

EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE
Monday, 3 November 2014

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held at
Committee Room - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Monday, 3 November 2014 at
11.30 am

Present

Members:

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

Officers:

Alistair MacLellan	Town Clerk's Department
Alison Elam	Group Accountant, Chamberlain's Department
Deborah Cluett	Assistant City Solicitor, Comptroller and City Solicitor's Department
Nigel Lefton	Director of Remembrancer's Affairs
Sam Cook	Remembrancer's Department
Sarah Clarke	Assistant Director (Property Advisory), City Surveyor's Department
Sue Ireland	Director of Open Spaces
Paul Thomson	Superintendent, Epping Forest
Andy Barnard	Superintendent, Burnham Beeches, Stoke Common & City Commons
Jo Hurst	Business Manager, Open Spaces Department
Maria Traynor	Open Spaces Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Deputy John Barker, Barbara Newman, Virginia Rounding, Deputy Alex Deane and Alderman Ian Luder.

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

Deputy Stanley Ginsburg and Ian Seaton declared an interest as Members of The City Bridge Trust Committee.

3. **MINUTES**

The public minutes of the meeting held on Monday 8 September 2014 were approved as a correct record subject to the following amendments: that the apologies for lateness of Deputy Catherine McGuinness be recorded; that it be noted that the Verderers are responsible for Epping Forest business only and therefore the approval of the Introduction of Dog Control Orders at Burnham Beeches was outside the remit of the Verderers; and that Members resolved to adopt the Historic Environment 'Policy'.

Matters Arising

Oak Processionary Moth

The Director informed the Committee that the moths trapped at Hampstead Heath; the City Cemetery and Crematorium and Epping Forest had been confirmed by the Forestry Commission as male Oak Processionary Moths, however, the numbers recorded are below the statistical threshold for concern.

4. **OPEN SPACES LEGISLATION**

The Committee considered a report on proposals to make amendments to the legislation governing the City's Open Spaces. The amendments would clarify the City Corporation's management powers, increase opportunities to receive revenue for the benefit of the Open Spaces and strengthen enforcement powers. The report recommended canvassing local opinion ahead of potentially promoting a City of London Bill in autumn 2015.

The Director of Open Spaces noted that the report was being submitted to each of the City Corporation's Open Spaces Committees. The suggested possible amendment of the legislation arose from the need to tackle long standing issues regarding management powers, finance and enforcement in the Open Spaces. The Director added that it was advisable to consult the local communities on potential measures before taking any decision to bring forward legislation. The report provided an introduction to the issues involved.

The Director of Remembrancer's Affairs added that it was customary to introduce Private Member's Bills in November each year. The proposals did not deal with electoral or constitutional matters but focused on matters of immediate practical concern. Subject to the views of the Committee, Officers would discuss with local interest groups and work up more detailed proposals which would be put to Members of the Committee in due course.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Director of Open Spaces clarified that Officers were not proposing a formal or statutory consultation but rather informal consultation to get a sense of local opinion.

In response to a suggestion from a Member, the Director of Open Spaces agreed to circulate the minutes from local meetings to the Committee.

In response to concerns raised by a Member, the Director of Open Spaces confirmed that the fact that the City Commons Consultative Committees would not meet until early 2015 did not pose a problem for the proposed timetable.

In response to concerns raised by a Verderer that the proposed consultation was taking place too soon, and that instead more detailed proposals should be considered by the Committee, the Director of Remembrancer's Affairs noted that the Parliamentary process would itself provide a formal public consultation process. The Director of Open Spaces emphasised that the purpose of the proposed informal consultation was to work up possible measures which would be reported to the Committee in due course.

RESOLVED, that Members instruct officers to test the views of local interest groups on possible modifications to the legislation, as described in the Report.

5. **SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE**

Recruitment

A Gardener had commenced work during October 2014 alongside two temporary litterpickers. A recruitment campaign for a Head of Visitor Services was currently underway.

Weather

September 2014 had been the driest month for the Forest since 1910, with rainfall being less than 20% of the long term average. By contrast, October had been more unsettled with temperatures 1.6 degrees above the 20 year average and rainfall at 125%. The residue of Hurricane Gonzalo had little impact across the Forest on the 20/22 October.

Chamberlain's Visit

The Chamberlain had visited Epping Forest on 3 October.

Highams Park Lake Dam

Work had commenced on deep excavations for the floodwall to protect the Watersports Centre. Over 5,000m³ (the equivalent to two Olympic sized swimming pools) will be shortly removed from the site over the next 3 weeks.

Great Gregories

The site had been prepared for works to commence, with footings for steelwork having been dug in anticipation of building construction which will commence on 10 November.

Open House 20/21 September

750 persons had visited the Hunting Lodge and The Temple during the national Open House Event weekend.

Anti-Air War Memorial, Woodford Green

The restored 1935 Grade II memorial had been rededicated following restoration funded by local developer Galliard Homes. The memorial was unveiled by peace campaigner Bruce Kent and local MP & Minister Iain Duncan Smith on 24 October.

Visit England

Epping's annual visitor figures had been accepted by Visit England, leading them to declare Epping Forest the fifth most visited free attraction in London,

after the British Museum, National Gallery, Natural History Museum and Tate Modern.

Ghost Bike

A Ghost Bike had been erected at Woodford Green to mark the death of a cyclist following a collision with a car in February 2014.

Traveller Trespass

A trespass involving eight traveller caravans on land at Sewardstone Green, Bury Road, Chingford on 22 September was prevented by Forest Keepers with support from Essex Police..

Fly Tips

The Superintendent was able to revise provisional figures reported to the September Committee confirming that Epping Forest was subject to 375 fly tips by the end of September 2014, a 51% fall for the same period in the previous year.

Rough Sleeper Clearance

Rough sleeper clearances now stand at 41 for 2014, compared to 50 for the whole of 2013. Three large camps had been dismantled in cooperation with the Targetted Rapid Intervention Outreach (TRIO) team, the London Borough of Waltham Forest and Essex Police.

Prosecutions

Officers were investigating an air gun attack on The Temple at Wanstead Flats.

Saprotrophic Study

Epping Forest was one of five sites across the UK to be selected by a group of European scientists – the self-styled 'Beech Boys' - researching saprotrophic fungi, flora and invertebrates that are associated with fallen beech across Europe.

Estate Management Contract

Phase three of the first year of the Epping Forest Estate Management Contract was close to completion, with previously difficult tasks such as the cutting at Yardley Hill, and Fernhills, together with hedge cutting on Lippitts Hill and Mott Street undertaken to schedule following work by contractors.

Street Trading Consent

Epping Forest District Council had given Street Trading Consent for a trader to operate an Airstream 'Bubble' catering trailer at two locations at High Beach.

Metropolitan Police Service cadets

Work on clearing scrub on Wanstead Flats to reduce anti-social behaviour was undertaken as a partnership project.

Greenpeace Event

Officers facilitated a team building event involving 100 members of Greenpeace staff at The Warren House.

Bushcraft

60 pupils from Britannia Village Primary, Canning Town completed a bushcraft course at Wanstead Park.

Staff Work Day

30 staff worked to clear invasive scrub at Strawberry Hill Pond on 12 September.

Sportivate Football Funding

The Sports Development Officer has successfully bid for £1,500 of Lottery 'Sportivate' funding towards the expansion of the mental health league at Wanstead Flats.

Butterflies

There was evidence that White Admiral numbers had significantly increased over the last few years, and that both Silver-washed Fritillaries and Purple Emperors had been recorded as laying eggs in the Forest for at least three years, making them a resident species again. Ringlet, which had previously been absent for 10 years, were now present in good numbers.

Rural Payments Agency Inspection

The RPA inspection on Entry and Higher Level schemes had been passed and officers were working on mapping alterations recommended by the inspectors.

Pest and Disease Surveys

An ash dieback survey carried out by volunteer Tree Wardens at six sites had found no evidence of the disease. Sudden Oak Death inspections at seven sites had similarly found no evidence of infection.

Gypsy and Oak Processionary Moth Surveys

All seven suspect Oak Processionary Moths that were reported to the September 2014 Committee have been confirmed as male moths. The 20th annual Gypsy Moth survey between Highams Park and Leyton Flats recorded 35 moths. The Forestry Commission has acknowledged that the moth is now an established species and has therefore stopped monitoring activity, but will rely upon Epping Forest staff for long-term population monitoring data.

Challenge Network

250 young people have volunteered on Leyton and Wanstead Flats over three weekends in support of two fundraising campaigns and four practical projects.

Volunteers

Volunteers contributed 2,644 hours during August and September. Volunteer Task Leaders continued to lead projects including holly clearance from the Olde Birch Well at Leyton Flats.

National Crucian Carp Conservation Project

A UK-wide conservation project meeting had been hosted at Epping Forest to discuss how to conserve the Crucian Carp, given that the Forest was a stronghold for the species.

The Chairman thanked the Superintendent for his update and commented that the level of outreach work was remarkable and that the challenges facing the forest were being managed well. He noted that the Committee had been given the opportunity on 1 November when visiting the Forest to see the excellent work overseen by the Head of Operations to manage the trees and vegetation at Highams Park Lake, and how this provided a good example of the vision displayed by staff at the Forest.

A Verderer added his support and congratulations for the recent work in the Forest, particularly the use of Ryetec machines to catch up on maintenance works at Fernhills and Woodbury Hollow. He expressed his recent pleasant surprise to find contractors at work at 5.00pm on a Saturday which demonstrated; he felt, the excellent working relationships built up by the Head of Operations. He went on to query whether the volunteers in the Forest included volunteer litter pickers and reminded the Committee that despite 5,000m³ of silt being removed from Highams Park Lake, this represented only one-third of the silt removal that the Verderers would like to see achieved.

The Superintendent thanked both the Chairman and Verderer for their kind words. In relation to volunteers, he noted that he was keen to capture the level of work being undertaken by volunteer litter pickers in the Forest and that a process was in place to achieve. He noted that he understood the ambitions of the Verderers regarding silt removal, but that he was bound by the costs associated with removing, transporting and depositing the silt at a specialist landfill site at Leigh-on-Sea.

In response to a question from a Verderer, the Superintendent replied that Epping Forest was not in competition with the Field Centre, which also provided bush craft courses, and instead officers were working in tandem with the Forest's Learning Providers to identify areas for cooperation.

In response to a query from a Member, the Director of Open Spaces confirmed that the initial discussions had been held with both the Field Studies Council and the Epping Forest Centenary Trust with regard to future cooperation.

6. REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGETS - EPPING FOREST 2014/15 & 2015/16

The Group Accountant introduced a report of the Chamberlain, updating the Committee on Epping Forest's latest approved revenue budget for 2014/15 and seeking approval for a provisional revenue budget for 2015/16. She added that the recommendation authorising the Chamberlain, in consultation with the Director of Open Spaces, to revise the proposed budgets would be subject to any revisions not exceeding £50,000.

The Superintendent of Epping Forest went on to outline the context of the proposed revenue budget in relation to the City Corporation's Service Based

Reviews, noting that he was required to factor in significant budget reductions of £492,000 over the coming three years. Efforts to achieve this target ranged from applying to The City Bridge Trust for further education-related funding; commercialising the grant of wayleaves; more proactive asset and fleet management; and the introduction of charges for guided walks and educational visits. Other measures included the adoption of a forthcoming Retail Strategy, a Lodge Residency Strategy, car parking charges, and sponsorship.

In response to a question from a Verderer, the Epping Forest Business Manager noted that the £102,000 reduction in the Local Risk repairs and maintenance budget was misleading given that the budget which was reserved for improvement works was reverting to its normal level following an exceptional item of expenditure in 2014/15. The Director of Open Spaces added that the remaining figure did not include the amounts spent of repairs and maintenance separately by the City Surveyor's Department provided in Table 2. The Verderer responded that he was seeking industry standard indices to determine whether spend on repairs and maintenance was appropriate.

In response to a question from a Verderer, the Superintendent noted that officers from the Department of the Built Environment would be reporting to the Committee in January 2015 on the proposals for Baldwin's & Birch Hall Park (Deer Sanctuary) Ponds projects, and that costs would form part of that report.

RESOLVED, that Members:

- Agree that the provisional 2015/16 revenue budget meets the Committee's objectives, and that it be submitted to the Finance Committee;
- Approve the draft Capital budget;
- Authorise the Chamberlain, in consultation with the Director of Open Spaces, to revise these budgets to allow for any further implications arising from Corporate Projects, departmental reorganisations and other reviews, and changes to the Additional Works Programme, subject to any revisions not exceeding £50,000;
- Agree that should additional service based review proposals to in addition to those within the report are requested by another Committee, that the substitution of other suitable proposals for a corresponding amount is delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman. If the substituted saving is not considered straightforward in nature, then the Town Clerk shall also consult with the Chairman and Deputy Chairmen of the Policy and Resources Committee prior to approving alternative proposals.

7. SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE
Kenley Heritage Lottery Fund Bid

A major review meeting would be held with the HLF on 21 November to examine the Conservation Management Plan, activity plan, budget,

management plan and maintenance plan. The project was currently on track for submission as a phase 2 bid in March 2015 with an announcement expected in June 2015. If the bid were successful it would be a challenge to implement the project in time for the September 2015 commemorations of the Battle of Britain.

Personnel

Mid-Year Staff Appraisals had been completed and a Support Services Manager was expected to be in post by February 2015. The Personal Assistant to the Superintendent will be taking maternity leave in January 2015 and so options for the coming year were currently being evaluated. On Ashted Common, a Cambridge University student had just completed a six week work placement and a Merrist Wood student had joined the team on a three month, three day week placement. On the City Commons, the post of Information Ranger had just been filled.

Winter Work Programme – City Commons

The Superintendent noted work on the stock fencing project at Woodplace Farm Fields, Farthing Downs, and recent dangerous tree works on Coulsdon Commons. He went on to note that staff had held a conservation and wildlife talk at West Wickham Library at West, and the work of corporate volunteers across the Commons, with 1,024 hours at Ashted in particular.

The Superintendent went on to note that the individual who had advised officers from the Commons on the production of charcoal had recently passed away but that the work he had encouraged and advised upon continued to be put into practice on the Commons and was an excellent way to utilise what would otherwise be waste material.

Winter Work Programme – Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common

Major restoration work for Year 7 was underway and included the clearance of 1.4 hectares of secondary woodland from Stoke Common, followed by mulching. The work included tree shearing and clipping.

Exmoor ponies were being used for grazing on North Common for the first time on the area cleared in late 2013. The ponies were able to be utilised on land that other animals would find difficult to graze. The Exmoor pony grazing had the added benefit of preparing the land for further grazing by other animals.

The third invisible fence trial of 2014 at Burnham Beeches had been completed using the new loop at Pumpkin Hill, whereas the Dog Management and Enforcement Strategies had been produced for approval.

A SITA grant had enabled the return of two work horses to West Wickham from 3 November until 7 November. The horses would be assisting with removing trees from the site.

Sylvia Moys left at this point of the meeting.

8. DOG MANAGEMENT STRATEGY - BURNHAM BEECHES

The Superintendent of Burnham Beeches, Stoke Common and City Commons introduced a report requesting approval of the proposed Dog Management

Strategy that would guide the enforcement, administration and monitoring of Dog Control Orders (DCOs) at Burnham Beeches. He noted that the report recommendations had been amended to reflect advice received from the Comptroller and City Solicitor, and that interested parties had been largely positive regarding the introduction of DCOs.

In response to a question from an Alderman, the Superintendent replied that officers would employ an element of forewarning and education before pursuing straightforward enforcement of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs). He added that, despite there being no formal appeal process, that the City Corporation had nevertheless introduced an informal process of appeal.

In response to a question from a Member, the Superintendent confirmed that refusal to pay a FPN constituted a criminal offence. The Member noted therefore that Officers should place an emphasis on forewarning and education to avoid, potentially, burdening people with criminal records too readily.

RESOLVED, that City Corporation Members:

- Approve the Dog Management Strategy for Burnham Beeches so that it may be advertised according to DEFRA requirements and used to guide the administration of Dog Control Orders on the site;
- Provide delegated authority to the Director of Open Spaces to authorise officers at Burnham Beeches for the purpose of issuing Fixed Penalty Notices for offences under each of the Dog Control Orders and giving directions under the Dogs on Leads by Direction (Burnham Beeches) Order 2014;
- Approve the level of Fixed Penalty for breach of a Dog Control Order at £80, with a reduction to £50 if paid within 10 days;
- Note the site signage arrangements.

9. **REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGETS - BURNHAM BEECHES, STOKE COMMON, & CITY COMMONS 2014/15 & 2015/16**

The Group Accountant introduced a report of the Chamberlain updating the Committee on the latest approved revenue budget and seeking approval for the provisional revenue budget for 2015/16. She added that any delegated revisions would not exceed £50,000.

The Superintendent provided further context on the proposed revenue budget for 2015/16 in light of the City Corporation's Service Based Reviews, noting that proposed budget savings would be met through focusing on core services, achieving operational efficiencies and generating income.

RESOLVED, that City Corporation Members:

- Agree that the provisional 2015/16 revenue budget reflects the Committee's objectives and approve its submission to the Finance Committee;
- Authorise the Chamberlain, in consultation with the Director of Open Spaces, to revise these budgets to allow for any further implications arising from Corporate Projects, departmental reorganisations and other reviews, and changes to the Additional Works Programme, subject to any revisions not exceeding £50,000;
- Agree that should additional service based review proposals to in addition to those within the report are requested by another Committee, that the substitution of other suitable proposals for a corresponding amount is delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman. If the substituted saving is not considered straightforward in nature, then the Town Clerk shall also consult with the Chairman and Deputy Chairmen of the Policy and Resources Committee prior to approving alternative proposals.

10. **UPDATE ON THE EXPANSION OF CONSERVATION GRAZING AT BURNHAM BEECHES**

The Superintendent introduced an update report on the expansion of conservation grazing at Burnham Beeches. He noted that the scope of the project had changed since it was first introduced, and that the trial of invisible fencing had revealed the need to adopt a more organic approach to implementing conservation grazing at the site. Moreover, it had become apparent that there would always be a need to provide some element of permanent enclosure at the site for example to hold livestock in emergencies. He concluded by noting that some short-term solutions to issues identified within the report were needed in advance of more reliable technology becoming available.

The Chairman noted that, given the invisible fencing project had been a trial, it was inevitable that a degree of flexibility would be needed in how the project was approached during the course of its implementation. He added that the potential to commercialise the project existed, and that he would welcome the opportunity to consider proposals to do so in due course.

In response to a question from a Verderer, the Superintendent replied that conservation grazing in Trial Area 1 would not have a detrimental effect on the Scheduled Ancient Monument, as English Heritage had advised that any damage would be outweighed by the benefit of vegetation control.

In response to points raised by a Verderer that no alarm system was operating in the event of the circuit being broken and that there was potentially scope to fit animals with GPS collars to assist tracking, the Superintendent of Epping Forest replied that an alarm system was feasible but the poor mobile phone coverage in both the Forest and Burnham Beeches prevented the transmission of alarms alerts. At Epping Forest GPS tracking had been added to selected collars allowing cattle to be located by a Smartphone application and the overall

pattern of movement to be recorded. Further work on a 'geofence' to monitor straying cattle requires further development work. The Deputy Chairman noted that should the technology come online, then the City Corporation should be prepared to embrace it.

RESOLVED, that City Corporation Members:

- Approve the continued and expanding use of invisible fences at Burnham Beeches as technology allows;
- Approve the retention of existing traditional stock and temporary electric fencing until such time as reliance on them can be satisfactorily reduced by use of invisible fences.

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

There were no questions.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

There was no other business.

13. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED: 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.

14. NON-PUBLIC MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the non-public minutes of the meeting held on Monday 8 September be approved as a correct record, subject to an amendment.

15. HIGH BEACH REFRESHMENT SITE

The Superintendent of Epping Forest introduced a progress report on the tender for the refreshment site at High Beach.

16. LAND AVAILABLE FOR ACQUISITION

The Superintendent noted that this was intended as a verbal item with no associated report, contrary to the published agenda.

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

There were no questions.

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

The Committee heard two items of urgent business.

The meeting ended at 2.15 pm

Chairman

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