Highcliffe & Walkford Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of **Amenities Committee** held on Wednesday 25th March 2026 at 18.30 in The Old School, 254 Lymington Road, Highcliffe. BH23 5ET.

Present: Cllr A Sofianos (Chair), Cllr R Ede, Cllr D Martin, Cllr S Walters, Cllr Steve Slatter (substitute) S Skinner, Cllr J Webster.

In attendance: Nicki France (Assistant Clerk), Andy Butler (Amenities Officer) and three members of the public.

The meeting was being recorded for the purpose of note taking and the Chair made members aware.

344 Apologies for Absence:

Apologies for absence were received from Vanessa Ricketts – Clerk (approved annual leave) and Cllr W Mc Neill (prior engagement), and Cllr S Slater was substituting.

RESOLVED to accept the apologies for absence.

345 Declarations of interest:

There were no declarations of interest.

346 Minutes of the meeting of 28th January 2026:

RESOLVED that the minutes be accepted as a true record and be signed by the chair.

347 Chairman's remarks:

The Chair welcomed Andy Butler (Amenities Officer) to the meeting and noted the outstanding work he has conducted recently, particularly on the Nea Meadows replanting projects. The Chair expressed that the Council feels extremely fortunate to have Andy's expertise and commitment. Thanks were extended to Andy for attending the meeting and for his continued support. Further updates will be provided later in the agenda.

348 Public participation:

A representative from Christchurch Angling Club noted interest in current matters, particularly the lake and dredging work, and indicated there may be opportunities for collaboration. The Chair confirmed this item would be discussed later and invited the representative to contribute at that point.

The Chair from Lakewood Restoration reported that he had identified a potential lower-cost option for the dredging work, using the same machine and operator previously used at Lakewood. The equipment is currently located in the north of the

country and would require transport costs of approximately £3,000, but the operator would be available for a full week. The Chair agreed this could be explored further under the relevant agenda item.

With no further comments, the meeting moved on to the next agenda item.

349 Nea Meadows:

a- Progress of the copse planting

The Chair provided an update on the replanting work near the car park. The contractor appointed to clear the site required multiple visits, and further ground preparation was completed by the Amenities Officer. This delayed progress and brought the project close to the end of the planting season.

The ground has now been cleared and rotavated. Meadow wildflower and grass seed have been sown following ecological advice. Approximately twenty-five saplings from the Woodland Trust (Rowan, Wild Cherry, Silver Birch) and two mature elms from Stewarts have been planted.

Hedgerow planting will be deferred to the autumn. Any saplings that fail over the summer will also be replaced at that time. Members were advised that ash cannot be sourced due to a national sales ban, and oak was ruled out for this location due to long-term root impact on nearby properties and the car park.

The Amenities Officer proposed relocating the row of Wild Cherry saplings along the car park to a position nearer the boundary wall, leaving space for a future hedgerow. Members supported exploring this option, subject to planting being achievable within the remaining time frame. The Amenities Officer will confirm the availability of suitable mature replacements.

RESOLVED: It was agreed that the Amenities Officer and the Assistant Clerk will liaise on next steps and keep the Chair updated. The Chair thanked both for their work in progressing the project.

b) The progress of the Management Plan

The Chair provided an update on the development of the long-term management plan for Nea Meadows. The plan, intended to guide management over the next 15–20 years, is being prepared by ecologist Chris Gleed-Owen following extensive ecological surveys, including birds, trees, invertebrates, reptiles, fish, bats, and invasive species.

The Assistant Clerk and the Chair met with the ecologist for an initial briefing. The Committee was asked to consider the emerging proposals so that the ecologist can prepare a full draft plan for review before referral to Full Council.

The proposals are structured around three areas: the lake, the meadow, and the woodland.

1- Lake

- Significant overgrowth around the lake is restricting access and contributing to leaf fall and silt build-up.
- A phased reduction of approximately 50% of trees and shrubs over five years is recommended (around 10% per year).
- Initial focus should be on the north-west section near the island, which is also the priority area for dredging.
- Dredging should also be undertaken in phases over five years to minimise ecological disturbance and align with vegetation clearance.

2. Meadow

- Species diversity has declined since the previous management plan.
- A phased programme of overseeding, dividing the meadow into quarters and treating one section per year, is recommended.
- Edges of the meadow have encroached inward and require targeted clearance.
- Additional measures include:
    - creation of sanctuary areas left unmown,
    - selective scraping to encourage specific plant species,
    - continued removal of cuttings to reduce nutrient levels.

3. Woodland

- Tree removal is required around the lake and wildlife ponds due to overgrowth.
- Ash dieback is present and will require regular monitoring.
- Loss of ash may create opportunities to form glades, supporting natural regeneration and rewilding principles.
- Invasive species have been identified, including Himalayan balsam and thorn apple; ongoing monitoring and removal will be required.

General Approach

- The plan emphasises rewilding principles, biodiversity enhancement, and long-term phased management.
- Implementation is expected to span at least five years, with ongoing budget provision required.
- Once initial works are complete, natural regeneration should play a greater role, supported by routine maintenance.

The ecologist has been supplying survey reports, and a draft framework is in progress. The full management plan has not yet been produced. The Committee must first agree the overall direction before the ecologist prepares the full written draft.

Members requested access to the survey documents so they can review the material before providing detailed feedback. This was supported.

Members discussed the importance of public engagement once a draft plan is available. It was agreed that the plan should be publicised through the Council's website, social media, and wider communications. A public event may also be held to present the proposals and gather feedback. The existing stakeholder group for Nea Meadows will be reconvened, with potential involvement from BCP Council officers, Christchurch Angling Club, CHOG and other relevant groups.

Cllr A Martin reported ongoing discussions with BCP Council regarding the potential designation of Highcliffe as a "nature village." Engagement with BCP on the Nea Meadows plan may be appropriate as the project progresses.

The Chair summarised the ecologist's key recommendations, including phased work around the lake, meadow, and woodland. Members were invited to raise any major concerns before the ecologist proceeds to the drafting stage. As the main planting and maintenance season is ending, it is hoped that approved works can begin in the autumn.

RESOLVED that the ecologist be asked to produce a draft management plan based on the Committee's discussion. The proposal was seconded and agreed.

c) To revisit the lake dredging project

The Chair gave a brief background on the dredging project. An initial offer to dredge the lake had been agreed in principle, but no contract was finalised. Concerns later emerged about the contractor's approach, including plans to dredge two-thirds of the lake at once, store material in large bags on the meadow, spread waste in the woodland, and the fact they did not have the required permit. As a result, two dredging windows were missed, and the contractor is no longer being considered. More than £100,000 of the budget remains available.

Informal advice from BCP's countryside officer and the ecologist suggests a phased approach, starting at the north-west part of the lake to reduce ecological impact.

Members noted the urgency of the work due to the lake's worsening condition. One Member has identified a possible new contractor and will pass details to the Assistant Clerk.

The Chair invited views on prioritising the project, acknowledging that discussions began around four years ago and that the lake has visibly deteriorated since then. Without action, the lake could be lost within the next 10–20 years, making the project a clear priority.

The Chair acknowledged the slow progress on the dredging project but noted that delays were due to legitimate concerns about contractor suitability. The previously considered contractor had proposed industrial-scale methods, including storing large quantities of dredged material in bags on the meadow and later spreading it in woodland areas. These approaches were considered environmentally inappropriate, with risks of nutrient runoff. The Council agreed that discontinuing engagement with this contractor had been the correct decision.

The Chair supported the recommendation from both the ecologist and BCP's countryside officer to adopt a phased dredging approach over five years, beginning

with the north-west section of the lake. This method is expected to be more manageable and reduce ecological impact.

Reference was made to the successful dredging of Ballard Lake in New Milton. It was agreed that enquiries should be made with New Milton Town Council to learn from their experience.

The Chair noted that the forthcoming Management Plan provides important context and should help drive progress. As dredging can only take place during a limited seasonal window, the aim is to commence Phase 1 during the next autumn–winter period.

The Chair confirmed that approximately £100,000 remains available for the project. Costs may be reduced if alternative waste-managing methods are used, as the previous contractor's proposal involved expensive storage bags costing around £20,000.

Both the ecologist and BCP's countryside officer have independently suggested an alternative method of burying smaller quantities of dredged material onsite in carefully selected locations. This may allow nutrients to break down naturally while reducing environmental impact and cost. Further ecological assessment will be required.

It was agreed that:

1. The Assistant Clerk and Paul will liaise, and the Assistant Clerk to contact New Milton Town Council.
2. Alternative waste-management methods, including burial, will be explored with ecological input.
3. Progress will be reported at the next meeting.
4. The Council will aim to begin Phase 1 of the dredging during the next operational window.

Members supported the urgency of progressing the project, and the Chair noted that discussing lake restoration alongside wider Meadows' work demonstrated positive forward momentum.

350 Graffiti/Litter

The Chair invited Cllr A Martin to discuss this item and addressed members noting recent examples of residents undertaking voluntary litter picking, including John Power and other individuals across the Parish. Members agreed that these efforts highlight the value of community involvement and the potential for the Parish Council to support and coordinate similar activity.

It was suggested that the Council explore establishing a regular community litter pick, potentially once a month, and seek to encourage wider participation from residents, including families and young people. Members noted that several informal groups already carry out litter picking or environmental work locally, including verge-clearing volunteers, the Bure Brook community group, New Forest Litter Pickers, and beach-cleaning groups. The Parish Council may have a role in helping to link these groups and coordinate activity.

Members discussed the issue of graffiti, particularly on seafront shelters and other public structures. BCP Council does not routinely remove graffiti due to resource constraints. A member referenced a successful community-led graffiti response model in Charminster, supported by small seed funding, and suggested that a similar approach could be explored in Highcliffe.

It was noted that Highcliffe School may be a useful partner for engagement. A member recalled that the school previously held information on local graffiti tags and may be able to assist. The Deputy Head will be contacted to discuss potential involvement and opportunities for student participation in community clean-up initiatives.

Members agreed that setting a provisional date for a community litter pick would help generate interest and provide a focal point for coordination.

The Chair asked members to undertake initial research into existing groups, potential partners, and practical arrangements. An update will be brought to the next meeting, or the following one, depending on progress.

351 Lakewood Fishing License

The Chair noted that the licence document presented was unchanged from the previous year, aside from updated dates. The licence runs annually from 1 April to 31 March.

It was noted that the Chair of the Lakewood Restoration Group had asked whether the licence could run from November to November. Also further explained that fishing activity typically ends in October, and a November cycle would give the Parish Council additional time to consider renewal without affecting the fishing season. The Chair advised that the current April–April cycle aligns with the Council's financial year and other annual processes and therefore remains the preferred approach.

Members confirmed that no changes had been requested to the content of the licence and that the document remained satisfactory.

The Chair proposed that the Council renew the licence for the forthcoming year. It was, therefore.

RESOLVED to renew the license from 1st April 2026 to 31st March 2027. The Clerk will be in touch to arrange a time for the agreement to be signed, and the Proper Officer will complete the formal signing.

352 High Street Improvement – Update

Cllr A Martin provided an update on progress regarding proposed High Street improvements. The Parish Council has written to Greg Kerr, BCP's Highway Services Manager, outlining the intention to use the allocated £100,000 budget for works including:

- resurfacing uneven or damaged sections of pavement,
- installation of additional bollards (primarily between Bure Hay Close and Stanley Road),
- repainting approximately 114 existing bollards,

- repainting the metal railings between Mill Lane and the Milestone Roundabout,
- and identifying suitable locations for new planters and potentially benches.

BCP has responded and will provide estimated costs for the works. It was noted that while bollard installation would need to be conducted by Highways due to specification requirements, other elements—particularly painting—may be delivered by external contractors if more cost-effective.

Cllr A Martin added that Greg Kerr has proposed a site meeting in April to review the proposals. BCP indicated they are supportive in principle, provided the works are fully funded by the Parish Council. They are unlikely to take on ongoing maintenance responsibilities, particularly for street furniture, which may therefore be better located on private land where feasible. Existing planters on the High Street were noted as an example of this approach.

Members discussed previous feedback from local businesses regarding benches, noting mixed views and some concerns about potential antisocial behaviour. It was agreed that this would be considered further once detailed proposals are available.

The Council will continue to work within the scope of the previous resolution and will report back following the site meeting with BCP Highways.

353 Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Amenities Committee would take place on Wednesday 29th April 2026 at 6:30pm

There being no further business the Chair closed the meeting at 7.47pm

Signed …….. Date……