

Whitworth Town Council's
Minutes of the Environment and Wildlife Committee Meeting
Monday 7 October 2024, 1 pm, Council Chamber

1. Welcome by Chair

Attendees were welcomed by Cllr Mike Royds, Vice Chair of the committee.

2. In attendance:

Members

Councillor Mike Royds (MR)

Councillor Sarah Rhodes (SR)

Sue Neilson (SN)

Andrew Thorpe (AT) farmer, landowner and Chair of the Commoners Association

Ian Wright (IW) LCC Treescapes

and 7 members of the public.

Apologies: Councillor Kim Olaolu (KO), Richard Whittle (RW), Countryside Ranger Rochdale Council, Andy MacNae and Mick Holding.

3. To approve minutes of the last meeting

It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 15th July 2024, copies of which had been circulated to each member, were correct and should be approved by the signature of the committee. This was moved by Councillor Sarah Rhodes and seconded by Sue Nielson.

4. Matters arising from minutes of the last meeting

SN asked if the proposed farm visit by local schools could be investigated further with SR. They agreed to progress with this.

5. To discuss consent for email sharing under GDPR

The committee discussed whether all members were happy to share their email addresses with the rest of the committee. SR suggested setting up a WhatsApp group for some communications. MR advised members that if a Freedom of Information request was submitted and members had been using a personal email address, the contents of that email account may need to be made available. MR suggested to any members using a personal email address that they set up one specifically for this committee to avoid this situation occurring. It was agreed that all members would be blind copied into emails at present.

6. Updates from all members:

(i) Key members to invite

SN reported that since the last meeting Councillor Scott Smith, Andy MacNae MP for Rossendale and Darwen, Emma Mackenzie (LCC's Principal Nature Recovery Officer) and Mick Holding had been invited to join the committee and were now included in emails for any committee communications.

(ii) Ecological survey – first report attached

SN gave an overview of the first longitudinal survey of Barlow Bottoms which identified 116 species. She felt this survey validated the need to protect and conserve this rare example of a water meadow.

Action: further reports will be carried out at different times of the year.

(iii) Meeting re water pollution at Cowm Reservoir with Dan Crook (UU) on 18 July

SN gave a report of the meeting, which included the discovery that some of the filter tanks were full and no longer fit for purpose, increasing the amount of sediment going into the water, which was in breach of an enforcement permit from the Environment Agency. AT reported that a university 30 years ago had undertaken a survey at Cowm Reservoir. The committee discussed options for bringing attention to this pollution and discussed fears for the pressure on the dam.

Action: the committee agreed to contact Andy MacNae and consider contacting celebrities to assist with bringing more attention to the pollution.

(iv) Albert Mill and Spring Mill updates

Albert Mill – SN reported that she, MR and KO had met with Mayor of Whitworth Councillor Gareth Baron (GB) on site and noted evidence of vandalism, arson, import of non-hardcore toxic materials and other ecological damage as well working on site beyond the boundary of the original planning application. SN reported that at this onsite meeting, it was agreed that this would be reported to RBC's Planning Enforcement Officer. SN reported that stop notices had been issued but works had continued. SN stated that she had suggested that s106 monies be used for surveillance measures as the works being undertaken are impacting on the local community's health.

Action: SN suggested contacting local media outlets and MR requested members to consider monitoring the situation, taking photos if safe to do so.

Spring Mill – SN reported that the situation had been referred to United Utilities (UU), DEFRA, Rochdale Council and Rossendale Borough Council and that irreparable damage had been carried out to the heritage at the site.

Action: SN requested members report any inappropriate works being carried out.

(v) Lancashire Environmental Fund

SN reported that RW will report back on this at a later meeting.

Action: await RW's update.

(vi) Tree planting at Waingap Woods

IW reported that 420 trees, acquired from the Woodland Trust, had been planted at Waingap Woods at the southeastern corner of the site to extend the current tree line. Despite some earlier concerns, the site had been revisited and a significant number of them are thriving. IW reported that another application has been submitted for a further 400+ trees in the area as well as a further application to the Forestry Commission via LCC. IW gave an overview of Miyawaki tree planting technique. IW thanked KO for her activism and for contacting Treescapes initially to start this process.

Action: await the outcome of the Forestry Commission application

(vii) Biodiversity event

SN reported that the biodiversity event may not now go ahead due to time constraints but that there was a possibility for a local nature reserve strategy in Whitworth in the future. SN also reported that Emma Mackenzie (EM), LCC Principal Nature Recovery Officer, offered suggestions for possible future events.

(viii) Meeting with Trains re keeping their land at Barlow Bottoms as a wildlife area

SN reported that she and KO had met with the Trains family and there had been a mixed response to this.

(ix) Boundary of LCC adopted land at Barlow Bottoms

SN reported that she had been investigating this and Tim Blythe (TB) at LCC had been very helpful regarding ownership details. SN also reported that TB had agreed to manage the encroaching alder trees there as has been suggested in the RFNS survey's first report. SN suggested that the area could be put forward as an SSSI area in the future.

(x) Landscape Recovery Scheme, including biodiversity management and ranger service for moorland areas.

AT reported that he had talked to local farmers about this and will provide an update in the future. SN confirmed with AT that they were aware of the ELM Workshop on Green Finance Opportunities and encouraged him to share this information with local farmers.

7. To discuss recommending that Whitworth Town Council becomes a member of LancsCAN (Lancs Climate Action Network). Please see information attached.

This was discussed by members.

Action: It was resolved that the committee recommend that Whitworth Town Council becomes a member of LancsCAN. This was moved by Sue Nielson and seconded by Sarah Rhodes.

8. To discuss ideas and plans for future action and events

(i) Ranger Service on Rossendale side of Healey Dell

Members discussed this. SN reported that she had met with an officer at Rossendale Borough Council (RBC) who was assisting with land registry information for various parts of Healey Dell and is awaiting additional information. Members discussed the possibility of getting a larger business involved in funding a ranger.

Action: await requested information and contact David Smurthwaite at RBC

(ii) Bid for orchard on land behind Barley View

SN reported that the bid has been prepared and is ready to be submitted. Calico has taken soil samples. SN reported that Calico will arrange for soil samples to be tested before the bid can progress as there has been a concern that soil may be contaminated by previous landfill use.

Action: await the results of the soil sample.

(iii) Escaping livestock across Whitworth and LCC non-maintenance of fencing and cattle grids

SN reported that herself and KO had met with Andy MacNae recently to discuss this. KO has obtained grid references for the fence locations that require maintenance. SN reported that KO has also written to Highways District Lead regarding this. SN has also written to LCC regarding this, as have a number of local community groups.

Action; await responses to communications.

9. WVN articles – 2 submitted since last meeting – Introducing E&WC and Hedgehog Awareness Week

SN reported that another article has been submitted for the November edition. RH suggested that, if tree planting is going ahead next year, an article is submitted encouraging the local community to get involved in the project in the February edition.

Action: MR suggested members email the Town Clerk with any articles they feel would be appropriate for inclusion.

10.AOB

SN requested that the EWC is used as a conduit for WTC councillors environmental concerns. MR and SR will liaise with councillors regarding this.

AT asked who is responsible for maintaining the fencing at the top of Oak House. MR will look into this.

11.Date and time of next meeting

Monday 13th January, 1pm, WTC Council Chamber.

12.Thanks for attendance and close of meeting

Attendees were thanked and the meeting was closed at 3pm.