillor McGuire continues on her extended period of absence.

OS4.2 Chairman's Announcement

There were no announcements.

OS4.3 Declarations of Interest.

There were no declarations of interest.

OS4.4 Minutes of the meetings held on 25th February 2020

The minutes from this meeting were accepted by the council as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Resolved that:

The minutes of the meeting on 25th February 2020 were signed.

OS4.5 To receive the Pollinator Project outline

The meeting received a presentation from Councillor Faith and the Head of Conservation and Head of Engagement of Somerset Wildlife Trust, outlining a proposal to work in partnership with Shepton Mallet Town Council to deliver a pollinator project across the town and boundaries. The town council has recently confirmed its commitments to environmental sustainability and identified its desire to develop projects within its Town Plan, to protect the environment. This collaboration would be a huge step in that direction.

SIGNED: (CHAIRMAN) DATE:.....

Nature Recovery Networks had been identified at national level and funding had been identified at a more local level, to satisfy the requirements of the new Environmental Bill, to invest in ecological networks. This project, based in Shepton, would ensure that habitats (gardens, parks, roundabouts and verges, in and out of town) would be protected and enhanced to ensure the long term viability of a wide range of endangered species. The project was being led by Somerset Wildlife Trust, funded by grant funding via Somerset County Council. Three towns have been identified to be the beneficiaries: Taunton, Frome and Shepton Mallet. Funding was in the region of £300k, from the Esmee Fairburn Foundation, and in order to secure this it would be necessary for the council to confirm its support. In addition, if funding is secured and the project can be delivered in Shepton Mallet, the town council would be asked to make a contribution of £16k over a period of 3 years, from 2021 to contribute towards information and education packs and community participation (this would be considered at budget setting time to see if it had any impact on the overall council budget).

Councillors considered the wide benefits that participation in this project would bring to the town: civic pride, community engagement and open space management and hopefully the creation of new community groups that would take the project beyond the three-year period. Educational benefits were wide and there were opportunities for schools and businesses to get involved, as well as using the project to deliver craft and art projects.

Councillors also considered the benefits to wellbeing, protecting the environment that surrounds the town, the opportunity to deliver a strong community engagement programme which empowers groups to get involved and take a lead, as well as being mindful of the cost to the council and tax payer and the need to allow some grassed areas to be maintained for recreation and safety purposes.

Resolved that:

The Town Council agrees to give its support to the project in principle and send a non-binding letter of support to Somerset Wildlife Trust.

The committee includes, as part of the budget setting process, the sum of £6k for 2021/22, followed by a further 2 years of £5k p/a to support the project, if it secures its funding from the third party.

The guests were thanked for their presentation and for opportunity to be considered in this partnership.

OS4.6 To receive the Allotment Officer's Report

Councillors received the allotment report from the Assistant Town Clerk.

The waiting list has increased recently (from 3 to 19) and it was agreed that priority would be given to newcomers who currently do not have an allotment. Once the waiting list had reduced then those who already have an allotment would be moved up the list.

Some allotment holders (3) have been unable to visit their plots due to their need to remain at home and shield. Inspections had taken place, and those individuals were being given additional time to bring their plot to standard. It was proposed and

agreed, as a good will gesture, that those identified plot holders receive a 50% reduction in the allotment charge for the 2020/21 season.

The contracts, that stipulate that the contract renewal must be sent via recorded delivery each year, was considered. It was proposed, as a cost saving method as well as an environmental saving and the main driver being the pandemic and potential uncertainty of working from home/office, that the contracts and invoice be emailed to plot holders (posted to those who do not have an email address) in order to save in the region of £300 each year. In addition, plot holders would be encouraged to pay online (with payment facilities to remain for those who cannot). This saving would create the basis of a support fund that could be used to help those who might struggle to pay the increased fees next year, at the discretion of the council officers.

Councillors discussed the proposal to increase fees for 2021/22. Research had been undertaken to establish what other town councils charge for different size allotments in order to consider a price increase. Two proposals were put forward for consideration:

Option A

The proposed fees, in line with the charging structure of another council in the district.

Option B

A price structure based on 50p per week for a small plot, 75p per week for a medium plot and £1.00 per week for a large plot.

Plot Size	Agreed Rent 2019/2020	Agreed Rent 2020/2021	Option A Suggested Rent 2021/2022	Option B Suggested Rent 2021/2022
Small	£15.00	£16.50	£20.00	£26.00
Medium	£21.00	£23.00	£28.00	£39.00
Large	£35.00	£38.50	£45.00	£52.00

Councillors considered the above, and whilst Councillor Height objected to any increase, other councillors were in favour of option B, as increased fees would create an opportunity for investment into the site as well as activities related to allotments.

Councillors Faith and Inchley were nominated to undertake the annual allotment inspection.

It was proposed that an information and awards evening be hosted, to which someone from the National Allotment Association would be invited, to give a presentation to interested allotment holders, on devolved self-management, which is how the council wish the allotments to be run in the future.

It was agreed that funds from the support fund would be used to pay for the awards evening, with some prizes and refreshments.

Resolved that:

The report by noted.

A policy decision be made that when there is a waiting list for an allotment, priority will be given to those who do not have an allotment until there is no longer a waiting list.

That the plot holders who have had to shield during the pandemic be offered a 50% reduction on their plot for 2020/21.

That the fees for 2021/22 are as follows:

Small	£26.00 per annum
Medium	£39.00 per annum
Large	£52.00 per annum

Councillors Inchley and Faith to undertake the annual judging of the allotments in a number of categories.

That an awards and information evening be hosted, when it is legal for public meetings to be held indoors, subject to Covid 19 restrictions.

A newsletter would be sent to allotment holders in August 2020.

The Assistant Town Clerk was thanked for her efforts in managing the administration of the 100 plots.

OS4.7 Town Plan update

The Town Clerk explained to councillors that the adoption of the new Town Plan, and the agreement to deliver many new projects, was placing a disproportionate workload on the Open Spaces Committee, and therefore proposed that some changes be made to the current Terms of Reference of the Committee, as well as consideration of creating a new committee. The number of meetings and the number of councillors on the committee would also be considered, to ensure that the structure makes the best use of councillor time and that relevant matters are appropriately considered.

The Town Clerk was delegated responsibility to draft new Terms of Reference in accordance with the proposal within the report and take a similar report to other committees, for consideration at the next full council meeting.

Resolved that:

A proposal be submitted to the full council meeting on 8th September as follows:

- An amendment to the Terms of Reference of the Open Spaces Committee to focus on infrastructure and to include ecology and environmental matters
- To consider a new name for this committee
- To have 6 councillors on this committee
- For this committee to meet 4 times a year (from 5 meetings)
- To create a new committee that focused on tourism, community development and engagement, events, youth activities, flag days and awareness weeks, markets, events, festivals, volunteering, civic awards and business awards.
- For the new committee to have a membership of 8 councillors
- For the new committee to meet 6 times a year
- For this new committee to receive feedback from councillors who sit on external bodies, as appropriate.
- If agreed at full council, for Standing Orders to be amended and for the budget process to be amended (new committee to be given a new budget from 1 April 2020, but to share the budget with Open Spaces for the remainder of this financial year)

OS4.8 Tourism Strategy

The Project Officer introduced her report which was based on whether the council wishes to deliver tourism as a function in the future, following the recent demise of the tourist information office. If the council wished to take on the function, it was essential to understand what is meant by delivering tourism, what resources would be needed and what the strategy for the long term would be. It would be crucial to agree what was involved with tourism before accepting it as a new function.

It was proposed that a strategy be developed, a budget for tourism related activities be proposed, as well as consideration be put into what support can be given to the local economy, as well as the creation of a tourist/town website. At the same time, it was proposed that the Town Clerk become a director on Mendip Tourism Limited (MTL) and that the council make a proposal to MTL to secure funding to assist with the resourcing of this project.

There was a discussion on the need for tourism to continue, and thanks were expressed to the manager of the former Tourist Information Centre, for the efforts of her and the team, as well as many volunteers, in offering a first rate service.

There now existed an opportunity to develop a new sustainable tourism offering, as well as a new town and town council brand.

Resolved that:

- The reports be noted
- The Open Spaces Committee give its commitment to supporting tourism as a function of the town council, through the future adoption of a tourism strategy
- Authority be delegated to the Project Officer to develop a tourism strategy for future consideration and to propose a budget for tourist related activities, during the budget setting process
- To release £500 from the advertising budget towards the creation of a strategy
- The Town Clerk be nominated as a Director to MTL, with the Project Officer as a substitute
- The Project Officer develop a costed proposal to MTL for funding towards tourism related activities

OS4.9 Benchmarking Strategy

The Project Officer presented her report which focused on the opportunity to undertake a benchmarking survey of the town and identify some statistics against which to measure future growth, improvement and success. In order to strive for economic vitality and regeneration it was essential to have a base line, which would also be useful as a tool to apply for funding. As part of the process the Project Officer, with others, was intending to pay a visit to similar sized towns to develop an understanding of some of the issues and opportunities.

Councillors discussed this and requested that car parking be part of the survey as well as other information that had been collated by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. It was recognised that the current economic climate would give a false picture, due to many businesses and service providers still not open and the cautious nature of the public to return to town centre shopping. It was therefore proposed that whilst the council endorsed the project, that it be delayed to Spring 2021.

Resolved that:

The committee agree in principle with the need to undertake a benchmarking exercise, but request that a report be brought to the committee in Spring 2021, with a view of doing the survey in Spring 2021, if there are signs of recovery, post lockdown.

OS4.10 Town Signage Project

The Project Officer introduced her report which explained in detail the benefits of the overhaul of the town signs: civic pride, local identity, and obviously wayfaring for pedestrians and drivers/cyclists. Many of the signs were out of date and therefore misleading to visitors. The budget of £65k was large but this was an expensive exercise and would be done in partnership with Mendip District Council. Some of the signs needed an immediate remedy as they were misleading, and new facilities needed to be incorporated into the signs. However, it was recognised that the signs must not be seen as clutter and therefore the review must also address the impact on the landscape.

Resolved that:

The report be accepted.

That the Project Officer be delegated responsibility to initiate the project and commission People and Places to undertake a wayfaring and signage audit, as per the report.

For the Project Officer to continue to liaise with other local authorities to move the project forward, and also to request the appropriate financial contributions from other authorities.

OS4.11 Community Development

The Project Officer invited councillors to consider how the council could be better positioned to become more involved in community development, by joining existing networks and help create new networks, to offer peer support and work with befriending schemes. Examples were given of how social subscribing was working in other local towns, and that a real opportunity existed, from the pandemic, to make stronger connections with community groups and individuals.

Councillors were requested to consider the immediate involvement with the Community Connectors scheme and to undertake training via Health Connections Mendip and become Community Connectors. Other initiatives were considered, including the 0800 phone number, the Help Shepton website and the role of the Coronavirus Volunteers, which was winding down as a group.

The Town Clerk was in the process of preparing a more robust Emergency Plan which would allow the council and community to respond to any type of emergency. The Town Clerk was requested to write a letter of thanks to the Coronavirus Volunteers, requesting that the unspent funds of circa £1,300 be returned.

Resolved that:

Councillors delegate responsibility to the Project Officer to create a draft proposal for community development, that demonstrates the commitment of the town council to pro-actively support community development.

Councillors consider attending the Community Connector online training and become Community Connectors.

The Town Clerk to write a letter of thanks to the Coronavirus Volunteers, as well as request that the unspent funds, from the grant bestowed for administrative costs, be returned to the Town Council.

The Chairman asked councillors if they were willing to continue with the meeting after 9pm. It was agreed by all that the meeting continue no later than 9.15pm.

OS4.12 Operational Update

The Town Clerk brought councillors up to date with matters affecting the town. Specifically, decisions needed to be made as follows:

Art Project

The Town Clerk, aware that the nursery that had previously provided the summer bedding plants, had struggled to do so due to the pandemic, suggested that the Art Bank be invited to create a community led art work in the centre of town, as a way of brightening the town centre and providing a project that involved the community. It was proposed that £2,000 be provided, to include any installation costs, to the Art Bank. Councillors agreed that this project would be of benefit to the town and its residents and resolved to support this proposal.

Remembrance Day

The local branch of the Royal British Legion had requested that the Town Council take on the organisation of Remembrance Day this year. However, due to the pandemic, it was very difficult to gauge the government guidelines to the hosting of public events by the autumn, and therefore any event that is arranged would have to be planned within the current guidelines. Therefore, an alternative Remembrance Day would need to be planned, which reduced the number participating, but still included those who were essential to this important civic event.

Councillors agreed that a working party should be set up, and to seek volunteers to assist with arrangements.

Festive Lights

The Festive Lights Working Party had met and proposed that the current contract, that we due to end with year, be extended for one final year and those companies who had submitted proposals, as part of the tender process, be asked to resubmit their ideas in Spring 2021, when it will hopefully be possible to undertake a site visit and meet with councillors to consider proposals.

Shepton Mallet Football Club

As a way to generate a new income stream, the football club was selling sponsored seats at £20 each. The Town Council agreed to the purchase of 5 sponsored seats, at a cost of £100.

Councillor Mayall gave a verbal update on the wide interest in the Innovation Awards that that more than 80 applications had been received. Thanks were expressed to the Project Officer and Councillors Kennedy and Mayall for their contribution to the success of the project, which ultimately is great PR for the town.

Resolved that:

The Project Officer and Town Clerk commission the Art Bank to work with the community to create an inspired art project for the town centre at a cost of £2,000.

A Remembrance Day Working Party be set up, consisting of 3 councillors, to consider the arrangements for Remembrance Day 2020.

A one-year extension to the current Festive Light contractor be requested and that the Assistant Town Clerk seek tenders for a 3 year festive light contract for in Spring 2021.

The Town Council purchase sponsored seats at Shepton Mallet Football Club, at a cost of £100.

OS4.13 Budget Update

The committee received a written update on the budget position at the end of month three.

Resolved that:

The report be noted.

OS4.14 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 13th October 2020 at 7pm.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm