

Minutes of an Extraordinary meeting of the Leisure Services Committee held at the Oakwood Centre on Thursday 7 October 2021 at 8:00 pm

Present: *Councillors D. Bragg (Chairman); N. Al-Sanjari; K. Gilder; A. Heap; R. Horskins; V. Lewis; B. Rowland; D. Smith;*

Officers present: *K. Murray, Deputy Town Clerk; M. Filmore, Committee Officer*

Also present: *Cllr K. Baker
2 members of the public*

13. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A. Swaddle.

14. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

15. **WOODLEY TOWN CENTRE TREE GARDEN**

The Chairman set out the background to the Town Centre Tree Garden project and noted the recommendations detailed in Report No. LS 17/21.

The Chairman highlighted that the original planting project had been agreed at Full Council on 21 July 2021, and at the Leisure Services Committee meeting held on 17 November 2021 the Committee resolved to commit £4,500 from Section 106 money for the planting scheme. At that time, it was envisaged that the project could be undertaken in-house, however this was not now possible.

The Chairman of the Friends of Woodford Park, Mr David Provins, was invited to speak by the Chairman. Mr Provins stated that this project was not what the people of Woodley wanted. From discussions with members of the public he believed the public want seating areas. He also stated that the newly proposed planting scheme did not address the issue of the solid road base under the garden area nor access, stating it would be unsafe for volunteers to step over the wall to undertake work. Mr Provins also stated this was not what people wanted their public funds to be used for.

In response the Chairman highlighted that Section 106 money can only be used for capital projects such as this. The Chairman also confirmed that seating would be considered in phase 2 of the project.

In response to a query it was noted that the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions had prevented the Council from moving forward with this project after it was originally agreed in November 2020. The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed the project was further delayed when essential tree works had to be undertaken to the trees within the garden area, which Wokingham Borough Council were unable to undertake until the Summer 2021. When these works were completed a capacity issue emerged which meant the work could not be undertaken in-house. It was noted that agreeing the new planting scheme and funding now would enable to the planting to take place imminently, by the end of this planting season.

With regards to the future maintenance of the garden, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that the general maintenance of the garden, including weeding and watering, would be undertaken by the Grounds team as part of their annual maintenance regime. There would only be the need for one annual cut back to make way for the new seasons growth. It was noted that a projected cost for the annual maintenance of the site was not known. There would also be some cost related to the water supply, but it was hoped this would be offset by the new rainwater harvesting installed at various Council buildings. The Deputy Town Clerk also confirmed that the aforementioned capacity issue was not expected to impact the general, day to day grounds maintenance.

Following a query the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed there was compacted rubble under the garden. This could be broken up as part of the planting project as required and the soil level raised.

With regards to seating, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that nothing would happen without full consultation with residents and interested parties, such as the Woodley Town Centre Management Initiative. The plan is to consider how residents use the space once the planting is completed before considering what type and location of seating will be appropriate.

In response to a recommendation, it was agreed that the planting scheme should be adapted to include sensory flowers, for example scented flowers, so those with sensory impairments can enjoy the garden too.

Following a query directed to the Chairman of the Friends of Woodford Park as to whether they were keen to be involved in the upkeep of the garden, Mr David Provins confirmed that the group, as they had stated previously, did not wish to be involved due to the lack of access or space for their equipment whilst undertaking maintenance.

A concern was raised about liability should someone be injured either tripping or falling over the wall. The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that anybody either working for, or undertaking voluntary work on behalf of the Town Council would be covered by the Council's public liability insurance.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note the contents of the report.
- ◆ To approve the planting scheme presented in the report along with the allocation of £15,000 funding from the available Section 106 monies, and to approve Officers to engage the contractor to deliver the planting project and water supply as detailed in the report.

Voting: For: 5 Against: 1 Abstentions: 2

The meeting closed at 8:42 pm
