

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY, 13 FEBRUARY 2012 AT 7.30PM IN THE CASTLE,
HERTFORD**

PRESENT: Councillor M McCormick, in the Chair

Councillors P Boyle, Mrs B Mansfield, R Radford, P Ruffles
R Willis and N Wilson.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs N James, Town Clerk
Ms T Carpenter, Civic Administration Manager
Mudlarks Community Allotment Group

1 member of the public

393. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors Mrs B Haddock (Family Commitment) and D Poole (Family Commitment)

394. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

395. THE MINUTES

The Chairman circulated a revised set of minutes for the meeting held on 14 November 2011 which included several alterations to those which had previously been circulated for adoption.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The revised minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2011, as tabled, were approved as a correct record of the proceedings and the Chairman was authorised to sign same once the minutes had been incorporated into the minute book.

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

Land at Sele Road

The Clerk advised the Committee that confirmation had been received from Groundwork that funding had been allocated from the M&S legacy project to develop the land at Sele Road as a community garden and a project outline was currently being drawn up. Groundwork were keen that clearance work at the site took place prior to the nesting season and had requested that the Council employ its own contractor to clear the land in the next couple of weeks. Funding was available to contribute toward the cost of clearance work.

Churchyard Resurfacing Work

It was noted that substantial resurfacing work had taken place at both Holy Trinity and All Saints Churchyards along with patch repairs to tarmac at St Andrew's Churchyard.

Community Gardening Scheme

The Chairman advised that discussions were taking place with Hertfordshire Highways with a view to implement a Community Gardening Scheme to the flower beds adjacent to Bluecoats Yard.

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

None.

398. ALLOTMENTS – STATISTICS AND MAINTENANCE

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

It was confirmed that, whilst waiting lists still existed, there was a turnover of applicants being allocated allotment plots, particularly at the start of each year when some tenants decided not to renew their tenancies.

The Mayor had recently received correspondence from an allotment tenant and resident at Cromwell Road regarding the annual hedge cutting programme at the site. It was felt that in order to promote wildlife habitat, consideration should be given to reducing the regularity of the hedge cutting, where shading issues permitted.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The allotment statistics and maintenance details be received and noted.

399. ALLOTMENTS – MUDLARKS COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECT

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

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee notes the report.

400. ALLOTMENTS – MUDLARKS LEASE

The Committee received a verbal update from the Clerk regarding the Mudlarks lease. Lease negotiations were now at a reasonably advanced

stage and the Committee was asked whether it would wish to continue to delegate authority to the Working Group, (which had been set up at the beginning of the project) or transfer this to the Chairman and Vice Chairman in discussion with the Clerk to finalise the terms of the lease. The Committee considered that the Working Group membership should be updated and continue to be given delegated authority to determine the terms of the lease.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Working Party membership be updated to include Councillors Boyle, Mrs Mansfield, R. Radford and Wilson.
- b) The Working Group finalise the terms of the lease arrangements with Mudlarks
- c) The Committee notes the verbal report.

401. DEVOLVED MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT, NORTH ROAD ALLOTMENTS

The Committee received a verbal update from the Clerk regarding Devolved Management at North Road. Some members of the previous Devolved Management Committee had called an Extraordinary General Meeting of all the tenants at North Road with a view to ascertaining whether it wished to continue with devolved management, elect a new management committee and enter into negotiations with the Council for a new Devolved Management Agreement.

The Committee was pleased to note that there appeared to be a positive way forward for the management of the site and awaited to hear the result of the Extraordinary General Meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee notes the verbal report.

402. FRUIT CAGE

The Committee received a report seeking the view of the Committee regarding whether the large 'fruit cage' structure on plot 67a at Cromwell Road Allotments was acceptable under the Council's rules and regulations.

It was noted that East Herts Council, as the planning authority, had determined that the structure required planning permission, however, following a visit by a senior planning officer it was assessed that it would not be expedient in planning terms, or in the public interest, to take any formal enforcement action in this case.

Notwithstanding the decision of East Herts Council, it remained for the Town Council to determine whether the structure was permissible under its own rules and regulations. It was noted that the tenant maintained

that the structure was a fruit cage which was permissible under the rules and regulations.

The Committee noted that the structure was extremely large but at the same time well built and well maintained, there had been no complaints from neighbouring tenants and in the circumstances it was agreed that this particular structure could remain in situ. The Committee was however keen to ensure that there could be no such misunderstanding of the rules and regulations in future and it was requested that the revision of the rules and regulations be considered at the next meeting of the Committee. It was further requested that a clause be added emphasising that written permission would be required for all structures on allotment plots and each request would be considered on its own merits. In the interim, it was suggested that new allotment tenants should be advised that planning permission for any structures was a separate matter which required enquiries to the District Council.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee, having considered the fruit cage on its individual merits, agreed to it remaining, on condition that the owner continues to ensure that it is maintained to a safe standard.
- b) A letter be forwarded to the allotment tenant advising him of the decision of the Council.
- c) The allotment rules and regulations be revised at the next meeting of the Committee.

403. 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.

It was noted that there had been a large drop in non-resident burials in 2011 and concern was expressed as to whether this would have a budgetary impact on the Council. The Clerk however indicated that 2010 had merely seen an unusually high number of non-resident burials. It was noted that the cost of these burials had been set at a rate to ensure that burial space was not taken up by residents of other towns simply as a result of our charges.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

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

404. CEMETERY AND CLOSED CHURCHYARDS - REVIEW OF BURIAL FEES

The Committee received a report outlining an increase in burial fees in line with RPI of 4.8%. The Committee noted the Council continued to

subsidise the cost of grave digging and had sought to address this over the past years by increasing the interment fees by £50. The Committee considered that, given that it was now close to recouping the cost of grave digging, (£20 for a single grave, £80 for a single or re-opened casket grave and £60 for a triple casket burial) it was decided to increase the fees outlined in Appendix A by the amounts indicated above.

The Clerk advised the Committee that an enquiry had been received for a burial on a Saturday. Whilst this was not normally a service offered by the Council, cemetery staff had indicated that they would be prepared to cover the burial as a one off, but the Clerk sought advice from members regarding the charge payable. The grave digger had indicated that an additional charge of £100 would be payable, as would staff overtime costs. The Committee approved additional charges to recoup the additional costs to the Council and requested that a letter be forwarded to the family explaining the reason for the additional charges.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee approves the revised scale of charges along with the additional interment fees as outlined above, to be implemented with effect from 1 April 2012.

405. CEMETERY AND CLOSED CHURCHYARDS – BUDGET EXPENDITURE PROPOSALS

The Committee had received a report outlining proposed major areas of expenditure in the Cemetery and Closed Churchyards in 2012/13. This report contained recommendations that requests be made to the Finance, Policy and Administration Committee to carry over the remaining budgets for Block J and Closed Churchyard Maintenance.

Garden of Remembrance

The Chairman advised the Committee of a discussion he had had with the Cemetery supervisor regarding the removal of plants which had been planted on the grassed area between the flagstones and the berberis hedge in the Garden of Remembrance. The plants, and a conifer had been planted by families whose relatives ashes were interred in the Garden of Remembrance and were adjacent to the tablet memorials of their relations. The Committee was generally of the opinion that the plants did not improve the area and whilst recognising that this was a particularly sensitive issue, considered that the plants should be removed from the grassed area before they became overgrown. It was requested that the families be advised of the Council's decision in a sensitive manner.

The Committee noted that the flagstones at the Garden of Remembrance were in urgent need to repair, but considered that improvement work to the crazy paving was not so urgent and could reasonably be left until the following year.

All Saints

The Committee felt that before the new litter bin was installed in the vicinity of the Pearson Memorial, the Council should ensure that it will not become responsible for any collection charges.

Holy Trinity Churchyard Resurfacing

The Committee sought clarification regarding the precise area of land which required resurfacing and it was agreed that this would be looked into.

Memorial Repairs

The Clerk advised the Committee that, following the memorial testing exercise in 2008 the Council had been working through its 'urgent action' memorial repairs as funds became available. Substantial work had taken place in Holy Trinity Churchyard in 2010 which had been enabled through grant funding from the Pilgrims Trust, and considerable work had taken place in the St Andrew's section of the Cemetery in 2011. Work was this year programmed to take place in All Saints Churchyard. It was noted that there was an important heritage value of the memorials in All Saints Churchyard and therefore it would be desirable to repair as many stones as funds allowed in this financial year. The Clerk indicated that repairs would be prioritised by those closest to the church building, since these were in the most visually prominent and publicly accessible areas. It was requested that of the funds available, half be allocated towards the repair of box tombs and half to the smaller memorials in order that an immediate visual impact could be made.

Provision of Garden of Rest, (Block J)

The Chairman confirmed that work in this area was progressing but that further decisions needed to be taken with regard to finishes and widths of paths for example. These matters would be referred to a future meeting of the Committee

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee RECOMMENDS to the Finance, Policy and Administration Committee to carry over the remaining budgets of £3997 for Block J and £1600 for Closed Churchyard Maintenance.
- b) The Committee notes the report.

406. SUB COMMITTEES AND ADVISORY SUB COMMITTEES

The Committee had received a copy of the minutes of the Youth Town Council held on 24 November 2011. It was further noted that the Youth Town Council met informally on 26 January 2012 and had a tour of

County Hall with the Mayor and Vice Chairman of Hertfordshire County Council

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee receives the minutes of the Youth Town Council meeting held on 24 November 2011.

407. FINANCE - THIRD QUARTER INCOME AND EXPENDITURE 2011/12

The Committee received a report detailing the third quarter income and expenditure.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The report be noted.

408. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED** that:

In view of the confidential nature of the following items, which related to the business matters of individuals and organisations, the public be excluded while the following item was discussed. This is in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, as amended by the Local Government Act 1972.

409. CONTRACT GARDENING, HOLY TRINITY, ST LEONARD'S GARDEN AND MOAT GARDEN

The Committee considered future Contract Gardening arrangements at Holy Trinity Church, St Leonard's Garden and the Moat Garden.

The Town Clerk updated members on recent discussions concerning the Moat Garden which is currently under licence to Hertford Town Council from Hertfordshire County Council. It was agreed that the Contract Gardening maintenance should only extend to the Sensory Garden in this area.

The Committee received two proposals from alternative providers. Following a debate on the merits of both proposals, the Committee favoured the proposal from Mudlarks. Mudlarks had indicated that the Contract would enable it to increase the work experience provision for its Gardening Team from one day per week to three,. Mudlarks was a not for profit charity and their proposals were also the most competitive. The Committee recognised that Mudlarks had completed work on the Sensory Garden to a high standard and considered that the proposal offered something both positive and different to the Council and the community. The Contract would be subject to regular review.

The Committee recognised that the current contract gardener had put in a substantial amount of work on the gardens and it was requested that a letter be forwarded to him expressing the Council's appreciation for his work for the Council.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

Authority be delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman to finalise the terms of the Gardening Contract with Mudlarks for the Sensory Garden, flowerbeds at Holy Trinity Churchyard and St Leonard's Garden, to take effect from 1 April 2012.

This being the final meeting of the Committee in the current Civic Year the Chairman proposed a vote of thanks to the Mayor of Hertford for her support during some of the more contentious aspects of the work of the Committee.

Appreciation was also expressed to the Chairman and Officers for their work over the previous year.

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm.