

# Clerks Report for Mere Town Council meeting 4.10.21

Agenda Item:

## **4b) Update on Wessex Water Environment Fund Grant Application for water refilling station (Minute Ref: 54e)**

We have made enquiries with suppliers and with Wessex Water but we cannot find a supplier that also provides an installation/maintenance service.

We have got prices for 2 different models from 3 different suppliers which range from £1375 to £4118 for the supply only

Wessex Water have supplied us with installation guidelines but in summary these are

- Unit must be from the approved list (no idea if the above suppliers are on their approved list)
- Notification of installation must be completed before installing and approval sought
- Wessex Water will require a site visit before connection can be made
- Owner of the water supply to the unit to be responsible for maintenance, regular cleaning, appropriate flushing regime and monitoring

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## **4c) Request for Speed Limit review along Shaftesbury Road – in view of the response from the Highways Authority, does the Town Council want to submit this ‘highways improvement request form’ to the Community Area Transport Group (CATG). (Minute Ref: 57a)**

Having sent the following email to the Highway Authority:

*“The Town Council received representation from numerous residents of Shaftesbury Road at a recent meeting and as a result agreed to request that the Highway Authority at Wiltshire Council carry out a review of the 40 mph speed limit along that road. I would like to stress that this is not a complaint about the speed of traffic but their argument is that, with the amount of development and residential houses now along the Shaftesbury Road and the new developments behind the Walnut Tree Inn and on the old Brush Factory site at Woodlands Road, the 40mph speed limit is no longer appropriate or suitable on what is now a residential road with a large number of cyclists and horse riders and should be reduced to a 30 mph speed limit in accordance with the following documents: Department for Transport Circular 01/2013 SETTING LOCAL SPEED LIMITS and also Traffic Advisory Leaflet 1/04 Village Speed Limits  
I wonder if you could please advise as to who I should contact about requesting a review of the speed limit in this location.”*

I have now received the following reply:

*“The Parish Council must first complete and submit a highways improvement request form to formally raise the issue with Wiltshire Council. The issue will then be considered at the next Southern Wiltshire CATG meeting in November. I have enclosed a copy of the form. There is both a PDF and Word version of the form enclosed. The form is the same so please feel free to complete whichever one is easiest for you. The form should be submitted to [CATGrequests@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:CATGrequests@wiltshire.gov.uk) when completed. However, the advice to the CATG will be that the standard cost for a formal review of a speed limit is £2,500. If both the Parish Council and the CATG support the undertaking the speed limit review one would then be ordered up. The costs of the review would split 75% (CATG) / 25% (PC). The review might not recommend any changes to the speed limit but if it does a scheme would then be drawn up for implementation the costs of which would be split as outlined above.”*

I then pointed out:

*It has just occurred to me that the Town Council is likely to ask what the cost of implementing said scheme might be so that we could work out what 25% of that would be too. In other words, I think it is unlikely that they are going to commit the £625 for the review unless they have a rough idea of what their contribution towards the implementation of the scheme might be (subject, of course, to the review recommending any changes).*

Reply received was:

*It is impossible to say what the cost would be at this stage but I would suggest that you would be looking at around £4,000 to implement any changes. That figure would encompass the legal Traffic Regulation Order work and any signing and lining changes required. However, the figure could be considerably higher depending upon the amount of signing and lining changes required on the ground.*

So..... as I suspected and as I think some councillors predicted at the last Town Council meeting, there is a clear expectation of a financial contribution from the Town Council if this request is to be made formally to the Community Area Transport Group (CATG).

I did inform Mr. Clowser of the answer to the first email and his response was that he didn't now if it was possible or even legal but he and some of the other residents would be prepared to fund the 25% of the review costs.

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#### **4d) Replacement road signs (Minutes Ref: 218a)**

Street Name Sign Quotations - We have used Springfield Road as an example to get our quotations. White lettering on blue background. Approx 165cm X 23cm (as current sign on the railings)

Source 1 – 3mm aluminium substrate – £62.40 + VAT  
Source 2 – solid cast aluminium - £825 + VAT + delivery

If you choose to replace any signs then we need to get a proof and get approval from Wiltshire Council before we can install them.

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#### **5a) Wiltshire Councillor's Report including South West Wiltshire Area Board Car Club Pilot**

Please see separate report attached

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#### **7b) Report from Wessex Water on the Mere stream support trial**

Please see separate report attached

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#### **8a) Tennis Courts & potential tree root issues**

At the beginning of September I was informed by Shelagh Leakey of Mere Tennis Club that Ray King of Kings Courts (Tennis Court Maintenance Contractor) had advised that two of the beech trees on the eastern boundary of the

Recreation Ground were going to cause damage to the tennis courts soon as there was evidence of minor cracking to the painted surface. Mr. King had recommended to Mrs. Leakey that the roots of the trees could be cut off underground and some kind of underground barrier could be inserted to stop the roots from coming back thereby averting any damage to the tennis courts.

The trees in question are numbered 0936 and 0937 in the Town Council's Tree Register and are mature beech trees that are likely to be in the region of 100 – 140 years old. It was my initial thoughts that these two trees were encompassed within the Tree Preservation Order (TPO) for the line of beech trees on the eastern boundary of the Recreation Ground but upon further investigation, I now realise that these two trees fall outside the TPO.

The Town Council has all its trees inspected and surveyed every 3 – 5 years by an Arboricultural Consultant: Jonathan Astill Dip.Arb.(RFS) M.Arbor.A. of Astill Treecare Ltd.

The objectives of the survey are to assess the tree's condition within the context of their setting and make appropriate management recommendations pertaining to safety for people and property. In addition the following two areas with the largest and oldest trees are subject to a formal survey:

- Mature boundary trees (predominantly Beech) around the Recreation Ground
- Mature Beech trees at the foot of the south side of Long Hill

A formal survey is where each tree is recorded on the survey plan and schedule regardless of whether there is a recommendation for tree surgery works, monitoring or detailed inspection. The benefit of the formal survey is that comparative assessments can be made in future surveys and assists with determining the best course of management in the long-term.

The most recent survey was carried out in July 2021 and the information within the tree schedule pertaining to these trees' is:

#### **Beech trees 0936 to 0959**

Line of mature beech on the east boundary of the recreation ground and adjacent to the footpath dividing the recreation ground and Ivy Mead Playing Fields provide a dominant landscape feature within the grounds. Whilst the trees are mature, most exhibit good structural and physiological health. Beech trees on the east boundary grow within a dense and wide formal beech hedge and some are densely clad with ivy. (Some have had ivy severed as recommended in the 2017 survey and others have not). Despite the difficulties of inspecting the base of these trees within the hedge, the buttress regions of the ivy clad trees have been probed with a steel rod to feel and listen for cavities, hollow spots or fungal fruiting bodies. The crowns are mostly dense, evenly branched, well-formed and afford a good level of self-shelter from strong winds. Most of the trees grow on the peripheral edge of the grounds playing field with a low target occupancy. Others grow in closer proximity to paths, the tennis courts, the skate park, football pitch and school grounds affording a higher risk in the event of failure. The presence of ivy beyond the crown break often obscures a thorough visual inspection of the primary and major branch unions. In this regard it is strongly advised that ivy is severed thoroughly at the base of all trees 12 months prior to the next formal survey to facilitate a more thorough inspection of their crowns. It should be noted that ivy severance should be undertaken with a hand saw as one tree (0938) has sustained damage to its trunk from cutting ivy with a chainsaw.

#### **0936 Beech *Fagus sylvatica* - Approx. stem diam: 780 - Age class: M - Phys. Cond: F/G**

- No basal or trunk features of significance
- Trunk divides into 3 stems at 3.5 to 4 metres above ground level with normally formed unions
- Crown is more exposed following removal of adjacent Beech to north c. 8 years ago
- The crown has been subject to reduction pruning (in height and lateral spread) since the 2017 although not specified in the last survey schedule (Perhaps at the request of residents to the north due to obstruction of light to solar panels?)

- Occasional deadwood over very low use area, none overhanging tennis courts
- One decayed stub from old primary stem at 3.5 metres above ground level

**Management Recommendations:**

- No tree works currently recommended

**0937 Beech *Fagus sylvatica*** – Approx. stem dim: 850 – Age class: M - Phys. Cond: G

- Ivy to c. 8 metres above ground level - partially severed during inspection
- Historic root disturbance on west side of tree for soil profiling (construction of tennis courts and club house). No visible wounding or decay on structural roots on west side.
- Freshly emerging fruiting body of heartwood decay fungi, *Ganoderma australe*, between buttress roots on south side. Normal resonance when tapped with sounding mallet and currently of no concern. No notable change since 2017 survey. No current requirement for a detailed inspection
- Tree grows on boundary (east side of stem base viewed from over the fence only and no features of significance noted)
- Crown breaks at c. 4 metres above ground level into multiple primary branches extending over tennis court and bottom of large residential garden
- The crown has been subject to reduction pruning (in height and lateral spread) since the 2017 although not specified in the last survey schedule

**Management Recommendations**

- No tree works currently recommended, but arboriculturalist to monitor basal decay during next formal survey (possible microdrill assessment in future if any cause for concern)

Following the concerns raised to me by Mrs. Leakey, I have contacted Jonathan Astill to seek his advice. Whilst he has not inspected the surface of the tennis courts, his verbal advice was that if the tennis courts are porous, it would be rare for the beech trees of this maturity to cause surface damage as the root system would be extremely well established as the trees were there long before the tennis courts. However, I think it is unlikely that the tennis courts are porous as I seem to remember the surface being tarmac long before they were treated with the synthetic/acrylic layers that they are now treated with.

Mr. Astill also advised that cutting off any roots at this proximity to the trunk is likely to cause significant harm to the physiological health and structural integrity of the trees and is not a course of action he would recommend if the Town Council/Recreation Ground Charity wants to preserve the trees.

It seems that there are a number of options/courses of action that the Town Council/Recreation Ground Charity could take:

1. Take no action at the present time but monitor the cracking/damage to the tennis courts surface and take action if it becomes more visible or problematic for players.

Possible courses of action that could then be taken would be to:

- a) raise the height of the tennis courts in their existing position OR
- b) fell the two beech trees, dig out any protruding roots and re-surface the courts

2. Fell the two beech trees now – this option is likely to cause significant public upset.

3. Re-build new tennis courts in a more suitable location

Options 2 and 3 would have a financial impact with option 3 being the most expensive option. However, there are plenty of grants available for sport and the Town Council has access to funding that could be used as match funding if this option were considered appropriate.

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## **8b) Issues with public toilets**

We have problems with the public toilets:

Problem 1 – lighting – the lights in the gents are not coming on and there are only 2 of the 4 lights in the ladies that work. This is not a problem that can be fixed by replacing light bulbs – it is actually the light units that no longer work and they are obsolete so you can't get parts for them. Also, the light in the accessible toilet is inadequate (there is no window in there and it is extremely dark once you shut the door even with the light on). So,.... I have asked Michael Jeans to give me two quotations:

1. To replace all the broken lights in the two toilet blocks
2. To replace all the lights in the three toilet blocks with LED strip lights and add sensors so that they come on only when someone walks through the door.

Problem 2 – the hand wash units that are in the ladies and gents are not working adequately. They have always been temperamental but they are just getting worse. They are obsolete and we cannot get them serviced any longer.

Problem 3 – we have had problems with the ladies toilets blocking up and one of the toilets is leaking. I have asked Nugents to come in and assess. They have done some work to the flushing systems so that they flush out more water which might help to stop them blocking up. However, they have advised that all 4 pans need replacing and it is not that easy to get toilet pans that are not close-coupled any more. They would propose to do the work 2 at a time so that 2 of the toilets are in use but the pans themselves are likely to cost at least £800 so the whole bill will be more like £1500

My concern is that we could start throwing a lot of money at these toilets when in actual fact they are just past their sell-by date and need to be refurbished or knocked down and start again.

Since I wrote this report the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and myself have taken the decision to lock the ladies block. We have modified the gents so that there is no access to the urinal system and made them all unisex. Therefore there are now three toilet cubicles (two in the 'old gents' and one in the 'old disabled' that are available for all to use, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The toilets are cleaned once per day.

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## **9a) Payments – To review and authorise schedule of payments (attached)**

Please see separate report attached

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## **10b) Proposed Westbury Incinerator – email from Westbury Town Council**

I have received the following email from Westbury Town Council:

“Westbury Town Council has written to the new Secretary of State, the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, to reiterate our request to his predecessor to call in the planning application for a proposed incinerator on the edge of our town. At a meeting of the Town Council on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2021, council resolved to apply for Rule 6 and approved a sum of money to seek legal advice and representation in our challenge to the decision by Wiltshire Council to approve the planning application. Our councillors have discussed many of the issues surrounding the decision however we will be relying on specialist lawyers to advise us where we have the strongest case.

Whilst a sum of money has been set aside, it is difficult to predict what this legal challenge may cost. We are looking at other options to help fund this and we would like to ask your council to consider making a contribution to this fighting fund.

I would be grateful if you would take this request to your members as this incinerator isn't just a Westbury problem; if it is built it will be all of our problem.

On behalf of Westbury Town Council, we thank you for your time and ongoing support.

Sent on behalf of Deborah Urch, Town Clerk.”

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