

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2011 AT 7.30PM IN THE CASTLE,
HERTFORD**

PRESENT: Councillor M McCormick, in the Chair

Councillors P Boyle, Mrs B Haddock, Mrs B Mansfield, R Radford
and R Willis.

IN ATTENDANCE: The Worshipful the Mayor of Hertford Cllr Mrs S Newton
Councillor Miss I Sigmatic
Mrs N James, Town Clerk
Miss M Challis, Marketing & Promotions Manager
Mr S Davies, Finance Manager
North Road Plotolders Group
Mudlarks Community Allotment Group
PC M Bullen, Hertfordshire Constabulary

3 members of the public

Prior to the meeting the Chairman announced that retired Youth Town
Councillor Miss Emily McFiggans had sent her thanks to the Town Council for
the presentation which was made to her at the Community Service meeting on
5 September.

267. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors D Poole (Royal British Legion commitments), P Ruffles
(another meeting) and N Wilson (moving home).

268. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs M McCormick and R Radford both declared personal and
prejudicial interests (agenda item 6a) as they were members of the
North Road Allotments Working Group.

269. THE MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2011 were approved
as a correct record and the Chairman authorised to sign the same.

**270. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES NOT DEALT WITH
ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA**

Resurfacing works at the cemetery

The Chairman told the Committee that a new contractor had been
employed for resurfacing work at the Cemetery. He asked the Town

Clerk whether the grounds staff were happy with the standard of work. The Town Clerk confirmed that there had been no negative feedback.

271. QUESTIONS AND/OR STATEMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There was one member of the public wishing to address the Committee and the Chairman reminded the Committee of the rules of public participation at meetings.

Mr John Cook

Mr Cook wished to address the Committee regarding the renewal of the Devolved Management Agreement for the North Road Allotments.

Mr Cook said that he felt that the decision by the committee members of the North Road Plotolders Group (NRPG) to disband the group in order to form a gardening club had not been handled properly. He said that the NRPG committee had not fully consulted the members of the group before making the decision.

He felt that the majority of the members were keen to continue with the group and said that other members had stepped forward to take on the roles of secretary and treasurer. He asked the Committee to bear this in mind when considering the renewal of the Devolved Management Agreement.

272. ALLOTMENTS – NORTH ROAD ALLOTMENTS SITE

In accordance with the Hertford Town Council complaints procedure, the Committee was asked to consider an unresolved complaint from the NRPG.

Cllr R Radford left the room.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) Cllr Mrs S Newton, the Mayor of Hertford, take the chair for this agenda item.

Cllr M McCormick left the table and sat in the public gallery.

The Mayor outlined the procedure for hearing, debating and resolving the complaint to the Committee and the public.

Mr Wilkerson, as Secretary of the NRPG, (the complainant) was invited to speak for three minutes, during which he outlined his complaint. He felt that the distribution of a questionnaire by the Town Council's North Road Working Group was unfair; copies of the questionnaire were sent to plotolders rather than the full membership (eg one questionnaire was sent to married couples, which the NRPG committee and members felt was discriminatory. He went on to say that some members of the

group had more than one plot, and therefore they should have received more than one questionnaire.

The Committee then asked questions of Mr Wilkerson.

Councillor M McCormick, as Chairman of the Working Group, was then given three minutes to make a statement.

Cllr McCormick pointed out that in order to supply one questionnaire per plot, Mr Wilkerson had been asked to supply details of the plot numbers, to accompany the list of names and addresses for plotholders which he had previously given. The Working Group felt that one questionnaire per plot was the fairest way to achieve a sample of the opinion of the group and is the usual way of conducting a survey for statistical analysis.

The Committee then asked questions of Cllr McCormick.

Cllr McCormick, then Mr Wilkerson, made a closing statement in accordance with the procedure before leaving the room while the remainder of the Committee debated the resolution of the complaint.

Cllr R Radford was called away on urgent business at this point and did not return to the meeting.

The Committee then considered the matter. The feeling of the members was that the Working Group Party had acted honourably with the best of intentions and the Town Clerk had already apologised for any perceived discrimination, which was certainly not intended. It was felt that even though not every member of the group had received a survey, the aim of the exercise was to take a representative sample of views and the number of surveys returned certainly fulfilled this aim.

Mr Wilkerson and Cllr McCormick were invited back into the room and the Mayor announced that the complaint had been rejected for the above reasons.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The complaint should be rejected and the decision confirmed in writing to the complainant within 10 working days.

273. ALLOTMENT - STATISTICS

Councillor McCormick resumed the chair of the meeting.

The Committee received a report detailing the latest statistics for the Town Council's allotment sites, and also maintenance work on the sites.

The Town Clerk confirmed that the North Road plots were all let and that the site had a waiting list.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The allotment statistics and maintenance details be received and noted.

274. ALLOTMENTS – MUDLARKS COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECT

The Committee received a report from Mudlarks regarding the recent activities of the project.

The Chairman thanked Mudlarks for its work to restore the sensory garden at the Castle, which had been initiated by the Youth Town Council.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee note the report.

275. DEVOLVED MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT, NORTH ROAD ALLOTMENTS

The Committee received a verbal report of the work of the Devolved Management Working Party. Prior to giving this report, the Chairman made the Committee aware that he had discussed the position of members of the public speaking on a verbal report with the Town Clerk. He understood they were allowed to do this as the verbal report would need to be noted and therefore carried a recommendation to this effect. The Town Clerk confirmed that this was correct.

The Chairman said that it was with regret that the NRPG had chosen not to continue with the renewal of the Devolved Management Agreement. He thanked Officers and Councillors for the work to revise the terms of the Devolved Management Agreement, which was due to be sent to NRPG for their consideration, subject to one clarification required from the Council's legal advisors, when the decision to terminate the agreement was confirmed. The Chairman congratulated the group on its success and thanked those involved for all their hard work over the last few years. The Chairman noted Mr Cook's statement and was pleased that there may be a possibility of devolved management continuing.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee notes the report.

276. ALLOTMENT RENTS

The Committee received a report regarding a proposed increase for allotment rents with effect from 1 January 2013. It was noted that 12 months notice was required to increase allotment rents and that costs associated with running the allotments, particularly the cost of water, had risen considerably in the last year. Hertford remains extremely competitive in its allotment rents and generally provides a higher level of

service than its neighbours including, for example, the provision of toilets.

The report from Officers recommended an increase to £5 per pole. Members debated this increase and the Chairman stated that he felt an increase to £4.20 would be more manageable, particularly given the current economic climate.

It was proposed and seconded that the allotment rents be increased to £5 per pole, with continued provision of concessions for senior citizens. This was put to the vote, which was split. The Chairman then moved and used his casting vote to carry an increase of £4.20 per pole, with continued provision of concessions for senior citizens.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The allotment charges be increased to £4.20 per pole with effect from 1 January 2013 with continued provision of concessions for senior citizens.
- b) Should the management of North Road Allotments return to the Council, the increase will also apply to that site.
- c) The age at which concessions would apply would continue to rise in accordance with the state retirement age.

Cllr Willis wished it to be recorded that he voted against the proposal.

277. CEMETERY AND CLOSED CHURCHYARDS - STATISTICS FOR BURIALS AND INTERMENT OF ASHES

The Committee received a report outlining the recent burials and interment of ashes statistics at the Cemetery and details of the maintenance work programme and the recent seasonal inspection.

The statistics for the burials and interment of ashes were queried as the two tables did not tally for August 2011 and 2010. There were also no figures for January 2010. The Town Clerk said this would be looked into.

The Chairman queried the cost of cleaning the War Memorial in St Andrew's Churchyard which was the same as the railing repairs. The Town Clerk said she would check this after the meeting. The Chairman also asked about the Council's formal responsibilities for maintaining closed Churchyards, particularly in relation to memorial repairs. The Town Clerk advised that beyond health and safety obligations, responsibilities for memorial repairs were a grey area. Members felt that it would be beneficial if Church Wardens had an opportunity to meet with both Councillors and Officers to discuss general maintenance issues from time to time.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The report on the statistics for burials and interment of ashes and details of the maintenance work programme and the recent seasonal inspection be noted.

278. CEMETERY AND CLOSED CHURCHYARDS - GREEN FLAG SUBMISSION

The Committee received an update on progress towards the Green Flag submission in the Cemetery.

The Committee had concerns about the investment required to obtain and retain the Green Flag, as while there were parts of the standard which were directly applicable to the Town Council, other areas were not as easily justifiable. Therefore the Town Council would continue to use the Green Flag criteria as guidance but would 'cherry pick' the most appropriate sections for local use.

The ground staff were commended for their efforts to work towards the award.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The report of the progress in pursuit of achieving Green Flag standards be received and noted.
- b) The Committee defer the decision of the Cemetery Management Plan Mid Term Review document to maintain the Green Flag standard so this may be considered in light of not proceeding with the award.
- c) The Council would not proceed to the formal application process for a Green Flag award in January 2012.

Cllr Mrs B Mansfield wished it to be recorded that she abstained from this vote.

279. CEMETERY AND CLOSED CHURCHYARDS – PROGRESS OF BLOCK J

The Committee had received an update of action to be taken to date regarding the development of Block J as a new Garden of Rest. Two proposed plans for the design of the Garden of Rest were also available.

Both designs allowed for flexibility on trends towards burials or ashes interments, and the chosen design would be presented to contractors in order for a tendering process to be undertaken.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) Option 2 as the basic design for the Garden of Rest would be submitted to tender.
- b) The Committee approve the relocation of the skip from the front of the Cemetery

280. CEMETERY AND CLOSED CHURCHYARDS – HOLY TRINITY AND ST LEONARD’S GARDEN

The Committee received a report from the gardener at Holy Trinity and St Leonard’s Garden. The Committee felt that work had been carried out at Holy Trinity which went beyond the core maintenance responsibilities for which the gardener had originally been contracted. The Chairman queried who had instructed the creation of the ‘physic garden’ and the Town Clerk said she would look into this.

The report outlined a proposal to remove the kissing gate at St Leonard’s Garden, which it was felt impeded access to the gardens. The Committee were concerned about the costs associated with this work and therefore felt unable to support it at this time.

The Committee expressed that it would like to see properly costed proposals which went beyond regular garden maintenance work before the gardener undertakes any work on the areas, particularly as work recently undertaken had exceeded the budget provision 2011/12.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The kissing gate remain in situ.
- b) The report be noted.

281. SUB COMMITTEES AND ADVISORY SUB COMMITTEES

The Committee had received a copy of the minutes of the Youth Town Council held on 28 September 2011.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee receives the minutes of the Youth Town Council meeting held on 28 September 2011.

282. FINANCE - FIRST QUARTER INCOME AND EXPENDITURE 2011/12

The Committee received a report about the second quarter income and expenditure.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The report be noted.

283. FINANCE – TO CONSIDER ITEMS FOR BUDGET 2012/13

The Committee received the second draft budget for 2012/13 and considered optional projects for the forthcoming financial year.

It was clarified that the optional project of the allowance of £2,000 for the provision of a community garden scheme was for wider projects in the town and not for the conversion of the newly acquired Sele Road site.

In order to achieve a 0% increase in the Precept for the 3rd year running, the Chairman of the Finance, Policy and Administration Committee had suggested that a number of the recommended optional projects were reduced.

The Town Clerk advised that some the reduction of some of these projects were against Officers' advice, and that if no budget provision was made some of the recommended maintenance may have to come out of the Town Council's reserves, particularly the repair to the entrance at North Road Allotments, which is becoming urgent.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee approves the alterations suggested by the Chairman of the Finance, Policy and Administration Committee.
- b) The Committee approves the revised the draft budget for recommendation to the Finance, Policy and Administration Committee at its meeting on the 19th December 2011.

The meeting closed at 10.00 pm.