

EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE

Monday, 7 July 2014

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held at
Committee Room - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Monday, 7 July 2014 at 10.00
am

Present

Members:

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

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 & City Commons
Alison Elam	Group Accountant, Chamberlain's Department
Sue Rigley	Land Agency Officer, Epping Forest
Allan Cameron	Head Ranger, City Commons
Roger Adams	Senior Principal Surveyor, City Surveyor's Department
Andrew Buckingham	Public Relations Office

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Deputy Alex Deane.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

3. **MINUTES**

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

Matters Arising:

The Director informed Members that the Epping Forest team had worked with colleagues in the Public Relations Office and banners had been positioned at the roadside and on a roundabout along the Tour De France route

In relation to the membership of the Epping Forest Management Plan Steering Group, the Town Clerk clarified that Verderer Richard Morris had been elected to serve on the steering group.

4. **SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE**

The Committee received the following update from the Superintendent of Epping Forest:

Staff Changes

A gardener, litter picker & maintenance worker had retired in the past two months. The Branching Out Project Manager had also left to join Royal Parks, 5 months before the project closure. An interim Senior Forest Centres Officer and Branching Out Project Manager had been appointed. North London Open Spaces were providing a senior manager to temporarily cover the role of Head Keeper and recruitment for the role of Head of Visitor Services was continuing.

Dry Weather

Both May and June were a 1 degree Celsius warmer than the last 20 year average. While May saw average rainfall, June had seen rainfall amounting to half the monthly average leading to very dry conditions across the forest.

Fire Severity Index

In response to the very warm and dry weather the Fire Severity Index as measured by the Meteorological Office had ventured into 4 (very high), on a scale of 1 to 5, much earlier in the year than normal.

Ladies Day

The weather was kind for Ladies Day, where 60 guests enjoyed walks on Fairmead Plain and The Warren. In a very welcome break with tradition the Lord Mayor attended the pre-lunch estate walk to observe progress with the grazing scheme.

Football Season

The Football season ended on the 10th/11th May. 1,808 games were played between September and May generating £66,500 in income. A further 28 school sports days and 12 summer football matches and a summer soccer school were also held. Unusually 6 weekends were cancelled due to poor weather in January and February and the Superintendent's delegated powers were used to extend play for 3 weekends to 10/11th May.

The FA Chairman's England Commission Report

The FA Chairman's 84 page report had been published with a focus on increasing the levels of England Football talent. A key finding hidden away in the report showed that England lagged behind other countries in the quantity and quality of affordable grassroots facilities. A further report on new funding models for grassroots football was to be delivered in the Autumn.

Chingford Golf Course

The number of rounds played in 2013/14 were up 1,657 or 8% from 20,497 to 22,154. The Sky Sports Golf Survey indicated that 70% of clubs reported a continuing fall in membership.

Rough Sleepers

Forest Keepers were continuing to clear Rough Sleeper encampments. Figures were yet to be confirmed but the rate on increase compared to last year's caseload appeared to be slowing. According to CHAIN 6,508 people slept rough at some point in London during 2013/14, an increase of 15% on the previous year's total of 6,437 and a 64% increase on 2010.

The Autumn 2013 total of street counts and estimate in London was 543. This was a decrease of 3% from the 2012 figure of 557, which was an increase of 25% from the 2011 figure of 446. London accounted for 22% of the total England figure compared to 24% in 2012 and 20% in 2011.

Fly tipping

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

Prosecutions

3 cases of disfiguring the Forest were successfully prosecuted at Colchester Magistrates Court.

Advertising Encroachment at Woodford Green

The City had commenced legal action to remove an advertising hoarding that was previously on London Borough of Redbridge allotment land but had been re-erected on Forest Land at Woodford Green.

Paws in the Park – 8th June

Forest Keepers held a well-attended Dog Show event at The Temple, with Local Authority partners; vets; dog training clubs and the Kennel Club to share messages about responsible dog ownership and Dog Control Orders.

Fawn Tagging

A further third year of tagging was completed in partnership with the Deer InitiativeWhere 7 fawns were successfully tagged.

High Beach Visitor Centre

Visitor Numbers for first three months of operation by the Friends of Epping Forest totalled 4,355 visits (April 1,368, May 1,825 June 1,162). Volunteers provided 673 hours of volunteer time.

Evening Craft events at The View

The mosaic making courses had sold out and proved to be a very popular event.

Wanstead Park Hydrology Study

Final study had been presented by consultants JJB. The study found that The Basin was losing water due to springs at the edge of the Boyn Hill Gravels; the Shoulder of Mutton was largely a sealed system but sewers had reduced the effectiveness of surface water collection; Heronry Pond was leaking at a rate 13 litres/second making it the most problematic lake. Perch Pond was struggling to maintain a positive balance and Ornamental Pond was probably beyond intervention due to its construction in porous alluvium. A full report will be made to Committee in the Autumn.

Highams Park Lake

Balfour Beatty had submitted project cost estimates on dam strengthening, but work has not commenced in June as scheduled. Desilting options for 5,000 M3 of the 14,000 M3 of silt were being considered including extraction from the north or south of the lake.

Grazing

Redpolls were now out on Fairmead, Whitehouse and Almshouse Plains following grazing on the Buffer Land. Further cattle would follow once new collars had been supplied by Lacme and the invisible fencing was installed.

8th Symposium on the Conservation of Saproxylic (Woodloving) Beetle Fauna – Basel

The Head of Conservation presented a scientific research paper at the conference. The paper outlining the success of the Forest's wood pasture restoration work had been well received.

Grassland Invertebrate Monitoring

Epping Forest hosted Imperial College MSc students studying grassland invertebrate ecology for the 8th year.

Windsor Forest – Cooperation with Crown Estates

The Head of Conservation met with the Superintendent of Windsor Park and the Chief Forester of Windsor Forest to consider ways of working together on wood pasture restoration and conservation grazing.

Proposed Development – Forest Lodge, Wake Arms

As discussed on the recent Saturday visit an application for 19 new homes on the former play facility and stables had been submitted to the District Council.

Common Agricultural Policy - New Greening rules

Staff were considering new guidance on Ecological Focus Areas.

Kew Gardens – Shed Limb Death

The long awaited inquest that had been adjourned to study Kew's tree safety policies and pruning history of the tree in question. The Coroner had ruled accidental death and would not be producing a Prevention of Future Deaths Report.

The State of UK Public Parks

Major report on The Condition of Parks published by Heritage Lottery Fund. The report showed that while 34million people visit parks, making them one of the most used of public services. 86% of parks were reporting cuts to revenue budgets since 2010, with 45% of Local authorities considering selling parks or transferring management to others. 77% of parks had lost staff since 2010.

Volunteer Hours

Volunteers had helped replace revetment around Knighton Pond over tasks in April and May. Volunteers provided 1,470 hours of time between December and January.

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 passed through Epping Forest. The Epping New Road would be closed on race day between 09.00 hours and 17.00 hours.

In response to a query from a Member regarding a sign illegally situated in Woodford, Officers explained that it had not been removed yet as it was a sizeable and costly task which Officers wanted to ensure would be paid for by the culprits.

The Committee thanked the Superintendent and his team for their hard work.

5. REVENUE OUTTURN 2013/14 - EPPING FOREST

The Committee considered the joint report of the Chamberlain and Director of Open Spaces which compared the revenue outturn for the services overseen by the Committee in 2013/14 with the final agreed budget for the year. Members noted that in total, there was a worse than budget position of £398,000 for the services overseen by the Committee compared with the final agreed budget for the year. The better than budget position of £1,000 for Local Risk had been aggregated with the local risk variations on services overseen by other committees. The City Surveyor's overspend of £357,000 was due to re-phasing of the additional works programme and meeting historical claims for breakdown maintenance.

Officers informed Members that the 2013/14 latest approved budget for the services was received in November 2013 was £4,255m. This budget was endorsed by the Court of Common Council in March 2014 and subsequently updated for approved adjustments.

Members noted that the actual net expenditure for the Committee's services during 2013/14 totalled £4.665m, an overspend of £398,000 compared with the final agreed budget.

In response to a query from Members, Officers clarified that the Epping Forest logo now included the tagline “registered charity”. The webpage content was being expanded to include information about the registered charity status of Epping Forest.

6. UPDATE ON THE EPPING FOREST VISITOR SURVEY

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest which informed Members that the Questionnaire Survey provided the opportunity for visitors to express their opinions of Epping Forest and how it was managed. It was available at the Forest Centres, online and through face to face interviews conducted by the Visitor Services section, Forest Keeper section and volunteers.

Members noted that the total number of visits to 24 of the geographically distinct sites could now be calculated using data from 2010 - 2013. The results helped Officers estimate figures for the remaining six sites not yet surveyed. Other recorded statistics, such as visitor centre statistics and football pitch bookings, were included to develop a more accurate picture of the actual number of visits to Epping

Forest. The estimated total number of visits to Epping Forest in 2013 based on data from 2010-2013 was 4.4 million per annum. A more accurate picture would only be available at the end of 2014 when all of the 30 sites had been surveyed.

In response to a query from Members, Officers said the total volunteer time for the whole project was in excess of 400 hours in 2013. This included collecting and inputting the data from both the Observation Survey (384hrs) and the Questionnaire Survey (48hrs).

Members discussed the possibility of undertaking the visitor survey exercise at earlier and later times of the day to ensure the results recorded the use of Forest by all its visitors.

Members agreed that the use of the Temple by the public should be encouraged. Officers assured Members that action plans using the results of each survey and encouraging public use of the Temple would be included in the Community Engagement Officer’s action plan.

7. EPPING FOREST PLANNING CASEWORK - 2013/14

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest and Members noted that land surrounding Epping Forest continued to be subject to intense development pressure. Officers informed Members that in order to protect the context and setting of Epping Forest and its overall environmental condition, the Conservators continued to object to planning applications which are considered to pose significant threats to the Forest environment, and to lobby LPAs for the full representation of Forest interests as they revise their Local Plans.

Members noted that some 91 planning applications had been considered on the Committee's behalf. Objections were made to 28 applications. From these applications 28% were refused or withdrawn, 32% were granted permission, four applications remained undecided and the remaining three applications were for pre-application advice. The 28% refused or withdrawn level compares with national statistics for 2012/2013 which show a 13% refusal rate.

Discussions ensued regarding the relationship between City Corporation and Epping Forest District Council colleagues. In response to a query, Officers clarified that although colleagues from Epping Forest District Council were invited to Ladies Day many were unable to attend following a major restructure after the Chief Planning Officer's retirement. Officers informed Members that initiatives were underway to inaugurate a local Liaison group to include colleagues from Epping Forest District Council.

Members agreed that following the recent elections in neighbouring London Boroughs, Officers should seek to build relationships with the relevant Cabinet Members and Leaders of the Councils. The Superintendent informed Members that he had already written to the new Leader of the London Borough of Redbridge. It was noted that the Chairman of Policy and Resources Committee regularly met with the Leaders.

8. WHIPPS CROSS ROUNDABOUT HIGHWAY DEDICATION SCHEME

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest which informed Members that the Whipps Cross Roundabout was a major element of the A104/A114 highway infrastructure on Forest Land.

Members noted the large scale changes proposed by the current Highway Authority responsible for the dedicated land, the London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF). LBWF had been successful in securing a major grant award totalling £30 Million from the Mayor of London which involved the construction of a cycle "Super Highway" along the Lea Bridge Road (A104) and the redesign of the Whipps Cross Roundabout with protected cycleways and priority traffic lights on Forest Land.

Members were informed that the current proposals were contained within the existing land dedicated to Highway so the influence that the City of London may be to bring to bear on the project will be limited.

In response to a query from Members regarding the potential for conflict between different road users, Officers clarified that the Mini-Holland Scheme was designed to give cyclists and walkers greater priority over motorised vehicles and sufficient design detail would be put in place to manage this process. The final design will be subject to further discussion, including compensatory tree planting and a licenced contractor's depot. A more detailed would be submitted to the Committee for consideration at a later date.

9. ANNUAL REPORT OF LICENCES ISSUED 1 APRIL 2013 TO 31 MARCH 2014

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest. Members noted that there had been 227 licences issued for various events, activities and temporary use of Forest Land which together have raised a total of £66,235. The most popular licenses were Filming (73) 32%; Community Events (32) 14% and Fitness Events (27) 12%. A further 485 horse riding licences, including annual, weekly and replacement licences, were also issued raising a total of £17,092.00.

Members noted that the filming charges report is considered by the Open Spaces Committee. The number of students filming in the Forest who pay a nominal charge has brought down the overall average in relation to the number of licences issues.

In response to a query raised by a Member, Officers clarified that the annual Donkey Derby was a very popular event and an important local fundraiser. Members agreed that the licence should continue to be issued to the event and should include permission for organised gambling activities, which while prohibited under the byelaws are traditionally central to the event.

10. VOLUNTEERING IN EPPING FOREST 2013/14

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest and Members were informed of the progress with the implementation of the Epping Forest Volunteer Strategy, which was adopted on 8 March 2010.

A total of 21,186 hours of volunteer activity were donated during financial year 2013/2014, which includes 10,884 hours from volunteers managed by the City of London; 5,595 hours by the Epping Forest Centenary Trust and 4,707 hours by the Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers. This represents a 2.56% decrease in total volunteer hours on 2012/13, however this overall figure masked a 20% increase in City of London volunteers, whilst other partners had planned reductions. Members noted that at the end of March 2014, 227 people were volunteering for Epping Forest. A further 311 people have participated in mass volunteering days. 26 new volunteers were recruited during the year.

Members were informed that the annual Volunteer Party in February 2014 staged at Butler's Retreat was a great celebration. The Chairman awarded the following medals: Nine Gold (600 hours), seven Silver (300 hours) and seven Bronze medals (150 hours); £14,317 was spent on volunteer materials, equipment, travel and expenses in 2013/14, excluding training course fees. City of London volunteers contributed time equivalent to more than six full time staff and provide vital match funding for the Heritage Lottery funded Branching Out Project.

The Committee thanked the volunteers for all of their hard work and continued support.

11. ANNUAL REPORT OF FLY TIPPING AND WASTE DISPOSAL 1 APRIL 2013 TO 31 MARCH 2014

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest and Members were informed of the quantity of litter and rubbish removed from

Epping Forest in the year 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014. There had been 666 fly tips recorded on Forest land which vary from a single black sack of house waste to lorry loads of builders waste; it also includes fly tips of hazardous waste such as asbestos and tyres.

Members noted that over 325 tonnes of waste had been removed from the Forest comprising of over 160 tonnes taken to London waste, over 100 tonnes of general waste disposed of in skips, over 50 tonnes of mixed recycling and 4.6 tonnes of tyres. The total cost of removing waste from Epping Forest in this reporting year was £212,213.58 made up of £36,156.06 for general waste, £5,066.26 for recycling, £8,602.88 for hazardous waste and £162,388.38 in staff costs.

The Superintendent informed Members that new sentencing guidance had been issued on 1st July 2014 which increased the fine up to £3million for companies and £95,000 for individuals caught fly tipping hazardous waste. He confirmed that compensation costs and fees were sought following a prosecution.

Members agreed that the reward scheme offering rewards to anyone who reported a successful prosecution relating to fly tipping must be widely advertised to encourage members of the public to report the crime.

Members noted that a covert camera set up to catch fly tippers had recently itself been stolen. The Superintendent said that given the precarious nature of its deployment it was not able to insure the camera. Officers were now investigating different designs of covert cameras including the possibility of hiding their large battery packs in a more discreet manner. Members noted that although CCTV was available in the forest, often it was very time-consuming to search through footage to identify potential vehicles. Much of the fly tipping activity took place at night around the 52 car parks in the forest which were often located down roads where CCTV monitoring was extremely limited.

Officers informed Members that fly tipping was a national problem and cooperation with the CLBA's national campaign was continuing. Members agreed that it should be made clear to the public that money spent clearing up the waste could be spent on delivering the Charity's objectives by providing more services for member of the public to enjoy.

12. EPPING FOREST FOOTBALL CHARGES 2014/15

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest and Members noted the charges for the sport facilities that are provided at Epping Forest. The proposal was to increase the charge by 2.5% (3.5% for adults and 2.5% for juniors) and to hold the Sunday published tariff charges at current levels. The City had held Sunday prices for the past 5 years, while it had increased Saturday prices by 10% for the past 2 years. The Sunday price differential was now considered to be in balance. After 5 years of holding Sunday prices during the recession a moderate increase of 2.5%, which represented the current retail price index is considered proportionate.

In response to a query from Members, it was clarified that the Wanstead Flats Playing Fields Committee strongly supported the pricing differential that kept junior and youth football as affordable as possible.

RESOLVED: That Members:

- Approved that the proposed charges for sports facilities in Epping Forest for 2014/15
- Approved that the Superintendent retained delegated powers to discount or waive charges for trial periods in order to develop both new pitch configurations and offpeak and out-of-season use, and to help target underrepresented groups identified in the Sports Development Plan.
- Approved that the Superintendent retained delegated powers to revise the current sport charges terms and conditions and retain the deposit arrangement for clubs “block booking” pitches in advance that was introduced four years ago.

13. SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

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

Staffing

- The Head Ranger of West Wickham Commons had retired. A new post of ‘Support Services Manager’ was created as a direct replacement. This would bring cohesiveness to the administration of the division and allow the remaining three Head Rangers to concentrate on their staff and sites. The post should be filled by October 2014.
- Recruitment of an Information Ranger at City Commons was imminent with interviews being held in July for the 18 month contract. This role would ensure a closer focus was given to this aspect our work and the successful candidate would work closely with the Burnham Beeches team.

Visits

- The Lord Mayor visited Burnham Beeches for the annual pollard visit on 9th June. The visit appeared to be very successful and widely appreciated.
- The Committee had visited Spring Park and Stoke Common, and Consultative Committee site visits were also underway this month.

Dog Control Orders

- The Statutory Consultation Period for the Dog Control Orders at Burnham Beeches would draw to a close on 14th July. The Kennel Club had an active national campaign regarding the orders.
- Most respondents so far were dog walker’s and comments were largely based around the publicised Kennel Club briefing.
- Local Support from Farnham Parish Council, District Council, Consultative Group and local’s contributing to the survey. There was

active lobbying of Member's, local politicians and various groups to not support the orders.

Heritage Lottery Fund

- Kenley Airfield Heritage Lottery Project was progressing well.
- A concrete conservation workshop was hosted at the Merlewood Estate Office and expert attendees attended from Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage, Friends of Kenley Airfield and other interested parties. The group considered how best to conserve the built infrastructure such as the blast pens and fuel station.
- This work would inform the Conservation Plan and final bid for phase 2 funding.

Conservation Grazing

- A fourth invisible fence loop was installed at Burnham Beeches.
- Two new cows had been purchased for Burnham Beeches.
- Planning permission had been applied for to extend the grazing on Coulsdon Common at The Grove.
- Hay making had also commenced and the sheep had recently been sheared. A novice was introduced to the sheep shearing process in the form of new employee.

Oak Processionary Moth

- Spring Park was within the 2KM zone for monitoring and had been inspected and even with an extensive visual search, no caterpillars had been found.
- A precautionary check at West Wickham would also take place although it within the 5km outer zone.

Work Experience

- During June work experience opportunities were being delivered across the division and proved to be a great opportunity to give young people a taste for environmental work.
- Riddlesdown Collegiate continued to regularly participate in volunteering tasks.

Volunteers

- Over 1000 hours had been contributed during this last period.
- A charcoal making task on Kenley had produced over 140 bags of charcoal.
- The Pond clean up at Spring Park had taken place and a Greater Crested Newt survey at Ashted Common had been undertaken.

Events

- The programme of events for young people continued to take place, promoting the connection between conservation grazing and wildlife.

In response to a query from Members, Officers clarified that Oak Processionary Moth inspections were undertaken from ground level using binoculars.

The Committee thanked the Superintendent for all of his work in relation to Dog Control Orders. Members agreed that the Superintendent had dedicated a great deal of time and effort to this work, and his patience and tenacity were an asset to the work of the Committee.

14. REVENUE OUTTURN 2013/14 - BURNHAM BEECHES, STOKE COMMON & CITY COMMONS

The Committee considered the joint report of the Chamberlain and Director of Open Spaces and Members noted that in total, there was a better than budget position of £161,000 for the services overseen by the Committee compared with the final agreed budget for the year. The better than budget position of £69,000 for Local Risk had been aggregated with the City Surveyor's better than budget position £46,000, with additional works programme underspends being available to spend in subsequent years.

Members noted that it was proposed to carry forward £217,000 of this underspend. These requests would be considered by the Chamberlain in consultation with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Resource Allocation Sub Committee. Underspends in The City Surveyor's Additional Works Programme would be available to spend in subsequent years of the scheme.

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

There were no questions.

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

There was one item of other business that the Chairman considered urgent in relation to a petition that had been received by the City of London Corporation.

The Director informed Members that she had received on behalf of the Chairman a petition addressed to this Committee from a delegation representing the 'Save the Tea Hut' Campaign. The petition based on www.change.org started on 17th June and had secured 7,493 signatories by the time it was presented at Irish Chambers on 27th June 2014. This was a lower figure than the claimed 8,002 signatories. The Director informed Members that it was important to make Members aware that the online petition now stood at 8,367 signatories.

Members noted that the petition was addressed to the 'City of London Corporation, the Open Spaces Committee and the Superintendent of Epping Forest and read as follows:

'On this day, the 27th June in the year of 2014. We the people petition the above to leave the "Bikers" tea hut in High Beach Epping Forest alone. Do not put it out to tender and recognise this place as part of local history and to start listening to the people that use the forest'.

At 6.30 am of this day the current total of “we the people” stands at 8,002 and rising. We are comprised on many local residents to High Beech, Motorcyclists, Horse Riders, Cyclists, walkers and general users of this unique business. Unique by the nature of its historical presence in Epping Forest, its service provided and as a focus for the community that uses this as its central hub.

For the many views and evidence of the community and its support I urge you to view the social media page “save the tea hut” and to view the website savetheteahut.com as well as attached comments to the petition signed on change.org’.

Staff at Epping Forest analysed the data which revealed that some 33% of signatories were immediately local to Epping Forest and 20% were local to Greater London and Essex. Some 26% of all signatories added a comment. By postcode 610 or 25% were from immediate neighbours and 213 or 24% were from outer neighbouring postcode areas. The overwhelming majority of the comments, 32%, were in relation to the importance of the heritage of the tea hut. A further 16% were in relation to the community aspect of the tea hut as a place to meet and socialise. Some 14% focused on the family tradition of visiting the Forest and the tea hut, while another 10% expressed concern about the construction of a new café, especially by a High Street “chain”.

The Chairman invited the Superintendent of Epping Forest to address Members. He informed the Committee that the licence for this tea hut was first provided by the City of London in 1931, 83 years ago. The current steel hut which replaced the original wooden hut was installed 17 years ago in 1997 and was relocated as part of the car park expansion project in 2009.

Members noted that the market testing of this facility which was licensed until 31st December 2014, was discussed by the Committee during the visit of 8th May and in Non-Public Session on 10th May 2014. The Non-Public session was selected to protect the business details of the licensee. On consideration of the performance of the existing licence, the Committee determined to market test the commercial letting at Hill Wood.

The current licensee was informed of the Committee’s decision on 12th June. In response to the news, a Social Media ‘Facebook’ page was created by the newly formed ‘Save the Tea Hut’ campaign. The site currently has 7,572 ‘Likes’. On this matter, the City of London has received 28 emails, one letter, 3 Freedom of Information Requests and a formal complaint.

Members were informed that the local Member of Parliament Deputy Speaker Eleanor Laing had spoken in support of the tendering process but has asked the City of London to ensure that the strength of feeling of the local community are properly reflected in any selection process.

On the matter of the tender, the Committee were informed that adverts were placed in the weekly Epping Forest Guardian for 2 weeks on the 19th & 26th

June, weekly Caterer and Hotel Keeper on the 27th June and DaltonsBusiness.com for one month from 20th June. Sealed tender responses addressed to the Superintendent were expected at the Warren on or by 18th July. Bids were welcomed from the current licensee, along with any other interested parties. Tender opening would be witnessed in line with Financial Regulations and the tenders would be assessed by a team of staff for a range of criteria including quality; presentation; value and potential income. Officers stated that a central part of any successful tender would be an effective business plan which would demonstrate how improvements in quality, value, presentation and rental would be achieved. Customer loyalty and market development would be an integral part of any interested party's business plan, which would need to reflect on how the needs of the existing and very loyal clientele will be properly met and sustained.

The Chairman invited questions from Committee Members. One Member asked if the Superintendent could advise on recent street trading licence applications made to the District Council for the High Beach Area. The Superintendent informed Members that two applications had been made to the District Council by the current licensee for a Street Trading on Fairmead Road, close to the site of the current hut, and Manor Road at the Pillow Mounds car park. The joint application was on hold while issues of location were confirmed with the applicant.

A Member asked whether the hygiene levels and waste disposal methods exercised by the current licensee were a cause for concern. The Superintendent said the current licensee had received a 2 star rating under the National Food Hygiene Safety Rating Scheme, which indicated that improvement was needed. Other tea huts in the surrounding area had a higher rating. The treatment of waste had been brought to the attention of the current licensee on a number of occasions. Members agreed that the City Corporation had a duty to act in the public interest and should look to license businesses with a 3 star minimum hygiene rating.

Members noted that whilst it would be desirable for the operator of the tea hut to provide toilet facilities for the public, it was not a requirement. It was however, a requirement that a toilet was available for the operator and tea hut staff to use.

Members agreed that there was a high interest in this matter and it was imperative that accurate information be disseminated to the public. The Chairman agreed and said that Committee Members would recognise from their visits to Epping Forest that the existing facility at Hill Wood was a very popular venue for a range of Forest Visitors including motor cyclists; walkers; horse riders, mountain bikers and cyclists.

The Superintendent informed Members that the petition included a very clear request to recognise the interests of bikers using the Hill Wood facility. It was suggested that the Hill Wood Bikers, provided that they could demonstrate a sufficiently mandated individual, should be added to the Epping Forest Statement of Community Involvement which was approved by the Committee in

2012. Members welcomed this idea and agreed that a representative of the group should be included.

The Director informed Members that the City was committed to seeing all its commercial lettings continuing to improve both in terms of quality and the range of services provided. Given the very real reduction in contributions from City's Cash over the past 3 years, the requirement for the City to find another £20 million of savings in the next 3 years and the responsibilities of managing the charitable trust; there was also an equally real necessity for all tenants, and ultimately their customers, to help support the City's major investment in the Forest, which it had made for the past 136 years.

The Chairman concluded the discussion stating that Members would have read the often passionate contributions to the Facebook page, the 2,002 comments on the petition and numerous discussions strands on the dedicated website. While it was disappointing that the Superintendent and his family had been subject to some unpleasant comment, the majority of the comments focused on what was perceived to be the timeless nature of the facility; the camaraderie of the tea hut community and the continuity of the Miller family's involvement. Members agreed that they must allow the tender assessment to be properly and professionally made and that the balance of assessment parameters would allow the sentiments being expressed to be reflected in the aggregate scoring.

17. 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 Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act

18. NON-PUBLIC MINUTES

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

19. EPPING FOREST CAR PARKING - POLICY AND STRATEGY

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest

20. RENT REVIEW 2013

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest

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

There were no questions.

22. 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 11.55 am

Chairman

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