



Operations & Amenities Committee

Present: Cllrs Goodman (Chairperson), Chapman, Dunford, Hitchin and Maslen

In attendance: Town Clerk, Operations Manager, Senior Maintenance Technician, Project Deliver Manager

Absent: Cllrs Bolanz, Collings, Cooper-Marsh and Johnson

Minutes of the meeting of the **Operations & Amenities committee** held on **Tuesday 15th October 2024** at **7.15pm** in the Eaton's Centre, The Maltings, St Neots, PE19 8ES.

Public Participation

There is one member of the public present who wished to address the Council in relation to the Museum Repair agenda item.

ACTIONS

049 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were noted from Cllrs Bolanz, Collins and Johnson

Admin

050 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Chapman declared an interest in agenda item 11 the draft 'Hire of Council Equipment' policy as a Member of the Eatons Community Association who use Council equipment to facilitate a May Day event.

051 Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the meeting of the Operations and Amenities Committee held on 10th September 2024 as a true and accurate record.

052 Action list

Members received and noted the committee action list. The following items were raised in more detail;

Jubilee Trees – Trees purchased by the Town Council are to be delivered directly to HDC who will be planting the trees on the Council's behalf. The agreement with HDC includes the planting of wildflowers as well as trees. This will happen during the current planting season.

Changing Places – Awaiting approval of charity. Provided all evidence needed.

Members were informed that approval was awaited from the Muscular Dystrophy Charity that the Changing Places toilet could be opened and used. HDC were currently pursuing these permissions. Members raised concerns about the ongoing closure of the toilets and asked that if the standard toilets were ready to use then these should be opened now, rather than waiting for the Changing Places toilet sign off and opening all toilets together.



053 Local Highways Improvement Bids 2024-25

- i) Location of signs – attach to existing post if possible as less street furniture. **RESOLVED** to go route without additional post.
- ii) Provided an update on Luke street – go through individual objections – could we see written objections and wording of them, along with the successful ones. Ask Simone to attend as well.
A Member expressed that they wouldn't support Montague Street being one way.

054 Community Orchard

Town Clerk introduced a report which had been put together by the Councils Environmental Project Officer. Members noted that there would be a surplus of trees from the Bio Diversity Grant the Council had received. It was recommended by the Environment and Emergency Committee that the Council use these trees to create a community fruit orchard at the Steve Van de Kerkhove Community Centre.

A Member commented that there was a community orchard at Sudbury Meadow and expressed concern the proposed location could be encouraging people to go to that area, which is isolated and now the base for the Town Council office. It was felt there was a risk of attracting anti-social behaviour adjacent to and in the cemetery.

The Operations Manager commented that surplus trees would be good to use in a number of locations around the town as part of reducing annual bedding plants and the costs and maintenance associated with them. Members expressed support for this idea.

A Member commented that the land at Steve Van de Kerkhove Community Centre could have other purpose in the future and the ability to consider this would be lost with an orchard.

RESOLVED that the Operations Manager work with the Environmental Project Officer to identify locations around the town that would be suitable for, and benefit from trees as part of reducing annual bedding.

055 Operational Equipment

Members received and considered a report proposing that the Council invest in a new piece of equipment for the purpose of the operations team delivering its work/services. The Operations Manager and Senior Maintenance Technician addressed the Council to explain the benefits of the equipment, how it would help create efficiencies in the team and how the resource freed up could be allocated.

Members welcomed the report and the proposed equipment. A Member queried how the vehicle would be stored given the pressure on depot space. The Operations Manager explained that the equipment also worked as a forklift truck which would allow the team to better store and stack items, creating more floor space.



Members discussed the benefits of the equipment and the additional works it would allow the team to undertake. Members particularly welcomed the resource that would be freed up to allow the team to undertake more traditional operational tasks which would improve the public realm under the Council's ownership.

Members asked several questions about the equipment's ability and scope of work it could undertake.

It was noted that the equipment would allow the operations team to widen its ability to;

- Cut banks and ditches it couldn't currently, but which fall under the CCC grass cutting contract.
- Cut more areas and verges.
- Help remove weeds.
- Reduce time to cut hedge rows and potentially cutting more hedgerows.
- Potential to undertake more work for County Council as part of reviewing the grass cutting contract.

The equipment will also dramatically improve efficiency, reducing the number of operatives and time involved in certain tasks, particularly hedge cutting. This freed up resource will allow the team to address operational jobs it does not presently have resource to undertake.

The Committee discussed leasing the equipment rather than purchasing. However, it was not felt that this would be a practical option given the use of the vehicle and the potential it has for wear and tear.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council purchase an Avant-AV 760I and suitable attachments at a cost of £60,627 and that the Finance and Governance Committee consider and make a recommendation on funding for the equipment.

056 Budget Setting 2025/26

Members received and considered current budgets which fall under the Operations and Amenities committee, along with budgets highlighted by officers which may need increasing or could be lowered based on current and previous actual spend. Members noted that officers had recommended a revenue budget for the maintenance of defibrillators. This is in response to the Council adopting community defibrillators during the past year. It was proposed and seconded that funding is also included to fund the purchase of additional defibrillators as part of ensuring the Council responds to community need.

It was proposed that if the purchase of new defibrillators can be regarded as small capital items that the revenue budget is increased to £3,000 to allow for the purchase of additional defibrillators.



RESOLVED to RECOMMEND as part of the budget setting process that the proposed 'Defibrillator' budget is increased to £3,000 to allow for the purchase of a new defibrillator for consideration by the Council as part of the overall budget setting process.

057 Strategic Projects

Members received and considered a schedule of key projects which fall under the remit of the Operations and Amenities Committee. Members noted that several projects were due to come to a conclusion, while others were still to be started. The schedule included timeframes and estimated costs based on current available information.

Members were in broad agreement with the projects highlighted in the table and the timeframes set against them. A Member commented that not all the projects were strategic and instead were day to day operations related to existing assets, play park improvements was highlighted as an example. The Clerk explained that it was important that all projects be included as the same resource would be used to deliver all the projects and Councillors needed to understand timescales, priorities and work allocation in that context.

Members discussed play provision in detail, noting that the schedule proposed bringing forward refurbishment of two poor quality play parks. The reason for this was that they were assets that needed improving and could be more quickly addressed the developing a completely new play park in Eaton Ford, which would require consultation and planning. Members discussed the creation of a new play park at Eaton Ford, which was a strategic project. It was explained that it was not intended to push this project back, but that there were a lot of enabling works such as identifying the best location, assessing play need and consultation.

It was agreed that the refurbishment of Swift and Bevington play parks were not strategic but would be left on the schedule due to the resource implications related to the projects. The Project Deliver Manager would highlight that they are not strategic projects. They would be progressed under business as usual for the committee.

Members discussed timescales for items such as cemetery land, depot options and a new play park and it was confirmed these matters would be worked on and brought forward to future meetings in line with the schedule.

The Chairperson would feed the Committees comments back to the Strategic Working Group.

058 Burial Regulations

Members received amended Burial Regulations for St Neots Cemeteries. Members noted that the committee had reviewed the documents over a period of months



and that two Councillors had submitted amendments, which had been incorporated into an updated version.

A Member commented that in addition there was no mention of consecrated land within the documents and that the regulations should identify if the land available is consecrated or unconsecrated and any process related to this.

It was agreed officers would bring back amended versions of the regulations which included reference to the consecration of the land available.

059 Hire of Council Equipment Policy

Members reviewed the draft Hire of Council Equipment policy. It was explained that the policy had come forward as there was no clear guidance for officers on when the Council will lend equipment and the impact that has on the life of the equipment and resource of the Operations Team. The policy was coming forward as a result of a recommendation from the Promotion and Events Committee.

A Member commented that the policy did not cover equipment that may have been purchased by the Council for a specific purpose and that in such cases that equipment should not be hired out and should be used for the purpose for which the Council resolved to purchase it. Market Square bistro tables were provided as an example of such equipment.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the Finance and Governance Committee that the Council adopts the draft Hire of Council Equipment policy subject to include an amendment to state that equipment purchased by the Council for a specific purpose will not be hired out unless the Council resolves as such.

060 Date of Next Meeting

Members noted that the date of the next Operations and Amenities Committee would be on 12th November 2024 at 7.15pm.

061 Lease – Steve Van de Kerkhove Community Buildings

Members received and reviewed professional valuations for the two buildings which comprise the Steve Van de Kerkhove Community Centre. Members commented that the recommended rent was fair and discussed the basis for agreeing a new contract with tenants for either building in the future, which should ensure the valuation is reflected. It is important that there is a public record that shows the Council is obtaining the correct value for its buildings, or if it is granting funds otherwise that this support is recorded and clear in our accounts system.

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON