

Didcot Town Council

Environment & Climate Committee
Monday 18th November 2024 at 7.30pm
All Saints Room, Civic Hall



DRAFT 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 Macdonald
Cllr S Cole
Cllr J Broadbent
Cllr A Hudson

Officers:

Mrs J Wheeler (Town Clerk – TC)
Mrs L Blake (Deputy Town Clerk - DC)
Mr M Blake (Outdoor Services Manager - OSM)
Mr P Bint (Estate Administrator – EA)

Five representatives were in attendance on behalf of Restore.

32. To receive apologies

No apologies were received. Cllr Z Mohammed was absent.

33. To receive declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were received.

34. To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 16th September 2024 as a true and correct record

It was proposed by Cllr S Cole, seconded by Cllr K Morrison, and **RESOLVED** to **APPROVE** the minutes as a true and accurate record of the meeting, and note them as such. All members agreed.

35. Questions on the minutes and review the progress report

The Committee noted the progress report – shown on the next page.

Environment & Climate Committee Meeting
DRAFT Minutes 18.11.2024

Progress report			
Meeting	Item	Comments	Review date/meeting
-	Smokefree play park signs.	New Estate Administrator has taken on this project.	Was on agenda for consideration 18.11.2024
-	Investigate chicanes/bollards at Stubbings Land.	Taylor Wimpey will not pay for the work but may allow DTC to install at their cost (to include associated drawing costs). Should DTC consider putting something on DTC land or wait for the land to be transferred and work with the landowner?	No further progress has been made.
-	CIL Grant Fund application.	Application submitted on 28 th June 2024. Update circulated to Cllrs 18 th October 24 to state a decision may be received w/c 18 th November 2024.	When decision has been made.
15.07.2024 – min 15 (17)	Hiring the robotic mower to cut the mounds	Due to commence mid-September.	Completed.
15.07.2024 – min 17	Recommend the potential relocation, replacement and investigations into the skate park and adjacent area in Ladygrove, to Full Council.	Will be discussed at Full Council on 2 nd September 2024.	At FC meeting 2 nd September 2024. Update on agenda 18.11.2024.
16.09.2024 – min 26	Purchase the Playground Inspection app.	PO number has been given. Training has been arranged and all sites will be set up at the start of next year.	Update covered in OSM report.
16.09.2024 – min 27	Clearing the vegetation at the community polytunnel.	Agreed to clear at 16 th September meeting. Progress has been started and companies have been contacted requesting donations of materials.	Update on agenda 18.11.2024.
16.09.2024 – min 28	Permanently ban the use of chemicals by the allotment tenants on all sites.	Signs have been put up across all sites and allotment tenants were advised of this new rule with all invoices 1 st October 2024.	Completed. Posters have been put up and tenants informed in the rent letters
Future Projects			
	Investigate water supply at the lakes.	The Council investigated this in the past and many ideas	On-going

		were looked into.	
	'Do not feed ducks/geese' signs.	The OSM will investigate the costs.	On-going
	Art grants to potentially create a lake feature and/or literary trail for children.		On-going
	Hedges – to be cut back at the lakes and skate park.	Already part of the outdoor team's work – will be done in the winter months. Work has started.	
	Investigate specific Ladygrove events, or events that can 'travel around' other parks.		On-going
	Walking Trail to Wittenham Clumps.	Been confirmed there is already a trail but maybe this could be improved?	On-going
	Pears Mapping.	Staff to investigate when this will become 'live' – additional training will be needed. New Estate Administrator will be arranging to learn this software.	Training confirmed for 11 th December 2024

It was confirmed by the Deputy Town Clerk (DC) that the outcome of the CIL Grant should be received this week.

The Chair proposed suspending Standing Orders 30 and 31 to enable the representatives from Restore to address the Committee regarding their plans for a new building on the New Road allotment site. All members agreed.

A representative from Restore provided an overview of the charity, highlighting its status as the longest-established mental health charity in Oxfordshire and its presence at Fleet Meadow since 2004. Members were provided with information packs detailing the charity's history at the site, a letter from the Secretary of State, and plans for a new building.

The architect presented the proposed building plans, explaining that the new structure would match the size of the existing portacabin and include two workshops, a kitchenette, a wash area, and an external veranda. The revised design is planned for completion within six months, as opposed to the original three-stage construction. She noted that various surveys, including tree and ecological assessments, as well as public consultations, had been conducted in recent years. The Town Clerk (TC) requested copies of these surveys and consultation outcomes.

Cllr A Macdonald enquired about the status of planning permission. It was confirmed that the application is ready for submission.

The TC informed the Committee that the Secretary of State had made a decision regarding the land in 2019, based on circumstances at the time. However, with an increase in demand for allotments and a lengthy waiting list, the current situation has changed. The TC emphasised that Didcot Town Council (DTC) would need to consult the Secretary of State again before any decisions on the land are made. Additionally, it would be necessary to determine whether entering into an agreement with Restore for the proposed building would constitute a disposal of a Council asset.

It was confirmed that Restore will provide DTC with copies of the surveys undertaken, and the TC will seek advice from the National Association of Local Councils (NALC). Further meetings will be expected.

The representatives thanked the Committee for their time and proceeded to leave the meeting at 7.55pm.

Standing Orders were fully reinstated.

36. To note the Income and Expenditure to date for the Environment and Climate Committee report, as updated on 4th November 2024

The Committee noted the income and expenditure as updated on 4th November 2024.

37. To consider the Outdoor Services Manager's report

The Committee noted the Outdoor Services Manager's (OSM) report, noted the updates, and considered the recommendations.

6. Hire a shredder and operative for on day

Members considered the recommendation to approve the cost of hiring a shredder and operative for one day's work, on the New Road allotment site, to shred everything in the compost bay and to start the composting process. The compost would then be used to benefit work at the polytunnel, the community planting area and potentially for the allotment tenants.

It was proposed by Cllr A Macdonald, seconded by Cllr S Cole, and RESOLVED to approve the £940 +VAT cost to hire a shredder and operative to clear the area near to the community planting area, and create fresh compost. This would come from cost centre EMR 334 'Community Projects'. All members agreed.

24. Installation of bollards at Edmonds Park

The OSM noted that carpark users of Edmonds Park park in front of the access gates preventing access to the depot by the staff. Whilst the OSM received a quote for 3 telescopic bollards with installation at a cost of £950, the OSM has since researched and found that the team can purchase 5 telescopic bollards for approximately £500, which can be installed by the outdoor team. For the purchase of these 5 bollards and the cost of sand cement and to hire a breaker for their own use, the total sum of this would be approximately £700.

It was proposed by Cllr A Hudson, seconded by Cllr A Macdonald, and RESOLVED to approve the installation of 5 bollards by the Outdoor Team for the cost of £700 +VAT. This would come from cost centre 307/4041. All members agreed.

39. Purchase of a new rotovator

As the Outdoor Team have been working more on the allotments, the OSM noted it would be beneficial to purchase a new rotovator to aid in clearing the plots. Alongside this, Cllr A Macdonald stated that this would allow for the additional services to potentially be reinstated, to which the OSM agreed.

It was proposed by Cllr S Cole, seconded by Cllr K Morrison, and RESOLVED to approve the purchase of a new rotovator for the cost of up to £700. This would come from cost centre 307/4041. All members agreed.

38. To consider the report on applications received to hold events on Town Council owned/managed land, and the recommendations to the Committee

5b. Hatwells Event July-August 25 at ED Park

This event has been provisionally approved.

It was proposed by Cllr A Hudson, seconded by Cllr G Roberts, and RESOLVED to approve of Hatwells Funfair with a total income of £2,400. All members agreed.

6a. Hatwells Events March-April 25 at Ladygrove Park

This event has been provisionally approved.

It was proposed by Cllr A Hudson, seconded by Cllr G Roberts, and RESOLVED to approve of Hatwells Funfair with a total income of £2,080. All members agreed.

6b. Didcot 5-mile Road Race

Members considered the recommendation to approve this event. Didcot Runners also hire Willowbrook Leisure Centre for this event. It was noted by the DC that in the past, there was a £200 charge to the organisers for the park hire, on the condition that a statement was provided to confirm that the proceeds would go to charities. DTC no longer participate in the road closure and Didcot Runners will also have access to Willowbrook Leisure Centre.

It was proposed by Cllr A Hudson, seconded by Cllr G Roberts, and RESOLVED to approve the Didcot 5-mile Road Race and 2-mile fun run with no charge. All members agreed.

39. To consider the report on the suggested annual charges for Didcot Town Council's services for the 2025-2026 financial year and the recommendations to the Committee

The Committee considered the report to approve the Cemetery Administration fee of £80 as well as to remove the Junior Concession charge of £7 for a fishing permit as it was unclear as to what the requirements were for this charge. The DC explained that other Town Councils already provide a fee for the Cemetery Administration.

It was proposed by Cllr S Cole, seconded by Cllr A Hudson, and RESOLVED to approve of the Cemetery Administration fee of £80 and to remove the Junior Concessions charge. All other annual charges were approved. All members agreed.

These charges would be ratified at the next Full Council meeting.

40. To consider the report of the future of the electric vehicle

The Committee considered the report over the concerns of the Alke vehicle and to find an adequate solution. The OSM expressed concerns over the current expenditure of the Alke vehicle, stating that year to date from point of purchase, DTC has spent approximately £9,000 on repairs. It was also stated that in order to keep the Alke, DTC would have to rely on a single company who charge a £320 callout fee alone, due to it being a specialist vehicle.

Cllr A Hudson raised concerns over the safety of the Alke as the wing mirrors change position while in use and the lack of heating in the vehicle itself. The OSM stated that as they currently have a large tipper, it was not necessary to have another one and the focus should be put into a vehicle for transport of equipment. It was therefore proposed to sell the Alke for a previously quoted £7,000 and purchase a box van for the same price as the 'buy back option'. It was noted by the OSM that this would be easier to service as any mechanic can complete any necessary works.

It was proposed by Cllr J Broadbent, seconded by Cllr S Cole, and RESOLVED to 'sell' the Alke back to the supplier and purchase a box van with the proceeds. All members agreed – *this will need to be approved by Full Council as it will be a disposal of a Council owned asset.*

41. To receive the update on the investigations into a potential new skatepark and consider the recommendation to the Committee

The Committee considered the report, and the possible locations to relocate the new skatepark. The DC relayed the response from representatives from a skatepark installation company regarding the location of the skatepark at Ladygrove Park, to install the new skatepark within the enclosed play area as it considers several factors such as visibility. It was therefore proposed to proceed with the next stage of the project which is to consult with the residents through DTC's social media channels.

It was proposed by Cllr J Broadbent, seconded by Cllr S Cole, and RESOLVED to approve to proceed with the initial consultation. All members agreed.

42. To receive the update on the draft guidance on discouraging rats on the allotment sites document, and the recommendation to the Committee

The Committee considered the draft guidance on discouraging rats on the allotment sites, which included natural remedies. The use of chemicals was not advised due to protecting dogs and other wildlife. The guidance included planting strong, smelling plants, and herbs to deter the rodents. The work would be undertaken by the Outdoor Team.

Members suggested amending point 7 to inform tenants not to encourage wild animals on their plots.

It was proposed by Cllr K Morrison, seconded by Cllr G Roberts, and RESOLVED to approve the document with the slight amendment. This document will be placed in the noticeboards at the allotments and on the Council's website. All members agreed.

43. To note the update on the Smokefree Playground signs and consider the recommendation to the Committee

The Committee considered the update on the smokefree signage scheme. An update was provided by the Estate Administrator that although all the schools which had previously been contacted, had been contacted again, only Ladygrove Primary School expressed interest.

It was proposed by Cllr K Morrison, seconded by Cllr J Broadbent, and RESOLVED to offer Ladygrove Park Primary School the option to design all the smokefree signs for all sites. All members agreed.

44. To note the update on the Community Planting area

The Committee considered the update on the Community Planting Area. The DC expressed that contact had been made with various groups to see if they have any interest in the planting spaces. The next step would be gathering volunteers to arrange clearance days and to consider rental charges and agreements.

45. To consider the second round of budget considerations for the 2025-2026 financial year

The Committee considered potential projects for the second round of budget considerations. Cllr A Macdonald expressed an interest to replant a World War 1 commemorative tree lost in Edmonds Park and also suggested a shade cover would be beneficial for the Splash Park. The OSM voiced concern over keeping the cover safe from vandalism at nighttime.

Cllr A Macdonald also expressed an interest in installing more inclusive play equipment. Following this, the OSM explained a potential project thought up by the outdoor team to install artistic benches around the Garden of Remembrance Cross in Edmonds Park, which would exhibit the history of Didcot.

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Pursuant to Section 1 of the Public Bodies [Admission to Meetings] Act 1960 the committee will be asked to exclude the press and public from the meeting on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted

46. To consider proposals from two parties regarding an allotment plot on the Broadway site

The Committee considered the report on the two proposals made by separate parties to undertake an allotment plot on Broadway which hosts an orchard. The two parties consist of a charity and a private tenant, both currently rent an allotment plot.

The OSM had concerns that the plot already rented by the charity is unkempt and therefore claimed it would be irresponsible to allow them to have another plot. However, the interest of the orchard presents new opportunities for the charity as they would like to host apple pressing events amongst other workshops. Whilst all

members were positive about the proposals, it was suggested by the DC to request plans of these workshops, including event plans and risk assessments in order to enable the Committee to make an informed decision. It was noted that the charity would need to show they are active on their current plot before any decision is made.

Both parties would be requested to submit additional information to the Committee on their proposals.

The meeting closed at 8.53pm

Signed: _____ (Chair) Date: _____