



EYNSHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Amenities & Estates Committee Meeting
held at 7.30pm on Tuesday 12th September 2023
at Eynsham Village Hall

MINUTES

Councillors Present – Cllr Sue Brown, Cllr Milly Chen, Cllr Ross Macken and Cllr Carl Rylett.
Also, in Attendance – Clerk to the Council.
There were two members of the public present.

23/AE52 To receive apologies for absence – Cllr Sue Osborne, Cllr Ann Partlett and Cllr Beth Partlett.

23/AE53 To receive Declarations of Interest in agenda items – None.

23/AE54 Public Participation – Nature Recovery Network (NRN) representatives wished to discuss agenda item AE/57 which was brought forward and the following points were raised:-

- (a) The Council is required to consider the [Environment Act 2021](#) which was enacted after the last public consultation on grass cutting. The Council is therefore required to consider what action it can take to further the general biodiversity objectives.
- (b) Some of the verges are never going to be good for biodiversity as they will require many years of work to reduce the fertility of the soil. Other verges already have low fertility/good biodiversity which have plants that are low growing and therefore need less mowing. A win-win situation could be attained.
- (c) Various criticisms regarding communications, lack of information provided and the style of the recent ‘consultation’ and current standards of maintenance of verges were made. (The Council sought general opinions only – this was misinterpreted as a consultation on Eynsham Online).

It was noted that there was a balance of opinions received on the [news item](#) of how the Council should approach its responsibilities for looking after public areas of grass (see Appendix A). A request for the Council’s Tree Risk Assessment was made. The Clerk advised that this will be provided on the basis that the NRN’s Village Tree Report will be forwarded on completion to the Council. Cllr Rylett raised a point about the Bartholomew School students being involved in community projects.

23/AE55 Old Witney Road Playground Project Update – Committee to receive an update on the project and agree any actions required. Work has now begun and is progressing smoothly. Deputy Clerk is pursuing McCracken and Son to commence work on the football playing surface.

23/AE56 Report on Annual RoSPA Inspection and Update on Playground Repairs and Inspections

- (a) Committee to receive report on RoSPA inspections completed on 4th August 2023 and agree actions – Members noted the contents of the inspections and **RESOLVED** to approve the Deputy Clerk’s recommendations.
- (b) Committee to receive update on playground repairs Dovehouse ‘Come & Play’, Oxford Road and Oxford Road Skate Park – The Clerk reported that further sand is required in the sandpit. It was **RESOLVED** that this is purchased under Financial Regulations in liaison with Cllr Macken. It was pleasing to note that Gravity Engineering is returning to correct faulty repairs at the Skate Park. It was requested that they are accompanied onto and off site to ensure work completed is at an appropriate standard. It was noted that additional repair work is required – Deputy Clerk to obtain quotes from alternative companies. A quote is to be obtained to address the entrapment risk at Oxford Road Play Area gate.

23/AE57 Parish Grass Cutting

- (a) To note the expiry of McCracken & Son's contract at the end of the year. Noted.
- (b) Committee to consider revising the grass cutting specification in line with [Plantlife guidelines](#) – It was **RESOLVED** that the following principles for grass cutting will help to determine the grass cutting specification:-
 - i. Amenity grass to be kept short, tidy and regularly maintained. (Areas that are directly adjacent to homes and will impact on wellbeing of residents/can be used as informal social/play spaces)
 - ii. Other areas/verges - Improve and expand on areas for improving biodiversity with due consideration for public accessibility.

It was further **RESOLVED** that:-

- i. An informal Working Group is set up to draft and recommend the grass cutting specification to the next Amenities & Estates Committee for consideration.
 - ii. Cllr Macken will Chair the Working Group, joined by Cllr Chen, Cllr Rylett as members.
 - iii. Catriona Bass and Lucy Dickinson are co-opted onto the informal Working Group.
- (c) To consider and resolve consultation details, communications, and other associated matters - The Deputy Clerk agenda for the specification to be considered at the October committee meeting and for quotes to be obtained in readiness for the November committee meeting and inclusion in the Council budget setting process.

23/AE58 Replace Bench on Mill Street – It was **RESOLVED** that an Earth Anchors bench (recycled plastic in brown) is installed at Mill Street and installed by the Maintenance Operative.

23/AE59 Parish Council Owned Litter Bin Emptying

- (a) To receive an update on developments with WODC (West Oxfordshire District Council) and Ubico TUPE enquiries – The Clerk advise that she had met with Publica and Ubico Officers who confirmed that no TUPE regulations apply to the current Ubico employee.
- (b) To consider quotes for emptying the Parish Councils bins, including report on budget adjustments and agree actions - Members considered the quote from Shield Group for bin emptying. It was **RESOLVED** to approve the quote based on half the bins being emptied once a week and the other half emptied three times a week (play areas and by the Pavilion) and for the efficiencies to be monitored, for the period 1 October to 31 March 2024. (See Appendix B). Bin stickers with QR codes are to be placed on the bins when the Shield Group service commences to allow residents to report overflowing bins to the Clerk.

23/AE60 Dog Attacks at Oxford Road - To receive a report on dog attacks being reported at Oxford Road playing fields and agree on actions to take to prevent further attacks occurring. It was noted that dog attack reports have been posted on social media. The Deputy Clerk made recommendations and the following was **RESOLVED**:-

- (a) Deputy Clerk to contact West Oxfordshire District Council's Dog Warden to see what advice they can offer.
- (b) Request that if after advice, the Dog Warden visit and issues on spot fines as a very last resort
- (c) Ask for the Communications Officer update the website to include relevant signposting information for dog owners.

23/AE61 Improvement Works – B4044 (Thames via the Wharf Stream)

To discuss the access improvement works from the B4044 towards the Thames via the Wharf Stream and consider further requirements – The previous surface at new accessibility gate has been made good. The new gate isn't ideal, but it is an improvement and overall allows improved access to the river.

The meeting closed at 8.45pm.

Date of next meeting Tuesday 24th October 2023.

Appendix A – Grass Cutting Opinions

	Area	Grass kept short?	Left to be longer?	Comments
1	Abbey Farm Barns	Yes but only for 1m at the road borders, and for paths through the play areas which will make it look cared-for. Presumably football and cricket pitches will need regular mowing, with 1metre round the edge for spectators.	Yes, some areas do not need cutting at all apart from paths through them.	Paths/edging-only will be cheaper for the council and a huge relief for biodiversity, supports NRN proposals
2				The village sports a headline of "a great place to belong" and would not justify such a welcome if the grass was a mess! So please maintain the grass cutting (have a look at Ducklington to see what a mess it is now cutting is reduced and take care on the way in because you won't be able to see half the traffic on the roundabout!)
3	Willows Edge	No	Yes	Only cut frequently for safety reasons, otherwise rarely. In some cases a mown path through or around an uncut area may be useful.
4				We are facing a global biodiversity crisis and we all need to do our bit to halt the devastating loss of biodiversity. Not cutting lawns and letting wildflowers grow is such a simple way of improving biodiversity. It's everyone's moral duty to support this move. And it looks so much prettier than neat verges. Please plant the wildflowers, let the grass grow, encourage the bees, give wildlife more natural habitats, allow our insects to thrive. We all need this.

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5	Dovehouse Close	No	Yes	Thanks for giving residents the chance to input. I appreciate the efforts of the Council to accommodate local requests. I support the Council's efforts to improve biodiversity in the Parish in recognition of its value to society and the concerning biodiversity loss across the UK. I have also enjoyed the opportunity to engage with neighbours in efforts to improve the green spaces we have together.
6	Dovehouse Close	No. I prefer it to be allowed to grow longer so that flowers have time to grow between cuts.	Yes	I appreciate everyone has different tastes when it comes to grass cutting and hope a plan which allows for both neater areas e.g. smaller areas directly in front of houses and more wild areas e.g. in larger grass areas or on road verges might be manageable and keep most people happy.
7	Abbey Farm Barns			I prefer the road verges and edges of open spaces, such as play areas and playing fields, to be left to grow wild in accordance with Plantlife guidelines.
8	Millmoor Crescent	I think we should consider mowing every other month to allow the grass to grow longer, but look carefully at verges that might impact vision for car drivers - eg at roundabout at bottom of Newland St - when that grass is long it is hard to see cars coming from the right. But it doesn't mean that the whole area needs cutting.	Yes	Footpaths... the one that goes down alongside the primary school gets very difficult to walk along due to stinging nettles. I appreciate that it has been cut more this year and I hope it continues. I also need to comment on the caravans parked on the footpath near Tesco - I'm very sure something is being done, but the wreck is an eyesore and no one should be allowed to live there.
9	Dovehouse Close	Yes		long grasses are potentially breeding ground for Blandford Fly

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10		No. But not left to allow monoculture grass to take over - it still needs management. I would prefer it be managed according to Plantlife's Good Verge guidance for urban grassy road verges as suggested	Yes. Plantlife's urban verges management protocol sounds very sensible for most verges in Eynsham.]	It would be great to enhance any suitable urban verges where visibility was less of an issue / not within 2m (at a guess - sure there's an evidence-based recommendation available online) of junctions/driveways by planting seed mixes of perennial flowers. Appreciate the seed mix would have to be different, but I think Oxford Botanic Garden have done a brilliant job with this in their big border (info pic attached as I'm planning to use their planting ideas for our front garden!), and I noted Hyde Park have undertaken similar planting when I was there last week. Sure some of the village children would love to get involved with the planting
11		Yes		please make our village verges look decent again. It is not a nice place to belong at the moment. I am glad that you are consulting the people of the village about this. And hope that our village can look good again
12	Malborough Place	Within reason. I don't think it needs doing as regularly as one would mow their lawns and think biodiversity is much more important then grass areas looking "messy". Some neighbours nearby me took it upon themselves to cut communal/street area grass, even in no-mow May which was disappointing to see this year.	Yes please	Providing verges that affect traffic/road crossings are maintained, I'd be very happy to see longer grass and wildflower areas in the village
13		Regular and short in residential areas		

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14	High Street	I am strongly against cutting the grass regularly to make it look neat and tidy. I very much like the look in other parts of the country where the verges are left to grow long to encourage wild flowers ,which then encourages wild life; Butterflies, Bees and other pollinating insects	Even cutting 6 cm a month as suggested in question 2 sounds too short and too frequent in my opinion. There must also a huge cost element to consider in this also.	Clearly it is important to be aware of sightlines at road junctions. Also I strongly believe that the area in the middle of roundabouts should be kept with the plant life kept short thus ensuring good visibility. This is especially relevant at the roundabout at the bottom of Oxford road on the way to the toll bridge.
15		As appropriate	Yes	<p>I very much welcome an approach that aims to increase verge biodiversity in our area. But I think it should be done properly following the ' Plant life' guides. This includes proper assessment, planned times for cutting and clearing the cuttings.</p> <p>It is complicated though as certain areas will continue to need to be short eg where we wish to encourage children to play outside eg some areas within Dove House Close</p> <p>I also wonder if we are missing an opportunity with the roundabouts around Eynsham eg the roundabout at the end of Cassington Road. With careful choice of species we could have trees/ a tree with other plants that do not obstruct drivers sight which would both improve biodiversity and the aesthetics</p>

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16	Acre End Street	No	Yes	We should be doing all we can to support biodiversity in our area. Roads are mainly unsafe due to the speed at which vehicles travel, even within 20 mile zones, and so I think enforcing speed limits is more important than cutting grass in terms of safety.
17	Witney Road	Yes	Yes, for areas away from traffic	
18	Witney Road	Yes	No	
19		Yes	No	
20	Malborough Place	Only if it impairs vision/becomes dangerous whilst driving/cycling (ie long grass on junctions or close to zebra crossings/play areas/schools etc). Time has moved on and priorities have changed - I think the days of 'keep it as short and tidy as possible' are dated now and a lot of residents are leaving their garden to nature for longer. Children need to see wildlife in the prime months so leave the natural habitat for as long as we can. There are no apps on mobile phones to recreate this!!	Yes, definately, although I have seen some of the pavements/cycle path on A40 slightly overgrown so perhaps a 'quick trim' along the edges would keep everyone happy!	There is an area of communal grass on Greens Road that a neighbour mows at least twice a week (even in 'no-mow May'), this is upsetting to see as we lose the wild flowers/insects for birds and with the hot dry weather it just looks like an ugly yellow patch. I love the wild flowers that are growing as you enter Eynsham Village (roundabout end), they compliment the new white signs and look lovely bobbing around in the summer breeze. KEEP UP THE GOOD GREEN WORK AND THANK YOU!!

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21	Thornbury Green	Long grass is fantastic as a three-dimensional habitat which is essential for different stages of insects' lifecycles and to enable taller grasses and flowers to flourish. The Thornbury Green area of long grass is fantastic, with a strip mown around the back of it so that you can walk right round it – it is fabulous. To promote meaningful biodiversity in our grassy spots, varied-height mowing regimes are needed, including significant areas that are only mown once a year in the Autumn after the seed has been set.	Yes, to wildlife-friendly; no to a mandatory 6cm cut of all grassy areas once a month. A height of 6cm only allows shorter species to flower, so there needs to be a variety of heights to enable taller plants to flower as well, and ideally grass cuttings removed if possible. A closer cut might be ok for some areas of open grass, but not for all and a mosaic of long and short grass would enable a wider variety of plants and insects to flourish. Paths and edges could be cut as a 'picture frame' through and around grass left to grow long, to facilitate things looking managed, but we need long grass to ensure that insects can fulfil their lifecycle needs, and for it to be left long for longer. Verge management could create long ribbons of continuous long grass habitat to benefit insects and help insect populations disperse along them.	I love seeing uncut verges and I cycle along the A40 to Oxford Monday-Friday. It is a shock when the verges are mown so destructively in early summer, it could just be mown enough to let walkers and bikes along. It seems overzealous to mow and strim everything so severely near road junctions, but I realise it may be necessary in the immediate vicinity of a junction. I support Plantlife's best practise guidelines for mowing verges and hope that the Council will facilitate this.
22		Yes across the whole village	No	Please continue with the current approach to grass cutting. Over-grown grass is challenging for children crossing the road or riding their bikes. It also looks like the area is uncared for.
23	Mill Street	No	Yes but with allowances for cutting at junctions, etc.	General preference for reduced or no grass cutting, coupled with active wild flower meadow planting
24	Evans Road	No	Yes	I am very happy for the Council to use Plantlife recommendations to increase biodiversity of wildlife on verges which need to be cut more often for safety reasons and their recommendations on wildflower areas that need less cutting

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25	Witney Road	Yes	No	
26	Wytham View	Yes	No	Please make sure that all the areas are cut regularly, otherwise it gives a bad impression of the village
27	Wytham View	Yes	No	Uncut grass makes the area look uncared and neglected.
28	Hazeldene Close	only for traffic visibility	Yes	I am however concerned about the cutting along the B4449 on the village side. A wider swathe needs to be cut on either side of the entrance to Hazeldene Close as otherwise one has to hope traffic that we cannot see is not coming too fast. I have gone and cut it back myself for the last two years.
29	John Lopes Road	Yes	yes definitely - and the buzz cut idea seems like a good compromise between cutting too much and not cutting at all.	I'm in favour of verges being more wildlife-friendly, but I don't like them to look scruffy (which can look as if the community doesn't take pride in its surroundings). The verges on John Lopes Road could, I think, be tended better in order to increased species diversity whilst improving the way they look
30		No	No	Look at NRN proposals for verge pilots
31		No	Yes	I think the move to cutting less frequently for biodiversity is hugely important. My son loves seeing the wildlife, plant life and insects associated with this approach.
32	Acre End Street		Yes	

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	Area	Grass kept short?	Left to be longer?	Comments
32	Fruitlands	No	Yes, definitely. I am very much in favour of allowing as many opportunities for nature as possible and grass verges are ideal locations as they are shared spaces that get little other use. Issues around visual concerns from letting the grass grow longer can be addressed by deliberately sowing wild flower seeds. This will enhance an areas appeal.	need to move away from using petrol/diesel powered machines for grass cutting, more environmental solutions?
33	Old Witney Road	No - too much cutting is ugly	Yes - do all we can to promote biodiversity	not sure why we are being asked again
34				8 page pdf
35		Yes	No	Instead of wasting time so called consulting the residents of the village, just get the grass cut as its always been done. Stop pandering to the minority of green zealots who in most cases are not country people. If they don't like where they live suggest they move elsewhere.
36	Station Road	No but also not unmanaged	Yes	Doesn't like the 'debris' being left after grass cutting. Verges, green spaces and wall edges around Station Road and village generally are 'a complete mess'

Appendix B – Eynsham Parish Council-owned bins

