

Minutes of the Meeting of the **ENVIRONMENT & GREEN SPACES COMMITTEE** held at the Town Hall, High Street, Swanage on **WEDNESDAY, 23rd OCTOBER 2024** at **2.15 p.m.**

Chairman: -

Councillor D Monkhouse

Swanage Town Council

Present: -

Councillor M Coward

Swanage Town Council

Councillor T Foster

Swanage Town Council

Councillor C Sutton

Swanage Town Council

Councillor C Tomes

Swanage Town Council

Outside Representatives: -

Ms G Crisford

National Trust

Mr L Luke

Planet Purbeck

Mrs J Owens

Sustainable Swanage

Mr F Roberts

Swanage Landers

Also in attendance: -

Dr M Ayres

Town Clerk

Mr C Milmer

Visitor Services and Business Development Manager (VSBDM)

Ms G Percival

Assets & Compliance Manager

Mrs E Evans

Democratic Services Officer

Mr A Young

Retrofit

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

Public Participation Time

There were no matters raised.

1) Apologies

Apologies for their inability to attend the meeting were received from Councillors Dorrington and Moreton and Mr D Pratten (Beach Buddies).

2) Declarations of Interest

Members were invited to declare their interests and consider any requests for Grants of Dispensations in accordance with section 9 and Appendix B of the Council's Code of Conduct.

No declarations were made on this occasion.

3) Matters arising from the Meeting of the Environment and Green Spaces Committee held on 26th June 2024

An update was provided on Minute Nos 10) and 13a).

4) Environment Action Plan - Review of progress to date

Further to Minute No. 5) of the Environment and Green Spaces Committee meeting held on 26th June 2024, Members noted the contents of the updated version of the

Environment Action Plan, version 12. A discussion ensued regarding the retention of the Motion for the Ocean Action Plan within the wider Environment Action Plan. It was agreed that until the Motion for the Ocean Action Plan had been established it would remain within the wider document.

5) **Swanage Bay Water Quality-To consider proposals for improving the provision of information to the public**

Further to Minute No. 6) iii) of the Environment and Green Spaces Committee meeting held on 26th June 2024, consideration was given to a briefing paper, prepared by the VSBDM, which set out various options in regard to water quality alerts and signage to improve the provision of water quality information to the public.

The paper outlined the importance of this, especially during the winter months, partly due to the growing popularity of year-round open water swimming.

The current information provided during the summer months (May to September), was based on the Environment Agency's (EA) weekly water testing on the designated Blue Flag beach. Daily forecasts from the EA notified the Town Council of any advice against bathing, based on an AI-driven risk forecast model. During the winter months the EA halts testing, meaning sea users would be dependent on online sources like Wessex Water's website for updates on the Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) discharges. It was noted that the CSO alert did not provide data on water quality, only that the CSO had discharged.

Members discussed the proposed improvements to signage, which included a central noticeboard outside the Swanage Information Centre, for the display of water quality information for easy public access and new signs along the beach, which would direct sea users to online resources. Ongoing discussions with local sea swimmers were highlighted as a key factor in raising awareness about water quality.

It was proposed by Councillor Monkhouse, seconded by Councillor Sutton and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

TO RECOMMEND:

That a budget of £1,500 be allocated for 2025-26 to amend the header board of the existing A2 double sided noticeboard, to be sited at the Swanage Information Centre, at a cost of £1,000, and to install appropriate signage along the seafront at a cost of £500.

During the debate, it was recognised that there are potential challenges and risks for staff in maintaining daily updates of the signage along the beach during the winter months and it was noted that when the Swanage Information Centre staff were unavailable this could lead to confusion.

It was proposed by Councillor Monkhouse and seconded by Councillor Foster:-

That during the summer months, water quality updates will be provided daily, based on the Environment Agency's risk forecast and that in the winter months, a central noticeboard, outside the Swanage Information Centre, will display notifications issued by Wessex Water regarding discharges at the Ulwell Stream Combined Sewer Overflow outlet.

Upon being put to the Meeting, FOUR Members voted IN FAVOUR of the Proposition, and there was ONE AGAINST, whereupon the Proposition was declared CARRIED.

6) Swanage Streams Partnership - To consider provision of funding community engagement work

Consideration was given to a briefing paper, prepared by the VSBDM, which outlined the National Trust's 'Swanage Streams Partnership and the Swan Brook Wetlands Natural Flood Management project', which had been established following a public meeting in September 2023. The project aim was to develop a programme of action to improve the condition of the Swan Brook and other local streams and involve the local community in the process.

The National Trust representative provided an update to the committee, which included information regarding the funding of the partnership, and the six sites of headwater requiring mitigation. Community engagement was noted as a key component in raising awareness of the history of the local stream network and ways in which the quality of the streams could be improved. It was anticipated that local schools would become involved in the projects and this would have a positive impact on encouraging behavioural changes to protect the local streams for the future.

In order to provide adequate community engagement, it was proposed by Councillor Tomes, seconded by Councillor Monkhouse and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That £6,000 of the £7,000 Environmental Community Engagement Budget for 2024-25 be allocated to the National Trust to implement and oversee the community engagement elements of the Swanage Streams Partnership.

7) Motion for the Ocean Action Plan - Update

The lead councillor of the Environmental Policy and Action Plan working party provided an update regarding the Motion for the Ocean (M4O) action plan which included:

- a. Collaboration with Wessex Water and EA - plan to reduce sewage discharges and improve monitoring near the bathing beach.
- b. Defining the Bay Area - proposal to define the scoped area of the bay as 'what can be seen from Peveril Point', naming it 'the two bays' (Ballard Down to Durlston Head).
- c. Water Quality and Marine Life Study - need for a better understanding of water contents. Proposals for a citizen science project or a maritime bio audit of Swanage Bay and Durlston Bay, possibly leading to seafront presentation boards. Potential funding from the Environmental Community Engagement budget.
- d. Stakeholder Engagement - form a group to discuss issues in Swanage and Durlston Bay, involving relevant stakeholders once a clear direction is set.
- e. Consultation with Expert - Plan to discuss direction with the DCF Chair, a marine scientist.
- f. Website and social media for Marine Life - an idea to create platforms for divers and boat users to share marine life content from Swanage two Bays.
- g. Rainwater Management - investigate ways to reduce rainwater entering sewage systems, potentially through educational programs for local residents.
- h. Local MP Engagement - involve the local MP in the M4O discussions.

8) Sustainable Swanage - Update

The representative from Sustainable Swanage reported that the group had held two public meetings to encourage additional members to join the group. The meeting held in September entitled 'Repair and Reuse' had attracted 60 attendees and the meeting in October entitled 'Healthy Homes' had attracted a smaller number of attendees but had facilitated valuable discussions.

Members were encouraged to attend the upcoming meeting being held on 26th November 2024 at 7.30 p.m. at The Swanage School regarding the Swanage Streams Partnership Project.

9) **King George V & Queen Elizabeth II Field biodiversity audit - To consider audit report**

Members noted the contents of a report produced by LC Ecological Services Ltd, and the following summary was brought to the attention of the committee:

- This preliminary ecological survey had been carried out to inform Swanage Town Council of the ecological baseline information for a biodiversity audit and to make recommendations for potential management or enhancement measures to increase biodiversity.
- The preliminary ecological survey comprised a baseline habitat survey and a general species survey, giving a snapshot of species recorded on site at the time of the survey. It also includes an assessment of the site's potential to support any legally protected, notable, and invasive species.
- The main playing fields comprised modified grassland, however, a number of other habitats were recorded within the site.
- Species recorded on site during the walkover survey included a disused badger sett, breeding bird species, some of conservation concern, and common invertebrates. The site also has the potential to support roosting, foraging and commuting bats, great crested newts, hedgehog, otter and water vole, and widespread reptile and amphibian species.
- The survey contains recommendations for potential management or enhancement measures to increase biodiversity.

It was noted that the well-used playing fields would be unaffected. However, the ecological plan would ensure that the boundaries provided a wildlife habitat and an element of connectivity to the borders of both fields.

It was agreed to refer the plan to the Sport, Leisure, and Wellbeing Working Party for review. As part of this process, stakeholder engagement would be conducted to ensure a balanced approach to using the areas as both sports fields and wildlife habitats.

10) **To note links between the Environment and Green Spaces Committee and the Swanage Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and its Task Teams**

Members noted the contents of a briefing paper, prepared by the Planning and Community Engagement Manager, which detailed the establishment of the Swanage Neighbourhood Plan (SNP) sub-committee, and its Development (DTT) and Environment Task Teams (ETT).

It was noted that the ETT was in the process of reviewing existing green spaces, and the Swanage Green Infrastructure Strategy (SGIS), exploring additional greening efforts such as footpaths, tree planting, and green corridors. The Town Council and SNP group members will be collaborating closely to update the SGIS, which, once completed, will be shared with both the SNP group and this committee. The Town Council is expected to adopt the SGIS as a standalone policy, to be referenced in the SNP.

A public survey would soon be conducted to gather residents' views on green spaces, including their usage, value, and potential improvements. Following Dorset Council's advice, a public consultation on the draft SGIS will also be held, with further updates to be provided at a future meeting.

11) **Weed control on highways -To consider continuation of funding supplementary weed clearance**

Consideration was given to a briefing paper prepared by the Assets and Compliance Manager, which set out the options for weed control on the highways.

It was noted that for the 2024 season Dorset Council had outsourced surface dressing on highways to a third-party contractor. Weed control formed part of the contractor's remit, however, the treatment in Swanage in the early part of July was largely unsuccessful due to weather, resulting in visible weed growth along kerbs and pavements. A further treatment in September had proved more successful, but in light of the number of complaints from residents, the Town Council intervened and performed additional weed control in some areas through mechanical and surface spraying. It was stated that the Town Council allocated resources for weed control on high-traffic roads and paths, even though these were not under its direct ownership or management, in order to maintain the town's appearance.

During volunteer clean-up efforts, it was noted that debris along kerbs and pavements often contained dog waste and, if left unchecked, seemed to encourage further littering.

A question was raised regarding the environmental impact of surface spraying, and it was clarified that the Town Council used a controlled, targeted spot treatment method. Mechanical methods were also employed, although they were labour-intensive.

Given the Town Council's resources and potential impact to businesses should the town's visual appeal decline, it was proposed by Councillor Tomes, seconded by Councillor Foster and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-**

That the Town Council should continue to carry out sealed surface spraying, as a supplementary weed control service to that provided by Dorset Council.

12) Waste Management

a) Dorset Council Waste Services - Summer service review and 2025 proposals

Further to Minute No. 11 a) of the Environment and Green Spaces Committee meeting held on 26th June 2024, members noted the contents of a briefing paper prepared by the Assets and Compliance Manager, which outlined the review of Dorset Council's Waste services over the summer and proposals for the 2025 season. It was reported that both Town Council and Dorset Council officers acknowledged that the season had been successful, with effective communication and collaboration. Dorset Council provided a resorts' waste service in Swanage from 29th March to 8th September 2024, with approximately four collections per day, seven days a week. Waste was stored in a large, covered skip, swapped twice weekly and additional bins were placed along the seafront for Swanage Carnival to manage the increased waste from visitors. The Mechanical Road Sweeper (MRS) increased its visits over the season, reducing the need for additional sweeps by the Town Council.

During 2025, Dorset Council has proposed to provide the same waste service as in 2024. However, Dorset Council has decided not to replace the previous street cleansing service but planned to ensure regular cleaning, aiming for the MRS to attend twice per month.

Concerns were raised regarding the potential impact that a reduced street cleaning service from Dorset Council would have on the volunteer groups and on the visual appeal of the town.

It was agreed that a meeting of the Waste Management working party would be arranged and invitees would include Dorset Council representatives, the Chairman of the Tourism and Local Economy Committee and the date would be circulated to members of the Environment and Green Spaces Committee.

b) Update on activities from Beach Buddies

Members noted the contents of an update circulated prior to the meeting in which it was reported that the Beach Buddies had completed 50 beach cleans year to date and had removed 915kg of litter and debris. The average number of volunteers who attended on Sunday mornings had been 15. It was stated that the average weight of litter and debris per beach clean for the last five years had been recorded as follows: 2020 16.0kg,

2021 19.0kg, 2022 19.4kg, 2023 16.2kg, 2024 18.3 kg. It was noted that cigarette butts were the most numerous items of litter found each year.

The Chairman thanked the Beach Buddies team for their hard work.

c) **Update on activities from Swanage Landers**

The Swanage Landers representative provided an update, noting the challenges involved in disposing of detritus after its removal. It was highlighted that a 'Street Pride' initiative would provide an opportunity for residents to take pride in maintaining the areas in front of their properties, with Sustainable Swanage offering support to help promote this effort.

13) **Budget Setting**

a) **2024-25 Budget - Update**

Members noted the contents of a briefing paper prepared by the VSBDM which set out the forecast spend for the current year, 2024-25. It was noted that a budget of £20,000 had been approved for 2024-25 and it was forecast that £14,350 of this would be spent by the end of the year.

b) **2025-26 Budget - Proposals**

Consideration was given to the proposed budget for 2025-26 which included the inclusion of essential items in order to meet the Council's safety and regulatory obligations and those items required for routine/planned maintenance of assets, at a total of £49,500.

It was proposed by Councillor Monkhouse, seconded by Councillor Foster and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the one-off revenue items totaling £49,500, and continuation of the £25,000 per annum contribution to the Environmental Projects earmarked reserve, be taken forward to the meeting of the Finance & Governance Committee to be held on 11th December 2024 for consideration as part of the budget setting process for 2025-26.

14) **Stakeholder Consultation - Wessex Marine Team, Wessex Area Team, Natural England- Marine Protected Areas - New and updated Marine Conservation Advice packages: September 2024 - Invitation to comment - further to discussions at the Planning and Consultation Committee Meeting held on 7th October 2024**

Further to Minute No. 5 a) of the Planning and Consultation Committee meeting held on 7th October 2024, ongoing research into the topic was noted and Members agreed that any findings should be reported to the Planning and Consultation Committee for consideration.

15) **Meeting with other Councils about Environmental issues**

It was noted that the Chairman and the VSBDM would liaise with local Town and Parish councils on shared environmental issues and provide a report to a future meeting.

16) **Items of information and matters for forthcoming agendas**

a) **Portland Waste Incinerator**

It was reported that Dorset Council had refused planning permission for the waste incinerator on Portland, however, the developers had appealed that decision and further to a public inquiry in 2023, the government granted planning permission in September 2024. Dorset Council has said it will not mount a legal challenge.

b) **Washpond Lane footpath**

The Chairman noted that the proposed footpath along the edge of the Cricket Club ground would be discussed with Dorset Council officers and a further update provided to a future meeting.

17) Date of next meeting

It was noted that the meeting times would remain at 2.15 p.m. on Wednesday afternoons, to be reviewed at the Annual Council meeting held in May. It was noted that the next meeting had been scheduled for 2.15 p.m. on Wednesday 26th February 2025.

The Meeting closed at 4.00 p.m.

Attachment 1 and Contents

The Chairman noted that the proposed facilities along the edge of the Golf Club ground would be discussed with Forest Control Officers and a further update provided to a future meeting.

(V) Date of next meeting

It was noted that the meeting times would remain at 3.15 p.m. on Wednesday afternoon to be reviewed at the Annual Council meeting held in May. It was noted that the next meeting had been scheduled for 3.15 p.m. on Wednesday 20th February 2025.

The meeting closed at 4.00 p.m.