

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Environment and Amenities Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 10 March 2015, at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX.

PRESENT:

Councillors:	Keith Chambers (Chair)	Vicky Brown
	Marjorie Chambers	Avril Chisholm
	Glyn Davies	Maggie Lang
	Pauline Thompson	Ely Turnbull
	Louis Brown (Ex Officio)	

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mike Slaughter – Town Clerk
Stephen Humphrey – Funding & Projects Officer
Sue Coulthard – Snr. Admin. Officer
Cllr. Stephen Fenwick – Non-Committee Member
Members of the Public – 0

E&A15/255 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Kris Lavery and Bob Walkinshaw.

E&A15/256 2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of personal and prejudicial interest.

E&A15/257 3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meetings held on 18th November 2014 and 10th February 2015 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

E&A15/258 4. MATTERS ARISING

E&A15/252 Ashington Neighbourhood Services Partnership:
The Town Clerk informed members that the special meeting held on 10 February had been arranged to discuss the Neighbourhood Services Partnership, to which Full Council had been invited. Members were informed that the Northumberland County Council

(NCC) Neighbourhood Services Management Team had also been invited to present a progress report.

The Town Clerk drew members' attention to the resolution which agreed that NCC be asked to operate a pilot scheme of environmental enforcement over an initial period of two months, that the current vacancy in the Ashington Neighbourhood Services Team be filled with effect from 1 April 2015, and that the final payment to NCC for the 2014/2015 Partnership Agreement be made.

The Town Clerk added that the NCC Neighbourhood Services Manager had alluded to a financial saving of £25,000 from the ATC contribution to the Partnership Agreement for the 2014/2015 financial year.

E&R15/259 5. ASHINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES PARTNERSHIP

The Leader of the Council stated that he had attended a meeting of the Partnership Board earlier that afternoon (10 March) along with the Committee Chair and the Town Clerk. Members were informed that the meeting had covered issues including the additional environmental enforcement cover at weekends; grass cutting; filling the current vacancy; update on apprentices and the future of Hirst Park.

The Chair summarised the items discussed at the meeting held that afternoon as follows:-

General Update: NCC Officers reported that the grass cutting season was about to start and that a number of the employees would now be carrying out grass-cutting enhancements agreed as part of the new arrangements. It was reported that the zonal working arrangements had been successful over the winter, helped by the exceptionally mild weather.

Dog Fouling: 7 fixed penalty orders for dog fouling had been handed out, mostly in the town centre area.

Hirst Park: It was reported that there was currently a significant amount of fly tipping taking place in the park which was a cause for concern. In addition the former "Park-Keeper's" house had been boarded up which had given the impression that the park was not now monitored after working hours.

The Town Clerk confirmed that a meeting of interested parties had been held the previous week between to discuss the future of Hirst Park. NCC Officers had stated that it was the County Council's intention to submit a funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) in to secure resources to carry out work which would bring the Park back into full use and address some of the problems currently being experienced.

The Town Clerk stated that the HLF bid was likely to be in the region of £1million for a 3-4 year project. The project would include a proposal to open up the park keeper's house and have a member of the Neighbourhood Services Team in residence, carrying out duties as park keeper as part of his/her normal work activities. The County Council had made the reasonable assumption that the Town Council would wish to endorse the HLF funding application.

In the meantime, there was a significant amount of capital works needed on the house and outbuildings and NCC had asked the Town Council to consider making a contribution towards this work.

Following a lengthy discussion, members agreed that the Hirst Park was an integral part of the town's history and culture and that they would like to see it return to its former glory as a safe and pleasant environment for traditional outdoor activities.

Current Vacancy: It had been reported that the recruitment timetable was about to start and NCC had asked whether the Town Council wished to be involved in the interview process.

The Town Clerk stated that it may be the case that because of NCC policies, any County Council employees considered at risk of losing their job would need to be considered for the post. The Town Clerk advised members that this process may understandably lead to a delay in the appointment process beyond the envisaged April 2015, start date.

It was agreed that ATC would be represented on any interview panel by Cllrs. A Chisholm and V Brown.

Financial Reporting: The Chair suggested that the County Council be asked for reassurance that any balance within an NCC cost centre resulting from savings made from the ATC contribution was not "rolled up" into the County Council's budget. The Chair added that, in the event of a significant saving being identified, the Town Council would have the option to reduce its 2015/2016 financial contribution.

Resolved:

That:-

- (i) The Town Council fully endorse an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund to secure resources needed to carry out capital works to return Hirst “Flower Park” to its former status,**
- (ii) A maximum contribution of £10,000 towards the total cost of renovation work on the Hirst Park house and demolition of the outbuildings be approved,**
- (iii) Any contribution would be subject to a successful bid being submitted to Heritage Lottery Fund for the wider Hirst Park Project; and that**
- (iv) Any contribution would be taken from the financial savings made within the Ashington Neighbourhood Services Partnership 2014/2015.**

Public Conveniences: The Town Clerk reported that the County Council had been forced to close the conveniences on Station Road and Milburn Road following health and safety issues. Recent inspections had revealed serious misuse of the public toilets, including evidence of drug-taking and general vandalism.

The Town Clerk stated members that the provision of public conveniences on Station Road was the responsibility of the County Council, but that the Town Council had always acted in the best interests of the community. Members were reminded that, for the last three years the Town Council had made provision for a “Use our Loo” scheme whereby recompense would be made to retail partner organisations to make their toilets available to the general public.

A lengthy discussion followed regarding the provision public toilet facilities, particularly in the town centre. It was agreed that as the responsible body, the County Council be asked to identify an interim option until more permanent adequate provision of public toilet facilities was made.

E&R15/260 6. ASHINGTON MEMORIAL GARDEN PROJECT

The Town Clerk gave a verbal progress report on the Ashington Memorial Garden Project. It was reported that, since the last meeting, the funding application submitted to the SITA Trust had regrettably been unsuccessful. The Town Clerk reported that while this was disappointing, it was important to note that the overall project was not in jeopardy. Members were advised that the project architects (Hugh Massey Associates) had been informed of this decision and asked to look at the potential for reductions in the overall project costs, without impacting on the quality of the scheme.

Members were reminded that the important and most significant areas of the project would not be affected or jeopardised; i.e. the re-siting of memorial, the new plaques and the relocation of the footpath. The Town Clerk advised that the “softer” project areas such as the hedging and landscaping would be likely be identified as the best option for cutting back on overall costs.

The Town Clerk reported that an amended project cost of £90,000 had been submitted by the architects and he informed members that this could be covered by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant and the Town Council’s own contribution, although it was likely that the HLF would seek and require assurances from the Town Council that the scheme was safe and could be both delivered to a high standard and funded.

Members were informed however that external funding applications were currently being prepared and submitted to several local trusts and that the officers would be working to identify alternative funding sources.

E&R 15/261 7. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

E&R15/262 8. DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Environment and Amenities Committee was scheduled for 6:00pm, Tuesday 12 May 2015, in the Council Chamber at the Town Hall, Ashington.

The meeting closed at 8pm.