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BARKHAM PARISH COUNCIL

**Minutes** of the meeting of the Coombes Woodland Committee held on 16th November 2023 in the Parish Office, Arborfield Green Community Centre at 10am.

**Present**: Cllr Barker (BPC) (in the Chair), Cllr Wrobel (BPC), Cllr Fox (ANPC, and the Clerk for BPC.

Cllr Clint attended to hand over to the Committee

**CWC 23/001 To Elect a Chairman of the Committee** Local Government Act 1972 S15(2)

Cllr Barker was proposed for the role of Chairman by Cllr Wrobel, which was seconded by Cllr Fox

Resolved: Cllr Barker Duly elected Chairman of the Committee

**CWC 23/002 To receive and accept any apologies for absence** Local Government Act 1972 Sch12

Cllr Starkey – Work Commitments

Mr Steel – Prior engagements

**CWC 23/003 To receive any declarations of interest on items on the agenda** (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012/1464)

None

**CWC 23/004 To Co-opt resident members onto the Committee** Local Government Act 1972 S16

Cllr Barker Proposed Mr Steel, a resident of Barkham be co-opted onto the Woodlands Committee, this was seconded by Cllr Fox.

Resolved: Mr Steel was duly co-opted onto the Committee

Discussion around a resident representative far Arborfield & Newlands Parish Council were had. There are 2 possible options of potential representatives. If these 2 people are not interested, a post will be made on social media, asking for a representative to put themselves forward.

**CWC 23/005 Questions from members of the public in respect of the business on this agenda (allotted time 15 minutes)** Public Bodies (admissions to meetings) Act 1960 s 1 extended by the LG Act 1972 s 100

Adjournment of the Meeting will be called if any members of the public wish to address the Committee on any matters or concerns relating to The Coombes Woodlands. If you would like to ask a specific question to be answered at the meeting, please submit the question at least 24 hours in advance.

Cllr Clint, ANPC Chairman attended to formally hand over to the committee with the following considerations.

Today is the day the council’s exchange and complete on the purchase of The Coombes Woodlands.

The Terms of Reference for the Committee have been agreed by both Parish Council’s, and the official agreement of the terms binding the purchase are being drafted by the solicitors.

It would be advisable to consider a 5 year plan be established. The Committee should always remember the reason for the purchase in al that they do, and that is to allow residents to enjoy, in perpetuity, the woodlands

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and to protect the natural environment. To conserve, maintain and enhance the woodlands to encourage insects and biodiversity. There are grants available to assist with this, and the Committee should look into these. There is also the opportunity to work with WBC and Berks Bucks and Oxford Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) to assist with this.

Rhododendron removal needs to be looked at and phased into the plan.

With regards to Health and Safety, WBC have confirmed they are responsible for maintaining the Public Rights of Way within the Woodlands, and any issues, should be reported to them to resolve, there is 1 boardwalk that needs to be repaired/replaced.

The informal paths need to be considered and risk assessments needs to be undertaken. Mrs Tims, BPC Clerk informed that there are example risk assessments available from the BBOWT as a starting point. Cllr Fox also recommended looking at ChatGPT to assist with constructing a risk assessment for the woodlands.

It is a great opportunity to get a volunteer group from across both parishes to work on The Coombes, and there is an organisation called Berkshire Conservation Volunteers, who may work with us to set this up.

Questions were raised about the Café that was being run out of The Coombes. The Clerk for BPC will look into this and will speak with WBC about whether there are any planning issues for this.

Cllr Wrobel asked about protected species in the woodlands, and what wee need to do to find out what species there are in the woodlands. Mr Steel has a list of these, and he will be asked if he can share this with the committee.

Cllr Wrobel asked to clarify, that there are grants available, but we need plans in place to access these. That is correct, and plans will be drafted for the management of the woodlands.

Cllr Wrobel asked if the woodlands were an SSI. No, they are not as this would have come up in the searches for the purchase.

Cllr Wrobel stated that Document control for versions of documents needs to be used.

Cllr Wrobel asked if a Wildlife license was required. Surveys need to be undertaken to answer this. Bat Surveys need to be undertaken, and Duckworths Arboriculture Ltd, may be able to help with this. WBC should also be contacted about these requirements.

11.00 Cllr Clint left the meeting

**CWC 23/006 To note that Insurance to cover the woodlands has been agreed by both Parish Councils**.

The Committee noted that the insurance for the woodlands had been agreed by both BPC and ANPC, and that it had been taken out to cover the woodlands with effect from 16th November 2023

**CWC 23/007 For the Committee to:**

* 1. Review and Approve the Tree Survey which has been carried out.

The Committee reviewed the Tree Survey, and approved the results of the Survey.

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* 1. Agree a management plan for the works identified from the Survey.

The Committee agreed a management plan for the works identified in the tree survey as follows:

1. The urgent tree to be sorted as a matter of priority

2. The works identified in the report to be undertaken as separate projects, to be completed within the timescales of the report.

The Timescales within the report are as follows: Priority 1 – to be rectified within 3 months; Priority 2 – to be completed within 6 months; Priority 3 – to be completed withing a year.

3. The items for the Priority 1 are to be managed first, with all works being completed by 16th February 2024

4. After the completion of each stage, identified in the report the next priority period will be undertaken.

* 1. Decide whether the tree listed as urgent needs to be removed or reduced / cable braced. The Arboriculturist has said about keeping it as it is an important ancient woodland indicator.

The Committee Resolved to Keeping as much as the tree as possible, and bracing the tree as required. Quotes for this work had been obtained.

* 1. Agree temporary measures to make the area around the tree safe until works can be carried out.

The Committee agreed to put post and string fencing around the tree, to make the area safe for the public. The works to reduce and brace the tree will be undertaken as a matter of priority, and this will occur as soon as practicably possible.

* 1. Develop a management plan for ongoing works to the woodlands (clearing rhododendrons etc)

The Committee resolved to create a management plan for the woodlands. Cllr Barked agreed to look at creating an initial draft, for the committee to review. Plans have been sent from BBOWT and WBC, which will assist in creating a draft plan.

**CWC 23/008 Finance**

* 1. To agree a budget to take up to the end of the financial year.

The Committee agreed that a budget of about £6250 Should be suitable for the remainder of the financial year. £5000 has been agreed by BPC and the Clerk will work out the ratio for ANPC based on this figure. The budget for ANPC is to be agreed at the November meeting.

* 1. Agree to a quote for the urgent tree work required being sought, and to agree to make the decision under delegated authority once received, as it is an urgent item to be remedied.

Quotes for the urgent tree had been sought as a matter of urgency. The first quote was to reduce the tree height and cable brace the tree, at a cost of £950.00 +VAT to reduce the height, and a cost of £269.99 for the Cable Bracing. The second quote was to remove the tree and the quote for this was £1500.

The Committee review the 2 quotes that had been received and resolved to approve the quote to reduce and cable brace the tree.

* 1. Agree to quotes being obtained for the works identified in the survey to be undertaken, and agree to use the tendering process, if any works go over £25,000.

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The Committee agreed to quotes for the Priority 1 work being sought, and should these go above the threshold, the quotes will be put to the tender process. The quote for Priority 2 and 3 will be sought as and when they need to be, and will follow the tendering rules if applicable.

* 1. To draft a required budget for the next financial year, to be put to the Councils for approval

The committee agreed to a budget of £35,000, to be split in the ratios of the purchase, to be put to the Councils for inclusion in the budget for the next financial year. The Clerk will work out the exact amounts for each Council ready for their draft budgets.

* 1. To consider a contingency Reserve (Ear Marked Reserve) for emergencies that may arise, to be included in the budget for the next financial year, to be put to the Councils for approval.

The committee agreed to an EMR budget of £5,000, to be split in the ratios of the purchase, to be put to the Councils for inclusion in the budget for the next financial year. The Clerk will work out the exact amounts for each Council ready for their draft budgets.

**CWC 23/009 AOB**

None

**CWC 23/010 To set the date of the next meeting**

The next meeting will be held in January. The exact date is to be agreed.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 11.25am.