

Lowestoft Town Council
Extraordinary Meeting of the Parks and Open Spaces Sub-Committee

First Floor, Hamilton House, Battery Green Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1DE
19:00 on 10 September August 2024

MINUTES

Present: Cllrs Robert Breakspear, Wendy Brooks, Christine Moore, Andy Pearce, Bernadette Rappensberger, Deborah Ray and Elise Youngman (Chair)

In attendance: Lauren Elliott (Project and Committee Clerk)

Public: There were no members of the public in attendance

46. Welcome

The fire evacuation procedure and public right to report were explained, and the meeting was welcomed.

47. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllrs Neil Coleby, John Murray and John Pitts, with reasons provided. Cllr Pearce proposed approval of the apologies received. Cllr Brooks asked to approve all apologies aside from Cllr Coleby's. Cllr Rappensberger seconded Cllr Pearce's proposal to approve all apologies received; six Councillors voted in favour; one Councillor abstained from the vote.

48. Declarations of Interests and Dispensations

- 48.1. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary, Other Registerable and Non-Registerable Interests from councillors on items on the agenda – Cllrs Brooks and Ray declared they are members of Suffolk Wildlife Trust. Cllr Moore declared she is an employee of East Suffolk Council.
- 48.2. Written requests for dispensations for Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and note dispensations granted – There were none.

49. The draft minutes of the meetings on 20 August 2024

Cllr Brooks proposed approval of the minutes; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour.

50. Public Forum

No advance comments had been received and there were no members of the public in attendance.

51. Monitoring expenditure by this Sub-Committee from its delegated budget

Cllr Brooks noted bicycle racks had been installed at the Denes Oval, which had been grant funded as part of the Tour of Britain. The Project and Committee Clerk advised the bulk order for bicycle racks as previously approved had been delivered, and installation would be rolled out in due course.

52. Budget requirements for the 2025-2026 financial year and making a recommendation to Budget and Loan Working Group for consideration

The Project and Committee Clerk advised this would remain as a standing item on the agenda during the budget setting round. It had already been agreed that the standalone Zoom meetings to discuss the five year plans would be scheduled again, and the projects already approved for the five year plans would be costed. Cllr Ray requested consideration be given to rolling out wildflower areas in all of the Town Council's parks. Whilst this would not be possible in a single year, officers would consider the feasibility and discuss with Councillors in the standalone Zoom meetings, and add an agenda item for this Sub-Committee to formally consider and make recommendations. Several projects had been in discussion or were

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underway, and it was requested that updates be provided. A number of condition surveys had been completed and were under review by the Facilities and Contracts Manager. A budget and a plan for large scale projects, such as the Denes Oval, had not yet been put into place. An asset tour was being arranged for Councillors and relevant officers, which would provide Councillors the opportunity to see what works are underway, what the next priorities are, and to discuss the results of the condition surveys in context. For projects which have already been approved by Council, officers will provide at least approximate costings for budgeting purposes, which will go straight to the Budget and Loan Working Group. Officers were asked to explore funding options for restoration of the Denes Oval perimeter wall and refurbishment of the pavilion.

53. Planting needs for 2025

Cllr Brooks broadly supported the approach as set out in the Project and Committee Clerk's notes, which recommended a move away from bulk ordering of bulbs and bedding plants, to wildflower seeds, mature trees and more sustainable planting. Officers considered that the bulk ordering of bulbs over several years had provided a sufficient quantity across the relevant parks and a further bulk order was not required.

It was considered that a move away from bulbs to more drought tolerant and hardy planting would be a policy decision for Council to make. As well as drought tolerant, the Council would also need to consider planting which can cope with prolonged wet weather and which would improve biodiversity and support pollinators.

The officer recommendation to plant willows at Clarkes Lane was queried, as they require a large amount of water. Clarkes Lane was however an area which retained water and a scrape had recently been developed. It was requested that officers explore species to support pollinators. Officers were asked to consider all parks for wildflower areas, though it was clarified there was no suggestion that every park should have one.

Cllr Pearce proposed to endorse the officer recommendation not to progress a bulk order of bulbs for 2025, and to have a conversation with the Grounds Maintenance Team between now and the budget setting round in September 2025 about a horticultural policy going forward.

Cllr Breakspear considered the needs to provide information and education to the public on wildflower areas and the importance of them.

A long-term planting policy would need to be discussed as part of the five year plans. Cllr Breakspear seconded Cllr Pearce's proposal and all Councillors voted in favour.

It was considered that the Town Council's existing policies may already refer to drought tolerant and hardy planting, but there had been no policy decision to move away from ordering bulbs.

Cllr Pearce proposed to endorse the officer recommendation to purchase eight established trees, within a maximum budget of £3,000. It was understood there had been discussions about purchasing fruit trees for Gunton Community Park. Fruit trees planted at Uplands and Clarkes Lane had established well. An item was requested for the next agenda to consider the planting of more fruit trees. Cllr Youngman seconded the proposal and all Councillors voted in favour.

Cllr Pearce proposed to endorse the officer recommendation to purchase wildflower seeds for the areas listed in the meeting notes, within a maximum budget of £3,500, and a delegation to officers to progress this and make the necessary preparations. Officers were asked to check the best time for sowing the seeds, which would likely be the autumn or the spring. Cllr Rappensberger seconded the proposal and all Councillors voted in favour.

54. A request from the Maritime Museum to install a noticeboard in Sparrows Nest

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Cllr Pearce proposed approval of this request, subject to planning consent. If the Maritime Museum were not already aware of the need to secure planning permission, Cllr Pearce proposed for Town Council officers to provide administrative support for the process, and for the Town Council to pay the application fee. Officers were asked to check that the proposed location of the noticeboard was not obstructing nearby seating or blocking the view. Cllr Brooks seconded the proposal and all Councillors voted in favour.

55. Officer proposals for improvements to the Uplands Road North Pond

Cllr Brooks proposed to approve the recommendations as detailed in the meeting notes, with a maximum budget of £3,000 for the fence. An update was requested on the scheduling of works to trees in the area. Cllr Pearce seconded the proposal and all Councillors voted in favour.

56. The installation of a duck food dispenser in Kensington Gardens

Cllr Breakspear declared he is the Chair of the Friends of Kensington Gardens. The Project and Committee Clerk had researched the dispensers and understood ten percent of the proceeds from the dispenser would be donated to the Friends Group.

Cllr Breakspear temporarily left the meeting 19:44 for the consideration of this item

Though it would be difficult to ban feeding birds in the Town Council's parks, Cllr Brooks considered that the Town Council should not be actively encouraging it. There was a concern that the duck food would still pollute the pond and Cllr Brooks had seen advice from Suffolk Wildlife Trust in line with this. The Town Council had spent a lot of money to improve the health of its ponds. Cllr Rappensberger clarified that her previous comments relating to duck feeding at Fen Park was to advise that feeding had not attracted an unsustainable number of ducks to the pond. The item had been deferred pending the receipt of feedback from other authorities who had installed the dispensers. The feedback had not yet been received. Cllr Pearce proposed to defer this item, pending feedback from other authorities; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

Cllr Breakspear returned 19:49

57. The inclusion of 'Happy to Chat' benches in parks to reduce loneliness and improve mental health

The feedback from East Suffolk Council's Communities Team had suggested identifying the benches by painting them a bright colour. If the initiative were to be progressed, it was suggested the benches could be painted orange and could be launched during Mental Health Awareness Week. There was a discussion as to whether existing benches could be used and potentially repositioned to naturally encourage social interaction. It was suggested the Town Council could work with the Communities Team on the initiative. Cllr Pearce proposed for officers to bring ideas to the next meeting with regard to locations and the use of existing benches or proposed new benches; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

58. Methods of Council support for the Sports Development Officer

The Sports Development Officer was happy with the current support he was receiving from the Council. The Sub-Committee welcomed his regular reports to keep the Council updated on his activities. Cllr Brooks proposed to pass on the Sub-Committee's thanks to the Sports Development Officer for his regular reports; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour. The Budget and Loan Working Group would be considering a dedicated sports development budget from 2025 – 2026, and would welcome input from the Sports Development Officer. The Sports Development Officer was due to attend a sports, health and wellbeing event the following week and would have the opportunity to promote the sports facilities the Town Council has. As part of this, the Sports Development Officer had requested a maximum budget of £500 to

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produce some promotional materials for the event. Cllr Pearce proposed approval of this request; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour. It was noted that the Sports Development Officer had been undertaking community engagement events at Whitton Green, and the Gunton Estate Community Hall would be interested in speaking with him about indoor sport opportunities.

59. Date of the next meeting

15 October 2024 19:00

60. Items for the next Agenda and Close

There were no requests for items for the next agenda.

There were no confidential items for consideration and the meeting was closed at 20:02.

61. Resolution to close the meeting to the public

Signed:

15 October 2024