

HIGHGATE WOOD CONSULTATIVE GROUP
Wednesday, 7 October 2020

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Highgate Wood Consultative Group held on
Wednesday, 7 October 2020 at 11.15 am

Present

Members:

Anne Fairweather (Chair)
Karina Dostalova (Deputy Chairman)
Deputy John Tomlinson
Stephanie Beer
Councillor Bob Hare
Councillor Julia Ogiehor
Michael Hammerson

Officers:

Jonathan Meares - Highgate Wood, Conservation & Trees Manager
Bob Warnock - Superintendent of Hampstead Heath
Leanne Murphy - Town Clerk's Department

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Peter Corley, Therese Gray (represented by Louise Lewis), Lucy Roots and Alison Watson.

2. **DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF ANY PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA**

There were no declarations.

3. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2019 be approved as a correct record subject to a typo.

4. **MINUTES OF THE HAMPSTEAD HEATH, HIGHGATE WOOD AND QUEEN'S PARK COMMITTEE**

The public minutes of the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee meeting held on 9 September 2020 were received.

5. **SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE REPORT - OCTOBER 2020**

Members considered an update report of the Superintendent regarding Highgate Wood and the following comments were made:

- The Highgate Wood Manager highlighted the significant challenge for the Team operating throughout the Covid pandemic and thanked them for their hard work. Members echoed this thanks and congratulated staff on their hard work and extra duties they had taken on.

- The pandemic has had a significant impact on visitor numbers which was estimated to be a 50% increase (up from 800k to well over a million). This has significantly impacted the woodlands, environment and pathways at Highgate Wood as new paths and desire lines have developed from people trying to socially distance.
- The autumn would see the Team focus on recovering the natural aspect of the Woods.
- The Roman Kiln Project remains on hold due to Covid as the HLF bid has been delayed until 2021/22. The Friends of Highgate Roman Kiln (FOHRK) have set up a website to broaden support for the project.
- With regards to waste and recycling, this was a drastically reduced operation at the beginning of lockdown with bins turned upside down and visitors being encouraged to take waste home. The volumes of litter increased drastically along with the number of visitors after the lockdown restrictions were lifted and this has been an ongoing challenge to manage.
- The Team have been dealing with a high level of tree failures (31) including branch damage.
- A new reporting format to the Highgate Wood Consultative Group for 2021 was proposed to Members. This approach aimed to determine the objectives that would form the priorities for annual charity reporting process.
- Members were advised that the City Corporation had launched a new Climate Action Strategy, and this had a significant role for all of the City Corporation's Open Spaces who inputted into the Strategy. Climate change would subsequently be an item on all future agendas.
- OPM numbers have significantly increased in 2020 at Highgate Woods. To date, a target-based approach of nest removal has been used to combat OPM rather than spraying trees with harmful chemicals.
- For 2020, the number of nests in trees at the Heath reduced by 50% and it was hoped this trend would follow at the Woods in 2021. It was noted that a parasitoid fly, *Carcelia iliaca*, were found in harvested nests and Officers and ecologists hoped this would provide a natural control of future OPM populations in the future.
- The City Corporation has continued to support the tenants of the Pavilion Café throughout lockdown. Officers were working to retender the Pavilion Café in parallel with other Corporation cafés. Officers were pleased with the current tenant and hoped they would stay.

- Forest Schools remained suspended since the beginning of lockdown and would resume activity in the autumn. New licencing procedures would be introduced in the winter to better regulate their activities and cap the number of schools.
- In response to a concern about OPM control impacting food species for sparrow hawks, Members were advised that an ecological and biological approach was being used rather than pesticides and sprays.
- A Member was concerned by the erosion and desire lines that had developed and enquired if logs could be used as a deterrent to allow these areas to recover. Officers confirmed dead hedges and large pieces of timber and temporary fencing were all being considered.
- In response to a query regarding restarting open air guided walks and events, it was confirmed that walks were being considered but this would have to be in line with Government's rule of six guidelines. A test and trace booking system would also be used.
- A Member queried if TfL had been approached concerning the railway land discussed in previous meetings. Officers confirmed TFL's Property Department had been contacted and an expression of interest had been sent to discuss arrangements for a land transfer. It was noted that the bridge dating back to the 19th century could be a future health and safety risk.
- With regards to the outstanding school representative, Members were advised that the Head of the Highgate Primary School was unable to attend the last or current meeting but would hopefully attend the next meeting. The Town Clerk agreed to share the meeting information.
- A Member stated that there were cracks and suspected subsidence at the Pavilion Café. Officers agreed to inform the City Surveyor's department to investigate and take action if needed.

6. **GOVERNANCE REVIEW**

Members received an oral update from the Chair concerning the City Corporation's Governance Review and noted Lord Lisvane's report.

The Chair stated that Lisvane's report was a comprehensive review of everything including the Standing Orders. A major review point was the number of committees which was higher than the number of Members. It was acknowledged that some areas were addressed in more detail than others, with the Open Spaces as a whole considered to be much less detailed than needed.

The Review recommended the disbandment of a number of consultative committees, including the Highgate Wood Consultative Group, and the merger of the four Open Spaces Grand Committees into one overarching Committee. The Chair emphasised that the statutory requirements for Hampstead Heath

prohibited this and that Lord Lisvane had not fully understood the implications of the legislation.

The Chair and Deputy Chairman stressed their view that Consultative Groups were very helpful and had an important role in terms of accountability and local engagement. The Chair was keen to keep Members involved in the process and share their views on the recommendations.

A Member felt that the recommendations were undemocratic and saw the role of Open Spaces Consultative Groups as more vital than ever in light of the current Covid pandemic challenges.

It was agreed that the different open spaces were completely different in character from each other and that needed addressing at a local level. Whilst there were common issues for all Open Spaces, Members did not feel that one merged Committee could cover all of the specific local issues.

A Member believed the role of the Consultative Groups went further than just a mechanism for locals to feed into the City Corporation, but that they helped the City Corporation feed out expertise and best practice. This knowledge was regarded as invaluable to the local groups and communities. A Member agreed declaring that as a local resident the Wood was incredibly important to the local community who were grateful to input into the service it provided.

A Member was concerned that there would be a potential negative PR impact on the City Corporation if it disbanded the Consultative Groups and excluded the local voice from its management processes and decisions.

A Member, who was a Member of Court, felt that Consultative Groups were extremely valuable and saw the recommendations to be short-sighted. The Member regarded dialogue and capturing the society view to be invaluable to the decision-making processes.

The Chair thanked Members for their comments and agreed that these views would be shared. The Chair saw the whole review process to be an opportunity to streamline their work and ensure best practice.

7. QUESTIONS

There were no questions.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

There were none.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting on 21 April 2021 was noted.

The meeting ended at 12.09 pm

Chairman

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