

HAMPSTEAD HEATH, HIGHGATE WOOD AND QUEEN'S PARK COMMITTEE
Wednesday, 3 June 2020

Minutes of the meeting of the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park
Committee held at Virtual meeting on Wednesday, 3 June 2020 at 4.00 pm

Present

Members:

Anne Fairweather (Chair)
Karina Dostalova (Deputy Chairman)
Deputy David Bradshaw
Alderman Prem Goyal
Michael Hudson
Alderman Gregory Jones QC
Wendy Mead
Deputy John Tomlinson
William Upton QC
John Beyer (Heath & Hampstead Society)
Councillor Richard Cornelius (London Borough of Barnet)
Oliver Sells QC (Ex-Officio Member)

Officers:

Colin Buttery	-	Director of Open Spaces
Bob Warnock	-	Superintendent of Hampstead Heath
Katherine Radusin	-	PA to Superintendent of Hampstead Heath
Richard Gentry	-	Constabulary and Queen's Park Manager
Jonathan Meares	-	Highgate Wood, Conservation & Trees Manager
Declan Gallagher	-	Operational Services Manager
Yvette Hughes	-	Business Manager Hampstead Heath
Paul Maskell	-	Leisure and Events Manager
Kristina Drake	-	Media Team, Town Clerk's Department
Leanne Murphy	-	Town Clerk's Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Graeme Joshi-Smith and Ruby Sayed.

2. MEMBERS DECLARATIONS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA

There were none.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the public minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2020 were approved as a correct record.

The Chairman advised Members that her three-year term as Chairman had come to an end. Members were advised that due to the current pandemic restrictions, April Court had been unable to go ahead to reconstitute its

Committees for the year and there would be no 2020 elections for the Chairman. Subsequently, the current Deputy Chair would become Acting Chair until the elections could take place. The Chairman thanked Members and Officers for their support during her tenure which had been humbling. Members and Officers thanked the Chairman for her great support and leadership over the years.

The new Acting Chair thanked the outgoing Chairman and noted that she was keen for the elections to go ahead as soon as possible.

4. **VOTE OF THANKS FOR THE OUTGOING CHAIRMAN**

Alderman Jones paid tribute to Karina Dostalova, the past Chairman.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

THAT Members of the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee wish to place on record their sincere appreciation to

KARINA DOSTALOVA

For her outstanding service during the last three years as Chairman of this Committee.

DURING her tenure as Chairman, Karina has dealt with often contentious issues with tact, diplomacy and an unwavering dedication ensuring that Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park have remained among the front rank of London's public open spaces.

ISSUES that Karina turned her attention to include legislation, namely the promotion of a City of London Corporation (Open Spaces) Bill in Parliament, and of course the ever present need to be vigilant to ensure planning applications on the fringes of Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park do not have any adverse impact on the public enjoyment of those open spaces.

PUBLIC open spaces that are so intrinsically important to the communities who rely on them for sport, leisure and relaxation can often provoke strong feelings, and it is the measure of a Chairman that on those occasions when feelings run high that the issue is resolved through measured consideration and appropriate compromise. With that in mind, the Committee wishes to place on record its particular thanks for the way in which Karina handled the development of the Heath Vision and the Hampstead Heath Management Strategy 2018-2028 providing the overarching framework for the Heath for the next ten years. Karina also supported the development of a High-Level Asset Management Plan which has informed the development of capital projects to improve public toilets, swimming facilities and visitor access.

ACCESS to leisure and sports, in support of mental and physical health and wellbeing, have been issues that Karina has championed and she has always encouraged and supported the Sports Clubs using the Open Spaces. Indeed, Karina was instrumental in the success of the 2020 London Sports Awards

being hosted by the City of London Corporation for the first time and demonstrated her support for cross country running at the Night of 10,000m Personal Bests.

KARINA has championed Queen's Park throughout her tenure and during this time was able to reopen the Children's Farm after being refurbished by staff from across the Division. Along with the arrival of sheep at Queen's Park, Karina has also seen Shire Horses on the Heath to help restore grassland following the Cross-Country Championships. In addition to a much-acclaimed appearance on Radio 4's Farming Today, this heralded the return of sheep grazing to the Heath during the summer of 2019. Continuing the animal theme, she has also supported the Zoo Development Plan including the restocking of the deer enclosure and the introduction of wallabies to the donkey enclosure.

KARINA led a series of celebrations to mark the City Corporation's 30-year custodianship of Hampstead Heath. This included a visit by the Court of Common Council, hosting a dinner at the Old Bailey and a joint walk with Members of the Heath Consultative and Management Committees, which culminated in a ceremonial tree planting at the Model Boating Pond.

IN closing her tenure, Karina led the Hampstead Heath Swimming Review to secure the long-term sustainability of the swimming facilities. The outcomes from the Review will ensure that the Heath's Swimming Ponds and Lido remain safe, well managed facilities whilst recognising the health and wellbeing benefits of these treasured facilities.

THROUGHOUT her term of office, Karina has managed the Committee's deliberations with a fair and firm hand to ensure that the Committee executed its duties in a competent manner. In taking leave of their Chairman, Members wish to highlight the robust state of health that the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park are in, which is due in no small part to the work Karina has undertaken as Chairman.

FINALLY, in congratulating their former Chairman upon a most successful term of office, her colleagues on the Committee wish to convey their thanks for her extremely dedicated service to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park during her tenure. It is hoped with continued good health and happiness she can continue to serve the City Corporation for many years to come.

5. **COVID-19 UPDATE**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Superintendent relating to issues and matters concerning the Covid-19 pandemic. The following comments were made:

- The Superintendent gave thanks the now Deputy Chairman on behalf of the Team for her support during her chairmanship.
- The Superintendent thanked all staff for their ongoing hard work throughout the lockdown to keep Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and

Queen's Park open to the public as these open spaces were playing a significant role during the lockdown and contributing to the physical and mental health of all that used them. It was noted that local communities were using the open spaces at the beginning of the lockdown, which had meant that communicating changes, such as the need to take rubbish home, had been more successful. However, since the lockdown rules were relaxed on 13 May 2020, more people were traveling longer distances to visit the Heath. This increase in visitors has resulted in a significant increase in the amount of litter left on the open spaces, and an increase in anti-social behaviour.

- Regarding communications, social media remained a quick and proactive way of engaging with the public and receiving information about incidents on the ground.
- All of the Heath's car parks were open to the public, and discussions continue with the NHS for a phased withdrawal from the Lower Fairground site.
- Due to an increase in litter, 600 litre capacity Euro bins have been placed around the Heath at strategic locations. The bins have a combined capacity of 18,000 litres. The dog waste bins are being emptied on a daily basis, as opposed to twice weekly during normal usage. Messaging has continued to call on the public to take their rubbish home.
- A Member highlighted that litter was a huge issue across all of the City Corporation's Open Spaces with lots of people being at home/not at school/the desire to go out/alcohol/etc creating a "perfect storm". Staff on the ground were commended for all of their efforts; however, the Member did not feel that staff should be responsible for clearing up the huge quantities of rubbish left every day which was a big commitment and suggested removing bins completely.
- The Member felt the public needed to be educated that the City Corporation would not provide an endless capacity for them to make more demands on staff and encouraged the start of a new process. Members were reminded that bins were removed at the beginning of lockdown and had not be re-instated in all areas. The Superintendent advised that a report was in development providing five potential options (including the suggested no bins) concerning the City Corporation's strategy on waste for Hampstead Heath. The Member mentioned that this was a severe health and safety issue and that a no bins strategy had been introduced elsewhere.
- The Chair stated that waste and litter were not new issues and would likely get worse in August as it would be busier from people not going on holiday.

- A Member thanked staff on behalf of the Heath & Hampstead Society and saw the current restrictions as a good opportunity to revisit the litter/waste strategy as changes were already being implemented.
- A Member noted the early pressure to close all open spaces at the beginning of the lockdown and congratulated staff on keeping them open with skeleton staff in place. The Member queried if there were enough staff in place and was advised that there had been significant reliance on staff members close to sites. The workforce was gradually being brought back except those shielding and were operating as two separate teams to allow for minimal contact.
- In response to a query concerning the opening of all car parks encouraging more people, Officers confirmed that there had not been a dramatic change in numbers and it was considered beneficial as it reduced congestion and double parking in surrounding streets, and was an important income stream.
- The Superintendent stated that cycling was an ongoing challenge and was impacting on ecology of the Heath, especially at Sandy Heath and the Heath Extension. New 'no cycling' signage was installed, and Staff, including the redeployed Lifeguards, have undertaken increased patrols in the worst affected areas to engage with cyclists.
- Members were advised that the Cafés had opened offering a takeaway service which had received a mixed response.
- The tennis courts, athletics track, and bowls and croquet green were available for use. Bookings are being managed via online platforms.
- The Constabulary have continued to engage with people not adhering to the social distancing regulations. Members were advised that yesterday (2 June 2020) at 4.30pm, a large group of approximately 200 youths gathered at Parliament Hill and clashed with the Police, who were already on site dealing with robberies in the local area. The gathering required Police Officers from across the neighbouring Boroughs to attend and assist in dispersing the gathering. A number of fights broke out and were dealt with by Officers. Six arrests were made, and a section 35 Dispersal Order was put in place until the following afternoon.
- Members commended the great response from the Constabulary and support from other areas but were concerned that similar incidents would occur across the Corporation's Open Spaces. A Member queried if a complete ban on alcohol was possible and Officers confirmed this was particularly difficult to enforce in open areas. It was acknowledged that most alcohol consumption by the public was moderate and was generally part of picnics.
- The Superintendent noted that contractors had completed a second spray for OPM today. To date 60 nests had been identified at Highgate

Wood, one in Queen's Park and numbers were not yet confirmed at Hampstead Heath but were likely to be high. It was feared that the high winds and rain may have affected the effectiveness of the spraying.

- Following a question about the spread of giant Asian hornets, Officers confirmed that these were not yet present in the UK.
- The Chair reminded Members that a Countryfile episode featuring the Heath would air on Sunday 7 June.

6. **SWIMMING FACILITIES UPDATE**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Open Spaces concerning the Hampstead Heath Swimming Covid-19 temporary arrangements and the following comments were made:

- The Chair acknowledged that the report was late but reminded Members that the Team was extremely busy and working with the Swimming Associations to progress on these complex issues.
- The Superintendent confirmed that conversations with the Swimming Associations had been helpful and the next step was to engage with swimmers. Officers also continue to work in collaboration with other swimming facilities in London.
- A key challenge remaining for the facilities was what system to implement to monitor the number of swimmers.
- The Superintendent stated that there were short and long-term plans in development. In the short-term, a new platform would be used for online booking and payments and in the long-term an app would be introduced which would be integrated with wrist bands. It was noted that it was currently difficult to trial and test the new technology as site meetings with providers were not currently possible, but that progress was being made and the Team were working with the Director of IT to progress these matters.
- The Director of Open Spaces confirmed there had been Gold and Silver Group engagement concerning the swimming facilities and advice had been received from the Director of Public Health concerning Government guidance. Leisure centres were expected to be permitted to open under step 3 and guidance was expected to be announced for step 3 on 4 July. It was noted that this announcement would begin the next steps, but opening facilities would be a phased process once Officers had agreed upon a safe operational model for staff and the public which would need to be tested first.
- The Chair stated that whilst this was a challenging process with numerous factors to overcome, the first steps had begun, and Lifeguards were in place and staff training and qualifications up to date.

- A Member noted that paragraphs 41-43 concerning finance suggested the costs would be met from the Heath's Local Risk Budget and highlighted the resolution from the Establishment Committee emphasising their "support for any Open Spaces Department bid that goes to RASC that requests funds related specifically to improvements for health and safety at the Bathing Ponds". The Member felt that the recommendations should be changed to allow for requests for additional money from elsewhere as these were safety issues and the local budget was already significantly constrained.
- Members agreed that a fourth recommendation be added giving delegated authority to the Chair and Deputy Chairman to progress matters in light of the ever-changing regulations caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

RESOLVED – That Members:-

- agree the temporary arrangements relating to online booking and session swimming as set out in paragraphs 13-17;
- agree the temporary arrangements around introducing additional control measures as set out in paragraphs 18-21;
- agree the temporary arrangements around charges and concessions as set out in paragraphs 22-28;
- agree that the Town Clerk in consultation Chair and Deputy Chairman be given delegated authority to make decisions to ensure the swimming facilities are able to open, in light of the developing public health pandemic.

7. QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

The Chair noted the HHCC minutes from their virtual meeting on 18 May 2020 and the request for a legal note from the City Solicitor on the relationship between the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee and the Hampstead Heath Management Committee and the provisions within the 1989 Order. This was requested as HHCC Members were disappointed that the Grand Committee did not support their recommendations during the swimming review decision in March. The Town Clerk agreed to follow up on this request.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

There were no urgent items.

9. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED, that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

10. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**

RESOLVED, that the non-public minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2020 were approved as a correct record.

11. **REPORT OF ACTION TAKEN**

The Committee received a report of the Town Clerk summarising the public action taken outside of Committee meetings under Standing Order 41.

12. **NON-PUBLIC QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**

There was one question.

13. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT AND WHICH THE COMMITTEE AGREE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHILST THE PUBLIC ARE EXCLUDED**

There was one item.

The meeting ended at 5.24 pm

Chairman

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