

## EARSWICK PARISH COUNCIL

***A public participation session took place with Parish Councillors immediately prior to the following Parish Council meeting.***

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of Earswick Parish Council, held in Earswick Village Hall on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

**Councillors present:** D Jones  
G Offler  
B O'Connor  
P Leveson  
BS Wiseman

**Parish Clerk:** J Fisher

**Members of public present:** Ten

**1. Apologies for absence**

Cllr Bell.

**2. Declarations of Interest and Any Other Declarations**

None

**3. Co-option of Councillor**

The Parish Council (PC) agreed to co-opt Mrs Shirley Leach onto the PC.

**Action: JF**

**4. Earswick Scented Garden (SG)**

The PC discussed the report prepared by the PC and given at Annex A. They resolved to authorise £2,514.18 towards the cost of remedial work to the Scented Garden (£618 of which will come out of SG Section 106 provision held by the PC), provided the Scented Garden Committee agree to the 'Other Considerations' numbered 1 - 6 in the report at Annex A.

The PC agreed Cllr O'Connor will meet with other Scented Garden Committee members to discuss the 'Other Considerations', before any further action is taken.

**Action: BOC**

The meeting closed at 6.55pm

Joanne Fisher (Parish Clerk)

Chairman's Signature.....

Date.....

**Earswick Scented Garden Report**

**Executive Summary**

Earswick Scented Garden was established in 2008 on the site of the old Bowling Green. The Scented Garden Committee (SGC) has a lease from the Parish Council to operate the garden for a period of 20 years.

In 2018 the very hot summer made it difficult for the garden volunteers to carry out the full range of maintenance work required with the result that the flowerbeds have become too overgrown with grass and the grassed area has been badly damaged by the sun.

In order to remedy the situation it is recommended that the Parish Council offers the SGC a Grant of £2,514.18 towards the cost of remedial work in the garden subject to the SGC agreeing to a number of conditions as outlined in this report.

**Introduction**

Earswick Scented Garden was established in 2008 on the site of the old Bowling Green. The Scented Garden Committee (SGC) has a lease from the Parish Council for a period of 20 years at a rent of £12 paid annually. One of the conditions of the lease is that the SGC “keep the demised premises.....in good and substantial repair without any alteration except as shall be previously agreed in writing by the lessor” (Parish Council).

The Garden provides an attractive visual and sensual contribution to the character and physical layout of the village. The garden has become a meeting place, or somewhere to relax and enjoy the well stocked flower beds and aromas. The garden is wheelchair accessible and has been designed particularly to appeal to the partially sighted. The Scented Garden is well used by Earswick residents and much admired by visitors to the village. It also contains bench seating and tables for picnics.

The Scented Garden has operated successfully for the past 10 years and has continuously won a number of RHS Awards.

**Problem:**

In 2018 the very hot summer made it difficult for the garden volunteers, many of whom are elderly, to carry out the full range of maintenance work required to keep the garden up to its usual high standards. As a result:

- the flowerbeds have become too overgrown with grass for simple weeding to be effective.
- the grassed area has been badly damaged due to the very hot weather experienced in 2018. There is some concern that the sandy soil makes it difficult to keep a lawn healthy. The SGC need to decide whether to put turf / grass seed down or gravel or something else.
- The Parish Council has received a number of complaints from residents that the garden is frequently closed for a variety of reasons and even when not closed opening times were sporadic.

**Options:**

**a. Do nothing**

To do nothing would result in the garden continuing to deteriorate making it even more expensive in the future to rectify the situation. Option rejected.

**b. Close the Scented Garden permanently**

This option would see the garden closed and either left to deteriorate further or utilised for other purposes. This would remove a valuable and much-loved asset from the village. The Scented Garden is also protected through the Neighbourhood Plan as an essential Local Green Space. Option rejected.

**c. Carry out complete remedial work in order to bring the garden back into use**

In conjunction with the SGC the Parish Council obtained a number of quotes from contractors to carry out the majority of the works required both to the flowerbeds and the grassed areas. The total costs quoted were in the region of £10,000. Neither the SGC nor the Parish Council was prepared to fund this option. Option rejected.

**Preferred Option**

Both the SGC and the Parish Council agreed that the best way forward was to phase the required works such that the grassed area would be left for this year and that the weeding of the flowerbeds was the immediate priority.

To this extent the SGC, at their meeting of the 8<sup>th</sup> May 2019 agreed that in order to assist with the long term viability and sustainability of the garden 6 of the 8 beds surrounding the central bed with the obelisks would be reduced by 50%. This together with the essential works listed below will make it much easier to maintain the garden into the future.

The remaining 2 beds at the front of the garden were to be retained in size as these form the first visual impact on entering the garden. Work on these beds is to be carried out by the SG volunteers.

The essential works, for which the contractors quoted against included:

- Strip out 6 flower beds to a depth of 200mm and remove waste from site.
- Fill 6 beds with new topsoil.
- Lay membrane on all 6 beds.
- Fill 6 beds with 50mm gravel – option 1 OR
- Fill 6 beds with 50mm Bark chippings – option 2.
- Spray/clear central bed ready for replanting.
- Remove shrubs as agreed along rear perimeter bed.

**The lowest quote received for this option was from The Conservation Volunteers at a cost of £4,190.30 + VAT (£5,028.36 in total).**

**All the above works will expect to be completed by the end of 2019 as they are weather dependant.**

Chairman's Signature..... Date.....

**Funding Options:**

- The Ward Councillors have already confirmed that it is unlikely that ward funding would be available in this current financial year due to the late release of the level of funding allowance from CYC and the pre-allocation of funds to other projects in the ward.
- The Conservation Volunteers have indicated that they would be able to assist the SGC in applying for external funding, provide information on the costs, methodology and timings etc. for the proposed project and could help to put together other text for the application as required. They are experienced in making successful funding applications and could review and comment on the draft application. This would be on the understanding that TCV was the preferred contractor if the application was successful. However it is unlikely that such funding would be available to meet the required deadline for the works to be started. If this were to be the case then the SGC should consider using the assistance of The Conservation Volunteers to secure funding for the second phase of the garden rejuvenation project to replace the grassed areas.
- The SGC or the Parish Council could provide funding for this project in full. However the cost is probably too great to fund by either individual body.
- The preferred option would be for the SGC and the Parish Council to provide joint funding on a 50:50 basis i.e £2514.18 each (includes VAT). This grant would include the £618 S106 money that the Parish Council has ring fenced for the Scented Garden. The extra money provided by the Parish Council would therefore be £1,896.18.

**Other Considerations:**

Several councillors have expressed concerns about spending large sums of parishioners money on the Scented Garden. The Parish Council would want assurances on several things including the following:

1. It is appreciated that opening and closing times of the garden are reliant on the goodwill of volunteers however the Parish Council would like the SGC to consider the publishing of minimum opening times for the garden; suggest 10am to 8pm in Summer and 10am to 4pm in Spring and Autumn.
2. If sufficient voluntary help is not available to keep the garden maintained, then the SGC will hire additional help to do so at their cost.
3. Once the work to tidy up the beds is done, and their size reduced to 50% of their current size, then no expansion will take place without the permission of the Parish Council. This is a Condition of the existing lease.
4. That the SGC have a financial plan such that it is clear as to how much (or at least on what projects) the Parish Council will be invited to help with over the next say 3 years. Appendix 1 refers.
5. If additional funding is secured to help with the work on the beds, then it's split 50:50 between the SGC & the Parish Council.
6. That the SGC agree to amend Clause 11c of their Constitution such that upon dissolution any surplus funds shall be given to the Earswick Parish Council in order to continue the maintenance of the Scented Garden, and not to "another organisation with similar objects".

Chairman's Signature.....

Date.....

**Recommendation:**

It is proposed that the Parish Council offers the SGC a Grant of £2,514.18 towards the cost of remedial work in the garden subject to the SGC agreeing to the conditions as outlined above.

£618 will be made available from the ring fenced S106 money with the remainder, £1,896.18, funded from the Parish Council's "surplus".

**Appendix 1: Outline Plan for the Continuing Viability of the Earswick Scented Garden**

The SGC have agreed that in order to assist with the long term viability and sustainability of the garden 6 of the 8 beds surrounding the central bed with the obelisks would be reduced by 50%.

This together with the essential works listed in the proposal will make it much easier to maintain the garden into the future.

The remaining 2 beds at the front of the garden will be retained in size as these form the first visual impact on entering the garden. Work on these beds is to be carried out by the SG volunteers.

The 17 residents who have volunteered to help will then undertake ongoing maintenance of the Garden.

Once this first phase has been completed work will be undertaken to assess the various options available for the areas surrounding the flowerbeds, currently grassed. It is likely that The Conservation Volunteers will be actively involved in these investigations with a view to their assistance also being given to help secure funding from external sources to cover some of the costs.

Preliminary quotes to cover the areas in stone chippings or bark have been obtained in the region of £6,000.

Other options, such as the phased laying of artificial grass, will be explored over the coming months with a view to carrying out this work between 2020 and 2023.

Any such investigations will include the Parish Council via its member on the SGC and any alterations to the existing layout will be discussed with the Parish Council and their permission sought as per the existing conditions of the lease.

Whilst the SGC are currently in financial good health the cost of carrying out the works mentioned above will have a major impact on the SG finances.

Fund raising through the very successful Plant Sales (approx. £1,000 per year) and other events will continue in order to boost SGC funds.

Wherever possible grants will be sought from external bodies other than the Parish Council for any future projects i.e Ward Funding, Lottery Grants etc.

As part of this proposal the SGC has also agreed to amend its dissolution clause such that any surplus funds, on dissolution of the SG, will be "gifted" to the Parish Council to help with any future ongoing maintenance.

Chairman's Signature..... Date.....