

HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE 14 September 2021

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present The Right Worshipful the Mayor Councillor Paul Stevens, and Councillors Boulter (Chair), Carwardine, Foxton, Hornsey, Kenyon, Oliver, Owens, Wilcox and Williams.

In attendance Steve Kerry Town Clerk, Becci O'Reilly Administration and Events Manager

CD2021/22.34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Tyler and Hey.

CD2021/22.35 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTES

Councillor Hey appointed Councillor Foxton as substitute. The Chair welcomed Councillor Foxton to the meeting.

CD2021/22.36 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Boulter declared a pecuniary interest in Item 9 regarding Allotments as her spouse is a plot holder. She indicated she would leave the meeting and Councillor Williams as Vice Chair would take over the meeting at this point.

Councillor Kenyon declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 5 regarding Aylestone Park as the grant applicants are known to him but confirmed he had not pre-determined the matter.

CD2021/22.37 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

It was proposed by Councillor Kenyon, seconded by Councillor Owens and unanimously

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meetings of 6 July 2021 and of 19 July 2021 were accepted as an accurate record and were signed accordingly by the Chair.

CD2021/22.38 AYLESTONE PARK ASSOCIATION – LARGE GRANT APPLICATION

The Chair welcomed Alastair Gibbs and Kevin Gilbert, representatives of the Association, to the meeting and invited them to present their application.

Mr Gibbs explained the background to the application. Aylestone is a large park of some 47 acres on the northern edge of the city, supporting a wide variety of habitats. It has previously been awarded Green Flag status but cuts in Herefordshire Council services have meant it was declining and the Association now take the major responsibility for maintenance. Some areas are still cut regularly, but this is only a narrow strip either side of the footpaths, the rest would be left to grow wild if it were not for the Association's efforts. They prune, mow, plant and generally look after the park. At present they use two ride-on mowers which are simply insufficient for work on the scale they are now undertaking. Recently they had to borrow a larger piece of equipment to be able to mow and do other work, and this will not be available indefinitely. The machine they wish to buy now is the same as the one they borrowed, so they know it will be sufficient for the task now and in the future.

In discussion with members the following points were noted.

There is a wildflower area of some 1.5 acres and this could be enlarged. The borrowed machine was used to prepare the ground for this. The machine will be kept inside a securely

locked shipping container, inside a securely locked steel cage. It will be fully insured, including registered for on road use which will enable it to be moved to other sites to support other groups. In this context it was noted that the machine on loan had been driven to Tupsley Quarry to prepare ground there for wild flower planting which had been hugely appreciated, and saved a lot of money for the group there.

There is a management plan which sets out which areas are mown regularly, which are allowed to grow as natural meadow and mown annually etc. This is continually adapted to changing needs such as the development of wild flower areas for habitat and biodiversity. The park will always be mainly a country park, that is it will not be manicured lawns throughout, but will have a wild and natural appearance which is integral to its appeal. It is widely used by residents of the City, not just local residents but those in adjacent wards greatly value it, and they also appreciate the work the Association has done over many years to keep it in such good order.

There has been considerable discussion with the proposed supplier regarding trade in and VAT implications and the final sum sought was confirmed as £9,340-00.

No other applications for funding have been made for this item, although the Association have secured funding from other sources in the past. It was suggested that if they wished to buy add ons for the machine it would be appropriate for them to seek other funding, and it was also noted that the Association were planning to contribute themselves to the cost of the machine now being sought.

It was confirmed that the machine would be clearly marked as being funded by a grant from the City Council, which would have added positive impact as the machine was moved from site to site.

There was some discussion of the need to prioritise funds for community support in the ongoing pandemic crisis, but it was also noted that in addition to routine grants the Council had in the past supported emergency relief projects and could continue to do both activities.

After a thorough examination of the application, it was proposed by Councillor Williams, seconded by Councillor Foxton and unanimously

RESOLVED That a recommendation be forwarded to Council on 21 September 2021 that a large grant of £9,340-00 be made to the Aylestone Park Association for the purchase of a tractor/mower as outlined in their application.

CD2021/22.39 ALLOTMENTS SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

The Chair asked for this item to be moved up the agenda as one member had to leave promptly at 7.30. This was agreed. Having declared a pecuniary interest in the item, the Chair then left the meeting and Councillor Williams, as Vice Chair of the Committee, presided for this item.

The Clerk introduced the item and explained the background, which was a mandate to move the relationship with the Allotments Society onto a similar footing to those with other organisations which receive ongoing funding from the City Council. This was through a service level agreement (SLA). After discussions between Councillor Kenyon and the trustees of the Society, the Clerk had brought a draft agreement to a previous meeting which had been agreed in principle. The responses of the Society had been received together with the Clerk's suggested resolutions of the points made and these had been circulated with the agenda.

Councillor Kenyon thanked the Clerk for producing a very good report, which he felt had adequately represented the views of the Society and the reasons for agreeing to some of their suggested changes, and not others. As guardians of the public purse it is important that the Council's relationship with the Society is on a professional and reasonable basis, he felt they had in the past been over-reliant on the council and had not undertaken as much local management of the sites as they could have. It would be better for them to have more day to day control of activities and better for the Council.

In discussion the responses suggested in the accompanying paper were agreed as set out below.

Section One – the name of the organisation is Hereford Allotments and Leisure Gardeners, abbreviated to HALGS, and the SLA will reflect that.

Section Two – no changes sought or needed.

Section Three – there will not be an open ended commitment to fund new sites; the agreement stands unaltered in this respect. The SLA will be reviewed when the long lease issue is resolved. In the meantime it stands, subject to annual review. Noting HALGS' strong financial position and the investment made by the Council in reducing water costs by installing rain water collection and storage, it was agreed that the variation of the annual grant should be upward only. Whilst a tree survey is not unreasonable it is not necessary before the agreement is completed, if it is needed it could be carried out at a later date, possibly at shared cost.

Section Four – should be rewritten to give HALGS absolute discretion on how they let plots, including letting adjacent small plots to one family or household to allow for a viable area of cultivation. This is a matter for the Society to resolve on a site by site basis as they think fit. Elsewhere in this section, if HALGS wish to engage a contractor to manage some, or indeed all of the hedges, they are at liberty to do so. The costs of such a contractor could be a consideration in the annual grant review, noting savings in other areas. There is no need for a boundary survey, each allotment has site drawings which clearly show the boundaries. The ambiguous wording "public spaces" should be replaced as HALGS suggest with "access routes and paths between plots". The position on pesticides remains as stated in the draft agreement. The Council does not accept that it should be an arbiter of disputes between plot holders and the Society, and it was noted that on the only occasion this was invoked a representative of the Society accused the Council of being in breach of contract when the appeal was upheld.

Section Five – as it is normal practice to review an SLA when the annual grant award is made this should stand. It was noted that this doesn't mean the agreement will be subject to frequent change, in most cases SLAs remain unaltered for their duration.

Section Six - it is for the Council to decide the terms on which it allocates public funds to activities and the suggestion that any changes must have HALGS' consent is therefore not workable, and this section will not be altered.

There were some additional points raised either by HALGS or members of the committee as noted below.

The funding of pest control, which may well continue to require an external contractor for rat control, will be part of the consideration in setting the annual grant. HALGS will be expected to produce an annual report and show their accounts as part of that consideration. The annual report from the trustees to members of the Society would be an acceptable format for the

annual report to the committee. In order to resolve issues about water sources and drainage etc rather than addressing each site in the agreement the general position will be “The Council shall retain responsibility for sub surface water, draining and sewerage.”

Finally, it was noted that the problem of title which is holding up the resolution of a long lease is a historic one going back many years and for which both the former Hereford City (District) Council and Herefordshire Council are culpable as neither councils’ legal officers handled the matter correctly. Whilst the delay does not prevent this SLA from going forward it is of concern and the resolution below was amended to reflect this.

It was then proposed by Councillor Wilcox, seconded by Councillor Kenyon and unanimously

RESOLVED

That the Service Level Agreement, as amended by the detailed changes noted above, is confirmed, and presented to HALGS for signature.

That the Clerk uses his best endeavours to progress the title issue to enable a long lease to be agreed.

CD2021/22.40 COUNTRY PARK SUPPORTERS SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT UPDATE

At this point Councillor Boulter re-entered the meeting and returned to the Chair.

Members noted a very clear and helpful annual report from the Country Park Supporters and it was accepted without a formal vote. The Clerk was asked to contact the CPS and thank them for such an excellent report.

CD2021/22.41 SUNSHINE PRIDE AWARDS

The Administration and Events Manager presented the report and explained the background to the Community Group Achievement Awards, which had been introduced as a way of stimulating interest in the Annual Parish Meeting, which had often had only one or two citizens attending, as well as a way of recognising and rewarding good work by community groups. After a few years of being quite successful, interest in the awards had declined, with barely enough to distribute awards to in some categories, and attendance had also dropped off at the Annual Meeting. It was taking a great deal of effort for a poor return and compared poorly with more glitzy and stylish awards ceremonies, burdened as it was with the heavy bureaucracy of the Annual Parish Meeting. Covid had led to the programme being cancelled which was an opportunity to take stock and see if there was a way of revitalising the awards. The “sponsors” of the awards had only actually been the awarding panel, they had not made any financial contribution in return for the positive publicity they gleaned.

The proposals for sponsoring Sunshine Awards had come out of discussion between Sunshine Radio, herself and the Tourism and Communications Manager. Both officers have had extensive dealings with Sunshine in the past and they have been active in supporting City Council events, notably the Christmas Lights Switch On and other major events.

In discussion of the proposals, members expressed some concern at the lack of reliable listening figures as Sunshine is not part of the body that gathers these. The reach of the station is quite wide across Herefordshire, Shropshire and Monmouthshire and there was some concern that Hereford awards might get lost in a much wider event. It was noted that we could either sponsor an existing award but add a Hereford City category within that, or bring in a completely new award. It was noted that the total cost of the previous Council event, including catering, had been around £3,200, plus substantial officer time for a very weak

return in terms of positive publicity or public interest. There isn't another active radio channel we could partner with in the area, it really is a case of do nothing, do it ourselves or partner with Sunshine.

Members raised several possible awards, including the ongoing work of the Climate and Biodiversity Committee and the keen interest of schools in environmental projects. The Youth Council should also be invited to contribute to the debate as they sponsor an award at present. The Events and Administration Officer confirmed she would be taking this issue to the next meeting of the Youth Council.

Having raised a number of options, including exploring the possibility of working with HVOSS for a range of voluntary group awards supported by them, members did not come to a final conclusion on this matter. As an interim, it was

Proposed by Councillor Wilcox, seconded by Councillor Owens and unanimously

RESOLVED That no action be taken on recreating community group achievement awards on the previous model, and that further discussion takes place with HVOSS, the Youth Council, and possibly local primary schools, about a new set of awards noting the proposals being discussed by Climate and Biodiversity Committee.

CD2021/22.42 THE COURTYARD THEATRE SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT UPDATE

It was reported that a request had been received for a small variation in the terms of the existing SLA had been received, to enable £500 to be spent on advertising the restarting of the Family Festival. This is necessary because Covid restrictions have placed constraints on what could be done in terms of the usual lead in for this event. Members agreed without a formal vote that this was reasonable and that the Year Three instalment of the SLA money should be released.

CD2021/22.43 ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Further consideration of the community awards issue.

CD2021/22.44 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 1 November 2021 10am Grants Meeting

Tuesday 30 November 2021 6pm Routine Agenda

There being no other business the Chair closed the meeting at 7.25 pm

Signed

Date