



Town Clerk

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15 Station Road
Stone
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7 January 2025

Dear Councillor,

A meeting of the **ENVIRONMENT SUB COMMITTEE** will be held in the **Council Chamber at 15 Station Road, Stone**, on **TUESDAY 14 JANUARY 2025 at 7:10pm**, or on the rising of the Tourism & Town Promotion Sub-Committee, if later.

The agenda is set out below and I trust you will be able to attend.

Les Trigg
Town Clerk

Councillors: R. Townsend (Chairman), T. Kelt (Vice Chairman), J. Battrick, A. Burgess, B. Kenney, J. Metters, J. Powell, N. Powell and C. Thornicroft.

AGENDA

1. **To receive apologies for absence**
2. **Declarations of Interest and declarations under Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992**
3. **Requests for Dispensations**
4. **Representations from Members of the Public**

To consider representations from members of the public on items to be considered at this meeting, in accordance with the Council's scheme of public participation.

5. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Sub-Committee held on 5 November 2024, Minute No's ENV25/019 – ENV25/026 (attached)

6. **Environment Sub-Committee Works Update**

To receive an update on the work being undertaken by the Council's Grounds Maintenance contractor (update attached) and to consider any variations required.

7. **Crown Meadow**

To receive an update from the Chairman (reports attached) on project work relating to:

- i) Willow trees
- ii) Footpaths
- iii) Himalayan Balsam

8. **Budget 2025-26 – 2027-28**

To consider the report of the Town Clerk (attached).

9. **Reports of Working Group**

- Environmental Working Group (Co-ordinator: Councillor R. Townsend)

Will any Councillors who wish to speak at this meeting, but are not members of the Sub-Committee, please inform the Chairman before the start of the meeting.

Members of the public are welcome to attend the Environment Sub-Committee Meeting as observers and/or to make representations to the committee in accordance with the Council's scheme of public participation. Details of this scheme are displayed on the Town Council's noticeboards and website.

The Council Chamber is accessed from the rear of the building.

Stone Town Council – Environment Sub-Committee

Minutes of the meeting held in the Council Chamber at 15 Station Road, Stone, on Tuesday 5 November 2024

PRESENT: Councillor R. Townsend in the Chair and
Councillors: J. Battrick, T. Kelt, B. Kenney, R. Kenney, J. Metters, N. Powell and
C. Thornicroft

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

By Chairman's Invitation: None

ABSENT: Councillors: A. Burgess, P. Leason and J. Powell

ENV25/019 Apologies

Councillor: P. Leason

ENV25/020 Declarations of Interest

None

ENV25/021 Request for Dispensations

None

ENV25/022 Representations from Members of the Public

None

ENV25/023 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Environment Sub-Committee meeting held on 17 September 2024 (Minute Numbers ENV25/011 – ENV25/018), were approved as a correct record.

ENV25/024 Environmental Sub-Committee Works Update

The Chairman drew the Sub-Committee's attention to the Grounds Maintenance Works Update which had been enclosed with the agenda for the meeting.

He referenced the most recent comments which included:

Asbestos on Allotment Plots

The asbestos removal work has been held up by the plot holder (where the asbestos is sited) renewing the lease of his plot for another twelve months. The plot holder has requested a replacement material be installed as it is in use to retain the ground.

The Town Clerk emphasised that the Council had been professionally advised that the asbestos was low risk and did not present a danger if left undisturbed.

The Sub-Committee raised questions about who had introduced the asbestos to the plot and questioned whether the installer should be held responsible for the costs of removal.

The allotment agreement now prohibits the use of asbestos, but the Town Council has committed a sum in the budget to remove existing asbestos as in this case.

Wooden Footbridge

The Grounds Maintenance Contractor has started work on the footbridge which will be completed soon.

Angler's Car Park

Repairs to the car park surface had not been possible during the summer months but the Grounds Maintenance Contractor will complete the work during the winter.

The Chairman advised the Sub-Committee that the Deputy Town Clerk was in regular contact with the Grounds Maintenance Contractor and updates were received monthly. He said it was hoped that much of the outstanding work would be finished by the end of the calendar year.

ENV25/025 Crown Meadow Update

i) Chairman's Verbal Report

The Chairman advised the Sub-Committee that the important issues relating to maintenance and improvement work on Crown Meadow were in the Grounds Maintenance Update document.

He said that additionally an issue had been raised by a member of the public about feeding the swans and the Town Council was seeking advice on this point.

The Chairman advised the Sub-Committee that additional information on Crown Meadow had been added to the website with lots of lovely photographs taken by Mr Dave Emley.

He said the plan was now to get more information out to the public about Crown Meadow. This could include a press release about the swans, why they were there and whether they should be fed or not.

The Town Clerk informed the Sub-Committee that safety signs (to be supported on long poles) were soon to be installed as a public warning about the potential risks to health and safety on Crown Meadow. One of the signs was brought into the Council Chamber to show Sub-Committee members.

Councillor Jill Hood expressed her view that she was against littering Crown Meadow and the fact that there was a river there was common sense.

The Chairman informed the Sub-Committee that warning signs had been recommended by the Town Council's Health and Safety Consultants (as a prevention measure) and would only be installed at the three main pedestrian entrance points (on the pavement side of the footbridge, on Anglers' Car Park, and the footpath on Trent Road by Workhouse Bridge), not within Crown Meadow itself.

ii) To consider 2025-26 Projects

The Chairman advised the Sub-Committee that there were two projects he would like to propose to the Working Group.

Footpath – The footpath across Crown Meadow is regularly under water making the route impassable and forcing people to walk wider. Following discussions with the Grounds Maintenance Contractor a solution would be to raise the footpath level (surface finish to be discussed) in some sections so that it was above the sitting water level.

Coppicing of Willow – The second proposal, originating from the Grounds Maintenance Contractor, was to undertake significant coppicing of tall mature Willow from the perimeter of the scrapes. This will reduce the seeds they produce from blowing and then setting within the scrapes.

One Sub-Committee member suggested that heavy cutting back of the trees might not sit well with everyone.

The Chairman advised the Sub-Committee that a proposal for the management and containment of Himalayan Balsam was almost ready for circulation.

The plan would involve a call for volunteers from late spring for two or three meets to pull up the Himalayan Balsam and manage safe disposal.

The Town Clerk confirmed that the Town Council had insurance to cover volunteers, but this was for a limited number of people and

would require monitoring, given the plan to use volunteers at the Heritage Centre.

ENV25/026 Reports of Working Groups

Environmental Working Group

The Chairman invited Councillor Kelt to address the Sub-Committee.

Councillor Kelt advised the Sub-Committee that the next meeting of the Stafford Borough Community Panel would be held in December 2024.

Chairman

Stone Town Council - Environment

Dept	Job Description	Details	Current Status	Approved Budget	Est Date
Allotments	Asbestos Removal	Remove and dispose of asbestos. Asbestos survey confirmed issues as low risk and requires monitoring.	MP has removed asbestos pile from plot 2A and stacked in a layby on the site. MP will add to the pile as he gradually clears asbestos items from other plots. MP will inform us when finished, and we will then obtain a quote to have asbestos professionally removed by a specialist. Raised borders on plot 13 to be dug out and replaced with sleepers as budget allows - MP is liaising with the plot holder on this, as they need to agree to the work. 30.08.24 MP confirms that the plot holder is going to give up the plot soon, and then work can commence on the removal. 24.10.24 Plot holder has renewed for another year, investigation underway to resolve before next growing season. Nov 24 - MP suggests using gravel boards as a cheaper alternative to sleepers.	1825	Work started March 24
Crown Meadow	Wooden footbridge.	Cleaning and re-treating wood.	MP to complete in time for Westbridge Park re-opening ceremony which is April 2024. MP confirms this will be completed in March. 4.5.24 MP confirms will be completed by 30.6.24. 27.8.24 MP intends to complete by end Sept. Bridge will be wood-painted rather than varnish as the wood no longer holds varnish and painting enables MP to more easily maintain and cover vandalism. 24.10.24 - Bridge has been powerwashed and sanded, MP aims to paint in the coming weeks dependant on the weather. Nov 24 - MP has said that this will be completed by the 31.03.25	525	Mar-25
Crown Meadow	Scrape 1. Grasses cut back	Cut back grasses to encourage new growth and to allow other species to grow. Cut back a third of the area on a three year rotation. Strim and remove. Volunteers can assist if required.	Cut scheduled for 2023 not possible due to late flowering, floods and waterlogged ground. MP will now attempt in Autumn 2024 and before 31/12/24. 27.8.24 Reviewed with MP. Cut & collection will take place before 31.12.24. 24.10.24 - MP confirmed cut will take place anytime soon, weather dependent. Nov 24 - MP has indicated that this will be completed by the 31.03.25	1000	Mar-25

Crown Meadow	Scrape 1 willow saplings	Removal of invasive willow saplings. The saplings need to be uprooted using a digger and disposed of or offered to Bill Waller/SBC for replanting at another site	Some saplings were successfully removed in Dec 23 by MP with digger aided by Staffs Wildlife Trust volunteers. MP scheduled Mar 24 but was unable due to flooding. Flooded and saturated ground has made this impossible so far in 2024. Subject to conditions, MP aims to do this later in 2024 the year. Possible collaboration with Staffs Wildlife again. 27.8.24. MP confirmed willows will be removed by 31.12.24 and probable collaboration with Staffs Wildlife and Bill Waller again. 24.10.24 - Update, MP confirmed that this will be undertaken imminently. Nov24 - MP has indicated that work will be completed by the 31.03.25	500	Mar-25
Grounds Maint	Walton Roundabout pruning and re-planting	Cut back/prune existing shrubs & ivy to promote new growth. Insert new shrubs where required.	Has been rolled over from 2022/23. MP has now done some cutting back in Spring 2024. Remaining budget will be used for further cut back and planting new shrubs later in 2024. 27.8.24. MP confirmed cutback and selective replant will be completed by 31.12.24. 24.10.24 - Pruning has taken place, some shrubs planted, this will be revisited over the coming months. Nov 24 - MP has indicated that work will be completed by the 31.03.25	600	Mar-25
Grounds Maint	Town borders pruning and re-planting	Cut back/prune existing shrubs & trees to promote new growth. Insert new shrubs where required.	Time sensitive. Has been rolled over from 2022/23. MP has now done some cutting back in Spring 2024. Remaining budget will be used for further cut back and planting new shrubs later in 2024. 27.8.24. MP confirmed the plan to cut back, remove and replant where required and particularly on Stafford & Lichfield St borders. 24.10.24 - MP confirmed that work has commenced and is ongoing. Nov 24 - MP has indicated that work will be completed by 31.03.25	600	Mar-25
Grounds Maint	Re-install Lock Gate	Replace damage lock gate on Walton Roundabout	Canals Trust to source lockgate or MP to manufacture. Agreed that MP will make if Canals trust does not supply soon. 27.8.24. MP is committed to reinstating lock gate. No date given.	400	
Environmental Initiatives	New hedgerow	Mixed native species sourced by MP. To follow the fence line from the corner of the fence to Angler's Car Park.	Planned for Winter 2023 but persistent flooding & saturated ground has prevented. STC has now agreed to cancel this project due to the risk of the new hedgerow being affected by persistent flooding and wet ground. Env Sub Comm will propose an alternative project on Crown Meadows for the fund.	1400	
Environmental Initiatives	Balance of carry over			1190	

Crown Meadow	Repairs and Improvements to Angler's Carpark	Reposition and replace the fence and resite the display board to increase the width of the entrance. Excavate the embankment, remove growth on Ampitheatre side. Resurface car park with crushed concrete and limestone.	MP will complete this project when he has a two day window in his diary and the conditions underfoot are dry. 27.8.24. MP is planning this for October 24. Scope of the project was reconfirmed. 24.10.24 - MP confirmed that this will be his project over the winter. Nov 24 - MP has indicated that work will be completed by the 31.03.25	3100	Mar-25
Crown Meadow Volunteers	Restoration of Scrape 2	Excavating the area of Scrape 2 specifically to remove willow saplings, other overly dominant plants and some of the silt. Reinstate required plants	The scrape will need to be relatively dry in order for MP to commence work. MP to advise council office when work is scheduled so that notices can be published about what is happening. Timing is sensitive to protect plant, insect and animal species. 27.8.24. MP confirmed that late Summer/early Autum is the best time so work should take place soon. 24.10.24 - The wet weather has not made this possible, MP confirmed that this will be completed when the scrape dries out. Nov 24 - MP has indicated that work will be completed by the 31.03.25	2800	Mar-25

Environment Sub Committee Working Group

Report on willow saplings affecting Scrape 1 on Crown Meadow.

By Robert Townsend. Dec 11th 2024

Scrape 1 is being negatively impacted by hundreds of willow saplings growing in it. They grow in height very quickly and they develop a large root mat which stifles the growth of grasses and flowers that are essential to the health and biodiversity of the scrape. The willow saplings have to be removed from the scrape by our contractor using a digger. We budget £1000 a year for this. Progress toward removing the willows from scrape 1 is being affected by the wet conditions in 2024 and the willow saplings are now taking a firm hold in the scrape.

There is stand of mature willow shrubs on the spoil heap above scrape 1 and we believe that this is responsible for the willow seed that blow into the scrape. Our contractor recommends cutting back this stand of willows to reduce the seed spread, to control their growth and to let more light into the scrape. The cuttings will be chipped. The stand of willows will regrow but cutting them back now, alongside digging saplings out of the scrape will give an overall benefit to the health of the scrape.

Our contractor has quoted £300 to complete this job which represents good value. This cut back will not need to be done every year so we do not need a recurring budget item.



Fig 1. Two images showing a multitude of willow saplings in scrape 1



Fig 2: Two images showing the stand of willows above scrape 1 that should be cut back.

Regards

Robert

To members of The Environment Sub Committee Working Group

Observations and suggestions regarding the footpaths across Crown Meadow

9th December 2024 and updated on 20th December 2024.

By Robert Townsend

On 17.12.24, Tom Kelt and myself walked the CM footpaths with the Council's contractor Mick Plant, to look at what actions could be taken to deal with the footpath flooding and persistent puddles. We agreed that it is important to maintain the diagonal footpath because it is well used and is the most direct route across CM. If we don't make any improvements, it will deteriorate further and be unusable for long periods.

Mick Plant has proposed the following: He will edge the diagonal footpath to remove the grass that has encroached from both sides thus returning the path to the width it should be. The scrapings generated by edging can be used to build up the path where it sinks and holds water. He will then add a layer of aggregate to slightly raise the level of the path. This should mean that water drains off the path into the meadow, rather than vice versa, and the path won't be built up so much that it acts as a dam. Mick will also reinstate the drain that runs from Scrape 2 to into the Scotch Brook by the wooden footbridge. This will improve drainage from Scrape 1 after a flood event and reduce the time that this section holds water.

Mick can do this work using the budget amount of £1560 which is excellent value for money. This can be paid for using the budget that has been diverted from the hedgerow we agreed not to plant. More budget may be required if further repairs are needed, additional aggregate or if the price of aggregate increases. Mick will keep us informed as the project is carried out.

This report will be discussed at the Env Sub Comm meeting in January and we must agree a proposal to put forward to GP for the 2025/26 budget.

We can propose the £1560 is used for footpath repairs and a further £1000 contingency fund.

Regards

Robert

9th December 2024

Crown Meadow and the scrapes have both been flooded many times this year and have been waterlogged for long periods. This is what the meadow and scrapes are supposed to do. They play a vital role in slowing down the surge of flood water down the river.

The two main footpaths that cross Crown Meadow are both submerged when the river overtops its banks. The main footpath that follows the river bank is holding up very well, considering how much it's used and how often it's flooded. The flood water mostly passes over the main path and into the scrapes and meadow. However, there are two short sections of this path that retain water and become impassable to pedestrians (without wellies).

The other footpath (the diagonal path), which cuts across Crown Meadow in a line from the footbridge to the amphitheatre steps, is a different story. Flood water is held for long periods on this path and for several weeks after a flood event, often making it impassable for long periods.

The diagonal path retains water because its surface is at a lower level than the surrounding meadow land. The flood water on the meadow slowly drains away down the footpath and downward to Scrape 2. This makes the path impassable over several long sections with standing water of 8 to 12 inches.

There have been suggestions that this footpath should be altered and raised so that it does not flood. Whilst desirable, I've had a good look at the situation and believe that to raise the level of this path and prevent it from flooding would be difficult to achieve, costly and perhaps not good for the meadow.

- The diagonal path would need to be built up by 6 to 12 inches on almost its entire length which would be costly and perhaps visually unattractive.
- The resulting elevated path would create something of a dam across the meadow which we cannot do as this will disturb the natural purpose and flow of the flood plain.
- Elevated boardwalks are a possible solution but are very costly and, given that this footpath is not an essential right of way, then I don't think the expense is justifiable at this time.

Suggestion:

Seek advice and quotes to deal with the two small sections that retain water on the main river side path. Ascertain if we can build up these two sections by 4 to 10 inches up so that water drains off rather than collecting in these two sections. This is a much smaller issue to deal with than trying to fix the whole of the diagonal path. The work would then keep the main path open and passable after a flood event whilst the diagonal path remains obviously impassable.

Below are some images to illustrate the situation. Separately I will send some video footage of the flooded paths. I welcome any comments on this report and suggestion.

River Side Path

Images showing the two areas of water retention on the main river path.



Fig1. River side path. Shallow puddle approx. 30 feet long.



Fig 2. River side path. Shallow puddle approx.. 20 feet long.

Diagonal Path across Crown Meadow

Fig 1. Diagonal path at its access point at footbridge. Deep flooding merged with Scrape 2 water.



Figs 2. Four images showing the extensive sections of persistent flooding along the diagonal path.

Himalayan Balsam and Crown Meadow. July 2024

A few facts:

Himalayan Balsam (HB) is a non-native invasive species. It spreads rapidly and easily, especially along river banks and flood plains. Each stem can grow to 10 feet tall and can disperse up to 800 seeds annually.

It quickly takes over by blocking light and space for all other plant species. This in turn reduces the bio-diversity needed for a healthy ecosystem. HB has shallow roots which destabilise river banks. It produces a lot of flowers which are good for pollinating bees but nothing else.

Crown Meadow is being invaded by HB. It is spreading quickly. In three years, it has spread to about 10 locations on Crown Meadow and has quadrupled the area it covers. It is spreading down the banks of the River Trent and Scotch Brook as well as inland towards the scrapes.

HB has reached Scrape 2 and will soon move to Scrape 1. The scrapes are essential to the eco-system on Crown Meadow and flood prevention.

We need to act. If we don't, we could lose the whole of Crown Meadow to HB and the outbreak will contribute to further infestations downstream. We will not be able to completely eradicate it but we can control it, thus protecting the ecosystem of Crown Meadow and downstream.

Below are links for information and a few photos for ID.

[HIMALAYAN BALSAM - Environment Controls](#)

[Himalayan balsam / RHS Gardening](#)

Different techniques are being used to combat Himalayan Balsam, such as:

- Cut back to the base before flowering.
- Pulling up by the roots. Dispose of roots.
- Herbicide treatment
- Volunteer 'Balsam Bashing' groups
- Treatment by professional environmental companies
- Timing and disposal methods are important

The Environment Sub-Committee Working Group has contacted local agencies and authorities regarding Himalayan Balsam, as follows:

* David Moreton - GM of Oak Tree Farm and his partner Hannah Rigden, Senior Historic Environment Officer for Natural England

* Dr William Waller - Biodiversity and Ecology Officer at Stafford Borough Council

* David Cadman - Staffordshire Wildlife Trust

They each offered similar advice which is summarised as follows:

We cannot use any form of chemical treatment due to the proximity to the river. The best method would be to pull them up at the root and leave the plants to rot down, preferably in a spot where they will not be washed downstream before they have decomposed. HB needs to be lifted and composted before it goes to seed which is usually from July onwards.

Strimming is an option but it only slows down the spread of HB and does not prevent future growth.

Any programme to remove HB would need to be conducted over two consecutive years for the greatest impact on controlling it. It is not essential to remove all HB from CM as it is OK for pollinators but we must control its spread across CM.

A test has been carried out on a small of HB at CM in June 2024. This proved that plants are fairly easy to pull up and decompose to nothing very quickly.

The recommendation of the Working Group is that we call a series of volunteer sessions in 2025, (April to July) to lift as much HB as we can. We recommend a small group of volunteers working closely together to keep it organised and safe. The group will be made up of Town Councillors and other known/trusted individuals, if needed. The group will comply with STC volunteering criteria as well as the necessary health and safety measures.

If the volunteer project is approved then there is no need for a budget request for 2025/26 other than a possible small increase in insurance premiums if STC volunteer numbers are increased and the requisition of some gloves and safety glasses.



Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to determine the level of budget for services under its control that the Sub-Committee wishes to recommend to the General Purposes Committee.

Background

2. The General Purposes Committee on 10th December 2024 considered the standstill budget for 2025-26 and indicative figures for the next two years based on a number of assumptions contained within the report.
3. The standstill budget was prepared on the basis that all Council services will continue at broadly their current level. Inflation has not, however, been included in Sub-Committee budgets beyond 2024-25. A separate estimate of inflation beyond this date has been made across the whole of the Council and will be considered by the General Purposes Committee.
4. The figures for this Sub-Committee on the above basis are:

Actual		Budget	Forecast	Budget	Budget	Budget
2023-24		2024-25	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
£		£	£	£	£	£
22,776	Grounds Maintenance	23,600	23,000	23,050	23,050	23,050
975	Crown Meadow Improvements	11,735	11,200	-	-	-
-2,928	Allotments	2,425	600	-2,050	-2,050	-2,050
-	Environmental Initiatives	1,190	-	-	-	-
20,823	TOTAL	38,950	34,800	21,000	21,000	21,000

5. . In respect of these figures, Sub-Committee Members should note that:
 - a. The Grounds Maintenance forecast for the current year includes the regular contracted works, replanting the town borders and Walton roundabout (£1,200), replacing the Walton Roundabout "Lock Gate" (£400). The 2025-26 budget figure includes regular maintenance (£22,050) an annual provision for bridge cleaning/painting (£600) plus a contingency for unforeseen events (£400).
 - b. The Crown Meadow Improvements forecast includes the new hedgerow (£1560), cutting back Scrape 1 (£1,000), willow removal (£500), repairs and improvements to the Anglers Car Park (£3,100), the restoration of Scrape 2 (£2,800), removal of a dead tree (£390) and safety signs (£560).

- c. The Allotments budget for 2025-26 and subsequent years includes provision for water charges (£800), general maintenance (£1,430) and the allotment competition (£250). Against this is set estimated annual income of £4,530.
 - d. The Environmental Initiatives budget is currently unspent, though there is an outstanding commitment for the remaining amount of the budget that is currently in dispute. Any remaining allowance as at 31st March 2025 can be rolled forward for spending in 2025-26. In line with normal practice, no budget provision has been made beyond the current year. If the Sub-Committee wishes to provide for additional budgets in future years, this will need to be recommended to the General Purposes Committee.
6. As reported to the meeting of the General Purposes Committee on 10th December 2024, the standstill budget is just the starting point for the budget process. Members of the Sub-Committee will want to review this standstill budget and the amounts provisionally included. In addition, there are likely to be other areas where the Sub-Committee will want to undertake new developments or stop/change the things that they are doing now.
7. The Sub-Committee is asked to consider the standstill budget and any areas of growth or savings which they would want to be taken into account in setting the budget for 2025-26 and future years.

Recommendations

8. The Sub-Committee is asked to recommend their proposed budget for consideration by the General Purposes Committee.