

NAILSWORTH TOWN COUNCIL
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
 Minutes of a meeting held on 8 January 2013

Present	Cllr SM Reed (chair) Cllr A Elliott Cllr MJ Kelly Cllr MP Robinson Cllr S Robinson
Apologies	Cllr P Carter
In attendance	Cllr SE Thorpe – Housing Needs Survey item Cllr JL Duckworth – CLT item Mr Will Wilkinson Charlton Abbots Forestry - Norton Wood Mr Ian Crawley – CLT item Mr Martin Hutchings GRCC – Housing Needs Survey item
Non attendance	Cllr MM Rahman

MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

Christmas lights

The Mayor reported that several local residents had expressed their appreciation of the new motifs.

Mast and mobile telephone issues

Cllr Reed reported that she had received a letter from the organisers of the recent public meeting thanking the Environment Committee for listening to their concerns.

Winter arrangements

Cllr Reed reported that Peter Starkiss had kindly agreed to continue as snow warden for the coming year.

GCC Highways Scheme: A46 Inchbrook to Tiltups

The Mayor reported that a further public meeting regarding road safety on the A46 had been arranged for 4 February in the Council Chamber. He had advised GCC Highways of this meeting and had requested that NTC be informed of the start date of the projected roadworks.

Shortwood Green

Cllr Reed reported that she had discussed with the Clerk a possible method of temporarily fencing off the informal 'track' created by horse riders across the bank between the green and the lower Shortwood Road to enable this area to be restored which would involve an arrangement of hurdles, ropes and stakes. The Clerk was obtaining a quotation from an appropriate contractor for this work.

The Mayor reported that a local resident had informed him that damage had recently been caused to the green when her daughter's horse had bolted. The resident had attempted to rectify the damage.

Sue Nicholson reported that she had been informed by Yakub Mulla GCC that the drains in Plumbers Lane had now been cleared. Repair work to the potholes would take place within the next few weeks in line with the GCC Safety Policy.

NORTON WOOD – LONG TERM PROPOSALS AND PLANNING AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Cllr Reed welcomed Mr Will Wilkinson of Charlton Abbots Forestry to the meeting and thanked him for sending NTC his outline proposals for the long-term management of the woodland, which had previously been circulated to Committee members. Cllr Reed reported on discussions she had held with various local residents and community groups and gave Mr Wilkinson a copy of a report produced by the Norton Wood Orchard Working Group. Cllr Reed had advised the group not to undertake any further clearance or extend the boundary of the orchard area. Discussion ensued regarding the potential for voluntary groups to become involved in the maintenance of the woodland. Mr Wilkinson suggested that it would be advisable for any volunteer group to have a leader with some knowledge and experience of forestry. He suggested that volunteers could usefully carry out activities such as coppicing with hand tools, severing ivy from trees and making and erecting nesting boxes. It might also be possible for volunteers to help with stacking and loading log billets after small scale annual professional thinning of trees had taken place. These billets could then be sold to generate income. However, this would require considerable commitment from volunteers. Cllr Reed explained that, though local residents had shown considerable interest in the woodland, community involvement was as yet aspirational as no distinct voluntary group apart from the orchard group had emerged.

There was some discussion of the feasibility of larger scale commercial thinning. Mr Wilkinson advised that, despite recent rises in the price of fuel wood, the relatively small size of Norton Wood and the rising costs of labour and machinery together with the disruption and public concern such a large scale operation might cause indicated that commercial thinning would not be appropriate. He agreed to give further consideration to ways in which the sale of fuel wood could be incorporated into the future management plan, in the absence of a clearly defined voluntary group. It was agreed that this plan could be modified if such a group was to emerge.

In response to questions, Mr Wilkinson explained that ash dieback disease, whilst a serious problem in general, would not, in his view, have a major impact on Norton Wood as it contained a fairly low proportion of ash, which tended to be suppressed by the beech trees that formed the majority of the woodland. Affected ash trees could therefore be thinned without destroying the appearance of the woodland. He confirmed that no government money had been made available for the removal of diseased ash trees.

It was agreed that the maintenance programme should include work to improve the state of the paths, some of which were steep and slippery. It was suggested that consideration be given in due course to the provision of interpretation boards in strategic positions, possibly including the marking of walking routes. It was acknowledged that squirrel damage was an ongoing problem and measures would need to be taken to control the nuisance in order to protect the viability of the woodland into the future.

Mr Wilkinson undertook, in the light of the preceding discussion, to provide a business plan for the management of the wood over the next 15 years. He would retain the sectional plan of the woodland attached to the previous management plan as the basis for identifying the progressive works.

Mr Wilkinson updated the Committee on the ongoing programmed work on tree safety which his organisation had been carrying out at Norton Wood and in the Avening Road belt. This had involved the identification and classification of trees into high, medium and low risk categories, based on the system which had been successfully adopted by both the Woodland Trust and the National Trust. The 'high risk' category had now been dealt with and Mr Wilkinson advised that it was now appropriate to start work on the 'medium risk' category. It was agreed that work on 'medium risk' trees at Norton Wood up to £1500 should be undertaken (Mr Wilkinson to prioritise) together with all the 'medium risk' tree at Avening Road at approximately £500. In addition, a climbing inspection of trees along the lower boundary of Norton Wood where branches had fallen into the garden of an adjacent property, and the removal of a row of goat willows adjacent to the Jovial Foresters car park was approved.

TOWN INFORMATION CENTRE

Cllr M Robinson reported that the architect was currently drawing up a specification for tenders for the building work to the former police station. Discussions with the library service relating to access issues over NTC land were in progress. Cllr Duckworth was developing a draft schedule of work. The Police Station Working Party planned to meet in the near future to progress these matters.

In response to a question, Cllr M Robinson confirmed that the Working Party had discussed the provision of energy efficient forms of lighting and heating, and that this would be taken account of in the specification, within the constraints of the capital budget. He agreed to inform all Environment Committee members of the date and time of the next Working Party meeting. It was noted that the Working Party would now report to the Environment Committee, but that any urgent issues could be taken to full Council.

The Clerk pointed out that the proposed new entrance to the building would reduce the space in front of the Library currently utilised for the sale of goods etc by various local organisations, particularly the weekly Country Market. She suggested that it would be advisable to remove the whole wall which currently existed outside the proposed new entrance, rather than simply lowering it, thus maximising circulation space in this area. The Clerk agreed to liaise with the organisers of the Country Market about the impact of the new entrance on their operation. Cllr M Robinson confirmed that the Working Party would consider the issue.

NAILSWORTH BUS STATION PROPOSALS

The Mayor reported that he had inspected the enlarged plans. Two alternative options had been put forward. Option A would create three bus stops parallel with the kerb opposite The Passage to India restaurant, with the existing bus station becoming a drive-through facility for buses. The free parking spaces in Old Market would be lost with parking spaces in the bus station retained and increased although there would be a net loss overall of parking spaces in Old Market would be lost. Option B would involve changes to the layout of the existing bus station with the

number of bus bays being reduced from three to two, and the apparent loss of 2-3 parking spaces.

Committee members found the plans somewhat confusing and would have appreciated an accompanying written explanation. They were unhappy about the proposed loss of free parking spaces in Option A, and unsure of the benefits of Option B, feeling that it was inappropriate to reduce the number of bus bays when the existing bus station was frequently used by private coach companies to pick up and drop off passengers. After some discussion, it was agreed to seek to arrange an afternoon meeting with Mr McGough SDC at the Town Hall as soon as possible to discuss these concerns, and to invite a representative of GCC Public Transport team to attend. The Clerk confirmed that SDC aimed to begin work on the bus station in the new financial year.

HOUSING NEEDS SURVEY

Cllr Reed welcomed Mr Martin Hutchings GRCC to the meeting. Mr Hutchings explained that he worked as a Rural Housing Enabler for GRCC and had a background in affordable housing, with experience in working closely with Community Land Trusts (CLTs) and Housing Associations. He gave an overview of the processes involved in conducting a Housing Needs Survey. The basic GRCC questionnaire, which had been previously circulated to all Committee Members, contained three parts, with Parts A and B to be completed by all householders and Part C by those who were seeking or likely to be seeking affordable housing in the parish. Mr Hutchings explained that Part B included a question on employment, as this could generate useful data on home-based working which could potentially feed into CLT initiatives. Questionnaires would be sent to all households in the parish and they could be distributed by post or inside a parish newsletter. Standard address labels could be obtained from SDC. He recommended that a combination of Freepost and strategically placed ballot boxes be used to maximise the response rate, which tended to range between 30-40%. Additionally, an online response facility could be used, but experience had suggested that this tended to generate a low response rate. Mr Hutchings stated that he would be happy to add additional questions to the basic questionnaire, but he cautioned that the questionnaire should be kept relatively short to encourage completion.

Cllr Reed reported that she had researched the possibility of distributing the questionnaires via the Nailsworth News but that this would not be feasible. SDC had promised a grant of £500 to contribute to distribution costs. The Clerk confirmed that funding for the survey would come from the Action Plan budget. Mr Hutchings estimated that printing costs were likely to be under £100, with postage potentially costing around £1000. This cost would be borne by NTC, but there would be no charge for Mr Hutchings' services in producing the questionnaire, a suitable covering letter and a written report for publication on the NTC website. He would also include a shorter summary report for publication in Nailsworth News. Mr Hutchings agreed to use data from SDC housing waiting lists in the report. He indicated that the whole process would be likely to take approximately 2.5 months, allowing for the recommended 2 week questionnaire response period.

It was agreed to **recommend that a Housing Needs Survey be conducted.**

Cllrs Reed and Thorpe agreed to co-ordinate volunteers to assist with enveloping the questionnaires, and to liaise with Mr Hutchings regarding the planning and execution of the survey. Mr Hutchings agreed to email to NTC a draft covering letter, which

would involve reference to the proposed CLT, together with a letter of engagement and examples of additional questions used by other parishes in their survey questionnaires.

COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

Cllr Reed welcomed Mr Ian Crawley to the meeting in his capacity as unpaid facilitator of the CLT project. Cllr Duckworth reported that he had drafted a letter to SDC expressing NTC’s interest in forming a CLT and requesting a meeting with SDC to progress this. He agreed to email this draft to committee members and to the Clerk. Mr Ian Crawley advised that it was vital to secure SDC’s commitment to the initiative.

TOWN ACTION PLAN

Cllr Reed reported that she and Cllr M Robinson had met with Mr Chris Harmer and Mr Ian Crawley to progress the Action Plan. Two public meetings would be held on 28 and 29 January. It was hoped that these would generate a small group of local people to develop the Action Plan. Cllr Reed emphasised that, whilst NTC councillors were very welcome to attend these meetings, the Action Plan should be community led and ideally should not involve councillors in a significant amount of extra work. She agreed to write a short article for the March edition of Nailsworth News to publicise the initiative. She hoped that the draft Action Plan would be completed in May and placed on the NTC website for public comments. In response to a question, Cllr Reed confirmed that there were no plans to involve GRCC in the initial stages of the production of the Action Plan, but that she proposed to keep GRCC informed of its progress as it may be able to assist with further advice as the plan developed.

BROKEN ROYAL MAIL DEPOSITORY ADJACENT TO TOWN HALL CAR PARK

The Clerk was asked to write to Royal Mail requesting the removal of this defunct structure.

FOOTPATH AT NEWMARKET

It was agreed that GCC Rights of Way should be notified of the destruction of the footpath running through Mr P Robinson’s property following his earth moving works, requesting that it be reinstated as soon as possible.

LOCAL COUNCIL REVIEW – CLIMATE WEEK IN MARCH

Cllr Thorpe drew attention to this initiative and invited councillors to participate as appropriate.

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Chair

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Date