



Operations & Amenities Committee

Present: Cllrs Goodman (Chairperson), Bolanz, Chapman, Collins, Cooper-Marsh, Dunford, Hitchin and Maslen

In attendance: Town Clerk, Operations Manager

Absent: Cllr Johnson

Minutes of the meeting of the **Operations & Amenities committee** held on **Tuesday 9th July** at **7.15pm** in the Priory Centre, Priory Lane, St Neots, PE19 2BH.

Public Participation

There is one member of the public present.

ACTIONS

025 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were noted from Cllr Johnson.

Admin

026 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Goodman declared an interest in agenda item 9 as a cemetery plot holder.

027 Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the meeting of the Operations and Amenities Committee held on 11th June 2024 as a true and accurate record.

The Chairperson brought agenda items 6, 7 and 8 forward to allow public and staff present to speak on those matters address the council first.

028 Action list

Members received the committee action list. Members noted the action list and raised a query about repair to the Jubilee mosaic. A Member raised a query over repairs to the jubilee mosaic and whether the artist had responded to the Operations Manager. It was confirmed that the artist had provided a cost for assessing damage to the mosaic and putting together a proposal for repair. The cost was within delegated authority from revenue budgets and officers would progress the matter.

029 Local Highways Improvement Bids 2024-25

Members received and noted an update on noncomplex LHI applications submitted as part of the 2024-25 application window, which are due to be considered by Cambridgeshire County Council in September 2024.



The Clerk would liaise with the LHI Working Group to call a meeting in August to consider 2025 applications.

030 Forget-Me-Not Memorial Garden

Members received and considered a report from the Council's senior administrator on the provision of free memorial plaques under the regulations for the Forget-Me-Not baby loss memorial garden.

A representative of the Working Group which brought forward the Memorial Garden and the supporting policy/regulations addressed the committee, outlining the matter and recommendation of the report. It was explained that the Council's policy for the Memorial Garden stated that plaques for baby loss would be offered free of charge and this had been based on a generous offer from a funeral company to provide the plaques. Unfortunately, the plaques were unsuitable and alternatives which are more appropriate for the outdoor setting and longevity have been sourced. There is a cost of £35 per plaque, but due to donations from external company's the Council can continue to offer the plaques for free during the current financial year. However, the Council will need to consider if it amends its policy for future years or continues to offer free plaques at a cost to the Council.

Members discussed the matter at length, discussing the importance of the plaques and the value and difference they make to grieving parents. However, the need for ensuring comparability with other memorials was also raised. It was suggested that a subsidised approach could be more appropriate than fully funding plaques. Members also commented that a charge doesn't balance out emotional impact and examples were shared of the positive impact the plaques had made.

It was proposed and seconded that the council continue to offer free baby-loss memorial plaques for the Forget-Me-Not Garden and that the Council budget for this in its 2024-25 budget setting process.

A point of clarification was raised around applications from outside the parish and it was noted that applications are only eligible from residents.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council continue to offer free memorial plaques for the Forget-Me-Not Memorial Garden in the future financial years and that the Council consider and budget for the provision of plaques as part of the 2025-26 budget setting process.

031 Burial Regulations

The Town Clerk introduced the draft Burial Regulations and the purpose for bringing these forward for review. The Senior Administrator advised that the aim of the policy was to clarify and be transparent in our rules and expectations for undertakers,



masons and residents. Once the regulations are approved shorter supporting versions highlighting key areas for targeted recipients will be produced.

Members considered the regulations, which were large and detailed documents. Due to the size of the documents, it was felt that more time was needed for Members to fully read and consider the regulations and their implications.

RESOLVED to defer the review of St Neots Town Council Burial Regulations until September 2024.

Members were asked to consider the documents and submit any queries or questions to the Senior Administrator ahead of the September 2024 committee meeting.

032 Memorial Bench and Tree Policy

Members received and considered a draft memorial bench and tree policy. It was explained that the policy had been amended to include memorial trees within the policy. Officers will continue to assess and develop the list of suitable locations and availability for memorial trees and benches and will update the policy in line with this. Members queried the requirement to remove items on benches or hanging from memorial trees. It was explained that while it was understood to be a very sensitive matter, benches are for public use and the Council must be careful to avoid health and safety risks that arise from things such as string lights, ribbons etc. These also cause maintenance issues and can pose a risk to wildlife.

A Member commented that the Council needs to strike a balance between a desire for benches and ensuring cemeteries and public spaces are attractive.

RESOLVED to defer the review of the Memorial Bench and Tree policy until September 2024.

Members were asked to consider the policy and submit any queries or questions to the Senior Administrator ahead of the September 2024 committee meeting.

033 Allotments

Members received and considered a report from the Town Clerk on concerns raised by an allotment holder in relation to plot rent increases and areas of maintenance.

Members noted the following points;



Mowing of paths

Concern had been raised that mowing of allotment paths at the Cemetery Road site had been reduced to only mowing the main path between the two entrance gates and not paths between plots.

It was explained that section 2.1 of tenancy agreements schedule stated; “The Tenant shall keep every hedge that is planted on their allotment properly cut and trimmed, all pathways between plots trimmed and well maintained up to the nearest half with by each adjoining tenant.”

The Operations Manager advised that the Council stopped cutting in between paths some time ago following a meeting with Allotment Association at the time (at an AGM) where the association requested the Council only cut the main pathway.

The Council is not able to use a push mower on the paths between the lots due to the narrow width of the paths. The Council did use to trim between the paths but received a lot of complaints about damage to plants/crops and property as a result of the strimming.

The main path through the allotment site is cut at the same time the St Neots cemetery is cut, meaning it would usually be cut every 2 to 3 weeks during the cutting season.

Lack of security

Concern had been raised over a lack of security at the Cemetery Road allotment site and that the fencing line has a lot of gaps.

The committee previously considered costs for installing perimeter security fencing at the site, which was quoted at approximately £15,000 for which there was no agreed budget. The Operations Manager confirmed he would address gaps in fencing by using stakes, wires and planting hedges which can help improve security and add to wider improvements in planting and biodiversity on council sites.

Vacant Plots

There have been a number of empty plots which left untended spread weed seeds to other areas. Plots may not be vacant, but unattended by the allotment holder who is still paying rent for that plot. Members heard that there is a process that must be followed to evict allotment plot holders who are not tending their plots, which must include suitable notice periods and opportunities for the allotment holder to act.

It was confirmed that there are currently four vacant plots and two which are being allocated to community groups. All four allotment plots have been offered to



interested persons on the waiting list and confirmations on taking up the plots are awaited.

Rent Increase

Concern had been raised regarding the large percentage rent increase for allotment rents from 2024/25. Members noted that the Council like all organisations is facing increases across its budgets, including utilities and staffing. The committee felt that rather than implementing smaller, incremental increases year on year, it is more practical and transparent to have one larger increase, helping stabilise the fees for a longer period. This was in part due to the requirement to write to allotment holders annually to advise of rent increases, which incurred costs higher than the actual rent increase itself.

Members debated the period in which the rent should be stabilised and it was proposed and seconded that the Council do not look to review and increase the allotment rents again in the life of this Council, which would mean the earliest the rates will be reviewed would be 2027.

RESOLVED that following that large increase in allotment rents in 2024 the committee does not review and put forward further increases during the life of the current Council, assuming there are no major specific capital costs incurred in relation to the allotments.

034 Brickhill Play Area

- i) Members received and noted a report on the installation of a new inclusive seesaw at Brickhills, which the Council had resolved to purchase and install. It was noted that work was currently scheduled to start on 29th July 2024. Works would take approximately a week and a half. Members requested that notices be displayed at the site during the works which advise residents of what is happening and the estimated timeframes.
- ii) Members received and considered a report from the Town Clerk and Operations Manager on surfacing for an accessible picnic bench. Members noted that costs of the surfacing for two options, one permeable tarmac and one for rubber mulch. The costs for both options were similar, but the rubber mulch was cheaper than other similar safety matting solutions due to it being included in works by the contractor installing the seesaw, who would already be on site.

Members commented that the Council needs to look at the best environmental options for such works, not necessarily the cheapest.

RESOLVED that officers progress with rubber mulch surfacing and connecting paths for the Brickhills accessible picnic table within delegated play park maintenance budgets.



035 Tree Maintenance Policy

Members received and considered a draft tree maintenance policy for comment. The Clerk commented that the purpose of the policy was to guide the Operations team and residents on how and when the Council would maintain its tree stock. It was not the intention that this policy would cover planting of trees, which would be look at separately under the Climate Action Plan. The Environmental Officer had reviewed the policy. A Member commented that they thought the policy was sensible and proposed it be recommended to Council for adoption.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council adopt the draft Tree Maintenance Policy.

036 Date of Next Meeting

Members noted that the date of the next Operations and Amenities Committee would be on 10th September 2024 at 7.15pm.

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON