

Policy & Resources Committee Meeting – 27th September 2023

Agenda Item 11. SIBLY – COLLINS DRIVE

The public spaces at the Collins Drive development (Sibly) were finally transferred from Persimmon to Earley Town Council in mid-July 2023. The first task for officers has been to assess the condition of the various areas of transfer and prioritise any work required before a general site management plan can be created. To date, the actions taken include:

- **Finance**

ETC received a little over £414,00 in S106 monies to fund the maintenance of the site in perpetuity. We have invested £400,000 of this money in a CCLA account (Churches, Charities and Local Authorities) an instant access, low risk fund currently paying about 4.6%. Interest earned will be paid into a ‘Sibly’ earmarked reserve. A long-term financial management strategy will be devised once initial works and repairs have been carried out and we have a clearer idea of what costs could be incurred over time.

The asset has also been added to ETC’s insurance policy.

- **Redhatch Copse**

We commissioned a professional tree survey of the copse, focussing on areas affecting public footpaths, neighbouring properties and adjoining land. Consideration was given to identifying diseased or dying trees and also any areas where trees could possibly cause future issues such as subsidence. No such issues were identified but health and safety works were recommended for some trees. These works will be commissioned shortly and are expected to cost in the region of £10-15k.

The tree survey also covered the trees on the estate but outside the boundaries of the copse. Some trees planted by the developer have died, we will be replacing these with more appropriate, small specimens.

Led by ETC’s Park Rangers, the Wednesday volunteers have cleared footpaths in the copse of brambles and overgrown vegetation.

- **Toddlers play area**

The condition of the play area is so poor that nothing can be salvaged, ETC will need to start from scratch to provide a useful and compliant play area for the local children.

Officers have met with play equipment providers to scope out what could be possible in what is a relatively small space. An initial consultation will be held with Sibly residents to gauge preferences in terms of appearances and types of play equipment, ie climbing, imaginative, slides and so on. A couple of draft plans will then be drawn up and Sibly residents will be consulted with again. Once a final draft scheme has been agreed, the project will go out to tender before a final decision on play equipment provider is made.

The play equipment providers are assisting officers with creating the consultations (FOC) and will assist with the tender process. New fencing, signage and planting will form part of the project. We do not yet have a cost for the project but officers are aware that £35k of the original S106 monies were labelled ‘Play Area’. Progress reports will be provided to the Council.

- **Conservation Areas**

A long-term maintenance plan of the conservation areas, including the SUDS (surface water drainage features) is being drawn up. Until that work commences, officers have tidied up the areas, cutting back nettles

and brambles and have created grassed margins around the features to prevent further encroachment of vegetation on walkways and paths.

- **Stream**

ETC now has riparian liabilities for the Collins Drive side of the stream, up to the centre of the stream bed, WBC has the same liability for the other side, whilst Thames Water has responsibility for the grilles and culvert. The Town Clerk requested a site meeting with WBC's new head of 'Blue Infrastructure' to discuss partnership working on the stream. This was held on 9th August and was quite informative. In order to further assess the condition of the asset, the WBC officer has agreed to 'walk' the stream with an ETC officer – we are awaiting a date from WBC for this.

The stream is currently very overgrown with brambles, vegetation and some fallen trees Whilst some of this is a fairly positive thing, in that it slows the flow of any water thus reducing the likelihood of issues further downstream, too much vegetation could cause blockages and possibly lead to localised flooding. The aim will be to remove some of the growth but not too much. Officers will be in a better position to view the situation once the summer vegetation has died down.

ETC did discover a very large wasp nest in the bank of the stream which we instructed our pest control contractor to remove. This was a challenging task owing to the nest's size and the fact that the contractor needed to avoid contaminating the stream but it was eventually achieved after five days of treatment.

- **Notice board**

We shall be installing an Earley Town Council notice board on the site. This will help us communicate with residents (who will be welcome to put their own notices in the public section of the board) and will hopefully reassure residents that Earley Town Council is being proactive in the management of the site.

There have been frequent interactions with residents when ETC officers attend the site. The feedback from them has been very positive with three central themes emerging: residents are pleased the Town Council has assumed the management of the site; they appreciate ETC's proactive approach to the tasks ahead; and residents are keen to engage with the Town Council and its officers in determining aspects of how the site is managed.

Jo Friend
Town Clerk
15th August 2023