**BARLING MAGNA PARISH COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF THE WILDLIFE RESERVE COMMITTEE** Meeting held on Monday 2 March 2020 in the Barling Magna Parish Hall, Little Wakering Road, Barling Magna, Essex.

Present: Councillors Bond (Chairman), Cohen, Gardiner and McKillop (Vice-Chairman).

In attendance: Mr J. Goodman and Mr P. Shaw (volunteers) and I. King (Parish Clerk).

Apologies: Councillors Bright and Steptoe.

**MINUTES**

1. **The Chairman to declare the meeting open**
2. The Chairman declared the meeting open at 7pm.
3. **To receive apologies for absence.**
4. Apologies were noted, as recorded above.
5. **To receive Declarations of Interest in accordance with the Council’s Code of Conduct and with section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.**
6. There were none.
7. **To agree the Minutes of the Wildlife Reserve Committee held on 2 December 2019**
8. Proposed by Councillor Cohen, seconded by Councillor Gardiner that the minutes be approved. For 4; against 0; abstained 0. Carried.
9. **The meeting will stand adjourned to permit Parishioners of Barling Magna to address the Committee on matters relating to the Wildlife Reserve**
10. There were none present.

1. **Volunteers’ matters**
2. Mr Shaw reported that recent storms had brought down 5-6 medium sized trees which had now been cleared. A poplar tree near the car park, though standing, might need attention. Two dead elm trees had also been cleared from beside the Ropers Farm fence. Another poplar, located on a bend in Mucking Hall Road was in a dangerous condition although this was not the responsibility of the Council. The volunteers were creating a stumpery. The meadow in the northern half of the reserve was very sodden following recent prolonged rainfall. Fencing supplies had been received and these would be used to repair the car park fence at the end of March. There had so far been no contact from the Green Flag inspector this year but, given the recent storms, this was not surprising. Some excellent wildlife photographs taken at the Reserve had been posted on Facebook recently.
3. The right-hand side of the meadow had been extensively sown with wildflower seeds and this patch would need careful mowing.
4. The Committee expressed its thanks to the volunteers for their continuing work.
5. **Survey of flora and fauna and a new site management plan**
6. The Council continued to seek recommendations from other parishes and from wildlife reserves for consultants to undertake an up to date survey of flora and fauna and to offer a new site management plan. This was a requirement of the Green Flag awards. The Clerk was actively seeking recommendations and would consult upon a draft specification for the work before Council settled on a contractor.
7. **Equipment and expenditure**
8. The Committee agreed to request to purchase some new heavy-duty pairs of fully-leather gloves (tougher than rigger’s gloves) and some neoprene groves, as well as some new rails for the footbridges for safety. It was noted that Langdon Hills Country Park no longer affixed netting to the timbers of bridges as this might prove a trip-hazard. The Committee would also request some new extruded/reclaimed plastic 6x2 boards.
9. **Volunteering and promotional video**
10. Mr Shaw would pursue the kind offer of Councillor Bright to create a promotional video. This might have a greater impact than posters and static social media posts in recruiting new volunteers. It was hoped to have an open day in April, as well as a volunteer day. Mr Shaw was in touch with U3A in Thorpe Bay. Councillor McKillop reported on her contact with the Royal British Legion and the Clerk would follow this up to ensure the donation was best directed. The social club that meets at the Legion would be another potential source of volunteers. Councillor Gardiner reminded the Committee of the senior staff working party from Rochford District Council which had volunteered in the early days. The Committee noted District Councillor McPherson’s suggestion of the Community Service Volunteers but the experience of CSV of those present, at the Reserve and elsewhere, was not encouraging.
11. **Dogs at the Reserve**
12. The Clerk reminded the Committee of two recent decisions of the Council (minutes 19.186iv and vi) both to launch a social media consultation in the spring of 2020, explaining the tension between the facility as a nature reserve and its attractiveness for dog-walking, seeking residents’ insights and views on how these two uses might be resolved. Also, to require all dogs to be kept on leads throughout the Reserve.
13. In the discussion that followed, the tension between the amenity as a nature reserve and as a park was rehearsed again. It was noted that the site had originally been named the ‘Millennium Park.’ Its later renaming as the ‘Barling Magna Wildlife Reserve’ carried a change of emphasis in the minds of those who were naturalists but no-change in the minds of those who had always used the area for dog walking.
14. Concerns were raised again by volunteers about dogs that were not under the close control of their owners. Councillors raised complaints by some residents about the perception that dog owners were being reprimanded inappropriately by volunteers. In one incident, an owner felt that a volunteer had shouted at her; the volunteer, who said he had been bitten by her dog, had raised his voice to attract her attention.
15. It was agreed that it was impossible to ‘police’ the Reserve and that any further signage might detract from the pleasure enjoyed by visitors. Some compromise options were named:
16. A self-closing gate between the barn and the meadow, with no dogs allowed beyond the gate.
17. A dog-walking path, fenced off to the side of the reserve.

Neither of these options was thought practicable by the volunteers.

1. It was agreed that other local councils must face the same tensions and the consultant for the new site management plan would be asked to comment specifically on steps that might be taken to accommodate both types of visitor. Meanwhile, the Council’s police was to require all dogs to be kept on leads throughout the Reserve. Volunteers were encouraged to be mindful of their own safety in any interactions with visitors.
2. **To note the date for the next meeting of the Committee**
* Monday, 15 June 2020
1. **Exchange of Information.**
2. There were no additional matters raised.

**The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.08pm, thanking members for their attendance.**

**\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \***