**Minutes of the Environment Committee meeting held 10th February 2025**

 **Present:** Cllr K Phillips (Chair), Cllr S Al-Hamdani, Cllr H Bishop, Cllr L Dawson, Cllr J Garner, Cllr D Wall, Cllr B Witt, Mrs T Rhodes (Greenfield & Grasscroft Residents Association)

**621. Apologies for absence:** Cllr E Adamson

**622. Declarations of Interest:** None declared

**623. Minutes from meeting Monday 16th September 2024**

The minutes were accepted as a true record and signed at the meeting by the Chair.

**624. Matters Arising**

Cllr Wall informed the committee that since the meeting of 16/09/24 he had received confirmation from the RSPB reserve manager that clarified the border of their lease area runs along the course of Greenfield Brook, and so the information provided in the minutes 613 para. 6 “*A meeting was held 13th May with the RSPB, which was very informative. They expressed concern about shooting taking place on their land and the safety risks to their visitors walking in a possibly dangerous environment*”, should more accurately state “expressed concern about shooting taking place on the border of their lease and the safety risks to their visitors”.

Cllr Al-Hamdani picked up on the information provided in the minutes 618 para.1 that suggested that bags of litter from voluntary litter picks could be left at the bottom of Wellington Road outside the OMBC facility where “*OMBC will collect them*”, clarifying that this would only be possible “by prior arrangement with OMBC”.

**625. Update from Task and Finish Group**

The Chair reported that a proposal had emerged from the first meeting of the Task and Finish Group that is looking into efficiencies in the Parish Council’s processes, which was that the Traffic and Transport and Environment committees could merge.

Councillors discussed the weight of agendas for each committee as currently constituted and also the benefit of potentially improving attendance by the public at committee meetings. It was widely felt that if meetings were to exceed two hours in length as a result of any changes, that would be a sub-optimal outcome. A consensus view also agreed that combined agendas between these already closely aligned subjects, might result in more public attendance. There was general agreement that the proposed changes were a positive development.

**626. Community Toilet Scheme**

It was reported that the Finance Committee had decided not to fund the proposed new signage for Community Toilets in the next budget, and instead proposed to review whether it could be included in the following year.

Cllr Garner asked the Chair to request a clarification of this as an undertaking rather than an intention, to be shared at the next full Parish Council meeting.

**627. Update on Game Shooting/Rewilding Progress**

Cllr Wall reported that in their belated reply to his correspondence following the September meeting of the Environment Committee, United Utilities has clarified:

“We formally wrote to the sporting rights holder to remind them of their legal boundaries.

We also asked, as per our agreement, the sporting rights holder to retain appropriate signage but not block off public access during shooting events.

As explained previously, United Utilities agreed in 2020 to allow the shooting rights holder access along the track, but shoots are not to take place on the access track. That agreement remains in place.”

Cllr Bishop noted that this stance from UU was welcome, but it was also important to clarify that the Parish Council would expect the company to take action to monitor the situation and ensure that the shooting did not take place, so that public access is no longer restricted, in practice as well as in principle.

Mrs Rhodes asked whether the action recorded in the previous minutes (to make a third attempt to take the views of the commercial shooting business into account) had been carried out. The Chair asked for a letter to be drafted for her to send to the Upperwood Estate, so that they could contribute their views in writing before any policy is proposed to the full Parish Council.

**628. Access at Diggle Rifle Range**

Cllr Wall explained that he had been approached by a local walk leader regarding restrictions to Open Access land at Diggle Rifle Range. A group had been turned away from the site despite there being no shooting taking place, and the Ordnance Survey mapping indicating that the land was accessible under the CRoW Act 2000.

Cllr Wall showed examples of pages from the Natural England website that explained how the legal power to place restrictions for reasons of health and safety had been properly completed by Diggle Rifle Club, working with the access officer of the Peak Park as the relevant authority. The problem he described was that this information is not public-facing, and can only be found with a knowledge of the layout of Natural England’s website and an expectation that such a restriction might be in place, he described it as hidden from view.

In contrast to the frustrations described at 627 above in relation to United Utilities’ tardy response to concerns about access restrictions, Cllr Wall was complimentary about the responsiveness of both the rifle club and the Peak Park authority. The Chair of Diggle Rifle Club had agreed to put up permanent signage so that walkers are informed about the access restrictions and the Peak Park has agreed to provide a new accessible gate to replace the rotten and dangerous stile that currently provides an alternative route onto the open access land.

Cllr Al-Hamdani suggested that the PC also write to DeFRA to propose that land owners should be given a legal duty to produce signage for the public whenever they successfully apply for restrictions to CRoW access land.

Another query for the Clerk (who was absent) was to find out when and how the Peak Park consulted the Parish Council in April 2024 about these access restrictions, when the statutory five year period came up for renewal, as the parish council is listed as a statutory consultee in all such cases, but the matter had not been raised at the Environment Committee during the consultation period.

**629. Energy survey next steps**

This report from the Clerk was not available due to her absence but the Chair explained that she had been told that staff had taken action where it had been expedient. Cllr Garner was concerned that this was not a very strategic approach, and he suggested that the most effective investment would be in behavioural change.

There was discussion about Oldham Energy Futures and consensus that it would be a good idea for the Environment Committee to host this body at a future meeting. Mrs Rhodes reminded the committee of the scope and ambition of the recommendations made in the energy survey carried out last year. Cllr Bishop observed that the high cost of these recommendations meant that only the most high impact and short term payback options should be considered.

The Chair suggested that an energy Policy should be considered in order to structure such considerations and Cllr Al-Hamdani offered to provide a model policy for consideration.

**630. Support for voluntary litter-picking by residents**

As noted above in 624 Matters Arising Cllr Al-Hamdani explained that OMBC will remove litter that has been collected by community volunteers, if the litter-pick is pre-notified to the authority. He provided the name of Ian Monaghan as a point of contact at OMBC’s District Team.

Cllr wall agreed to contact OMBC about this process and the Chair suggested that once understood it would be helpful for a summary to be posted on the SPC website. Cllr Wall agreed to write such a post.

**631. Standing orders/terms of reference**

This item had been covered by the report from the Task and Finish Group at Minute 625 above.

**632.** **Oldham Energy Futures**

Item deferred

**Next meeting: Monday 31st March 2025 at 18.00 hrs**