

EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE **Monday, 10 March 2014**

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held at Committee Room - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Monday, 10 March 2014 at 11.00 am

Present

Members:

Alderman Gordon Haines (Chairman)
Deputy Stanley Ginsburg (Deputy Chairman)
George Abrahams
Deputy John Barker
Deputy Catherine McGuinness
Sylvia Moys
Barbara Newman
Virginia Rounding
Ian Seaton
Verderer Peter Adams
Verderer Michael Chapman DL
Verderer Richard Morris
Verderer Dr. Joanna Thomas

Officers:

Natasha Dogra	- Town Clerk's Department
Sue Ireland	- Director of Open Spaces
Paul Thomson	- Superintendent, Epping Forest
Andy Barnard	- Superintendent, Burnham Beeches, Stoke Common and City Commons
Lucy Frazer	- Town Clerk's Department
Geoff Sinclair	- Open Spaces Department
Andrew Thwaites	- Open Spaces Department
Jo Hurst	- Open Spaces Department
Roger Adams	- City Surveyor's Department
Mark Bailey	- City Surveyor's Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Alderman Luder, Alderman Evans and Deputy Deane.

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

There were none.

3. MINUTES

Resolved: That Members agreed the minutes of the previous meeting as an accurate record.

Matters Arising:

Officers informed Members that riding fees and licences had been discussed recently at a Horse Riding Forum, and would be investigated as part of the management plan.

Officers also informed Members that the Highams Park Lake consultation management plan would be discussed at the Committee meeting in May.

An action from the public minutes regarding activity at the Loughton War Memorial was also referred to non-public session.

4. **MINUTES OF THE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES OF THE EPPING FOREST AND COMMONS COMMITTEE**

Resolved: That Members received the minutes of the Consultative Committees of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee.

5. **SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE**

The Committee received an update from the Superintendent of Epping Forest and noted the following points:

Staff Changes

The Head of Visitor Services had left the Division.

Wet Weather

In complete contrast to the fires of last July and August, Epping Forest had experienced double its normal rainfall in December and January. This had led to widespread flooding across the Forest. The newly restored Jubilee Pond on Wanstead Flats had flooded, as the overflow had been unable to drain into flooded ditches alongside Centre Road. Alexandra Lake also burst its banks and flooded onto Aldersbrook Road. In addition, Connaught Water also flooded in January, though the dam did not overtop as it did in 2011.

Football Season

The unprecedented wet weather saw an unusually high level of cancellations for football at Wanstead Flats across six weekends on the first and third weekend of January and throughout February. A two week extension at the end of the season was planned to allow fixtures to be completed.

Crime Reports

There had been a disturbing rise in serious crime reports in the Forest. A Forest Keeper was threatened with a knife on 15th January by a Rough Sleeper and two Forest Keepers were assaulted while an arrest was being made for a byelaw offence. Two members of the public were mugged at the Caddy House car park and Forest staff had been involved in the recovery of a vehicle from Wanstead Flats following an alleged rape. The western flank of Wanstead Flats was currently cordoned off while Police seek evidence in connection with a double murder in nearby Montague Road.

Rough Sleepers

Despite the wet weather rough sleepers were still being found. In addition to the incident on 15th January four migrants had been found in a camp on

Wanstead Flats on 7th January. With the support of Redbridge Council three rough sleepers were found hostel accommodation and a further sleeper returned home under the Redbridge Street Outreach Team (SORT) initiative.

Fly tipping

Following the overall 24.8% fall in incidents across 2013, the first two months of 2014 had seen 105 fly tips up 21% on 87 for the same period last year.

Prosecutions

15 cases of fungi picking were placed before Chelmsford Magistrates with fines totalling £2,575 for 12 individuals. Two individuals were elected for trial on 18th March.

Royal Parks - Richmond Park Visit

Forest Keepers from the South team, together with a representative from the Wren Conservation Group met with the Assistant Park Superintendent to discuss skylark conservation. The visit also considered the deer processing unit; licensing and dog control issues.

Bushwood Volunteers

Clearance works by the newly formed Friends of Bush Wood and the high rainfall had seen ponds holding water for the first time in many years.

Tour de France – 7th July

The Head Keeper had been attending key meetings with race organisers and local authorities regarding the management of the events when it passes through Epping Forest. The Epping New Road would be closed on race day between 09.00 hours and 17.00 hours.

Gifford Wood Update

The planting of 5,280 trees had been completed and spiral guards had been added to manage rabbit damage within the enclosure.

The Grotto, Wanstead Park

The first phase of works to clear The Grotto of encroaching trees and shrubs had been completed. The removal of vegetation would reduce seed sources and consequent damage to the Listed Building.

Wood Pasture Research

Staff at both Epping Forest and Burnham Beeches, had been interviewed as part of a pan-European Wood Pasture condition assessment led by Universities across Germany, Hungary and Romania.

Highams Park Lake.

Balfour Beatty was selected in January as the contractor for pre-construction services. A planning application was submitted for dam strengthening works on 8th February. 100 people attended an information afternoon and evening held on 24th February.

Epping Forest Hydrology/Engineering Assets

MK Surveys had completed survey work for the City Surveyor on engineering assets on water bodies and watercourses. Every main path, watercourse and 57 ponds had been inspected for structures.

Wanstead Park Hydrology

JJB have provided their interim results on the Park's Hydrology ahead of the main report in April/May 2014. Leakage at Heronry Pond and Ornamental Water had been identified as the main weaknesses in the 5 lake cascade.

Social Media

Twitter followers of Epping Forest have reached 1,795 and were being added at 9%/calendar month compared with 3% before the Forest's Twitter campaign.

Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme (VAQAS)

All three Visitor Centres had again secured from Visit England the coveted VAQAS blue marque for a further year. The judges assessment would be shared once received.

New Fallow Deer Buck, Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge

Following taxidermy, a recently culled distinctive melanistic Epping Forest fallow deer buck has been put on show at the Hunting Lodge replacing the existing exhibit.

Chingford Golf Course

Comic Relief Day was being used as a promotional opportunity to publicise the relaxation of the red clothing rule for golf course players at Chingford Golf Course.

Waymarked Trails

The 10 km Oak Trail, the ninth waymarked Epping Forest trail, had been completed on the Forest around Theydon Bois.

Great Gregories Cattle Outwintering Facility

The extreme weather had delayed the start of the construction of the Outwintering facility. A temporary straw facility had been created adjoining Great Gregories.

New Planning Policy Guidance

The Planning Minister Nic Boyles had launched the revised and much reduced online guidance on 6th March 2014.

Visitor Survey

In addition to 1083 questionnaire surveys, 1,395 visitors were mapped by volunteers over 60 hours covering a distance of 120 miles.

Legible London

Staff were working with Transport for London's 'Legible London' initiative to annotate digital mapping to include references to Epping Forest.

Gateways

Staff continued to work with CodSteaks and Evolve on a suitable Gateway design.

Volunteer Hours

Volunteers provided 1,470 hours of time between December and January. The total for 2013 was 10,165 hours which is the equivalent of £66,000 or over 6 full-time staff. 2014 will also be the first year in which our 4 volunteer task leaders have led tasks. Of the 22 tasks planned for 2014, 14 will be led by Volunteer Task Leaders.

In response to a query raised by Members, Officers informed the Committee that staff including Forest Keepers all had undertaken resolving conflict and managing personal safety training. This knowledge was cascaded through the department, and staff undertook regular risk assessments to ensure they had all of the information and equipment necessary. Officers were concerned that if all staff wore protective equipment whilst working they would appear too confrontational and this may exacerbate a situation. Members agreed and asked Officers to regularly review the risks posed to their staff.

6. EPPING FOREST ENFORCEMENT OF ACTIVITY REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent which informed the Committee of the byelaw enforcement activity undertaken by Epping Forest Keepers within Epping Forest during the period of 1 January 2013 to 31 December 2013.

Members noted a similar level of Byelaw enforcement during the period of 2007 to 2013, with the exception of the 2010 peak which was as a result of a high level of prosecutions for fungi picking and lighting fires. The period of 2007 to date covered a conscious programme of informal education rather than formal prosecution or warning. This was evidenced by the 7,075 "Advisory conversations" conducted by Forest Keepers during the period under report, an increase of 2,828 or 66.6 % on the figure of 4,247 reported for 2012.

Members were informed that there were eight prosecutions undertaken during the period, two for dogs not under effective control, two for fly tipping, two for riding a quad bike on the Forest, one for riding a horse in a restricted area and not displaying a current licence and one for taking a vehicle more than forty five metres from the highway.

There had been eleven warning letters sent for various misuse of the Forest, including, taking firewood, feeding wildfowl, dog not under effective control, metal detecting, obstructing an officer, and taking a vehicle onto Forest land.

In response to a query from Members, Officers stated that the level of Court costs and charges for the disposal of fly tips remained the same for three years. The Committee had approved a 50% increase in May 2011. It was proposed to increase charges by 10%, in line with the three year Retail Price Index (RPI) of 10.01%.

Members noted that the cost of taking a case to the local Magistrates' Court was initially covered by the local risk budget of Epping Forest in the form of staff costs.

These monies were then put to the Court as "case costs" and could be recovered at the magistrates' discretion using section 18 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985. If additional Court appearances were required then the costs were adjusted as necessary. These costs were not always awarded in full, and were often unpaid by the guilty parties. It was the responsibility of the Courts to recover these monies and pass them on to the City of London. Payments to the City of London currently broadly reflect the national average collection rate of 52%. From 1 April 2007 the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Surcharge) Order 2012 introduced a "Victims surcharge", which was levied in addition to the fine and was aimed at helping improve services for victims of crime.

A Member sought a better understanding of the number of 'advisory conversations' in relation to general interaction with visitors. Officers agreed to furnish additional information. Members were also informed that a series of site visits had been arranged for local Magistrates to help address concerns regarding the variability and consistency within the current range of fines.

Resolved: That Members approved the proposed increase in Court costs and fly tipping disposal charges.

7. **EPPING FOREST OPERATIONS PROGRAMME FOR 2014-2015**

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent which informed Members of the visitor access, risk management and conservation projects proposed in the Forest for the year 2014-15.

Members noted that increased visitor access work was proposed at St Johns and Woodford Green. Staff would also be working with the Wanstead Park Steering Group to increase management activity within the parkland. Officers also hoped to extend volunteer activity at Wanstead Park and Swaines Green to help meet increased work needs in these areas.

Significant work was to be carried out on the dam at Highams Park Lake during 2014 which the Operations team would be supporting. A new area of risk management activity to be undertaken this year was the survey of highway vegetation as part of a new Highways vegetation management programme. Tree safety would continue to be a large aspect of the Operations teams work in 2014.

Members noted that the completion of the Forest structures survey by City Surveyors would provide an opportunity to develop the Constraints Management System for the Forest during 2014. Habitat management supported by the Stewardship Grant from Natural England to the value of over £160,000 annually, plus the Single Payment Scheme funding, would continue on the same basis as the previous 6 years with work concentrated in the core areas of Hornbeam and Oak pollards, especially Bury Wood and Walthamstow

Forest, and around the heaths. The grassland mowing programme would encompass more work on cutting of the wood-pasture glades and restoration areas.

Officers informed Members that the Keystone Tree programme would target 130 Beech and Oak pollards. Cattle grazing would be extended into new areas, such as Honey Lane Quarters, with the help of the new infrastructure including the invisible fence network.

Officers would be seeking to improve the value for money we achieve from the contract work we let each year. This would be done by preparing an Estates Maintenance Contract covering a comprehensive package of works and tendering it widely to appropriate contractors.

In response to a query regarding amenity areas, Officers informed Members that proposals to consider more areas as recreational and amenity areas were being investigated by Officers. This would ensure the grass was regularly cut in these areas. Officers also informed Members that the view into recreational and amenity areas was not overly obscured by grass and shrubbery.

Members congratulated Officers on a well written work programme and thanked Officers for their constant hard work.

Resolved: That Members approved the annual work programme.

8. **HIGHAMS PARK LAKE PROGRESS REPORT**

The Committee considered the report of the City Surveyor which informed Members that following the last inspection at Highams Park Lake it was necessary to comply with the Inspecting Engineers Recommendations for Safety and reinforce the Dam, to allow overtopping and the passage of the design flood.

Members were informed that in January 2012, the Committee approved, the option of proceeding with a solution which involved removing the Michael Mallinson Watersports Centre; something which was thought to be unavoidable at Detailed Options Appraisal. Following further discussions with Members and local groups, the project team were asked to look at ways in which the watersports facility could be retained. After further design development, an option was produced where the watersports facility would be protected by a flood wall; negating the need for its demolition as part of the works.

Members noted that Walthamstow Scouts had now signed a Tenancy at Will for the interim period, and would not be using the lake during the 2014 works period, apart from some onsite storage at their own risk. Discussions were underway with the main contractor for the temporary use of the Watersports Centre as site offices and welfare facilities.

Members queried whether access to the Michael Mallinson Watersports Centre had been identified as part of the planning application that Officers submitted to

the London Borough of Waltham Forest. Officers confirmed that this had not formed part of their application, and access arrangements would be confirmed at a later stage. Officers informed Members that the primary objective was to secure the safety of the dam in a probable Maximum Flood Event.

Members noted that over 100 people attended an open meeting for local residents to discuss this site, and there was still time to discuss the proposals as the detailed design would not be finalised until April 2014.

Resolved: That Members:

1. Approved the new option of reinforcing the dam whilst retaining the Michael Mallinson Watersports Centre.
2. Agreed that, subject to planning and the project remaining within the approved budget, the appointment of the contractor for the main project works and Gateway 5 (Authority to Start Work) remained under the Delegated Authority of the City Surveyor so that works can proceed on site within the statutory deadline.

9. **SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE**

The Committee received an update from the Superintendent of Burnham Beeches, Stoke Common and City Commons, and noted the following:

Burnham Beeches

- Tree safety and post storm inspection procedures had been enacted six times since 1st January 2014. Significant works were required and this had hampered other work programmes.
- Heathland restoration and path clearance along Hawthorn Lane and Bedford Drive had been performed to improve access and help reduce long term tree safety issues and support the grazing project.
- Work around Burnham Beeches café had begun to improve surface condition and drainage.
- 156 volunteers had completed 887 hours of work – 58 of these hours were achieved by under 18's.
- Strong winds had forced the cancellation of 3 events. However, 3 school visits, 3 health walks, orienteering, half term woodland wonder days and bird box building events had taken place.

Ashtead Commons

- Inspection procedures were utilised after each event. It was estimated that 20 small trees had been cut from across paths, and 4 veterans had collapsed with many others losing major limbs.
- Two days of emergency tree works had taken place after storms – the work included rebalancing veteran oak and removal of hangers in another veteran oak.
- Scrub management in the Woodlands Road area was taking place with Epsom volunteers, Eco volunteers and The Lower Mole Project. This project was currently ongoing.

- Veteran tree management work was completed for this year. Members noted that 70-80 trees aerial work and 120-140 ground based works had occurred.
- Scrub management work has achieved a 50:50 mix of grass & shrubs in Thorn Field & Pine Field.
- Volunteers had completed 1204 hours.
- The New Year Ramble and Roman villa talk events had taken place.

Coulsdon Commons

- Heavy winds and high rainfall over the past couple of months meant the team had not been able to get onto the Commons. There were a number of windblown trees yet to be cleared up.
- Volunteers had completed 850 hours working on Kenley grassland & heritage management and Farthing Downs grassland management.
- A work experience student was also working at Coulsdon Commons two days per week.
- The 4 Health Walks and Star gazing event had been very successful.

West Wickham Commons

- A Large mature hawthorn with a canopy of ivy had collapsed but Officers had cleared the path.
- A small-leaved Lime Project 2013/14 had been completed with installation of a display board. The project had been 90% funded by a grant of £8,000 from the SITA Trust.
- Volunteers had completed 51 hours.
- Three episodes of fly tipping had been recorded in West Wickham Commons.
- Following damage done to the Common by water company contractors, a restoration package had been agreed, including the installation of kerb line to prevent future encroachment.

The Superintendent presented the Committee with the restructure at City Commons & vacancies. In response to a query from Members, the Superintendent agreed to circulate the new team structure complete with the names of managers included.

10. INTRODUCTION OF DOG CONTROL ORDERS AT BURNHAM BEECHES

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent which sought approval to proceed to the statutory consultation phase for the introduction of Dog Control Orders (DCO's) at Burnham Beeches National Nature Reserve, using the powers provided under Secondary Authority status.

Members were informed that in 2010 the City entered into an agreement with the Kennel Club to guide the management of responsible dog ownership on the Open Spaces. In recognition of that agreement the Superintendent had met with the Kennel Club to discuss and develop proposals to introduce DCO's at Burnham Beeches. The Director of Open Spaces and Superintendent attended a further meeting with the Kennel Club in December 2013.

A Member Working Group was formed to review the comments submitted by the Kennel Club in January 2014. Membership consisted of the following:

- Verderer Peter Adams
- Deputy Stanley Ginsburg
- Sylvia Moys
- Deputy Alexander Deane

Members discussed the Kennel Club's points in detail and challenged Officers on the key issues. Revisions to the final document were then undertaken. The outcomes of the working group's deliberations were supported by three of the four working group members. Comments provided by Deputy Alexander Deane were circulated in the agenda. Comments made by Alderman Luder were also made available to Members of the Committee.

Since the Superintendent's report of November 2013 the informal public consultation process, conducted by Footprint Ecology, had concluded. A total of 359 visitors were interviewed. The 'headline' results were:

Schedule 1. Failure to remove dog faeces. The large majority of interviewees supported the introduction of Schedule 1 across the whole site.

Schedule 2. Failure to keep a dog on a lead in an area so designated. The introduction of Schedule 2 was supported by the majority of interviewees across 50% of the site or less.

Schedule 3. Failure to put and keep a dog on a lead when directed to do so by an authorised officer. The introduction of Schedule 3 was supported by a large majority of interviewees across 50% or more of the site.

Schedule 4. Permitting a dog to enter land from which dogs are excluded. This was supported by a minority (37%) of interviewees.

Schedule 5. Taking more than a specified number of dogs on to the land. This Schedule was supported by the large majority of interviewees with 3 being the favoured maximum number followed very closely by 4.

The following proposal was based on the informal public consultation exercise and recommendation of the Burnham Beeches Consultation Group:

Schedule 1. This schedule will be applied across the whole site.

Schedule 2. To be applied to approximately 59% of the site.

Schedule 3. To be applied to approximately 41% of the site.

Schedule 4. No new dog exclusion zones will be created. Dogs will continue to be excluded from a small area around the café, as existing.

Schedule 5. The proposed maximum is 3 dogs per owner.

Members noted that the areas covered by Schedules 2 and 3 did not exactly match the findings from the visitor survey, albeit they were as close as practicable (within 10% - 40acres) to that ideal.

Members were informed that DCO's offer additional controls and a more flexible approach to enforcement compared to the byelaws. Officers informed Members that this exercise provided a rare opportunity to establish a proper balance between the needs of the many site users and the statutory requirement to enhance biodiversity.

In response to a query, Officers stated that the Dog Control Orders report was a bespoke report for the Burnham Beeches area alone. It would not be appropriate to use this report as a template to design future Dog Control Orders in areas such as Epping Forest, due to the differing characteristics of each of the open spaces owned by the City. Officers assured the Committee that the Dog Control Orders work at Burnham Beeches would only be used as a guide for other sites insofar as estimating future timescales and cost implications.

Members queried whether introducing such orders would cause displacement of dog owners, and whether irresponsible dog owners would obey such orders. Officers informed the Committee that Natural England were not concerned that the introduction of Dog Control Orders would cause displacement.

Officers assured members that the Rangers would be appropriately trained and equipped to enforce dog control orders in a low key but effective manner and ensure irresponsible dog owners kept their dog(s) on a lead in designated areas. Members agreed that the City Corporation had a responsibility to ensure their open spaces could be enjoyed equally by all site users

Further discussion took place regarding the proposed maximum number of dogs per owner. Officers summarised the level of support during the survey for both 3 and 4 dogs was similar, that the Consultative group had considered 3 appropriate but it was generally understood that they would be content if it was increased to 4.

The Chairman expressed his gratitude to all Members and Officers for their hard work and tenacity in producing this report.

Resolved: That Members:

- noted the outcome of the recently completed informal consultation process.
- considered the deliberations of the Dog Control Orders Working Group as part of their decision making process.
- gave their approval to commence the statutory DCO consultation process in spring 2014 based on the proposals contained within this report.
- determined that Schedule 5, the proposed maximum number of dogs per owner should be 4.
- requested that the Superintendent provide a final report to this Committee in July 2014 for Members to consider the representations received and to decide whether or not to make the proposed Dog Control Orders.

11. **BURNHAM BEECHES, STOKE COMMON AND CITY COMMONS MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES FOR 2014-15**

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent which presented the management priorities for the Burnham Beeches, Stoke Common and City Commons Division that will guide the annual work programme during the period 01 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

Resolved: That Members approved the Management Priorities for 2014-15

12. **SPORTS AND MISCELLANEOUS CHARGES**

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent which requested that Members reviewed the charges for sports facilities and miscellaneous items that were provided by the City Commons Division and sought approval for the proposed charges for 2014-15.

Resolved: That Members approved the proposed charges for 2014-15

13. **QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**

There were no questions.

14. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**

There was no urgent business.

15. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

MOTION: 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 that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act.

16. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**

Resolved: That Members agreed the minutes as an accurate record.

17. **EAGLE POND RESERVOIR**

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent and City Surveyor.

18. **AMENDED LEASE RENEWAL TERMS - LOUGHTON GOLF CLUB, CLAYS LANE**

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent.

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

There were no non-public questions.

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

There was no urgent business

The meeting ended at 1.10 pm

Chairman

Contact Officer: Natasha Dogra
Natasha.Dogra@cityoflondon.gov.uk

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