

Amenities & Leisure Committee Meeting – 15th October 2025

Agenda Item 5 – Culver Lane Allotments

The Allotment inspections for 2025 have gone very well and officers have seen the majority of plots being well maintained. This year officers introduced an additional site visit between monthly inspections in order to stop unmaintained plots from becoming an issue between inspections. The final inspection is due to be carried out in October.

General Information for 2025: -

Raised Bed/Trough terminations by ETC	1
Raised Bed/Trough termination by tenant	3

Allotment plot terminations by ETC	2
Allotment plot terminations by tenant	6

Current number of vacant Raised Beds/Troughs	3
Current number of vacant allotment plots	3

Tenant reasons for terminating tenancies have been due to various things, such as moving out of the area, health issues or unable to commit to maintaining plot.

Waiting List

There are currently 3 people on the Earley residents waiting list and 1 person on the non-Earley residents waiting list.

Allotment Competition

The judging panel carried out their final visit in September and have made their decision based on their scores. The winners and runner-up are to be informed and invited to the Mayor's reception in 2026.



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Agenda Item 6.2 – SOL JOEL PARK - CENTENARY

We are approaching the 100 year anniversary of the park land, now known as Sol Joel Park, being gifted to the local community and Members are requested to consider appropriate ways in which this milestone can be recognised.

The park is registered with Fields in Trust (NPFA) and therefore has a degree of protection against development, in fact the NPFA has previously confirmed the importance of the park:

"It may be of further interest to the council to know that Sol Joel Park was actually the first gift of land received by The NPFA (Fields in Trust) in 1926, given by Mr Sol B. Joel, along with £10,000 for its layout (equivalent of £615,000 today). When layout had proceeded the opening was carried out in 1927 by our charity's first President, King George VI (sic*). The land was then passed to Reading Borough Council. It therefore holds a significant place in our own history."

(* at the time of opening SJP, in 1927, NPFA's president was the then Duke of York, who went on to become King George VI in 1936)

Reading Borough Council granted Earley Town Council a 50 year lease for Sol Joel Park in September 2001, with ETC becoming responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the site.

In 2012, Sol Joel Park was one of 1,392 parks across the country to be granted 'Queen Elizabeth II Fields' status as part of a lasting legacy to the late monarch.

ETC has improved the facilities dramatically, most notably with the building of a new pavilion in 2012, opened by HRH the Duke of Kent. The park is now home to football and cricket pitches, a skatepark, parkour equipment, basketball court, inclusive playground as well as traditional park land.

Mr Sol Joel was a man of great wealth with a passion for horses. He owned land and properties in Earley and his gifting of the land to the community, along with funds to lay out the park, has benefitted countless local residents over the years.

Councillors have previously mooted the idea of holding a large celebratory event but, at a recent meeting of the committee chairs thoughts turned to how ETC could deliver a longer lasting way of marking the first 100 years of Sol Joel Park. Ideas suggested by the chairs and by officers so far include:

- Creating a maze or trail with accompanying information board (long lasting; encouraging increase in activity; could be themed to fit in with Sol Joel/Earley/royal connections/nature etc) Position = between pavilion and play area
- Commissioning an information board detailing the history of the park and of Sol Joel himself
- Installing a commemorative plaque on the pavilion
- Running a nature-based workshop in the playground area for the children of Earley St Peter's Primary School, for example building bug hotels, bird boxes etc. (this school uses SJP for games lessons, sports day and has direct access to park; demonstrates benefits to children of having access to green space; next generation needs to continue to care for SJP)

In view of the significance of the SJP playing field to Fields in Trust it may be likely that they would be willing to participate in some way, it may even be possible for ETC to ask their current President - Prince William, to unveil the plaque and join us at the workshop.

With regards the timing of such activities, 2027 would be the centenary of the park being launched as a public, community asset. ETC has elections in 2027 so it could make sense to aim for a centenary 'celebration' in late June 2027 (avoiding school summer holidays). If ETC does decide to go with the suggestions in this report, then publicity can be focussed on the time just before and after the actual 'launch' thus avoiding issues around pre-election prohibition of promotions.

Jo Friend, Town Clerk

8th October 2025

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Agenda Item 7.1.1 – Centrepoint CC - Floor

The floor at Centrepoint has been increasingly hard to keep clean over recent months, with complaints being received from hirers. Despite changing the timing and method of cleaning, the problem was not improving so officers investigated the possibility of having a professional clean undertaken.

During these discussions we were advised that the issue was actually the condition of the flooring – the wear layer had completely worn away. The wear layer on this type of flooring acts as a non-porous barrier, without it whatever is underneath the flooring will draw to the surface, especially dirt. The result is that however much you clean the floor, the dirt will keep on rising to the surface. The only solution is to replace the sheet vinyl. We have advised hirers of the nature of the problem and told them ETC is looking into finding a solution.

Officers have obtained quotes for the work, all companies quoting have recommended replacing the existing sheet vinyl with heavy duty LVT (luxury vinyl tile) which is laid in planks. The area to be covered is the main hall and cupboards, floors elsewhere in the centre are different materials and unaffected. The cost of the work, including the removal and disposal of the existing floor covering will be in the region of £6,500 and the hall will need to be closed for a minimum of two days.

As the cost of this work exceeds the general maintenance budget for this centre (£4,500), **Members are asked to discuss the proposal and agree, if appropriate, a recommendation that the Town Clerk, the Chair of the Council and the Leader agree the funds for the work be taken from the Dilapidations EMR. (Referral to the Policy & Resources Committee would cause delay and prevent the work being scheduled during the Christmas holiday period when fewer hirers would be affected by a closure.)**

Note: Members will be aware that, following the refusal of WBC to renew ETC's lease on Centrepoint CC, the Town Council is on a 30 day rolling contract for the centre. The Town Clerk has recently approached WBC's Property Services and asked them to reconsider their position and grant ETC a lease. WBC has indicated that it is now willing to grant such a lease, the length of which is yet to be determined. The issuing of a lease to ETC for Centrepoint CC will be put on the next Policy & Resources Committee agenda for discussion.

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Agenda Item 9 – PHONE BOX PROJECT

Town Council officers have made great progress on the refurbishment of the traditional telephone box in Silverdale Road.

The phone box has been repainted, new glass and signage installed and replacement hinges and a brand new door lock fitted. The work has not been all plain sailing – we had to wait for a replacement part to become available (derelict phone boxes are broken up and the parts used in projects such as ours) but when it arrived it turned out to be not compatible, so we had the part custom made by a local welder.

The end result:



During the renovation works, our staff were regularly approached by members of the public asking what they were doing. On hearing the details of the project, all of them were very enthusiastic and supportive.

Appendix E

The chair of the Amenities and Leisure Committee and the Town Clerk are due to meet with the University of Reading's community engagement officer and members of their education department to discuss the collaborative project further. We will discuss the themes of art, climate and local history in more detail and provide further updates to Council when they are available.

Jo Friend, Town Clerk
7th October 2025

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Agenda Item 10 – Biodiversity Projects

A wide ranging project to measure and record the natural world at various ETC sites in order to inform actions which will improve the biodiversity at these sites and across Earley.

We will use the evidence and knowledge gained to develop and carry out both short term and long term initiatives in a variety of areas including: habitat development; collaborative working with other groups and organisations; educational and recreational activities for residents and so on.

We will aim to apply this project to all sites that ETC either owns or has control of. We will encourage others (residents, businesses, organisations) to follow our lead in their own physical spaces.

The biodiversity project will help ETC achieve the aims of its Green Infrastructure and Climate Emergency agendas. This project is open ended and flexible. Results will be measured by observable and recorded improvements to the biodiversity of a site or location.

We will promote and celebrate the work of the biodiversity project and any improvements achieved as a result of ETC's commitment to this body of work.

The Town Clerk, Operations Manager and both Park Rangers meet monthly to plan and discuss ideas to improve local biodiversity. Topics discussed in these updates are in addition to the Park Rangers usual work.

Work carried out since last report:

Woodland Trust tree application

The Town Clerk submitted a successful application to the Woodland Trust who have awarded ETC 420 trees (whips) to plant at MELNR and Redhatch Copse. The trees are an assortment of native specimens, focussing on providing food and shelter for wildlife including insects. They will be delivered in November and the Rangers are planning at least 2 planting sessions. We will be inviting a group of volunteers who have not previously been involved in such projects (details to be decided) to assist with one of these planting sessions.

Botanical surveys in swales at Collins Drive

We are in the process of drawing up a plan and planting schedule to improve the biodiversity along the swales. Some of the existing vegetation will be removed, including some of the nettles, and the end result will increase the variety of plants and be more visually attractive for residents.

Bat surveys

More data has been collected regarding the bat population at MELNR. There are at least 5 different species of bats at the site and numbers appear to have increased, indicating that the food sources have increased. We shall be purchasing bat surveying equipment for the Rangers in order that more regular recordings can be obtained. The Berkshire Bat Group have indicated that they are happy to support us with future surveying of bat boxes.

Bramble clearing in scallop pattern at Redhatch Copse

15 bays have been cleared of brambles along the pathways in the Copse. These are areas where bluebells have previously grown. Signs are to be erected asking people to keep clear of the scallops to

allow the bluebells to thrive. We will monitor the number of bluebells that come up and plant more bulbs if necessary.

Snowdrops

We will be purchasing more snowdrop bulbs to plant near the path next to the Interpretation Centre (known locally as Snowdrop Alley). This will extend the drifts further into the woodland. This year we will also plant Winter Aconites to further enhance the area. A number of both types of bulb will also be planted at Meadow Park at various places around the edge of the park.

Boat use

The Rangers and two additional staff members will receive training in safe use of the boats at MELNR. Once this has been completed, a survey of the island will be undertaken and, if required, measures taken to improve the habitat for ground nesting birds.

Jo Friend, Town Clerk
7th October 2025

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Agenda Item 12.1 – Green Fair

The Green Fair held on 2nd August 2025 was another great success and saw one of the busiest fairs to date. The weather was kind all day. As well as the many regular stalls there were some newcomers including Woody Wonders Twig-Pencils, Bags & Bling, TDP Photography & Craft.

The fair saw a new food vendor ‘Chilli Dogs’ who with their solar powered van, certainly fitted with the ethos of the Green Fair. Maiden Erlegh Rotary Club reported another successful year for their refreshment stall and our regular ice cream vendor took advantage of the warm day.

Out of the 53 pitches available, 50 were booked with only one no show.

Information about some of the stalls: -

ETC Stall

ETC officers ran a “Snug as a Bug in a Mug” activity where visitors could hand paint a mug and fill it with moss, bamboo and sticks to make the perfect mug hotel for bugs to hang in their garden.

Officers also ran a consultation seeking views on the future renovation plans for the playground at Meadow Park. This was very well received with dozens of youngsters, parents and carers casting their votes for their favourite play equipment. The mini-Helpshop was as popular as ever, providing advice, recycling bags, garden waste bags and food caddies. This year’s ETC stall was very much a family affair, officers’ children helped with setting up and running the stall and are keen to come back to ‘work’ at the Fair next year.

Earley Repair Café stall

Volunteers from the Repair Café spread the word about the Earley Repair Café, explaining to visitors what the repair café does and encouraging people to attend. Volunteers also ran a “Guess the Item” quiz with the prize being a delicious food hamper. The winner of the quiz kindly donated the contents to the Wokingham Foodbank.

Citizens Advice

The mobile Citizens Advice van had a particularly busy year and reported they spoke to 63 clients with the main topics being benefits/tax credits, employment, financial services & capability, health & community care and utilities & communication. Their session was so successful that Citizens Advice have expressed a wish to have discussions with ETC about how we can work together more often.

Earley Environmental Group

It was a record year for EEG, they sold 101 copies of their 2026 calendar!

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Agenda Item 13 – NEWSLETTER

The Amenities & Leisure Committee have been tasked with working up a proposal for producing an Earley Town Council newsletter.

Matters for discussion could include:

Content

The newsletter should raise the profile of Earley Town Council. Should the content reflect solely the reach and work of ETC or should other bodies/organisations be covered too?

Overall tone and that of individual pieces – factual/informative/light hearted. Inclusion of images and photographs. Feature articles ie profile of individual councillor(s), ETC asset or service.

How long, how many pages?

Editorial Policy

Who writes the articles, who checks them and who decides what content is included? Who designs the newsletter?

Copyright issues – who is responsible for checking?

Non-political?

Council to adopt policy covering publication of newsletter

Frequency and Method of Publication

Annually, six monthly, quarterly?

Electronic – permission needed from recipients, ETC currently has list of those happy to receive information on events so could ask them if they would agree to receive newsletter but how do we expand this?

Hard copy – cost, environmental concerns and distribution problems. Print too many and they go straight into the recycling. Could print some and make them available from libraries, Helpshop etc. Cost of print runs, small vs large – is it cost effective, does it represent value for many for residents?

Useful sites and documents for reference:

- Woodley Town Council's Communication Guidelines policy
- Wallingford Town Council e-newsletter and sign up (on Wallingford TC website)
- Finchampstead Parish Council e-newsletter and pop-up sign up on website