

HIGHGATE WOOD JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
Wednesday, 20 November 2013

Minutes of the meeting of the Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee held at
Committee Room - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Wednesday, 20 November
2013 at 1.45 pm

Present

Members:

Jeremy Simons (Chairman)
Virginia Rounding (Deputy Chairman)
Barbara Newman CBE
Stephanie Beer (Muswell Hill & Fortis Green Association)
Councillor Jonathan Bloch (London Borough of Haringey)
Jan Brooker (Highgate Conservation Area Advisory Committee)
Marguerite Clark (Highgate Society)
Michael Hammerson (Highgate Society)

Officers:

Alistair MacLellan	- Committee and Member Services Officer
Simon Lee	- Superintendent of Hampstead Heath, Queen's Park & Highgate Wood
Jonathan Meares	- Highgate Wood & Conservation Manager
Richard Gentry	- Constabulary and Queen's Park Manager

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Deputy Michael Welbank, Peter Corley, Councillor Bob Hare, Lucy Roots and Alison Watson.

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

There were no declarations.

3. MINUTES

The public minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2013 were approved as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

Page 2, paragraph 2 – amend ‘...offset b he fact...’ to ‘...by the fact...’

Page 3, paragraph 4 – amend ‘comment’ to ‘common’.

Page 3, paragraph 7 – amend ‘Chairman’ to ‘Manager’.

Page 4, paragraph 2 – amend ‘...face facility...’ to ‘...facility...’

Matters Arising Highgate Wood Restructure

The Superintendent stated that budgets had been set for 2014/15 and that it was likely that further reductions were possible following the 2015 national elections.

Dogs

The Manager noted that he was in discussion with the café operator to turn part of the terrace area into a dedicated are for dogs and dog owners. The Superintendent added that any proposal would first be submitted to the Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee for its views.

In response to an observation from a member regarding the aesthetic value of such an area, the Manager noted that any proposal had to be considered in the context of the overall profitability of the café, given the limitations imposed on its operations by the dated building design and small kitchen. He added that any outdoor terrace area would likely be designed to encourage patrons to use the area outside the café in order to maximise space for service indoors. Furthermore, in terms of its aesthetics the outdoor area would be improved during 2014.

4. SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE REPORT

The Highgate Wood Manager introduced the Superintendent's Update report and made the following points:

Background

The Wood had seen another busy year and its best summer since 2006, and the recent St Jude's Day storm on 28 October had a major impact on the Wood.

A draft summary document of the Highgate Wood Conservation Management Plan was appended to the report and comments and critique would be welcome up until the document was finalised in the New Year. The Superintendent took the opportunity to note that he would welcome the section outlining the vision to be moved nearer to the start of the document, and the Chairman requested that the maps within the document be made clearer, as at present the borders and other details were poorly defined.

Sustainability

The newly-installed photovoltaic cells in the Wood had generated 300kW since September. They would be less productive during the winter months but it was expected they would go on to produce 36,000kW annually which if achieved would meet half of the current demand for electricity in the Wood. The Manager noted that the City Surveyor's Department had been very supportive throughout the project, and the Superintendent added that the Manager had been instrumental in leading the project from the beginning.

The Manager stated that the Enterprise waste contract had commenced back in January 2013 and was proving unsatisfactory. He noted that overall the contract was working but was proving more expensive than had been anticipated. An issue had arisen over the need to separate dog waste from the overall waste that the Wood produced. The Manager concluded by stating that the waste contract for all three North London Open Spaces sites would be reviewed. In response to a question from the Chairman the Manager confirmed that the public sometimes put dog waste into normal waste bins, and that this was a fact of life. The Superintendent concluded by stating that Highgate Wood was the only site at which dog waste and normal waste was segregated and this was having a serious impact on costs, and therefore it was likely that the waste contract would need to be retendered.

Restructure

The Manager noted that the restructure had been progressing well and that the evaluation stage had been completed. He stated that the staff team would be reduced to six persons from April 2014 and that additional casual cover would be taken on during summer seasons. The Superintendent warned that any further reduction in staff would have a serious impact on the City of London's ability to properly staff the Wood, and that it was no exaggeration to say that with six staff operating a two-shift system it would prove difficult to guarantee the Wood would be properly closed every evening.

In response to a question from the Deputy Chairman the Superintendent replied that casual staff were recruited from a recruitment pool common to the North London Open Spaces division. He warned that casual staff could not be relied upon to the same extent as those on full-time contracts.

The Chairman noted that the restructure should be seen against a background of budgetary pressures affecting the whole of the City of London Corporation, and that this was of particular concern given that 70% of budgetary costs in Open Spaces were staff costs.

A member of the committee noted his concern over the risk posed to public safety arising from any further staff reductions.

The Superintendent concluded by stating that it was positive that the Town Clerk appeared to appreciate the intrinsic value that Open Spaces added to the City of London Corporation and to London as a whole.

Heritage and Roman Kiln Project

The Manager noted that Norwegian Log, the company that constructed the original Education Building in 1996, had been brought in to discuss how the building could be reconfigured to accommodate the Roman kiln. Three differing options had been provided and would provide evidence for a first-round application to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Tree Management and Woodland Conservation Work

The Manager stated that the St Jude storm on 28 October had caused some major tree failures in the Wood but most of the damage to the oak population

had been to upper branches and crowns, and that it would be interesting to monitor how the Wood responded to the storm damage. He noted that the 1987 hurricane had been worse, and that overall the damage had been significant but not catastrophic.

Oak Decline Survey Work

The Manager noted that the aim over the current year had been to digitally record and plot using GPS all of the oaks in the Wood. It was hoped that this method of data collection would create a system of records that would provide continuity and be readily accessible to any incoming members of staff in the future. He concluded by saying that overall the survey work indicated that the oak population was stable.

Play Area and Recreation

The Manager noted that the current wood chip surface in the Play Area was high maintenance and took up a lot of staff time, as well as costing £8,000 a year to maintain. Therefore quotes were being obtained with a view to replacing the surface with a rubberised material.

The Manager went on to note that the management team at Highgate Wood had assumed responsibility for all sports bookings within the Wood to ensure charging was maintained effectively. Furthermore it was noted there were some issues with the proximity of the pitches to the café given that players were sometimes given to expressing loud expletives.

Community and Events

The Manager noted that staff were keen to build on and improve links with the local community, and that this was reflected in the number of people using the Wood. He noted in particular the excellent and committed work of the volunteers of Heath Hands.

5. QUESTIONS

Roman Kiln - Heritage Lottery Fund Application

In response to a question from a member the Manager confirmed that an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund would have implications on staff-time. He noted that the application was very much in its preliminary, exploratory stages and that consideration would be given to bringing consultant in to deal with the application process.

The Superintendent added that the bid would be match funded with monies from the Local Risk budget, and that this may be phased over two years. Furthermore, he added that it would be worth exploring opening a trading account for the Wood given that it was a charity, as this would allow monies to be carried over from year to year.

The Chairman stated that this was an issue the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee could look at, and furthermore that the scope to apply for City Bridge Trust monies should be explored as a back-up option to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Deputy Chairman added that it would be ideal of a dedicated post could be created within the wider Open Spaces Department to apply for funding.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

St Jude's Storm

The Chairman registered his thanks on behalf of the committee for the hard work of the Manager and his team in the aftermath of St Jude's storm on 28 October. The Manager thanked him for his kind words and emphasised that he felt it was necessary to close the Wood for two days following the storm whilst safety checks were carried out. The Superintendent agreed, noting the fatality that had occurred recently in Kew Gardens that had been caused by branch failure. He concluded by noting the storm damage had challenged staff already stretched by the ongoing tree inspection programme.

Budgets

In response to a question from a member, the Chairman replied that budget reductions and efficiencies were still necessary despite signs the wider economy was improving due to the fact that local government was one of the main sectors that was required to find savings. Moreover, whilst the Open Spaces were financed using private City Cash, the corporate decision to apply budget reductions across the entire organisation had been made.

LiDar Survey

In response to a suggestion from a member, the Manager agreed to look into conducting a LiDar survey of the Wood.

7. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on 30 April 2014 at 12:00pm in the Highgate Wood Offices, Highgate Wood, Muswell Hill Road, N10 3JN.

The meeting ended at 2.43 pm

Chairman

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