

Minutes of the ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL WELLBEING COMMITTEE
of Bridport Town Council held in Mountfield, Bridport on Wednesday 8 January 2025
at 7.00pm.

PRESENT: Cllrs: Kelvin Clayton (Chairman)

Ian Bark
Julian Jones
Anne Rickard

Dave Rickard
Bev Thornton
David Worthington

ALSO PRESENT: Cllr Ann Langdrige (as observer), 16 members of the public, David Dixon (Project Manager), and Will Austin (Town Clerk).

PUBLIC FORUM

Nicola Dennis, a local resident, addressed councillors about the proposed Asker Meadows Management Plan 2025-30. She expressed concern that government guidance on local nature reserves had not, in her opinion, been followed. She also considered that the term 'enhancement opportunities' should be renamed 'action plans'. Ms Dennis emphasised the benefits of creating wetlands. She requested that the two designated wet meadow fields be 'no dog zones' to protect wildlife and biodiversity, and that the lower, unofficial grass path on the river corridor be subject to a 'dogs on leads' restriction.

Emma Bourne, a local resident, also spoke about Asker Meadows. She asked that the Management Plan be amended to refer to the meadows as a local nature reserve, and that the official status of the New Zealand area be clarified. She sought a more adventurous approach to the vision to make the meadow 'rich in wildlife', and considered that this would not be a financial issue. Volunteers would be more likely to get involved, if the plan was more adventurous. Ms Bourne considered the pond proposal to be exciting but thought it could go further.

Rachel Millson, of Bridport Food Matters and Edible Bridport, spoke requesting that a right to grow be included in the council's Food Security Plan. This would accord with a bill currently being considered in Parliament. Other councils such as Hull City Council were adopting the principles, including the aim to provide leases for community growing. The request to councils was to produce a map of council-owned land suitable for community growing, to make that land available, and to extend liability insurance to cover community groups involved. This would make the process of community growing simpler than at present and was the key to food security.

Sarah Wilberforce, representing Candida Dunford-Wood of Bridport Food Matters, reminded councillors that Bridport had achieved 'sustainable food place' status, which was prestigious, and gave opportunities for networking with other such places. Bridport Food Matters had refined its mission, which was to be a community hub promoting access to nutritious food for all, forever. The group continued its public awareness, engagement, and virtual hub activities, including via newsletters, social media, and a website. A physical presence for a hub was progressing after a search of a suitable venue. It was to be called 'Nourish'. Finally, Mrs Wilberforce advised

that Bridport Food Matters would not be the lead organisation for a food hub, and that this initiative should be led by farmers. This should be reflected in a change to the council's Food Security Action Plan.

Brian Atkinson, Chair of the Asker Nature Reserve Project (ANRP), advised that the group had been consulted on the Asker Meadows Management Plan and was content with the draft document. He thanked the Town Council and looked forward to working further with the council. The ANRP had received a grant of £2,000 for wheelchair-accessible gates and the extension of the nature trail, and both would be pursued in conjunction with council officers.

Wendy Cutts, Secretary of the ANRP, welcomed the Asker Meadows Management Plan and stressed the importance of working in partnership with the ANRP, for example on aspects relating to youth, and disability. Ms Cutts recognised a diversity of views over the varied possible uses of the meadows, both for wildlife and recreation. More consultation with the ANRP would help improve communications.

Dana Assinder, representing West Dorset Wilding (WDW), advised members that she was overseeing a Brit Valley landscape recovery project with 57 local farmers, including at Asker Meadows. She was hoping to get more involved with the Food Security Plan. WDW's project was DEFRA-funded, and Ian Rees had been involved in stakeholder engagement. Actions supported by the project needed confirmation with farmers, whom WDW wanted to get more involved.

The Chairman thanked members of the public for their input.

31. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Jonathan Bourbon and Steve Williams.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

33. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that, subject to the addition of Cllr Bev Thornton as having attended, the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 November 2024 be confirmed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

34. UNITED DIVERSITY – COMMUNITY BUS SERVICE

A request was considered from United Diversity, to act as the accountable body for a proposed community bus service between Bridport and West Bay.

For United Diversity Bridport (UDB), Josef Davies-Coates presented, setting out the group's proposal to establish a trial bus service between Bridport and West Bay every 30 minutes on Friday evenings, Saturdays and Sundays. If successful, the group would explore options for the future, including contributions from local businesses and a community share issue. The service would ideally charge no fare, but a maximum of £1, and would encourage car-free travel. Mr Davies-Coates outlined UDB, which was an unincorporated association, with a goal of making West

Dorset “a home to thriving people, in a thriving place, whilst respecting the wellbeing of all people, and the health of the whole planet.” The group was about to incorporate as a community benefit society, as it had 24 paying members, and would be renamed West Dorset Commons Community Land Trust. UDB had been offered a grant of £20,000 by the Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body towards the cost of the pilot, but did not have a bank account or the required status to receive the funds. Mr Davies-Coates asked that the Town Council consider holding the funds on behalf of the group.

The Town Clerk explained that in order to hold the funds, councillors would need to consider acting as the accountable body for the pilot, in order to comply with money laundering regulations and audit requirements.

Members discussed:

- The implications of accountable body status;
- The frequency of the proposed service;
- Funding the costs over and above the grant offered;
- The requirement of the funder that the funds be expended by March 2025;
- The financial viability of the proposed service;
- Whether a fixed fare would deter shorter journeys;
- The estimated total cost of up to £40,000;
- The future of the service after a pilot period of six months to one year; and
- A need for community engagement; Mr Davies-Coates advised that UDB had carried out a small amount.

RESOLVED: that Finance & General Purposes Committee be recommended to approve Bridport Town Council as accountable body for the community bus service between Bridport and West Bay.

35. ASKER MEADOWS – CIDER & MUSIC FESTIVAL

A request was considered from Ben Pimbley to use Asker Meadows for a Cider and Music Festival.

Addressing the committee in support of an outline plan circulated to members, Mr Pimbley outlined the theme of a three-day festival. It would raise funds for a range of local, regional, and national charities. Key attractions would include a cider village, live music, family activities, and food and drink stalls. There would be volunteering opportunities and collaboration with local businesses and community groups. Mr Pimbley requested that the Town Council (i) allow the use of Asker Meadows for the event, (ii) provide guidance on permits and compliance matters, and (iii) consider sponsoring the festival.

Members discussed:

- Whether the Jurassic Fields festival would be staged in 2025;
- Whether the proposed event was a good fit with other major events in Bridport;
- Possible logistical support by Bridport Town Council;
- The risk of poor weather; and
- Funding, including sponsorship.

RESOLVED: that the request for the use of Asker Meadows be supported in principle, and that Finance & General Purposes Committee be recommended to grant such use.

36. BRIDPORT FOOD SECURITY PLAN ACTIONS

Members considered a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3954. The Project Manager summarised the report as follows:

- A Food Security Plan (FSP) had been agreed by the Council in 2024;
- This report proposed an action plan stemming from the FSP;
- There had been extensive consultation on the action plan;
- The plan was focused, and recognised others' roles in delivery, rather than by Bridport Town Council;
- The draft action plan had been updated in December 2024 to incorporate the points made by Dana Assinder in the earlier Public Forum; and
- Committee approval was now sought.

Dana Assinder confirmed that West Dorset Wilding's support in principle hinged upon engagement, particularly with farmers.

Members discussed:

- The viability of a community food hub;
- The role of both livestock farming and plant-based production in changing dietary habits;
- The importance of horticulture;
- The importance of reinstating insect populations;
- The need to reduce packaging and additives;
- The inclusion of a right to grow;
- Linking the action plan with the council's five-year plan;
- Opportunities for allotment land;
- Property, resource, and liability issues for Finance & General Purposes Committee consideration; and
- The implications for Town Council officer capacity.

RESOLVED: that the draft Bridport Food Security Action Plan be approved as tabled, subject to the incorporation of minor amendments arising from discussion at the committee meeting, the inclusion of a 'right to grow' commitment, and the removal of Bridport Food Matters as lead partner for a local food hub.

RESOLVED: that Finance & General Purposes Committee be asked to consider the property, tenancy, licensing, infrastructure, right to bid, and insurance aspects of a 'right to grow'.

37. ASKER MEADOWS MANAGEMENT PLAN 2025-2030

Members considered the revised management plan, ENCL: 3955, ENCL 3956, and ENCL 3959. The Project Manager summarised the report, including the draft management plan and results of community engagement.

Members thanked the Project Manager for the extensive work that had been carried out to deliver the draft plan, and discussed:

- The importance of Asker Meadows as a community resource, and the varied and sometimes competing interests in use of the land, including for wildlife, biodiversity, exercise and dog walking, and events.
- The impact of dog walking and the approach needed to manage this without formal restrictions but with a focus on awareness-raising and behavioural change;
- The implications of short periods of prohibition of dog walking, should this be pursued;
- The need for further work, including translation of the plan into year-on-year actions; and
- The need for external funding and partnership to support delivery of the plan.

RESOLVED: that the Town Council:

- (i) approves the revised Asker Meadows Management Plan 2025-2030 for translation into detailed year on year actions; and
- (ii) approves the schedule of nature conservation enhancements as a basis for further investigation to be undertaken in early 2025, with the expectation of the Town Council being in a position to submit a funding application for defined actions by the end of 2025.

38. PROJECT UPDATES

Members considered updates on the following Town Council projects falling within the committee's remit, ENCL: 3957, as follows

Town of Culture

Evaluation of the Town of Culture Pilot was underway – surveys of partners and participants would inform an open evaluation meeting at the Arts Centre. The TOCIYA Group of Young Adults had devised and run a successful performance at the Arts Centre in November. Plans to deconstruct the "Pavilion of Regenerative Practice" and leave in place a permanent gathering space had been agreed and would be undertaken in January 2025. A handover event with Weymouth was scheduled for early February.

Energy Champions

Thermal imaging home visits were ongoing, and there was regular messaging on energy-related issues, such as problematic spray foam insulation and draught proofing and also various grants available for people living in fuel poverty.

River Water Quality

A third meeting of the steering group had been held to discuss research questions and how monitoring would tie in with the Natural Flood Management programme overseen by Dorset Wilding. Volunteers were monitoring the Brit, Simene and Asker every month.

Court Orchard Green

Funding to create natural seating had been applied for, as part of a wider grant. A much-loved old bench had been reinstalled by the grounds team. The tree planting group had been discussing additional trees with the residents' group.

Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan (BANP) 2020-2036

A light review of the BANP was underway with two funded assessments due to report in March 2025: A Workspace and Business Needs Assessment; and review of

the Housing Needs Assessment. A further application was to be submitted for technical support, with site options, in 2025.

Flood Wardens Scheme

A meeting had been held with the Dorset Council Flood Response Team to deepen understanding of property flooding issues and changes to the mains drainage system. Two additional flood wardens were to join the team once trained, and the flood plan had been updated.

The Committee also considered a presentation by Rachel Millson regarding Incredible Edible, including current and planned activity.

RESOLVED: that the reports be noted.

39. BRIDPORT TOWN COUNCIL FIVE YEAR PLAN

Members considered the latest draft of the plan for recommendation to full Council, insofar as it related to the committee's remit.

RESOLVED: that the draft Bridport Town Council Five-Year Plan 2024-29 be recommended to Full Council for approval.

40. COMMUNICATIONS/UPDATES FOR INFORMATION

Members considered a report from Cllr Paddy Mooney, ENCL: 3958, regarding feedback from the Arts Centre Board Meeting on 25 November 2024.

RESOLVED: that Cllr Paddy Mooney be thanked for his report, and that the contents of the report be noted.

The meeting closed at **8.49pm**.

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 5 March 2025