

Open Spaces Working Group Notes
23rd August 2023

Report Author: Cllr ID Clarke

Present: Parish Councillors ID Clarke, Mark Howe, Andy Scarisbrick and Mary Sheppard

No members of the public were present.

1. Election of Chairman

Cllr ID Clarke was elected Chairman of the Working Group.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Ann Davies.

3. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Howe declared an interest in relation to sites and locations germane to a contract held with the Council for the cutting of grass.

4. Terms of Reference

- 4.1 Members considered the draft Terms of Reference for the Working Group. It was noted that the Working Group had no formal decision making powers and that the Parish Clerk had been asked to attend the initial meeting purely to assist members in understanding their role and responsibilities. Some discussion took place regarding the invitation of other parties to future meetings of the Working Group. It was noted that the proposed Terms of Reference would enable the Working Group to expand its membership, but Councillors would need to be mindful of situations which might bring into question current contracts or have the potential to give a potential supplier a competitive advantage.
- 4.2 Members suggested the following amendments to the Terms of Reference as presented:
- 1.2 – Substitute ‘request the attendance of’ with ‘invite’
 - 3.4 – Add ‘(where applicable e.g. A370)’ to the end of the sentence.

5. Tree Report

5.1 Members noted that the tree report commissioned by the Parish Clerk was still awaited.

6. Allotments

6.1 Members noted that the Parish Council would receive a report regarding proposed new tenancy arrangements and charging structure at its meeting on 11th September 2023. It was noted that the Council currently subsidises allotment arrangements to a relatively high degree. Whilst there was a general acceptance that this situation needed to be addressed, members were mindful of the need to balance any price increases against the impact upon existing tenants.

7. Front of Coronation Hall

7.1 Members were advised that two quotes had been received to-date, but that one of the quotes addressed only part of the necessary works. It was also questioned as to whether apparent problems with drainage might also be considered as part of the scheme of works.

8. Work to Pea Green

8.1 Members considered a number of options in relation to the area known as Pea Green. It was considered prudent not to commit to works which might limit the ability of the Parish Council to redesign the toilets at some point in the future. Members also felt that it would be opportune to remove a number of overgrown bushes which created access problems; notably to the entrance to the male toilets.

8.2 Members concluded that the Parish Council should be recommended to completely remove the current planters and bushes and redesign the area (with due regard to the outcome of the scheduled drain survey).

9. Jubilee Garden

9.1 Members debated options relating to Jubilee Garden. Concerns were raised regarding the condition of the retaining wall and it was felt that it would be necessary to remove all of the plants from the garden in order to be able to fully check (and, if necessary, rectify) structural defects.

9.2 Whilst it was noted that there were no 'specimen' plants, the gardens had been a feature for many years and were held in high regard by many residents. As a consequence, it was suggested that it might be possible to allow residents to remove smaller plants themselves in advance of any works.

10. Priorities in Relation to New Contracts

10.1 It was noted that a number of contracts e.g. the Ranger contract and grass cutting contract would expire within the next few months. As a consequence, members debated the principles which might inform any new contract arrangements. This included recognition that the council would potentially be looking to undertake a number of projects over the next 3 year period, together with a more general move to outcome based contracts. The first element might require support across a number of specialist areas which might be difficult to achieve through a replication of the current contracts.

The second element would mark a shift in current practice, as many of the Council's current contracts specified inputs rather than outcomes. The potential difficulty with input based contracts being that it does not necessarily allow contractors to exercise their expertise and judgement to address problems. It also fails to recognize that the Council is fundamentally judged by parishioners on outcomes (what it actually achieves) rather than inputs (what it states it wants done).

10.2 It was agreed that the Working Group would revisit the requirements for contracts at a future meeting.

11. Open Spaces Budget and Income

Members noted the budget position as at 17th August 2023.

Recommendations to the Parish Council

- That the Council adopts the Terms of Reference for the Working Group as amended.
- That the Parish Clerk be asked to re-specify the nature of works to be undertaken to the front of the Coronation Hall to include drainage issues and seek three quotes.
- That in relation to Pea Green, the Parish Council agrees to the complete removal of existing planters and bushes, with a view to a complete redesign of the area.
- That in relation to Jubilee Garden:
 - The Parish Council agrees to the removal of all items (plants and soil) and to have the wall checked for structural stability.
 - That, if practicable, arrangements are made for residents to remove smaller plants as a memento/keepsake.
 - That future works to Jubilee Garden be considered once the Council has had the opportunity to consider the condition survey relating to the wall.