

Stonebridge Meadow Committee (SMC)

Minutes of 19th meeting held at the Council Chamber, Marlborough Town Hall
On 7th October 2015 at 9am

Present:

Richard Beale
Bryan Castle
Anna Forbes
Charlotte Hitchmough - Chair

Marian Hannaford Dobson
Margaret Rose
Linda Nemeth

1. Welcome and Apologies

Apologies received from Kevin Light, Richard Clarke, welcome by CH

2. SWIB Awards

Marlborough in Bloom AGM will be held 7th October 2015; Stonebridge has been awarded an 'Outstanding' award and the Monk Trophy (silver salver) for 'Best use of Native plants'. Both awards receive certificates. **CH** requested that ARK have use of the certificates and salver for promotional purposes. Contact to be made through the Town Council Office but no objections. **RB** will provide the feedback sheets to ARK which contains the award details. The salver needs to be returned for next year's competition.

3. Minutes of the last Meeting held on 10th June 2015

- **MHD** referred to Section 6 of previous minutes '**Consider suggestion of meetings being open to the public**', it was agreed at the last meeting the meetings should not be open to the public but **MHD** said MTC must be seen to be open and that the public should have the opportunity to raise questions, discuss activities etc. The committee discussed the option of an Annual Open Forum and it was agreed that this should be open to anyone who wishes to attend as there are many supporters/interested parties outside of the Marlborough area. **Action: CH** to discuss dates and venue with the Town Clerk.
- The minutes of the meeting were approved.

4. Matters Arising

- A) Update of Management Plan. **CH** circulated the revised plan with amendments requested by MTC highlighted in red and asked for any feedback within 3 days.
- **MR** stated she was not happy with the repaired river bank by Poulton Footbridge. She felt the faggots were dangerous and there was no safe access for children and that work had been crudely done. **CH/AF** clarified the faggots were necessary to prevent bank erosion and the wires on the faggots has been re-wired within the last week. Local groups (cubs, scouts, schools, etc.) are all using the area and no issues have been raised on their risk assessments. **MR** suggested a wider access point with no faggots should be created; it was unclear from discussions where this should be or why the

existing format created a problem. It was agreed a site meeting was required to investigate further.

- A) Update of Management Plan. **MHD** raised the issue of high on the vegetation around the amenity area and felt that the public should have access to view the river. **CH** explained the vegetation was needed to prevent bank erosion but could be lowered pending further discussion. Deferred to site meeting.
- B) Dog Bins. **RB** explained the results of the recent tree survey had put pressure on budgets. Until costs of tree work are confirmed the dog bin will need to go on hold. An update should be available by Christmas. **Action RB** to feedback when more information is available.
- C) Bug Hotel. Text has been amended.
- D) Budgets. **CH/RB** have met and produced a budget. ARK has provided their figures with total expenditure for 2015-2016 at just over £28,000. The MTC budget stands at £1000 with £250 already having been spent on emergency tree work. RB provided additional figures for Mowing and strimming, fencing, waste and machinery hire. In addition there will be costs from MTC budget to replace orange fencing and road pins which had been repeatedly removed and further tree work. There is the potential to recycle and re-coop some money with selling of wood chippings, wood, and use of wood for seating. **Action: RB** to look at options and feedback. **CH** to include MTC figures and re-circulate budgets to the committee.

MHD raised concerns about tree felling and showed a picture of a tree. The tree had no top branches and all that remained was a trunk at about 8ft.

MHD stated that this method shouldn't be used for safety reasons. **RB** clarified this wasn't raised as a safety concern in the tree report and the approach of leaving trunks standing was a recognized way to retain habitat for bats and beetles whilst removing the risk of trees falling in high winds.

- D) Budgets. **CH** raised the point that before tree work commences a bat survey must be conducted. ARK has obtained quotes in the region of £450. **BC** suggested that the cost should be billed through MTC to enable the VAT to be reclaimed. Concern over any delays that this may incur raised by **AF** as there are 'time windows' that should be used to avoid too much disturbance to the bats but it was agreed that if a safety issue was raised then action may be needed for specific trees. **Actions: AF/RB** to discuss quotes and timings, **RB** to discuss with Town Clerk
- D) Budgets. **RB** gave estimated figure of £1000 to complete the necessary tree work within Stonebridge, his team will complete some of the work to reduce contractor costs.

5. Reedbed

Reedbed, pond and Boardwalk are now all in-place and accessible. CH said feedback from the public has been positive and the boardwalk was being well used by walkers. In addition ARK had hosted a number of events for scouts, cubs and school groups making use of the boardwalk and wetland to learn about the environment. **RB** raised the concern of some local dog walkers that they had 'heard' they would be excluded from

Stonebridge. It was stressed that this is a rumour and the committee should act to make it clear this was completely unfounded. Dogs are welcome at Stonebridge.

6. Metal Railings

The plan has always been to remove the metal railings but RB was concerned that his potential budget restraints may impact this and it may slip to 2016. RB may be able to do the work if ARK could pay machine hire charges. RB suggested that once removed the railings should be stored for possible future use. **MHD** suggested the railings might stay to prevent people walking on the seeded area between Stonebridge Lane and the Boardwalk. AF advised footfall would not affect the area and the public should be allowed access. **MR** asked if an additional rail should be added to the dipping platform for health and safety reasons. CH/AF re-iterated that local groups had conducted risk assessments and this wasn't necessary. **Action: RB** to keep railing removal on his action list. **CH** to investigate whether money could be found to hire cutting equipment.

7. Camera and Signage

The committee agreed there was no benefit in discussing recent events but agreed a policy was required moving forward. AF showed a draft sign design stating cameras are present for the intention of filming wildlife and to make the public aware they may be filmed. AF also explained the cameras are moved periodically and are set at a low angle to capture wildlife. Signage was discussed by the committee and it was agreed the sign should include a line explaining that the filming is motion triggered and only records in 10 second bursts.

The committee agreed a policy for dealing with vandalism and criminal behaviour in future. If either party records an incident which may require police involvement ARK and the Town Clerk would discuss appropriate action and both parties would keep one another informed.

8. Footpath 45

Footpath 45 is a public footpath off Stonebridge Lane, runs along the back of the buildings then crosses the meadow. A member of the public raised a concern that the footpath was not adequately maintained and that the path has deviated from its mapped route to a 'desire line'. MHD and RB attended a meeting with Stephen Leonard and Barbara Burke from Wiltshire Rights of Way. RB stated that at this meeting he had been told by Stephen Leonard that a right of way must be cleared to a 2m width. MHD confirmed that this was the case. RB suggested that the request to clear the path was potentially a public reaction to rumours that dog walkers would be excluded from Stonebridge. He had been told unequivocally by Stephen Leonard that if one person objected to the movement of a footpath then then the mapped path must be cleared. The committee strongly objected to 45 being cleared. It was both a waste of public time and money, simply to prove a point of principle. They supported a pragmatic approach to maintain the path which followed the 'desire line' rather than the line from a map. RB re-iterated that footpath 45 must be cleared and there could be no exceptions. **Action: RB** to contact Stephen Leonard to establish the minimum maintenance requirement to be compliant with the law.

9. Update on Grant Funding

CH detailed new grant application which AF had submitted to SITA for repairs to the footpath by Poulton Bridge. The same grant would pay for needed kissing gate closure mechanisms. These would let people access the grazed area when livestock were present without risk of livestock escaping. Results should be known around Feb 2016.

CH thanked MR for her letter supporting the grant application. MR stated that it was inappropriate and unnecessary to ask other councillors to support a grant application without her permission. CH explained that the grant application process was driven by tight timescales and that it was perfectly proper for ARK to request letters of support from individuals who were familiar with the work at Stonebridge and could write letters of support both quickly and with knowledge of the project.

10. Tree Report

RB put an estimated figure of £1000 for tree work at Stonebridge but this needs to 'firmed up'. RB stated that access to some trees wasn't possible at the initial survey, to enable completion some fencing will need to be cut and there will be some disruption to vegetation etc. RB to feedback and liaise with AF where necessary for access.

11. Mowing Plan

AF tabled a plan for the Wild Flower Area around the edge of the wetland which showed the extent of mowing. Only two cuts would be required per year. The first in early spring and second in late September and cuttings need to be removed. RB confirmed the these small volumes could be picked up and composted.

Deferred to site meeting to agree area. Agreed area to be recorded in the management plan.

MR asked if cuttings in the whole amenity area can be collected rather than left on the surface. RB response volume is too great to move/dispose of.

12. PR, Publicity and Events

The committee discussed the proposed Opening Ceremony and agreed spring would be the best time to display the Meadow at its best. CH proposed Claire Perry to conduct the ceremony, BC suggested it should be the Mayor, this was discussed further and agreed that Bear Grylls would be an ideal candidate with his local and environmental connections. **Actions: AF/CH** to write to Bear Grylls and Claire Perry with proposed date of Friday 6th May.

BC requested it be acknowledged that there has been some recent negative publicity and all efforts should be made to dispel the rumours regarding dogs being banned. **Actions: AF** to contact Amber at the Gazette and Herald to publish something on dogs being allowed. **BC** asked that the Town Clerk should add something to the website, the Greyhound section in Marlborough Town and Country and an article by Shirley Prior in the Hungerford and Marlborough Adviser paper. **Action: MTC** to publicise 'Dogs Welcome at Stonebridge' on web and Greyhound and Adviser. **AF** to ask for NiB in Gazette and Herald.

13. AOB

- **AF** report on activities see appendix 1
- **MHD** has been told there are a further 400 hedge trees going in. AF confirmed this is correct and these will continue the hedge but will be planted inside of the barbed wire and will in time replace the fence as agreed in the Management Plan. **MHD** requested this is referred back to the Open Spaces Committee as the TC does not have the funds to maintain hedging. CH made clear the hedge was too far through the planting process and the principal had been established in the Management Plan. AF confirmed the ARK volunteers will maintain and provide hedge laying tuition to the RB's team. In the longer term the committee would need to agree how to split the costs of maintaining the hedge.
- **MHD** had a problem with the term Wild River Reserve and felt the only term used should be Stonebridge Meadow. CH explained ARK had established the 'Wild River Reserve' before Stonebridge Meadow had been purchased and that to ARK's mind Stonebridge Meadow was one part of the Stonebridge Wild River Reserve: the whole reserve included the North bank with the boardwalk and seating area (leased from the St John's Foundation Trust), the river (which had been extensively restored prior to the purchase of the meadow) and meadow itself on the South bank.
- **RB** raised a concern that recent publicity in the local press about events organised by ARK and held at Stonebridge didn't mention MTC. CH explained that every effort is made in press releases and articles to credit partners and funders, but it was not always possible to control the editorial process.
- **BC** requested MTC are included and credited in the ARK Annual Report. CH confirmed this is already in place. CH also said ARK welcome promotion of Stonebridge and ARK through MTC communication channels.
- **Request for Minutes** by a member of the public. The minutes of the most recent meetings are available on the ARK website. A request for the last 20 months of minutes has been received – deferred to Town Clerk. Committee discussion as to what should be published and agreed detailed budgets would not be included.
- **CH** passed on request from Lez Graham to use the meadow for a working dog test in November. Approved by the committee
- **AF** passed on request from local resident on jointly own land. Request is to crop or remove a single leylandi tree. The resident is happy to contribute towards the cost. **RB** suggested this is reviewed in the site meeting as it could be included as part of the tree work.

14. Site Meeting

Site meeting agreed for Friday 16th October at 9am to cover

- Tree work
- Footpath 45
- Vegetation around amenity area
- Mowing of wild flower area
- Leylandi

15. Date of Next Meeting

10th February 2016 9am Council Chambers

Apendix

Appendix 1 – Stonebridge Activities Report

Appendix 2 – Stonebridge Budget

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Stonebridge Oct 2015 – Anna Forbes

The wetland has continued to flourish, our volunteers have planted more native marginal and aquatic plants, native wildlife has arrived and the new recycled plastic non-slip boardwalk and pond dipping platform has been installed by contractors assisted by the ARK volunteers. The boardwalk facilitates easier access to the meadow, particularly for wheelchairs, mobility scooters and pushchairs. The pond dipping platform provides a safe area for using nets to explore this new habitat and is being used informally by families and in a more structured way with our Tour & Explore sessions with local groups.

Events held this summer:

Family Bioblitz

Moth Nights

Bat Walk & Talk

World Rivers Day Wildlife Walk with award winning natural history author Peter Marren

Tour & Explore evenings with Savernake Beavers and Savernake Cubs

Bat Night with Marlborough Cubs

Visiting this Friday is Dorcan Academy

Photographic Competition – Stonebridge was one of three locations where images could be taken. There were 45 entries and the majority were taken at Stonebridge.

Positive press – the ARK Moth Nights feature in Butterfly Conservation's regional magazine 'Butterfly Bulletin'. This is a four page article they requested and is written by Anna.

An exhibition of all entries will be on display at St Peter's Church, Marlborough 26th Oct – 1st Nov.

The cows are now back on the farm after doing an excellent job over the summer, a team of volunteer 'lookers' worked on a rota system to check every day that the cattle were healthy and the pasture pump was working.

We have begun plans to forward wildflowers in the larger of the two conservation grazing areas and this afternoon volunteers will continue to prepare the area.

Volunteers have maintained the hedging, which over all is thriving despite canes going missing on a very regular basis. We are pleased that The Woodland Trust has awarded us another 420 trees that will arrive in November. Two community planting afternoons will be held in November, St John's students will be heavily involved in the weekday planting and both Savernake and Marlborough Beavers, Cubs and Scouts will be attending the weekend session.

Volunteers have carried out maintenance on the riverbank restoration at Poulton Footbridge, keeping this popular spot in a good state. The dogwood will be cut back from the river this month to prevent it grow out too far across the river.

Surveying and recording has continued both in the river and on land, the bioblitz brought several new records as have the moth nights. A notable new species record being the Lesser stag beetle.