

## GENERAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the General Services Committee held at 6.30pm on Tuesday, 31 August 2021 in the Town Hall, Banbury.

Present: Councillor Colegrave (Chairman)  
Councillors: Bunce, Dalton, Donaldson, Kilsby, Mears, Phillips, Powell and Richards.

Officers: Mark Recchia (Town Clerk)  
Mark Hassall (Deputy Town Clerk & RFO)

**GS.9/21 Apologies for Absence**  
Councillor Cherry and Paul Almond (Operations Manager).

**GS.10/21 Declarations of Interest**  
None.

**GS.11/21 Minutes of the Last Meeting**

**IT WAS RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 June 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**GS.12/21 Income & Expenditure Report**  
The Committee considered a report prepared by the Deputy Town Clerk/RFO comparing year-to-date income and expenditure with the projected annual budget for the financial year. The report showed all expenditure incurred up to 23 August 2021.

Officers responded to a range of questions from Members relating to various budget codes and financial procedures. Members' attention was drawn to the fact that overall the Committee's expenditure was within forecast. This recognised the timing of completion of capital works and improved grant income. The main causes of variations were addressed as follows:

- Timing of grounds maintenance costs impacted equally by seasonality and awaiting August invoicing, across Parks, Football pitches and Horton View. Annual costs would be reviewed during the 6+6 budgeting exercise.
- Increased expenditure on cleaning across the estate, offset by grant income from the Controlling Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) received into the Resources committee within other income (£110k).
- Timing of capital expenditure invoices for Hillview play area refurbishment, which would be completed shortly.
- Increased advertising on Bus Shelters was being funded by a grant received from COMF.

**IT WAS RESOLVED** to receive and note the Income and Expenditure report.

**GS.13/21 Parks and Open Spaces Monitoring Report**  
The Committee considered a report on the condition of the parks, recreation grounds and open spaces in Banbury. The report covered the following areas:

- Parks & Cemetery Team Service Staffing.
- 4th Corner Landscape Contract.
- Park Ranger Service.
- People's Park – Walled Garden Refurbishment Design.
- St Mary's Churchyard – Landscape Refurbishment Design.
- Hardwick Hill Cemetery – Extension Planning.
- Princess Diana Park – Drainage Scheme.
- Banbury Borough Bowls Club - Lease Renewal.
- Land Adoptions - Hanwell View MUGA and associated Public Open Space & Longford Park Sports Pitch, Pavilion and associated Public Open Space.

#### Parks and Cemeteries Staffing

Unfortunately, over the last six months the service had been under considerable strain due to the high turnover of staff in both the parks and cemetery teams. In addition to these vacancies two further absences had occurred as a result of Covid 19 self isolations. Despite a comprehensive recruitment campaign the Council had difficulty in attracting suitable candidates to fill these roles. There were a number of factors that had contributed to this:

- The high employment in the area.
- A shortage of horticulturally qualified operatives within the industry.
- Competition from other local employers.
- Failure to recruit to the Seasonal Operative position despite twice advertising
- The current terms and conditions for the roles.

Although recent interviews would hopefully see the vacant positions recruited to, there was still a concern over the retention of staff. A report would be going to the Resources Committee on the 7<sup>th</sup> September 2021 which had recommendations regarding the terms and conditions of the staff that it was hoped would position the Town Council favourably in the employment market and aid long term retention of staff.

#### 4th Corner Landscape Contract

Although 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Ltd had experienced some of the same difficulties that the Council had with staff recruitment, they were delivering a good standard of maintenance in line with the contract standard. During August they did request approval to work on a Saturday to allow them to keep on schedule with the grass cutting of the recreation grounds. No other concerns with the contract performance were reported.

#### Park Ranger Service

Despite Covid self isolations, the team were up to date with the Health & Safety inspections of children's play areas, and had been busy carrying out repairs and installing the new Covid 19 guidance signs. They had also been assisting the parks team with annual bedding plant watering and the adopt a pot scheme for the Town Centre. Other activities included:

- Dealing with travellers accessing Moorfields Park.
- Improving security of some of our other sites, overseeing bollard installation.
- Opening up and closing facilities for sports pitch hirers.

- Assisting with the smooth running of events in parks, fairs, charity walks and activity days.

#### Peoples Park Walled Garden Landscape Design

The design aimed to incorporate and build on the features that were previously incorporated in the walled garden, to include sensory planting, incredible edible beds for vegetable and fruit production, lawn and seating area, tree and shrub nursery storage area improved tree, shrub and herbaceous planting refurbishment of pond feature, improved DDA access.

#### St Mary's Closed Churchyard Landscape Refurbishment Scheme

The design aimed to provide an improved landscape design that would be appropriate for the current growing conditions, with the mature tree canopy on site, whilst where possible including some of the plant varieties from the design by Dame Sylvia Crowe commissioned by Banbury Borough in 1949 and implemented 1950-51.

#### Hardwick Hill Cemetery Extension

Officers were still waiting to hear from the County Archaeologist, despite chasing, on whether further archaeological works were required. This may have an effect on the layout and the hard and soft landscape proposals. These were the only conditions still outstanding.

#### Princess Diana Park – Drainage

Members were advised that the drainage scheme to prevent water run-off from Princess Diana Park into Mold Crescent previously approved at the General Services Committee in March 2021 was now underway and due to be completed in the next couple of weeks.

#### Banbury Borough Bowls Lease Renewal

All legal documentation for the new combined lease had now been drawn up by Brethertons Solicitors and was ready for signing by the Club Trustees. The new lease would run for 20 years from 1 January 2018

#### Land Adoptions

*Hanwell View MUGA and associated Public Open Space.*

This site was now laid out and ready for adoption. The Legal process was underway for adoption by the Town Council subject to agreeing terms for the Joint Use Agreement with the school for use of the MUGA during school time.

*Longford Park Sports Pitches, Pavilion and associated Public Open Space.*

The sports pitches and Pavilion had reached Practical Completion, and subject to agreeing the commuted sums that were due in relation to all the facilities the legal process for adoption by the Town Council could begin.

In response to a member's question the Town Clerk confirmed that the potential to incorporate a radio controlled car track into an open space could be investigated.

It was then **RESOLVED** to:

- (1) note the Parks and Cemetery Service Update.

- (2) note the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Landscape Contract Update.
- (3) note the Park Ranger Service Update.
- (4) approve the design and authorise the Town Clerk to tender and complete the refurbishment of the Walled Garden at People's Park, within agreed budgets.
- (5) approve the design and authorise the Town Clerk to tender and complete the Landscape refurbishment of St Marys Churchyard, within agreed budgets.
- (6) note the update on the Hardwick Hill Cemetery extension and to authorise the Town Clerk to develop layout plans and complete the landscape designs, to secure full planning consent.
- (7) note the progress on the Princess Diana Park Drainage Scheme.
- (8) note progress on completing the Lease with the Banbury Borough Bowls Club.
- (9) authorise the Town Clerk to accept the transfer of the MUGA and associated Public Open Space at Hanwell View once the Joint Use Agreement terms are agreed, and the Sports Pitches, Pavilion and associated Public Open Space at Longford Park, with the appropriate Commuted Sums.

The meeting ended at 7.15pm