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Minutes of an Okehampton Town Council Parks Committee Meeting held on Monday 18th May 2026 at 7pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Okehampton

Members Present:

Councillor B Tolley (Chairman)	Councillor R Colman (Mayor)
Councillor C Marsh (Vice-Chairman)	Councillor L Bird (Chairman, Property)
Councillor M Ireland	Councillor T Leech (Chairman, Planning)
Councillor D McNeill	Councillor J Yelland (Chairman, Policy & Resources)

In Attendance:

Mrs A Horn (Assistant Clerk)
1 Member of the public

The meeting was livestreamed through the Council Facebook page.

19. Apologies for Absence

On the proposition of Cllr Ireland and seconded by Cllr Colman it was **RESOLVED** to accept the apologies from Cllr Holt (illness) and Cllr Ricketts (personal).

Cllr Weekes was absent.

20. Declarations of Interest

Cllrs Marsh, Bird and Colman declared personal interests in Minute Ref 35

21. Public Participation

A member of the public spoke about outside seating at the café in Simmons Park. They were hoping to place extra seating near the putting green, as in the summer months the café was getting very busy and they needed the space. They litter pick the area every morning to make sure it stays clean and tidy. They asked that the Parks Committee pass on to the Parks team how lovely the park was and pass on the thanks for their hard work.

Member of the public left

22. Park-Keeper

Since the last meeting, warmer weather has shifted work to weeding in the park and around the town, and to grass cutting. Several areas have again been left for No Mow May, and after four years the English bluebells are spreading well. Planting of annuals has begun in the sensory garden and park, although delayed by the continued risk of frost. The area around the original bandstand has also been replanted, and a path to it is still planned once conditions are dry enough.

The diesel spill has been the main issue of the past month, and clean-up work is ongoing, with some parts of the river still closed. While the stream feeding the river suffered significant

invertebrate loss, there has been no noticeable loss of life in the main river. Given that 1,200 litres of red diesel entered the water, the river's fast flow helped prevent a major environmental incident. It is hoped lessons will be learned from GWR's actions during and after the leak, including track cleaning the next day, and from the Environment Agency's delay in trying to stop the spill reaching the river. The response from both organisations was disappointing.

Last autumn, evidence of dormice was found on site and a couple of nest boxes were installed. The nocturnal evening walk in the park was very well attended, with over 50 people present, four bat species recorded and two seen by the public. Thanks were extended to Okehampton Police for attending with an infrared camera so the bats could still be viewed after dark. Dates for the remaining wildlife events are advertised on Facebook and in the park. The Green Flag Award judge has also recently visited, and the inspection appeared to go well; a decision is awaited.

23. Members' Questions

None

24 Minutes

On the proposition of Cllr Ireland and seconded Cllr Marsh it was **RESOVLED** to approve and sign the minutes of the Parks Committee meeting held on 16th February 2026.

25. Simmons Park

25.1 Bookings

a) Events in Simmons Park were.

- b) On the proposition of Cllr Ireland, seconded by Cllr Bird it was **RESOLVED** to adopt the Booking policy, terms and conditions and form/checklist with amendments:
- Booking form – to the number of people attending
 - Terms and Conditions – that responsibility for any Portaloo's, including cleaning any mess that may occur from them being tipped over, is that of the hirer

25.2 Cllr Tolley declared a personal interest being a Trustee of OCRA.

On the proposition of Cllr Marsh, seconded by Cllr Colman it was **RESOLVED** to ask OCRA and the DMAT to share the responsibilities for maintenance of the access to the Pavilion.

25.3 Footpath reinstatement

It was noted that the path rebuild was due to commence the week beginning 29th June.

25.4 Riverbank Repairs

It was reported that materials were currently being ordered and that a late June/July start date was anticipated.

25.5 Sporting Facilities

On the proposition of Cllr Ireland and seconded by Cllr Colman (1 abstention) it was **RESOLVED** to invite OCRA and the College along to provide additional information about their request for improve facilities and answer any questions arising.

25.6 Diesel Spill

It was noted that the clear up from the GWR rail incident would continue until there had been a few days heavy rain. Once that happened, and the clean-up team were satisfied the booms and pads would be removed. Cllr Ireland reported that he was attending a GWR stakeholders meeting in July and was happy to take any question from the council.

25.7 Wildlife events

The committee noted that events were being held on the following dates:

- Sunday June 28th 10.30 onwards - Hedges and bird event (with BTO Expert)
- Wednesday August 12th 1.00pm-3.00pm - Pond Dipping Dartmoor National Park hosting
- Tuesday August 18th 11-1pm - Insect catching meadow.
- Friday August 28th 7.30pm - Bat and nocturnal event

25.8 Simmons Park Car Park

On the proposition of Cllr Leech and seconded by Cllr Colman it was **RESOLVED** to offer free parking in December as previously and for a trial year offer free parking on the Saturday of the 2027 10 Tors weekend and ask West Devon Borough Council to offer the same in Mill Road Carpark.

26. Play Equipment

It was noted that the ROSPA annual inspections of the play areas and skatepark/BMX track had taken place in March with only a few minor issues, the majority of which had already been rectified. The Skatepark had been flagged as being safe but in need of replacing.

27. Cemetery

27.1 Burials

It was noted that 3 headstones and one burial had taken place since the last meeting.

27.2 Row 19 Memorial Alignment

The Assistant Clerk reported that the Clerk, Park Keeper and herself had met with one Stonemason at the Cemetery to discuss the new location of the stone and a date to meet another Stonemason was awaited. One stone had been removed for an internment and would be repositioned once returned. One stone mason had not responded, and this would be followed up. Several of the families had been in contact to confirm the repositioned locations and a photograph of the plumb line had been shared to give an indication.

27.3 New Land Purchase

The Clerk and Assistant Clerk had met with the Contractor that morning to start the process of applying for planning permission for change of land use now the council had written confirmation from the Diocese of the land sale.

28. Payment Schedule

On the proposition of Cllr Marsh, seconded by Cllr Colman, it was **RESOLVED** to approve payment of invoices and May salaries in accordance with the schedule (BACS payments totalling £31,607.80 excluding VAT and £1,452.06 from the Mayors Charity account). Payments made during the week of 11th May 2026 totalling £4,115.17 exclusive of VAT were noted.

29. Reports of Council Working/Task and Finish Groups

29.1 Cemetery Management

No meeting had taken place.

29.2 Projects

The next meeting was on 16th June to discuss the Skate Park improvements. The Assistant Clerk reported that West Devon Borough Council had awarded the Council a grant to create a Town Passport, similar to the Simmons Park Nature Booklet, and that she would update the working group after meeting the designer.

30. Members' Reports and Requests for Agenda Items

30.1 Business Improvement District

Cllr Tolley reported that GWR had awarded the BID a grant of £10,500 to improve signage and wayfinding between the Interchange Station and the Town. The BID had awarded the Tourist Information Point a grant to cover their running costs for the year. Edwardian Evening had been outsourced to an events company and planning was underway. The BID was supporting North Dartmoor Search and Rescue who were hosting a cycle event which was being organised for the first time by them. A BID member had attended the Annual Council Meeting/Mayor Choosing and enjoyed it. They have re-advertised for a manager and interviews were underway.

Cllr Marsh asked that it was minuted that the support the BID gave to the St Georges Day event was gratefully received.

30.2 Dartmoor National Park Forum

Cllr Marsh reported that no meeting had taken place.

30.3a) DCC Regeneration Board

Cllr Tolley reported that a presentation by a Senior Engineer of DCC had been received about the progress of Okehampton Interchange. There would be a 200-space car park and car drop off points on both sides of the station. Links were being made with active travel routes. Network Rail fit out works were taking place this month, safety testing in June and the station was on schedule to open in the Summer.

The Employment Fair held in Okehampton had gone well with 65 attendees and 16 stall holders. Although the interest from the attendees hadn't translated into jobs it was felt that there was genuine interest and it was a good opportunity to network.

Cllr Leech asked if Cllr Tolley could feed back that there needed to be more local employers involved and access to apprenticeships.

b) Farmers Market Sub-Group

Cllr Tolley reported that that after consultation it had been decided that there was not enough appetite for a farmers' market and this would not be taken forward.

30.4 Devon Town Champion

Cllr Marsh reported that no meeting had taken place and she had not heard anything from the group.

30.5 Okehampton Carnival Committee

Cllr Yelland clarified that a comment made at a previous meeting had caused concern to the Carnival Committee. Cash donations in buckets on the day were still permitted; only the lorry that used to follow the procession to collect thrown coins was no longer allowed.

The Assistant Clerk reported that the Carnival Committee had announced that the afternoon parade and road closure would not take place this year due to lack of support and complaints made about the road closure.

30.6 OCRA

Cllr Tolley reported that OCRA had recently held their AGM which was well attended. 3 trustees had left and a new Chair and Vice Chair had been elected and there was a new trustee as a representative from Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council. The finances are in the black, and the Café had made a profit for the first time in years.

30.7 Parklands Leisure Centre User Group/Meet the Manager

Cllrs Tolley and Marsh reported that there had been no meeting. It was hoped that once the new contractor was settled that they would establish regular meetings.

PART TWO – CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

31. On the proposition of Cllr Ireland seconded Cllr Bird it was **RESOLVED** that under section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items which are CONFIDENTIAL by virtue of relating to legal and/or commercial matters, staffing and/or the financial or business affairs of a person or persons other than the Council.

32. Play Equipment

On the proposition of Cllr Marsh and seconded by Cllr Leech it was **RESOLVED** that the correspondence be noted and that the piece of play equipment be left in situ.

33. Mower Replacement

On the proposition of Cllr Colman and seconded by Cllr Yelland it was **RESOLVED** to purchase a battery Cramer ATM553A mower from Vincent Tractors at the cost of £1,670.

34. Nibbles Café

A request from Nibbles for permission to place tables on council land for a period of six months was considered.

On the proposition of Cllr Leech, seconded by Cllr Colman (5 in favour, 3 against) it was **RESOLVED** to approve the request for a period of six months with the caveat that the tables and chairs are not put out until after 10am on Saturdays to allow the Park Run clear access and that there be a charge of £10 p/month.

An amendment by Cllr Marsh, seconded by Cllr Yelland that that the charge be £20 per month had not been carried.

35. Simmons Homes

35.1 On the proposition of Cllr Marsh and seconded by Cllr Ireland it was **RESOLVED** to agree replacement of a storage container in a garden area on the condition it was green to blend into the hedge.

35.2 On the proposition of Cllr Marsh and seconded by Cllr Colman it was **RESOLVED** to refuse a request to create a wildlife pond in the garden of one of the properties.

It was **RESOLVED** to suspend Standing Order 3 (bb) to permit extension of the meeting following a proposal by Cllr Ireland, seconded by Cllr Colman.

26. Football Club

On the proposition of Cllr Marsh and seconded by Cllr Colman, it was **RESOLVED** to email the Football Club a highlighted copy of its lease, explaining that registering the land with the Land Registry was in its interest. If no response was received, a solicitor's letter would be sent and the Football Club charged for the cost.

On the proposition of Cllr Ireland, seconded Cllr Yelland, it was **RESOLVED** to exit Part Two and ratify decisions made therein.

The meeting was closed at 8:34pm.

Cllr Tolley, Chairman