



Town Clerk

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15 Station Road
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10 September 2024

Dear Councillor,

A meeting of the **ENVIRONMENT SUB COMMITTEE** will be held in the **Council Chamber at 15 Station Road, Stone**, on **TUESDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 2024 at 7:05pm**, or on the rising of the Tourism & Town Promotion Sub-Committee, if later.

The agenda is set out below and I trust you will be able to attend.

Les Trigg
Town Clerk

Councillors: R. Townsend (Chairman), T. Kelt (Vice Chairman), J. Battrick, A. Burgess, B. Kenney, J. Metters, J. Powell, N. Powell and C. Thornicroft.

AGENDA

1. **To receive apologies for absence**
2. **Declarations of Interest**
3. **Requests for Dispensations**
4. **Representations from Members of the Public**

To consider representations from members of the public on items to be considered at this meeting, in accordance with the Council's scheme of public participation.

5. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Sub-Committee held on 16 July 2024, Minute No's ENV25/001 – ENV25/010 (attached)

6. **Environment Sub-Committee Works Update**

To receive an update on the work being undertaken by the Council's Grounds Maintenance contractor (update attached) and to consider any variations required.

7. **Crown Meadow Update**

- i) To receive a copy of the report from the Biodiversity & Ecology Officer at Stafford Borough Council regarding Crown Meadow (attached).

8. **Reports of Working Groups**

- Environmental Working Group (Co-ordinator: Councillor R. Townsend)

Will any Councillors who wish to speak at this meeting, but are not members of the Sub-Committee, please inform the Chairman before the start of the meeting.

Members of the public are welcome to attend the Environment Sub-Committee Meeting as observers and/or to make representations to the committee in accordance with the Council's scheme of public participation. Details of this scheme are displayed on the Town Council's noticeboards and website.

The Council Chamber is accessed from the rear of the building.

Stone Town Council – Environment Sub-Committee

Minutes of the meeting held in the Council Chamber at 15 Station Road, Stone, on Tuesday 16 July 2024

PRESENT: Councillor R. Townsend in the Chair and
Councillors: J. Battrick, P. Leason, J. Powell, N. Powell and C. Thornicroft

Officers: L. Trigg, R. Edwards and T. Williams

By Chairman's Invitation: J. Hood

ABSENT: Councillors: A. Burgess, T. Kelt, B. Kenney, R. Kenney and J. Metters

ENV25/001 Apologies

Councillors: T. Kelt, B. Kenney, R. Kenney and J. Metters

ENV25/002 Declarations of Interest

None

ENV25/003 Request for Dispensations

None

ENV25/004 Representations from Members of the Public

None

ENV25/005 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Environment Sub-Committee meeting held on 19 March 2024 (Minute Numbers ENV24/037 – ENV24/044), were approved as a correct record.

ENV25/006 Environmental Sub-Committee Works Update

The Chairman drew the Sub-Committees attention to the Works Update document which had been enclosed with the agenda for the meeting.

He informed the Sub-Committee about a progress meeting (held in May 2024) with the Grounds Maintenance Contractor and Deputy Town Clerk.

He said the Grounds Maintenance Contractor has been seriously hampered by the wet weather and poor ground conditions which had resulted in him needing to schedule new dates for the completion of project work. The dates were acceptable and contained within the Town Council's financial year for the spending of budgets.

The Chairman advised the Sub-Committee that the main projects were currently:

Hedgerow Planting

To be discussed under a later agenda item.

Renovation of Car Park

The Grounds Maintenance Contractor was hoping to start work very soon now that the ground had started to dry a little.

Excavation of Scrape 2

This is a rollover job from last year. The scrape isn't meeting its purpose as it is overwhelmed with Willow.

ENV25/007 Crown Meadow Update

- i) The Chairman referred the Sub-Committee to his report on Hedgerows and Amphitheatre Trees which had been enclosed with the agenda for the meeting.

He said that the hedgerow planted nearly two years ago was failing to thrive because of the waterlogged and saturated ground conditions with 50% of the hedge not expected to survive.

There was a budget and a plan to plant another 80 metres of hedgerow along the fence line to the Anglers car park. However, this ground had also been waterlogged for a six-month period and the Chairman suggested the project be postponed because it would be careless to plant saplings (worth £1,500) on ground that had already proven unsuitable for hedgerow.

Alongside the poor condition of the hedgerow there was evidence of some trees being stressed or dying (due to age and disease), mainly Cherry trees (Amphitheatre) but also Silver Birch (Crown Meadow).

The Chairman proposed reviewing the situation with the hedgerow and dying trees with a view to putting forward an alternative proposal for managing and improving the natural environment of Crown Meadow. To do this he suggested holding on to the budget of £1,580 which was agreed.

RECOMMENDED: That the Town Council does not pursue the hedgerow project and brings back to the Sub-Committee a further report on alternative proposals for use of the saved money.

ii) Verbal update from the Chairman

Himalayan Balsam

The Chairman referenced a document he had recently issued to the working group about Himalayan Balsam, canvassing opinion on what to do about the problem. Crown Meadow was getting severely affected by the pesky plant in several locations and it was now encroaching on Scrape 2.

The suggestion was made that information be produced for the tourist information board to inform people how it sets seed and to refrain from pulling it up. It was also suggested that a publicity article be put on Facebook but only when a real expert had given accurate advice.

The Sub-Committee agreed there was a need to call upon professional advice (from the Biodiversity & Ecology Officer and Staffordshire Wildlife and the like) on how to safely remove the Himalayan Balsam without spreading it. One advantage of the plant was that it was late flowering and good for bees. Councillors J. & N. Powell offered to seek advice from the professionals.

Vegetation on Riverbank

The Chairman advised the Sub-Committee that the section of ground between the pathway and riverbank had not been mowed recently because sections of the riverbank were unstable and there was no clear and defined riverbank edge making it too dangerous to work on. The Grounds Maintenance Contractor had strimmed a section that was most likely to be walked by the public to access the river. The concern about negligence liability for failing to maintain the area was explored and putting up signs at the entrance considered one solution. The Sub-Committee agreed that the Town Clerk should consult a health and safety consultant for advice and report back to the General Purposes Committee.

Bench overlooking Crown Meadow

The Sub-Committee discussed whether an isolated bench on the Meadow, often used for drug and alcohol consumption, should be relocated to a more open position. After a consideration and the point being made that it was also enjoyed for legitimate use it was decided not to arrange its relocation.

ENV25/008 Reports of Working Groups

Environmental Working Group

The Chairman reported on the Bee Friendly Seminar held at the Frank Jordan Centre that had been attended by Councillor Kelt (who had provided him with a report).

Councillor Kelt found the set of presentations and mini workshop interesting. It covered the importance of pollinators, their requirements and threats; along with work Stafford Borough were doing to provide good habitats for wildlife and the role of Streetscene with mowing and maintaining verges. He made a number of contacts with the people leading the programme that could be followed up at Cannock Chase District Council, the Borough Council and with local enthusiasts.

The Chairman advised the Sub-Committee that Councillor Kelt had taken another look at the Borough Council press release on Bee Friendly Status. Its achievements had included Stone Meadows in Barlaston, and Stone and Eccleshall were said to be applying for Bee Friendly Status next year.

Councillor Kelt had spoken with the lead on the project, Cabinet Member for the Environment (Stafford Borough Council), who advised that the best way to communicate on these matters was through the Stafford Panel (of which Councillor Kelt was already a member). Mention was made of a major event next year, but no further information was available.

The Chairman said the Sub-Committee may be able to adopt some of these points to assist the progression towards Bee Friendly Status.

ENV25/009 Exclusion of the Press and Public

To resolve, pursuant to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, that the Public and Press be excluded from the meeting whilst the next items of business are discussed on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the debate.

ENV25/010 Allotment Competition

The Sub-Committee considered the appointment of a new Allotment Competition judge with the first judging task taking place on 26 July 2024.

RECOMMENDED: That David Moreton (former General Manager of Oak Tree Farm Rural Project) and Hannah Rigden (Senior Historic Environmental Officer for Natural England) be appointed – as experienced and well qualified horticulturalists – to take on the role of Allotment Judges to the Town Council.

Mr Moreton will act as Lead Judge.

Chairman

Stone Town Council - Environment

Dept	Job Description	Details	Current Status	Approved Budget	Est Date
Allotments	Asbestos Removal	Remove and dispose of asbestos. Asbestos survey confirmed issues as low risk and requires monitoring.	MP has removed asbesto pile from plot 2A and stacked in a layby on the site. MP will add to the pile as he gradually clears asbestos items from other plots. MP will inform us when finished, and we will then obtain a quote to have asbestos professionally removed by a specialist. Raised borders on plot 13 to be dug out and replaced with sleepers as budget allows - MP is liasing with the plot holder on this, as they need to agree to the work. 30.08.24 MP confirms that the plot holder is going to give up the plot soon, and then work can commence on the removal.	1825	Work started March 24
Crown Meadow	Wooden footbridge.	Cleaning and re-treating wood.	MP to complete in time for Westbridge Park re- opening ceremony which is April 2024. MP confirms this will be completed in March. 4.5.24 MP confirms will be completed by 30.6.24. 27.8.24 MP intends to complete by end Sept. Bridge will be wood-painted rather than varnish as the wood no longer holds varnish and painting enables MP to more easily maintain and cover vanadalism.	525	Sep-24
Crown Meadow	Scrape 1. Grasses cut back	Cut back grasses to encourage new growth and to allow other species to grow. Cut back a third of the area on a three year rotation. Strim and remove. Volunteers can assist if required.	Cut scheduled for 2023 not possible due to late flowering, floods and waterlogged ground. MP will new attempt in Autumn 2024 and before 31/12/24. 27.8.24. Reviewed with MP. Cut & collection will take place before 31.12.24.	1000	Oct -Dec 2024
Crown Meadow	Scrape 1 willow saplings	Removal of invasive willow saplings. The saplings need to be uprooted using a digger and disposed of or offered to Bill Waller/SBC for replanting at another site	Some saplings were successfully removed in Dec 23 by MP with digger aided by Staffs Wildlife Trust volunteers. MP scheduled Mar 24 but was unable due to flooding. Flooded and saturated ground has made this impossible so far in 2024. Subject to conditions, MP aims to do this later in 2024 the year. Possible collaboration with Staffs Wildlife again. 27.8.24. MP confirmed willows will be removed by 31.12.24 and probable collaboration with Staffs Wildlife and Bill Waller again.	500	Sept -Dec 2024
Grounds Maint	Walton Roundabout pruning and re-planting	Cut back/prune existng shrubs & ivy to promote new growth. Insert new shrubs where required.	Has been rolled over from 2022/23. MP has now done some cutting back in Spring 2024. Remaining budget will be used for further cut back and planting new shrubs later in 2024. 27.8.24. MP confirmed cutback and selective replant will be completed by 31.12.24.	600	Sept to Dec 2024

Grounds Maint	Town borders pruning and re-planting	Cut back/prune existing shrubs & trees to promote new growth. Insert new shrubs where required.	Time sensitive. Has been rolled over from 2022/23. MP has now done some cutting back in Spring 2024. Remaining budget will be used for further cut back and planting new shrubs later in 2024. 27.8.24. MP confirmed the plan to cut back, remove and replant where required and particularly on Stafford & Lichfield St borders.	600	Sept -Dec 24
Grounds Maint	Re-install Lock Gate	Replace damage lock gate on Walton Roundabout	Canals Trust to source lockgate or MP to manufacture. Agreed that MP will make if Canals trust does not supply soon. 27.8.24. MP is committed to reinstating lock gate. No date given.	400	Before Dec 2024
Environmental Initiatives	New hedgerow	Mixed native species sourced by MP. To follow the fence line from the corner of the fence to Angler's Car Park.	Planned for Winter 2023 but persistent flooding & saturated ground has prevented. STC has now agreed to cancel this project due to the risk of the new hedgerow being affected by persistent flooding and wet ground. Env Sub Comm will propose an alternative project on Crown Meadows for the fund.	1400	
Environmental Initiatives	Balance of carry over			1190	
Crown Meadow	Repairs and Improvements to Angler's Carpark	Reposition and replace the fence and reset the display board to increase the width of the entrance. Excavate the embankment, remove growth on Amphitheatre side. Resurface car park with crushed concrete and limestone.	MP will complete this project when he has a two day window in his diary and the conditions underfoot are dry. 27.8.24. MP is planning this for October 24. Scope of the project was reconfirmed.	3100	By Dec 2024
Crown Meadow Volunteers	Restoration of Scrape 2	Excavating the area of Scrape 2 specifically to remove willow saplings, other overly dominant plants and some of the silt. Reinstall required plants	The scrape will need to be relatively dry in order for MP to commence work. MP to advise council office when work is scheduled so that notices can be published about what is happening. Timing is sensitive to protect plant, insect and animal species. 27.8.24. MP confirmed that late Summer/early Autumn is the best time so work should take place soon.	2800	Late Summer /early Aut 24

Stone Meadows Local Nature Reserves and the River Trent Floodplain



Stafford Borough Council owns two Local Nature Reserves in Stone, the larger Goodall Meadows in the north and the appropriately named Southern Meadow – boundaries highlighted in red at either end of the map.

In the centre of the map are Stone Town Council's Crown Meadow LNR and the lower section of Westbridge Park. Both sites include areas of meadow, scrub and riverside trees.

What is apparent from the map is the comparatively large area of land in Stone's Trent floodplain under some form of conservation management. It therefore made sense to coordinate management aims across all four sites. This will help establish a connected and coherent landscape that is also more resilient to climate change.

The most appropriate conservation aims for a series of fields in the river floodplain is to restore the old type of river meadow that would have been present in the past.

Floodplain meadows are beautiful, ancient and fascinating places rich in wildlife and history. Throughout the spring and early summer, they are awash with wildflowers and waving grasses, humming with insects and the birds that depend on them. They

provided a vibrant and beautiful spectacle that has now all but disappeared largely due to modern farming methods.

They evolved over many hundreds of years through the need to store the summer grass crop as hay to sustain animals over the winter months. The system of allowing the vegetation to grow up in the spring, taking a hay crop in midsummer and then grazing the re-growth, prevented taller, coarser species from becoming dominant and created a diverse flower rich habitat.

If you know where to look, there is still evidence of the original plant communities, found along the river corridor. Plants such as Meadowsweet, Great Burnet, Common Bistort and a number of sedges, resilient enough to have survived in unmanaged patches, indicate what was formerly present. That these plants have held on, often after decades of neglect, indicates both their suitability and the appropriateness for restoring them across their former range. This is also a path of least resistance, allowing the plants to inform the management rather than imposing some arbitrary aim. It used to be here; it wants to be here; so, let it be here!

Meadow restoration is under way across the sites in Stone. The main management task is to ensure an annual hay cut, with the bales removed from site. Continued support from the Biodiversity budget is essential.

Goodall Meadow LNR

The largest of the reserves at 8.4hectares, a railway viaduct divides the site into its own north and south fields. Meadow restoration works funded by HS2 are now under way on the north side. The larger south side has already been restored with a species-rich meadow developing. The HS2 grant is also funding the planting of a wet-woodland at the far end of the site, in an enclosed paddock area, too wet to establish a meadow.

Following a grant of £20,000, Trent Rivers Trust also undertook work on the site, reconnecting the river to the meadows by reprofiling sections of the river bank. Two ponds/wetland scrapes have also been made in the lowest lying areas of the site, to provide habitat for wetland plants, dragonflies and other aquatic wildlife.

Southern Meadow LNR

The second largest area at 5.5ha, Southern Meadow LNR consists of a main meadow area with small areas of wet-woodland on the southern boundary. The main section of meadow area was restored in 2020. Funding to restore an additional section of meadow is being provided by a £25,000 Biodiversity Net Gain agreement from a nearby development. The funding's main contribution is to maintain the management through annual hay-cuts, but also provided for the installation of a bench, (already well-used by locals), stock-fence removal and tree maintenance.

Westbridge Park

The refurbished park and play areas sit on a raised area of land, whilst the far end of the site is a lower lying area between the river and canal that holds seasonal rainfall and can often be waterlogged. Whilst not being suitable for formal amenity use, the conditions are perfect for more nature-based solutions, again with the creation of a meadow area, with a mown circular route around it. Meadows take many years to develop - in 2024, the first Southern Marsh Orchids were found, a positive indication that work is progressing in the right direction.

Crown Meadow LNR

Crown Meadow's topography means it is prone to flooding and the impact of that is to bring river-silt on to the meadow areas. This nutrient enrichment makes it difficult to establish a flower-rich meadow, as grass growth is so vigorous. However, the wetland scrape in the centre of the site has been largely successful, with the spread of Purple Loosestrife and other wetland plants. Willow growth does need to be managed quite strictly to prevent losing the feature's floral interest.

Conclusion - next steps

The Borough Council's, Nature Recovery Declaration, commits the Council to improving the quality of existing wildlife spaces by better habitat management and better connectivity between wildlife spaces.

It is hoped that the nature restoration work we are undertaking at Stone is an important part of this commitment and that it can be a benefit to the town and the local population. Funding for signage has been raised and this is work we hope to carry out over the next year.

It is therefore important to raise the profile of the work we are doing by sharing with the town's councillors. Meadow restoration requires annual management to be implemented for the long-term in order to maintain and improve ground conditions. Over time, as the meadows develop, it would be good if they could play a role in the town as a feature of natural interest.

