

CROXLEY GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
ENVIRONMENT AND AMENITY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER
ON TUESDAY 2 SEPTEMBER 2008 AT 8.00 pm

Present Cllr Seeley in the Chair D Allison – Clerk to the Council
A Taft – Minute Taker

Cllrs Birch, Brading (arrived at 8.04pm), C Jefford, Martin, Shafe and Vassiliou
Voting Members 7

In Attendance: Cllrs Bains, Bennett, Brand, Saxon and Seabourne (arrived at
8.02pm)

Public: There was one member of the public present

EA481/08 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Dann.

EA482/08 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

EA483/08 Representations from the Public

There were no representations.

EA484/08 Minutes

It was proposed by Cllr Shafe and seconded by Cllr Jefford that the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2008 be approved as correct. The proposal was agreed and the Chairman signed the minutes.

EA485/08 Matters Arising

EA473/08 (EA462/08; EA451/08 Matters Arising). The Clerk was asked about the basketball report and he replied that it had been presented to Council in July. The Clerk was asked if Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) may be willing to contribute towards the basketball group to which he replied that he had an email ready to be sent. He added that he was also still waiting for a reply from English Basketball for advice on funding. It was confirmed that this item is scheduled to be discussed at the next Council meeting when the responses from parents will be discussed. The Clerk was asked if there is to be a meeting with those involved in the basketball to seek their views on the future of the club before it goes to Council.

EA474/08 (Active Works List). The Clerk was asked if he had written to Hertfordshire County Council, TRDC, Countryside Management Service and the Guild of Sport to offer services such as litter picking, weeding, strimming and tree work in return for payment. The Clerk replied that he had not done so as yet.

EA475/08 (Village of the Year Competition). One Member complained that a press release was not issued regarding the Village of the Year Competition. The Clerk affirmed that press releases had been issued.

[Post meeting note: Press Releases regarding this competition were issued in February 2008 and August 2008].

EA486/08 Active Works List

The Chairman introduced this item and the Clerk referred to the list that had been distributed at the meeting. It was asked if in future, the Active Works List could be circulated with the Agenda prior to the meeting to which the Clerk replied that he would endeavour to have it prepared in time.

The Clerk was asked about the shed that had been built during August and he confirmed that this was a small storage shed to the side of the office.

The Clerk was asked who had cut the hedge opposite the shops at Baldwins Lane to which he replied that after requests from the Parish Council, Hertfordshire Highways had attended to this hedge. It was asked if the Parish Council could take on responsibility for the Hawthorn hedge opposite the shops at Baldwins Lane and the Clerk said that he would contact Hertfordshire Highways.

It was reported that the damage to the Kissing Gate at Stones Orchard which had been reported a month ago now has the top plank missing. The Clerk stated that the Parish Council are in the process of obtaining a replacement for this.

EA487/08

Flowers in Croxley

This item was introduced by the Chairman and Members were referred to the associated paper which had been circulated with the Agenda. The Chairman said that all Cllrs are welcome to attend the next meeting of Flowers in Croxley which is to be held on Monday 15 September at 10.30am. It was agreed that the Clerk follows up the sponsorship of the roundabout at Two Bridges with Robin Barber at TRDC. It was suggested that compost may be obtained from London Composting through Jenny Moore at TRDC. The Chairman reiterated that £2000 had been received from the Croxley Local Area Forum and £660 had been received so far in donations and reactions to this new project were encouraging. The Chairman added that she would be making a budget proposal for the Environment and Amenity Committee to support Flowers in Croxley. It was agreed that the Chairman would put some figures together for the likely ongoing costs to bring back to Council.

EA488/08

Maintenance Contract with TRDC for the Green and Stones Orchard

The Chairman introduced this item and updated those present on the events that had occurred since she received her copy of the letter dated 27 August 2008 from Peter Brooker to the Clerk. The Chairman was confused about the comments in the third paragraph which stated that the Parish Council did not wish to extend the current contract and reference to correspondence dated 5 April 2008 was made. The Chairman, being unable to find this correspondence, visited TRDC and requested and received a copy of a letter dated 5 April 2007 to the Clerk from Alison Page. In the meantime, Cllr Jefford had found her copy of this letter.

When Cllr Seeley and Jefford compared letters, they found that they differed in that the copy obtained from TRDC had extra wording to the effect of "as you have previously indicated that you do not wish for an extension" (in relation to the maintenance contract for the Green and Stones Orchard). The Clerk confirmed that these words were not on the original, signed copy that he had received on 10 April and copied to Parish Councillors. Cllrs Seeley and Jefford then met with Carl Murdoch of TRDC who reported that Peter Brooker was unable to explain or offer proof of this alleged claim but that correspondence was being looked for and that this would be available by 2 September 2008.

When Cllr Seeley returned to TRDC, she was given copies of old Minutes which stated the same information; that the Parish Council did not wish to extend the grounds maintenance contract. When Cllr Seeley queried this she was told that they could not explain it but that it is a very small matter as far as they (TRDC) are concerned. Cllr Seeley stated that it is not a small matter as far as the Parish Council and local residents are concerned. Carl Murdoch informed Cllr Seeley that he would continue to search for correspondence from the Parish Council to corroborate their claim and would contact her or the Parish Council.

Cllr Seeley added that TRDC had said that their decision not to allow the Parish Council to tender for the contract was irreversible as we had failed to meet Health and Safety requirements especially with regard to the Rangers' Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearance. The Clerk confirmed that one Ranger had CRB clearance and when asked, clarified that this had been applied for by the Parish Council. It was pointed out by one Member that CRB checks are not transferable

from job to job. The Clerk said that he is currently in the process of obtaining CRB checks for the members of staff. The Clerk confirmed that as the Parish Council has only four staff, there is no legal requirement for a "full blown" Health and Safety policy albeit that the Parish Council does indeed have such a policy. Members asked the Clerk to supply them with a copy of the completed questionnaire (copy enclosed with Minutes) to see where the Parish Council failed in its pre-tendering questionnaire.

Members generally considered that the requirements by TRDC for future contractors excluded and discriminated against smaller organisations and that the questionnaire was weighted against us. Members also felt that the incorrect information would have completely misled Officers at TRDC and may have prejudiced their decision not to allow the Parish Council to tender meaning that the whole process is now called into question. As TRDC Officers believed that the Parish Council did not wish to extend the contract, every part of their decision making process has been marred by this incorrect advice.

After much discussion, the Clerk informed those present that he would write to TRDC explaining the above and request that the IT Manager investigates the properties of these two letters. He added that he will ask if there is a way of calling the Executive Committee's Decision into question due to incorrect information and that possibly a judicial review may be called for. However, some Members felt that this incorrect information would not have made any difference to the outcome of the Parish Council's questionnaire and subsequent rejection to tender. The Clerk said that if TRDC have made a genuine mistake, they must have the opportunity to apologise and offer some sort of explanation especially given that they aspire to 'Quality Status'.

With regard to future works for the Rangers, the Clerk was asked how much time they spend maintaining the Green and Stones Orchard to which he confirmed that it was around 30% over a year. Suggestions for future work for the Rangers included grass verges, verge trees, hedges, hedges around schools, school playing fields, clear and tidy the new Village Green, Ragwort pulling and scrub bashing at Croxley Common Moor. The Clerk is to write to Hertfordshire Highways and the Keep Croxley Green Group in the first instance.

EA489/08 Maintenance of the Guild of Sport Football Pitches

The Chairman introduced this item and the Clerk informed those present that he had requested a meeting with Mr Evans of the Guild of Sport and that subject to confirmation this would take place early next week. A free trial cut is to be undertaken by the Parish Rangers and then this item will be placed on the Environment and Amenity Agenda for further discussion.

EA490/08 Tree Bulletin

The Clerk referred Members to the tree bulletin that had been circulated with the Agenda and Members noted this information.

EA491/08 Closure

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 10.01pm.