



MINUTES OF MEETING OF AMENITIES COMMITTEE
23 January 2023
10:00, Woolton Hill Church Hall

Chairman: Cllr Rand (Chair)
Present: Councillors Mr P Hurst, Mrs S Cooper
Clerk: Amy White

1. Welcome and apologies

Cllr Rand welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies accepted from Cllr Roots.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. To Agree Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2022 were agreed and accepted by the Chairman, Cllr Rand.

4. Actions from previous Meeting

Date	Action
13/11/22	Cllr Roots to investigate grant opportunities for the parish field biodiversity project. Not actioned - See Biodiversity item and action below.
12/12/22	Cllr Roots to provide a year plan of the field e.g. timings of planting trees, what seeds might be sown, when/if to get children involved, for the Amenities Meeting in February, for agreement to propose to full council at the February full council meeting. Actioned
12/12/22	Clerk to accept quotes from Woodberry. Actioned
12/12/22	Clerk to accept quote for playground repairs to proceed. Actioned
12/12/22	Clerk to ask Scofell to trim the HE hedge alongside the hall to approx. 8ft. Actioned
12/12/22	Clerk to agree contract quote with Scofell for 23/24. Actioned
12/12/22	Clerk to add boardwalk issue to the agenda for full council meeting in January 2023. Actioned

5. Purchase of advertising roller blinds

Cllr Rand has updated the blinds and wording. It was agreed for committee members to send Cllr Rand thoughts on new design and wording.

Action: Committee to send thoughts on roller blind wording to Cllr Rand

6. Parish Field update

There has been very heavy and prolonged rainfall but the ditches are flowing well and there have been no issues with drainage in and around Brownies Corner.

The path, though it has fared well over the winter and prolonged rainfall, has certain areas where it has standing water and some of the path material is washing away. It was agreed that the path material loss/compaction is just a normal weathering process and that maintenance will always be needed.

Action: Clerk to contact CE Groundworks for a quote to improve the camber on parts of the path and add extra material.

7. Biodiversity project

Cllr Roots has provided a useful calendar of observation for the field for the year, as well as options and recommendations on wildflowers and trees to plant as a next step. The committee agreed that this was a good plan, and the next steps would be to keep a visual diary of the field per month to record what is growing.

Action: Cllr Roots to decide and organise areas of parish field to photograph for visual diary for biodiversity.

8. Recreation Grounds

There has been a power cut, with the fault located near to the entrance of the recreation ground. Currently SSE has dug around the area and fixed the fault. Weather permitting, the area will be left as found (as much as possible) within the next 2 weeks.

The Clerk has received a request from a company to provide pony rides in the recreation ground. It was decided not to agree to this due to the precedent being set for other commercial venture requests, as well as the concern over the ground being churned up in inclement weather.

Lectern positioning: The Clerk has received the lectern, paid for using a borough councillor grant. Unfortunately the stand was not delivered.

Action: Clerk to get stand for lectern delivered and arrange installation (when weather improves).

Heath End: The Clerk has received a quote to reduce the height of the hedge bordering EWWH and Play Area to approx. 8ft with all arisings to be cleared from site: £650. This can then be added to the annual agreement (in liaison with EWWH) at an extra £70 per annum. The committee agreed to this one off cost and to add the job to the Annual Maintenance Agreement subject to the agreement of the EWWH committee.

Tennis court: The tennis court fence at Heath End has become very loose; Scofell has quoted £200 to repair the fence and cut back overhanging tree growth from the court. This was accepted prior to the meeting and work has been completed.

Scofell has also cut back the hedge at the front of EWWH at a pre-agreed quote of £105.

WH Rec ground: The repairs to the play areas by Dick Randall are yet to be completed due to the current freezing conditions. The quote of £993.80 was accepted. The Clerk has asked Dick Randall to repaint the swings at an additional cost of £650. It is possible more repairs will be required when Dick Randall is on site.

Scofell has quoted £100 to spray off the moss growth at both rec grounds. This was agreed prior to the meeting.

9. Meadowbrook

No update.

Action: Clerk to ask Cllr Falconer if he can assist with getting the process further along.

10. Finance Update

No further update.

11. General Maintenance

Lengthsman: Extra boards on the boardwalk have been replaced by Premier Grounds.

12. Items to take to next meeting

Bus shelters, Telephone kiosk, Noticeboards, Terms of Reference

Actions from 23 January 2023

- Committee to send thoughts on roller blind wording to Cllr Rand
- Clerk to contact CE Groundworks for a quote to improve the camber on parts of the path and add extra material.
- Cllr Roots to decide areas of parish field to photograph for visual diary for biodiversity.
- Clerk to add Amenities ToR, Bus shelters, Telephone kiosk, Noticeboards to next agenda.
- Clerk to get stand for lectern delivered and arrange installation (when weather improves).
- Clerk to ask Cllr Falconer if he can assist with getting the process of transferring Meadowbrook land ownership to EWPC further along.

Next Full Amenities Meeting:

Monday 23rd January 2023, Woolton Hill Church Hall

Cllr Roots Suggested Parish Field Observation Schedule:

Parish field : Increasing bio diversity and establishing a management guide for the future.

It is my opinion that for the first year of what is a new project, the main objective will be to observe and note what is actually going on, season by season. What follows is therefore a preliminary overview with outline recommendations. The field has not been subject to the application of fertilizer or weedkiller and is in good health. The overall ambition is, in my view, to continue the current light touch approach, with careful additions of wildflowers

(seeds or plugs) at the appropriate time of year. Restrained but thoughtful care of the field will, over time, encourage a greater range of species, both of plants and wildlife.

The field is cut annually, the crop removed . This usually occurs in late summer, or early autumn. The grass is not grazed. The ‘poaching’ of the ground by the feet of sheep or cattle for a short time after the removal of the crop can help keep grass short and push seeds into the earth. In the case of the parish field, with public access along the path, grazing is not feasible.

There are areas where unwelcome plants have established (bracken in SW corner) and it would be helpful to remove these before they become more invasive. In summer the removal (by hand) of ragwort before taking a crop of hay is advised; if the hay is to be used for feed this is important as ragwort is even more poisonous when dried. (Ragwort is the favoured plant of the cinnabar moth; removal of the plant can be done when necessary).

Most of the field is well drained but there are some areas where water fails to drain, pooling in times of heavy rain. The path remains largely dry but its existence is, in some places, inhibiting drainage. Since footfall is now restricted to the path, which is at a slightly higher level, this is not a serious problem for access but observation of the effects of altered drainage since it was installed is worth noting.

The Field is surrounded on three sides by domestic boundaries, with the SW section (opposite surgery) fenced but open to the road. On the Eastern boundary (Church Road) a mixed hedge exists. This should be cut during winter when birds are not nesting.

A survey has been done of the many grasses and (fewer) wildflowers in the field. Over the course of this year a close look at the species already growing is recommended. A basic assessment of what exists and what might be further encouraged can be made. It is certain that more species will come, both animal and plant, with sensitive care.

A basic calendar for field management follows.

In general : No fertilizers or chemicals to be applied at any time whatsoever. Nutrient poor soil and no damage from pesticides is crucial to a healthy meadow.

Clearance of areas in order to sow seed has to be done without using weedkillers. It may be quick but it completely undermines the ecology of the biodiverse aims of any project.

The field is, as far as one can tell, unaffected by any unwanted run off from outside its boundaries. It is fairly level, well drained (with the minor exceptions referred to above) and in an open and sunny situation. All these are very positive points when encouraging biodiversity.

Spring

In some cases, harrowing the field in spring to remove thatch from dead grass, acting as a form of scarifying, can be helpful. I suggest we ‘wait and see’ this year. Checking that aggressive weeds such as nettles and docks don’t overwhelm any areas, although nettles are of great benefit to wildlife so control these rather than remove.

Summer

Over time, wildflowers will, once established, give their best now.

Depending on seasonal fluctuations, late summer will be the time of year when the field needs to be cut. We are fortunate that the harvest is managed well. In brief, the field is cut, the grass turned (helpful to shake out seeds), and collected. These actions are important and the timings have implications:

It is worth pointing out that the earlier the cut (somewhere between June/ July – September) the more nutrients will be removed, the greater the impact on the control of the grass and weeds. As already stated, wildflower meadows need nutrient poor land. However, the current programme adopts a late summer early autumn cutting regime. It seems to work well and will be pursued.

Once flowers begin to proliferate a late cut is obviously likely to be better to take advantage of the wildflowers in bloom. The advantage of a late cut is that seeds will ripen and set, some being distributed before cutting, many dropping when cutting takes place and when cut hay is turned. It is important to make sure cut hay is on the ground for two or three days as the whole process of cutting a field has quite a dramatic effect on insects and any other wildlife. They need time to move before the hay is baled. Removing the hay is essential so that it doesn't act as a mulch and nourish the earth.

Summer/ Autumn

Once the field has been harvested, the grass being cut as close to the ground as possible, it is then possible to introduce seeds or plugs. Some seeds need winter cold to germinate. The successful addition of seeds to well established grass areas is difficult to achieve. However, scarifying localized areas, revealing as much earth as possible and applying seed mixed with sand (the application rate is very low/economical per square metre) and then treading it in, might/should encourage establishment. Grass is always going to outgrow wildflowers so the less competition the better. Some practitioners advocate the application of glyphosphate to clear ground to do this but I do not advocate this, especially after researching the subject more deeply. Perennial wildflower seed generally takes at least a year to establish and the germination rate is, depending on the species, about 85%. The task of adding seeds and thus more colour may sound daunting but I think it is entirely possible. It would be excellent if we could encourage the establishment of yellow rattle – not always easy – as it acts as a parasite on grass, helping to thin the sward. Seed is cheaper than plugs and must come from responsible British seed suppliers. (see notes). Not all wildflower suppliers are equal!

This is a project in its infancy and will take time. Carefully done we should all reap the rewards.

Notes on Wildflower seeds/plugs and Oak Trees

As explained in the notes/calendar for the field, adding seeds or plugs to grassland is difficult unless areas can be scarified or scraped to earth so that weeds and grass do not compete while seeds establish.

The sowing of ONLY UK sourced seeds is also vital. British Wildflower seed, through HABITAT AID is a recommended source. (See their website). They are a cross between a sort of NGO for biodiversity and act as a link to recommended suppliers. I have not given costs because I need to clarify the areas to be scarified/seeded. General application is 1g mixed in sand per square metre of cleared soil. Seeded areas enable more biodiversity than plug plants and are cheaper to establish.

Plug plants are £87 per tray of 104 plugs, (20% + discounts on more) 5 per square metre. Planting after harvest might mean these get away faster than seeds but much more expensive and one tray, planted at their suggested rates = 20 sq m.

Oak Tree:

I suggest either Quercus Robur (common oak) or Quercus Rubra. (Red leaves in autumn) Probably best to plant in Autumn, given the summers we have. Trees can be planted Nov to March, but might need a bit more TLC if planted in March. It is much better for the plant to go in the ground as a juvenile, in other words not more than 2 – 3 m high and with a girth no more than 10cm. Both these trees would do well in the SE area of the field.

Prices, as a guide (Ashridge Trees in Somerset – I have used – good) as a guide:

Q Robur and Rubra : 6/8 cm girth, 2 – 2.25m high - £89;

8/10 cm girth 3m high : £168

These are bare rooted and lifted between November and March. Both would need stakes and a decision taken as to where – and when – they should be planted.