

Stone Town Council – Environment Sub-Committee

Minutes of the meeting held in the Council Chamber at 15 Station Road, Stone, on Tuesday 16 July 2024

PRESENT: Councillor R. Townsend in the Chair and
Councillors: J. Battrick, P. Leason, J. Powell, N. Powell and C. Thornicroft

Officers: L. Trigg, R. Edwards and T. Williams

By Chairman's Invitation: J. Hood

ABSENT: Councillors: A. Burgess, T. Kelt, B. Kenney, R. Kenney and J. Metters

ENV25/001 Apologies

Councillors: T. Kelt, B. Kenney, R. Kenney and J. Metters

ENV25/002 Declarations of Interest

None

ENV25/003 Request for Dispensations

None

ENV25/004 Representations from Members of the Public

None

ENV25/005 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Environment Sub-Committee meeting held on 19 March 2024 (Minute Numbers ENV24/037 – ENV24/044), were approved as a correct record.

ENV25/006 Environmental Sub-Committee Works Update

The Chairman drew the Sub-Committees attention to the Works Update document which had been enclosed with the agenda for the meeting.

He informed the Sub-Committee about a progress meeting (held in May 2024) with the Grounds Maintenance Contractor and Deputy Town Clerk.

He said the Grounds Maintenance Contractor has been seriously hampered by the wet weather and poor ground conditions which had resulted in him needing to schedule new dates for the completion of project work. The dates were acceptable and contained within the Town Council's financial year for the spending of budgets.

The Chairman advised the Sub-Committee that the main projects were currently:

Hedgerow Planting

To be discussed under a later agenda item.

Renovation of Car Park

The Grounds Maintenance Contractor was hoping to start work very soon now that the ground had started to dry a little.

Excavation of Scrape 2

This is a rollover job from last year. The scrape isn't meeting its purpose as it is overwhelmed with Willow.

ENV25/007 Crown Meadow Update

- i) The Chairman referred the Sub-Committee to his report on Hedgerows and Amphitheatre Trees which had been enclosed with the agenda for the meeting.

He said that the hedgerow planted nearly two years ago was failing to thrive because of the waterlogged and saturated ground conditions with 50% of the hedge not expected to survive.

There was a budget and a plan to plant another 80 metres of hedgerow along the fence line to the Anglers car park. However, this ground had also been waterlogged for a six-month period and the Chairman suggested the project be postponed because it would be careless to plant saplings (worth £1,500) on ground that had already proven unsuitable for hedgerow.

Alongside the poor condition of the hedgerow there was evidence of some trees being stressed or dying (due to age and disease), mainly Cherry trees (Amphitheatre) but also Silver Birch (Crown Meadow).

The Chairman proposed reviewing the situation with the hedgerow and dying trees with a view to putting forward an alternative proposal for managing and improving the natural environment of Crown Meadow. To do this he suggested holding on to the budget of £1,580 which was agreed.

RECOMMENDED: That the Town Council does not pursue the hedgerow project and brings back to the Sub-Committee a further report on alternative proposals for use of the saved money.

ii) Verbal update from the Chairman

Himalayan Balsam

The Chairman referenced a document he had recently issued to the working group about Himalayan Balsam, canvassing opinion on what to do about the problem. Crown Meadow was getting severely affected by the pesky plant in several locations and it was now encroaching on Scrape 2.

The suggestion was made that information be produced for the tourist information board to inform people how it sets seed and to refrain from pulling it up. It was also suggested that a publicity article be put on Facebook but only when a real expert had given accurate advice.

The Sub-Committee agreed there was a need to call upon professional advice (from the Biodiversity & Ecology Officer and Staffordshire Wildlife and the like) on how to safely remove the Himalayan Balsam without spreading it. One advantage of the plant was that it was late flowering and good for bees. Councillors J. & N. Powell offered to seek advice from the professionals.

Vegetation on Riverbank

The Chairman advised the Sub-Committee that the section of ground between the pathway and riverbank had not been mowed recently because sections of the riverbank were unstable and there was no clear and defined riverbank edge making it too dangerous to work on. The Grounds Maintenance Contractor had strimmed a section that was most likely to be walked by the public to access the river. The concern about negligence liability for failing to maintain the area was explored and putting up signs at the entrance considered one solution. The Sub-Committee agreed that the Town Clerk should consult a health and safety consultant for advice and report back to the General Purposes Committee.

Bench overlooking Crown Meadow

The Sub-Committee discussed whether an isolated bench on the Meadow, often used for drug and alcohol consumption, should be relocated to a more open position. After a consideration and the point being made that it was also enjoyed for legitimate use it was decided not to arrange its relocation.

ENV25/008 Reports of Working Groups

Environmental Working Group

The Chairman reported on the Bee Friendly Seminar held at the Frank Jordan Centre that had been attended by Councillor Kelt (who had provided him with a report).

Councillor Kelt found the set of presentations and mini workshop interesting. It covered the importance of pollinators, their requirements and threats; along with work Stafford Borough were doing to provide good habitats for wildlife and the role of Streetscene with mowing and maintaining verges. He made a number of contacts with the people leading the programme that could be followed up at Cannock Chase District Council, the Borough Council and with local enthusiasts.

The Chairman advised the Sub-Committee that Councillor Kelt had taken another look at the Borough Council press release on Bee Friendly Status. Its achievements had included Stone Meadows in Barlaston, and Stone and Eccleshall were said to be applying for Bee Friendly Status next year.

Councillor Kelt had spoken with the lead on the project, Cabinet Member for the Environment (Stafford Borough Council), who advised that the best way to communicate on these matters was through the Stafford Panel (of which Councillor Kelt was already a member). Mention was made of a major event next year, but no further information was available.

The Chairman said the Sub-Committee may be able to adopt some of these points to assist the progression towards Bee Friendly Status.

ENV25/009 Exclusion of the Press and Public

To resolve, pursuant to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, that the Public and Press be excluded from the meeting whilst the next items of business are discussed on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the debate.

ENV25/010 Allotment Competition

The Sub-Committee considered the appointment of a new Allotment Competition judge with the first judging task taking place on 26 July 2024.

RECOMMENDED: That David Moreton (former General Manager of Oak Tree Farm Rural Project) and Hannah Rigden (Senior Historic Environmental Officer for Natural England) be appointed – as experienced and well qualified horticulturalists – to take on the role of Allotment Judges to the Town Council.

Mr Moreton will act as Lead Judge.

Chairman