

East Court and Ashplats Wood Steering Committee Meeting

4 December at 13:30 (East Court Mansion)

Organisation	Attendee	Apologies
East Grinstead Memorial Estates (EGMEL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• LR- Lloyd Richards (Chairman)• CN- Chris Nunn (Secretary)	None received
East Grinstead Town Council (EGTC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SO- Councillor Stephen Ody (Deputy Mayor and Chairman of Environmental and Sustainable Travel Committee)• JH- Town Clerk	None received
Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• CH- Councillor Chris Hobbs (Portfolio Holder)• RA- Robert Anderton (Assistant Director, Commercial Services & Contracts)• JR- Jo Reid (Head of Contracts & Services)	

1. Agree minutes from previous meeting (16 September 2022)

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate reflection of the discussion.

2. Actions from previous meeting

MSDC still need to make contact with WSCC regarding the undergrowth on the Sussex Border Path (which is a PROW). **MSDC to action.**

MSDC to add a map of East Court & Ashplats to future agendas. **MSDC to action.**

Feedback on the Woodland Management Plan had been provided by CN to Stuart Brown (previous Landscapes and Leisure Team Leader). **CN to resend that email to RA/ JR.**

The Holtye Track had been cleared and it was noted that this should be an annual task. **MSDC to schedule annual clearance.**

An action was recorded for LR to contact the Bluebell Gate developers to request enlarged gate access where Pegasus Road crosses the Holtye Track. No formal response had been received to the request and the last communication from LR stated that no reply would be taken as assent. However, now access can be facilitated down the track this is no longer the priority it was.

There was an action for MSDC to circulate the latest customer satisfaction survey results from idVerde's online platform. This was not completed, and it was agreed that, given this contract ends on 31 December 2023 there was now limited value in completing this task.

3. Introductions

CH introduced himself to the Steering Committee. CH has been a district Councillor since May 2023, following the local elections and has the additional responsibility of Cabinet Member for Leisure and Customer Services (<https://midsussex.moderngov.co.uk/mgExecPostDetails.aspx?ID=145>). CH is one of five representatives on the Cabinet.

SO introduced himself as long-serving Councillor at East Grinstead Town Council and Chair of the newly established Environment and Sustainable Travel Committee ([Committees – East Grinstead Town Council](#)).

The remainder of the attendees introduced themselves to the new members of the Steering Committee.

4. Site Walkabout (approximately 1 hour)

It was noted that MSDC had a 125-year lease agreement with EGMEL to use East Court & Ashplats as a SANG. The lease agreement had been in place for eight years.

During the walk the group were particularly focussed on the circular route around the SANG, the suitable maintenance of which is a main requirement of the use of the green space as a SANG. The condition is poor in places and it's not completely clear where the route starts. Quotes had previously been sought to install boardwalks, but this work wasn't focussed on the SANG route, nor the areas most in need (e.g., The Ghyll Steps).

ACTION: It was agreed that MSDC would look at improvements to marking the route. It may be an opportunity to work with Glendale (the Council's new green spaces service provider) to make use of innovate technologies like QR codes and install/ repair way markers.

ACTION: It was agreed that MSDC would review the SANG route and ask Polydeck to walk the route and make recommendations for improvements and prioritise within those (e.g., The Ghyll Steps). This would lead to a further action of being able to allocate spend in future years more effectively.

General discussion was had about how areas of Ashplats might be made more accessible (acknowledging it would be impossible to provide wheelchair or other limited mobility access to the whole wood).

ACTION: It was recommended that EGMEL might visit Bedelands Nature Reserve to see how boardwalks can be used in some sections to facilitate access.

The CCTV pole is in place, but no camera has been erected; it's likely that the installation is now caught up in the audit being undertaken by the Council's Communities team.

ACTION: JR to review the position and update the Steering Committee.

5. Update on works undertaken since previous meeting

a) East Grinstead Memorial Estates Ltd.

LR gave a brief run down of EGMEL, advising that membership is open to anyone living in the postcode area or with an interest in the SANG. Members pay £10 per year and get feedback via regular newsletters. The Committee is voted in and out at an AGM. Historically there has been challenge on MSDC's progress with the Management Plan and, where progress has been slow, this is thought in part to be as a consequence of an historic objection to the creation of the SANG.

EGMEL have increased the amount of money they contribute to charities around East Grinstead to £30,000 per annum. This is made possible by the c.£1m financial assets and the yield from this- particularly as their operating costs are modest.

More recently EGMEL have been doing some work to strengthen the corporate identity of the charity and have been reviewing the skills of the committee. They've also been writing, reviewing and publishing policies on their website to develop the transparency of the group further: <https://www.egmel.co.uk/>

It was noted that EGMEL had undertaken some work to trees alongside the access road by the football club. It was subsequently discovered that this land is owned by MSDC.

LR/ CN expressed their gratitude for MSDCs support in facilitating the East Grinstead Bonfire. The estate was immaculate afterwards and the volunteers put in considerable work to ensure the event was a success.

LR/ CN noted the continued frustration of EGMEL Members on the delivery of the Management Plan and reiterated requests to distil it down into a simplified action plan to make it easier to progress and update.

ACTION: JR to review the Management Plan and make some proposals to support the development of a focussed action plan.

b) East Grinstead Town Council – East Court

JH advised that there was a dead tree located outside the mansion. Rather than remove the tree entirely it had been carved into a totem pole Totem House, which had worked very well and was a good addition to the area around the mansion.

JH reported they had a coffee van most weekends (Friday to Tuesday) and some days during the week too.

The hedge had been taken out between East Court and the ambulance station, as had the flower bed by the public toilets. The hedge removal had supported the reduction of ASB, as had the installation of a barrier to the car park.

There had been some damage to a piece of play equipment, and this needed to be cordoned off and a repair was being arranged.

The East Court Live event in the summer had gone well.

ACTION: JH reminded everyone that any illegal activity should be reported to the Police on 101.

c) Mid Sussex District Council

RA advised the Steering Group that the Council had (on 2 December) awarded a new Green Spaces Management Contract to Glendale Countryside Ltd: <https://www.glendale-services.co.uk/>. The Council had received exceptionally positive feedback from the market and four excellent quality, competitively priced bids were submitted.

The services, whilst still focussed on grounds maintenance, were very different to those currently being delivered through the grounds maintenance contract, specifically due to the inclusion of Tree and Countryside Management within the scope.

ACTION: JR to arrange an introductory meeting/ walkaround with Glendale within the first three months of the new contract start.

Following a series of meetings with the Council's s151 Officer it was agreed that MSDC now have the correct summary to satisfactorily report the financial update for the Estate to

EGMEL. An annual statement, following the conclusion of each financial year now needs to be submitted.

ACTION: MSDC to share Annual Statement once the financial year outturn has been completed (usually end of June).

The Green Flag has been awarded and the next application is due at the end of January 2024. Following some lessons learned last year, it was agreed that a more comprehensive communications plan should be prepared for the possibility the Flag is also secured for 2024.

ACTION: JR to progress the application and share with EGTC for comment ASAP.

6. Forward plan

a) East Grinstead Memorial Estates Ltd.

LR/ CN spoke about having a long-term plan for the Estate and a design that we are working towards. RA noted that the Council had recently approved a strategic vision for Green Spaces Investment and East Court had been identified for 'master planning' within the next 10-years.

Meantime, it was discussed how the SANG route could be made more visible to visitors and also promote some of the other options for walking around the Estate.

ACTION: JR to liaise with Glendale to see if they can support a QR code led walking route around the Estate.

b) East Grinstead Town Council

SO spoke about the Town Council's Environmental and Sustainable Travel Committee, which has a small budget available, and the focus was on (amongst other things) the enablement of sustainable travel. There was some discussion about whether East Court could be promoted as a school cycle route and how footpath investment would help with that. It might be that the LCWIP could be linked through the Estate and a route could be designated.

ACTION: CN committed to looking at potential suitable routes across the Estate to support the Environment and Sustainable Travel Committees drive towards increasing cycling in the area.

SO also noted that the Town Council were looking to install more cycle racks in the car park area at the top of the Estate.

c) Mid Sussex District Council

JR updated the Steering Committee that she would be seeking support from the Council to proceed with significant works to Ash dieback infected trees in Ashplats. The estimated costs of these works are £160,000 and it was hoped that Phase 1 may begin before the close of this financial year, with a Phase 2 in early summer.

ACTION: JR to keep the Steering Committee updated on progress with this.

Recent works at Eastern Road Nature Reserve had revealed the devastation that large scale felling can have on the appearance of the environment, and it was suggested that EGMEL visit Eastern Road so they can be prepared for the potential impact at Ashplats.

ACTION: JR to send location details for Eastern Road.

The Council is developing an Engagement Hub, and we'd propose, when the time comes, to use this as a means to communicate with the local community about the works at Ashplats. It was recommended that the Steering Committee look at the Hub.

ACTION: JR to send Engagement Hub links.

As noted earlier in the meeting the Council was entering into a new contract with Glendale- this will offer a very different approach to Tree and Countryside Management and provide a level of technical expertise that the Council has not been able to leverage directly. This would provide a more consistent approach to woodland management particularly, as well as being able to deliver on the nuances of individual Management Plans.

The forthcoming Ash dieback works was discussed, and it was noted that community feeling is quite high when large-scale felling is undertaken. Prior to the felling the Council would look at developing a communications plan but also try to use it as a vehicle through which to establish community interest, support and action to help manage the Estate in the future. The Steering Committee agreed that this was a good opportunity to capture community interest.

7. Date of Next Meeting

A series of 'hold' appointments has been sent to the Steering Committee for week commencing 1 July 2024 and everyone has accepted and declined dates that do/ do not work for them. Based on this approach the next meeting will be held at:

East Grinstead Town Council on Wednesday 3 July at 1.30pm.