

Harrietsham Parish Council
Environmental Committee
Minutes of meeting held on Monday 9th September 2024

1. **Present:** Cllrs Brown (Chair), Dean, Luck, Stanley, and M Cuerden (RFO/Amenity Manager)
2. **Apologies:** Cllr Dayes, Mrs S Amos **Members of the public:** None
3. **Minutes of the last meeting** (9th July 2024) were signed (without amendment) at the following Council meeting, another copy was signed for our records.
4. **Disclosures:** Cllr Dean noted that she lived adjacent to Woodlands Walk, and may have an interest in the discussion. (In the event, no such interest arose.)

MC, as Amenity Manager / RFO, reported that all the open spaces contracts appeared to be going well, apart from a couple of areas, and then proceeded to go over each of the areas in turn, making supplementary comments as required:

5. **New Burial Ground:** MC reported that the archaeological dig in the Ground had now been completed, and the land reinstated as well as possible. He then went on to summarise the findings, as we know them so far. In essence, the dig had produced “interesting and complex” archaeology which was, if not of national importance then certainly better than just a local dig, encompassing Iron Age, Roman, Saxon and possibly early medieval eras. The main findings were a feature which was probably the drainage ditch for an Iron Age roundhouse, various features yet to be determined... and three burials, one cremation and two actual burials both with small daggers beside them.

It is the latter that presents us with our problem. The first reaction of the archaeologists was that this completely removes any chance of our getting planning permission for a cemetery, as you can't bury bodies in ground already so used, even in ancient times. After discussion, this view became that we could (maybe) get permission – but only if we did a full dig on the entire area we wished to use, which could, potentially, just be half the field. This is because as the dig proceeded, so any bodies could be lifted and removed for analysis and research purposes, clearing the ground for “our” burials.

MC – as RFO – expressed the view that this would probably not be a viable option for the Council to pursue. The original dig – covering a fraction of the area we are now considering – was originally priced as requiring two men for three days, plus the digger, plus “some” post-dig analysis and reporting. This required an additional 3 man-days due to the work required, and “significant” (but as yet uncoded) analysis work on the bodies removed. The on-site work is now close to £11,000, plus the analysis. To do even half the field is likely to cost many thousands, although he has asked both for an estimate of the analysis cost and a “ball-park” for excavating half the field.

Assuming that the project is now not affordable by the council, then unless other sources of funds can be found, then we shall have to abandon the planned cemetery. This will mean that there will be no space for graves in Harrietsham Church, although the interment on cremated remains may well be an option for some time to come. (That would be down to the church.)

We are awaiting both an interim report on the dig, which might give us enough information to reach a final decision, otherwise we might have to await the full report, the timescale for which is currently unknown. Either way, once we have some more information to work with, we might benefit from a chat with the County Archaeologist at KCC to see if we have any realistic options.

6. **Garden of Remembrance:** This is looking good. We had a meeting with Mike Phillips of White Horse Ecology to look at Teers Meadow, and as we walked past, he commented that it was a nice, well kept area.
7. **Glebe Field:** This area is also looking neat and tidy. The new goalpost, acquired at the start of summer, had not only survived, but was exceptionally well used. The shrub on the corner with St Welcomes Way had been trimmed back to preserve the sight-line up Church Lane following a request from a parishioner.
8. **Play Area:** MC reported that the two new signs had been delivered and installed – although the supplier had managed to put both signs by the main gate off the road. MC had asked our contractor to move the small one to the other gate (as originally intended), and this had been done promptly. Cllr Brown asked if we had a price for putting some matting down from the road the play area entrance – MC confessed that, whilst asking for the hedge trim and sign move, he had forgotten to include this; he would rectify this omission!

- 9. Medical Centre & Church Road:** The centre looks ok, although there are still some saplings and now some brambles in the beds.
- 10. Woodlands Walk:** The Walk appears to now be well maintained, with the previous issues resolved. Cllr Dean asked if the gates were being locked at night, or left open. Cllr Brown confirmed that they are currently being left open, with no adverse effects noted to date.
- 11. Benches:** So far as MC is aware, all benches under contract are in good shape.
- 12. War Memorial:** Here too, the area is much improved, with previously noted issues now resolved. MC had had a look at Tommy, and could see no way of attaching him to any existing items (such as the information board), and anyway, as noted by Cllr Dean, he is supposed to be standing respectfully separate from the memorial and other items. MC said that he felt that the only option would be to get a new Tommy, as, even with the use of large staples, he thought the figure would just twist and fall if unsupported. He would talk to the Clerk, and we would get prices for a decision at Council. In the meantime, Tommy is quietly leaning against the memorial, and appears undisturbed either by his travels round the area, or by anyone interfering with him.
- 13. A20 Verges:** Nothing to add to the above.
- 14. Saxon Place Amenity Land:** Brogdale have now been commissioned to undertake the recommended work in the community orchard, and this will be done at their convenience and as their expertise suggests. Other than that, the entire area appears well kept.
- Cllr Brown raised the question of having a councillor designated to keep an eye on the allotments – noting that we had previously had one, but that they were no longer on the Council. He volunteered to undertake the role, an offer that was accepted by all.
- 15. Teers Meadow:** MC and Mrs Amos had met with Mike Phillips to review the progress of Teers Meadow. He seemed very happy with the growth and spread of various species, and was satisfied that all was going according to plan in restoring this valuable habitat. He noted that we would still need to maintain the area, otherwise there was a risk that it would revert back to the scrubland that we started with. His suggested actions were to (a) Arrange to get the cattle back to graze the meadow. Cllr Luck said that she would contact the owner to see what could be arranged. (b) Continue asking the Medway Valley Conservation Partnership to make their annual visits and (c) Arrange for a flail-mow of the meadow every other year, just to keep the intrusive vegetation, such as brambles, down. MC said he would contact the contractor who did it last time, as he would know what was required.
- MC also offered a special thanks to Mrs Amos for attending, as it meant that there was someone there who could talk to the consultant about plants, as MC's knowledge could reasonably be described as somewhat limited.
- 16. Contract Specification:** MC had previously circulated the revised contracts for councillors to consider. These were briefly discussed, with councillors noting that they seemed to cover all the requirements. Two main items were agreed; (a) the additional cut back of the stream bank's vegetation should take place in May rather than any later, and (b) that the A20 verges cut eastwards towards Lenham would go out to the Harrietsham sign, and include all that verge, up to the private drive.
- 17. Date of the next meeting:** Monday 11th November 2024 in the Parish Office at 7:30pm.

Meeting closed at 9pm.