

Abbots Langley Parish Council

Council Offices
Langley Road
Abbots Langley
Herts
WD5 0EJ

12th August 2020.

To Members of the Leisure Committee

Councillors Sara Bedford, Jean Bowman, Liz Burns, Jane Lay, Simon Stanley, John Wyatt (Chairman) & Roxanne Yau.

The next meeting of the Leisure Committee will be held virtually ^[1] on Wednesday 19th August 2020 at 7:30 pm when your presence is summoned for the purpose of transacting the business outlined below.

The press and public are welcome to attend the meeting.

Tim Perkins
Clerk to the Council

^[1] *Permitting legislation - The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.*

AGENDA

1. **Apologies for Absence**
To receive and accept apologies for absence.
2. **Declarations of Interest**
To receive declarations of interest in items on the agenda.
3. **Public Participation**
To note if any members of the public have requested to speak at this meeting, in accordance with the Parish Council's Public Speaking Arrangements.
4. **To confirm the Minutes of the Meeting held on**
17th June 2020.
5. **Reports from Allotments Representatives**
To receive reports from the Allotments Representatives.
6. **Reports from Sports Representatives**
To receive reports from the Sports Representatives.
7. **Primrose Hill Play Area**
To considered the Three Rivers District Council Public Consultation and Tender Analysis Report and agree the final design option. (Clerk's report item 1 and report enclosed ^[2])
Charlotte Gomes, Leisure Development Manager, Three Rivers District Council will be logged in for this part of the meeting.
8. **Pitch Fees 2020-2021**
To consider the report from the Clerk. (Clerk's report item 2.)
9. **Fireworks Display**
To consider the report from the Clerk. (Clerk's report item 3.)

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10. Litter and Waste on Parish Council Open Spaces

To consider correspondence from a resident and the Clerk's response. (Clerk's report item 4.)

11. Key Projects 2020-2022

To consider the report from the Clerk. (Clerk's report item 5.)

12. Tree Management Programme - High Street

To consider the report from the Clerk. (Clerk's report item 6.)

^[2] *Committee members only, others on request.*

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1. Primrose Hill Play Area

The Parish Council part funding of the above was agreed by the Finance & Administration Committee in July, \$61,500 (+5% contingency £64,575) minute 85 refers.

Three Rivers District Council carried out a public consultation the results of which are detailed in the enclosed report.

The designs under consideration were reviewed at the June meeting of this committee and members had an opportunity to contribute to the consultation.

There is a clear recommendation to which contractor the project should be awarded (p7). I have included a copy of the recommended design with the report.

2. Pitch Fees 2020-2021

i. Football Clubs

Booking forms are usually sent out to football clubs end July, early August. I have asked colleagues to put these on hold as there are several issues on which I need guidance from members.

Clubs are struggling. They have lost commercial income and the income generated from summer tournaments. As recreational football starts to return there are concerns that membership subs, which are an important income for clubs, may be more difficult to collect as families are suffering financially.

Normally once we have agreed all the details with the club's invoices would be issued with an expectation that payment in full be made by end October. If a club has a cashflow problem we do sometimes allow flexibility, but we insist that all invoices are paid in full by the calendar year end, so there are no outstanding debts for the main audit in January.

Whilst the Parish Council has its own financial challenges, those of the clubs are none less real.

Rather than get into individual discussions with clubs I propose the following as a possible solution, for this season only.

- Booking forms agreed with clubs Aug/Sep. Invoices issued.
- Payment terms on the invoices set as nine equal monthly instalments Sep 2020 - May 2021. If clubs agree then a standing order must be established and this evidenced to the PC.
- In the event of payments being missed the PC will get grumpy and call in the full remaining balance of the invoice.
- If in the event of a pandemic "second wave" and National or Local Government require a cessation of all recreational sports, then the PC will credit the full weeks for which the clubs cannot play matches.

Some clubs have asked for credit of their pitch hire fees for the six weeks when matches could not be played due to lockdown at the end of the 2019-2020 season. If members are minded to give consideration to this, a solution would be to make the first month of the 2020-2021 season free of charge.

Whatever solution is agreed it must be consistent across all clubs, it would be administratively complex and time consuming to set up individual arrangements for each club.

Until it is known how many teams clubs will be fielding this year, as there are some suggestions that the number of teams may be below pre-pandemic levels, it is difficult to quantify the potential income from pitch fees.

I will provide an analysis once the terms for the coming season are agreed and **clubs have declared the number of teams they are fielding.**

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ii. Cricket Clubs

Some recreational cricket is returning, but the end of the season is already in sight.

The most practical solution may be to ask clubs to declare the number of teams they are fielding and officers to agree with the clubs fees based on the proportion on the season played.

3. Fireworks

The above are scheduled for 6th November 2020. The Lions have postponed a "go/no go" decision until the end of August.

The Parish Council will have to be involved in this decision as based on the then current government advice on large gatherings and social distancing.

If the decision is to go ahead and there is a November coronavirus "spike", there is a risk that services contracted by the Lions would have to be cancelled at short notice, such as;

- St John's Ambulance.
- Portable Toilets (possible higher virus related cleaning costs)
- Fireworks contractor.

Cancellation costs could be significant.

The Lions are also struggling as many of the club's volunteers are older and fall into groups at higher risk from the virus.

We are aware that at the time of writing a number of large displays have been cancelled. Locally Watford BC are taking a decision on the Cassiobury Park display in September.

Based on current HMG guidelines on large public events it would seem unlikely that the event will go ahead.

4. Litter and Waste on Parish Council Open Spaces

The following is an email exchange which took place with a resident. I agreed to bring their request to install bigger bins and extend litter picking hours to this committee.

Members views would be welcome.

Email from resident Sun 05/07 16:45 - TFP reply Mon 06/07 14:44

Residents comments in black italic, my responses in red italic.

As you are aware there has been a significant increase in the incidence and volume of rubbish being left strewn across the open grassed and wooded areas in the park. A matter you posted on your website about in April. Since then the issue has escalated unchecked and is poorly resourced, culminating in a significant deterioration in the quality of the grounds.

Having spoken with and observed your employees, who are trying to tackle the issue during the week, they appear woefully ill equipped and supported to tackle this issue. I would appreciate exploring this further with you.

Parish Council staff have all relevant equipment and PPE to carry out their duties. I have spoken to the managers of our grounds team and no issues about the provision of equipment have been raised. I will ask them to recheck with all staff.

I would disagree with your comment that they are "woefully ill equipped and supported", what additional equipment do you think they should have and also why do you think they have not been supported?

I will not go into details as it touches on employment practices but no issues about lack of support or equipment have been raised by colleagues who actually carry out the grounds work.

Since the Covid 19 lockdown measures were introduced the grounds have become more popular with many discovering the open space for the first time. It's popularity has grown with each new "measure" and now the skatepark area has returned as a litter hot spot, together with detritus spread across the fields, in the woods, in the Dell and near the footpaths.

This consists mainly of beer cans, cardboard packaging, bottles of wine, spirits, mixers, snacks, plastic packaging - a lot of it recyclable.

Each area covered by the rubbish appears to have been created by large groups of people having alcohol fuelled pic-nics.

This is a huge debate around local authorities. The behaviour of the users of grounds around the country has generally been great, but some feel they can leave all manner of waste, some of it foul and expect the "council" to clear it up. The Parish Council tries to keep on top of litter picking and it has been one of our key priorities during lock down, when staff resources have been stretched.

In the case of the lower woodland adjacent to the rear of Abbots Road and the Dell there have been fires set which has resulted in the fire service attending.

We are aware of this, Parish Council staff will address these incidents when they arise, but staff are frequently then faced with abuse and in some cases threats of physical violence. I have been put in threatening situations when I have been out on the grounds, I do not wear a stab vest nor am I trained to deal with violence. In another of our parks a colleague asked a family who left litter after a picnic to clear their waste, they walked away laughing saying that is for what they pay their council tax.

The woodland running down from Gallows Hill Lane is used as a toilet by the pic-nickers. Trees are damaged wilfully and no respect is shown for the wildlife.

We know !

I appreciate that you are not the only agency involved in the maintenance and management of the facility but I am given to understand you are the primary body. Therefore I would like to understand your position on the following areas please:

The Parish Council is freeholder of the Manor House and is responsible for the grounds

1. The installation of Mixed (plastic/cardboard/glass/cans) recycling facilities. This way your staff, dog walkers who regularly clear up, and members of the public can dispose of these items in to larger capacity retainers and reduce the burden on the woefully inadequate bins.

This will be a matter for the Parish Council's Leisure Committee, I will bring your comments to their attention when they meet in August.

2. Increase the size and number of bins. The current ones are no longer fit for purpose, and haven't been for some time.

As above.

3. Increase the number of rubbish removal patrols and include weekends. You are aware of the increase in the volume of rubbish so how are you planning to resource this?

Key point. Are the residents of the parish happy to pay for extended litter picking hours, or is there a responsibility on all residents and users to be responsible for litter? If you have brought food/drinks to the area why cannot there be an expectation that you take your waste home.

I am a resident, I would prefer to see users take a responsible attitude to litter, rather than my council tax to be increased to cover the irresponsible actions of a few.

4. The repair or removal of the vandalised bench looking towards the cricket pitch (rear of Manor House Gardens).

The bench is a focal point for every conceivable type of anti social behaviour and a magnet for those intent on causing it. This is a nuisance both to other users and the residents whose back gardens are adjacent. Don't you have a duty of care here?

The damaged bench was brought to our attention last week and is scheduled for removal today. I have asked colleagues why our patrols had not reported this and taken action.

There is broken glass frequently strewn on the pathways and grass, which you are aware of but is not removed consistently.

We cannot be everywhere all the time. Yes of course we have a responsibility to clear broken glass. But those that cause the hazard in the first place, should they not be the focus of the community's anger?

5. There is significant evidence of drug abuse in the woods and skatepark. In the car park opposite your yard is a part time police station. Occasionally a couple of PCSOs walk through the park. They never directly challenge any of the perpetrators of the ASB but I wonder if the police and yourselves are working in any kind of joined up approach to the ASB impacting on the grounds?

The Parish Council is discussing policing matters with officers next week.

My staff have frequently commented on the lack of a uniformed presence in the grounds.

Significant financial investment has been made in to the facilities now on offer. The grounds really were very impressive overall, although the vandalism and rubbish caused by the skate park users impacted negatively and was under resourced. However, the space is now deteriorating rapidly and is becoming an inhospitable environment for those of us who wish to enjoy and preserve it.

I would agree that the irresponsible usage of the grounds, breaking of glass bottles, leaving waste (850kg a few weeks ago) is a problem, the Parish Council is trying to address this, but and a big but, until users change their behaviour the problem will continue. The point about bigger bins may be relevant, but in Leavesden Country Park at the weekend I saw a pile of pizza boxes 5m from an empty bin. Our staff frequently complain that the bins are empty but the grounds are still littered. Also, for some unknown reasons residents sometimes pack bins with general household refuse, regularly staff comment that bins are crammed full of refuse that should have gone into normal collection streams.

I'm very happy to meet with you to show you first hand the matters described above, so please let me know if you'd like to arrange this. In the meantime do take a look at the Facebook pages of Abbots Langley Matters for the photographs posted by concerned and distressed users of the grounds.

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I understand your frustrations, they are very little different from those of Parish Council staff. At the end of the day priorities on staff and finances is the responsibility of elected Parish Councillors, they decide what staff should prioritise and how public money should be spent. It is my job and that of my team to carry out those priorities, if we do not then I take the can, which is part of the job.

I have copied my response to Cllr John Wyatt and Cllr Jane Lay, they are respectively the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Parish Council's Leisure Committee. This committee has responsibility for open spaces, play areas, etc. If councillors want to extend the hours of staff to litter pick every day (currently only Sundays are not covered), or buy bigger bins, that is a financial decision. Councillors will have to balance the impact that may have on the council tax we all pay. You may find it more useful to discuss your concerns with them

I would prefer to see users not trash our grounds and treat them more like the incredible public resources they are.

Personally, and it is a view shared by officers of councils all around the country, the litter, vandalism and broken glass type issues will never be resolved, until there is a change of attitude or maybe some action by those that can enforce legislation. The council has a responsibility to maintain the grounds, but the bucket of money is not bottomless and councils, residents, users all have a role to play.

You have not raised any points that officers of the council are not acutely aware of, but we do get frustrated when we get criticised for the outcomes of appalling behaviour of a relative minority of the users of our grounds.

We do really care. But we cannot be everywhere, all the time.

We would not need more litter picking, or bigger bins, if all users behaved responsibly.

I look forward to receiving your response at your earliest convenience.

5. Key Projects 2020-2022

Members reviewed the above at the June meeting of this committee and it will be further considered at the October meeting of this committee as part of the budget.

i. Deport Surface Project

Progress has been delayed due significant staff sickness at the consultants. Workloads have been reassigned we are waiting confirmation on when work will restart. There may be a further update at the meeting.

ii. Primrose Hill Footpath Lights

The Parish Council is responsible for the lights on the footpath that runs from Primrose Hill to the canal. They have been problematic for a few years; water ingress short circuits and head failures have occurred fairly frequent. The units are many years old from an era well before energy efficient lighting systems.

Usual pre-winter maintenance will be carried out but it will be worth considering in the spring if the units should be replaced with energy efficient, possibly solar powered units.

At the southern end of Leavesden Country Park, on the footpath from the pelican crossing, a run of solar lights has been installed.

The units store energy and admit a low level of light during the hours of darkness, when movement is detected they come on to a high level of brightness.

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They were installed about eighteen months ago, so by the spring they will have been in use through two winter periods so an assessment can be made of their practicality and reliability.

From a user perspective they are excellent.



6. Tree Management Programme - High Street

The Tree Risk Assessments carried out by our arboriculturist target "dead, dying and dangerous" issues and any obvious tree health concerns. They do not provide a long-term plan to manage tree growth and development.

The trees in the High Street are once again becoming overbearing for residents, particularly on the Vine House side of the road and we are also having vehicle strikes being reported by the bus companies.

We are going to instruct our arboriculturist to produce a Tree Management Plan for these trees. They are in a key residential area and the trees need to be kept in a good condition due to the heavy local footfall.

There is already a significant amount of tree work scheduled this year and it is likely this budget line will come under pressure.

Tim Perkins
12th August 2020.