

Runnymede Borough Council

Community Services Committee

Thursday, 15 June 2023 at 7.30 pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors C Howorth (Chairman), S Lewis (Vice-Chairman), A Berardi, M Harnden, A King, C Mann, J Mavi, N Prescott (In place of M Darby), M Smith and S Walsh.

Members of the Committee absent: None.

In attendance: Councillors A Balkan and L Gillham.

1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2023 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

2 Apologies for Absence

None received.

3 Declarations of Interest

Councillor M Smith declared an Other Registerable Interest in the item on day centre provision in Addlestone because he was a volunteer with an organisation mentioned in the report. This presented no conflict of interest and he was able to participate and vote on the item.

4 Open Space Development Priorities

The Committee received a report for information, setting out the priorities for the Open Space and Community Development team within Community Services.

Officers explained that this team was responsible for the strategy and associated development of the Council's parks and open spaces as well as instigating projects to develop and support the community. Operational matters were dealt with by Environmental Services; they were responsible for allotments, grass cutting, planting, paddling pools, play areas and day to day management and maintenance of parks and open spaces. Members were advised to contact the operational team with regard to issues that had been raised recently.

Seven priorities for Open Space and Community Development had been identified. These included creating new Site Management Plans to be approved by Natural England for 6 of the 7 Council owned Suitable Alternative Natural Green spaces (SANGS) and ensuring appropriate use of SANGS funding. Members expressed concern that the SANGS management plans had not been completed and asked for an anticipated timescale for this and the development plans for all the parks and open spaces. It was appreciated that this was a significant piece of work to be achieved by what was a very small team.

In the longer term Officers would be looking at completing a site development/management plan for each park and open space; the sheer volume of these made this work a longer term goal whilst Officers focussed on delivery of the seven key priorities.

With regard to the Play Areas Replacement Programme, Officers would present a procurement package for the improvements programme to the next scheduled meeting in September 2023. Another important area was completion of key repairs in the Council's play areas following the recent audit and producing a costed forward plan for them in consultation initially with the Health and Wellbeing Member Working Party (HMMWP, meeting dates to be confirmed) and establish 'cluster' ward councillor meetings to discuss the programme.

Members noted that work was progressing with the installation of a new skate park facility at Heathervale Recreation Ground, expected to open in 2024. The tender was now ready to be released and Officers agreed that the delay between publicising the replacement and realising it was unfortunate.

Members were pleased to learn that the paddling pool at Runnymede Pleasure Ground would be re-opened, funded through the Trust. However, it had been decided for a number of operational reasons not to re-open the remaining paddling pools at Victory Park, Heathervale and Chertsey Rec, pending plans to enhance water play facilities in the borough. There were also financial considerations; capital funding over 3 years meant that one area could be focussed on each year.

Officers emphasised the collaborative work taking place with colleagues in Planning to support the Green and Blue Infrastructure plans (GBI), Biodiversity Net Gain and Climate Change and also to take a lead on the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy working with colleagues across the Council with a holistic approach.

The last priority had come through the HMMWP which was connecting communities through green spaces which would also form part of the GBI.

Members looked forward to receiving updates on this important part of the Council's work in due course.

Members were assured that with regard to the parks and open spaces SANGS Management Plans Officers would be working closely with Surrey Wildlife Trust to ensure all the necessary aspects were covered in terms of enhancement and access.

5 **Open Space Development Resource Capacity**

The Committee's approval was sought to make a recommendation to the Corporate Management Committee to increase the Council's staffing establishment and to approve a supplementary revenue estimate to fund the posts from 2025/2026.

The two new posts were an Open Spaces Development Biodiversity Officer, and a Community Development Projects Officer.

Officers explained that following the recent departure of an experienced member of staff, and another vacancy within the team, these posts were needed to cover a wide range of activities including SANGS projects and management plans, recreational facilities (including enhancements) projects, biodiversity objectives, advice on the Council's Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, work relating to the provision of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), the play area replacement programme, and the development of site specific development plans for parks and open spaces.

Officers had discounted the options to do nothing or employ staff on temporary fixed term contracts; favouring permanent positions, the Biodiversity Officer to be partly funded using a grant secured from DEFRA via Planning and the savings realised from the change in the projects role to a lower graded post.

Officers explained that the funding was only for two years, hence the need to request a supplementary revenue estimate from 2025/2026 to cover the shortfall.

The Committee was pleased to support the proposals and welcomed the cross-departmental approach with Planning in particular for various projects including the preparation of a response to the River Thames Scheme, but also the guidance that could be given to colleagues on site management without the need to use external consultants.

Members appreciated the significant amount of work, and additional new requirements as a result of the Environment Act 2021 and agreed that these posts would put the Council in a much better position to meet these challenges as well as maximise the benefits of being able to have an in-house expert to keep funds and resources in the borough through the identification and surveys of current sites suitable for Biodiversity Net Gain projects.

The Committee noted the detailed business case which had been approved by the Council's Corporate Leadership Team and were pleased to recommend approval by Corporate Management Committee accordingly.

RESOLVED that –

- i) Corporate Management Committee be requested to approve that the authority's establishment list is amended as set out in the report with the following roles created:**
 - a) an Open Spaces Development Biodiversity Officer (permanent, 37-hour contract on grade 10); and**
 - b) a Community Development Projects Officer (permanent, 30-hour contract on grade 8).**
- ii) a supplementary revenue estimate of £4,886, required from 2025/2026 onwards, be approved**

6 Runnymede Community Safety Partnership Annual report

The Committee received the annual report on the work of the Community Safety Partnership for 2022/2023.

The report focussed on several key priority areas; including Violence Against Women and Girls, Domestic Abuse, Domestic Homicide Reviews, Prevent, Serious Organised Crime Domestic Burglary, Anti-Social Behaviour, and Fly-Tipping. The various bodies with whom the Community Safety Partnership worked were also reviewed, as well as Community Safety events such as Junior Citizen and Respect the Water: Water Safety.

Members also noted statistics regarding actions that could be taken by the various partner agencies to address issues such as anti-social behaviour and other negative actions in the community.

Officers confirmed that they would work with Communications on the promotion of 'Safe Streets' and reporting low level Anti-Social Behaviour.

Officers advised the Committee that a review of the two PSPOs in Addlestone and Englefield Green would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee. It was noted that there had been no reported breaches of either.

Officers were asked to gather some statistics on the use of 'Crimestoppers' (anonymous reporting) and continue promoting its use as a valuable tool to combat crime.

7 **Safeguarding Policy Update**

Members reviewed an update on matters relating to the Council's Safeguarding Policy, amendments to which were submitted for approval.

Since the policy was approved in November 2022, the Council's Monitoring Officer had been consulted on the need to appoint a Councillor as a Safeguarding Champion. The conclusion was that there was no legal requirement to do so. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to designate Community Services Committee as a whole to promote Safeguarding as being 'everybody's business' and encourage other Councillors to undergo the basic level 1 training which was mandatory for staff, but not for Councillors.

Members agreed with this approach and with the reduction of training levels from four to three to reflect departmental and individual responsibilities in relation to Safeguarding.

It was suggested that Officers conduct a 'skills' audit of Councillors to establish what experience and training they already had and to email a copy of the updated policy to all Councillors with details of the level 1 training.

Officers were thanked for their work in this important area.

RESOLVED that –

- i) Community Services Committee supports the direction proposed relating to Member safeguarding and agrees to encourage all Councillors to undertake the level 1 e-learning training as set out in the corporate Safeguarding Policy; and**
- ii) the proposed changes to the Corporate Safeguarding Policy as attached at Appendix 'A' to the agenda report be approved**

8 **Review of Housing Assistance Policy and Creation of Tenure Neutral Policy**

The Committee's approval was sought for a newly updated Housing Assistance Policy and the creation of a Tenure Neutral Policy. The policy had been approved by the Housing Committee at its last meeting on 7 June 2023 as it impacted on their Adaptations Policy.

The Committee was advised that in response to a recent decision by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, the Housing department and the Home Improvement Agency within Community Services had reviewed the Housing Assistance Policy with a move towards the creation of a Tenure Neutral Policy.

Officers advised that there were likely to be resource implications by moving to a tenure neutral policy, whereby 3,000 additional social housing properties would be included in the policy. This would necessitate close working between the teams to manage the workload.

Members welcomed this because it meant a more holistic approach where residents, regardless of their housing status would receive a fair assessment of their needs and appropriate adaptations. In terms of referrals, the HIA team was working towards using the Trusted Assessor model to streamline the process and reduce delays in improvements being made to people's homes.

The updated Home Assistance Policy offered more flexibility and the ability to help more people of all ages to maintain independence in their own homes with a system of mandatory and discretionary grants, some means tested, others not. The Committee was pleased that the policy now included information on the Armed Forces Covenant and how

former service personnel could be supported.

In terms of the Handyperson role, Runnymede was well placed to extend the service to take care of Council tenants in Runnymede and Woking, which was welcomed.

The next steps would be a Communications Plan and a public consultation would take place with key stakeholders internally and externally and if necessary a report brought back to the Committee prior to its formal adoption, noting however that the Housing department would implement it before the Home Improvement Agency.

RESOLVED that -

The proposed Home Assistance Policy, as attached at Appendix 'A' of the agenda, and the move to a tenure neutral service for residents, led by the Home Improvement Agency, be approved

9 Englefield Green Section 106 Funding

The Committee's approval was sought for plans to spend Section 106 monies arising from a planning application in 2018 granted for the development of the Runnymede Campus at Coopers Hill Lane in Englefield Green.

Members were advised that part of the planning conditions, requirements in relation to Section 106 payments were stipulated, and covered expenditure incurred by Runnymede and Surrey County Council. Of particular relevance to the Committee, was the use of sums relating to Community Support Facilities and the Minor Projects Contribution.

Officers had taken the opportunity to review how money was awarded to organisations and projects in Englefield Green, to ensure they would be in line with new governance arrangements for the allocation of developer contributions, approved by Corporate Management Committee in January 2023, to increase transparency and community engagement and prioritise projects specifically in relation to community support and infrastructure. This presented a move away from funding allocation being largely determined by local ward Councillors, whilst still retaining their valuable input into the process.

The Community Supports Facilities totalled £400,000 and the Minor Projects Contribution amounted to £85,253.

Five projects had already been awarded funding since the launch of the former Minor Projects Grant Scheme, totalling £17,402. Officers intended for this to continue but to have a more formal application process and to increase the grant sum for each project from £5,000 to £7,000.

Following consideration by Officers and ward Councillors, it was proposed that a Developer Contributions Advisory Group would recommend to Corporate Management Committee which applications should be supported. This included applications already submitted for a commemorative clock, a replacement shed for the Englefield Green Scout Group and for maintenance of the St Jude's Church clock. Members were asked to note that these would not automatically receive funding but would be considered alongside other applications.

With regard to Community Support Facilities; £67,763 had been allocated to The Village Centre and the Kings Lane Bike Ramp (a project still in progress as to what facility would be provided), leaving £332,237 available for other projects which could be spent directly by the Council or in partnership with others. As with the Minor Projects, it was suggested that recommendations from the Advisory Group would be considered by Corporate Management Committee. With regard to Kings Lane Members commented that there was

an impetus to look at the whole site and its best use, in consultation with residents and the local rugby club.

Officers had already undertaken some detailed preparatory work to ensure timely and meaningful engagement with the community.

For both funding pots, Officers were asked to consider suitable platforms (e.g. on-line Citizens lab/facebook) for communication and engagement with residents and interested parties including people involved with the forthcoming Englefield Green Neighbourhood Plan.

Officers agreed to provide a provisional timetable for potential projects and implementation. The intention was to utilise the Section 106 monies within the next 18 months. The planning application stipulated 7 years from the last occupation date and Officers were led to understand not all properties had been sold yet. However, to avoid any potential risk in this area, it was proposed the money would be allocated over the next 18 months (by December 2025).

Members were pleased to support the proposals and the opportunity to work closely with residents of Englefield Green to make improvements to the infrastructure, as well as support local projects.

RESOLVED that –

- i) Members approve the proposed delivery of the revised small grant scheme for Englefield Green for grants of up to £7,000 in value utilising the S106 allocation set aside for Minor Projects, as set out in sections 3.9 – 3.12 of the report; and**
- ii) Members approve the process outlined for the identification of projects and decision-making process on funding, related to the major projects fund, as set out in sections 4.7 – 4.9 of the report**

10 Voluntary Sector Capacity Building Grant Scheme

The Committee received a report outlining the opportunity to deliver another scheme to provide financial support for voluntary and community organisations, through a Voluntary Sector Covid Recovery/Capacity Building Grant scheme, for which approval was sought.

Members noted the background to the Contain Outbreak Management Funding (COMF) and the ways in which it could be used.

The Committee recalled that Corporate Management Committee had previously approved a sum of £50,000 for capacity building; and a set of criteria had been identified to ensure that the organisations that received funding would strengthen them and help them grow, post Covid, focussing on support with access to food/meals, mental health support and reducing loneliness and isolation, all under the general umbrella of health and wellbeing. Advice with financing in the current climate was also a priority.

The funding was time-limited and would need to be utilised by the end of the 2024 financial year; any underspend would have to be returned to central government.

To maintain flexibility, Officers would bring an update to either the September or November meeting of the Committee. The intention was that one report would set out all the applications made for approval.

The Committee was very pleased to approve this initiative and agreed that it was a good

opportunity to support the voluntary and community sector in their work with local residents across the borough.

RESOLVED that –

Members approve the delivery of the Voluntary Sector Capacity Building grant scheme (total funding in the sum of £50,000 to be funded from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) grant), available to community and voluntary organisations to assist with their post pandemic recovery and capacity building

11 Youth Development Budget 2023-2024

The Committee's approval was sought for an expenditure plan under the new Youth Development Budget, previously approved by full Council.

Officers set out a number of proposed activities and projects to utilise the budget of £215,000 for 2023/2024. This would be a combination of initiatives delivered by the Council's Community Development team, Chertsey Museum and Community Safety and in partnership with others such as Egham Orbit, Surrey Arts Partnership, local sports clubs, Core Judo and British Orienteering.

Members were informed that the intention was to have a blend of different elements; including activities free at the point of contact for families, affordable for all, supporting families in the Family Support Programme, a grant scheme to support youth development services provided by the voluntary sector, a contribution to the play area replacement programme and promotion of sport and physical activity.

There were 12 projects reviewed by the Committee, plus a contingency budget of £20,000. Members highlighted the 'Friday Night Project', aimed at providing diversionary activities linked to Anti-social behaviour reduction. Officers confirmed that the intention was to target projects to where they were most needed.

It was noted that the projects were not included in the Community Services Area Plan but had been discussed with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee. Officers added that they were confident that the team would be able to move all the initiatives forward.

Officers were thanked for their hard work to put these plans into practice.

RESOLVED that –

The proposed expenditure plan, as set out in paragraph 2.2 of the report, for the Youth Development budget in 2023/2024, be approved

12 Safer Streets Update

The Committee was advised of the latest position with regard to Safer Streets funding, secured by the Council to address issues of anti-social behaviour on the Garfield Road Estate in Addlestone. This was a cross departmental project mainly with colleagues in Housing and Community Safety.

Members were advised that a youth café would not be possible as no suitable venue had been identified. Officers were working with the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office and the Home Office to identify potential alternatives to the café that would retain the funding of £160,000 for Addlestone.

Officers reported that with the consent of the Home Office, the Council was working with a local charity, EIKON, to engage with young people and provide support and diversionary activities. Specifically, EIKON gave intensive 1:1 support where appropriate, targeted group work to address key topics such as healthy relationships, anger management etc and preventative work with larger cohorts of children on issues like on-line safety and school transition support. In addition, parents and carers were also supported by building their knowledge, confidence and skills to support young people's wellbeing and mental health in the long term. Officers would advise when the formal contract was signed.

In addition, the Council had worked with the Police and their Designing Out Crime Officer to make physical improvements to the area. This had resulted in the installation of gates to stairwells, CCTV cameras linked to Safer Runnymede, additional lighting and the reconfiguration of gardens to remove secluded pathways.

Members noted that the Council had spent £66,758 in 2022/2023, match funded by Safer Streets. Officers hoped to secure further match funding of £95,000 in 2023/2024.

The Committee was very pleased to be working with EIKON and asked for them to be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to give a presentation.

13 **Community Services Committee Appointments 2023**

RESOLVED that –

- i) the Corporate Head of Financial Services (Paul French) and Open Space and Community Development Manager (Chris Swatridge) be appointed to the Cabrera Trust Management Committee for 2023/2024;**

The Committee was asked to note that Officers from Environmental Services (Green Spaces) also attended this meeting.

- ii) Councillors M Nuti and J Mavi be appointed to the Chertsey Meads Management Liaison Group for 2023/2024**

Members were advised that Officers from both Environmental Services (Green Spaces) and Open Space and Community Development attended this meeting.

- iii) Councillor M Harnden be re-appointed as the Older Persons Champion for 2023/2024**
- iv) the appointment of Councillors to the Community Services Partnership Board be deferred, to be dealt with via a Standing Order 42**

The last appointments were deferred pending further discussion with Members.

14 **Chertsey Meads Management Liaison Group - Minutes 28 February 2023**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Chertsey Meads Management Liaison Group held on 28 February 2023, as attached at Appendix 'A' were received and noted.

15 **Community Halls Fees and Charges**

This item was withdrawn from the agenda as the proposed action to continue discounts for hall hirers, pending a review of fees and charges could be actioned under delegated authority. A report would be made in due course on a future fees and charges structure and charging regime.

16 Urgent Action - Standing Order 42

The Committee noted four urgent items that detailed action taken under Standing Order 42 with the agreement of the Chairman and Vice Chairman since the last meeting. These were set out on proformas 1018, 1019, 1020 and 1021 and concerned the following:

- 1018 – Runnymede Pleasure Ground Paddling Pool
- 1019 – Runnymede Pleasure Ground Car Park Improvements
- 1020 – Safer Streets Funding Release
- 1021 – Grant Funding for the Women’s Support Centre, Woking

17 Exclusion of Press and Public

By resolution of the Committee, for the reasons set out in the agenda, the press and public were excluded from the remainder of the meeting during the consideration of the remaining matter under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information as set out in Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

18 Addlestone Day Centre Provision

The Committee received an exempt report concerning future day centre provision in Addlestone following the receipt of confirmation that previously agreed plans to offer alternative provision with a local organisation were not going ahead for a number of operational and practical reasons. Officers had met with the organisation’s committee and significant preparatory work had been undertaken prior to their decision that they could not accommodate the proposed provision.

This had led Officers to consider how best to continue day centre provision, concluding that it would be feasible to re-open the Eileen Tozer Day Centre in Addlestone, until such time as the future of the site was determined in consultation with colleagues from the Assets and Regeneration Business Unit.

Members agreed that the proposed new staffing structure and service delivery model would strengthen Community Services in some of its key frontline areas, was cost effective and value for money. The Committee appreciated the efforts made to reduce the financial impact on the Council.

Members welcomed the proposal but were mindful that the centre would only open when fully staffed and safe to do so. Members asked that service usage continued to be monitored and further engagement took place with former service users to understand their needs and requirements. This would re-assure the Committee that opening the centre was the most appropriate way forward, pending further consideration of how service provision should look and be delivered. The Older Persons Champion, Councillor Harnden, was happy to be part of that process, for which she was thanked.

Officers confirmed that promotion of the centre re-opening would be carried out with the assistance of the Council’s Communications team at the appropriate time.

RESOLVED that –

Corporate Management Committee be asked to approve the recommendations set out in the restricted supplementary report.

(The meeting ended at 9.59 pm.)

Chairman

Runnymede Borough Council

Chertsey Meads Management Liaison Group

Tuesday, 28 February 2023 at 7.30 pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillor D Cotty (Chairman),
J Alexander, V Baldwin, R Deacock, G Drake, K Drury, S Hall, J Hearne,
N Johnson, C Longman, M Nichols, C Noakes, B Phillips, M Ray,
T A Stevens and D Turner

J Harper, P Joyce and C Swatridge (non-voting advisory members)

Members of the Committee absent: Councillor M Nuti,
T Athersuch, P Bickford, J Denton, I Girvan, A Goddard, F Harmer,
G James, H Lane, D Mead and J O'Gorman.

In attendance: PCSO R Sutton.

Other Officers attending: S Barnes, H Clark, M Godfrey, B Miller and
D Williams

1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2022 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Nuti, T Athersuch, Mr P Bickford, J Denton, F Harmer, I Girvan, A Goddard, and Mr J O'Gorman.

3 Membership of the Management Liaison Group

The Group approved the updated Constitution to reflect two new advisory members; these were Mr Chris Swatridge, Open Spaces and Community Development Manager and the currently vacant post of Assistant Head of Green Spaces.

Members also approved an additional section to clarify budgetary matters and the split of responsibility between Environmental Services and Community Services.

[At the close of the meeting, Mr Turner advised that Mr Mead was no longer one of the Chertsey Agricultural Show representatives and that he would advise who the new Member would be in due course.]

4 Site Security

The Group discussed site security as it related to management and maintenance of the Meads.

The condition of the Meads had been adversely affected by what both residents and Officers thought to be the activity of people tracking and poaching deer. Officers had discovered vehicular tracks, damage to sleepers and similar all of which if repaired would have to come from the operational management budget.

An informal meeting with the PCSO for Rural Crime, the Chairman, a resident from Hamm

Court and Officers took place on site to discuss possible solutions to deter future incursions.

PCSO Rich Sutton confirmed it was crucial that anyone witnessing the activity described reported it as 'crime happening now' via 999. The importance of building up an evidence base and patterns of behaviour would assist how the matter could be taken forward. It was also stressed that people witnessing these activities should not put themselves in danger by confronting individuals or groups.

There were a number of options which could address the problem, all of which would need specialist input from stakeholders such as Surrey Wildlife Trust, Surrey Botanical Society and the Council's Tree Officer. Options discussed included trenches, additional hedge planting, hedge layering, re-coppicing Hazel, more robust bollards and gates. Another option was to simply block the access points to Hamm Court Farm on the Meads side and/or on the other side when the identity of the new land owner had been established. None of these measures had been budgeted for and all would need careful research and discussion.

The legal status of the site was important. Any deterrent would need to complement the Meads Management Plan as well as have the permission of Fields In Trust as Chertsey Meads was the subject of a legally binding agreement which sought to protect the site from development.

The SANG status of the site was also relevant. Members were advised that the newly appointed Open Space and Development Manager, Mr Swatridge would be looking at how SANG funding could be used to benefit the Meads and other open spaces in the borough.

The Group understood the need for consideration of ecological issues but were equally concerned about site security and protection of residents as well as the site which had suffered in recent months owing to the Esso pipeline works.

This led to another discussion about general management and maintenance issues such as the condition of the sleepers, gaps in hedgerows and whether Esso could assist with replacing the sleepers with more robust bollards for example. The Group was advised that a sum of money had been received from Esso for environmental protection works; the list was quite specific and had been negotiated with Esso by the previous Assistant Head of Green Space. It was noted that this list of works formed a legal agreement with Esso; the Council's Legal department had been closely involved with this and what the money could be used for was subject to a number of restrictions. To vary this would be very difficult.

Officers confirmed that the 'Esso list' included some hedge laying, shaping and planting up gaps plus re-coppicing Hazel. The ideal time to do this would be over the winter months between October and February. It was acknowledged that this was not an instant 'fix' and the hedgerows would take time to mature but would ultimately be very beneficial for biodiversity.

The Group agreed that a smaller group be convened (reference 5.2 of the Group's Constitution) to take this forward with Dr Steward and interested parties.

5 **Update on Actions from the Last Meeting**

Moorings

There had been no progress with moving on the two over stay moorers from the second picnic area where they had been for some years.

Members were concerned that the condition of the Meads was suffering if raw sewerage was being emptied into The Thames, plus BBQs in the summer and potential anti-social

behaviour, all of which contravened the byelaws.

Neither vessel was registered with the Environment Agency. PCSO Sutton considered that if certain criteria were met a Community Protection Warning could be issued. However, neither occupant of the vessels were currently in evidence. Details of the vessels would be supplied to the Head of Green Spaces to follow up.

UK Power Networks (UKPN) Proposal

It was reported that this proposal had halted at the point where a risk assessment was required to lay the cables in the same trench as the Esso pipeline. It was confirmed that the matter did not rest with the Council who had done all it could to facilitate, but with Esso and UK Power Networks. Mrs Hearne said that she would make some checks with her contact and Officers would re-check with Legal.

[After the meeting it was confirmed that the draft wayleave was with UKPN and the Council awaited comments from them]

Bridge Repairs

The Group was advised that Officers were in contact with Surrey County Council to discuss repairs to the bridge; progress with which had stopped some months ago when the ownership of Hamm Court Farm had changed. It was suggested that re-instating the gate/barrier across Footpath 9 would be beneficial and or blocking off access to the smaller crossing point from the Meads side.

The accident in January which resulted in a dog losing its life was very sad and had highlighted the risks of exercising dogs around water when the water levels were high and fast flowing. Warning signs had been put up.

It was noted that the area around the informal path between the bridges was generally overgrown with hogweed and other vegetation. However, as a local Nature Reserve, the Group was advised that the Council did not want to over clear the area to encourage more biodiversity. Immediate safety concerns such as barbed wire could be prioritised subject to funding being available.

It was agreed to also approach Surrey Fire and Rescue for advice around water safety and a health and safety inspection would be advisable around suitable warning signage and vegetation clearance around the Bourne.

6 Management and Maintenance

The group discussed various management and maintenance issues as set out below:

Height Barrier

Officers confirmed that the process for arranging repairs had been protracted whilst colleagues resolved some insurance and procurement issues. Esso had accepted liability for damaging the barrier and were going to pay for it to be repaired. As the barrier was bespoke, owing to some integral safety features, the lead in period was 6 to 7 weeks from the point of order.

Some of the Group asked whether it was possible to have a lower gate like the one in car park 2 or an additional gate that could be locked overnight, which would effectively block access to the Meads for everyone except residents. There was some concern about access for emergency vehicles, which was acknowledged. However, some residents still wished this to be considered and thought that emergency vehicles would find a way through if necessary.

SANG Projects

Progress with various SANG funded projects was noted including the completion of works in car park 2, and re-painting picnic benches. It was reported that the existing passing places required some maintenance to make them more user friendly, such as cutting back some vegetation. Tarmacking the passing place on the approach to car park 2 was noted along with the additional bee bumps. The request for an additional passing place along the main roadway was noted. More robust signage to warn visitors that BBQs, bonfires and camping were prohibited had arrived and would be installed shortly; it was agreed on the main road to existing posts but to be mindful of maintaining the character of the Open Space.

Tree Works

Officers confirmed that funding had been secured to replace the damaged whips planted last year. Works had also been carried out near a residential property to thin the shrubbery around the first picnic area to deter anti-social behaviour.

Esso Pipeline

It was acknowledged that works had taken longer than desired and Esso would be issuing communications to residents with an updated timescale and would update the signs on site with the revised dates. They had recently re-commenced work on site. When complete, Esso would re-instate the site in consultation with the Council as landowner, in accordance with the terms of the land agreement.

Neospora

The Group was advised that Officers would be submitting a report to the Council's Environment and Sustainability Committee regarding a new policy to remove dog waste bins from parks and open spaces, including Chertsey Meads because dog waste could be put in normal bins. There was some concern that people would not bother using the bins at all so this would have to be monitored. Officers confirmed that damaged bins were not being replaced. Funding for additional bins would need to be agreed in discussions between Environmental Services and Community Services.

Any measures to limit the number of dogs people could bring onto the Meads was under consideration, particularly in light of the incident elsewhere in Surrey which had resulted in the death of a dog walker. Enforcement was also an issue.

Bat Hibernaculum.

The Group noted that the bat hibernaculum was currently unused and in a state of disrepair and that it would be an option to re-secure it in consultation with the Surrey Bat Group. A survey from 2021 had recorded six bat species on site, no roosts had been identified although it was thought they were nearby. Vegetation management would need to take account of having the least impact on bats.

Hay Cut

An option to combine the hay cut and reed bed cutting was noted. The Group was concerned that the reed bed was increasing in size and coverage because it had not been cut in accordance with the management plan. It was suggested that one side was kept long for the birds and deer and the other side cut in alternate years. Officers would liaise with Mr Phillips further, noting that the best time to cut the reed bed was in October/November. Cutting any earlier would only be possible subject to a survey by Surrey Wildlife Trust to ensure there were no ground nesting birds.

The results of the National Vegetation Classification survey carried out by Surrey Wildlife Trust in 2021 were noted. Chertsey Meads was not species poor and supported a good range of rare and unusual plant species. The site's importance in terms of encouraging wildlife had to be balanced to maintain the sympathetic meadow management regime currently in place.

Stewardship Arrangement for Chertsey Meads

Members were asked to note that the current Countryside Stewardship Arrangement for Chertsey Meads expired at the end of 2023. Renewal of the arrangement fell to Officers in the Green Spaces team in Environmental Services.

7 **Fire Breaks**

The Group discussed the merits of introducing fire breaks to the Meads in response to Climate Change and the increasing number of wildfires. Advice had been sought from Surrey Fire and Rescue Service about producing a Fire Plan for the Meads and including it in the general Management Plan subject to consultation with stakeholders.

An indicative plan of potential fire breaks was noted and Officers thanked for the preparatory research undertaken so far. It was agreed that there was a balance to be struck between making the Meads safe for everyone, especially during the summer months when the grassland was at its highest and maintaining the site in accordance with the Management Plan.

Different options were discussed including how wide breaks should or could be, where located and how maintained and funded, given there was no budget currently to introduce fire breaks. It was asked whether this type of work would be SANG funded or met from the general parks and open spaces budget. It was confirmed that SANG monies could be used to enhance the site but that it could also be classed as maintenance. Officers were currently working on a SANG strategy but any proposals would have to be properly costed.

Further thought was needed before making a decision but generally members agreed that a more frequent 'cut and collect' was desirable and that using the existing paths would be a good idea and to look at wider paths but not as wide as 5m which it was agreed would not benefit the overall look and feel of the site. There was an option to have variable widths depending on the location. Officers would share the mowing plan with Surrey Wildlife Trust and other key experts on the Group to discuss further to include obtaining further professional advice.

Recommend that –

Officers to take forward the idea of fire breaks and/or an enhanced mowing plan in consultation with key stakeholders to include detailed costed plans, and subject to sufficient funding being identified, and further professional advice being secured.

8 **Annual Work Programme**

The Group noted that the annual work programme was last updated in February 2022. A new Management Plan would need to be prepared with assistance from key stakeholders including Surrey Wildlife Trust. The Management Plan was due to expire in 2026. A lack of resources had meant that the annual work programme had not been updated but it was hoped to address this.

9 **Events**

Chertsey Show

Mr Turner advised that the 2023 Chertsey Show plans were well under way and the show was due to take place on 12 – 13 August 2023.

Members discussed the 2022 show, which despite the very hot weather had been a success.

It was confirmed that the one-way traffic arrangements could only be in force for the duration of the show itself for security reasons.

The new bin policy which was due to be considered by the Environment and Sustainability Committee would affect the show arrangements. Mr Turner agreed to discuss this separately with the Corporate Head of Environmental Services who confirmed there would be a budget to support community events.

The Chertsey Show would be discussed by the Council's Safety Advisory Group, to which Esso would also be invited.

Annual Site Visit

The Group did not set a date for an annual site visit.

Litter Pick

A Litter pick date had been set for Sunday 16 April 2023. However, staffing resources and availability of a trained first aider to attend the event meant that it could not take place as a Council led event this year. Volunteers could meet informally but this would be at their own risk and it was unlikely the Group would have the usual access to litter pickers and sacks. This would need further discussion.

10 **Any other Business**

The Group wanted to discuss the recent events at the Meads concerning a private property adjacent to Council owned land and other related incidents elsewhere. This was essentially a community safety concern but which touched on issues that might impinge on management and maintenance and the condition of the Meads.

Local residents had been alarmed by an attempt to gain entry to private properties but thanked Esso's security people for their assistance and the donation of some Heras fencing to deter further attempts. Options to address this were discussed.

The Council had acted swiftly in liaison with Esso but like the Police were limited in action they could take in what was essentially a civil matter.

Residents were grateful for the support given but remained concerned. They were urged to continue reporting incidents to the Police and remain vigilant.

Ms Harper asked the Group whether there would be support for events to mark the Great British Green Week from 10-18 June, or if they had an ideas of events that could take place to raise the profile of the Meads such as holding an open water safety event. Mrs Hearne agreed to discuss with Mr Bickford and report back. Any suggestions would be welcome.

The dates of future meetings noted as Tuesday 5 September 2023 and Tuesday 27 February 2024. To be held at the Civic Centre in Addlestone at 7.30pm.