

Minutes of the ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL WELLBEING COMMITTEE
of Bridport Town Council held in Mountfield, Bridport on Wednesday 3 September
2025 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT: Cllrs: Dave Rickard

Jonathan Bourbon
Kelvin Clayton
Julian Jones

Anne Rickard
Bev Thornton
David Worthington

ALSO PRESENT: Cllr Ian Bark (Leader ex officio), Daryl Chambers (Town Surveyor), Caroline Pearce (Project Manager and Community Initiatives Officer), Sally Freemantle (Town Clerk), 4 members of the public and 1 member of the press.

PUBLIC FORUM

A member of the public raised questions about the Brit Valley Project including; cars potentially crossing a pedestrian access; whether bat boxes and aids for other species could be included alongside the plans for owl boxes and log hides; is the proposed tree planting along the hedge line loose or a more dense treelined hedgerow; is there a composter proposed; and would a timber clad portacabin be accepted? The member of the public also added that Kingston Maurward college was looking for opportunities.

9. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bridget Bolwell and Steve Williams.

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

11. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 4 June 2025 were confirmed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

12. ST CECILIA'S – EDIBLE BRIDPORT

Members considered a verbal report of the Town Surveyor which summarised discussions regarding proposals for a 5-metre strip of land opposite the entrance to the allotment site to be used as an edible garden project with Edible Bridport, a group of local people who were keen to create a plan and move forwards.

RESOLVED: that the update be noted.

13. ASKER MEADOWS

Members considered a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 4033.

Sam Rose, representing the Brit Valley Project, outlined the project.

The presentation included:

- an overview of the Brit Valley Project, a collaborative effort involving 57 farmers and landowners to restore nature and improve local ecosystems. The project, one of 50 nationwide, spans 4,500 hectares and aims to enhance biodiversity, improve water quality, and create more sustainable agricultural practices.
- plans to reintroduce missing species, manage deer populations, and increase public access to natural spaces, with a target of significant improvements in biodiversity and water management by 2050. Proposals will be finalised by the end of February for submission to DEFRA. Funding decisions expected by May.

Sam explained that a response was required to the new draft Dorset Local Plan and potential development sites, including Crepe Farm, which is at risk of flooding; the importance of West Dorset Wilding's input on the local plan; and the need to review all proposed sites, taking into account that some are close to floodplains.

Dana Assinder provided a presentation about Asker Meadows and Nick Gray added further details:

This is a project focused on maximising wildlife opportunities on the land, aiming for simplicity in the approach. Habitat management plans for the nature reserve include seminatural grassland, scrub mosaic, and wild grassland areas. These incorporate pollinator-friendly species and the creation of a seasonal wetland with interpretation opportunities. The committee discussed the balance between wildlife benefits and public access, particularly regarding dog fouling in areas with long grass and the importance of maintaining public access while protecting nature.

The plans for the nature reserve and access improvements aim to create an inclusive access circular route around the meadows, including a 2.5-meter-wide path for vehicles near the compound leading to a boardwalk and hide for birdwatching. There is potential for a scrape feature, which could be dry for much of the year but would absorb groundwater in winter. The suggestion is for an "invited access" space in the wild zone for special events while keeping it dog-free. There are plans for new hedgerows and tree planting along paths, with a 3-meter-wide fence line to protect the new growth while maintaining cattle grazing.

The importance of engaging young people and creating safe spaces for them to participate was highlighted as well as educating people to care for nature be inspired to make positive changes over 20 years.

There was discussion around exploration of opportunities for an open farm project to educate people about food and wildlife, emphasising the need for more information about food sources and local grazing. Planting edible hedges and exploring climate-resistant crops as part of an experimental approach to adapt to changing conditions is being looked at. In the long term an education centre could be considered but there are currently no services to the site.

There are opportunities for public interaction, such as bird watching, to enhance the educational aspect of the project. There are several community engagement initiatives for the meadows, including a nature spotting bioblitz, volunteering taster days, and a biannual nature-friendly dog day.

RESOLVED: that the report and the presentation be noted.

14. COMMUNITY RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK

Members considered an e-mail from Theo Langdon about how Dorset's resilience efforts are being fed into the ongoing development and review of the National Resilience Framework.

RESOLVED: that support be given to the letter to Dorset Council regarding community resilience.

15. PROJECT UPDATES

Members considered updates on Town Council projects, ENCL: 4017.

The Project Manager provided an update on the projects in the report and particularly focussed on the shuttle bus service, reporting 1,500 rides recorded over the summer period with 100% positive feedback from users. The service costs £600 per weekend to operate, with 136 journeys on average made daily, and while funding will not continue beyond the pilot period, there is potential to seek additional funding. It was noted that the service had been particularly well-received by teenagers and provides a greener alternative to driving.

It was suggested that the matter of potential ongoing financial support be considered by the Budget Setting Working Group.

RESOLVED: that the updates and the future funding requirement for the shuttle bus service be noted.

16. WEST BAY SWIMMERS ACTION GROUP

Members considered a letter of support to DEFRA to make East Beach a designated bathing water.

West Bay Swimmers Action Group's would like to make an application to designate East Beach as a bathing water, noting that West Beach is already designated. Letters of support were required from the public, Dorset Council, MP, and Town Council.

RESOLVED: that the request for a letter of support to designate East Beach as bathing water be supported.

17. COMMUNICATIONS / UPDATES FOR INFORMATION

Concerns were raised about the dying trees in the Morrison's car park. It was suggested that the trees be added to the regular watering schedule.

Following a recent magazine feature, increased interest had been in the sculpture trail and the possibility of sourcing a new sculpture for Millennium Green was suggested.

The meeting closed at 8.25pm

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 5 November 2025