

# Marlborough Town Council



## Amenities and Open Spaces Committee

**Minutes of a meeting of the Amenities and Open Spaces Committee held Monday, 17 June 2024 in the Council Chamber, Marlborough Town Hall at 7pm**

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<b>PRESENT</b>	Councillor Mark Cooper	Chair
	Councillor Kym-Marie Cleasby	Town Mayor
	Councillor Andrew Ross	
	Councillor Lisa Farrell	
	Councillor Mark Luson	
	Councillor Susannah O'Brien	
	Councillor Kelvyn Shantry	
	Richard Spencer-Williams	Town Clerk
	Nigel Weatherly	Grounds Manager
	Dawn Whitehall	Corporate Services Officer
<b>ALSO PRESENT</b>	Neil Goodwin	Marlborough.News
	Anna Forbes	Action for the River Kennet (ARK)
	Eleven members of the public	

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The Chair welcomed all those present to the first meeting of the Amenities & Open Spaces (A&OS) Committee of 2024-25.

### **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

**Stewart Dobson (resident and former Councillor)** asked whether the Chair intended to suspend Standing Orders at agenda item 6 (Stonebridge Meadow) so that interested members of the public could comment. The **Chair** confirmed that he would.

**Neil Goodwin (Marlborough.News)** – referred to an agreement from February 2021 to use Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Funds for the creation of a new footpath joining Salisbury Road to the Old Railway Path via the 'sheep ramp' which was now very overgrown. He asked for an update on funding and plans. The **Town Clerk** would investigate and reply as appropriate.

**Sue Round (resident)** – a nearby resident of Stonebridge Meadow (Sue emphasised that she was not representing Marlborough News or asking as a dog-walker or a member of ARK). Her question was why there was a question over how Stonebridge Meadow was being managed to provide “open access amenity land”? From her point of view this prize-winning area was used extensively by people of all ages, including visitors to the town. The Town Council and ARK were doing a good job in facilitating this and the status quo should continue. She would like the Town Council to take the following into account in their deliberations:

- The meadow is a water meadow and is soggy and marshy for much of the year – so not suitable for ball games. The football field and designated Elcot Lane village green area is adjacent and the Recreation Ground not far away for these activities
- There are already benches, wheelchair accessible riverside board walk, beach areas (used extensively by families in the summer), seating areas on logs, defined walks, paths cut through long grass in summer, snakes head fritillaries in the spring, bird feeders with screen to watch and identify them
- ARK encourage many different groups to use the area and educate us about wildlife – 2,000+ children last year, bat and moth walks, over 400 volunteers
- The area provides habitat for many rare and declining species e.g. water voles, harvest mice
- Picnic tables would not be in keeping with the area and would encourage graffiti and litter. Closely mown grass would destroy valuable wildlife habitats

Let’s remember this is a prize-winning nature reserve, a haven for nature with proven wellbeing effects for us. We need to keep it as such, not try to turn it into a sterile park. The **Chair** thanked her for the question. Her comments would be taken into consideration when Members discussed agenda item 6.

**Val Compton (resident)** - Within, and on the doorstep of Marlborough, there are no less than 10 places where you can play, picnic or just be. Do we really need to sacrifice even one inch of the thriving, much loved and beautiful water meadow that we know as Stonebridge Wild River Reserve? By this council showing respect and genuinely valuing the river, the meadow and all the creatures living there, they could lead the way on the importance of protecting nature. Residents of Marlborough, many of whom access Stonebridge regularly, will then see that this council, alongside ARK, are prepared to be the guardians of such wild treasure. Our future generations will hopefully take notice and also learn how to respect and love nature, which in these times, is such an important lesson. She therefore asked again “ Do we really need to sacrifice even one inch of the thriving, much loved and beautiful water meadow that we know as Stonebridge Wild River Reserve?”

The **Chair** thanked her for the question. Her comments would be taken into consideration when Members discussed agenda item 6.

**Bronwyn Brown (Allotment Association)** asked whether members would discuss the Stonebridge allotment site at the meeting. The **Chair** appreciated there were issues at that site: while there was a general update about allotments on the agenda, a specific discussion about the Stonebridge site was not. He agreed that an agenda item would be added to the next meeting.

**59/24**

**APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence had been received from **Councillors Sheppard and Trow**.

**60/24**

**DECLARATIONS**

**Councillors Cooper and Luson** – agenda item 14 (Allotments) – non-pecuniary.

**61/24**

**CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The **Chair** referred to a recent incident where a driver leaving the car park at the Community & Youth Centre car park had smashed into and damaged a wall. The police had made a positive identification and would be conducting an interview with the driver. This reinforced the Committee's decision to install a car park barrier.

**62/24**

**MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** that the minutes of the meeting held 15 April 2024 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair

**63/24**

**ACTION LOG**

Members noted the updated action log.

**Councillor Farrell** asked whether the CCTV cameras at the Community & Youth Centre required renewal or cleaning, and whether police were able to use the images to identify car registrations or individuals. The **Town Clerk** confirmed that the police had used it to gather the details of a recent incident where a vehicle had damaged a wall; he would check whether the cameras required cleaning. Better CCTV coverage, possibly in liaison with the police, could be considered as part of the work arising from a decision by Members at the previous meeting to review the entire CCTV system.

A partnership meeting had taken place earlier in the day with Wiltshire Police; it had been agreed that they would be keyholders for the new Community & Youth Centre car park barrier for their use as/if required. Members also noted arrangements being put in place to communicate with local residents about the change in parking arrangements once the barrier was installed after the wall had been repaired. A non-confrontational approach coupled with clear signage and ongoing communication would be adopted.

**STONEBRIDGE MEADOW**

The **Chair** appreciated that people felt passionate about Stonebridge Meadow and so, prior to Members discussing the agenda item, he invited all interested attendees to speak and asked everyone to listen respectfully to others who may have different views.

During a Suspension of Standing Orders attendees put forward their points of view:

**Marian Hannaford Dobson (resident and former Councillor)** read out a letter she had submitted prior to the meeting:

“While congratulating ARK on the management of the river Kennet and their work with local school children invited to the river, I do have some concerns about the meadow. Please, when you are debating the Agreement with ARK could you bear in mind that Marlborough Town Council own 51% of the meadow and ARK the other 49%. Marlborough Town Council invested over £75,000 of its resident’s money to buy their share of the meadow with the precise aim to provide Amenity Land for the inhabitants of Marlborough and also contributes £5,000 per year towards the upkeep of the meadow.

ARK produce a Management Plan each year which I know the Town Council scrutinise and sometimes make minor changes to. Sadly it would seem that for many years the objectives and vision that has gone forward is almost all those of ARK. I am not criticising Town Councillors for this, with so many other Town issues to consider it is easy to “Rubber Stamp” a Plan. As a former Town Councillor myself I know how this can happen.

I feel the issue which must be addressed is very clear. There are at least fifteen acres at Stonebridge Meadow. Currently it seems that ARK has total control of each and every section of the meadow. Surely this is a little one-sided? Marlborough Town Council on behalf of the residents of Marlborough are 51% partners in the control and management of the meadow and must put forward their own vision and objectives.

When the purchase of Stonebridge Meadow was first considered by the Town Council in 2011 lots of ideas were put forward to persuade Councillors to contribute to the cost of the land. The overriding point made was that it would provide Amenity Land that would enable residents to enjoy seats for the elderly and infirm to look at the river, picnic tables for families, grass areas for parents to play ball games, a games field and importantly an extended river walk for everyone to enjoy. Sadly to date this has not happened. Not even a disabled entrance to the meadow. (It was interesting to note that the recent Neighbourhood Plan highlighted the lack of playing fields in the town.)

Instead we have a Wetland on the Amenity Land where the children's play area should be. The elderly and infirm are not catered for and it is impossible for anyone using a wheelchair or walking aid to enter the meadow. There is nothing to facilitate or encourage young families to make individual visits to the meadow. It is also impossible to see most of the river as it has been fenced off on most of the meadow with often massive thickets of brambles and undergrowth sometimes up to twenty metre wide. What good is it being told that the river is beautiful and teeming with wildlife if nobody can see it?

I do feel that the residents of Marlborough are being short changed and not getting value for their initial investment of £75,000 and the ongoing maintenance cost of £5,000. Added together over the last fourteen years it amounts to a considerable sum.

Surely with fifteen acres of land at Stonebridge Meadow there must be room for a balance between meeting the aims and objectives of ARK and the need and responsibilities of the Town Council to provide the Amenity Land which was the reason why the Town Council made their 51% contribution in the first place and is clearly shown on the original Deed of Trust.

I believe this is what a Partnership should mean."

**Richard Pitts (resident and former Councillor)** rejected Mrs Hannaford-Dobson's points about disabled access, stating that there were areas with access points for the disabled and wheelchair users at both sides of the meadow to allow disabled persons to enjoy the amenity. Also:

- When buying the land, one of the drivers had initially been to prevent further building which was a potential possibility long before the climate crisis which now gives the potential for flooding in all parts of the town
- One of the ways of dealing with the potential of flooding is to have natural wetland areas such as Stonebridge Meadow which can accommodate floodwater and prevent it causing further damage to the town
- As a member of the community he was delighted to see the way the Town Council works with ARK in an agreed management plan that looks after Stonebridge Meadow on everyone's behalf
- When he was a Councillor it had been understood that the Council's slightly bigger percentage ownership he recalled was put in place to ensure that, should ARK unfortunately close, the council would have a controlling interest and so be able to retain the open space for the town and the ARK share did not get sold to a developer
- He wanted to set the record quite straight, saying that we have plenty of play areas, plenty of picnic areas and there was nothing to prevent people laying a picnic blanket down and enjoying a picnic at Stonebridge

Meadow and the seats that had been put in were a very adequate alternative for people who were not able to sit on the ground – he believed the balance was right.

**Stewart Dobson:**

- Like Mr Pitts, he had also been involved at the time of the purchase. The deed of trust clearly states the purpose for ARK to further its charitable objectives, which is fine. The trouble is that they have done that over the whole 15 acres. It also says that it is for the Town Council (which had put forward its £75,000) to provide much needed amenity land and sadly if you look at the definition of amenity land it doesn't fit quite with what is there.
- He found it hard to understand why, when we've got 15 acres, the balance seems to be ARK doing what it set out to do which they were entitled to, certainly in the deed of trust in their 49% but he didn't think they were able to do that in the 51% without the agreement of the Town Council. He urged the Town Council to look at its responsibility (very different to ARK) and respectfully suggested it had not been meeting its requirement to provide amenity land.
- A member of the public had already said they were quite happy with the land as it was at the moment. He would say there are people in the town who were not necessarily as happy and he urged Members to look at this and try to meet, as best they could, what everyone would like to see there. He would hate to see it come to a state where ARK had to take its 49% and the Town Council its 51%
- He asked Members to consider setting up a user group to feed in information to the Town Council to discuss with ARK. It had worked well in Mr Dobson's time for Marlborough Common
- Over the last 14 years he felt the original intention to provide amenity land had not happened and hoped a compromise could be found

**Anna Forbes (ARK):**

- Reminded everyone that the Stonebridge Meadow Management plan is a joint plan, it is not ARK's management plan. The plan was a collaboration between ARK and the Town Council. There may be more ideas in it from ARK, but the Council agreed with those ideas and nothing has been railroaded through.
- There has been a Stonebridge Meadow Management Committee (SMMC) in place since the beginning. The deed of trust says there should be 2 representatives from each party (at one point that had risen to 3 each). Meetings are held quarterly, planned from one meeting to the next to make sure everyone is free to put the date in their diary and aim for full attendance

- The above means there are equal partners in a multi award-winning, successful project
- It is not about ARK taking control – every significant new feature is agreed.
  - For example, the wetland area is a significant feature, and it had to be agreed by the Town Council before it was put in, and the wetland area is, in itself, an amenity for the public. She appreciated that 20 people might like it, 20 might not... but it isn't taking anything away, it something that people of all ages can enjoy.
- By putting the wetland in, ARK had installed recycled boardwalk (all from ARK funding) to create accessible entry; other examples of ARK significant funding were that its volunteers had recently added two ramps to make the entry more friendly to people with mobility aids or with buggies. It was doing what it could to be as inclusive as possible within the constraints of the site being a water meadow. When the meadow dries out it is far more accessible to all.
- There are benches that had been put in specifically because elderly residents asked for benches with backs and arms; the most recent one was installed over the winter
- There was now far more accessible access than at the time of purchase.
- There is less riverside fencing than when the land was purchased.
- When **Mrs Forbes** was on site last week she could still see the river.
- Access points had been created by ARK's volunteers for people to be able to get into and experience the river
- The reason we have Britain's fastest declining mammal, the water vole, thriving in the Kennet at Cooper's Meadow and at Stonebridge – which we as a town should be proud of, and which is extinct in other parts of the country - is because of the bankside vegetation
- Regular free events are arranged for children and for adults
- Out of the 400 volunteers now with ARK, over 200 volunteers regularly contribute to looking after Stonebridge, which saves ARK and the council a huge amount. Many are very skilled, carrying out maintenance and other tasks, for example extending the boardwalk that is far into the meadow, putting in ramps and notice boards. The volunteers, adults, are very much part of this community and get a great deal of pleasure from looking after and nurturing the area.

**Sue Round** added some comments to those raised earlier in the meeting:

- Her neighbours have several young children and they spend a lot of time there especially in the summer; paddling in the river, having picnics by the river
- Every time she walks round there are often parents or grandchildren there

- There are other outside activities other than ball games. A space like that is very exciting for young children – imaginative, adventurous play such as hide and seek. There are lots of things young children can do other than play with balls
- There is a boardwalk running all along the river where you get a clear view of it

**Mrs Hannaford-Dobson** asked why we are not allowed to look at our own river. If you go to any other town (e.g. Trowbridge, Oxford, Hungerford) you see seats beside the river. Here people were not allowed to go and look at their own river. She refuted **Sue Round's** response, pointing out the boardwalk that runs alongside the river on the allotment side, because it is on land ARK leases is not within the Stonebridge Meadow site, was therefore nothing to do with this meeting; it belongs to someone else.

**Judy Pitts (resident)** also emphasised that people could still walk along the boardwalk and see the river; people could admire the river from the bridge. She reminded people that there used to be seating at the end of the boardwalk on the allotment side of the river. There was a lot of antisocial behaviour and vandalism – the bench was even set on fire. It had to be removed because young people were using the area unacceptably. Prior to this people could walk along the river and use a nice quiet seating area beside the river but unfortunately it had to be removed.

**Anna Forbes:** although people say it isn't part of this discussion, the boardwalk is only the other side of the river so although it is a piece of land ARK leases, most people who are not on the Council or from ARK view the whole area as one and the same, collectively known as Stonebridge Wild River Reserve which is what was agreed by the Council on the plans. ARK invests three times (*as much money*) in the whole area; sadly benches had to be recycled because of vandalism but ARK had invested a lot of money in them.

**Stewart Dobson** felt that many years ago the river had been far more accessible. His point was that the Town Council obligations were different to those of ARK; the Town Council has a responsibility to the general public – ARK has a responsibility to its members.

**Richard Pitts** reiterated that there was a management plan in place, a management committee with two members from each party: a joint partnership in managing the meadow which was how it should be controlled, by agreement in that meeting, and anything else was irrelevant. If people understand ecology they will know that you have to have vegetation margins to make water vole habitat viable.

**Neil Goodwin:** raised practical questions

- Water meadows have a purpose. Luckily there are water meadows further upstream (e.g. Lockeridge, East Kennet) that took a lot of the water in the recent floods – without them Marlborough would have been hit far harder. If you try to build water meadows into something else, where will the water go?
- Questioned what might happen to picnic tables or amenity furniture if they were installed. The area wasn't overlooked by houses – it was an area where antisocial behaviour could thrive, with a risk of the same type of behaviour that resulted in the removal of the seating area from the opposite bank of the river.

**Val Compton** asked Members to bear in mind that they should not just be thinking about a small amenity area; the whole 15 acres is an amenity for the general public and visitors to the town. It is well used: an amenity for the public that was enjoyed by the public. She had looked up all the definitions of 'amenity' before the meeting: we have a 15 acre amenity that is accessible to anybody at any time of the day.

**Stewart Dobson** did not like to correct Mr Goodwin, but his view was that water meadows were called water meadows because they were flooded twice a year to allow grazing by animals; taking flood water was secondary  
*Some people took issue with this comment: the Chair asked them to agree to differ*

It was important that there has been a SMMC, but he wondered whether perhaps it had not always been arranged as well as it could be. For example he believed it had originally been agreed that the Chair of SMMC should be a Town Councillor. The Town Council's two representatives have a duty to make sure the views of residents are taken into account, and he hoped his suggestion of a user group would be considered.

**The Chair** thanked everyone for the questions, their comments and their courtesy in listening to those who may have different views from themselves. The amount of people present was testimony to how many people cared about our open spaces albeit they may have different views, which was always a positive way to move forward.

After Standing Orders were reinstated the Chair gave Members the opportunity to comment before moving on to debate the **Town Clerk's** report and recommendation (*summarised here*):

*"Background: At the last Committee meeting the Stonebridge Meadow Management Agreement was reviewed. At this meeting the Committee resolved to:*

*(i) to ask the Town Council's representatives at the Stonebridge Meadow Management Committee to take forward the A&OS Committee's request for an increase in recreational space and a better view of the river*

*"The Committee is asked to consider the matter, with specific attention to the Amenity aspect of the agreement and meadow itself, i.e. the definition and land use; and what or how the 'amenity area' (the area between the wetland and the conservation grazing area) at Stonebridge might be managed in addition to what is currently agreed and practiced, as requested by the SMC"*

- **Councillor Ross** was generally satisfied with the status quo. Mr and Mrs Dobson had put forward their views very strongly and the Town Council's representatives to SMMC had heard the discussion and had every guidance they would require. He was happy that the SMMC should be charged with responding, to see what tweaking could be done to the amenity area, bearing in mind it was part of a conservation project
- **Councillor Shantry** declared that he was a member and keen supporter of ARK and a volunteer for ARK; he also sits on the SMMC. He wanted to add clarity to what he believed was an extremely modest proposal:
  - All agreed on the wonderful work ARK was doing to benefit the river and its abundant wildlife
  - He did not believe the proposal would damage the flood plain
  - In context to the whole 15 acre site, there would be no change to the scrub or two beautiful flower meadows
  - The noticeboard on site has a plan which refers to the 'mown area' as an informal recreation area. It is a very small part of the reserve (probably about 5%?) and is where two benches are in place
  - Today, nothing was mown in the mown area apart from a couple of narrow tracks leading to the benches and a path alongside the river
  - There was not a mown circle
  - There were many examples further along the Kennet of closely mown riverbanks – this was *not* what was being proposed
  - What was being requested was an area probably about 30 sq yards that could be mown closely so that children can wander, plus a couple of picnic benches. Organised school parties could use these for breaks – all in line with the intent stated on the notice board
  - The track that runs the length of the reserve alongside the river provides no view of the river or chance to get close to the river until you reach the bridge upstream

- What was being proposed is for a mown area with a 3-5m margin of vegetation retained for the benefit of the water voles, but somewhere where people can get close to the river on the Stonebridge Meadow side of the reserve
- He personally requested a small pond built into the mown area for children to go pond dipping
- He didn't think anyone would be playing ball games there
- If there was antisocial behaviour or vandalism, the benches would be removed
- It was a modest request allowing the people of Marlborough to enjoy the facility in line with the original agreement and he was confident that Marlborough residents would support it
- **Councillor Farrell** agreed with some of Cllr Shantry's points, especially regarding the size of the mown area and seating areas. She wondered whether all people's views were being taken into account, whether it would help to canvass the whole community on their views.
- The **Town Mayor, Councillor Cleasby** had no objections to the points raised by Councillor Shantry and agreed that it would be nice to have somewhere to sit at the meadow. She cautioned all to look at the request in the round: Stonebridge Meadow was not the only amenity space in Marlborough: there are other places where people can have picnics and get near the river, as well as defined play areas. In reaching agreement she didn't want to lose focus on the fact that Marlborough has an extraordinary area that as a town we are and should be proud of and we should recognise that has been achieved in partnership with ARK. She stressed that it was a partnership and not about which party had how many acres and it should continue as a partnership: what was agreed together should be implemented. Proposals should be taken to the management meeting and she was confident the Town Council representatives were more than capable of representing those views. She didn't agree about consulting the wider community – any solution would not please all the people all the time and it may even cause more upset. Council has delegated responsibility to the SMMC and that body should take the decision looking at the request in terms of all the open spaces available across the town. She didn't think it was necessary to implement the same approach to every area.
- **Councillor Lusson** worried about the impact of even a moderate amount of clearance given what had happened in the flood. The whole area at Stonebridge, including the allotments, had been largely unusable since Christmas. He worried whether any attempt to clear vegetation would damage biodiversity to reap some reward for the sake of a few weeks or months in the summer and for that reason erred more to the side of keeping the area as it is currently, conscious of the fact that the town does have Priory Gardens, Coopers Meadow, and The Common with a

large area of open space where people can play. He agreed that the proposal should be considered against the wider picture of the town and everything it has to offer, but maintaining Stonebridge Meadow as it is. He pointed out that one of the very few mandates of a Town Council is to protect the environment and increase biodiversity.

- **Councillor Ross** questioned why the proposal had been brought to this Committee rather than to take a decision at the SMMC. He would prefer to see the proposal discussed at the SMMC so it could be agreed with ARK.
- **Councillor Farrell** asked whether the proposal (*a request raised by members of the public at the previous A&OS Committee, for discussion at the SMMC*) had been discussed at the last meeting of the SMMC. **Councillor O'Brien** confirmed that it had been. She felt the request had not been properly discussed or agreed at the SMMC so the Town Council representatives had therefore referred it back to this Committee.
- **Councillor Shantry** agreed with Councillor Luson that the area would probably only be used 3 or 4 months a year. The mown area is about 50 yards from the river and probably couldn't be mown until May or June; but it would provide a nice area to use in the summer holidays. He wanted to keep a 3-5m margin so didn't believe it would affect wildlife and did not see any issue with meeting the request.
- The **Town Mayor** pointed out that when the original agreement was put together to manage the meadow it had been a different time; since that time as a society we have recognised more the importance of conservation and biodiversity. The original vision for the site therefore may not necessarily be the same today – everything changes with time. Additionally, in this joint venture we do have experts on biodiversity and we should listen to their views; not necessarily just to accept what they say but to consider their expert view.

The **Chair** thanked Members for their comments. He recognised that partnerships could be tricky at times, in all aspects of life, but ultimately it was all about working together. He stated that we are all incredibly proud of what ARK has achieved. He believed that as a Town Council we also needed to get more involved; by requesting things we want we can make sure they are properly considered. The passion shown (*at this meeting*) demonstrates a common cause and that we can all work together; as Councillors this can be a difficult job because we have to try to please everyone. Separate to the SMMC, perhaps the Committee could debate the merits of a user group at a future meeting. Members now needed to agree a proposal about the mown area and benches to be taken back to the SMMC. Views on the impact on ecology should be part of that. Risks about antisocial behaviour should also be considered. Perhaps a short trial might be a way to move forward.

A proposal by **Councillor Ross** seconded by **Councillor Luson** to keep the status quo (i.e. that the SMMC have been made aware of feelings expressed this evening and should be empowered to recognise this and come to an agreement, aware of expert opinions on wildlife, and report their decision back to this committee, but that SMMC, not the A&OS Committee, should make the decision) received 3 votes for with 4 against, therefore was not carried.

The **Town Clerk** and **Councillor O'Brien** clarified that the outcome of the last SMMC was not a refusal of the original request, but that Town Council representatives were asked to come back to the A&OS Committee to gather views and a clear Town Council proposal to take back to the SMMC for decision and action.

**RESOLVED:** (i) that the views expressed at this meeting regarding the request for picnic benches and a mown area be taken back to the SMMC for a meaningful discussion, including consideration of any ecological impact, and to recommend a solution for agreement at this Committee

**RESOLVED:** (ii) to add a discussion about whether to create a Stonebridge Meadow user group to a future agenda

*Nine members of the public left the meeting*

#### **65/24      GROUNDS MANAGER'S REPORT**

Members noted the Grounds Manager's report and all expressed dismay that watering cans had been stolen (again) from Marlborough Cemetery. Members debated this, including:

- whether to provide any water carrying equipment at all
- whether to provide undesirable but practical vessels such as milk cartons
- whether to put up signage to discourage further theft
- whether to ask for donated vessels
- whether to replace them with brightly painted and easily identifiable watering cans, together with an obvious location for their storage and return after use by patrons, and at the same time to post photographs of them to raise awareness and discourage their removal

**RESOLVED:** to provide distinctive, easily identifiable watering cans for the Cemetery with hooks or stands

#### **66/24      TREE REPORT**

Members noted the report on the management of the Council's trees.

**RESOLVED:** that work to trees at Stonebridge Meadow is agreed at a cost of £4,122 + VAT (50% of the total cost, with the remainder being paid by ARK)

67/24

### **FINANCE REPORT**

Members noted the A&OS finance report for month 2.

**Councillor Ross** queried the projects budget, which showed at 218% spend against budget. The **Town Clerk** agreed to provide an email response to clarify payments regarding projects, which included the new barrier for the Community & Youth Centre.

68/24

### **GROUNDS TEAM CAPACITY AND SICKNESS COVER**

Members considered the need for ensuring service delivery by the Grounds Team in the event of loss of capacity through sickness or unplanned external demand:

- In recent weeks the team had been reduced to 50% capacity, hampering the completion of routine tasks such as grass cutting and tending the Cemetery as well as contributing to project work. This had led to a number of complaints by members of the public
- Whether Councillors were aware of the impact of project work on the team's workload
- Whether, when Councillors agree new actions, they discussed staff availability with either the Town Clerk or Grounds Manager to check capacity and/or staff impact
- That decisions about the deployment of staff should always be made by the Town Clerk or Grounds Manager rather than directed by projects
- Whether to use temporary or contract services to cover short periods of absence
- Whether to recruit or identify local people who might be interested in providing short term cover
- That core services, especially those areas that had a wide public impact such as grass cutting, emptying bins, and looking after the Cemetery, should always be prioritised over project work
- Should there be a future period where staff capacity was significantly reduced, to pro-actively share this information with the public to ask them to bear with us and explain why some routine tasks may take a little longer
- Whether any decision should be considered/ratified by the Staffing Committee

**RESOLVED:** that in periods of Grounds Team staff absences, core tasks should be prioritised ahead of project work and that a staff sickness contingency be requested as part of the 2025-26 budget setting process

**ACTION:** add to a Staffing Committee agenda to provide more detail ahead of the budget-setting round

#### **69/24 WORKSHOP EXTENSION**

The Town Clerk gave a verbal update on the project:

- The new barn was now complete, secure, alarmed and looking good
- Parking and landscaping were complete
- A tender process for the next stage could begin once plans and a specification had been drawn up

**RESOLVED:** to delegate a decision on the tender process to the Town Clerk, Chair of A&OS, Chair of Property and Grounds Manager and the Town Council's agent

#### **70/24 CEMETERY EXTENSION**

Members noted the Town Clerk's report, and he provided a verbal update. The consultation timeline had been agreed at the last meeting but would be delayed due to the anticipated land handover from GreenSquare Accord not having yet been achieved. The play equipment had not yet been installed and there were still access and landscaping works outstanding before it could be transferred.

#### **71/24 CEMETERY REPORT**

- (i) Members noted Grants of Exclusive Rights of Burial that had been issued for the period 22 March to 3 June 2024
- (ii) Members noted inscriptions that had been approved for the period 22 March 3 June 2024

#### **72/24 ALLOTMENTS**

**Councillor Luson** provided a verbal update:

- The minutes of the most recent meeting of the Allotment Association (AA) were available
- The AA had renewed a T H White loyalty scheme for its members
- Surplus produce was being shared via the Community Fridge and Love Marlborough Kids Meals
- Elcot Lane : allotment holders were arranging delivery of compost; issues with rats were being addressed
- St Johns Close : still seeking a mower for the community garden, although storage may be an issue
- Stonebridge : AA had been disappointed at the 50% fee reduction hoping it would be waived entirely, although several allotment holders had signed up. Of those who had renewed, some were not maintaining their plots as requested, and they were becoming overgrown
- Whether a future meeting could consider a programme of work for more preventive action that could help in future, e.g. working with partners to clear drainage ditches etc to help ensure the site won't suffer the same level of flooding in future years

**73/24 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED:** that, under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and representatives of the press and broadcast media be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following item of business as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted

**74/24 TRACTOR CLUTCH**

As some quotations were still expected the Committee was not in a position to take a decision at the meeting.

**RESOLVED:** to delegate a decision on the Iseki Tg5470 tractor clutch repair to the Town Clerk, Chair of A&OS and Grounds Manager after receipt of further quotations

The meeting closed at 9.12 pm

Signed: ..... Date: .....  
Chair