

WEST SWINDON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the
PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
Monday 2ND March 2020 6.00 pm West
Swindon Library

Present:

Cllr Mike Burtenshaw
Cllr Nigel Gibbons
Cllr Geoff Gould
Cllr Prakash Khaitan
Cllr Tim Makofu
Cllr Nick Martin
Cllr Caryl Sydney Smith (Chair)

Officers:

Paula Harrison (Parish Manager)
Leanne Curtis (Assistant Clerk)

Public: Five

Public Question Time:

Resident asked whether decisions regarding the future of public pay phones had been made based on incorrect assumptions about usage. The Chair advised that the Parish Council had submitted its recommendations based on the updated figures and local knowledge. Swindon Borough Council would form its own recommendations.

Resident asked Councillors to note that the Westlea litter picking group attracts participants of all ages and had recently received notification that the group has been nominated for a Pride of Swindon award. Councillors conveyed their thanks and appreciation to the group.

Resident reported that the earlier drainage work undertaken on Shaw Ridge was now blocked (Chandos Close).

Resident thanked Councillors for the spring display of bulbs appearing across West Swindon.

Resident asked the Committee to confirm that Swindon Borough Council was withdrawing services in the future. The Chair confirmed that this was the case and that the Parish Council would be looking at all available options.

Cllr Nigel Gibbons reported that he had a number of questions to raise on behalf of a resident:

- *Grass cutting- Schedules plus use of differing machinery at differing times. Parish Council response:* Our current contractor uses a tractor mower for large expanses of grass and small triple mowers for other areas. To assist the tractor mower, the smaller mowers are expected to mow the edges in advance of the other mower – we are aware that the timings have been inconsistent – in part because the tractor mower is only used for a percentage of its time in West Swindon, coordination with our Contractor has not been particularly effective. The Parish Council has decided to take the service in house from July 2020 however it may still contract externally for tractor work so we cannot promise that the synchronising of machinery is fully resolved. It is also important to note that grounds levels are extremely wet and with months of mild weather, grass has grown. We anticipate a very difficult and most likely late start to the mowing season due to these conditions.
- *Hedge cutting- Differing standards reached. Parish Council response:* The Parish Council maintains 67,000 square metres of shrub bed and 69,000 linear metres of hedge across the Parish. Management is a huge and costly undertaking. As such, the Parish Council undertakes one annual cut to hedge and shrub beds. Hedges are predominantly cut by a tractor side arm. This is efficient in terms of time and reducing risks to hand/arm vibration from longer use of hand tools. It is however a rough cut. Shrub beds are cut annually also but with hand tools. Different shrub plants are cut to different levels to reflect variations in growth and habit. This may result in the appearance of different standards. Generally cuts are undertaken to 3-4 feet to allow a season's regrowth that will still be manageable for cutting 12 months later. There should not be differing standards in West Swindon where comparable machinery/methods are being deployed.
- *Stinging nettles over footpaths. Still evident today. Parish Council response:* The Parish Council does not use weed killer on a routine basis. Where there is a specific area of obstruction that is significantly impeding use of a footpath, the Parish Council team will deal with it on a case by case basis in response to specific reports. This is usually strimmed. If there is no obstruction we do not routinely remove nettles.
- *Brambles and low branches over footpaths. Still evident. Parish Council response:* Where there is a specific area of obstruction that is impeding use of a footpath, the Parish Council team will deal with it on a case by case basis in response to specific reports. If there is no obstruction we do not routinely remove brambles. If low branches are from trees on public open space, reachable from the ground and can be dealt with by hand tools, the Parish Team can respond to individual complaints. If it is not able to be dealt with by hand tools from the ground, it is a matter for Swindon Borough Council and should be reported directly to them.
- *Overgrown hedges and trees. Only action taken was to the overgrown bushes to the footpath on Shaw lane and close the The Bramptons. Parish Council response:* There is no routine or planned work on trees, these remain in the ownership and therefore the responsibility of Swindon Borough Council. Generally, the Parish Council does not take action on hedges or branches in public open spaces unless they border a

footpath or require remedial action. Where there is a specific area of obstruction that is impeding use of a footpath, the Parish Council team will deal with it on a case by case basis in response to specific reports.

- *Meadow Trial. Never been cut over the 2 years as the published plan. The 1m edging to footpaths were done in Sept 19 but the small triangular section nor the footpath through the southerly section ever been cut. Parish Council response:* The meadow areas will continue on Shaw Ridge and Toothill Park. The Committee has considered whether or not to continue with edging and has determined that it should continue as it should prevent grass toppling onto the footpaths. In the past, the Contractor has used Agency staff for mowing and as a result it can take time for a route to be learnt and understood. From 1 July, West Swindon Parish Council will be delivering its own service and so this type of detailed mowing should be improved.
- *Cycle trail. That was stated as being cleared and reinstated. No action to date. Parish Council response:* The Parish Council has noted the area and understands that will review it as and when there are the resources to deal with it. In the meantime, the Parish Council is continuing to fundraise to create a formal BMX pump track in West Swindon which hopefully should redirect bike users.
- *Overall standards of footpaths. Cracks, very uneven, raised manhole covers etc. Very unsafe. Parish Council response:* Responsibility of Swindon Borough Council.
- *Request for additional seating on the Ridge Path enjoying views to the northj over Cricklade and beyond. Parish Council response:* The request has been noted and will be considered for installation as and when resources are available. It is should be noted that seating on the grassed bank side of the footpath is not preferable due to challenges it would present to the mower drivers. An appropriate location will need to be considered.
- *Path running up to the Ridge path from West Swindon Leisure car park adjacent to the Indian restaurant is in a very poor state. Still signs of stinging nettles over the footpath, grass overgrowing path edges, surface very muddy and where the wooded pathways cross both mud and wood chippings lay. Overall not a pleasure to walk over. In fact the wood chipping will in a very short time rot down only adding to the problem. Parish Council response:* The copse areas and woodland did not transfer to the Parish Council and remain the responsibility of Swindon Borough Council. A small group of volunteers undertake work in the Shaw Ridge copse and lay down wood chippings for informal pathways. These are not managed or maintained by the Parish Council. In the last two months, the Parish Council team did cut back overgrown path edging in key corner points of the Shaw Ridge Linear Park however we do not have the resource to cut back every path at the present time. There has been heavy rainfall and saturated ground conditions this year which make any non paved or tarmac routes a challenge. There are no signs of obstruction to walking on the Shaw Ridge footpath from Asda to the play area on Shaw Ridge at the current time that require remedial action. If an area is unable to be easily passed by pedestrians, we would need further details in order to take action.

Meeting start 6.22 pm

335. Apologies

Cllr Simon Firth
Cllr Mary Martin
Cllr Keith Williams

The Councillors listed above are not in attendance due to work or committee commitments.

RESOLVED that the apologies submitted are noted and approved.

336. Declarations of Interest & Applications for Dispensation

Cllr Nick Martin asked that it be noted that as a Member of the Swindon Borough Council Planning Committee, he would not be participating in Item 5. Planning Report and that he is a property owner in Pioneer Close in respect of Item 5.

337. Update on Volunteer Litter Picking and Fund

The Assistant Clerk circulated a report, a copy of which appears as **Appendix A** in the Minute Book. The report set out hours submitted by individuals and groups as members of the Clean and Green fund. The report also noted expenditure of the fund to date by each area.

Councillors noted the report.

338. Future Grounds Maintenance

The Parish Manager discussed with Councillors the current standards and frequencies applied across grounds maintenance and street cleaning in order that Councillors could identify changes to current practices. Councillors agreed that continuity of existing standards would be the best focus.

RESOLVED that

- a) The Parish Manager continues to review future options based on existing service delivery standards, timings and frequencies
- b) The Parish Manager investigates options and prices for Parish boundary signs
- c) The Parish Office promote communications about the challenges relating to grass cutting this Spring.

339. Planning Report

Cllr Nick Martin abstained from this item. Councillors reviewed the applications in the Planning Report, a copy of which appears as **Appendix B** in the Minute Book and resolved the following:

339.1 S/HOU/20/0204 5 Pioneer Close, Middleleaze Swindon SN5 5TU

Erection of a single storey rear extension. **No Objection**

339.2 S/HOU/20/0229 50 Lineacre Close, Grange Park Swindon SN5 6DB

Erection of ground and first floor extension to rear. **No Objection**

339.3 The Parish Manager circulated a submission from Mr Martin Fry, Swindon Borough Council, Highways detailing plans for redirection of a footpath from Angus close to Pilgrim Close, a copy of which appears as **Appendix C** in the Minute Book.

RESOLVED that the following comments be sent in response to this communication

- a) West Swindon Parish Council cannot comment on the redirection without a detailed drawing indicating where the new footpath will be installed.
- b) The Parish Council requests that all consideration be given to ensure that a new footpath is installed and open prior to the closure of the existing path
- c) The Parish Council requests further information about the start and completion dates of this proposed work

340. **Date of next meeting: Monday 6 April 2020 6.00 pm**

Signed.....

Date.....

Chair of the Planning & Environment Committee