

Minutes of the ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL WELLBEING COMMITTEE
of Bridport Town Council held in Mountfield, Bridport on Wednesday 4 September
2024 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT: Cllrs: Kelvin Clayton
Bridget Bolwell Anne Rickard
Jonathan Bourbon Dave Rickard
Julian Jones David Worthington

ALSO PRESENT: Three members of the public, Will Austin (Town Clerk),
and David Dixon (Project Manager).

PUBLIC FORUM

Penny Hughes spoke about the dangers of battery storage at a proposed facility in Chickerell. This would need vigilance and scrutiny, including with Dorset & Wiltshire Fire Service, Chickerell Town Council, and Bridport Town Council. The Chairman reminded Penny that the site was far outside the Town Council boundary and this would afford the council little influence.

Penny further thanked the Town Council for the recent flax project. She felt it would be good if more people could be involved, for the benefit of both local heritage and the environment.

Ellie Pole, a resident of South Mill Lane, spoke about her concerns that the lane, having previously been left to grow wild for rewilding and to deter parking, was weed sprayed the previous week. The weeds were now dead and there had been a consequent impact on wildlife, including insects and bats. A recent article by Mike Galsworthy had highlighted wildlife, watercourse, and potential health concerns from the use of glyphosate-based weedkiller. She noted reports that the operatives were wearing 'hazmat' suits. Ellie recognised the spraying was by Dorset Council and not the Town Council, but she had been unable to report her concerns online, as the lane did not show up on the Dorset Council website as a maintained highway area. Cllr Julian Jones noted that a resident in Bradpole was similarly unhappy and wanted to see manual weed control instead. Cllr Dave Rickard said that it would be odd if the substance used was not hazardous, given the reports of hazard suits being worn. He noted that the dead weeds looked terrible if not removed. Cllr Jonathan Bourbon said that the same had happened in St Michael's Lane. The Chairman advised he had received several similar comments, and would like to see the matter tabled for discussion at a future meeting. Cllr Bridget Bolwell advised that Dorset Council had declared a nature emergency, but that this would need detailed drafting before the implications for weed control would be known. The Town Clerk clarified that the standard process at the moment, albeit very late this year, was for the Dorset Council Highways team to spray highway weeds, followed some weeks later by the Street Cleaning team clearing the dead weeds. He advised he would follow up on the issue and table it for future consideration.

The Chairman thanked those attending for their input.

12. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Ian Bark, Bev Thornton and Stephen Williams.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

14. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 5 June 2024 were confirmed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15. COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Theo Langdon was not in attendance to present on this matter.

RESOLVED: that this item be deferred.

16. WEST BAY BEACH WHEELCHAIR SCHEME

Elaine Leader, the lead volunteer for the Beach Wheelchair Scheme, explained the current situation to members:

- Work on the scheme had commenced in 2022 with a presentation to this committee who supported the idea.
- The Town Council had subsequently purchased beach matting which was very well received.
- Elaine had established a crowd funder to provide the initial wheelchair scheme, which offered three chairs and was run in partnership by the Town Council, Parkdean, and volunteers.
- In 2023 Parkdean had staffing difficulties and the Town Council had temporarily taken on the scheme bookings, and the Harbour Master had taken on the on-site hiring role. The scheme was not very busy at that time.
- In 2024 the matting was doubled by the Town Council, and a further wheelchair was added.
- Parkdean continued to play a lesser role, so Elaine, along with friends and volunteers had taken on more of the work, along with a trained instructor for the 'mobi chair', which enabled it to be used in the water.
- The scheme had been busier in 2024, but Elaine had limited volunteer support with eleven involved. She had made a call for more volunteers but had got no response and had subsequently made another call.
- There has been sixteen hirings so far in 2024.
- The matting had been a success, and the Changing Places toilets had added to demand for the beach wheelchairs, which were now promoted on the Visit Dorset website. West Bay was becoming a 'go to' destination for people with disabilities.
- Elaine was attending this meeting to ask that the Town Council should take on the running of the scheme in full, albeit that Elaine would still be able to help.
- The wheelchairs were stored in a container on the Esplanade. A permanent building was being pursued, along with fundraising. Hardwills would construct it at a cost of £20,000, of which £13,000 had been raised.

The Town Clerk added further detail in respect of the storage building, including discussions with Dorset Council about the property arrangements and permissions.

Members considered Elaine's request, including:

- Whether the Town Council had capacity to take on the scheme;
- The impact of funding the scheme on the precept, which was not yet known;
- Concerns about 'mission creep' from the original Town Council commitment to being the accountable body with a limited operational role; and
- The timing of any possible handover of roles.

RESOLVED: that the request for Bridport Town Council to take on the full running of the Beach Wheelchair Scheme be included in consideration of the council's five-year plan.

17. **PROJECT UPDATES**

The Project Manager, presented on a range of project updates as follows:

- A new timber seating structure in Asker Meadows, designed by and currently being constructed by Common Practice in partnership with local young people, as part of the Town of Culture initiative.
- Ongoing work to involve the Friends of Rivers group in the management of fishing rights on the River Asker.
- A review of the Asker Meadows Management Plan which aimed to be completed by December 2024.
- Work with Citizen Science, Pineapple Estate, and volunteers on river monitoring.
- Initiatives with Edible Bridport, including public growing sites, demonstrations, workshops, and other events and partnerships. Edible Bridport sought advice on whether the Town Council would support further growing sites and whether funding was available.
- Resident-led improvements at Court Orchard Green, now known as Court Orchard Community Park.
- The gaining of 'Wessex Watermark' status for Bridport, by increasing awareness and taking action to save water.
- The awarding of 'Bee Friendly' status to Bridport, with Town Council support.
- Progress with the Town of Culture initiative, including, a programme of skills development opportunities for young people to align with the town's calendar of culture, a launch event in July 2024, the establishment of 'culture cafes', a programme of events, and preparations for a handover event to the next Town of Culture, Weymouth.
- Actions relating to the Climate Emergency Action Plan, including work with Magna Housing on retro fit, and with Wessex Community Assets and local Community Land Trusts on low carbon solutions for social housing.
- Work with Magna Housing and Bridport Area Community Housing Trust on plans to bring Boldwood House back into productive use as affordable accommodation using sustainable building methods and retro fit.
- Ongoing support for the delivery of the Bridport Food Security Plan, and the Bridport Learning Hub.

The Project Manager advised that slides used to accompany the presentation would be a format for future updates.

Members discussed:

- A possible handover event to Weymouth;
- Aspects of food insecurity including poverty, and how these might be addressed through the Food Security Plan;
- Maintaining the number of volunteers for the Energy Champions group; and
- The positive outcomes from community involvement in the improvements at Court Orchard.

RESOLVED: that the report of the Project Manager be noted.

18. TOWN OF CULTURE BRIDPORT 2024

This item had been considered as part of the previous item, see minute 17.

19. CLIMATE EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

This item had been considered as part of minute 17.

20. FIVE-YEAR PLAN

The Town Clerk reminded committee members that submissions for the council's five-year plan were sought from them, in particular those relating to the committee's remit. These were to be sent to the Project Manager, by 23 September 2024.

21. COMMUNICATIONS/UPDATES ON OTHER ONGOING ISSUES

The Town Clerk reported that the council was looking into the possibility of a standing councillor representative to Magna Housing.

The meeting closed at **8.18pm**

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 6 November 2024