

ASHTEAD COMMON CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
Monday, 1 July 2013

Minutes of the meeting of the Ashtead Common Consultative Committee held at Ashtead Estate Office, Woodfield Road, Ashtead, Surrey, KT21 2DU on Monday, 1 July 2013 at 6.30pm

Present

Members:

Alderman Gordon Haines (Chairman)
Barbara Newman
Douglas Mobsby
David Baker
Bob Eberhard
Wyn James
Paul Krause
Anthony McLelland
Cllr John Northcott
Pippa Woodall

Officers:

Bob Warnock - Superintendent of City Commons
Andy Thwaites - Head Ranger, Open Spaces
Alistair MacLellan - Town Clerk's Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Deputy Stanley Ginsburg, Joseph Byllam-Barnes, Helen Cocker and Councillor Chris Townsend.

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

There were no declarations.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 29 January 2013 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. ASHTEAD COMMON CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE PROPOSED TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Superintendent of City Commons introduced the draft Terms of Reference of the Ashtead Common Consultative Committee. He noted the proposed format of a Summer site visit to the Common coupled with a Winter meeting at Guildhall to discuss the upcoming work programme for the coming year.

The Committee proceeded to discuss the draft Terms of Reference and the following points were made:

- The Superintendent was considering the degree of input afforded to local schools.
- The Superintendent would research and report back to the Committee the proposed final membership, and he would focus his research on individuals and organisations with a demonstrable affiliation to Ashted Common.
- The Chairman noted that he welcomed the encouragement and involvement of young people in the management and enjoyment of the Common.
- It was noted under 1(A) that 'Association' should be in the singular.
- It was suggested that the Environment Agency be involved, at least informally, in the business of the Committee and that the Terms of Reference could be redrafted to reflect the potential informal contribution of local and national organisations. The Superintendent responded by saying that a list of consultees will be drawn up to include organisations like the Environment Agency. Individuals and organisations on the list will not routinely attend committee meetings, but will receive information and may be called upon to attend consultation events depending on the subject in hand.
- The Superintendent concluded by saying he would welcome feedback from local organisations on any changes in membership in between the meetings of the Committee.

5. **CITY COMMONS MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES FOR 2013/14**

The Superintendent introduced the City Commons management priorities for 2013-14. He noted that the Committee had seen the draft proposals in January 2013. He went on to briefly discuss each of the service priorities and the management standards that staff of the City Commons would seek to adhere to. These included:

Rangering - the Superintendent stated that it was a key priority to maintain a visible public presence on the Commons.

Visitor Experience – the Superintendent noted that the City Commons had just undergone a Green Flag inspection and that the results would be available in the next few weeks.

Marketing – this was focused around Facebook and Twitter. The branding of the City Commons was currently being evaluated and will need to take account of the difficulty of marketing such a geographically diffuse set of Commons. The results of the evaluation would be shared with the Committee later in the year.

Condition Assessments – the Superintendent noted the obligation to assess the condition of City Commons sites given the receipt of government funding for their upkeep.

Tree Health – it was noted that Oak Processionary Moth was present in Kew. Furthermore, current City Commons volunteers had been designated as Tree Wardens and were carrying out inspections over the Summer to monitor the arrival and spread of tree disease. The Superintendent concluded by noting the need to study best practice from across Europe and the involvement of City Commons staff in the Ancient Tree Forum. In response to a question the Superintendent said that informal links and expertise provided by organisations such as the Ancient Tree Forum allowed the quick communication of intelligence on the spread of tree disease in areas in close proximity to the City Commons, but that there was no obligation of landowners in the immediate proximity of the Commons to report the arrival of tree disease. The Superintendent committed to providing advice via e-news on the course of action to follow if a disease such as Ash Dieback is spotted.

Consultation – the Superintendent noted that the minutes from each of the City Commons Consultative Committees were to be shared amongst the three Committee memberships.

Volunteers – the Superintendent committed to bringing a report on volunteering to the next meeting of the Committee. He noted that volunteer numbers 2012/13 had increased by 2% but that the corporate emphasis was very much on the quality of volunteer experience rather than the number of volunteers themselves.

Education – the procedures around education, recreation and events were being refreshed and the maintenance of the current number of walks had been made a Key Performance Indicator (KPI).

The Committee then briefly discussed the service priorities and management priority standards.

In response to a question, the Superintendent clarified that the term 'psychological contract' under the Business Plan service management priority referred to expectations over staff behaviour and staff recognition.

In response to a question regarding the branding of the City Commons the Superintendent answered that it was hoped the final branding would underline the relevance of the three charities that go to make up City Commons as a whole.

The Head Ranger then introduced the management priorities for Ashted Common. These included:

Oak Pollards – following an incident last year the programme for veteran tree management had been reviewed. This resulted in fewer trees being worked on and it was felt that this reduced amount was more sustainable. This assumption

was further bolstered by concern over tree disease and a suspicion that management techniques had caused trees stress. Consequently, a procedure had been implemented to properly monitor oak pollarding against a longer time plan.

Special Project – Crown reduction had been undertaken to achieve halo release, but the amount of reduction would be reviewed after a condition assessment.

Grazing – the current seven cattle on site was a reduction from eleven, with the balance going to market the previous week. The remainder would be moved to another part of the Common shortly. A diversity in sward height had been created during the herd's tenure on Pheonix Field and Pine Field.

Welcoming Site – the Head Ranger noted the introduction of new signage on the Common that sought to make it clearer which paths were open to cyclists and horse riders at the various points of entry. In response to a question he replied that the new maps would be available online after they had been formally launched.

Bracken Control – the Head Ranger noted the aim to roll/mow areas restored as pasture and to maintain routes designated as firebreaks. He admitted that there as a challenge in meeting this aim given the stewardship agreement stated that the percentage cover of undesirable species including bracken should only make up 10% of the Common. He added that to meet this target the work of volunteers, grazing and mechanical methods were all very important.

Roman Villa – the Head Ranger noted that this year represented the seventh year of work on what was originally conceived of as a five year project. Work would be undertaken to ensure the maintenance of the site as an Ancient Monument, and to develop a plan for future work around the interpretation of the data that had been gathered to date.

Boundaries – it was noted that fly tipping was not a problem on the Common. A member of the Committee noted that fly tipping had been a problem on the farm to the north of the Common, and that the problem had been addressed using covert cameras.

In response to a question on the potential to link the nature and habitat conservation work being undertaken on the Common with wider sites, the Head Ranger responded by noting the current partnership working with the Lower Mole Countryside Management Project. The Committee discussed the topic in greater detail, making the following observations:

- The Woodfield area of the Common was in terms of biodiversity, now considered to be of SSSI quality.

- Physical boundaries, such as the Railway, were not that important in hindering continuity of habitat given that deer had been spotted on both sides of the track.
- There was a gradation in the immediate local area between the urban park south of the railway, northwards to the Common and to the farmland beyond.
- A member of the Committee reported that it was likely there would be an issue over a land boundary with Merton College.
- A member of the Committee suggested the opportunity be taken to assess ownership of the Merton College and Mole Valley land.

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

Volunteers

In response to a question the Head Ranger reported that two training sessions on volunteer leadership had been held recently and that these were considered vital in maintaining a pool of trained volunteers.

Newton Wood

In response to a question the Head Ranger replied that the sale of Newton Wood was expected to be completed imminently. It would then be possible to engage with the new owner once we know his/her identity.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

There was no urgent business.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 18 February 2014 at 11:30am in the Committee Rooms, Guildhall.

The meeting ended at 7.50 pm

Chairman

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