



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 14th January 2026 which commenced at 7pm.

Present

Chair – Councillor A Long

Councillors: R Ahlawat, A Bassett, A Bradley, R Cook, T Maher, S Matthews, A Newton.

In attendance: J Friend (Town Clerk) and M Brown (Operations Manager)

54. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr N Brock.

55. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

56. PUBLIC FORUM

Two representatives from MERA addressed the committee to provide comments on a report to councillors re Item 6 Sol Joel Park – Parking Request.

A representative clarified that they were not aware that permission was required for the proposed change in use of the overflow car park and confirmed that MERA had not obtained advice from WBC Highways. They accepted the points made regarding how the narrow entrance to the car park could cause congestion on surrounding roads as well as impacting residents accessing their properties.

The MERA representative stated that, in their opinion, the main Sol Joel car park was too far away for parents to be incentivised to park there. They noted that Maiden Erlegh School's Sustainability Strategy encourages students to walk and cycle into school if possible but the representative explained that the school could not force people to do so and, in their view, not providing more parking spaces would create a false economy regarding emissions due to the behaviour of motorists who wait for the closest space during school drop off and pick up times

The Chair proposed that Item 6- Sol Joel Park - Parking Request be brought forward. It was **RESOLVED** that the item be brought forward and discussed.

Councillor T Maher entered the meeting.

57. SOL JOEL PARK

57.1 Parking Request

Whilst some Members were in favour of seeing if the obstacles identified could be overcome, others were of the view that the obstacles noted in the report were significant in nature. Not only would change of use planning permission be required, prior permissions would need to be sought from Reading Borough Council (landowner) and Fields in Trust, such development would contravene the Deed of Dedication that applies to the land. Members also expressed

concern over the safety of children having to cross Wokingham Road, a major road, and then the issue of having to walk down a private road. There were significant concerns over the operational constraints of the request, ETC does not have the resources to open and close this car park on a daily basis nor to deal with vehicles that may be locked in when it closes at 4.30pm. It was agreed that the Highways authority would have to advise on whether the use of this car park in the manner being proposed would comply with current road safety legislation.

Some Members were of the view that the proposal would not provide a solution to the problem of school traffic in the area of the schools, that at other locations, where alternative parking had been provided, parents did not use it but continued to wish to park as close as possible. It was also observed that, whilst parental parking had been an issue here for many years, parking behaviour in Silverdale Road had deteriorated recently and parents were now parking on both sides of the road causing obstructions.

Members were agreed that the Town Council did not hold responsibility for highways or parking issues but its role was to support residents in trying to find a solution. To that end

It was **RESOLVED** that the matter be referred to ETC's Planning and Transport Committee which will be asked to liaise with WBC Highways and urge them to review the existing situation and look at actions which could improve it.

The two members of the public left the meeting.

58. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15th October 2025 were approved as a true record and it was **RESOLVED** they be signed by the Chair. (Minutes 35-53)

59. ANNUAL FEES & CHARGES REVIEW – 2026/27

Members considered all the information available to them before agreeing on recommendations to go to Full Council, these to take effect 1st April 2026. The information provided included current ETC charges and comparisons with other local service providers.

59.1 Mays Lane Cemetery

Councillors **RECOMMEND** that all fees increase by 5% across all residencies for 2026/27.

In view of the limited space available for new burials, it was **RESOLVED** that a recommendation be put to Full Council to allow only residents of Earley and Woodley to be offered new burials. All other services would remain available for residents of Earley, Woodley and Out of Area.

59.2 Culver Lane Allotments

Councillors **RECOMMEND** that no increases should be made to 2027 fees.

59.3 Hall Hire

Councillors **RECOMMEND** an increase of 5% to Friday and Saturday evening hire charges (after 6pm), all other hall hire fees to remain unchanged.

59.4 Fishing Permits

Councillors **RECOMMEND** an increase of £1 to adult fees and no increase to junior fees.

59.5 Sports Pitch Hire

Councillors **RECOMMEND** that no increases should be made to 2026/27 fees.

60. CULVER LANE ALLOTMENTS

60.1 Raised Beds & Troughs

Members received a report stating that members of the judging panel had noted some of the raised beds and troughs had been vacant for some time and were asking whether ETC should continue with the provision of troughs and raised beds.

The report contained up to date occupancy figures, and it was felt that, although some beds and troughs had been vacant for some time, the current figures show that use had increased, to reduce or remove them would restrict the number of people who would be able to use the service and wouldn't provide much of an increase in the number of plots ETC were able to provide

The Committee **RESOLVED** that ETC would speak to the Huntley and Palmers Allotment Association and ask that they help promote the troughs and raised beds amongst their members.

60.2 Thefts

Members also noted the report stating that several plot holders have reported thefts of crops from their plots as well as aggressive behaviour from intruders at the allotments, noting that ETC officers had taken steps to prevent further instances from happening. The padlock code had been changed, the perimeter checked for unauthorised access points and the incidents had been reported to the police with the crime reference number being displayed around the allotments to enable plot holders to report suspicious behaviour directly to the police.

61. BIODIVERSITY UPDATE

The committee received an update on ETC's biodiversity work and associated projects being delivered by the Park Rangers. This included the surveying and plan for wildflower planting along the conservation corridor at Collins Drive; coppicing and bluebell protection measures carried out at Redhatch Copse; and an update on the first tree planting sessions as well as the second successful application to the Woodland Trust who have awarded ETC a further 420 trees.

The report also shared plans for future surveying of the habitat on the island at MENR Lake and detailed equipment that has been procured to carry out in house bat surveys around ETC sites plus plans for a potential duck feeder to be installed at MENR which should encourage visitors to feed the birds with more nutritious alternatives to bread.

62. OPERATIONS MANAGER – REPORT

The Operations Manager provided a verbal report which included the following:

- The planning of this year's Huge Earley Litter pick, to be held on Sunday 22nd March
- Tree donations made by members of the allotment association – 50 trees received
- Planting totals: 484 trees, 2,000 snowdrops and 15 wild pansies were planted in 2025
- Redecoration of the main hall in Centrepoint Community Centre to tie in with the replacement floor which was installed in early January
- Repairs carried out to noticeboards and benches following the October 2025 inspections
- An additional member of staff receiving play equipment training, this will be cascaded to other staff responsible for routine checks
- The deployment and safe return of the Sol Joel Park defibrillator in December 2025
- Details of the lake safety training session for staff accessing the lake at MENR

- The replacement of the hot water cylinder at the Interpretation Centre with an under-sink water heater, improving comfort and efficiency
- Investigation works carried out at Radstock Lane Community Centre on the heating system

63. PHONE BOX PROJECT

Members received an update on the progress of the phone box project on Silverdale Road and were pleased to note that a collaboration with Maiden Erlegh School has come to fruition and their art technicians have installed artwork created by students inspired by British artist Yinka Shonibare. The works were installed on Tuesday 13th January and can be seen on display inside the locked phone box.

Cllr N Brock and the Town Clerk are due to meet with representatives from the university and the Museum of English Rural Life later this month to discuss other, future collaborations.

64. TOWN COUNCIL QUESTIONS AT WBC MEETINGS

The committee were asked to consider any councillor requests for specific questions to be submitted to WBC meetings and to also agree the WBC meeting to which the Town Clerk is to submit the question.

Members **RESOLVED** that they had no questions to submit at this time.

65. PUBLICATIONS

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

Involve Community Services	E-newsletters – October, November & December 2025
Connecting Communities in Berkshire (CCB)	E-newsletter – December 2025
Friendship Alliance	E-newsletters – December 2025
Me2 Club	E-newsletter – December 2025

66. PRESS RELEASES, WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA

It was agreed that a press release promoting the phone box project would be issued as well as the ETC planting totals for 2025.

67. TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting was declared closed by the Chair at 8.57pm