



**LOOSE PARISH COUNCIL
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES
Meeting held on Monday 11 March 2024
at 7.30pm in Loose Parish Pavilion, KGVPF.**

In attendance: Councillors: Charlie Hollister (Chairman - CH), Peter Rigby (PR), Andrew Richards (AR), Sarah Leeson (SL), Mick Westwood (MJW), Sue Hill (SH) and Velma Bennett (VB).

Also in attendance: Amanda Baker (Assistant Clerk - AB) and Nicky Bourne (Deputy Clerk - NB) who took the minutes.

There were 5 members of the public in attendance.

House-keeping and meeting rules were covered by the Chairman before the meeting began.

AGENDA

1. To receive any apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Elaine Lawford (EL - prior engagement) and Jim Andrew (JA – prior engagement).

2. To receive and agree any decision regarding any item to be taken as confidential

None.

3. To receive any declarations of pecuniary interest on items in the agenda

(In accordance with the NALC Model Code of Conduct for Parish Councils (pursuant to section 27 of the Localism Act 2011). In addition, any declaration of personal or prejudicial interest (as agreed by LPC 21 Jan 13)).

None.

4. To receive any signed dispensation requests for any item on this agenda

(For Councillors to approve/disapprove as appropriate and to agree the reason for the dispensation if approved (see dispensation form). This follows the agreement made by the LPC at the meeting held on the 17 July 17).

None.

5. To sign as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2023 (Pages 418-422)

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2023 (Pages 418-422) were duly **AGREED** as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

The Committee agreed to take agenda item 6i first and to switch agenda items 8b and 8c.

6. Questions/comments from the public or Community groups (3mins)

(To include any correspondence & phone calls received by the office from members of the public)

a. Kent Men of the Trees (KMOTT) Trees In the Village competition

The Office has received notification that the winners of the best village visited in the 2024 KMOTT competition was Loose. A certificate and report have been sent. A “tree-credit” has been awarded. The report highlights that Loose has “a rich mix of age and species of trees. Council and Private land

also contain many large trees of interest. The Parish Council and complementary partner groups have in hand a longer-term vision of new and succession planting. There is much evidence of managed tree care and renewal.”

The Committee **AGREED** that the certificate should be displayed on the Pavilion hall noticeboard and KMOTT be contacted to ask if a Chequer tree could be sourced for the prize. The Committee all **AGREED** that the news should be shared with Loose Amenties Association (LAA) and Hoods Tree Services with thanks for their contributions that helped achieve the award. The news should also be shared with the community through the normal publications, website and social media.

b. Making Space for Nature update

NB attended the first Making Space for Nature in Kent and Medway briefing. The aim is to collaboratively develop Kent’s Local Nature Recovery Strategy by May 2025. The outcome will be a spatial plan providing the ecological framework for the planning system, driving funding and action for nature as well as securing wider environmental benefits. There have since been some face-to-face brainstorming workshops and a questionnaire published. NB has spoken with LAA and some local conservation volunteers interested in following the programme’s development. NB has completed the Parish questionnaire which asked about land ownership. The Committee **AGREED** that the office should continue to monitor the scheme, engaging where it would benefit Loose, and involving interested volunteers or other organisations as relevant. Action: NB

c. Pickering Street issues raised by resident at LPC meeting

This item was referred from the LPC meeting of 19 February 2024, where the resident spoke of concerns of speeding and parked cars in Pickering Street. Since the meeting NB has discussed with KCC Highways and as expected, they would not install physical measures as priorities remain with the A229 speed and parking issues around the school. The cut through from Boughton Lane was investigated and land ownership confirmed. NB will feed back this information to the resident. Action: NB

d. Walnut Tree Lane pothole

This item was referred from the LPC meeting of 19 February 2024. Since that meeting NB sought a quote to bring the likely cost to this meeting, but the contractor who resurfaced the car park has offered to fill the pothole free of charge. The Committee **AGREED** to the work and asked that the funeral directors be informed when it would be undertaken. Action: NB

e. Open bin replacement programme

NB explained the progress with the replacement of the open bins by Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) which has taken longer than expected and caused residents concern. The replacements that MBC agreed to fund are now all installed. However, John Edwards (Public Realm Operations Manager, MBC Environmental Services Section) has changed his mind regarding the village green and will not install a bin by the bench because there are two large bins already nearby. The bin at the pig bench will not be emptied by MBC and the Clerks’ office will be making arrangements for the emptying. A resident contacted the office to ask whether the new double bin at the pig bench contravened Article 4/Conservation area regulations as over one metre tall. This bin is the same height as all the existing bins that have been in the Conservation area for some years, but the Clerk has contacted the MBC Conservation Area Officer on the matter.

f. Memorial bench request for Brooks Field

This item was referred from the LPC meeting of 19 February 2024. A resident has asked for permission to install a bench in Brooks Field in memory of his late brother. He was not a resident of the parish, but a regular to the area and in particular to the Chequers Public House. The family would take responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of the bench going forward. The Committee discussed that there are currently three seats within Brooks Field and that they have turned down previous similar requests. They **AGREED** they should stand by their wish to keep

Brooks Field as undeveloped and natural as possible, with no further installations, particularly as it is now protected by village green status. It was suggested that the family could possibly approach the Chequers Public House for a memorial in the garden. Action: NB to contact the family.

g. Loose Valley Conservation Area request for support

A letter received from Tovil Parish Council had been pre-circulated asking if LPC will add their name in support of their letter to MBC's Head of Planning and Development. The letter requests that the Loose Valley Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan is produced as a matter of urgency. This is to protect the important green and blue corridor into the central urban core of Maidstone, which is being put under considerable pressure by development. After discussion, the Committee **AGREED** to add their support, but asked the office to check whether the local conservation groups (Valley Conservation Society and Loose Amenities Association) had been included in the request. Action: NB

h. Melrose Close refuse issues raised by a resident

A resident contacted the office with concerns over refuse issues affecting Melrose Close. Although not currently in Loose Parish, this road will be after the merger. There have been missed bin collections, without a reason being given. NB has asked the resident to contact MBC directly if bin collections are missed again and refer back to LPC if the situation persists. A second issue was discussed relating to a specific property. SL suggested contacting Sean Carter (Chairman North Loose Residents' Association – NLRA) as he had dealt with this same issue previously. Action: NB

i. Cornwallis Academy outdoor event and alcohol licence application

Residents neighbouring Cornwallis Academy contacted the Office to share knowledge of an application for a Premises Licence for public outdoor events. They had concerns regarding the hours and frequency that events could be hosted if the open licence was granted. NB consulted with Ward Cllr Sue Grigg who investigated with MBC Licensing, and NB consulted with the school to get clarification. After a telephone conversation, the Academy Events Manager sent a statement which was read out by NB explaining that the application was for their annual fireworks event. He stated that the premises licence was being applied for because a Temporary Event Notice can only cover up to 499 attendees, and MBC Licensing advised this was the only alternative for their event. In further communication he answered queries from NB regarding future plans and explained why the 3 days were given. MBC Licensing have explained that as a school, the Academy is exempt from the entertainment restrictions so the licence is essentially for the sale of alcohol. As the deadline for comments is 11 March 2024, NB had applied for an extension to allow LPC to meet and agree any comment, but was informed that extensions are not granted in the same way as they are for planning applications. MBC Licensing did advise that as complaints had already been received the matter would go to a hearing.

Five residents attended the meeting to explain their concerns, and reiterate the issues they are already facing with the noise from the 3g pitch (previously brought to the main LPC meeting on 19 February 2024). After discussion, the Committee **AGREED** that comments should still be sent on behalf of LPC, stating that although clarification has been provided by the academy, there is still a risk that plans could change, perfectly legally if the open licence was granted, and it would be preferable for a single event condition to be stated. They also wish to be advised of the date of the hearing and whether a representative can attend. Action: NB

j. Walnut Tree Avenue exit – parking on the hatchings

Ward Cllr Sue Grigg advised that a resident of Walnut Tree Avenue contacted her concerned by the ongoing issue of parked cars on the hatchings, which block sight lines and make the exit extremely dangerous. This is an ongoing issue that LPC showed their KCC Highways Improvement Community Engagement Partner during their site visit but it was frustratingly dismissed. All requests over many years for physical changes have always been refused. The issue is worse at school run time, but there are also regular users of the local businesses choosing to park there. The issue had already

been raised by the Beat Officer to the LPC Office but SG has made a formal request for the Beat Officer to pay a visit to the site and assist in lobbying KCC to rectify the situation. Action: Office to liaise with Beat Officer.

7. The Village Green & The Triangle – to discuss items below and make any necessary decisions

a. Risk assessment for the village sign in the triangle

The risk assessment for the village sign in the triangle has been undertaken by LAA and the paperwork has been received and filed. There are no issues.

8. Brooks Field – Pond - Roy's Wood – to discuss items below and make any necessary decision

a. Woodland Trust free trees application

Information about the tree packs on offer and a link to the scheme had been pre-circulated. After discussion the Committee **AGREED** not to go ahead with an application for a tree pack for Brooks Field on this occasion, and to maintain the space as an open field.

b. MBC "Love Where You Live" pondworks project and related tree works

NB explained that the works identified from the safety inspection have already been agreed by Round Robin but there was a question over extending those works to reduce the cherries, as on closer inspection, they are in very poor condition. A site meeting was held, attended by NB, the pondworks project organiser, the pondworks contractor and the tree works contractor, who explained the safety issues. They proposed that for the long term health of these trees, and for access for the pondworks, the cherries should be cut right back. Currently there are delays in getting planning permission for tree works in the conservation area, so an application has already been submitted. CH highlighted the need to proceed quickly due to nesting season and the deadline for the pondworks grant to be actioned.

After discussion, the Committee **AGREED** to the further work, which will be funded from the 2024-25 tree works budget. The Committee also **AGREED** that when the timescale is known, information clarifying the works and their importance for long term health and sustainability of the area should be published through the normal channels. Action: NB

c. Roy's Wood update (JA/AR)

JA had recently visited Roy's Wood and his report had been pre-circulated. He updated as follows:

- All trees were present (13No)
 - Too early in the year to really ascertain what is alive or dead
 - Common Oak planted a year or so back appears dead (no sap under bark)
 - Pyrenean Oak may be dead (no sap)
 - Oak in north west corner may be dead (no sap)
 - Stakes and straps are okay but some can be removed later in the year as per tree report
- The Hornbeam by Old Loose Hill gate is alive. The stakes have been removed as per the tree report and it seems stable.

The Committee discussed the replacement of the dead oaks and the different levels of success with some of species. The current species are listed on the memorial wood display board.

After discussion it was **AGREED** that the advice of KMOTT should be sought before purchasing replacements. Action: NB. If different species are recommended, and subsequently planted, the display board will need to be updated.

NB advised that she had been in contact with the resident who has 2 potted oaks, and they would still like these to be planted. After discussion the Committee **AGREED** that NB should contact the family to arrange a date when they can meet with JA and AR to plant the oaks up in the area near the King's Coronation Bench. Action: NB

d. Update on the bird box and insect house

The bird box and insect house have been installed on the shed in Brooks Field by the LAA volunteers during a recent working party.

AR asked about the remaining base of the old shed. This may need further work but will be reviewed after the pondworks have taken place.

e. Meadow

CH explained that there has been no further progress with the meadow because Phase 4 has been held back, pending the pond works project. NB explained the history of the meadow development to the new Councillors and why it has not progressed so far this year. The Committee **AGREED** that the 2023-24 funds should be transferred to ear-marked reserves so they are available when works are resumed. Action: KO

9. Cemetery - to discuss items below and make any necessary decisions

a. Update on progress towards the war memorial repairs

The Committee had been notified that the War Memorial Trust had approved the grant pre-application and advised that the works are eligible for a grant of up to 50% of the costs. The next stage is to proceed with the full application. NB has updated All Saints Church and also made contact with the specialist contractor who is reviewing the pre-application feedback and guidance. The application must be submitted by the next deadline (30 June 2024) and the outcome will be advised by 31 August 2024. The Faculty stipulates that works must be completed by 16 December 2024. Action: NB

10. King George V Playing Field (KGVPF) - to discuss items below and make any necessary decisions

a. Matters arising from the quarterly KGVPF walkabout completed 24 January 2024

The record of the last quarterly KGVPF walkabout completed on 24 January 2024 had been pre-circulated. All matters are in hand. Since the last meeting the car park root trip hazard works have been completed, and the annual tree maintenance works are being programmed. The Pavilion and Community Hub (PCH) Committee have agreed to purchase a new sign for outside the gates.

11. Highways – to discuss items below and make any necessary decisions

a. A229 and Highways Improvement Plan (HIP) projects

CH explained there are now only two items on the new HIP, as permitted by the new format. These were agreed with our Highways Improvement Community Engagement Partner as considered to be realistic and achievable requests. However, KCC Highways have now said that, after assessment, it will not be possible to take the 30mph limit further south, which was one of the key priorities. They have now proposed a range of options that could be installed to enhance the gateway and have a greater visual impact to slow drivers. Many of these would have ongoing maintenance costs (e.g. graphics on the road surface). EL and CH have been questioning the assessment and the reasons given for not being able to change the speed limit boundary and EL has been in contact with senior KCC staff.

The Committee discussed whether some of the alternative measures should be considered, whilst the assessment is still being challenged. The new measures could be monitored to assess the impact and if not effective, then pursue the speed limit boundary change. MJW asked if we could request another site meeting. After discussion it was **AGREED** that all correspondence should be shared with the whole Environment Committee, so future actions can be discussed and agreed. The Committee also **AGREED** that a sub-committee or working group should be formed to take highways discussions forward, because the matters being dealt with by the Environment Committee have become impractical to cover effectively in a single meeting, especially with the Parish soon to be extended further. Action: NB to add to next LPC agenda (18 March).

The second item on the HIP relates to improving safety in the areas around Loose Primary school. NB advised that an additional scheme had been put forward by a different KCC Highways Schools team for a crossing outside the school. If successful, and funded by another source, this would allow LPC's priority to focus on the ongoing parking issues.

b. 20mph scheme

NB explained the history of the 20mph scheme proposal for the new Councillors. The Office recently received two emails out of the blue that were copying LPC into comments sent to LAA regarding the 20mph scheme. AR explained that these had been sent following a new consultation by LAA just to residents in the proposed 20mph zone.

As circulated by the Clerk (KO), the Office received responses from LAA and Cllr Simon Webb requesting re-wording of the statement previously agreed at the LPC meeting of 15 January 2024 regarding the 20mph scheme. Cllr Simon Webb has also asked if the 20mph scheme can be put back on the HIP temporarily.

A response had been pre-circulated to the Committee, drafted by CH and EL to LAA, Cllr Simon Webb and Tim Read (KCC Head of Transportation). It explains why the 20mph scheme cannot be included on the HIP, reiterates that LPC have sought clarification and cannot legally hold the money, and suggests a revised statement as follows:

LPC supports the LAA taking this scheme forward on the basis that it is privately funded and they are not involved in any way apart from liaison.

After discussion the Committee **AGREED** that it should be a full council decision and the matter be added to the agenda of the LPC meeting on 18 March 2024. The Committee **AGREED** that the suggested revisions to the structure of the Committees should also be put on the LPC agenda for the 18 March. Action: NB

12. Risk/General Maintenance - to discuss items below and make any necessary decisions

a. Tree works update from the annual tree safety survey

The tree works from the annual safety inspection that were agreed by Round Robin are now being programmed. Applications for any works in the conservation area have been submitted and are awaiting approval.

b. Brooks Field pre and post duck race risk assessments

The pre- and post-duck race risk assessments are planned to take place on Friday 24 May and Wednesday 29 May respectively. Action: Clerks' Office

c. NLRA environment area responsibilities

A meeting with Sean Carter will be taking place on 20 March 2024 to continue handover discussions particularly related to the ancient woodland. Richmond Way green has been added to the groundworks schedule, to be cut monthly from March to October at a cost of £121.30 per cut.

By the next Environment meeting LPC will be operating as the new Parish. NB/KO/CH have completed a walkabout, with Sean Carter and Paul Kinnill, of the NLRA area. The list of NLRA Environment Area responsibilities had been pre-circulated. NB asked the Committee to consider what they would like put in place with respect to formal monitoring. The Committee **AGREED** that there will be a need for new checklists, the planter volunteers will need to be contacted and items will need to be integrated onto the 2024-25 Management Plan. Action: NB

13. Finance

a. To receive an update from the RFO

The Environment Committee finance report and LPC ear-marked reserves report from the RFO had been pre-circulated. NB explained that KO plans to make clearer which ear-marked reserves and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) amounts relate to which Committee. Action: KO. The documents were noted.

b. To review the lighting agreement for the power supply to the LPC street lights

The lighting agreement for the three LPC street lights (one in Walnut Tree Avenue and two in McAlpine Crescent) is with N Power Business Solutions and includes the maintenance contract and electricity costs. The annual cost increased from £195.15 + vat in 2022-23 to £239.88 + vat for 2023-24. Price p/kwh has increased from 33.8p to 50.1p and we no longer receive a discount which in 2022-23 was 12.7p/kwh. The Environment Committee **AGREED** to continue with the current lighting agreement. Action: KO. AR asked if the lights were LED and CH believed they had been converted. However, NB will investigate because one light costs significantly more than the other two. Action:NB

c. To discuss the 2024-2025 Management Plan and make any necessary decisions

NB has started to create the Management Plan for 2024-25, removing items completed, and incorporating items in the new extended parish. After discussion it was **AGREED** that once drafted, the plan should be circulated for comment and agreement by **ROUND ROBIN**. Action: NB

14. Monitoring and Ratification of any ROUND ROBIN decisions

The following **ROUND ROBIN** was ratified:
For Item 13b at the ENV meeting held on 23 October 2023, a **ROUND ROBIN** was sent on 22 January 2024: To agree the quote for necessary works from tree safety report.
A contractor and the quote of £1610 for all works were **AGREED** (CH, PR, JA, EL).

15. To discuss and agree any additions or changes to the website and media

When appropriate, and timelines confirmed, information on the pond and tree works should be published through all usual channels. Action: NB

16. Other Items (discussion only)

The groundworks contractor has advised that that due to rising costs in fuel, maintenance and replacement of machinery, and the general rise in the cost of living, they will be increasing their prices by 4% from 1 April 2024, in line with the current rate of inflation. They hope that the Council understand and will continue to do business with them and thank you them their loyalty and support.

The viaduct repairs have now been completed.

17. Date of Next Meeting – TBC

The meeting closed at 9.47pm.

Signed Dated.....