

MINUTES OF THE PARKS AND EVENTS COMMITTEE HELD ON 30TH JANUARY, 2018

Present: Councillor K Shaw (Chair) and
Councillors Mrs J A Bell, Mrs G Bleasdale,
Mrs K Brace, S P Colburn,
Ms R M Gratton, G N Hepworth,
Mrs L Kennedy, D McKenna, T Shepherd,
B Taylor, Miss L Willis

Apologies: Councillors Mrs B E Allen,
R Arthur, E Bell, S Cudlip, D Cummings,
Mrs V Cummings, Mrs S Forster,
Mrs S Pratt,

Prior to commencement of the meeting the Chair advised members of this Committee and members of the public that in line with the amendment to 'the public bodies (admission to meetings) act 1960', which came into force in August, 2014, parts of this meeting may be recorded by photographic, video and audio means.

1. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded prior to the start of the meeting of the need to disclose any interests, prejudicial or personal, in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 21st NOVEMBER, 2017

RECOMMENDED the Minutes of this meeting, a copy of which had been previously printed and circulated to each Member, be approved and signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

3. ALLOTMENTS

Mr James Smith from Fishbone Allotments stated that following the Full Council meeting he attended and requested evidence of allegations of a puppy farm being run from the allotment site he was told that he would receive some evidence that the Town Council had received. Mr Smith asked if this evidence was now available as he hadn't received anything. Mr Smith also stated that the Council have met with all of the Allotment Associations with a view to the rule changes and has there been any developments on this.

The Deputy Town Clerk stated that the puppy farm situation is a legal thing and if a member of the public gives the Town Council information it has to be kept anonymous as they would be concerned about their own safety and the Town Council wouldn't pass this information to another member of the public. Mr Smith accepted this and asked if there was any update on the situation. The Deputy Town Clerk explained that Mr Smith had asked for the evidence and the Deputy Town Clerk stated that it was a member of the public who didn't want to be named and it would be a breach if the Town Council passed on this information.

A Member stated that she was one of the Members who stated that she would like the Allotment Association to be given the information, however the Town Council have sought legal advice and it isn't the Deputy Town Clerks choice to do this and due to it being an ongoing investigation with the Police, Members are unaware as to what is happening, however when information is received and the Town Council are legally allowed to pass this on as an outcome then they will. The Member stated that she wasn't aware of what was happening at the last meeting and the Deputy Town Clerk is quite right that nothing can be disclosed as yet.

Mr Smith questioned whether it is still the Town Council's intention to deal directly with each Association when specific problems arise because the Associations cannot fix a problem if they don't know it has arisen. The Deputy Town Clerk stated that the Town Council do deal with the Allotment Associations all of the time with issues but where it is a member of the public passing on information and they wish to remain anonymous then the correspondence can't be shared as evidence.

A Member asked Mr Smith if he wanted the name of the person who had made the complaint or whether it would be the outcome of the investigation that was required. Mr Smith stated that not just on this instance but on others where there are complaints made the Allotment Association are there to manage on behalf of the Council and the Association can't manage the problem if they don't know there is a problem there. Mr Smith stated he understands the legalities of this situation but wanted to know if it is still the Councils intention that if someone reports a problem then the Association are contacted to discuss the problem. The Member stated that it is the Councils understanding. The Deputy Town Clerk agreed but on this instance it something that is alleged to be illegal then the Council may want to collate evidence before the evidence disappears.

Mr Smith questioned whether he would be given the outcome which he assured he would be and he understood that if a member of the public thought a puppy farm was taking place at the site they had every right and should report it.

A Member stated that the Council are here to help the Associations and not to hurt them. A meeting is going to be arranged where all of the Associations will be invited to discuss their problems and if the Associations don't like what the Council is doing then the Council can try and put it right. Mr Smith stated that the Associations have met and they feel that the Council are not trying to help but are trying to impose their will on the Associations. The Deputy Town Clerk stated that the allotments were provided for certain reasons and at the moment there are issues surrounding dogs and other things and the Council want to improve things for the benefit of Seaham as a whole. Mr Smith stated that himself and other allotment holders feel that the Town Council are trying to impose a set of rules on the allotment holders but it doesn't work.

A Member stated that the rules which were discussed at the meeting cannot be set in stone from that meeting it would have to be taken back to Full Council for a vote. Mr Smith stated that allotment holders weren't given a discussion they came into the meeting and were handed a set of rules and regulations and a Member told them that is what is going to happen and it will be imposed within a year and that did not go down well with the holders.

A Member stated that what Allotment holders were given at the meeting was what Councillors thought was a relevant item for separate allotment holders. It is no more than what is already set down as what the Council expect the allotment holders to abide to. No animals on the allotments apart from chickens and pigeons, no businesses and all allotments would be run in exactly the same way so there would be uniformity across the board and so no-one felt they were receiving preferential treatment and that was all that was suggested. Mr Smith stated it wasn't a suggestion it was an imposition. The Member stated that individual Allotment Associations were invited to come in to discuss with the Council what the Council would like to implement. A due date hasn't been decided to implement this but when the Council do decide the Allotment Associations will be informed about it. If more discussions are required by the Allotment Associations with the Council then this can go ahead. The Council just wants uniformity across the board. What was put to the Allotment Associations is what is already in place and has been in place for years but the Council want some structure to the allotments in Seaham. Mr Smith questioned why a Member stated that this is going to happen and it will happen within a year. A Member stated that an allotment holder had mentioned Councillor Johnson from previous years and there was an open ended amnesty. The Member stated what was the point in having an amnesty if it was open ended that isn't an amnesty it is carte blanche to do what you want. The Council stated they would put a timescale for what they would like to do as a Council, what the Council agreed they would like to do with Allotment holders and that they would abide by. The Council will put in place a timeframe and the Allotment Associations can come to an agreement themselves at how to structure it and bring it about. At the end of the timescale those rules will be adhered to the amnesty will end and the rules will be adhered to with agreement with the Associations.

Mr Smith stated that this is wrong as the Council are as much as saying with help from them what the Council are saying is going to happen. A Member stated that another discussion can take place with the Associations but at the end of the day there will have to be a cut off whereby the Council and the Associations agree a joint venture where a set of rules and regulations whereby everyone abides by. The fact remains that there have been too many grey areas over the allotments over the years and this Council wants to get rid of those grey areas and have everything black and white. Mr Smith stated again the Council are stating what is going to happen (you will). The Allotment Associations are quite happy to come and discuss things with the Council but they are not willing to accept carte blanche from the Council to say what is happening it's not the way that democracy works.

The Chair stated that the role of the Allotment Sub-Committee is to meet with the Associations to meet on some middle ground and move forward so the Council can make a recommendation. Mr Smith stated that hasn't happened and the Chair stated that this is what will happen.

A Member stated that the Council are not going to do anything without the permission of the Allotment Association. The Council want to invest money in the allotments as they have been left for far too long. The Council are not saying what you have to do with regards to getting the animals out the Council wants to talk about it. A member of the public stated that is what the letter states that is what the Council is going to do. The Member stated he didn't write the letter. The Member stated that all the Council want to do is invest money in the allotments. Mr Smith stated that has never been said and has never come across. Things are only going

to happen with the permission of the Associations.

The Chair reiterated that this decision isn't going to be made by the Allotment Sub-Committee, the decision will be made by the Full Council. Mr Smith asked why is it then that a Member of the Allotment Sub-Committee is saying this is going to happen. A Member stated that is what he wants to happen.

A member of the public questioned about what investment was planned for the allotments. A Member stated that Seaham Community Party want to spend £100k on the allotments. A member of the public stated that this was nonsense. The Chair stated that this was out of order as any decision to be made would be made by the Full Council and not by a minority party of the Council.

Mr Smith questioned when the next meeting would be taking place between the Council and the Allotment Associations. The Deputy Town Clerk stated there was an Allotment Sub-Committee taking place next week and another Association were coming in to talk to the Council.

A Member stated that the Associations would be invited to attend another meeting before anything is agreed by the Council. Mr Smith asked if allotment holders can be given an idea of what is to be discussed before the meeting takes place so they can discuss it at an Association meeting prior to coming to the meeting as at the last meeting they were just given a list of rules and weren't informed of this before they attended. A Member suggested that an agenda be given to the Chairmen of the Associations prior to the meeting so they can discuss this with their members prior to attending.

The Chair reiterated that no decision will be made until it is ratified by Full Council. The Full Council makes the decisions not the Sub-Committees or part of the political make up of this Council. A Member stated that the Deputy Town Clerk handed out copies of the proposals for the allotment holders to take away with them. Mr Smith stated they were handed a list of proposals that the Council wanted to impose on the Associations with no prior knowledge of what the meeting was about. A Member stated that the Deputy Town Clerk handed these out to all Associations and asked that they take them away and read them and share them with their members. A member of the public stated he was handed the same set of rules about not keeping animals on the land and he has grazing land. The Chair stated if there has been a breakdown in the process it will be looked at. Mr Smith stated that allotment holders were asked questions which they couldn't answer because they had not been able to speak to their members about prior to the meeting and felt that the Allotment Sub-Committee were forcing this down the allotment holders throats and trying to get a decision from the members in attendance which they couldn't do without speaking to the other members first.

A Member stated that allotment holders should have been given the information prior to the meeting so they could have discussed them with their members before attending the meeting. A Member stated that is why a second meeting can take place so they can come back with their answers. The Chair apologised if there had been a breakdown in procedure and the matter will be addressed.

A Member stated he could not remember anything being discussed about grazing land the meeting was purely about the Allotment Associations. A Member stated

that over a period of time some allotments had been turned into grazing land and people had been using this land as grazing land over a number of years and part of the clarification was to look at what is happening at the moment. Mr Smith stated he felt that they were being coerced. The Chair acknowledged Mr Smith's comment.

RECOMMENDED that:

- (i) A further meeting takes place between Allotment Associations and the Council to discuss and agree the Councils proposals.
- (ii) An agenda is sent to the Chairpersons of the Allotment Associations prior to the next meeting so they can discuss agenda items with their members prior to attending the meeting.

4. PARKS AND EVENTS SERVICES

The Committee considered the Deputy Town Clerk's report which provided an update on the following items:

4.1 Seaham Carnival 13th, 14th & 15th July 2018

The Deputy Town Clerk stated that the Carnival is taking place on the 13th, 14th and 15th July, 2018. The date was chosen some time ago to coincide with the twinning anniversaries as a run has been organised to take place between Gerlingen and Seaham. In the meantime the Durham Miners Gala have moved their date which is taking place on the 14th July and the Tall Ships event is also coming to an end on the 14th July. The Deputy Town Clerk stated he still thought the Carnival would be a good event and the Tall Ships would only be a benefit as it passes the Seaham coast.

A Member stated that the only concern was that the Durham Miners Gala is attended by a lot of families from Seaham and she was concerned that a lot of people would return to Seaham intoxicated which could be an issue. The Deputy Town Clerk stated that this would have to be monitored.

The Deputy Town Clerk stated that the Carnival isn't just 11-5pm on Sunday like it used to be, it's all weekend.

RECOMMENDED that Members note the information.

4.2 Armed Forces Day & A Year for Women Along with other potential Initiatives associated with this years 100 years anniversaries

The Armed Forces Day has been moved to the Terrace Green due to a wedding being booked at the Town Hall. The Armed Forces Day will take place on the 30th June, 2018.

A Member stated that it was only women over 30 with property who were given the entitlement to vote so this should not be celebrated. Other Members stated it was a start for women being able to vote.

The Deputy Town Clerk also requested early approval for the art work to be placed in front of Tommy in October/November for Remembrance.

RECOMMENDED that Members approve the artwork to be placed in front of Tommy in October/November for Remembrance.

4.3 Royal British Legion Events

The Deputy Town Clerk stated that a letter had been received from the RBL and he was seeking approval to meet with the RBL to discuss their proposals such as having crosses on the Terrace Green during the summer months as there could be some clashes with the Town Council's summer events.

A Member stated this would be a good idea but it would probably be better to take place nearer Remembrance in conjunction with the other artwork next to Tommy.

RECOMMENDED that the Deputy Town Clerk meets with the RBL and suggests that the crosses are placed from October.

4.4 Request to Maintain Rugby Pitch

The Deputy Town Clerk stated there had been a letter received requesting that the Town Council maintains the rugby pitch.

A Member stated that the letter attaches a note of what work has been done at the rugby pitch to date. No request had been made to the Council prior to this so could the Deputy Town Clerk inform the Council what had been done. The letter also states that 'as you are aware the Rugby Club have already paid £400 last season'. The Council had not agreed any work to be done last season. The Deputy Town Clerk stated it had been wrongly done under delegated authority so that is why it has been brought up at this meeting for formal approval. A Member asked who had done this under delegated authority. The Deputy Town Clerk stated it had been done by Parks staff. It should have been brought here before now for approval. The Chair stated that the work has been paid for. A Member stated that it shouldn't work like that and it should have been brought here for approval for the works to be carried out before it was done. The Deputy Town Clerk agreed it should have happened that way but the issues surrounding it have now been resolved and measures have been put in place to stop it happening again.

A Member questioned when the season started as she wasn't sure this Council was elected when the works were carried out. It wouldn't be for this Council to deal with the matter as it was down to the last Council to deal with it.

A Member asked what had been put in place so this matter doesn't happen again. The Deputy Town Clerk stated he had already spoken to the Councillor and explained the situation outside of the meeting and has now explained in the meeting that he has put measures in place to stop it happening again.

A Member stated that Wembley is used by lots of teams and asked who cuts that grass and who pays. The Deputy Town Clerk stated that the Town Council cuts the grass and the teams pay.

A Member stated that the rugby pitch belongs to Durham County Council not Seaham and the Town Council shouldn't have been cutting it without the rugby club paying for it. A Member stated that the fields at Lord Byron's Walk belong to Durham and there is no reason why Seaham Town Council should be cutting the grass. The Member asked how long the Council had been cutting the grass. A Member stated it hasn't been cut for long by the Town Council because prior to last season the rugby club were using the Leisure Centre.

The Councillor who has raised the questions has also stated that he thinks the Town Council should cut the grass and the Deputy Town Clerk will speak to him outside of the meeting about the other issues. Another Member asked for the background information on this situation. Another Member stated that the Council need to move forward as the Deputy Town Clerk has explained what he is going to do and how he is going to do it. A Member stated that the Deputy Town Clerk hasn't explained what he is going to do. A Member stated that you don't get work done first then ask for approval. It needs to be approved here first.

RECOMMENDED that approval is given for the grass at the Lord Byron's Walk be tended to by the Town Council and the Rugby Club be charged for the works.

4.5 Heritage Lottery Bid

The Deputy Town Clerk stated that Durham County Council has been working with the Town Council and other interested parties and they are looking for an answer around May if it has been successful in winning funding for a variety of Heritage Projects in Seaham which would include shutter art in Church Street, creating a visitor attraction of St John's Church grounds, improvements to pavements along Terrace Green and new historical attractions. The Deputy Town Clerk seeks permission to continue to work with partners to achieve these projects.

RECOMMENDED that approval be given for the Deputy Town Clerk to continue this work.

4.6 Dawdon Park Project

RECOMMENDED that Members note a further meeting of Dawdon Park Working Party will be taking place on 5th February, 2018 to make progress on the refurbishment of the sports pavilions.

4.7 Meeting with Dawdon Park Allotment Holders

RECOMMENDED that Members note a meeting has been arranged to take place on 6th February, 2018 to discuss the allotment holders setting up an association.

4.8 Harbour Cricket Club

The Deputy Town Clerk stated that a decision needs to be made on employing an extra seasonal worker not just for the Harbour Cricket Club but for all of the additional things that will need doing over the summer months and in order to try and keep the Gold Award that the Town Council received from Northumbria in Bloom.

A Member questioned whether this would be financially viable and whether a costing had been done on this. The Deputy Town Clerk stated that it works out at around £8k for a seasonal worker from March till September. The Member questioned whether this has been taken in conjunction with the Oldfields events and how much money the Town Council are going to lose because of the Oldfields situation. The Deputy Town Clerk stated he had spoken to the Finance Officer and the Town Council can afford to pay the extra seasonal worker from the reserves and a more permanent solution will be looked into for next year. A Member asked if a risk assessment had been carried out on this going forward. The Deputy Town Clerk stated that this would need to be looked at after this year. It was mentioned at the Budget Sub-Committee that a temporary arrangement would need to be in place for this year as overtime for current staff was looked into and the Internal Auditor stated that this was too expensive.

A Member suggested that this should be discussed at the next Budget Sub-Committee.

A Member stated that the seasonal worker would also be opening up the facilities at the Cricket Club so other sports users at New Drive can use the Cricket Clubs facilities such as toilets and changing rooms so this would be a saving to the Town Council by not having to provide a new building to facilitate changing rooms and toilets. The Deputy Town Clerk stated that the seasonal worker would also be expected to carry out works to the football grounds which the Town Council agreed to take over. A Member also noted that the seasonal worker will be required to assist with Northumbria in Bloom.

RECOMMENDED that a seasonal worker is employed from March – September at a cost of £8k.

4.9 Risk Management Issues

RECOMMENDED Members note the information being provided.

5. PRESS OPPORTUNITIES

RECOMMENDED the Council note that the Deputy Town Clerk will where possible encourage the press and media to promote the positive projects discussed at this meeting.