

Lowestoft Town Council
Meeting of the Parks and Open Spaces Sub-Committee
First Floor, Hamilton House, Battery Green Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1DE
19:00 on 15 October 2024

MINUTES

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

In attendance: Lauren Elliott (Senior Committee and Project Clerk)

Public: There was one member of the public in attendance (in person)

62. Welcome

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

63. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllrs Neil Coleby, John Murray, John Pitts and Deborah Ray, with reasons provided. Cllr Pearce proposed approval of the apologies received; seconded by Cllr Rappensberger; five Councillors voted in favour; one Councillor voted against.

64. Declarations of Interests and Dispensations

64.1. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary, Other Registerable and Non-Registerable Interests from councillors on items on the agenda – Cllr Brooks declared she is a member of Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

64.2. Written requests for dispensations for Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and note dispensations granted – There were none.

65. The draft minutes of the meeting on 10 September 2024

An amendment was requested under item 53 (planting needs), to clarify that any change in policy would be a decision for Full Council (the minutes had just referred to 'Council'). Cllr Pearce proposed approval of the minutes with this amendment; seconded by Cllr Rappensberger; all in favour.

66. Public Forum

Mark Webster from The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) addressed the Sub-Committee regarding item 68. Mr Webster also expressed an interest in items 70 and 71 and advised TCV may be able to offer its assistance in delivering these projects if required. TCV had received £15,000 of funding to enable a member of staff to take the project forward, including a co-design process involving as many members of the public as possible. A public engagement process would seek design ideas, then those interested in taking the project forward would review the feasibility of the suggestions. Councillors were invited to be involved in this process. If approved, it was anticipated the project would be delivered on site between December and March. It was clarified the total budget available for this project from TCV was £15,000. The project costs would depend on the feasibility of the suggestions put forward. The Town Council may wish to consider contributing funding to deliver the project. Assumption we would help to fund but need spec. have agreed to work with management committee and TCV. A meeting with the Town Council's grounds maintenance team was suggested, which Mr Webster agreed would be helpful. If required, existing volunteers could be brought in from other areas to support the project, but the aim was to attract as many local people to the project as possible. When the project had been initially discussed, ideas for edible elements, such as fruit trees, had been put forward. TCV were bidding for further work in the town with a view to employing someone to work on projects in Lowestoft for two and a half days per week, with a view to setting up a self-sustaining community group to continue these and other projects.

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

There were no matters raised under this item.

68. An update on the Gunton Community Park community garden project from The Conservation Volunteers, and a request to begin public engagement

A draft flier had been provided to the Sub-Committee. Cllr Pearce proposed to allow the public engagement process to begin, and for TCV to provide an update to the Sub-Committee every three to four months. Cllr Brooks seconded the proposal and requested that a meeting between TCV and appropriate officers be facilitated. Cllr Pearce amended his proposal to include this. All Councillors voted in favour.

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

Cllr Brooks suggested a considering a budget for planting needs, starting to plan for the pump track, the Normanston Park skate park lighting, and focussing on clearing the Great Eastern Linear Park stream. Regarding play areas, it was noted that Clarkes Lane and Thirlmere Walk had been identified as the priorities for the current year. It was considered that it may not be possible to insist on the inclusion of all those projects in the 2025 – 2026 budget, particularly the pump track, which would be a significant capital cost and would likely require external funding. It was requested the Budget and Loan Working Group ensures the capital and repairs and maintenance budgets for parks are at least equal to the current amount plus inflation. Cllr Brooks proposed to approve the idea of a pump track and to start seeking external funding. Site visits had already been undertaken and Normanston Park had been identified as the most appropriate location. Prior to formal approval by Full Council, an indication would need to be given of the cost, the payment period and any funding opportunities. Officers were asked to source this information and bring it back for consideration. An update on the sports development survey was requested.

70. Wildflower areas and which of the Town Council's parks would be appropriate for planting

Three locations had been approved at the previous meeting (Clarkes Lane, Great Eastern Linear Park and Normanston Park). Cllr Pearce proposed to progress those three sites first and see how successful they are before considering any others; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

71. Extending the Town Council's provision of fruit trees

Fruit trees previously planted at The Parklands and Clarkes Lane had established well, others planted elsewhere had been lost to vandalism. There was a discussion regarding appropriate locations, and it was suggested fruit trees could be incorporated into the community garden plans for Gunton Community Park, as discussed at item 68, or elsewhere in the park. Cllr Pearce proposed for fruit trees to be planted at Thirlmere Walk and Gunton Community Park, with staff to decide the specific locations (in conjunction with TCV in the case of Gunton Community Park); seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

72. Planting options for a flower bed in Normanston Park

The Grounds Maintenance Team Leader had some suggestions for replacement planting more appropriate for the space, and officers had recommended a maximum budget of £400, which would enable the purchase of more established plants. Cllr Pearce proposed to endorse the staff recommendation in the meeting notes to replace the planting in the flower bed, within a maximum budget of £400, with a delegation to officers to choose the planting plan and purchase plants and materials within that maximum budget; seconded by Cllr Rappensberger; all in favour.

Mr Webster left the meeting 19:36

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73. An additional entrance at Normanston Park for emergency vehicles

It was noted the provision of access for emergency vehicles would enable Normanston Park to be considered for larger events. Creation of the access would require the felling of two trees, one of which is in poor health. Whilst the Council would not usually approve the felling of trees, this was considered necessary to enable emergency vehicle access to the park, and it may be possible for timber from the felled trees to be used elsewhere. Cllr Brooks proposed to approve the development of an additional entrance at Normanston Park for emergency vehicles; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour. Cllr Pearce proposed to approve a maximum budget of £2,250 for the project to be delivered; seconded by Cllr Youngman; all in favour.

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

Cllr Breakspear this had been brought to the Council as a suggestion from the company which installs the dispensers, and no decisions had been made by the Friends Group.

Cllr Breakspear temporarily left the meeting 19:39 for the consideration of this item

Cllr Brooks considered this would send the wrong message to members of the public regarding the feeding of birds and wildlife in the Town Council's parks. Norwich City Council had provided feedback on the dispenser they had installed in one of their parks. Diss Town Council had also been approached for feedback, but their dispenser had not yet been installed. Norwich City Council had referred to an issue with rats, though it was unclear whether they considered the dispenser to mitigate against this. Cllr Brooks expressed concern over how this may impact water quality, and a potential over-abundance of ducks. Cllr Pearce proposed to approve the installation of a duck food dispenser in Kensington Gardens on a year's trial, for a review to then take place at the end of trial, or for the dispenser to be removed sooner if severe issues arise. As part of the trial, feedback will be sought from the Friends Group, businesses within the park, and the Town Council's grounds maintenance team. The Friends Group had not yet discussed or agreed to have the dispenser. Cllr Pearce's proposal was dependent on agreement from the Friends Group for the dispenser to be installed, particularly if they may be asked to top it up and clean it, etc. Cllr Rappensberger seconded Cllr Pearce's proposal and asked staff to check whether there is a fixed term period for it to be installed. The vote was taken and four Councillors voted in favour; one Councillor abstained from the vote.

Cllr Breakspear returned 19:45

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

A meeting paper had been provided. It was considered that the arrangement and style of seating to naturally encourage social interaction could be more effective than labelling benches. Design features such as seating with planters can also enhance a public space. Any plaques or logos should be discrete. Cllr Pearce proposed to endorse the idea in principle, including the suggested designs and locations, with any logo included to be discrete, and to ask officers to put together a recommended package for year one, for consideration at the next meeting. A concern had previously been raised that seating at the Triangle Market/Sails area should only be considered at locations where the boundary between the pedestrian precinct and the road is easily identifiable. It was confirmed there was no funding on offer and therefore no requirement for plaques or logos to be added to the benches. Cllr Pearce therefore proposed for the designs and layout of the benches to become the features to encourage social interaction, rather than plaques and logos, with officers to put together a package and budget for year one, for consideration at the next meeting, with the possibility of extending it to other locations the following year. Cllr Breakspear seconded the proposal and all Councillors voted in favour.

76. Date of the next meeting

Lowestoft Town Council
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77. Items for the next Agenda and Close

An item was requested to receive an update on various tree works, including the trees at Uplands.

Cllr Brooks had seen a news article reporting that Essex and Suffolk Water had advised a company it did not have the capacity to supply water to enable expansion of its business. Cllr Brooks would supply the article to officers, and this may require consideration at the next meeting, though the Town Council had not received any communications from its water supplier directly.

There were no confidential items for consideration and the meeting was closed at 19:58.

78. Resolution to close the meeting to the public

Signed:

19 November 2024