



## Operations & Amenities Committee

**Present:** Cllrs Goodman (Chairperson), Banks, Chapman, Collins, Dunford, Hitchin, Johnson, Maslen and Smith.

**In attendance:** Town Clerk, Operations Manager

**Absent:** Cllrs Bolanz and Cooper-Marsh

**Minutes** of the meeting of the **Operations & Amenities committee** held on **Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> April** at **7.15pm** in the Priory Centre, Priory Lane, St Neots, PE19 2BH.

### Public Participation

There were no members of the public present.

### ACTIONS

#### 107 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received and noted from Cllr Bolanz and Cooper-Marsh.

Admin

**RESOLVED** to co-opt Cllr Smith to the Operations and Amenities Committee in the absence of Cllrs Bolanz and Cooper-Marsh.

#### 108 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

#### 109 Minutes

Members **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the meeting of the Operations and Amenities Committee held on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2024 as a true and accurate record.

Admin

#### 110 Action list

Members received the committee action list. Members raised the following comments;

**LHI Bids** – The Clerk informed Members that he had received a copy of the Highways Authority consultation letter that would be sent to residents regarding the Luke Street LHI scheme proposal. A copy was circulated to Members for information.

The Clerk informed Members that non-complex works for the Loves Farm application had been completed and that Cllr Davenport-Ray had written to the Council expressing thanks from Loves Farm Resident Association for the Council's support for the scheme.

**Moore's Walk Garden** – The Clerk informed Members that he had received through a funding agreement the day of the meeting from the District Council for the



proposed works. He would be signing this and returning it to HDC and instructing work as soon as this was done.

**Eaton Socon Highways Petition** – The Clerk informed the Committee that the petitioner who had arranged the submission of a petition regarding highway safety matters was able to meet with Councillors on site the week of 13<sup>th</sup> May 2024.

**Public Toilets** – Members asked that the Operations Manager seeks costs to redecorate the South Street toilet doors to help improve street scene.

**Queens Jubilee Tree Planting** – The Clerk confirmed trees had been pre-ordered for the autumn planting season.

**Inclusive Play Parks** – A meeting of the Working Group was still due to be held. Recommendations on priorities and use of allocated funding would come forward from this group.

**Cemetery Land** – A Member brought a plot of land which may present an opportunity for future allotment provision to the committee's attention. It was agreed the member would forward details to the Clerk for further investigation.

#### **111 Crosshall Road Local Highway Improvement Proposal 2024-25**

Members received and noted a report from the Town Clerk on the Crosshall Road LHi scheme consultation. The Clerk reported that he had received confirmation from the Highways Officer that 70 responses had been received to the consultation and that a draft report for delegated decision making had been drawn up. A meeting would be held in April from which the Town Clerk would be able to report common themes that have emerged from the consultation, prior to decision making by the County Council.

#### **112 Solar Panels – Gate Lodge, St Neots Old Cemetery**

Members received and considered a report from the Town Clerk, along with quotations for the installation of solar panels on The Gate Lodge, St Neots Old Cemetery. The Clerk outlined the report and situation.

The Chairperson explained that the EPC for the building was poor and while PV panels would contribute to improving it, they may also be inefficient given the poor insulation of the building and high energy use. Members considered the installation of solar panels on the building, the costs and payback.

Members expressed concern over using public funds to install panels which would provide benefits and subsidies to a commercial company. While the committee acknowledged the benefits the installation of PV panels would have for the Council's move towards zero-carbon, the Council itself did not operate the building.



Members discussed whether a lease renewal for the building could be looked at, with a pay pack to the Council for the panels from energy savings factored in.

Members discussed wider issues with the building, including the poor insulation and need for the Council to invest in its buildings in the long term. The committee acknowledged the tenant should not be in a position whereby it was paying high energy costs due to poor insulation of the building.

However, overall Members did not feel the Council should agree to fund the cost of installing panels on the Gate Lodge at this stage as it would result in tax payer funds benefiting a commercial operation and there are other ways this amount of money could be spent to meet the Council's obligations as a landlord.

It was suggested that the Council look to bring the building up to standard and then consider the installation of panels at the time the lease comes up for renewal.

A Member commented that the Council's wider approach to solar panels within the Council estate should be considered by the Environment and Emergency Committee, with a recommended approach brought forward. There needs to be a plan in place which assess all buildings and where the best benefits for expenditure can be achieved.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** to defer a decision on the installation of solar panels at the Gate Lodge until such time that the lease for the building is renegotiated and the Environment and Emergency Committee have brought forward a recommended plan on the Council's approach to solar PV panels and insulation across its buildings.

### **113 Steve Van de Kerkhove Community Hub**

Members received and considered a report and quotations from the Town Clerk and Operations Manager on improving access surfacing at the Steve Van de Kerkhove Eynesbury Community Hub. Members also considered information provided by the Environmental Officer on the implications of different types of surfacing.

Members commented that while tarmac did present environmental challenges it was the most suitable surface for the requirements of the access track and parking area. It would also be the most versatile for multi-use vehicles and pedestrians.

A Member commented that they were not happy with a tarmac solution and that block paving would be a more environmentally friendly option. However, they accepted the surfacing needed to be undertaken that offered a safe entrance for multi-users.



It was proposed and seconded that the Committee recommend progressing with the tarmac resurfacing of the Steve Van de Kerkhove Community Hub access track and parking area and that Company B is recommended as the preferred contractor.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council tarmac surface the Steve Van de Kerkhove Community Hub access track, car parking area and pedestrian walkway. The environmental challenges with a tarmac solution are acknowledged, but due to the accessibility requirements a more environmentally friendly solution such as gravel is not a feasible option.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that Company B be approved as the preferred contractor for the Works at a cost of £73,000 and that the Finance and Governance Committee consider funding available.

Members discussed and agreed the importance of marking out a disabled bay once the work was completed.

#### **114 Autumn Planting**

Members received and noted a report from the Town Clerk on ordering of autumn planting. The use of an external contractor to deliver planting was a result of the Council losing access to greenhouses previously used to grow plants due to the sale of the land.

Members discussed at some length potential future alternative options for future planting which might involve the community, such as planting schemes or sponsorships. The Clerk and Operations Manager commented that sponsorship of planting beds would attract business rates and that while there may be scope of some community planting beds the Council plants over 10,000 plants. These need to be produced to a similar standard, uniformed colours and made available at the same time for planting designs. This would be difficult when not dealing with a professional nursery.

The Clerk commented that Members need to consider the purpose of town centre planting and maintaining a high-quality control was important in producing good displays.

**RESOLVED** to note the update on Autumn 2024 planting and that the committee approves the reduction in hanging and barrier baskets in line with the spring 2024 planting order, accounting for restrictions arising from Future High Street works.

Cllr Hitchin and Cllr Smith left the meeting at 20:47

#### **115 Operations Depot**



Members received and noted a report from the Town Clerk and Operations Manager on available rental units in St Neots which would fit the category of what was required for a larger Council depot. It was noted that there was no obvious rental option currently on the market which would meet the needs and requirements of the Council. Officers would continue to review and bring forward any opportunities that might arise.

#### **116 Health and Safety Inspections**

Members noted that annual health and safety inspections and risk assessments of all Council owned and/or operated buildings have been undertaken and no immediate issues were raised.

A full report would be issued to the Deputy Town Clerk and any matters for attention would be highlighted to the committee, with a plan for addressing those matters.

#### **117 Lime Tree, Eynesbury Village Green**

The Operations Manager reported the costs of undertaking the necessary felling of a tree on Eynesbury Village Green. The cost of the works was in the delegated expenditure and authorisation of officers, but the Clerk had felt it important to bring the required removal of the tree to the Council's attention given the importance of trees and its prominent position.

Members noted that the tree had to be removed on safety grounds upon the recommendation of an external suitably qualified tree inspector. The removal was due to a cavity that ran through to the base of the tree.

#### **118 Date of Next Meeting**

Members noted that the date of the next Operations and Amenities Committee would be at 7:15pm on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2024.

**COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON**