



AMENITIES & LEISURE COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Amenities & Leisure Committee held in the Council Chamber at the Council Offices, Radstock Lane, Earley on Wednesday 2nd November 2022 which commenced at 7.45pm.

Present

Chair – Councillor N Brock

Councillors: A Bassett, M Eastwell, D Ireland, A Long, T Maher, S Matthews, A Newton, C Smith and K Yabsley.

In attendance: J Friend (Town Clerk), M Brown (Operations Manager), R Fryer (Democratic Services Officer), Councillors G Littler and A Neal, two representatives from MERA and two members of the public.

57. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor G Bhangra.

58. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Littler declared an interest in Item 9 ‘Sol Joel Park’ as he lived nearby.

59. PUBLIC FORUM

The member of the public informed councillors that the Allotment Association were having difficulty securing a reasonably priced electricity supply for the trading shed and asked councillors to consider whether the town council could take on the energy supply as they would probably be able to procure a more economical rate. The Allotment Association would be happy to reimburse the Council for the energy used. Councillors were informed that he had written to the Town Clerk who had agreed to look into the matter. Councillors asked if the Allotment Association had considered alternative sources of energy, such as solar panels, and were told that investigations were ongoing.

The MERA representative commented on Item 15 ‘WBC Consultation – Rubbish & Recycling’ and informed councillors that MERA would be considering a response to WBC’s consultation at their next meeting but had a number of concerns about the proposals. They also reported that some residents had voiced concerns about the availability of obtaining medical appointments and so MERA had written to Rt Hon John Redwood to ask for his support in initiating a Royal Commission. The Chair thanked the representative for their comments and suggested that the comments on the WBC Consultation should be directed to WBC.

Two representatives from MERA left the meeting

60. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28th September 2022 were approved as a true record and it was **RESOLVED** they be signed by the Chair (Minutes 39–56).

61. ANNUAL FEES & CHARGES REVIEW – 2023/24

Members considered all the information made available to them, including comparisons with other local services.

61.1 Mays Lane Cemetery

Councillors considered the fees charged by local burial authorities and noted that the town council had not increased its charges for some time. Members are aware that space was limited at the cemetery and so suggested that, in addition to an increase being introduced in 2023/24, that the differential between Earley/Woodley resident charges and out of area charges be increased. Officers were given guidance on the size of the increase councillors would recommend and were tasked with working out the detail and reporting back to committee members.

61.2 Culver Lane Allotments

Councillors recommended that raised and flat beds increase by 50p, all other allotments increase by £1, with effect from January 2024.

61.3 Hall Hire

Councillors were in favour of streamlining the complex schedule of hall hire charges, as recommended by officers, as well as introducing a separate charge for the kitchen, in line with other local halls. It was recommended that prices increase by 10%, to the nearest 50p. Officers to develop replacement charging schedule incorporating such an increase and report back to committee members.

61.4 Fishing Permits

Councillors recommended that prices be increased by 10%, rounded to the nearest 50p.

61.5 Sports Pitch Hire

Councillors recommended that prices be increased by 10%.

62. BUDGET 2023/24

62.1 Members considered suitable projects for the financial year 2023/24. They discussed the viability of installing solar panels on Council buildings; investing in Parish Online, a system of cataloguing council assets; installing an electrical charging point at the Council offices; the installation and maintenance of hanging baskets; additional further outdoor exercise equipment at various sites; installing a fenced picnic area at the events field (WBC owned land); purchasing benches for Chalfont Park (WBC owned land); installing additional litter bins at Laurel Park (WBC owned land); and investing in an artificial cricket wicket at Sol Joel Park. Councillors were keen to ensure that budgets for environmental improvements and a youth service were included in the 2023/24 Council budget.

62.2 Members discussed their priorities of the projects previously discussed. It was agreed that the investigation into solar panel installation should be a priority and that due consideration also be given to funding the installation of hanging flower baskets, adopting Parish Online and investigating the improvements suggested for the cricket pitch and the picnic area on WBC land.

62.3 Members considered projects beyond the financial year 2023/24. Councillors were mindful that large scale projects would require evidence of need and a suitable location to apply for grants to assist with funding.

63. DOG WASTE BAGS

The committee considered the continuation of the provision of free dog waste bags to Earley residents in 2023/24. The Town Clerk reported that officers had seen an increase in uptake since the withdrawal of food bags by WBC and were questioning whether the two were related. Councillors were of the opinion that continued provision of this free resource was an unnecessary expense in the current financial climate and that the provision of single use plastics was incompatible with the climate emergency declaration. The committee recommended that this amenity be withdrawn for the financial year 2023/24.

64. CULVER LANE ALLOTMENTS

The Town Clerk provided a verbal update on the length of the waiting list, recent fence repairs and mare's-tail treatment. Councillors noted the impact of the summer heat, drought and Covid on the condition of the plots. Cllr Bassett noted the difficulty the Allotment working party had had on determining a most-improved plot, and members discussed replacing that award with a runner-up or best newcomer award.

Two members of the public left the meeting

65. SOL JOEL PARK

The Committee discussed the recent parking issues at Sol Joel Park arising from the Berkshire Youth Development League football matches on Saturdays and considered previous proposals to extend the overflow car park. The Town Clerk provided the historical context and noted that the league had now promised to provide a parking warden to patrol Mays Lane and had moved some of its games to Woodford Park to ease pressure on the car parks. Members were mindful that extending the overflow car park may alleviate the issues but would not resolve them. They felt that extending the car park, and thereby encouraging car use, would be at odds with the town council's climate declaration and would reduce the amount of recreational space available. Councillors agreed that the situation be monitored to determine whether the league's actions resolved the issues and the matter be revisited at the Amenities and Leisure meeting in January 2023. The costs of extending the overflow car park to be investigated when practicable.

Councillors A Newton, and C Smith left the meeting

Councillors A Newton, and C Smith re-entered the meeting

66. MAYS LANE CEMETERY

Members noted that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission would be installing a sign at Mays Lane Cemetery acknowledging the presence of six war graves on the site.

67. LODDON VIADUCT COLLAPSE

It was noted that a tree (hornbeam) would be planted alongside a memorial plaque at Dinton Pastures in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Loddon Viaduct collapse. Installation is scheduled for later in November.

68. BULMERSHE PARK - SULV

Councillors noted that Freely Fruity and volunteers from FoBOS would be restoring the orchard and planting additional fruit trees in Bulmershe Park on Monday 21st November.

69. TELEPHONE KIOSKS

It was noted that the town council planned to work with the Community HeartBeat Trust to install a community defibrillator in the council's adopted red telephone box in Wychwood Crescent. The kiosk would be refurbished by officers as part of the project. Plans for relocating and repurposing the telephone box in Silverdale Road were still under review.

70. SILVERDALE CENTRE

70.1 Hirers

The Town Clerk reported that the three remaining hirers had been offered alternative options at other ETC centres and would take those up from 1st January 2023.

70.2 Bike Workshop

It was noted that the bike workshop had been packed up and the equipment moved to Centrepoint where it awaited installation. Much of the office at Silverdale had been cleared, but the music studio, kitchen and main hall still required clearing and new locations for these had yet to be found.

71. EXTENSION OF MEETING

Councillors **RESOLVED** to extend the meeting in order to complete the remaining business.

72. WBC CONSULTATION – RUBBISH & RECYCLING

It was noted that Wokingham Borough Council was holding a public consultation on proposed changes to its rubbish and recycling operations. WBC is running a survey on its Engage website until Monday 5th December and intended to send a postcard to all households with details of the consultation.

73. PUBLICATIONS

The Committee noted that the following items had been received and were available for viewing from the Council Offices:

CCB	E-newsletter – October 2022
Me2 Club	E-newsletter – July, August 2022
MERA	Minutes of Executive Committee – 11 th August 2022 and 13 th October 2022
The Friendship Alliance	E-newsletter 5 th October 2022
Involve Community Services	E-newsletter 7 th October 2022

74. PRESS RELEASES

A press releases on the Loddon Viaduct memorial plaque was requested.

75. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

There were no members of the public or press present. It was agreed that the remaining items on the Agenda be taken under Part II.

PART II

76. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

77. TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting was declared closed by the Chair at 9.47pm.

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Chair, Amenities & Leisure Committee