



Helsby Parish Council

Minutes of the Parks, Cemetery and Allotments Committee meeting held at 7pm in the Parish Office at Helsby Community Sports Club on Monday 22nd April 2024

Present:

Cllr. Rob Nicklin (Chair)
Cllr. Sarah Temple
Cllr. Chris Ellams
Cllr. Mike Branigan

Also present:

Claire Jones Parish Clerk
1 member of the public

1. Public Participation – the treasurer of the Village Produce Association (VPA) spoke to outline the history of the group and to offer some background about the lease held with the parish council. It was outlined that the association had been active for over 90 years and had over 200 members. It was noted that they would like to continue with the lease of the land which contained the VPA hut but made 2 requests: to ensure the accuracy of the accompanying map to clarify which areas they were responsible for; and given the community-based nature of the association, to keep the rent at a nominal amount.
2. Apologies for absence were noted from Cllr Stothard.
3. Cllr. Temple declared an interest in items 7.2 and 7.3 as her partner was a member of the Village Produce Association and held 2 allotments.
4. Confirmation of Previous Minutes. It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Parks, Cemetery and Allotments Committee meeting held on 29th January 2024 were accepted as accurate and were duly signed by the Chair – **PCA12/24**.
5. Clerk's report – the clerk outlined the following:
 - The coping stones work on the wall adjacent to the parish field had been completed. The clerk to write to the homeowner to inform them of the action taken;
 - Work to the spring rocker unit and the telescope in the play area had been completed;
 - The general maintenance contract with Helsby Garden Services had been signed by both parties. The clerk to investigate options for them to undertake play inspection training; and

- The tree surveys had been completed and any urgent issues identified in the survey had been carried out.

6. The final budget spend for 2023/24 was noted and the Parks, Cemetery & Allotments Committee budget and reserves for the year 2024/25 were discussed as follows:

Budget Code	Description	Budget 2023/24 £	Budget spent 2023/24 £	Budget 2024/25 £	Budget spent to date £	Predicted To 31/03/25 £
201	Allotment maintenance	3,000	4,398	3,150	0	3,150
202	Allotment water charge	300	256	315	0	300
211	Cemetery repairs/renewals	1,000	746	1,050	0	1,000
212	Cemetery maintenance	3,500	4,282	3,675	0	4,500
213	Parks and general maintenance work	12,000	11,548	12,600	0	12,600
214	Park grass cutting	5,000	2,939	5,250	0	4,500
215	Park equipment	2,500	2,588	2,500	0	2,500
TOTAL		27,300	26,757	28,540	0	28,550

Reserves

Budget Code	Description	Reserves 2023/24	Spent 2023/24	Reserves 2024/25	Spent 2024/25	Total
501	Play area improv./upgrades	9,000	0	9,000	0	50,000
502	Future burial provision	4,105	0	7,900	0	43,152
504	Cemetery extension area design project	5,000	300	5,000	0	9,700
506	Cemetery garage roof	7,500	1,708	0	0	0
507	Wheelchair accessible roundabout	5,000	0	0	0	5,000
520	Parks Masterplan	20,000	0	0	0	20,000
TOTAL		50,605	2,008	21,900	0	127,852

The following was also noted:

- All figures above exclude VAT and are rounded to the nearest £1.
- Budget Code 201 – Contract with Helsby Garden Services for allotment maintenance work in 2024/25 = £2,880. Also to include hedge maintenance work with Hilldale (£88) and any other potential ad-hoc maintenance costs. Over budget in 2023/24 due to gate and fence repairs and tree felling.
- Budget Code 202 – All meter readings continue to be estimated as meter is obscured with water. Water Plus and United Utilities have both failed to assist.

- iv) Budget Code 211 – Look to appoint a contractor to carry out a memorial safety testing exercise.
- v) Budget Code 212 - Contract with Helsby Garden Services for cemetery maintenance work = £4,320. May also be some ad-hoc maintenance costs on top of contracted work (e.g. spoil heap clearance and tree root maintenance). Over budget in 2023/24 due to additional ivy removal and crown reduction to chestnut tree.
- vi) Budget Code 213 – Contract for general maintenance work (park and Helsby-wide) in 2024/25 = £9,990. Also to include £154 contracted hedge maintenance work and any other ad-hoc work as identified.
- vii) Budget Code 214 – Grass cutting contract for 2024/25 is £3,023 plus an additional £1,000 for weekly cuts of the parish field. Budget allows for any additional cuts, if required. Countrywide are paid over a 6-month rather than a 12-month period.
- viii) Budget Code 215 – Includes ROSPA safety inspection at play area.
- ix) Budget Code 501 – £9,000 added to specified reserves to include railings/gate maintenance. £50,000 expected in specified reserves by 31/3/25.
- x) Budget code 502 - £4,105 added to specified reserves in 2023/24. Budget is 100% of the amount of income received for burials in the preceding fiscal year. The income for 2024/25 is = £7,900. £43,152 expected in specified reserves by 31/3/25.
- xi) Budget Code 504 - it was noted that the Finance Committee had approved an additional £5,000 for the construction element of the project.

7. Allotments

- 7.1. The total income from the allotments in 2023/24 was noted as £1,657.50 (£1,500 from rent plus a total of £157.50 paid by the allotment holders for public liability insurance).
- 7.2. The clerk agreed to progress the S106 application for rabbit-proofing and drainage works at the Queens Drive site once she had received further information about the need for the project from the allotment holders.
- 7.3. It was noted that the council's lease with the Village Produce Association expired in 2024. It was **RESOLVED to take legal advice on the renewal of the VPA lease – PCA13/24**. The clerk agreed to contact the council's solicitor and to clarify the latest position with the air quality monitoring station lease at the same time. It was also agreed that the plan within the council's lease with RSK needed to be updated. It was noted that the VPA would be content with another 20-year lease but with the addition of a break clause after 10 years. Alternatively, it was suggested that the end dates for all three lease agreements (AQMS, RSK and VPA) could be brought together so they expired at the same time.
- 7.4. It was noted that several letters had been issued to tenants at both sites following the previous allotment inspection last November and that overall standards appeared to be falling. However, following the latest inspection it was noted that most of these plots were showing signs of improvement and with a few exceptions, both sites were generally in a good condition. It was noted that a complaint had been received from a tenant that had been served an eviction notice in November but had not received any letters from the council due to a

house move. It was **RESOLVED to revoke the eviction notice at plot QD3B but to re-issue another 'Stage 2' improvement notice and to inspect the plot in 1 months' time – PCA14/24.** Members also agreed to consider the tenant's suggestion to send letters by e-mail at the next review of both the Allotment Policy and Tenancy Agreement. The clerk agreed to send any letters both by e-mail and post in the meantime.

- 7.5. The clerk outlined that she had carried out an inspection on 19th April following a note to all plot holders that inspections would resume shortly. It was noted that the tenant of plot QD3F would be served an eviction notice which would be sent both by post via recorded delivery and e-mail (with a read receipt). It was noted that two Stage 1 letters would also be sent out (plots OCR1R and OCR7L).
- 7.6. It was noted that the clerk had circulated a list of the current allotment tenancies and waiting list. Members noted that plot OCR15 had recently become vacant.
- 7.7. It was agreed in principle to approve a request from the holders of plot 2B (small) on Old Chester Road to move to plot 3 (large). Cllr. Temple agreed to liaise with the tenants of both plots to agree timescales. A suggestion to split OCR15 into two smaller plots was also made. The clerk agreed to contact the next person on the waiting list to check their preferences. Members declined a request from a Queens Drive tenant to move to a new plot as this was no longer vacant. It was agreed to offer them an adjacent plot which would become vacant shortly as an alternative.
- 7.8. A request from an allotment holder in relation to taking any cemetery spoil heap material for use at the allotments was considered. Given that burial arisings were subject to waste classification/regulation, it was **RESOLVED to decline a request to allow allotment tenants to use any excess burial arisings from the cemetery - PCA15/24.**
- 7.9. No member's reports were raised.

8. Parish Field and Children's Play Area

- 8.1. The results of the latest RoSPA Play Safety inspection were noted. Whilst no elements were identified as high risk, the clerk agreed to liaise with Helsby Garden Services in relation to some of the issues raised. It was agreed that any issues identified with the cableway would be dealt with as a single project in the Autumn along with the replacement of the spring in the springer unit. The clerk agreed to source quotes nearer the time. It was **RESOLVED to complain to Northwich Town Council in relation to the fixing of the basket swing and to ask them to resolve the issues raised by RoSPA at no cost to Helsby Parish Council - PCA16/24.**
- 8.2. It was noted that Planit had provided a quote in relation to design work for the park masterplan project. Cllr. Nicklin agreed to source another 2 quotes for a comparison. The clerk agreed to thank a local resident that had offered some suggestions in terms of potential new equipment and Cllr. Nicklin agreed to include these within the council's specification, along with an idea for 2-minute litter pick boards. The clerk outlined that the scouts had no major objections to the provision of a climbing wall on the scout hut wall and she agreed to look further into taking this forward during 2024, potentially using some of the S106 arts funding.

- 8.3. It was noted that the guides had written to the council to say that their preference would be to try to sell the guide hut as the scouts had declined an offer to use the building. Various options were discussed such as finding a new tenant or asking the guides to demolish the hut, but members felt that further information from the guides and some legal advice would be beneficial before taking the matter any further. It was **RESOLVED for the clerk to seek legal advice from the council's solicitor and to seek further clarify from the guides about their plans for the future of the building – PCA17/24.**
- 8.4. Parish field lighting – it was noted that a complaint had been received from a resident about the failure of the council to light the top end of the field overnight. Given the difficulties of finding the timer switch in the scout hut, it was **RESOLVED to ask Mega Electrical to source and disable the timer switches in both the scout and guide huts and set the lights to rely solely on the light sensitive timers – PCA18/24.** It was also **RESOLVED for the lights to be kept on during the hours of darkness all year round – PCA19/24.** The clerk agreed to remind the scouts and guides to send invoices for the electricity costs of the lights.
- 8.5. It was noted that Helsby Garden Services had an extensive list of ad-hoc tasks to complete as part of the general maintenance contract and the clerk was in regular dialogue with him to move these tasks forward.
- 8.6. Member's reports – the future use of the dismantled goal posts was discussed. It was suggested that given their poor general condition, the best option may be to dispose of them from the side of the storage container.

9. Cemetery

- 9.1. The income received from cemetery fees in 2023/24 was noted as £10,950.
 - 9.2. It was **RESOLVED to renew the Council's annual membership with the ICCM at a cost of £100 – PCA20/24.**
 - 9.3. Cemetery extension area design project update – it was noted that a topographical survey had been completed and a draft design was expected within the next 2-3 weeks.
 - 9.4. No member's reports were raised.
10. The outstanding actions log was noted. It was suggested that some of these tasks could be removed/updated.
 11. Urgent matters – Cllrs. Nicklin and Temple outlined that they were happy to continue with their chair/vice chair roles on the committee after May 2024.
 12. Date of next meeting – it was agreed to reschedule this to Monday 15th July 2024.

The meeting closed at 8.59pm

Chair's signature Dated.....