

WEST WICKHAM, SPRING PARK AND COULSDON COMMONS
CONSULTATION GROUP

Thursday, 24 January 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the West Wickham, Spring Park and Coulsdon Commons Consultation Group held at the Merlewood Estate Office, Ninehams Road, Caterham, Surrey, CR3 5LN at 6.30 pm

Present

Members:

Deputy Philip Woodhouse (Chairman)	Sarah Lovatt
Sylvia Moys	Dr Jane McLauchlin
Jeremy Simons	Peter Hodges
Richard Carter	Chantal Lane
Alan Clifford	Val Polydorou
Malcolm Jennings	Sam Wheatcroft
Graham Lomas	

Officers:

Andy Barnard	- Superintendent of The Commons
Allan Cameron	- Head Ranger (The Commons)
Barry Gutteridge	- Senior Ranger (The Commons)
Hadyn Robson	- Support Services Manager (The Commons)
Louise Fletcher	- Administrative Assistant (The Commons)
Alistair MacLellan	- Town Clerk's Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Graeme Smith, Avril Sleeman, Brian Hudson, Cllr Nicholas Bennett, Cllr Neil Reddin, Cllr Steve O'Connell, Gwyneth Fookes, Phil Rathbone and Sue Short.

The Town Clerk noted that Jean Hooper, Chris Wright and Donald Speakman had resigned from the Group.

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

There were no declarations.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2018 be approved as a correct record.

Matters Arising

Gladys Edmonds

In response to a question from the Chairman, Members agreed that it was not necessary to seek a replacement Member in the room of Ms Edmonds following her resignation.

Coulsdon South Railway Station

A Member noted that Southern Rail were looking to hire advertising space on station signage so it was now unlikely that the signage would include the tagline 'Coulsdon South for Farthing Down and Happy Valley'. In response to further comments from Members, the representative from the Friends of Farthing Downs agreed to investigate whether Southern Rail would be content to include the Farthing Down and Happy Valley tagline on other station signs.

Terms of Reference – Attendance of Members

The Town Clerk agreed to provide a summary of Member attendance at meetings.

Kenley Revival Project Update

The Superintendent noted that the fighter pens at Kenley had suffered a series of mortar failures due to the level of sulphur within the mortar. Officers were negotiating with the contractor for costs.

A232 Signage

In response to comments from Members, the Superintendent agreed to continue to raise the issue of poor sightlines for drivers with Bromley as a result of the positioning of Bromley signage on the A232.

Lyme Disease

In response to a comment from a Member, the Superintendent noted that he would discuss with his Senior Rangers whether Lyme disease signage was required on the City Commons.

4. ACTIONS

Members considered a report of the Town Clerk regarding actions arising from previous meetings.

WW2 Fighter Station Heritage Network

The Superintendent agreed to further review whether the wider Fighter Station Heritage Network of which Kenley was part could be advertised on City of London Corporation webpages.

The Superintendent added that the Ministry of Defence had commenced installation of fencing at Kenley airfield in Autumn 2018, and works had progressed passed the halfway mark.

RESOLVED, that the report be received.

5. EVENTS POLICY - AS AGREED BY THE EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE 19 NOVEMBER 2018

Members agreed to vary the order of items on the agenda so that Item 10 (Events Policy) was considered next. The following points were made.

- The Superintendent noted that the policy was broken down into two parts, and overall provided the City's Open Spaces Department with a

consistent approach to events across the Open Spaces, and the flexibility to apply variable charging.

- In response to a question, the Superintendent replied that he had a degree of discretion over what charges could be applied to events across the City Commons, and that he would appreciate notification from groups of any size when they planned to use the Commons.
- The Chairman noted that the Events Policy was not a tool to prevent anyone from using City Open Spaces, but that it was important for the City to be aware of any event taking place so that appropriate steps could be taken to ensure appropriate management of that event if it was required. It was important for dialogue to be had between interested parties and the City.
- The Superintendent concluded by noting that the events licence that would be issued in the event of an application would be a standard document that had been used by the City Commons for several years.

RESOLVED, that the Events Policy be received.

6. **SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE**

The Superintendent provided an update to Members and the following points were made.

Budget Position 2019/20 and Beyond

- The Superintendent noted that the City Commons were facing a budget reduction of £199k over the period 2017-2023 and therefore a review of spending was required. One area for consideration, to be discussed elsewhere on the agenda, was the management of dog waste, which cost £39k on West Wickham Common alone. Unlike other City Open Spaces such as Burnham Beeches, the City Commons had no major financial legacies, and fees from licenses only provided £1k of income.
- The Superintendent continued, noting that City's Cash, the fund from which the Open Spaces were paid for, would be under increasing pressure from 2021. It was therefore necessary to review areas of potential income such as car parking.
- The Superintendent noted that his areas of priority would be (1) to meet legal requirements of conservation, public access and the enforcement of byelaws (2) securing grant funding for areas such as cattle grazing and management of veteran trees (3) meeting the aims set out in the City's Corporate Plan and (4) creating additional income streams. The savings required would be met from September 2019 and the challenge for the Superintendent going forward was deciding a fair allocation of spend across all areas of the City Commons.

- In response to comments from a Member, in particular around the use of commemorative roundels for bequests on the Isle of Wight, the Superintendent agreed to provide the current Legacy policy to Members of the Group.

National Nature Reserve (NNR) Status for West Wickham, Coulsdon Common, Spring Park and Happy Valley

- The Superintendent noted that he had secured Member-level sign-off from the Epping Forest and Commons Committee to progress an NNR application up until the designation phase. The next report to the Epping Forest and Commons Committee was due in Summer 2019, after which the proposal would be progressed with Natural England. Securing NNR status for all of the Commons and Happy Valley would be fantastic recognition and would lead to greater joint-working with Croydon. It would also facilitate income for scientific monitoring on the Commons.
- A Member welcomed the progress being made on the NNR proposal, particularly in the context of funding pressures faced by local authorities such as Croydon.

RESOLVED, that the Superintendent's Update be noted.

7. CATERING AND REFRESHMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR FARTHING DOWN AND RIDDLEDOWN

The Head Ranger was heard regarding catering and refreshment opportunities for Farthing Down and Riddlesdown and the following points were made.

- A Visitor Centre with associated catering had been envisaged as far back as 2007. The car park had been upgraded in 2009 with a view to increasing visitor numbers and creating a sustainable market for catering operations. A tender for a mobile catering van service had proved disappointing.
- A consultant had been appointed to review the potential for a catering facility at the Riddlesdown Countryside Office, and their report was expected at the end of January 2019. The early indications were that catering at Farthing Down would not be sustainable due to its isolation from nearby residential communities.

RESOLVED, that the Head Ranger's update be noted.

8. CAR PARK CHARGING AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT FOR FARTHING DOWN AND RIDDLEDOWN

The Head Ranger was heard regarding car park charging and infrastructure project for Farthing Down and Riddlesdown and the following points were made.

- There were currently no parking enforcement measures at Riddlesdown, which had 36 parking bays including two disabled bays. Riddlesdown car

park had a single entry/exit point, was situated in an urban area and was very popular with local people visiting the site.

- Farthing Down similarly had no current parking enforcement and was situated off the public highway and behind electrically controlled gates.
- There were several options to consider in implementing parking controls, including Automated Number Plate Recognition (ANPR), parking attendants, pay and display machines (P&D) and Pay by Phone technology (PbP).
- An ANPR option provide a constant monitoring of the parking area and would require a power connection. The national ANPR database would be provided by a management company. The Attendant option could be delivered by existing Rangers using handheld technology but would detract from their wider duties. P&D machines that required coinage would not provide change and would lead to customers overpaying. In contrast, P&D card machines would require a reliable internet connection and each card transaction would be subject to a fee that would impact on that option's overall profitability. The PbP option could be delivered by multiple providers and represented a very convenient and flexible solution – however, it was reliant on strong phone signal at the parking sites.
- The Head Ranger concluded by noting that officers were working with providers to establish what option worked best for the City Commons.
- The Superintendent noted that officers would be reviewing whether an Equality Impact Assessment would be appropriate.
- A Member noted that a successful parking option had been implemented in the City of London and encouraged the Superintendent to get in touch with his counterpart in the City's Department of the Built Environment.
- The Chairman noted that it was rare for free parking to be on offer at sites such as the City Commons, and in introducing any form of parking controls the City would work to ensure no-one was unnecessarily excluded from enjoying the Commons.
- The Superintendent noted that when similar controls had been implemented at Burnham Beeches it had encouraged local people to walk to the site rather than take their cars.

RESOLVED, that the Head Ranger's update be noted.

9. THE PROVISION AND MANAGEMENT OF DOG WASTE ON WEST WICKHAM AND COULSDON COMMONS

The Head Ranger was heard regarding the provision and management of dog waste on West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons and the following points were made.

- The Head Ranger noted that the collection and disposal of dog waste from the Commons had been contracted out for the past 25 years and had been delivered by three different contractors over the past decade. In October 2018 the current provider had folded and failed to continue to provide the expected levels of service. The City's Ranger Team were currently delivering the service whilst the City sought to recover costs from the contractor. This was a temporary solution that was not sustainable in the long term.
- The provision of dog waste bags and collection and disposal of dog waste had cost £28,500 on West Wickham Common alone during 2017/18 – a significant amount when compared to the current need to identify savings and additional income streams.
- Options for future provision included (1) provide a free service to the dog-owning users of the Commons (2) provide an in-house service (3) reduce and rationalise the number of dog waste bins on the Commons (4) stop providing dog waste bags and (5) stop providing dog waste bins altogether.
- The dog waste contract would be retendered in April 2019 although officers were mindful that the last tender exercise had only identified one provider.
- Offices would trial the removal of free dog waste bags at some sites, and the number of available dog waste bins would be rationalised. Social media would be used to increase awareness of the dog waste issue, and officers would work with counterparts at Croydon to proactively enforce local byelaws.
- In response to a question, the Head Ranger noted that Croydon employed five dog wardens in the area adjacent to the City Commons, and that he planned to build a relationship with those wardens going forward.
- The Superintendent noted that an important element of education was the key difference between herbivore waste and carnivore waste on the Commons, with the former contributing to a healthy habitat whereas the former not contributing to a healthy habitat.

RESOLVED, that the Head Ranger's update be noted.

10. **MANAGEMENT PLANNING**

The Head Ranger was heard regarding Management Planning and the following points were made.

- Local Site Plans would conclude in 2021 and therefore the aim was to produce further plans for Kenley, Coulsdon, Farthing Down, Riddlesdown, Spring Park and West Wickham. 2021 was also significant as the year that existing Environmental Stewardships came to an end.

- The new plans would adopt the same format – each site would have its own vision and would have a dedicated operational work programme linked to grant funding, and would be linked to Heritage Conservation Plans.

RESOLVED, that the Head Ranger's update be noted.

11. REVIEW OF THE ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2018-19 AND PRESENTATION OF THE 2019-20 PROGRAMME

The Senior Ranger was heard regarding the review of the Annual Work Programmes for 2018/19 and 2019/20 and the following points were made.

2018/19

- During 2018/19 over 50 walks, talks and events had been delivered including topics such as carving, geology, a 'bio-blitz' to identify resident species, and wreath and fire making.
- Over 5,300 hours of volunteering had been delivered at Coulsdon Common and 550 hours at West Wickham Common – this was a mix of corporate, school and individual volunteering.
- City Commons staff had been privileged to visit an optical services underground factory at Riddlesdown Quarry that had, in the past, served as an air raid shelter.
- Fifteen volunteers had assisted in re-excavating two miles of bank and ditch at Farthing Down in four weeks.
- Chestnut coppicing at Spring Park had been undertaken and represented the final area in the current annual coppicing rotation to be completed. The coppicing rotation would start again from the beginning next year.
- Year 8 of 10 of the Environmental Stewardship scheme had been completed.
- The City Commons had achieved six Green Flag and three Green Heritage awards.

2019/20

- Priorities for 2019/20 included,
 - Restoration of grassland
 - Scrub control to maintain downland, pasture, wood and heath
 - Ensuring tree safety through coppicing and glade creation.
 - Maintaining a visible Ranger presence.
 - Developing a sustainable grazing programme for livestock.

- In response to a question, the Senior Ranger replied that to his knowledge the Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) nest opposite Spring Park had not been removed, and he expected OPM to appear in Spring Park shortly. Any OPM in the City Commons should be detected from May 2019 onwards.
- A Member commented that the increase of OPM across London had been exponential and that it was important for the City to focus its efforts on areas where OPM would cause a public health issue e.g. footpaths, car parks and catering facilities.
- The Senior Ranger commented that some natural predators of OPM had emerged but that they were not yet having an impact on OPM numbers.

RESOLVED, that the Senior Ranger's update be noted.

12. QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

There were no questions.

**13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT
Chairman's Last Meeting**

The Superintendent noted that this was the Chairman's last meeting prior to his term as Chairman of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee concluding in April 2019. All expressed their thanks to the Chairman for his support for the City Commons during his term. The Chairman was heard in reply and noted his particular appreciation for all of the volunteers who contributed so much time and effort to the Commons.

14. DATE AND SUBJECT OF SUMMER WALK

The Chairman noted that the Town Clerk would be in touch with Members to arrange the date and subject of the Summer 2019 walk.

The meeting closed at 8.25 pm

Chairman

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