

Didcot Town Council

Environment & Climate Committee Monday 10th July 2023 at 7.30pm All Saints Room, Civic Hall



Minutes

Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a true and correct record by the next meeting of this committee.

PRESENT

Councillors:

Cllr G Roberts (Chair)
Cllr K Morrison (Deputy Chair)
Cllr A Hudson
Cllr S Cole
Cllr A Jones
Cllr J Broadbent
Cllr L Hislop

Officers:

Mrs L Blake (Planning and Environment Officer – PEO [minutes])
Mr M Blake (Interim Outdoor Services Manager - OSM)
Mr A Guzinski (Planning and Allotment Officer - PAO)

13. To receive apologies

No apologies were tendered.

All members were present.

14. To receive declarations of interest

Cllr L Hislop informed the Committee that he worked for a company who monitors Air Quality and who does have contracts with South Oxfordshire District Council.

No other declarations were received.

15. To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 5th June 2023 as a true and correct record

It was proposed by Cllr A Hudson, seconded by Cllr L Hislop, and **RESOLVED** to **APPROVE** the minutes as a true and accurate record of the meeting, and note them as such.

All members agreed.

16. Questions on the minutes and review the progress report

The Committee heard the updates for each item as listed on the following page.

There were no questions.

Action	Responsible	Rating	Meeting 05.06.2023	Meeting 10.07.2023
Tidying up of the noticeboards	Officers	Amber	Would be carried out throughout the summer, using casual staff.	This was due to be started in the Summer.
Shared cycle path additions to visible desired line in Ladygrove	Officers & Councillors	Amber	Work on this was on-going.	Investigations to this had stalled due to work loads.
Ladygrove Lake Pump	Officers & Councillors	Amber	Work on this is on-going and meetings will be arranged with the Fishing Association and the newly formed Ladygrove Management Group.	Ladygrove Management Group would have an initial meeting set up.
Millennium Woods signs	Officers	Green	An update on the noticeboards was covered in the OSM's report.	An update on this was covered in the OSM report.
Reducing the Oak tree and felling the Pine at Cockcroft allotments	Officers	Amber	It was resolved to carry out this work.	Work would commence in August.
Graffiti Project at the Skatepark	Officers & Councillors	Amber	It was resolved to approve this project in principle, subject to more information being obtained.	Investigations were on going.
Investigate installing a bench at the bus stop on Wantage Road	Officers	Amber	It was resolved to not install a bus shelter on Wantage Road, but to investigate installing a bench instead.	OCC had agreed that a bench could be located in Wantage Road. Officers were waiting on quotes for this.
Smokefree play park signs	Officers	Amber	It was resolved to investigate whether local primary schools would be interested.	Six local primary schools were emailed on 12.06.2023, two had agreed to be involved – would make sense to start this project at the start of the next academic year (September 2023).
'Sow & Grow' – Community Planting project at New Road allotments	Officers	Amber	It was resolved to apply for the Active Communities Grant and proceed with this project.	Application was submitted 09.06.2023 – Closing date was 30 th June 2023.
SODC's Deep Cleanse locations	Officers & Councillors	Green	Members suggested areas in Didcot.	Suggested areas were sent to SODC by their deadline.

17. To note the External Income and Expenditure to date for external works, as updated on 19th June 2023

The Committee noted the updated figures, as of 7th July 2023, presented to them at the meeting.

18. To consider the Outdoor Services Manager's report

The Committee noted the Outdoor Services Manager's report and considered the recommendations.

Edmonds Park

Cllr A Hudson explained that a bench in Edmonds Park had been graffitied. The OSM confirmed the team would investigate this.

23. The Committee was asked to consider and approve the tree quote for Edmonds Park. Members discussed the need for the work and the OSM explained there could be savings made due to some members of the outdoor team being trained in the felling of smaller trees.

24. The OSM explained that the bark levels needed 'topping up' to ensure the depth remains at the legal required depth. The cost would amount to £1,239.42 (inc VAT) to be taken from cost centre 309/3149 'Bark Top-up'. Members agreed this work was needed.

25. The removal of the dying hedge along the tennis courts and the creation of a wildflower bund, was discussed. The OSM explained this would be a winter project and costs would be minimal as the work would be done 'in house'.

Members enquired whether a tree surgeon could inspect the hedge to ensure that it needed to be removed, prior to any work being carried out. The OSM confirmed this would be done.

It was proposed by Cllr G Roberts, seconded by Cllr K Morrison, and **RESOLVED** to:

- Approve the tree work in Edmonds Park at a cost of £1,950, to be taken from cost centre 310/3158
- Approve the cost of topping up the play bark at a cost of £1,239.42, to be taken from cost centre 309/3149
- Approve the removal of the hedge along the tennis courts and replace with wildflower bunding, in principle, subject to confirmation that the hedge was dying from the tree surgeon

All members agreed.

Ladygrove Mounds

32. The Committee discussed the cutting of the mounds. Some Councillors felt that the mounds should be left as wild areas, with just the walkways cut. Signs could be displayed to state that the Council had intentionally left the areas for wildlife.

The OSM would investigate options of doing this and would feed back to the Committee via email.

The cutting of the mounds was **AGREED** in principle.

Millennium Woods

38. The Committee considered the recommendation to pay a tree surgeon for half a day's work in Millennium Woods, where their expertise would be used by the outdoor team.

It was proposed by Cllr G Roberts, seconded by Cllr K Morrison, and **RESOLVED** to approve the cost of the tree surgeon at £250 plus VAT (to be taken from cost centre 310/3158), for half a day's work, where knowledge and advice would be obtained by the team, regarding the thinning of the woods.

All members agreed.

19. To consider the purchase of new battery-operated equipment report and recommendations to the Committee

The Committee considered the report and the recommendations.

Members discussed the need to replace ageing equipment and agreed that electric equipment was preferred. The OSM also explained that electric machines did not have the same issues as fuel machines in regard to trigger time (due to vibration).

Cllr K Morrison asked how the old equipment would be disposed of. The OSM confirmed that they would be kept until they were unusable and would investigate environmentally friendly disposal.

It was proposed by Cllr S Cole, seconded by Cllr K Morrison, and **RESOLVED** to approve the £1,715 cost to replace three hedge cutters with electric machines and extra batteries.

All members agreed.

20. To consider the report on Ladygrove Lakes and the recommendations to the Committee

The Committee considered the report and recommendations.

The OSM explained that the aerator was due a service on 18th July 2023. All members were welcome to attend.

Cllr S Cole explained that in his opinion, the Council could source cheaper alternatives for the dissolved oxygen meter reader and tests, and Officers should investigate this.

Members approved the Ladygrove Management Working Group terms of reference with an amendment, as shown on appendix 1.

It was proposed by Cllr S Cole, seconded by Cllr A Hudson, and **RESOLVED** to approve the purchases of a dissolved oxygen meter reader and tests on the lake in principle, subject to receiving more quotes. The quotes would be forwarded to members, via email, for approval.

All members agreed.

21. To consider the South and Vale Air Quality Action Plan

Members discussed the proposed Air Quality Action Plan.

Cllr L Hislop explained that it was difficult for the Town Council to comment as Didcot was not mentioned much within the plan.

It was **AGREED** that members would look again at the plan. If they decided a comment should be submitted, the suggestions would be sent to the PEO by 20th July 2023, so that all comments could be agreed by the Committee prior to being submitted before the deadline on 27th July 2023.

22. To consider the recommendations from the Allotment Liaison Group and note the draft minutes of the meeting held on 8th June 2023

The Committee noted the draft minutes of the ALG meeting held on 8th June and considered the recommendations.

- a. Alternative to bonfires

Members discussed the negative impact bonfires have on the environment and to surrounding properties.

It was proposed by Cllr S Cole, seconded by Cllr L Hislop, and **RESOLVED** to ban bonfires on the allotment for a trial period and instead, approve the OSM's recommendation of composting and removal with the help from the outdoor team. The Committee approved the hire of a 'green skip' at a cost of £230 plus VAT to be taken from cost centre 302/3244 'Allotment Maintenance'.

- Bonfires would still be allowed in exceptional circumstances, at the Town Council's discretion. The rules would be amended to reflect this change.

b. Wildlife Camera Policy

Members discussed cameras and it was reiterated that allotment holders who had received permission to install a camera, would need to erect a sign on their plot to warn other tenants. Signs would also be secured to the allotment gates to inform visitors that cameras were in operation on each site.

The new camera policy was discussed. It was proposed by Cllr S Cole, seconded by Cllr L Hislop, and **RESOLVED** to **approve** the Wildlife Camera Policy and additional allotment rule regarding cameras, subject to ratification by Full Council – attached as appendix 2.

All members agreed.

c. Clarification on BBQs on the allotment sites

Although allowing BBQs on the allotments was never formally approved following a successful 12-month trial period, members discussed the types of BBQs which should be allowed on site.

Some members believed that allowing BBQs on the allotment site would be beneficial for the tenants without an outdoor space at home.

Concerns were raised regarding fuel storage and whether gas bottles would be left on site. It was agreed that charcoal would be the safest fuel type.

It was proposed by Cllr G Roberts, seconded by Cllr S Cole, and **RESOLVED** to allow small kettle type BBQs on legs, to be used on the allotments. Only charcoal types would be permitted.

All members agreed with 1 abstention.

- The amendment to the rules read as follows (as agreed via email with members):

*“Small, occasional, family (or close friends) BBQs are allowed on the plot provided they take place within the plot boundary.
BBQs should be small in size, similar to a small kettle BBQ on legs, and must always be supervised, extinguished, and disposed of in an environmentally friendly way.
Only charcoal/briquette are to be used as a fuel on the BBQs.
The tenant of the plot where the BBQ is being used will be held solely responsible.
The Council will not be held responsible for loss by accident, fire, theft, or damage from the Allotment Site.
All food waste should be taken home and disposed of.
If these rules are not adhered to, the tenants right to hold a BBQ on their plot, will be revoked.
The Council reserves the right to amend this rule at any time.”*

d. Flowers on allotment plots

Discussions were had as to whether wildflowers were classed as cultivation. Some members did agree that certain flowers did act to deter insects.

It was proposed by Cllr J Broadbent, seconded by Cllr K Morrison, and **RESOLVED** to amend the rules to state only one third of the plot could be used for flowers.

All members agreed with 1 abstention.

e. Reduction in rent for allotment representatives

Members considered the report but noted that no other Council representative received discounted services.

It was proposed by Cllr S Cole, seconded by Cllr G Roberts, and **RESOLVED** not to allow discounts on rent for allotment representatives.

All members agreed.

f. Beehives on New Road allotment site

The Committee considered the request regarding installing a beehive on New Road allotment, in conjunction with Restore.

Members were concerned about possible risk implications to visitors of the site, especially as the Town Council was starting a community project on site.

Cllr K Morrison suggested encouraging wild bees with wildflowers would be a better solution and suggested that Restore could carry out surveys on wild bees as an activity.

Cllr A Jones suggested offering Restore alternative locations to investigate (not owned/managed by the Town Council) where hives were already in situ.

It was proposed by Cllr S Cole, seconded by Cllr K Morrison, and **RESOLVED** to not allow beehives on the allotments, including New Road, but to plant more wildflowers to encourage wild bees, as an alternative.

All members agreed.

The meeting closed at 21.15

Signed: _____ (Chair)

Date: _____

Name of Working Group	Ladygrove Management Working Group
Membership Who should be part of the group, and what rights do they have in decision-making?	<p>Seven Didcot Town Council Members - voting. If membership would otherwise have no Ladygrove-representing member, any nominees for membership representing Ladygrove shall have priority over non-Ladygrove representatives – a Chair will need to be appointed at the first meeting.</p> <p>Environment Agency rep (1) - voting Fishing Club rep (1) - voting Earth Trust (1) – voting Ladygrove Residents Association (1) - voting Outdoor Services Manager – no voting rights Outdoor Services Supervisor – no voting rights Other Industry Specialists when required</p>
Purpose Why does it exist? What does it seek to achieve?	To suggest a strategy to safeguard and improve the area and increase the facilities for the enjoyment of Didcot residents and to create a plan for the future management of the lakes.
Task and finish/ongoing? If task and finish, please define the date or output that marks the groups closure	This group is NOT a task and finish working group.
Meetings Does the group meet in person or virtually?	The meetings can either be in person, and/or virtual.
How often should it meet, and should it meet in the day time or evening?	To meet at least three times a year and in emergency situations.
Reporting How should the business be reported and to whom?	All reports and recommendations will be reported to the Environment and Climate Committee.
Minutes published Are minutes required, and who should they be sent to?	Yes, the notes will be circulated to all members of the group.
Public attendance Can the public attend, can they participate and are there any rules around this?	Not at regular meetings without prior agreement of the working group Councillors.

Appendix 1

